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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

Wednesday

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you Speaker.

Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 7, second reading of Bill 27.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Thank you, everybody.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that Bill 27, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 27, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3." (Bill 27)

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Welcome, everyone, to Wednesday morning. This is An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No.3. A subsection of that act, we are just changing the date to March 31 of 2024.

So it's a fairly straightforward and simple bill this morning, but it's a very important one. We're introducing amendments to the

Revenue Administration Act to extend the tax reduction on gasoline and diesel of seven cents per litre for the next year, until March 31 of 2024.

This is very important for the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This maintains a lower price at the pumps by 8.05 cents per litre, which that includes HST. This reduction is one of many initiatives that we've delivered by the provincial government to support residents, families and businesses with the currently high cost of living.

While this cost of living is due to challenges that are global in nature, we know Newfoundlanders and Labradorians feel it close to home. The tax reduction for gasoline diesel was initially set until January 1, 2023. It was later extended until March 31, 2023, next week. Further extending the tax reduction until March 31, 2024, is an initiative of budget 2023-24 at an estimated cost of \$63.4 million. So it is a very substantive revenue reduction for the people of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

It's certainly important to the people of the province who travel on our highways and our roads, going to get groceries, going to doctors' appointments, going to pharmacies, travelling for work or for business. It's also important for our businesses, many of whom have to transport goods and services across this vast province of ours, and so it is equally important to the business community that we keep this gas tax as low as possible.

Speaker, on that note, I will note that this is the second-lowest tax in the country, next to Alberta. Alberta has a lower tax but everyone else – I can tell you, for example in Quebec, the gasoline tax is 19.2 cents. In Saskatchewan, it's 15 cents. In Nova Scotia, it's 15.5. In Newfoundland and

Labrador, it's 7.5. So it's a significant tax reduction for the people of the province. It's costing \$63.4 million, but I think it's a good investment that we're able to make and ensure that people have lower taxes, especially with the vast geography that we have in this province.

It's our latest move, I guess, now as we move into the next fiscal year. As everyone in the province knows our fiscal year in Newfoundland and Labrador, of course in most governments across the country, ends at the end of March which is in very short order. It ends at the end of March. So in our next fiscal year this is a very important move I think for the people of the province, but it does have significant budgetary impacts at \$63.4 million.

As I've said, budget 2023 is coming up next week, or I guess it's a week from tomorrow. I have a lot of work to do between then and now. It's going to be delivered on March 23, and I hope people tune in and I know that the House of Assembly will do a very thorough job of reviewing that budget and going line by line through the budget to ensure that we're making wise investments and wise decisions on behalf of the people of the province.

Speaking of wise decisions, I think it was a very wise decision that this government took over the last year, and especially as we had some additional revenues we were able to put towards reducing the cost of living and the burden of the cost of living on the people of the province – things like the one-time relief cheque that we were able to provide to residents of \$500. That was, of course, anyone with adjusted income of \$125,000 or less received an appropriate amount of money based on where they fit under the \$125,000. If you were \$100,000 below, you received the full \$500. From \$100,000 to \$125,000, it was a proportioned amount.

We also are providing a home heat supplement for those that are utilizing oil.

We all know the price of oil has been impacted by the volatility in global markets and, because of that, we were able to provide a \$500 supplement to people who heat their home with oil. But we're also going beyond that, Speaker. We're also providing an amount of money to help people switch from oil to electricity because we all know the volatility in the oil pricing, but also because it is right for our environment and impacting climate change.

I know my colleague at Environment and Climate Change has been very, very engaged in helping people switch and he's just announced, as part of next week's budget, an extension and continuation of that program. So very, very pleased to see that transition from oil to electricity. We've also, for example, provided additional funding for those that receive the Income Supplement and those that receive the Seniors' Benefit.

Hundreds of thousands of people receive – you know, some of them receive both the Income Supplement and the Seniors' Benefit, and it's very important last year that we increased that. We also increased the income support payments. So Income Supplement went up, the income support payments went up and the Seniors' Benefit all went up last year to help address the cost of living.

That's not even to speak about some of the other – and I think of them as long-term impacts of how we've been able to keep the cost of living low in this province. You know, some things like helping with child care. We've been able to move very quickly. I've been Finance Minister now for 30 months – 30 months and I'm about to give my fourth budget. But we started with \$25-a-day child care, which was a huge benefit to people. Went to \$15, now we're down to \$10 a day for child care. The investments that we're making there are certainly helping.

A friend of mine has three children under the age of four. Can you imagine? Busy life.

Four children under the age of four and the savings to that family is unbelievable. Very, very important because, of course, if she didn't have that she would be paying upwards to \$45 to \$50 a day for child care, each child. That would really impact not only their finances but their ability to work because, of course, that would be an exorbitant amount of money. So helping in that way.

Making sure, for example, that Muskrat Falls didn't double electricity rates. That was a huge worry of the people of the province and we've been able to mitigate that. By doing so, we're helping the people of the province with cost of living.

I can report to this House that Newfoundland and Labrador has the second lowest cost of living in the country, next to Alberta. So we seem to be following Alberta very closely in a lot of ways. I'm very, very pleased to be able to say that the impact of cost of living hasn't been as significant here as it has been in other places.

I think, Speaker, it has something to do with the way we've been able to support people, the way we've been able to keep our gas tax low. We've been able to support people by giving them assistance by increasing the Seniors' Benefit, the Income Supplement and the income support payments.

Speaker, I will say that I'm hopeful that everyone in this House will support the continuation of the lower gas tax. I'm sure everyone in this House will be supportive of that.

AN HON. MEMBER: It was our idea.

S. COADY: I beg your pardon?

AN HON. MEMBER: It was our idea.

S. COADY: I would say to the Member opposite, that while I appreciate his

interjection that is not exactly the way I see it.

We've been very –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

S. COADY: We have developed a suite of cost-of-living measures that, I think, have been robust, have been important and we're going to continue to keep our focus on the people of the province, because that is exactly what you've asked us to do and that's why we're sitting on this side of the House.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's indeed an honour to sit our first Wednesday morning back for the people who are watching or listening, back to debate an important piece of legislation before only a week away we get into debating what's coming in our budget.

I do have the honour of getting to speak to any bill, as everybody in this House does, and see the legitimacy and the importance of passing legislation that reflects what people are doing.

I do find it a little bit amusing that the minister sees what they're offering through rose-coloured glasses here because, at the end of the day, when she mentions things like the lowest cost of living in Newfoundland and Labrador in this country,

I don't know where you're living. I don't know where you're living. You're not living in Nain, Labrador; you're not living on Bell Island; you're not living in Bonavista or CBS or Whitbourne or the Burin Peninsula or Central Newfoundland or the West Coast or the Connaigre Peninsula because we don't hear that from anybody.

We hear the opposite. We see the thousands of workers who have to leave Newfoundland and Labrador every week to do a transition in to find gainful employment to come back here and they're helping keep this economy going. They look at the cost of living in the provinces that they travel to. It's nowhere comparable to the increased cost in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are rose-coloured glasses here that are, in my opinion, skewed when it comes to the actual facts of the situation. We had a similar conversation yesterday about facts in this House of Assembly. It was about our education system, it was about facts.

Now anybody can take a fact and turn it and make it relevant to what you want to do. The facts are the reality from the people we've heard.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

D. BRAZIL: Do you know the facts that we heard a year and a half ago was about the regressive gas tax. So regressive that we on this side of the House – and I'll give credit to particularly the independents who worked with us too – fought and we threatened filibusters and we went late in the night to ensure that there were some changes made to the gas tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: That came by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador speaking to the Opposition here to make sure it got done.

We were happy, we were happy finally; finally we could see some collaboration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's hard to hear the speaker when people are chatting back and forth, so, please, I want to hear the speaker.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All I'm echoing is what we've heard from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Also from their own districts, I know they were hearing the same thing. That's why it was easy to pass after we outlined the business plan of why this would be beneficial to the people of this province from an economic point of view. Why it would help drive industry. Why businesses saw the value of it. Why people on fixed income saw the value of it as part of it.

Now, while I have no qualms, I will be voting for Bill 27 and I suspect all of my Members will. The problem I have is it's a bad bill. Bill 27 should be saying we are going to eliminate the gas tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: If we're really going to show that we're going to invest in industry, we're really going to show we're going to put money back in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We're really going to show that we're a progressive society in Newfoundland and Labrador and we're really going to show, at the end of the day, we can take some of that money – and you want to do something for the environment, put it back into education. Put it back into health care. Put it back into industries providing a better environmental situation in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The level of chatter is getting way too loud. I can't hear the speaker. I've asked people to remain quiet while the speaker is speaking. If it continues, I will name Members and they will lose speaking privileges.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I welcome a lively debate here because I can only imagine what's going to happen next Thursday when the budget comes down, when we look at exactly what gaps in services for the people of this province are there and what hasn't been done to address a lot of the issues that are necessary in this province for people here. Because if we look at it, we've talked about the government over there touts the lowest cost of living, lowest tax in the province. All I see is highest tax in the province, cost of living is outrageous in Newfoundland and Labrador. Every citizen will say that, every business will say it and talk about what's happening.

They talk about \$25-a-day daycare. My colleague here, very eloquently outlines, you can offer it for free, if you can't access it. I had a business one time that used to sell hockey equipment. I used to sell hockey sticks and if somebody came in and say Canadian Tire got them on for \$5 cheaper, but they don't have any. Well, you know, at the end of the day, \$5 cheaper means nothing if you can't access it, and that's what's happening in daycare here in Newfoundland and Labrador and we're hearing that constantly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: So if we're going to have a plan in Newfoundland and Labrador, the plan not only got to be affordable but it's got to be

accessible and that means you've got to have a long-term plan that includes all the key stakeholders here.

That's one of the criticisms that we've had here. Stakeholders are not being engaged. We heard that again yesterday in debate, conflict on factual information, because we know stakeholders are saying we haven't been engaged. We haven't been asked to give proper input and the input that we've given haven't been put in play to outline policies and programs that would be beneficial to the people of this province.

So getting up and touting, we're extending the seven-cent portion on gas for another year doesn't really do anything. It pushes it down the road. It's a small relief for people but it's not a sense of confidence and it doesn't give anybody in any area here a sense that they can plan for the future.

If you're in business and you're trying to outline what your fleet of vehicles are going to be and what the costing is going to be and you talk to your accountants and that, and then the cost of your product, because you have to add all expenditures into that, you have no way of being able to plan that long term. You're going to be fluctuating on your costing in and out because it's only temporary.

Temporary is never a solution. Temporary is when you don't have a plan, and we've seen that so often in this administration and this House the last eight years, there's no plan.

I keep saying and we've been saying it here: Work with us to be proactive instead of reactive. This is a political reaction here. Keep people happy because people are upset the cost of living is getting out of hand and you can't control bringing the cost of living down if the cost of fuel is up, because that has an impact on every product that's produced and supplied and brought to Newfoundland and Labrador.

So again, while this will be a little, tiny temporary relief and it may get people to pause for a second, oh, at least it's not going up; but wait until this time next year when there's a different process here or the general public or businesses look at it and say well, I've got to plan a business around what I'm going to really save or my expenditures. This doesn't do anything. I've got to plan down the road so my products got to be increased as part of that process.

Let's look at some of the other taxes here, and we had a discussion yesterday about the sugar tax. Fair enough, the minister got up and talked about well, here's where it's going into other programs and we welcome that, happily. Now, it didn't go in all the programs we would have liked to see it go, but it's welcome in that.

But what that tells me, again, is no plan to address those issues. Those issues just didn't come to fruition because, at the end of the day, they didn't exist until we got this money from the sugar tax. Those were issues or programs that weren't being adequately funded for the last number of years that existed. So this was a way of them patting themselves on the back and saying look, the money we put into it. But you know where we got the money from? Your pockets. We got it from the most vulnerable financially, and put people in an awkward situation where they had to make decisions around things that normally would be detrimental to them. If you can't afford milk or healthier foods or healthier juices, why all of a sudden now do you think you're going to be able to afford it when it's more expensive if you haven't given a break in the healthier areas?

So, to me, it didn't play well that it was going to be beneficial to the people. It's a great political move: Look what we've done over here, we've got a tax that we tout – and the only people that I can hear tout it is the people on that side, that it's going to help from a health point of view. I've yet to sit with any of the physicians that I talk to on a

constant basis to say they see any real value in that particularly.

Now, does some more money go for a school lunch program and breakfast programs which are very valuable programs and very important, very important, but they should have been funded 10 times over. They should have already been acknowledged that they're very important programs and money should have been allocated through one of the other pots of money that this administration hasn't been proactive on in putting in play. If it was the extra money they paid for building buildings and places like this, if it's monies that they've done in other programs and services taking care of other people and within industries that weren't necessary, frugal use of that money, well then that's where that should have been done at the end of the day.

Taking money out of people's pockets when it doesn't provide any direct benefit to them and doesn't provide a benefit to the people of this province, I've got a real problem with that. That, to me, is reflective in a lot of the bills that are coming to this House here. They're political bills. It's politically moving money around to make it look that they're doing something in a particular area and addressing it. If I hear the word "RFP" again about health care in this province, I am going to have to scream out for the people of this province because it's crazy when we're talking about an RFP. We should have plans. There has been discussion here for decades about what needs to be done. Every health organization, every union have outlined what they feel is necessary. How do we not have a hybrid here where we can put into play immediately what needs to be done, instead of pushing it down the road?

We need to be more proactive, and that's what this administration needs to be. Where else in our history have you had the Opposition say – and that includes all two parties on this side of the Opposition and the independents – we will be co-operative?

If you come up with the right plan, you know what, we'll be co-operative. We, actually, on this side voted for stuff that even our supporters would say, why would you support that? Because we felt it was in the right interest of the people of this province. We're not seeing that. I'm not seeing that in what's being put forward in the last couple of years and the only times we do get any movement is when we force the hand.

I would hope this budget – and I've said it, I am cautiously hopeful. Now, cautiously hopeful doesn't mean that you've got a lot of confidence, but it's cautiously hopeful because I'm an optimist. I would always hope that people are going to come up with a plan that works for the best interests of the people of this province.

I know on this side of the House we're always thinking that: What is in the best interest of the people of this province? More importantly, how do we implement it in the most efficient, frugally beneficial way but in a timely fashion? That we don't wait a generation down the road or we don't put people in peril while we're taking our time to put it in. We don't overthink a process that we know already has a solution to it. There are the challenges that we have in this House of Assembly.

Right now, I'm not getting instilled with a lot of confidence that that side of the House has those plans. Now, you've got an opportunity to prove me wrong next Thursday. As a matter of fact, you've got an opportunity to prove me wrong over the next number of days by outlining some of the things you already have in your budget. Because if they're good, God, we can get up here and tout it and let the people in Newfoundland and Labrador know at least there's another week of anxiety you can take away from them because we're going to address health care, we're going to address education, we're going to address the cost of living, we're going to ensure that people in every district here have access to infrastructure. We're going to do these

things that are necessary for the people of this province and that seniors can feel comfortable that they're going to have access to long-term care and all the supports that they worked and put in place over the last number of decades in this province to make sure that they had some adequate health care and quality of life in their later years.

So they're the things that we're asking from this side of the House. But to get out and tout that this a wonderful thing we're doing by pushing money down the road that has been taken out of the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for the last seven years and say it's going to be beneficial to the people is not actually, in my opinion, in the best interest of the people of this province, and I know people in this province see the difference too. I know 100 per cent they see through what's being offered here.

Let's start coming up with solutions that are long-term planning initiatives that help. Let's say if you're going to do taxation – I get we're in a society and taxation is what's going to drive how we generate our revenues, but let's put the taxation into improving programs and services so the outcomes are better and the amount of money we have to invest becomes minimal every year as we improve.

One of those is health care and another is education. The third would be infrastructure, but a bigger one is the cost of living. The minute the cost of living gets too outrageous in Newfoundland and Labrador, we lose people. I already hear people who are going back and forth saying my next time I go to Alberta or Ontario or Quebec or out West I'm staying there. I can't afford to come back here anymore; it's not to my advantage to be here as part of this process. Or we have to move. We just had a young child. I know in a year I'm not going to have daycare for him, so why would I stay in a province that doesn't offer me the services? Long-term care patients – I know I have family saying

now, you know what, we're going to have to send Mom up with my brother who lives in Ontario because at least they can access long-term care supports and services.

Is that the society we want to have in Newfoundland and Labrador? Is that the legacy we want? It's not my legacy and I know it's not the legacy of the people on this side of the House. Let's find a collaborative approach to doing things; let's have an open and transparent concept. We had the conversation yesterday evening about the cyberattack and some of the challenges we had last year about being more open and transparent with people.

I get you're not going to get into every minute detail. The same way as you're not going to with every deal if it's the Upper Churchill or if it's with Canopy Growth or if it's with any other entity, or it might be building a mental health facility. You're not going to get into all the minute details, but the things that the people of this province should know about they should have an ability to have input into. Being open and transparent should be a better approach here. You're going to get better solutions on the programs and services that are going to work.

While I'll be supporting the vote for this because at least for the next 12 months people will have seven cents when they're filling up their tanks back in their pockets to try to offset the cost of not having access to health care, not having access to child care, not being able to put fuel in their oil tanks, not being able to buy medications, not being able to eat healthy. At least that gives that, but that's not a solution to solving the issues that we have in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's got to be a long-term plan.

Mr. Speaker, while I'll be voting for this, I would hope Bill 27 would've said we're eliminating this tax and a number of other taxes because here's the strategy we have to grow our economy, provide services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador

and make people in Newfoundland and Labrador be proud again to stay here and start bringing people back to Newfoundland and Labrador because it's the place they want to live.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak here on behalf of my constituents of Labrador West. We're reducing this tax; we're pushing it down the road for another day. That's fine, that's great. But I'll say this, and the minister mentioned that this is for the cost savings for delivery and stuff. Well, I haven't seen anything from this tax actually translate to the grocery store shelves in Labrador West. I've seen it considerably rise, but I haven't seen any savings on this.

The amount actually being saved here is not getting passed down to the actual individuals. The only time that individuals actually see a little bit of savings is when they physically go to the pump. That's just one thing I find disingenuous about this is that they say the cost savings there, but I haven't seen any cost savings on any store shelves with this yet.

That's where I find that I don't think we're doing enough to put money back into people's pockets. It's fine that we do this little thing here for commuters, that's fine, but what are we actually going to do to actually save individuals money? Not everyone can afford a car, not everyone can afford that kind of thing. What do we do to actually help those individuals?

Yeah, you'll go back to the one-time cost-of-living cheque. That's one time. That's one cheque for one point in time. But what are we doing to actually reduce the cost of the

goods and stuff so that people save? Or the biggest one I hear about is the cost of actually heating your home, which I'll go back to the fact that we actually charge HST to heat someone's home. A necessity of life and we charge HST on that.

If we removed that cost from there, wouldn't that save a lot of people a lot of money? That would actually physically help a lot of people. We shouldn't be charging HST on stove oil. We shouldn't be charging HST on residential electricity. Those are necessities of life.

There you go, that's 15 cents a kilowatt-hour or 15 cents a litre that we'd actually put back into people's pockets, everybody who pays for their heat and light. A lot more people pay for heat and light than actually drive. That's how you really would put money back into people's pockets. Because we shouldn't be charging HST on necessities of life. I say again, heating your home is a necessity of life.

We don't charge HST on grocery store shelves for non-prepared foods, yet we charge it to heat your home. So this is where we can actually help everyday people, we can actually help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We can actually help reduce the cost of living. It's actually helping them live. That's where I really think we should be actually focusing our attention to. That's where I think we can actually do the greatest good right now while we face this cost-of-living crisis. We can actually make sure that people actually have a warm house to go into because right now a lot of people don't.

I know the minister says the global markets and things like that, but, at the end of the day, we still have to look after people here. This is our part of the globe. This is our actual little place in the world that we have to look after and that's our responsibility. Our responsibility is to people that are here.

We're supposed to be, as a government, a government is supposed to shelter its people from the effects of sometimes the global markets. We're supposed to shelter people, yet we're charging them tax upon shelter. This is the interesting part that I find, you talk about saving seven cents here on the gas, but we still charge HST for a necessity of life.

That's where I think we can actually do the greatest good in this province and the greatest good for anybody is maybe look at the broader things of what we actually do tax and where we think that we can actually pick apart to find maybe this is a good thing to do, maybe we can actually put some money back into people's pockets here.

It affects a lot more people. We have these issues and right now this is probably – I find here, coming back and forth between here, it's probably one of the coldest winters in a long time on record for this province. I went for a five-day stretch in Labrador West of 50 below, probably the longest I can remember in my entire life living in Labrador. Then I come here into the city and it's interesting that this time in March and actually walking around and actually still seeing high snowbanks in the City of St. John's. So that would have been a lot of savings, but do you know what? This winter a lot more people burned a lot more heating oil and burned a lot more electricity this past winter. I'm sure that the HST line on their bills is going to be pretty high for a necessity of life. I'll say it again: heating your home is a necessity of life and we tax it.

So this is where we can actually save so many more people save a lot more money than just a little seven cents off gasoline. We can put a lot more money back into people's pockets. We can actually make sure that people have a warm and safe home.

Talking to that, housing in itself is a massive issue in this province that has to be tackled on top of that. So anything we can do to

make sure that people have shelter, warm shelter especially after the cold winter we had, that's where our focus should be. That's where people should be focusing on.

This is also a savings because if they have that money, then they can afford the other things that they need. A tackling on that, like I said, I'll go back to what the minister mentioned about the cost savings to transportation of goods. I think there's actually a good justification or warrant to actually investigate how much it does cost to ship things in this province and actually ship things to my corner of the world in Labrador, because honestly it's getting a little high.

They say that there are a lot of these global things, but I'm honestly starting to think that there has to be a better way to get those costs down, too, because I haven't seen prices like this and I used to deal with logistics in a previous life about shipping goods and stuff like that. The cost of that has skyrocketed in the last three years of shipping goods.

I know people say the prices of fuels and stuff like that, but I honestly think just on top of what we're seeing now with the committee in Parliament on the pricing of food and services and stuff like that, I think there's a lot of gouging going on for a lot of these things because I think people have taken advantage, large corporations and stuff have taken advantage of the situation. I don't think it honestly costs this much to ship goods. I honestly don't think it's that much to put it on a shelf in a store, especially in the national chain.

I honestly think that even us ourselves, as a province, need to investigate what's actually going on in the logistics world of shipping food and also some of these large corporations that are actually, I honestly think, taking advantage of the situation and taking advantage of the people of this province, because we shouldn't see this.

We have some of the highest employment rates in a long time too, yet we have to also see some of the largest amounts of poverty in a very long time. So it just goes to show that even if you have a job right now, you're still living in poverty. That's a serious thing that we need to have a very serious look at. Is that what is actually going on? Where are these extraordinary rent rates coming from? Where is the extraordinary cost of shipping coming from? Where is the extraordinary cost of groceries coming from? Yet, we have high employment rates and we have some of the highest amounts of poverty right now.

There seems to be a very serious issue in this province when it comes to costing. I think we need to have a very serious look at why and who and what kind of advantages these companies are taking against our own people, because there's no way in this world that any of this equates to anything. It seems to be that the equation is off skew, that nothing is adding up right now. Yet, somewhere along the line there are pockets being lined that shouldn't be and there are extraordinary amount of profits taken that shouldn't be. At the time, I will say again, it's our responsibility to protect the people of this province. It's our responsibility to protect those that are the most vulnerable, but we're also supposed to protect everyone in this province. Everyone has the right to be protected from this kind of behaviour, I think, that is happening here and across this country.

So maybe we should all just take a step back. Maybe we should look at removing HST from heating our homes. That's a necessity of life; housing is a necessity. Housing is a right in this country. It's a right to have shelter. We need to take a look at that and say maybe we could look at these different avenues.

I hope that the minister does take it into consideration that maybe there's another avenue here to protect that, because heating should also be a right along with

housing in this province. The right to heat and the right to be warm in the winter.

With that, I take my seat.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be supporting Bill 27 as well. I would say, Mr. Speaker, the first thing that comes to my mind when I see this – and continuing on with this and some of the other initiatives that have been taken, whether it be this initiative, whether it be the \$500 cheques to everybody – is, thank God, thank God for offshore oil.

It's amazing how our fortunes continue to change. It was only a year or two ago we were talking about the fact that allegedly we couldn't make payroll. It was only about a year or so ago that we were bring in the Greene report and we were going to be selling everything off. We were going to be selling off all our assets potentially and making a lot of unpopular decisions.

Now, all of a sudden, we're in a position where we can take initiatives such as this one. We can hand out \$500 cheques to everybody, the cost-of-living cheques. We also had another program for people burning oil, a rebate there. I'm not knocking any of these things, but it does go to show the dependence really that we continue to have on offshore oil.

So when I hear people – and I'm not saying this to beat up on any of my colleagues and it's not just people in this House of Assembly, but sometimes people outside the House of Assembly and people will challenge you on social media and so on over our oil and gas industry and talk about how we have to shut down our oil and gas

industry. This is the reason why we simply cannot do it at this time. We simply cannot do it at this time.

Imagine the state we would be in – the state we were in. I mean, we were projecting a huge deficit last year and we were able to overcome that deficit and at the same time put out almost \$200 million – I think it was \$194 million, I believe was the amount, \$194 million on these \$500 cost-of-living rebate cheques and all the other things we've done.

Now, we also have to absorb the loss of revenue from the carbon tax because, even though it was a federal program, it was actually the provincial government that was collecting all that carbon tax money for the last two to three years. While the money was supposed to be going into green initiatives, the reality of it is, as we pointed out in this House time over time, it was just more money going into general revenues. Not to say that there was zero green initiatives, but certainly nowhere near the money being spent on green initiatives as was coming in to provincial government coffers.

So now that the feds are going to take over the program, citizens are going to get that money back by way of a quarterly cheque. Now, I've heard Minister O'Regan saying you're going to get all the money back and more and so on. I question that one. I can't wait to see that one. I really don't think that's going to happen. There may be some people who may make out okay, but I think most people are not going to get back all their carbon tax. Not even close to it.

For one thing, they're not even factoring in the costs of goods and services, the cost of groceries and everything else that has gone through the roof because of carbon tax. That's not even factored into their calculations as to what the carbon tax is actually costing us as a province and as a country. But I suppose the good news is at least people will get something back, some

more than others. But by the same token, when that happens, that's another loss of revenue to provincial coffers.

So when you look at this, this is really no different – the provincial budget, while it's a large budget, obviously, I think it's like \$7 billion or \$8 billion, it's a big number, but it's really no different than your own household budget or anything else. Money coming in, money going out and, hopefully, you should be able to balance the two.

It's important that we recognize that every time the government foregoes taxes like they're doing here, seven cents a litre, every time the government decides to come out with these rebate programs like these \$500 cost-of-living cheques, that's money that we don't have to spend on education and health care and so on. I mean, that's the reality of it. It's money we don't have to spend on those things. It's money we don't have to pay down on our provincial debt, which has been climbing and climbing and climbing for years.

I'm not being critical of it because there is no easy answer. I will support this because people are finding it tough. There's no doubt about it. Some more than others. There are some people who are really struggling. There are some people who are able to weather the storm. There are some people who, over the last couple or three years, are quite able to weather the storm. They would say, yeah, it has cut back on my expendable income. It's cut back on everybody's expendable income, but they still have an expendable income. Maybe that means they have to go on vacation every second year instead of every year or one trip a year instead of two trips a year or whatever the case might be. But there are a lot of people that are still doing fine and life goes on as normal. They're pretty much living the same lifestyle they always did.

Now, there are other people who are struggling to various degrees and it's the people that are struggling are the ones, I

believe, that we really need to focus our efforts on some of these cost-of-living initiatives. I think we have to prioritize them on the people that really need it because it's all a balancing act.

As I said to the Minister of Finance, before we started, we were having a little chat there, and the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, before the House opened, the reality of it is no matter what the government does – and I don't care what stripe it is. It doesn't matter if it's red, blue, orange, whatever. It doesn't matter. No matter what the government does, any program the government puts out, you are always going to get people who are going to agree with it and people are going to disagree with it, for various reasons.

Sometimes the reasons are political, as simple as that, because this side came up with I'm against it or this side came up with it I'm for it. But a lot of people, it's their own personal circumstance. How much does this policy impact me? That's the reality. A lot of people look at these things at how it impacts them on a personal level or a family members and so on. We don't always think about everybody else. That's just human nature. You're concerned about yourself, your family, your kids, your parents, your grandparents and that's just the way it is, for the most part.

So when government comes out with any of these policies, there's no doubt there's going to be people that are going to applaud this and there are going to be people that are going to say we shouldn't be doing this. This is money that we should be paying down on the debt. This is money that we should be putting towards getting more doctors, more nurses, whatever the case might be. Or you look at the Roads Plan. I look at the Roads Plan that just came out, and the minister was touting the fact that this was the largest expenditure on roadwork in that department. I think he said it was the largest expenditure in any given

year they've ever done, the biggest one ever. I think that's what I read.

That may very well be. The reality of it is, I would suggest that he could triple that, quadruple it, and there's still not going to be enough money to do everything that needs to be done and there are going to be people that are going to be happy because their roads got done and there are going to be people that are going to be unhappy because their roads didn't get done. That's just the reality of everything that we do in this House of Assembly. Every expenditure that happens in the budget that we either vote for or we vote against, that will always be the case. Some people are going to agree with it; some are going to disagree with it.

Now, like I said, I will agree with this. It's something we've had in place. They're going to extend it. I agree with the Leader of the Official Opposition that – I'm not going to say we had to drag government and they were screaming to do this. I'm not going to try to make it too political, but the reality of it is that a number of these initiatives were pushed by this side of the House. They were, and government, to their credit, adopted them. It might have took them a little while to do it. Maybe we thought they should have done it quicker and so on, but they eventually did it. We supported it. I still support it and I'm not going to knock it.

The point I'm trying to make here is that – and I heard the Leader of the Official Opposition talk about this as well. I won't give him too much credit there, but he's a pretty good fellow. I want to talk about when he talked about having a plan. It's true because some of the things that we've seen done feel like they've been done somewhat haphazardly, somewhat reactive. Even that \$500 cheque and how it was administered and so on, it just felt sort of like a knee-jerk reaction to get this done, get the money out, and I know a lot of people appreciated this. I know a lot of people did and I also know that some people who said I don't need that

money. It would have been better off if we had taken that money and put it towards the debt. People would say someone on the lower end of the income scale we should have gave them more money and a guy making \$100,000 a year didn't need it.

Again, that comes down to this whole concept of you'll never please everybody. I understand that. But some of the things that I've seen just feel like they been a little bit knee-jerk, so I kind of agree with the Leader of the Official Opposition when he talks about having a plan, have it all planned out so it feels like we've examined the bigger picture, we understand the plight of people, we understand what are the key things that people are finding it difficult to afford or can't afford and we get a firm understanding of who is able to weather the storm more than others and find ways to target any kind of program towards the people that need it the most. That requires planning and having a strategy on how you do it.

That will be my only criticism, I suppose. It just feels like it hasn't been planned out carefully enough, taking all those factors into account and really targeting people who are really suffering the most, who are really struggling the most. That would be my only criticism.

But beyond that, I certainly will support this initiative. Again, I think it highlights, for me at least, until such time comes that we have an alternate source of revenue that's going to replace our oil and gas industry, then to simply talk about shutting down Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore, I think is a bad idea. I think it's a very bad idea. It would leave this province in absolute peril. We wouldn't be in a position to do any of what we're doing. I mean it's a good thing that we're actually debating cutting taxes, being able to cut taxes. That's a good thing that we're able to do it. To imagine that would not even be a possibility were it not for all the revenue coming into this province from our oil and gas industry. So it's very,

very important that as a province we continue to support our oil and gas industry.

Once we get to a point that the economy is diversified in terms of whether this wind stuff is even going to work, I don't know. I mean it's really not proven technology. It is to some degree but it's in its infancy. I think the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology would acknowledge that it is in its infancy. It is brand new for us. It's not something that's being done all over the world, per se, and we really don't know what it's going to look like at the end of the day and how much revenue is going to be derived from it, how many jobs are going to be derived from it. Whether it be direct or indirect jobs and so on, and whether that industry or any other industries that we try to develop, whether it be like the tech industry that is certainly another one that there's definitely opportunity, but whether that will be able to replace – and I know we're doing very well in mining as well and rare earth minerals will be another big one. But whether or not we will be able to replace those revenues that are coming through the door via oil and gas or when that will happen is a question mark in my mind.

When we get there and then we're able to pay for health care, pay for education, deal with cost-of-living issues, then I'd be willing at that point in time to say we have to transition out of this now. But until that time, I think it's a very, very bad idea for any of us to be bringing forward this idea that we're just simply going to shut down our oil and gas industry. I really think that would be a bad idea.

Again, I'm not saying this to dump on any of my colleagues. I'm really not. I respect the people who feel that way and are entitled to their opinion and I respect them for it. I really do. But the reality of it is you have to have money to spend money. You cannot have these programs if you don't have the revenue. We cannot continue to borrow and borrow and borrow. It's hypocritical for us to stand up in this House of Assembly and say

why are we not spending more money on health care? Why are we not spending more money on education? Why are we not investing more money in roads, ambulance services, air ambulance services, food subsidies for Labrador and so on? How can we do that on the one hand and on the other hand shut down our revenue source? We cannot do it; it just doesn't make sense. We cannot do it.

I'm glad to be able to support this bill. I'm glad that we are in a financial position that we're able to do it, but I do caution – and I know the minister knows this – I do caution again that every time we do these things, even though they may be good things, even though they may be needed at the time, we've got to recognize that that revenue that's going into this is revenue that's not paying down debt and paying for our other expenses.

It's a balancing act. I get it, a total balancing act. I think we've arrived at a fair balance, a reasonable balance in my mind and we could always argue over you could do a little more here, a little less there or whatever. But at the end of the day, it's about a balance. As one Member, I'm fairly satisfied with where that balance is right now. I'm fairly satisfied with where the balance is.

I'd love to be able to do more. I'd love for us to be in a position to hand out \$2,000 cheques to everybody and cut all taxes. Wouldn't that be wonderful? But it is not realistic. When people talk about oh, the government got money. No, the government don't have any money. The government don't have any money; the government don't have a dime, actually. It's all our money. All we're doing is taking our money and then we're saying to the government, now, you spend it. But all we're doing is just spending our money.

Some people got this sense that – it's amazing actually – some people actually believe that the government is this entity that has this money. They actually think that

the government will pay for this. The government will pay for that. Not thinking about well, where do you think the money is coming from that the government is spending? It's my money; it's your money. That's reality.

So with that said, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and again I'll support Bill 27. It's something that certainly we had asked for on this side of the House. It's something the government delivered on and they're going to continue to do so, at least until March 31.

I do wonder why we keep going every quarter or whatever, it seems like we're approving it again, approving it again and approving it again. Arguably we should just approve it for a full year and be done with it until the next year. If I want to try to make it a little political, I suppose one could argue that by doing it this way then the government gets to make an announcement we're doing something every three months as opposed to one bang for the year to say we're doing it for the year and then that's the end of it. I don't know, but I will support it nonetheless.

Thank you.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I just wanted to make a comment on what my colleague had to say about government expenditure. Government expenditure is all about choices and how you choose to spend the people's money because he is correct, this is the people's money. This is the people's House. So at the end of the day, you could either choose to spend it on a new office for our Premier in Grand Falls, you could spend \$5 million on the Rothschild report that we've never seen or you could choose to spend it and help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Today, the government on the opposite side has chosen to help the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador and, obviously, we are going to support that.

But I would argue again that if it wasn't for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador and my fellow colleagues, the people on this side, none of that would have happened. None of those decisions would have gotten made, because last March the government introduced their budget and called it a five-point plan and that was it. That was good enough.

But the people of Newfoundland and Labrador said no, it wasn't good enough. The people in our caucus, myself and others said no, it's not good enough. The people on this side of the House, others stood and said no, it's not good enough. As a result of all of that, we saw changes in the budget.

I know the minister is introducing her fourth budget this year, but some would argue it's her seventh. We actually changed the budget twice or three times in this past year, but it was for the benefit of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. So we're glad to see the government actually listen to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and make those changes because it did impact the people and it did save them money.

Today, the minister agreed with the PC Opposition and the people on this side of the House because she said it's a good investment and it's a wise decision. That is something that we have been saying for the last 12 months; that any time you can put money back in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, it is a good investment and it is a wise decision. So I will support that because I agree that it is good.

We have stood here on this side of the House for the last 12 months for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have stood here for that senior who couldn't afford to fill up their tank with oil. We've stood here for the workers who had to travel

two hours and the extreme cost of gas because of the high cost of gasoline. So we have stood for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and we will continue to do that.

One of the things the minister did not mention was the five cents that the Public Utilities Board continues to charge for the closure of the Come By Chance refinery, a temporary measure that is still being charged to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Now, the government on the other side have said there's nothing they can do. Their hands are in the air. There is nothing they can do. It's under the control of the Public Utilities Board.

Well, I can tell you, Speaker, those of us on this side of the House and in our caucus are going to continue to raise that issue because it's extremely important and it needs to be deal with. So we will continue to pressure and pressure the Public Utilities Board and whoever else we need to, to get that eliminated.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: There is a real challenge though. The province is keeping the eight cents gas tax off for the current year, but what we are going to face and the people of this province are going to face on July 1 is a significant increase in taxes as a result of carbon tax and those increases will have huge impacts on the cost of home heating fuel and other fuels for the people of this province.

It wasn't that long ago, maybe 18 months, that the Members opposite, the Liberal government stood and talked about their made-in-Newfoundland carbon tax solution – made-in-Newfoundland. Now, unfortunately, that solution was vetoed by the federal government and the government opposite were not able to convince their federal counterparts, their colleagues that they shouldn't do it. So they're moving ahead to tax the people of Newfoundland

and Labrador with a carbon tax on July 1 that will have significant impacts on them.

We argued against the carbon tax, we voted against the carbon tax and we will continue to vote against the carbon tax. As I stand here today, I have not seen the evidence that suggests the carbon tax has lowered emissions in Newfoundland and Labrador because we all know the challenges we have in this great province of ours.

We have a large geography. We have very little public transportation, so people continue to have to rely on their personal vehicles to get to and from their destinations. Whether that's to a medical appointment, whether that's to work, whether that's taking your kids to hockey, you don't have a choice. That's why this measure today of retaining the eight-cent reduction on gasoline tax is so important. That's why it's a good investment. That's why it's a wise decision, because we're actually helping people of Newfoundland and Labrador and that's what makes it a good decision.

But if we go back and continue to think about it, where's the evidence to suggest that causing people more hurt, taking money out of their pockets, increasing the cost of our food and our supplies – because we all know that most of the goods that are brought into the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are trucked in or come across on the ferries. So the cost goes up. Those fuel adjustment charges, they're all passed down and ultimately it's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, when they go to the stores, that wind up having to pay those costs. That's what's happening right now. No evidence, other than the fact that people are being hurt and it's costing them.

I would make a similar argument, and I'd like to see the evidence that says a sugar tax that has been implemented in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has improved health outcomes. I'd like to see the evidence that suggests that

because nowhere in the Health Accord in the 700 or 800 pages of that document did it even mention a sugar tax improving health outcomes. There were lots of other great suggestions in the Health Accord that talked about the social benefits of health and they talked about things that needed to be done. Let's get on and get those things done. But sugar tax was not one of them.

But what has sugar tax done? It has hurt people, it has taken more money out of their pockets and we'll see that when we see the actual revenue taken in. We'll see the success of the program when we see how much is budgeted for next year because, ideally, the whole concept was we wouldn't collect any money because people would have their – quote – behaviour modified. But there's no need for a sugar tax. There's no need for that.

Do an education program as my colleague from Bonavista talked about yesterday. Educate the public. We all understand that too much sugar is not good for you. We all agree with the Canadian Diabetes Association and all those reports. We all know about our lifestyle. But simply penalizing people and taxing people is not the way to go. So that needs to be eliminated now and there's an opportunity in the upcoming budget for that decision to be made. I look forward to that decision actually being made. But we will wait and see.

As I said, this kind of tax relief is about choices and making choices. Any time you choose the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, you make the right choice. That's what we've been arguing for, for the last 12 months, since that budget was first introduced. That's what we will continue to argue for, for the next 12 months and the next 24 months. Because when we make choices and when we bring down budgets, we should be focused on the simple question: How does this impact the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? How will this help the people of Newfoundland and

Labrador? Those are fundamental decisions of any government that you have to make, so it cannot simply be about choosing one or implementing a tax unless you have the evidence to support that that tax measure will actually produce the outcomes you're hoping to achieve.

But we have no evidence of that and we continue to take money out of people's pockets because we have no idea whether that is going to work or not work. So why are we continuing to take the money out of people's pockets? If something doesn't work, admit it doesn't work and move on. That's what we should be doing. Making choices, always about choices. Let's keep making choices, but let's make those choices based on the evidence in front of us.

My colleague talked about the oil industry, the importance of the oil industry off Newfoundland and Labrador's coast. Make no mistake about it, if there is no demand for oil in the world, there will be no development off our shore. Those companies are not going to stay there if there's no demand for their product. You don't need our prime minister to be trying to shut down the offshore oil industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. In fact, he should be promoting it. He should be arguing for an increase in production to help the world get off other oils that are out there, to stop Canada from having to import 130,000 barrels of oil a day. That's the kind of decisions we need to make. That the kind of decisions that our government should be pushing the prime minister of this country to make. Not simply to turn around and say, we're moving away from oil.

At the same time, our prime minister has a responsibility to stand up for Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to all of the other opportunities we have as a province to create revenue and to help us, not simply to give us loans, but simply to invest, take equity stakes in projects. That's another thing that needs to happen.

Today, as I said, this is a good decision. This is a decision that I've been calling for, we have been calling for since months. Last year we were able to get the government to change their budget. We were able to get this eight-cent reduction on gasoline tax and the government acknowledged the issue and introduced it, and now they're going to continue. We were also able to argue about the high cost of home heating fuel and were successful in convincing the government to change their budget and produce a refund on home heating fuel.

Those are decisions that the government listened to. But those decisions would never have been made if it wasn't for the influence of the PC caucus and others on this side of the House who pushed hard for that, and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who contacted us and I'm sure contacted their own MHAs about how they were being hurt, about the cost of living and how it was so important that they find ways to reduce those costs.

The government did listen. So that's good for the government that they listened. They listened, and that's what makes a democracy work. There is nobody has a patent on good ideas. So as my colleague alluded to earlier, I don't care whether you're a Liberal, a PC, an NDP, an independent, it doesn't matter. When we make decisions, as I have said, it should be about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and how does the decision we're going to make help them. Or in the case of certain taxes, how does it hurt them?

Right now, people in this province are hurting. They're hurting big time. They're hurting because of the cost of transportation, whether it's to a medical appointments, whether it's the back and forth to work, whether it's to take their kids to any kind of an event. We are experiencing high inflation, almost 6 per cent, 5.9 per cent, I think, was the last estimate.

So with that kind of inflation still playing a big part in the province, we have to do something. We have to find a way to help people. This tax reduction today, the continuation of this will go a step towards that, will help that. But, again, I would think the fact that the failure to be able to get the federal government to stop this crazy carbon tax that they're planning on putting in place on July 1, the increase – let me tell you about that one for second, because the federal government says, oh, no, no, no we're going to increase the tax on July 1, we're going to put it on home heating fuel, but we're going to give rebates back to families.

So think about it. On the one hand, the minister says we're going to charge a tax, but on the other hand we're going to give it back. Okay, the basic question: Why are you charging it in the first place?

They're going to spend millions of dollars to collect this tax. They're going to spend millions of dollars to give it back, but what they're not telling you is they're going to keep the 15 per cent of HST that they continue to charge on it. So at the end of the day, it is the people of the province, the people, the seniors of this province that are going to be impacted the most by this particular tax increase.

Again, this particular tax reduction is a good one. It's a good one and I'm delighted to stand here and say that we will support it because it's something that we've been arguing for.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm glad to get up and speak to this bill. I'm glad to say I fully support the bill. There's

absolutely no argument there. Any opportunity whereby we can ease the burden on residents of Newfoundland and Labrador is a good thing.

I'm glad we talked about who takes credit for this and, I think, as Opposition and the parties on this side of the House, our job is to bring forth issues that are raised to us and, of course, this was a big issue that was raised by many people in, I suspect, every district in this province. So we were glad and proud, actually, to get up and voice our opinion on behalf of the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador and to see that government has extended this relief at the pumps.

We look at what exactly we're talking about here. I do want to just clarify because and I know most of us know this, but I think the point was raised by the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands when talking about taxes, just a definition here and I'm sure you could find other definitions quite similar. A tax is a mandatory fee or financial charge levied by any government on an individual organization to collect revenue for public works, facilities and infrastructures. So, you know, that's how government operates. That's where we get the funds to do what we do – filling potholes to providing health care.

Again, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands – he knows I'm listening to him – he talked about finding the balance. I would probably argue against that because it's not so much a balance as it is managing the revenue that comes in in an effective way to ensure that those in most need or those priorities are addressed.

You know, there may be some priorities low on the totem pole, so to speak, that are not able to be addressed, but, certainly, two of the big issues here in this province is the cost of living and health care. No doubt about it. This certainly looks towards helping out with the cost of living in terms of lowering the fees that we pay at the pumps.

Does it help everyone? No, not really. It has the biggest effect on those who are driving, who have cars, who pull up to those pumps on a daily basis. It does also have an effect on transportation, those goods and services that require transportation. So it does affect the bottom line when it comes to costs of those services.

When you're talking about a tax, of course, and not taking it back so to speak, you're actually giving people back their own money. I mean, that's what we're doing here. When you're working into a surplus, as the minister pointed out we were at, government was able to offer the \$500 cost-of-living cheques.

Well, many will agree that it was great to get a cheque, but many would argue that it probably should have been more focused on those in greater need because, as we know, we looked at a threshold of \$125,000 per family and you received \$500. We know there are so many in this province who are in so much need and perhaps a greater effort to look at how this money could have been distributed in a more effective manner. So, I mean, the \$500 cheque to everyone was, I guess, a balance across the board, but was it effective in that or could it have been more effective? I certainly think it could have.

The minister mentioned – and I stand to be corrected, I'll try to quote her – cost of living here is not as significant as other parts of the country. That maybe based on an index, I don't know what it was based on, but I would argue that if you're looking at the effect of cost of living, it's not a subjective issue. It's an issue that is subjective to many. You have to look at the individuals out there who are living below the poverty line, those that don't have shelter, those with health care who are splitting their prescription pills and diluting medicine because they can't afford to get their prescriptions renewed and those, of course, who don't have transportation to and from wherever they have to go.

We know food banks have been strained to the max. There are lots of communities – I know in my district there are people who have on the roads now, individuals that have created these little food pantries. That's where we've gotten to.

I'm suspecting many in this House, when you go home at the end of the day, the question is: What are we having for supper? A common question, but there are houses and there are people in this province who go home and say: Are we having anything for supper? That's not an exaggeration because there are homes out there, there are people out there who have to make other decisions with, I'll call it, disposable income, but, essentially, it's not disposable income when you talk about individuals who can't pay for heat or have to decide between heat and food. But that's a question that's being asked.

As we know we heard in this House, the home heat rebate, there's still about 20 per cent of those cheques have not yet gone out.

You think of elderly out there on fixed incomes and the amount of money to fill a home heat tank is unbelievable. My mother, she lives at home. For a 91-year-old, she's as healthy as they come, comes and goes and fills her oil tank. She tells me the other day a tank that would cost around \$500 or \$600 to fill is now \$1,800 and greater. Imagine it now.

I'll talk with my brother here too; our mother has lots of supports around her. It's just a phone call and we're there, you know. She has lots of supports and she's quite able to get around and she'll tell us what to do and when and where. But there's a lot out there who don't have those supports who are living from day to day.

And we talk about this tax – again, any elimination of a tax is a good thing. But this government has a budget coming up. I really hope, and I don't care, as my

colleagues have said on this side of the House, I don't care where you get the solutions. I really don't. Now, politically we'll say, yeah, we raised it, and in many cases we have, but we're getting it from the people, those with lived experience, they're telling us this. I do hope that the coming budget will give us a better insight into what's being done to ensure the cost of living is not literally killing us in some instances. That there are measures to help those who are most in need.

The minister did mention a significant impact this cut will have, this eight cents at the pump will have. But the question is on who? On who will this significant impact be? Will it be on the individuals who need it the most?

We talk about child care, the \$10 child care, but we also know not everyone can access it. In fact, there are no seats available for many for child care. You're keeping individuals, mainly women, out of the workforce because some of them have to decide between their child and a job and that's really not a decision because most, you're picking your child. But they need to have that decision. They need to have accessible, available, affordable child care so that they can make that decision, but they don't have that. So I mean when we talk about focusing money towards an incentive, we need to start looking at our population, where the most need is.

In all of this, and I think that it was mentioned in the earlier, we talk about the second lowest tax in the country. As I said, we talk about how the cost of living has not been as significant here, but we really, really have to focus on what is here. Back in 2006, a previous Progressive Conservative government – I mean, say who it is – brought forward a Poverty Reduction Strategy for the province. That was in 2006. A report on the success of that was done in 2014. This strategy was lauded across the country and in some other nations as an outstanding initiative, a real comprehensive

plan that was addressing poverty and the needs of those most in need in this province.

That wasn't something elected officials dreamed up. That was something experts dreamed up. There was a panel that developed that strategy and it was working extremely well. In 2003, this report spoke to 63,000 people were in low-income brackets and I'm not going to argue the stat but, by 2011, that number was reduced to 27,000. That's huge progress in poverty reduction and you can pull the report out. You can read everything in it.

But that's one point here. At the same time, in 2011, 8.8 per cent across Canada were considered low income while Newfoundland and Labrador, after the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, that was reduced in Newfoundland and Labrador to 5.3 per cent.

So when we look at measures we're taking, I would hope to see, and something we've asked for, we asked for it in health care, we've asked for it everywhere, where it falls in relation to a full-stage plan – what's the ultimate goal we're trying to reach? It's fine that political pressure or whatever reasons you may come up with this, but what is the full, ultimate plan? I hope to see more of that when the budget comes down. I hope to get a clearer vision of what we're doing.

As the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said, you can take your surplus and you can pay down the debt. No doubt about it, we got a huge debt here. But again, I go back and he called it a balancing act; I call it looking where your priorities are. So if your priority is paying down debt, then that's the priority you take. But at the end of the day, you still have to, as everyone in this province, as everyone in this House are, we're elected – I always say that I'm elected by the people to serve the people.

So you look at what's the most effective way to serve the people, and that all is based on

a number of factors: timing, the economy, it could be based on anything. Times change as you move along. It's always a gerbil's wheel you're running on all the time, but at the end of the day, the end result, the end focus should be on what's the best you can do to manage the revenue to serve the people of this province. I understand you can't please everyone. You're never going to please everyone, but there are groups out there that probably don't have a voice that use us as their voice and won't speak out.

We've had that in the House the last couple of days when we're talking about long-term care. Long-term care, when we talk about our seniors who are in long-term care and home care, and they're in situations where they're either separated by policies and programs that one has to live in one home and one in the other. We've heard the horrifying stories of those suffering dementia and in homes who have been beaten or assaulted. These are places where we need to look at maybe funding going towards long-term care and measures and that can be taken to make it safer. Safer for our residents and our elderly. And, as I mentioned earlier, child care or lack thereof is a huge piece here.

So as we move forward, as we hear more on the budget, and as we've asked for – especially I, as the shadow minister for Health, I've asked for it in Health. Let's see more targeted approaches to utilizing our revenue, our surplus, to address some targeted area that residents of Newfoundland and Labrador need to be addressed, not want to be address. There's a difference between a want and a need, and we all have a lot of wants.

Everyone would want this and want that, but what are some of the areas we ultimately need to address? To some of us, it's obvious. In fact, I would suspect to many of us it's obvious: health care and cost of living. But bits and pieces and addressing it, as it appears, piecemeal without seeing a

full laid-out plan, with benchmarks, with timelines, with targets, we're not seeing that.

Now, I hope March 23, government presents that in their budget and we see a clear road to what they're trying to do. I hope to see that and I'll wait for that to happen and I'll wait to hear the budget on that. But at the end of the day, we want to ensure that everyone in this province has what they should have, have the essential needs and services that they should have and should not be begging for something like food, shelter, transportation, basic health care. These are things that should be available to everyone.

Back to this seven-cent, eight-cent reduction at the pump is a good thing. None of us are arguing over here. I think this will be supported 100 per cent. I can't speak for the Third Party or the other independent, but I'm sure this bill will be supported 100 per cent.

But at the end of the day, is it having – well, not even a significant impact, but is it having any impact on those in most need? We really need to think about that. If back in 2003 we had 63,000 people on low income, you know, those are areas we need to address. What are their needs?

The seven cents is a good start, but it is a start and I'd like to see the plan that lays out how we get to that finish. That may be – and I hope it's looked at. Look at the Poverty Reduction Strategy of the past. Look at the results of that strategy because when the change of government happened in 2015, we saw a lot of that fall to the wayside.

So if it works, use it. That's all I'm going to say.

Thank you.

SPEAKER (Warr): Thank you.

I am recognizing the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I remember a conversation I had many years ago when I was teaching up in Ferryland with a colleague of mine and I was sitting on the executive of the NLTA. The debate was with our health coverage – here is the question being posed to teachers – should we increase premiums or should we decrease benefits?

I remember this colleague of mine saying, you know, Jim, increase the premiums because you'll never miss insurance until you need it, or when you have to go and have a benefit and it's no longer there or it cost you more at that level. That's the purpose, I guess, of insurance. Insurance is not about hoping that you never use it. It's buying peace of mind more than anything else.

I would argue that taxes are very much the same. I will support this but I think when we go after eliminating taxes at many times, we're going after the low-hanging fruit.

So I've heard the minister speak to the gas tax to reduce the cost of living for individuals and businesses, and it seems that we're in a competition to become the lowest – I guess, when it comes to the gas tax, in Canada, we're the second lowest. I don't know if the benefits of lower taxes have actually attracted more business to the province. I am not sure. There are other jurisdictions that have much higher taxes. I think of the Nordic countries, even Quebec and they seem to be doing much better.

So let's talk about choices and about people not having the choice. I think, in many ways, I look at government choices over the years and of why we don't have a public transit system. That was choice, a choice by administrations. We had a rail system here; it no longer exists. We made a choice to use that money from rails to – at the time, I

remember we were going to twin the highway right across the province. They got as far as Whitbourne and there are other areas on the other side that have it, but that's it. It's an expensive proposition to maintain roads.

But we had a system that we could have chosen to improve. How do we make this more efficient? How do we convert the mainline, for that matter, to a standard gauge? We didn't. We chose that option, the government at that time. No doubt it seemed at the time it was a good deal, but I would argue if you look at the state of our highways and the cost of trying to maintain them, maybe not such a good deal.

We don't have a choice; people don't have a choice because of choices that maybe governments at different levels make. Every time we open up a brand new subdivision and we increase the urban sprawl we're making the choice, and we choose not to invest in public transit – and I'll come back to that – we're actually increasing the expense on municipalities that have to maintain those roads.

A public transit system – now, it's interesting, because the gas tax will no doubt benefit anyone who drives, but for a lot of my constituents, people I meet on the bus when I take the bus in here, it's not necessarily helping them. They need a more efficient public transit system. I would say why not look at how we expand affordable public transit for those across the province who don't have their own vehicle?

It's interesting that in 2020 DRL was threatening to pull its buses from the roads because of inadequate government support during the pandemic – a choice. Now we have other measures. The minister mentions the \$500 supplement to switch from oil to electricity. I would say that works if you've already got money in your pockets to do that. Income support payments went up by 5 per cent I think it was.

There was a reference there that we increased it. Yet, I'm looking at the income support payments right here. A single parent with children, Speaker, boarding with relatives, earns \$299.50 twice a month. That works out to a little less than \$7,000 a year, or \$19.69 a day to support that parent and that child. If, on the other hand, they're maintaining a residence, it's \$364.50 twice a month, \$8,748 a year or \$23.90 daily. Now, they might have their rent subsidized but still that's the money they have if that child is school aged to pay for the necessities of life and so on and so forth, food, school supplies, you name it. So we can pat ourselves on the back, but, in the end, it comes down to legislative poverty.

Child care has been brought up already, \$10 a day and it's great I'll tell you. Yes, if I could find a spot. But what savings are there to parents with children who have to make the decision to leave the workforce because they can't find a place to have their child taken care of.

I think in many ways, part of the thing here is that it's great, I will applaud the reduction in the cost of child care, but it's got to be in tandem with how do we make sure we increase the spaces because once you drive down the price you're definitely going to increase the demand, especially of people who might say, do you know what? I'm going to go back to work.

I remember a time when I was young when there was no tax on children's clothing, if I remember correctly. There was that time, and I think if we're looking at targeting taxes, we can look at that. An awful lot of people who have children, that will be a tremendous boom to them. Maybe we need to be looking at things like this as well. I accepted that I'm going to be paying taxes on any clothing item or luxury taxes or anything along those lines, but there are certain necessities when you got young children that you need.

The sugary tax drink, it's been promoted certainly as an attempt to increase health, but it's interesting how the sugary tax drink was implemented in the United Kingdom versus Newfoundland and Labrador. In the United Kingdom, it was introduced on the producers based on the amount of sugary drinks they produced. They were taxed heavily on that, forcing them into more alternatives. So it was penalizing the producers for basically producing the drinks and forcing them into less sugary drinks. Here the tax basically is penalizing the people who are going to purchase the drinks.

But I guess the part that bothers me the most about this is that even then I would still argue that a two litre of Coke or Pepsi still costs way less than a two litre of milk. It's still more affordable. So somewhere along the line, we've got to look at making the necessities of life more affordable and that ties into a point I'll bring up later with guaranteed basic income.

Now, it's easy to say that taxes are the culprit and the answer to the relief is to lower the taxes. I will be the first to say yes. I go to the pump and see that, wow, it doesn't take as much to fill up the truck or whatever this time, fantastic, love it. But in the end – and I do remember when we had George Murphy predicting the prices, let's get there Thursday night in the lineup or take a drive into Costco. I gave up doing that because I looked at the cost-benefit analysis of waiting an hour in the lineup versus the amount of money I would spend getting in there, I said in the end it evens out.

But what I have not heard here to much talked about, when we talk about the cost of living on people, the effect that the extreme cost of living, is the excessive profits, the record-breaking profits of our oil industries and our grocery stores, but we'll come down to taxes as driving up the cost of living. In the end, you look at the huge record breaking, billions of dollars of profits that

they're raking in. Yet, we're told, thank goodness for the oil revenue because a year and a half ago we were spending hard earned public funds to prop up the oil industry, to companies. Actually, these record-breaking profits are so great that it's prompted certain ministers to ball up their fists in rage.

We were spending, I guess you want to call it, corporate money a few years ago and this year, with the record-breaking profits, we're fighting here to make sure that when it comes to doing the topsides work, to do it here in Newfoundland. The companies will make the decisions based on their own bottom line. You would think they would make sure as hey, Newfoundland and Labrador, thank you for your support, we are going to make sure you get a lion's share of the work. But instead, we're fighting to have that here, to make sure our workers have something, to make sure that the communities which they live have some security and we can't get that from them.

Supermarkets are at record-breaking profits. Now, they might argue well, that's because of our cosmetic sales and so on and so forth. They haven't shown that to us. Yet, here we are – call it greedflation – we're paying the price for it.

Now, all this, of course, and even the discussion around climate change, we're ignoring the crushing cost of climate change, both individually, those who have lost their houses as a result of post-tropical storm Fiona, or in the amount of infrastructure that we've got to repair as a province, or the infrastructure that we've got to upgrade to withstand the storms. It's going to come out of our pockets.

Now, we attempted to have a mature conversation on this because we weren't talking about shutting down the oil industry today, tomorrow, this year or next year, but we did want to have a transition plan, just transition legislation that would plan for an orderly phase-out and diversification and to

avoid the volatility of what we've seen in non-renewable resources because it might be good this year; a year or two from next year, we might be back in the same boat.

So how do we plan for this? How do we plan to make sure that we have our workers protected, our communities protected, our people of this province protected?

Otherwise, the alternative is to wait until there's no demand for oil and therefore no offshore industry. We're not prepared to go down that route. It's about having a plan.

So in many ways, yes, a break on gas tax, we understand it, we'll support it, but somewhere along the line we've got to look at the bigger picture of how do we pay for things and, if we're going to tax, how do we tax smartly as well and who do we tax? But in the end, it's about having the common good.

I've said this before, taxes are the price that I pay for living in a democratic and a civilized society in the society in which we live. It may not benefit me directly, but it's about the common good. Whether it's about eliminating the 1.6-kilometre busing rule, all of these demands that we have. It's about making sure that we have the necessary funds, the necessary resources to keep the benefits, the services that we need.

Again, I pay life insurance, health insurance hopefully that I'll never have to claim. As a friend of mine used to say to me, buying life insurance is like betting on a horse you hope is not going to win. Now, I've had teachers who used to come to me: I don't need this insurance; I'm healthy. Maybe you are, but you're also contributing to the greater good of those people in the profession who aren't. But hopefully someday if you are sick, you have insurance there to look after you.

That's how I look at taxes. It's about the common good. Do I want a break at the pump? Yes. Do I want to see my personal income taxes reduced? Yes. But I also want

roads. I want a health care system with well-paid staff, health professionals. I want teachers. I want parks. I want those things, not only for me but for everyone else and that's the purpose, I think, when we're talking about taxes. It's easy to get up and say yes, let's reduce this tax, but in the end I've got to think about, what is it that we need as a society?

A \$500 cheque, we can pass that out, and very few people are going to turn it down, but a lot of the people we spoke to said: Why am I getting this cheque? We could have spent this better. I think in many ways we've got to look at how that money could have been spent to help people. I don't know, let's look at the number of people who have called my office because their oil heating supplement has run out and now they can't fill up their tank.

So, in many ways, I think maybe taking that money – or maybe we could have looked at a break on children's clothing taxes, or maybe we could look at increasing the supplement for those who need it or whatever. But I think, in many ways, the hard work is looking at how we move forward.

The Health Accord – and I'm coming back to this and I'll finish with this. Very clearly – because this is not Newfoundland alone, by the way; this is about the federal government itself. They're partners in this, we're part of a federation and it's not Newfoundland doing this alone. Whatever we choose to do, it's incumbent upon the federal government to provide the necessary support, whether it's about improving our health care system or about a just transition, whatever it is, they're partners in this, especially if they're demanding this of us.

I will say this: The Health Accord is not a cheap proposition. It's a lot of upfront money, a lot of upfront investment with a long-term payoff and that's where we have to hold the course. In the end, if you look at

the stats and the figures in the Health Accord, 20 per cent of a person's health is related to the health care system – 20 per cent of our health. Sixty per cent of our overall health and well-being is related to the social determinants of health. Our ability to put food on the table, the ability to put a roof over our heads, the ability to enjoy life, recreation, you name it, to get a good education, all of these things. That's fully 60 per cent, and if we follow that logic then, really, we have put a significant investment in addressing the social determinants of health so that we have healthier people who no longer need to rely on the health care system as much and tax it as much. That's what it comes down to.

I am committed myself to a basic income because any of the research I've read shows it has significant benefits. The downsides of it have not been proven. But I think, going forward, it's about providing the people of this province, all people of this province, those are who are maybe on income support, those who are in precarious employment, those who are in the gig economy, those who are making minimum wage, those who find themselves thrown out of work, have some form of a consumption insurance that smooths out the shocks, that protects people.

That's not Newfoundland and Labrador alone, but that's Newfoundland and Labrador and the federal government as well. Because I think if you want a healthier province, then you have healthier people and you start looking at the things that impact our health. Not just a car accident, but the ability to eat healthy food, the ability to not be stressed out by the next food bill or whatever else. It's those things that will increase our health.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll stand and have a few words on this Bill 27 and the seven cents. Of course I'm going to vote for this bill itself to help out people with the high cost of the gasoline, the high cost of living. I just want to bring one little issue up that a few ministers brought up yesterday, about the sugar tax.

The issue was brought up about the sugar tax, about the great work that's being done with it, no doubt. But one thing they're leaving out – and I just want to put this in because if we're planning on having an open debate, we should put all of the facts on the table. When myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, last year, when we broke the deal to get this bill through this House which we did out here, the minister made a commitment that the funds that you got from the sugar tax would not go to any existing government program. It would go to education. That was the commitment.

No one here is going to deny that giving money for the school food program is an issue. But when the minister made that commitment, the idea was to put it out through new programs that would educate people on healthy eating, healthy living and the drawbacks on it. That was the commitment and the other commitment that was made was that you would have a line item on exactly where the money went and some of the organizations that we agreed to out there – Heart and Stroke, diabetes of Newfoundland and Labrador and any other program that's going to provide education.

So when the minister stands up and wants to talk about the sugar tax and the great work they're doing, there's no one can deny that. There's no one going to deny that. But when you make a commitment that you're going to use that money for promotion, down the road, you should follow that

commitment. I firmly believe that when the minister made that commitment that you wouldn't use it for existing programs and you took the money and put it in existing programs, then you question every other piece of legislation that comes through this House. I know it was brought up in this House about the use of the Canadian Diabetes Association but if you look at the actual report – and I haven't got it in front of me, but if you look at the actual report they made a list of seven or eight recommendations that could be done to help with diabetes in this province. They actually list them on what can be done.

So if we're saying here today that all these taxes that are coming in and some coming off are going to be for the benefit of Newfoundland and Labrador, like the sugar tax, and using this group, the Canadian Diabetes Association, we should follow through and try to work on the recommendations they've got there that's going to improve healthy living for the people of the province.

The Member for St. John's Centre, he brought up the living wage for people and some kind of a base for people. Do you know that's one of the recommendations there? That's one of the recommendations in the Health Accord, Sister Elizabeth Davis put in there that we have a basic income for people.

If you look at the study from the Canadian Diabetes Association, you'll find out that the lower end of income are the ones with the greater chance for diabetes. In Newfoundland, it's part of the geography that we have in rural Newfoundland to get the care that people need.

So when you want to stand up and talk about the sugar tax, we should put it all on the table that when we all agreed with it here, there was a commitment made and then we were hoping that the commitment would be followed because if you gave, just for an example, a million dollars to the Heart

and Stroke Foundation, what an education program they could put across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador or you give to the Canadian Diabetes Association to use for Newfoundland and Labrador, what an education program they could do in schools and other places to promote healthy living.

I just want to put that out there that no one is ever arguing about the programs that are here in the schools for food and helping kids out and healthy eating. No one is going to deny that, absolutely no one, but what we have to do is to find some way that when we make a commitment, to keep that commitment.

I'll leave that there now, Mr. Speaker.

P. LANE: Didn't talk about gym memberships, did we?

E. JOYCE: Pardon me?

P. LANE: Didn't talk about gym memberships.

E. JOYCE: No, that's right, we didn't talk about gym memberships, talking about using some of that funds to put it towards gym membership, where you have to spend \$3,000 or \$4,000 to get back \$100 or \$200. If you look at the studies around, a lot of people, low income, can't afford to pay the \$3,000 or \$4,000 gym memberships or \$3,000 or \$4,000 to go and do their downhill skiing and do things like that. They can't afford to try to get back \$200 or \$300. They can't do it.

So when you take that money, which was committed for education, for healthy eating, and put it into gym membership, where a lot of people that we should be targeting can't use that, that's not what we all agreed to and that's not how the minister made that commitment to us. There was four or five us out front, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands was there, that we agreed to.

P. LANE: CBS.

E. JOYCE: Pardon me?

P. LANE: CBS, maybe?

E. JOYCE: The Member for CBS, he was there, yes, and the Government House Leader at the time was there also.

I'm going to go back to this Bill 27. I heard my colleague this morning talking about government, the balancing act; it's true. It is true. It is a balancing act. I had the fortunate pleasure of being on both sides, the Opposition, government. Government first, Opposition and then back to government. I had that opportunity to see on both sides how it works. It's difficult, it is difficult because every sector of this province, you can say that they're a group, they have concerns daily. You can't meet all the concerns in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Then, again, I look at this seven cents off and probably eight cents when you put in the HST, eight cents off gas and I just think about some of the things that can be done. Just think about it, Mr. Speaker. Here we are, it's great news, seven cents off the gas. Just think about if this province right here and now with a stroke of the pen could take care of 800 seniors for cataracts in Corner Brook, not just Corner Brook, Western Newfoundland. Just think about it. They can do it with a stroke of the pen. They just did 3,000 for St. John's region. Not saying you didn't need them, not saying there's not – but there's no intake officer.

This government tomorrow morning could go into office, stroke of the pen and get rid of the wait-list for the cataract surgeries in Western Newfoundland and won't do it. Here we are today saying oh, what a great announcement, we'll take seven cents off. It is a good announcement. It is going to help out a lot of people, absolutely not denying it. I will vote for it, no doubt.

But we always hear in this House: What is it we can do now to get things done? It is astonishing, it's absolutely astonishing that we see bills coming in here – some are good bills, absolutely. It's hard for government. I'll be the first to say that it's hard because you've got people who are always going to look and say well here's another concern. You can't meet all the concerns. Absolutely, you can't, no way.

But when you can take care of 800 people and no one here in this House of Assembly – I challenge anybody to debate me on why this can't be done, anybody. Any minister, any former minister, challenge me, debate me in this House why they can't get those 800 seniors – and you want to talk about the waiving of seven cents. Do you know those 800, most of those 800, right now as we speak, they're not going to be able to use this here because they can't drive because their licence is taken away.

So I'm going to go back to someone now and say oh, yeah, they just reduced the gas tax by seven cents. Well, that don't bother me because I can't drive anyway, they took my licence away because I had to wait to get cataracts surgery.

So when the government wants to come out with good news, let's do the things we can do. Let's do some of the things we can do. Then there are a lot of other issues that we have, like education. People are always saying we need more funding for education. We need more nurses.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if it's appropriate but I have a note here from a nurse practitioner. I could read it out about how nurse practitioners could actually save money. I don't know if I can read this or if it's leave of the House – well, I don't need leave of the House, Mr. Speaker. You want to talk about saving money and how nurse practitioners can actually save the province money. I'll do that another time when another bill comes up instead of this, Mr. Speaker.

But this is from a nurse practitioner who wrote a letter to me asking me to read it in the House of Assembly to show how government could alleviate the shortage of doctors in this province. That's what it is, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what it is.

So while we're here debating Bill 27, there are a lot of other things that we can do as a government. There are a lot of other things we can do as a province. I know the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure is there. I know that he came out with the big road plan. I can tell the minister now, and I make no bones about it, that when you have people talk about the gas tax, that some money should be put toward the roads. I can tell the minister that if he took every cent in his budget that he had in his department, forget everything else, every cent and spent it, there would still be people saying we need parts of the road done. There are certain sections we need done. That is a part of people saying there are certain areas not done and that bigger part is that we don't have enough funds to do everything everybody wants in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is just an example.

I look at other ministers over there that are in the same predicament. The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, when it comes to Capital Works, the requests that are made to the minister well exceeds any funding he can put in there. Yet, you have to have people saying we're a priority. This is where the government can't do everything for everybody in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, but we need to balance.

I've been talking about this, Mr. Speaker, the balance. When you can put nurse practitioners in there to help out with the doctor shortage and the long waits at the emergency room, why don't we do it? If we could do 800 cataracts, the people on the wait-list, why don't we do it? Why are we making people suffer? Why?

On one point you can't do everything, on another point there's a lot you can do, but you won't do for some reason. I think I know the reason, but for some reason you just won't do it. This is where people become skeptical. I was just on *Open Line* talking about the cath lab and people in Western Newfoundland. One person waiting 45 days. Problems with air ambulance – I brought it up yesterday, waiting for air ambulance. It is not out there; they're bringing people in.

Whatever happened to this fly-in, fly-out for a day? What happened to it? Where is it? People are out there waiting to get in. People are waiting up there and there are people out there now and they admit – again, it's a tough one because there are a lot of people who need it. But if you're going to make an announcement about we're going to fly you in, fly you out the same day, let's do it. Let's do it. You wouldn't have a wait-list out there. You wouldn't have people calling our office and other offices from Members out on the West Coast also. They know who I'm talking about, if they took their calls. They know who I'm talking about. Those people up there, one person, Mr. Speaker, I was told was waiting over 40 days. Another person was ready to go and the air ambulance didn't come out to get them.

This fly-in, fly-out, if we're going to say we're going to do it, let's do it. If we can't do it, let's just say it's not going to work. These are the issues that came up – when you hear something, oh, we're going to get the gas tax, seven cents gone off it, that's great. But there are other things that we can do.

I'll take my seat now and, again, I'll have that opportunity to speak on this on many occasions here in this House. But, in closing, I'll repeat myself again, because I won't give up until it's done. Why won't we do the 800 seniors – mainly seniors – in Western Newfoundland who need cataract surgery when it could be done with the stroke of a pen? The money is there to do it. Absolutely, the money is there.

There's not a person in this House who could debate me and any information that I put in that it's cheaper to do it at APEX than the hospital. You'd get more people done and there's a wait-list too in Corner Brook. Mr. Speaker, there's no one here who knows the difference, because they all know it's true. They all know it's true, but it won't be done. Why don't we take the nurse practitioners and use them to their full skills? Why don't we do that?

P. LANE: Let them bill MCP.

E. JOYCE: Let them bill MCP and if they have to go out on their own to do it, let them bill MCP. Let them bill MCP. Why can't they bill MCP? I have yet to get a reason.

I'll just give you an example. If they went out on their own, say you've got nurse practitioners that went out and set up a practice on their own, they can't bill MCP, yet Eastern Health can hire people – and so do Western Health, by the way – they hire nurse practitioners, they can hire them through their own system but they won't set up an office for them to let people go through it. They'll hire them within the system, pay them. They're getting paid, but they will not hire them to go out and set up and say okay, you're working through Eastern Health or Western Health, you can go off and you can see people and do the same thing they are doing in the private practice, only they can't bill MCP. If they do it and get remunerated for it for Western Health under Western Health, get paid under Western Health, they could actually do the same work for the prescriptions or people who need blood work done, they can do it. It's an easy fix.

But for some reason, we – and I'm not talking we as a government, but we as parliamentarians in this House – can't get it done. Just can't get it done. We always said in this House if you want to know the right answer, go to the people who are affected most, go to the nurse practitioners and ask them, go to the ones that I know out on the

West Coast and ask them could they help take care of the people who haven't got a doctor. Yes. If you start seeing patients, would you help with the stress and the long waits at urgency? The answer is yes, and we won't do it. We won't do it.

So this is the role of the Opposition. I know any concerns that I get from people on the West Coast I will bring up, and there are three or four that I know that is very concerning. I'll just say again that I'll sit down but I'll have lots of opportunity and when we get into the main budget, Mr. Speaker, I'll read this out and talk about a nurse practitioner, for themselves, of what they think they can do and why their full scope of practice that they can be utilized much better and help out the 130,000 people who are without family doctors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

They're the experts. They know what they can do. They're already registered. The government knows what they can do. They hire them in the health authorities, so I'm just asking government again to review that one on the nurse practitioners, get the cataracts done because it's a crime what we're doing. I'm going to leave this off with the cataracts, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to leave this here with the last words on the cataracts. I've got to ask you a question. I'll ask any Member in this House a question: If there's a senior outside that door that needed help, how many of us would go out? Every one of us. Every one in this House would go outside that door and do what we can.

There are 800 in Western Newfoundland who need that help and we can't give it to them. It's sad. It's actually sad. It's a sad state when I can stand in this House and I have to stand in this House saying, with a stroke of the pen, we can take care of 800 people in Western Newfoundland and give them back their quality of life, give them back their dignity, give them back their sense of value, give them back their family, give them back their mothers or fathers, and

we won't do it. Yet, if there was someone outside that door right now, every one of us would rush out to help. It's sad. It's actually sad and it's all over personalities, period.

We're making seniors suffer all over personalities. They know it, I know it, yet we can't get it done. It's a sad day that I have to stand in this House of Assembly and give a government an option to help out over 800 people in Western Newfoundland and they won't take it and it won't cost them a penny, a penny extra. It's going to be cheaper on the taxpayer of the province, and it won't be done.

So when the government stands up and says –

P. LANE: The Premier's own constituents.

E. JOYCE: Pardon me?

P. LANE: The Premier's own constituents.

E. JOYCE: Some of the Premier's own constituents are calling me – own constituents. The Member for St. George's - Humber, constituents of his. The Member for Corner Brook, constituents of his, and you know it, they're calling you. You know it. I know he's shaking his head it's true. Let's get it done. Let's get it done. It's an easy fix I say to the Member, and I know you're concerned about your constituents. I know you are. Let's get it done. Let's work together, put it a bit of water in our wine and let's get it done to help out those people on Western Newfoundland.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 27 be now read a second time?

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against.

The motion is carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, No. 3. (Bill 27)

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

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

J. HOGAN: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, No. 3," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 27)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 27.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole 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?

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 27, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, No.3.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, No. 3." (Bill 27)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, No. 3.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill without amendment, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 27.

CHAIR: The motion is the Committee rise and report Bill 27.

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.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

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

B. WARR: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 27 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed him to report Bill 27 without amendment.

When shall the bill be received?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bills be read third time?

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Further to a point of order that was made yesterday, I want to retract that comment I said that government took offence to.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move that the House now recess.

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

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Good afternoon, in the public gallery I would like to welcome Gary Martin, who is to be recognized in a Members' statement this afternoon – actually, he is in the Speaker's gallery.

Welcome, Gary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also visiting us today in the public gallery for a Members' statement are Gail Brown, Reg Durdle, Eliza Swyers and Helen Durdle.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Joining us this afternoon for the private Member's resolution, I would like to recognize Tom Johnston, of the Holyrood Fire Department; Ron Ghaney, Conception Harbour Volunteer Fire Department; David Peddle with the Bay de Grave Regional Fire Department; and Lacey Pottle with the Bay de Grave Regional Fire Department.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Labrador West, Lake Melville, Placentia - St. Mary's, Bonavista and Mount Pearl North.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you so much, Speaker.

I rise today to pay tribute to Joan Stamp, a pioneer and resident of Labrador West who passed away at the age of 96. Joan, like many of our pioneers, moved with their families in the 1960s to what was then Carol Lake, now known lovingly as Labrador West. Joan spent 61 years in Labrador West and, from the very start she was devoted to the area. Her motto and secret to a long and happy life was simple: Keep busy.

Throughout her time in Labrador West, Joan raised her family, volunteered with countless organizations and loved to be on committees. She held a position with the Status of Women until her final days and was one of the longest serving members.

Joan brought a light to our community with her sense of humor and her ability to light up a room. We certainly will miss her laugh and the presence she brought to our community events, especially at community dances which she loved so very much.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in remembering Joan Stamp for her dedication to her family, our community and thank her for being an inspiration to so many people.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay recently lost one of its most passionate community builders, Charles Warr. A dedicated resident since 1964, Charlie started Warr's Pharmacy, the first such business in Labrador.

It did not take long for this pharmacist to become much appreciated by employees and customers alike. Charlie served on the town council and was a tireless community supporter of numerous causes, including

the creation and operation of the Paddon Home, the first seniors' complex.

Other community initiatives involved the support and development of various sporting organizations and infrastructure. A competitive athlete in many sports, he was an early promoter for the E. J. Broomfield arena. From softball to soccer and more, many generations received generous corporate support through his various teams of Warr's Warriors.

A favourite memory for many is of the pilgrimages the Warr brothers, other family and friends would make to Montreal to watch their beloved Habs. While what happens on the road stays on the road, it is well known that this pioneer in business, municipal governance, sports and community well-being will have a long-lasting legacy in Central Labrador.

I would ask this House of Assembly to recognize the achievements and contribution of this remarkable builder. Thank you, Charlie.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, on January 2 of this year, Mrs. Elizabeth Critch of the Gaskiers, St. Mary's Bay, turned 100 years old.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mrs. Critch is the youngest of nine siblings, born to Patrick and Jane Tobin. She married Joseph Critch in May of 1946 and they raised eight children together. Today she has 19 grandchildren, 29 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

With five hours of home care a day, Mrs. Critch lives in her own home surrounded by family and friends. She continues to cook

meals with her home care worker and loves blue potatoes, fish and homemade bread. Every Sunday the tradition of eating Jiggs' dinner lives on, cooked in her home or brought to her by a family member.

Another favourite of Mrs. Critch is when the door to her house swings opens. Mrs. Critch enjoys company and gets lots of visits from family and friends. She loves a good game of cards, especially 120s. Every evening, you will find her watching the *NTV Evening Newshour*, followed by *The Young and the Restless* and *Family Feud* as she enjoys the warmth from her kitchen woodstove.

Please join me as I wish Mrs. Elizabeth Critch a happy 100th birthday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

It is a privilege to rise today to acknowledge the many residents of the Bonavista and area who initiated a rally line in support of health care in the region, where they gathered on Hospital Road for an hour each day. This rally began in July of 2022 and continues today during the cold days of winter.

The organizers of this rally line – Gail Brown, Reg Durdle, Eliza Swyers and Helen Durdle – have dedicated much time and effort to peacefully rallying and advocating for quality health care in the Bonavista area.

On March 1, the rally line group organized a public meeting at Discovery Collegiate in Bonavista, which involved approximately 500 residents from throughout the region attending and more than 300 participating online. The event heard many real-life examples from the residents that inspire the group to keep up with their advocacy efforts.

I ask Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the outstanding efforts and advocacy of the rally line organizers, and the many residents who have been participating on the rally line in Bonavista.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. STOYLES: Speaker, Gary Martin has spent almost 40 years coaching, officiating and volunteering, and he shows no signs of slowing down.

Gary has served on the NL mission staff for seven Canada Games; as head coach of women's hockey in 2019; as chef de mission in the 2022 games in Niagara Falls – Team NL's best-ever performance, winning 9 medals; and February past, Gary was assistant chef de mission at the games in Prince Edward Island.

Gary has devoted countless hours to amateur sports and continues to do so in his current position with SportNL and the provincial Sports Centre. Gary is fully aware of the importance of sport in the province and promoting health, the development of leadership and the importance of inclusion and diversity in our society.

Gary Martin is a community-minded individual. His motivation is the success of the young athletes representing our great province. Gary truly values represents our province and he thanks those who entrusted him in this role.

Speaker, Gary and his team continue to represent us well on the national stage. He has laid a solid foundation for the success of our 2025 Canada Games hosted right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize an incredible group of young people from Newfoundland and Labrador.

More than 160 athletes from our province were in Prince Edward Island recently to compete in the 2023 Canada Winter Games.

Today, I want to extend my congratulations to everyone who competed, including five remarkable athletes who came home with medals: Gleb Evstigneev, gold in Trampoline; Maddox Glover, gold in Special Olympics Level II Figure Skating; Mark Butt and Lily Evans, bronze in Pre-Novice Pairs Figure Skating; and Mike Gosine, bronze in Boxing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: I also invite all Members to join me in congratulating Team NL's Gabe Flynn for winning the Pat Lechelt True Sport Award, which is also an incredible achievement.

Speaker, just as Premier Furey we pleased to join Team NL for the opening ceremonies to see the athletes in action, I was equally honoured to join our athletes at the closing ceremonies where the Canada Games flag was handed off to Newfoundland and Labrador and our capital city of St. John's as the next host of the 2025 Canada Summer Games.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: To the mission staff, coaches, managers and family members who stood behind our athletes, thank you for all you do to guide them, support them and teach them the skills they need to be successful in their sport lives.

We look forward to 2025 with much anticipation and will work with the City of St. John's and other community partners to deliver a Canada Games like no other. Our support to date has been strong, including recent investments in tennis and a new track and field facility. I look forward to sharing more exciting news about these efforts in the coming months.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I would like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. We in the Official Opposition want to congratulate our athletes, coaches, managers and mission team on their recent success at the Canada Games in Prince Edward Island.

To our medallist, we want to congratulate them on achieving their goals through hard work, dedication and commitment to training. Many times athletes must pass over other activities like social events and family functions to train to achieve their peak performance.

To Gabe Flynn, what an achievement to be awarded the Pat Lechelt True Sport Award. I'm told Pat was idolized by her fellow mission members from across the country.

We look forward to hosting the country in 2025 and hope government continues to financially support upgrades to our facilities and to increase support for our athletes and

teams in their preparations for 2025 so it's our best Canada Games ever.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Our caucus also congratulates all members of Team NL on their performance and a special shout-out to the members from Labrador West who went in the first ever snowboarding, also cross-country skiing and also we did send some support staff from Labrador West as well.

With the games coming here in 2025, our government must ensure that the investments are made so our athletes can compete at elite levels. This means financial support for travel within the province and investments in world-class facilities to bring us so much closer to that podium.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

On behalf of the provincial government, I would like to acknowledge that March 8 of last week was International Women's Day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: People of all genders throughout Newfoundland and Labrador joined in marking this important occasion.

This is a global day of celebration for the achievements of women here in our province and around the world. Women and girls in Newfoundland and Labrador are making strides and forging change in a variety of sectors and industries, which is certainly something to celebrate.

Speaker, last week, I was honoured to attend the 67th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women as a part of the Canadian delegation. This event was incredible and a unique opportunity to learn from and connect with global leaders about how to leverage technology to combat gender barriers.

It also allowed space to share the important work happening to advance gender equality here in Newfoundland and Labrador. The learnings from this event will be another reference point as we work to ensure that our policies and our programs and services are relevant, timely and promote gender equity in this province.

Collectively, we must continue to challenge gender stereotypes, call out discrimination, draw attention to bias and seek out inclusion.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

On the occasion of International Women's Day last week, I was honoured to participate in several events in my District of Harbour Main and to meet incredible women, supporting and empowering each other.

It is important to celebrate our victories, while at the same time acknowledging the real challenges and barriers that exist.

There have been strides toward gender equality, but there is still so much more work to be done.

Therefore, I take this opportunity to ask the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality to firmly advocate to her Cabinet colleagues to stop delaying on the implementation of pay equity and pay transparency legislation in this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement and join her in recognizing International Women's Day and the achievements of women and girls.

Technology is one tool to combat gender equality, no mistake about it. What is more effective, however, is solid legislation crafted through extensive consultation. This government cannot rely on engageNL to fix their inadequate and rushed legislation from the fall. Labour and women's group need to be at the table if government is to avoid the consistency of failures that impact women and gender-diverse people across this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the prime minister is in the province today and no doubt had to drive past shuttered emergency rooms in the community of Whitbourne.

I ask the Premier: Was the issue of shuttered emergency rooms in our province discussed with the prime minister? If so, when can we expect the Whitbourne emergency room to reopen?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

We were indeed glad to host the prime minister in the province again today. Any time the prime minister of our country visits Newfoundland and Labrador, I think it's important; he gets to understand and see the developments and requirements of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

There was a discussion between the prime minister and Premier on a number of issues. The Premier always takes the opportunity to bring the issues of the province to the prime minister and that would include health care among many other issues that would have to be discussed.

I will say that I was pleased to see, today, that Angus Reid indicated that the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador is indeed the top-rated Premier in the country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: I think this speaks volumes to the leadership of the Premier and I thank him for his efforts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

From what we're hearing, his popularity wouldn't be based on what we're doing for health care in Newfoundland and Labrador. We seen that here today and we seen it again yesterday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: The prime minister was in Clarenville this morning, an hour-and-a-half drive from the Bonavista emergency room. This would have been an excellent opportunity to show the prime minister how important this emergency room is to the people of that region.

I ask the Premier: Why wasn't the prime minister brought to Bonavista? Was it not important enough for the Premier or, like for patients needing an ambulance, was it just too far to drive?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Myself and the Premier have had numerous discussions with Minister Duclos, Dominic LeBlanc, the Premier with the prime minister on the health care issues in this province, on the emergency departments that have closures, no different than any other province across Canada where there are emergency departments closed, where there's a shortage of staff.

What the prime minister has said back to this province and what Minister Duclos has said back to this province is that our agreement has been reached very easily. That the bilateral agreements will be reached very easily because we have a Health Accord, a 10-year plan in place, which many other jurisdictions across the country don't have. They will address the issues including collaborative care, family care clinics in the province, in terms of

recruitment and many other initiatives that are under way.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

I didn't hear once that they guaranteed enough revenues so that you could do proper recruitment and retention to keep our physicians in Newfoundland and Labrador so they stay in Bonavista and they stay in Whitbourne.

Yesterday the Deputy Premier said – and I quote – the carbon tax is a federal tax and suggests we advocate to the federal government for its removal. Yet, today, the Premier has the ear of the prime minister.

Did the Premier get a commitment from the prime minister that carbon tax would not cause home heating fuels to increase in this province?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

As I did note yesterday, the federal government has imposed a carbon tax across the country. We did have an agreement with the federal government to not impose a carbon tax on home heat. We are disappointed that they have decided to do so. That's why there will be a federal backstop.

As the Member opposite well knows, this federal tax is being applied across the country. We are concerned about it going on home heating fuel, and that's why we were disappointed in the fact that the federal government has made this policy decision.

Speaker, I will say that we have offered the people of the province over \$500 million in attempts to address the cost of living in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, I just want to make people aware that it is that administration over there who supported this and are supporting the 17 cents that will go on home heating fuel on July 1 to the people of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, a mother in Labrador has been waiting for a medevac from Happy Valley-Goose Bay to St. John's after suffering a heart attack on March 10. Five days after her cardiac event, she's still no closer to receiving the care she needs on the Island. The mother is stuck on a wait-list for treatment and the family fears it could be 21 days before she's able to receive treatment.

I ask the Premier: Where is Heart Force One?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just a couple of days ago, we signed off on approval for four more flights for Heart Force One. One of them is actually, in fact, to Labrador. This is a very positive program. It's been working very, very well. The reviews from not only cardiologists and health care professionals but from the patients who've taken advantage of this service all rave about the service, Mr. Speaker. There will be a flight to Labrador and we hope that that individual is part of the flight.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, hopes are one thing, necessity is more important here and that's what this family needs. The family is under incredible stress as they wait for treatment. They're concerned the stress of the situation could cause further cardiac events for their mother. They need answers and it could be a month after the initial event before this mother knows her condition.

I ask the Premier: Is this an acceptable situation for health care in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, the prioritization for patients is done between the referring physician and the cardiologist. So I'm not about to say who's going to be on the flight and who's not. That's not my job; that's the job of the cardiologist. I certainly hope that that individual is one of the people that are on that flight.

The cardiologists, the referring physicians will do their job, will ensure that the appropriate people are on the flight. It is my hope that that individual is one of the individuals on the flight. This is an exceptionally good program, Mr. Speaker. It's serving the province well. I believe there's plenty of room on the plane, but I will leave the professional job of the cardiologists to the cardiologists.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister may not book the flights, but he is responsible to ensure that every

Newfoundlander and Labradorian has access to health care in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: The health care system in this province is in a crisis; 136,000 people without a family doctor and over 750 vacant nursing positions. The Health Accord laid out a plan for health care and if not fully funded, as Sister Elizabeth Davis says, it will fail.

Did the Premier get a commitment from the prime minister to fully fund the Health Accord in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will address the preamble. The individual had said that it's our job to ensure people have access. That's the reason we put Heart Force One in place. It's the cardiologists' job, Mr. Speaker, to determine who's on the plane. But we're providing the planes, Mr. Speaker. We're providing the funding for the planes. We're ensuring that that service is available and it's a good service for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, it's great to have the residents of the Bonavista area in the gallery today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Residents of the area are seeking emergency care in the Bonavista region for those that have arrived at the local hospital to find the doors locked. One of these individuals, Charlie Marsh, died in an ambulance on the way to Clarenville. Mr.

Marsh's family put his death squarely on the fact that he could not receive emergency care at the Bonavista hospital.

I ask the minister: Will he guarantee that the emergency room in Bonavista will be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, welcome to the House of Assembly to the individuals from Bonavista. I appreciate the invite by the Member opposite to speak with them today; we had a productive meeting.

On behalf of the individual who passed away, our heartfelt condolences. Mr. Speaker, I did speak with his daughter. It is a very sad situation. We certainly hope that we're able to address that so we don't see other situations. We are certainly working, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that clinic is open 24 hours a day, 365 days year. That is the goal. We have some excellent financial incentives in place for physicians and for other health professionals in the area.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Yesterday the minister said if we know of health care workers that want jobs, that he would hire them today.

So I ask the minister: When did his government first know about several doctors who were willing to cover shifts at the ER at the Bonavista Peninsula health care clinic and why didn't he accept their offer?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I understand that Eastern Health has put offers out to the individuals. The financial incentives, Mr. Speaker, government can put in place. In terms of the HR issues, Eastern Health deals with that. I understand that currently, today, there are seven individuals that offers are being made to.

I can say, Mr. Speaker, that we went through the approval process, we got the approval, the provincial health authority is offering \$200,000 for any physician in this province or anywhere else across the country that is listening, a \$200,000 signing bonus for two years return in service to work in Bonavista. That is on top of the Come Home Incentive, Mr. Speaker, of \$100,000 if they are coming from outside the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

The situation in Bonavista is all too common in the province. People that need emergency care are finding locked doors. We have people from Bonavista here in the gallery today and they need assurances that their emergency room will be there when they need it.

I ask the minister: Can the people in the gallery, their families and their loved ones be confident that emergency room care will be available to them in their time of need?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for the question because it is an important question, especially for the people of Bonavista.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the incentives we're putting there for physicians to be

hired, we're paying \$3,300 a day for a 10-hour shift, 14 hours on call for physicians to work in Bonavista. We are also providing – because if a physician is not available, you need airway management and emergency department skills, we're providing a \$1,000 bonus for any physician, nurse practitioner or qualified nurse in this province to do airway management and the emergency room skills so that not only in Bonavista, but other Category B sites, if there's not a physician available, we can keep them open on a virtual basis. We are determined to get Bonavista hospital open.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, this morning the prime minister came to shake hands with his Liberal friends and to re-announce \$10-a-day child care. With no new details about child care in our province one parent said – and I quote – if there are no spaces, life isn't affordable when you can't go to work.

When will we see enough staff to meet the demand for child care in our province?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Child care is important, and I will say it's early learning and child care because the early learning is an important aspect of that. It's important for every young family in this province, Mr. Speaker. We've added 700 seats in post-secondary. Obviously, it takes time for those individuals to graduate.

We've reached out because there are a significant number of people who are licensed and capable to be early learning educators in this province but left because the wages were low. We're addressing that

in terms of the wage grid in this province, Mr. Speaker. We're reaching out to those who've retired or gotten out of the sector to encourage them to come back to the sector. We've put on recruitment drives and so on. We are doing the best we can to recruit to the early learning sector.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I might add that that wage grid is months late and with little to no consultation.

Parents cannot take advantage of \$10-a-day child care because there are not enough spaces because there are not enough early childhood educators.

Did the Premier get a commitment from the prime minister to increase the number of staffed child care spaces in this province?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will address the preamble there. The wage grid, Mr. Speaker, will not be late for individuals who are working in early learning because we will pay retroactive to January 1.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. OSBORNE: In consultation with the sector, there were issues that had to be worked out in terms of the wage grid. It's important to get it right instead of getting it fast. But nobody will miss out on any of the increase in the wage grid funding because it will be retroactive to January 1.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: I say again today, they need to communicate this with the operators because that's not what they're hearing. They're in total limbo and they're very frustrated.

Speaker, yesterday, the minister stated that private daycare operators had asked for more time to develop and implement the wage grid. I've heard from operators and their association and this is not correct. Apparently, government has had the wage grid report since October.

So I ask this minister: What's the hang-up?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I can speak based on the information that I'm getting from officials in the department. They say that there were details to work out, including with individuals involved in the sector. Those details are worked out.

The wage grid will be effective, I understand, as of April 1, retroactive to January 1. Every early learning childhood educator in this province will get the wage grid retroactive to January 1.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Minister, I appreciate your response but that's not the full issue. That's what they're being told; there are a lot of other details in between that's not been told.

Speaker, operators in the Newfoundland child care association that I spoke to blame the minister's department for – quote – total lack of transparency and consultation on the

new wage grid plan. Unfortunately, they've not been able to get any answers from the minister's department.

Why is your colleague continuing to blame operators for his failures?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My colleague is not in the House today so I'm answering on his behalf. I'm not sure of the issue that you've just raised. I will speak to my colleague on that, Mr. Speaker.

I can say from my time when I was in the department, the relationship between the associations, AECENL, Family and Child Care Connections and others has been very, very positive with the Department of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: I say to the minister, maybe he should go back there and get some answers.

Speaker, operators feel – and I quote – the minister is totally out of touch with the on-the-ground reality of child care in this province. Not my words, their words.

Does this minister feel his rollout of the new wage grid plan is, as your colleague says, going very well?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I will say that as of April the wage grid will be in place. It will significantly increase the wages for early childhood educators, recognizing the valuable work and the valuable contribution they make.

If you drop your child off to an early learning child care centre, Mr. Speaker, you're putting full faith in the hands of the early learning childhood educators. That speaks to the responsibility they have and the respect that they should get. That will be reflected in the wage grid, Mr. Speaker, a substantial increase for most of the early childhood educators in this province which will also help in terms of recruitment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Minister, there's nowhere for those people to drop their child off to. That's the problem. I appreciate it. When they can find a place to drop their child off to, I'm with you. Right now, there's nowhere to go.

Speaker, the minister is in denial about the child care crisis. Perhaps he should listen to his colleague, the Member for Mount Scio, who recently said publicly – I quote again – I know it's near impossible to find child care.

So does this minister agree with your colleague?

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

T. OSBORNE: It is challenging to find child care right now, Mr. Speaker. We all understand that. What we will say, Mr. Speaker, is that moving from \$40 something or \$50 a day down to \$25 a day, Mr. Speaker, increased the pressure and the demand for child care because it became more affordable. Decreasing the fee to \$15 a day put even more demand because it became even more affordable. Decreasing to \$10 a day put more demand, but it was important to ensure that it became affordable while we work on making sure that it's accessible.

Having 700 additional seats for early childhood educators in our education system will produce the early childhood educators; reaching out to those that are retired will produce the early childhood educators; increasing the Family Child Care Capacity Grant, doubling it will increase –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a case of government rushing good announcements. They put the cart before the horse. They came in with affordable child care and there's nowhere to put children. It was a great shiny announcement, but here we are dealing with this child care crisis, another crisis again today. It's a record this government owns and they own it. They've had it for eight years and they're continuing to do so.

Speaker, I've had stories of new mothers extending parental leave without pay, while one mother has made over 150 inquiries to various places looking for child care with no luck. One daycare location has over 600 people on their wait-list

Speaker, why is this minister and government in denial about the child care crisis?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I have to address the preamble. I'm not sure if I actually heard what I believe I heard, but if I did, I can't believe the Member said we shouldn't decrease the price of child care even though it's putting more pressure on

the system. Our job is to make it as affordable as we can make it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. OSBORNE: There are individuals in this province, Mr. Speaker, who couldn't afford child care when it was \$30-something or \$40-something a day, but can afford it at \$10 a day. Of course that put more pressure on it.

We are working to make it more accessible as well. Adding 700 seats, Mr. Speaker, makes it more accessible, but we need to wait for those individuals to graduate. We can't knit an early childhood educator, Mr. Speaker, but we can educate them, and that's what we're doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't need the minister speaking for me. If government would have done their job properly in the beginning, we would have had ample spaces and affordable child care. Instead of having one without the other, we would have both.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Do your job. This government has a record and over and over we've seen it and it's always reactive, not proactive. We call it out and we continue to call it out.

I've heard from parents who've had their children on wait-lists for over 2½ years and still don't have access to child care.

Will the Premier and government admit that today's announcement with the prime minister was smoke and mirrors and without a single child care space created and, no doubt, a great photo-op?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the Member of just about a year and a half ago, an agreement that this province reached with the federal government on early learning and child care that allowed this province to get the \$10 a day making it more affordable, that allowed us to put the money into educational programs to educate early childhood educators, Mr. Speaker, to allow us to expand this sector.

But, of course, we need to educate people before we have them here. You can't just create – you know, I can't point to you and say you're going to be an early childhood educator. You need to be educated, Mr. Speaker. We are putting that in place. It's all as a result of the federal-provincial agreement on early childhood education, which the federal government fully funded without having a requirement for this province to put any additional money in it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I've got one quick question for the minister: Will you admit today to this House and the province that we have a child care crisis in this province?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I will admit is that we made child care more affordable for families in this province. What I will admit, Mr. Speaker, is that we've created 700 spaces to educate early childhood educators. What I will admit is that we doubled the grant for –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

T. OSBORNE: – home-based early learning and child care to allow more spaces to be created, Mr. Speaker. What I will admit is that we're working on creating accessibility while we've already achieved affordability.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I think the point that we're trying to make over here is that there should be a plan, ahead of anything getting rolled out, to make sure that we do have an ability to achieve our goal that we're setting out.

It's been six months since the tragic explosion at the Come By Chance oil refinery, yet workers and area residents still feel they have questions about the incident and how it could have happened.

Will the minister make public the occupational health and safety report into the tragic incident?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a very important question. I first want to respond to the preamble. Child care is a challenge. I know we are making significant improvements. It's also a challenge across the country and internationally. It's not just a challenge here, a lot of demographic factors at play and I am impacted but, as a government, we are doing a lot.

In terms of the very important question, the occupational health and safety investigation is under way. It is our biggest investigation that we've ever done. It's a super high priority. My condolences go to the family, friends of the worker who was impacted.

Our team are working with other law enforcement and if charges will be laid, that will be done before September 2024, but that investigation is under way and I won't really have an update until that investigation concludes.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Order, please!

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

J. DWYER: I appreciate the go-forward basis, but like I said there are people out there now that are scared to be on the job and they just want to have some answers. So maybe let the union talk to their membership and let them know what exactly is going on, and our condolences certainly go out to the family as well.

Workers and those considering going to work at this site need to have the confidence that they will be safe at work. Given the site's track record, many are fearful.

What measures have been taken to ensure the safety of all workers at the Come By Chance oil refinery?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I think it's an excellent question. Worker safety is incredibly important; it's top of mind for all of us. In terms of the safe worksites – our team came in on the ground with many other law enforcements and with the union and with the employer and the employees, we determined that all of the stop-work orders could be lifted.

So at that point when stop-work orders are lifted, that means it is a safe work environment. Now, safety is also everyone's responsibility. So the workers, if they feel

like they are working in an unsafe environment or they see unsafe behaviour – and they're experts in that – then they should raise that through the channels, which I know they're familiar with.

Safety is everyone's responsibility, but at the moment there are no stop-work orders at the refinery. I encourage everyone to keep an eye out for their own safety as well.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Justice and Public Safety identified the entity responsible for the cyberattack on our health care system and reassured us that the threat had been extinguished, in this case, by the US government.

Will the minister tell this House what measures have been taken to address the deficiencies that were identified in the 2020 Canada Israel Technology Solutions report that allowed the attack to happen in the first place?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I believe the report the Member is referring to is the health-specific report. Cybersecurity is an incredibly vulnerable and important topic that all of our ABCs, as well as core government, take very seriously. There's an infinite amount of stuff we can do. We're trying to do as much as we can to protect the data of the people of the province.

Tactics are changing on a daily basis. What was spamming emails is now social

engineering. I think it's important that everyone is vigilant. When you get an email, you have to see am I receiving this from the person I think I am. Our help desk is never going to send out emails asking you to put in your username and password. Our teams, as well as the health authority, are putting measures in place to address concerns when we're making investments, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, I'd still like to hear what those measures are.

Speaker, how much money would've been saved had this government corrected the deficiencies –?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DINN: Speaker, how much money would've been saved had this government corrected the deficiencies identified to them in the 2020 report?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is an incredibly nuanced area where we see companies across the world subject to this type of attack. It's very unfortunate, and protecting data of the people of the province is incredibly important. I'm not going to stand here and list everything exactly that we're doing to combat that because that would be giving future attackers a blueprint to tell them what we're doing and how we may or may not be vulnerable.

We have a range of tactics that we are employing. We're working very closely with the new regional health authority and ABCs to make sure that we can all collectively work together to better protect the data of the people of the province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Mr. Speaker, it's encouraging to hear that government is implementing a new wage grid to entice much-needed early childhood educators to re-enter the workforce to care for some of our most vulnerable citizens – that being our children – and address the woefully inadequate number of child care spaces throughout our province.

However, as they do that in the Department of Education, the Department of Health continues to leave another group of our most vulnerable citizens, our seniors, in many cases without the care they require.

I ask the minister: When will his government likewise take the safety and well-being of seniors and other vulnerable citizens seriously and implement a fair remuneration system for our home care workers?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the federal funding, Mr. Speaker, discusses wages for individuals such as home care workers. We have been working with the federal government on that. We've also been working within the province to look at that issue. What I will say to the Member, we all know that next week is coming soon, so stay tuned.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Mr. Speaker, for months on end I stood in this hon. House and presented petitions on behalf of the group, Advocates for Senior Citizens' Rights, calling upon this government to legislate the required staff-to-patient ratio in long-term care facilities, including dedicated resources in common areas to ensure that patients suffering from Alzheimer's or dementia could not harm themselves or other patients.

Unfortunately, instead of embracing this idea, the minister of the day chose to ignore this mess and/or make light of the situation. In recent weeks, we have seen some pretty disturbing stories coming out of long-term care, which has finally sparked yet another review.

I ask the minister: Rather than wasting more taxpayers' money on yet another consultants report, can he simply commit to properly resourcing long-term care and enshrine the appropriate standards in legislation, as suggested?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's more than just staffing, and I understand that staffing is an issue. There is a global health care professional shortage. Staffing is an issue; we need to get the staffing, but it is more than just staffing. I don't think the review by the expert panel is a waste of money at all, Mr. Speaker. There are systemic issues.

This review will help improve the life of seniors living in our personal care homes and our long-term care homes. It will help improve the working conditions for staff in our personal care and long-term care homes, Mr. Speaker. I don't call that a waste of money.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you for allowing me to table more documents today.

Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House to table the 2023-2025 Activity Plan of the *Pension Investment Committee of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador Pooled Pension Fund* as per the requirements of the *Transparency and Accountability Act*.

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

S. COADY: Thank you.

Today, I rise in the House to table the 2023-2025 Activity Plan of the *Government Money Purchase Pension Plan Committee* as per the requirements of the *Transparency and Accountability Act*.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Are there any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Residents in the Bonavista region who experienced a severe health event, Level 1 or 2, on the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale need to be seen by a physician within 15 minutes, 95 per cent of the time, if not immediately.

Residents of the region, during periods of diversion, have for many days approached the doors of Bonavista hospital only to find them locked and redirected to Clarenville over 90 minutes away.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to address the practice of health care professionals being on site, behind locked doors, unable to respond to individuals who arrive requiring immediate medical assistance.

In addition, the government must reclassify Bonavista hospital as a Category A facility, thus enabling ER physicians to receive the same remuneration as their counterparts who save lives in other areas of the province.

I've stated for those viewers at home, the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale, which say that if you are Level 1, the most severe, which would enable resuscitation – I'm sure our paramedics will be well aware of that – you need immediate attention. If you are Level 2, which would be emergent, they say that the attention should occur within 15 minutes. In Bonavista, they have little chance if they fall in a Level 1 or a Level 2 emergency of getting that standard of care which is recommended.

Last summer, we were aware that we were going to have difficulty with staffing the Bonavista hospital. We've had several

doctors in the local area who were interested in staying, but we couldn't agree on a contract. The contract wasn't forthcoming.

Many people who are in the gallery here today would wonder why it didn't happen last summer that we could arrange a meeting or a contract with these doctors to make sure that the emergency room would remain open.

If you read a book by Rosalind Coleridge you would find that there was a doctor in Trinity years ago. We have now regionalized stations, hospitals and clinics in rural Newfoundland. We must have those regional clinics and hospitals staffed adequately. They are regional. We're not talking about isolation in small given communities, but they are regional outfits.

The minister had stated when dealing with other jurisdictions nationally, he may even have to ante up. All we ask is that they would have parity with those in Category A to give Bonavista a fighting chance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

WHEREAS there are approximately 2,500 students currently enrolled in four elementary and one intermediate school in Paradise with an additional 3,300 students enrolled in intermediate and high schools in neighbouring communities; and

WHEREAS with a population of approximately 24,000, Paradise is growing every year with some school-aged groups doubling in size over a 10-year period; and

WHEREAS there is no high school in Paradise and hundreds of students are

being transported to nearby communities to attend school; and

WHEREAS nearby intermediate and high schools are beyond maximum capacity and seeing class sizes escalate to unmanageable levels.

THEREFORE we petition the House of Assembly as follows: To urge government to see the urgency for the need of a high school in Paradise and plan a course of action for when it will be implemented.

Speaker, this was a piece of the previous PC government budget back in 2015, looking at the data and looking at statistics to build an intermediate school in Paradise and as well to start a review to look at a high school in Paradise. We know when the current government came in back in late 2015, the intermediate school was deferred for two years and the review for high school was deferred indefinitely.

The intermediate school, of course, is functioning and open now, but there still remains a need for a high school in Paradise. Not only does it affect Paradise students, it affects students in Mount Pearl and Conception Bay South because we are busing kids out to those high schools.

These schools have large numbers in terms of enrolment, large numbers. We know that when the first review was initiated or was put in the budget to start, we were looking at projecting the development of Galway and the development of Southlands. Now, those have not developed at the pace that was expected back then but they're starting to ramp up again.

We know with our population increasing, immigration and that, we're seeing more and more people on the Avalon Peninsula and Paradise and my District of Topsail - Paradise is a very young community and growing at a fast pace. We're going to see the need for a high school much sooner than expected.

I have written the Minister of Education on this. I have recently sent another letter out looking for a meeting, looking for a discussion on this. At a bare minimum – and I would hope potentially in this budget – that there would be at least initiated a review to look at a high school in Topsail - Paradise because I guarantee you there is going to be a need very soon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

The long-term care facility located in Stephenville Crossing was constructed in the 1970s. It was not designed for the levels of care it is currently providing. The facility is substandard with a small bathroom size for the lifts required, and the sizes of the rooms are not to today's specifications, very small and cramped. The seniors in the Bay St. George area living there deserve better.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to consider the replacement and construction of a new long-term care facility for the residents of Bay St. George.

Speaker, there are over 100 residents in this particular facility. The staff that are there go above and beyond to maintain the dignity of the residents and care for the residents. But the facility desperately needs to be replaced. I'm sure the Member opposite whose district this actual long-term care facility is in would agree 100 per cent.

What we would like to see in the budget is an announcement that the government will conduct a feasibility study to begin and start the replacement of the long-term care facility in the Bay St. George area, because it does serve both my district and my hon. Member's district opposite.

We actually petition the House again, let's get that study started and let's get it announced in this year's budget.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: You have approximately two minutes.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

WHEREAS the residents of St. Shott's, Trepassey, Portugal Cove South and Biscay Bay are lacking a full-time family doctor; and

WHEREAS Eastern Health is failing to accommodate a physician who's willing to practise full-time in the area; and

WHEREAS the Trepassey region is the furthest away from a primary care hospital on the Island portion of the province; and

WHEREAS the Trepassey region has only one ambulance and the region can be under red alert for multiple hours at a time;

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately the address the doctor shortage in our province by accommodating those who wish to practise here and to immediately address the physician shortage in the Trepassey area by accommodating the available physician.

Speaker, I've spoken to the minister a good many times and the minister before him about the doctor issue in Trepassey and been dealing with it now in the last two years, I'm going to say. We had a rally in Trepassey last summer. We have a doctor who's available and is interested in going to the area.

I said last year in here, or maybe the last session, that she is willing and able, but they don't seem to be willing and able to do it. It's disappointing. I said I think we can get it figured out and we haven't got it figured out yet, and she was still interested.

In a meeting last week Eastern Health says, well, they don't really need it, they have two practitioners and the area has been serviced well. Well, a call from the area the other day, after Eastern Health were there, that the first appointment would be nine days for a lady with a pain in the side, and the second person that went in was going to be 21 days before she could be seen. Without having a doctor there, they're going to see a nurse practitioner. It's not acceptable to not accommodate this doctor and something should be done.

Now they came out and offered a fee for service to go up and do it. That's not what she wants. There are not enough people there to do it, but she's willing to go to rural Newfoundland to practise as a doctor and they won't take her. They won't accept it because it's not their idea. They don't negotiate. We've met; we don't negotiate with doctors. You can go over to Britain and negotiate or go somewhere else in the world and negotiate to get them here, but they won't negotiate here.

It's time for them to stand up and put a doctor back in Trepassey and that area to take care of them.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, I call the Member for Harbour Main to introduce their private Member's resolution.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

It is an honour for me today to stand in the House of Assembly as the Member for Harbour Main to bring forward a private Member's resolution, which is seconded by the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

WHEREAS volunteer firefighters are true community heroes who provide an indispensable service to their neighbours despite the risks, costs and sacrifice often required of them; and

WHEREAS our province's declining, aging population bases in some areas may leave communities with fewer people to serve as volunteer firefighters; and

WHEREAS our province and other jurisdictions have found innovative ways to support volunteer firefighters, reduce their costs and facilitate their work; and

WHEREAS more can and should be done to support Newfoundland and Labrador's volunteer firefighters;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to explore innovative solutions and best practices that will further support our volunteer firefighters; reduce the costs they bear, both as individuals and as departments; help them balance their firefighting roles and their other obligations with policies that better adapt to volunteers' individual circumstances; lessen their need to undertake their own fundraising activities; improve the gear, the facilities and the vehicles they rely on for their work and their training; enhance, modernize and mobilize training opportunities and equipment to properly prepare them for the range of circumstances that they encounter and the risks they face; care for them and their families more effectively if they are injured or their health is compromised while better protecting them from injury or illness; debrief firefighters and better support them after traumatic events; promote volunteer firefighting to upcoming generations, women and new Canadians; better educate the

public on effective fire prevention; and collaborate inclusively with firefighters on any other measures that may work to attract and retain volunteer firefighters and protect Newfoundland and Labrador communities.

Now, Speaker, I understand there is a friendly amendment from government on this resolution.

SPEAKER: We'll have to have the amendment put forward by a Member.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay.

When I first got this idea to bring forward the private Member's resolution, I must say it came from a conversation with another firefighter in the Harbour Main-Chapel's Cove-Lakeview Fire Department. It was at a firefighters' evening ball. He spoke to me and he said, you know, I think there needs to be more that's done for volunteer firefighters in our province. He said that people don't really understand what's involved and what it takes to be a volunteer firefighter. I might even suggest that perhaps people don't necessarily always appreciate the work and what it takes to be a volunteer firefighter.

Speaker, this is an opportunity today to do just exactly that. It is to acknowledge the work and the commitment that it takes to be a volunteer firefighter. It is also an opportunity to see what we can do in the Legislature, in the House of Assembly, to support the work of our firefighters in our province, and to also empower them to continue on. Because we do know that our firefighters are the very first to respond. They respond, of course, to fire calls, but we also know it's not just fire calls. It's more than that.

Our firefighters have to now attend at other emergency and medical calls that take place. We know right off the bat that they are putting their lives, essentially, at risk. Their lives are on the line, really, every day. They put their lives at risk, they also put

their health at risk and there are also a lot of other things that they do that we need to really, really think about and understand.

They make a commitment to be a volunteer firefighter. That is a huge commitment that they make. They must be available essentially 24-7. They must be available; therefore, what does that mean? It means that they sacrifice. They sacrifice and their families sacrifice, Mr. Speaker. Any plans that they have at the time with their family or friends, that can change on a dime. It can change at a minute's notice. It could be Christmas Day, it could be one of their children's birthdays; it could be a call while they're sleeping soundly in their home at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning.

Speaker, it is very important for us to acknowledge – and this is why this private Member's resolution is a great opportunity to recognize that, to recognize what they do and the time that they put in to volunteer. The hours that they not only have to go on calls, whether it's 3 o'clock in the morning, but it's also the time and the hours that they put into training so that they're equipped to attend at medical emergencies or fire emergencies.

There's so much that goes on behind the scenes, the training behind the scenes. They have to be qualified. They have to meet requirements in terms of physical tests and physical fitness. But, Speaker, one of the things I think about when I look at this private Member's resolution, which was inspired by a fellow firefighter, is that we probably should even have another clause. Although I'm not suggesting that we make amendment to it. But we should perhaps say WHEREAS volunteer firefighters face higher demands because of the lack of ambulance services in many communities.

We know that our ambulance services are inefficient at the time and they are not able to often get to the calls. So who is it that attends first? It is people like those in the gallery today who are representatives, for

example, of some of the fire departments in the District of Harbour Main, from Colliers, from Conception Harbour, from Avondale, from Holyrood –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: – and from Bay de Grave as well. These are our volunteers, but they are all over the province. They are in all of our communities. Their brothers and sister are out there doing this volunteer work on our behalf to make our homes safe and to make all of us safe.

I think we really need to look at the fact that right now, especially with the situation with our health care system and the demands that are placed on it – and we are in a crisis – we know that people are calling throughout all of our province, in every community, there are desperate residents who are reaching out, who may have a medical emergency and where there is often no ambulance readily available and where every minute counts, these are the men and women who are the ones that respond and who are available immediately and go.

Not only to pick up the slack, if you will, from the ambulance service that is in crisis, but also I've heard from RCMP who often can't get – because of the geography – to calls in time, that our firefighters are the ones that attend there as well. We should be mindful of the fact that they are not trained either as health care professionals; therefore, we need to ensure that they are equipped with the adequate training to be able to respond appropriately when they are called.

Speaker, this is so important that I think this is an opportunity that we need to listen – yes, we will have discussion about this today – but we need to listen to our volunteer firefighters. We need to hear what they need. We need to hear what supports they need so that they can do the important work in protecting each and everyone of us.

Let's give them a forum as well. After everything is said and done here, and I hope that we have unanimous support, I understand there is a friendly amendment coming, but I hope we have unanimous support so we can do the work for them.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this private Member's resolution this afternoon. First, I just want to thank the Member for Harbour Main and recognize her statements. I know when she speaks, she speaks from the heart and honestly about how she feels the value of volunteer fire departments and firefighters in this province are.

I say that because one of the first, if not the first, volunteer fire department I visited when I became Minister of Justice and Public Safety was in her District of Harbour Main in Avondale. We had a lovely morning actually. They welcomed us – welcomed me, I'm sure she's been there more than I have. We had coffee and snacks and we toured the department. I could really see the pride that they took in the equipment and the trucks and they took pains to tell me the efforts that they put into it. Then they also took a lot of time to say how important they know that department was to not only the community, but the surrounding communities as well.

It was a very good meeting. I think they're happy with the results of that meeting because they showed to me and to the department the commitment that that fire department has to that area and to the province as a whole.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: So having said that, though, Speaker, it is a priority of this government and the Department of Justice and Public Safety to ensure our communities are safe and the work of volunteer firefighters certainly helps make that a reality.

There are approximately 6,000 volunteer firefighters throughout our province. These individuals – as the word says – volunteer their time to protect families, homes and businesses throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. It does take a special type of person to be a firefighter, a person who is compassionate and has a desire to help others. They're leaders of their community. They're a source of inspiration to our young people who look to them for guidance and support in our communities.

We also, of course, need to recognize not only the firefighters, but the families and friends who stand by and support them during the days, evenings, long nights and many times they're responding to an emergency or even when they're doing a training. To all of them, family, friends and the firefighters themselves, I say thank you. Thank you on behalf of the Department of Justice and Public Safety for the sacrifice you all make when the fire department gets a call in the middle of the night. Thank you for allowing your loved ones to risk their lives to help others.

The Department of Justice and Public Safety works closely with communities and fire departments to develop strategic approaches to the delivery of services and infrastructure and the protection of public safety. *Budget 2022* provided more than \$1.8 million for firefighting vehicles, equipment and services.

I'm pleased to say today that in addition to the \$1.8 million previously announced as part of *Budget 2022*, the department is advancing funds towards five fire protection vehicles that were previously approved. That means we have an additional \$750,000 that will be available next year to

support volunteer fire departments to help mitigate cost pressures due to increasing costs they have.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Providing volunteer firefighters with the means for necessary equipment helps ensure that they are able to provide support adequately and safely for both themselves and members of their communities.

I also say that we should stay tuned for budget next week where I hope to be in a position to say more about further support for our volunteer fire departments.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: In addition to funding for vehicles and equipment in *Budget 2022*, the government provided \$116,000 in grants for the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services to support operations and the Learn Not to Burn program. This year, I'm pleased to announce today as well we can give an additional \$50,000 to the Association of Fire Services to assist with mental health training and supports for volunteer firefighters.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: We all know that these firefighters do extremely demanding work that can take a toll both physically and mentally. They often deal with dangerous, traumatic and difficult situations which can often stay with them long after they finish their shift. I know this \$50,000 will be used to assist those firefighters who face those consequences. It is important we are there for volunteer firefighters and all first responders when they need us to lend a helping hand, be an ear to listen, a shoulder to lean on and show them compassion and empathy.

Recognizing the importance of providing the necessary training and equipment so firefighters can effectively do their jobs is why we continue to invest in the fire services training school. In 2021, there were 322 participants in the training school, representing 112 organizations participating in a variety of fire and emergency management training workshops encompassing nearly 7,000 instructional hours of training delivery. Workshops included topics such as National Fire Protection Association Firefighter I, II, and Fire Operations in the Wildland/Urban Interface.

In addition to training school, the Fire Services Division offers ongoing training and certification through a variety of delivery methods, including practical, online and blended delivery. The division also provides ongoing training through its regional training program.

In October, I had the pleasure of speaking at the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress fall conference. Held in St. John's, it brought people here from all over the world. The group focuses on training and accreditation and it was fantastic to see so many representatives focused on enhancing and increasing professionalism within Fire and Emergency Services. It also of course provided an opportunity to highlight the high level of fire services we see here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In 1991, 30 years ago, what was then the Office of the Fire Commissioner of Newfoundland and Labrador hosted the first such visit in North America. At that time, there were just 20 firefighters from across the province who had been tested and accredited. In 1992, accreditation was approved for additional firefighters who passed testing and were certified to the current National Fire Protection Association.

The province has come a long way since 1992. With expanded accreditation to 24

levels of the National Fire Protection Association professional qualification series, we have provided certification to over 7,000 firefighters and first responders.

Fire departments from across this province have a significant impact on their communities. I'm sure you will hear more about this as the afternoon progresses. In many areas, fire departments are the heart of a community and act as more than just a firehouse. The departments exemplify what is truly great about our province: strong representation and selfless dedication.

Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not use my time to remind those watching that fire prevention is everyone's responsibility. Public awareness can help to not only protect your property, but ultimately can save a life. We know that fires can have a devastating impact on families and communities, and it is remarkable to think that something as simple as a working smoke detector can play a significant role in life or death.

I'm also pleased to announce today we have \$90,000 in government support for the fire department in Corner Brook who will be embarking on a pilot program with neighbouring volunteer fire departments in the western region of our province to install new, long-life battery smoke detectors in homes for residents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: In Newfoundland and Labrador, our current regulations require a smoke alarm on each level and in each sleeping area of the home. The goal of this pilot program is to supply long-lasting smoke alarms in owner-occupied homes that were built before the year 2000, because since then, the size, style and furnishing of homes and habits have changed. So, too, did the requirements for smoke alarms. We know a fire can be devastating, unpredictable and deadly. Any initiative that prevents these disasters from occurring, and which leads to

fewer risks for our responders, is worthwhile.

Every fall, we mark Fire Prevention Week in the province. The public awareness initiative encourages people to learn more about the simple but important actions they can take to keep themselves and everyone around them safe. Of course, we all hope we are never in a situation where we have to deal with a fire in our home. Unfortunately, it does happen, but everyone can take steps to be prepared in the event they're faced with a fire.

Last October, building on the theme, Fire won't wait. Plan your escape, we encouraged everyone in the province to plan and practise a home fire escape so that everyone in the household knows what to do if the smoke alarm sounds. Given that every home is different, it is important to know the fire escape plan for any home in which you are staying. Everyone should consider the needs of all members in the household and include them in the planning so everyone knows what to do and where to go.

As I conclude, Speaker, I want to again thank all of our firefighters for the crucial role they play in helping us feel safe and protected at home and in our communities. It is in part due to their contributions that we continue to boast that Newfoundland and Labrador remains one of the safest places to live, work and raise our families, not only in this country, but in the entire world.

I hope the positive relationships between the fire association, municipalities, communities, fire departments and the provincial government can continue as we work together to support the important work being done by our volunteer firefighters across this great province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always an honour to stand in this House and represent the residents of Placentia West - Bellevue, especially with this private Member's resolution, and stand here and represent our volunteer firefighters that I'm so very proud of.

In my district, we have 16 volunteer fire departments. So no small task when you have 36 towns on top of that, but my impetus to help them is that I volunteered all my life. But I don't talk about volunteering anymore now that I represent volunteer firefighters because, to me, all the other volunteering is very important in the communities, don't get me wrong. I appreciate every volunteer and every effort that they put in. But when you put your life on the line and your family is home still worried about you and stuff like that, then that's the ultimate, to me, in volunteering.

So I want to commend all our volunteer firefighters for their dedication and service. In my district, I have some volunteer fire brigades that are more than 50 years old. With that being said, I've also had the honour to give out a lot of fire service awards. One of the most proud was this past year in Marystown, I gave out a 35-year award to one of my buddies from growing up, Jerry Hanrahan, very important. In Arnold's Cove, we've had Melvin Peach 50-plus years. We've had Cec Warren and Bill Hurley – can't say one without the other; that's just the way it works.

While I'm proud of these gentlemen, I would also like to acknowledge the women firefighters that have taken on this predominantly male position to bring a worthy perspective to make our brigades much stronger. I've had female firefighters that have won firefighter of the year just in the last year. One that comes to mind is Keesha Temple in Sunnyside. I think I told

the House one day here before, in the morning she wrote her journeyman for her electrical, and in the evening she won the volunteer firefighter of the year, so we congratulate her.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: If you can't be proud of that, there's not much to be proud of, I guess.

These guys and ladies, they work really hard to raise funds to make their departments work. But also, I found that in a couple of larger brigades that what they want them to do is memorialize the firefighters that went before them. Unfortunately, I've gone provincially and federally and everything to try and find funding for that, but there's no pocket of money for that. So that might be something we need to consider going forward. It's not something that we have to fully fund or anything like that, but maybe it's an opportunity that we can probably match some funds up to a certain amount or anything like that. Just to give them a little leg-up on their fundraising abilities because, obviously, running a fire department is expensive. There's no doubt about that.

It was nice to hear the minister talk about the \$1.8 million from last year. I've brought my concerns forward to the minister and he's had a listening ear. I will admit that, but out of 16 fire departments, I got two bunker suits last year. I want my firefighters to be safe and to have the right equipment and be able to do their job to the best of their ability without any hang-ups or without any compromise. Hopefully, this year we can work on a couple of the other initiatives that I'll get into now in a second.

There is a great need for funding in our district, just for the simple fact that it is so big. We cover 5,503 square kilometres. We go from Long Harbour to Marystown and then we have the other side of the highway in the isthmus area that goes down the Trinity side. We have the Terrenceville,

Grand le Pierre, English Harbour East branch with all volunteer fire departments, then we have Baine Harbour. Baine Harbour is very much a regional fire department, looks after many towns, basically from Red Harbour; Rushoon; Baine Harbour, obviously; Parker's Cove; Boat Harbour; Petit Forte; all these. When you go to firefighter's banquet in Baine Harbour, all those communities are there. They support them unequivocally. It's so unbelievable and it's so impressive to see their camaraderie and the support and the appreciation that our Baine Harbour fire department gets because of their regional purview.

They've been driving the service vehicle now that actually broke down on the way to a call last year. I was a little disappointed in that, but I do have the request in. This is, I think, our third or fourth year for applying for a service vehicle for Baine Harbour because there are over 400,000 kilometres on this vehicle now. While they're doing whatever they can with their duct tape and bubble gum, this truck has really surpassed its livelihood. So I would hope that the minister will consider that in his deliberations of doling out the extra \$750,000 because now there's \$2.5 million to draw from and, like I said, I would really appreciate it if some of that money would certainly come our way.

Marystown is a large fire department that is very willing to help out other fire departments. They have a paid fire chief there. It's the only paid firefighter I have in my district, Chief Justin Bolt. This gentleman is a young man with a young family that is so dedicated. He lives the life of a firefighter. He had a job at Grieg before he became fire chief and he went down to Grieg and set-up a triage down there because there were so many people on site. It was unbelievable. It was like a little hospital. I'm telling you, this guy lives for firefighting, no doubt about it.

We have Norman's Cove-Long Cove, which is another regional real department that is

primarily on the highway and all this stuff. They were actually at the rally for the clinic in Whitbourne. That shows you their dedication to the services in the area. So I would just like to acknowledge them for being there as well.

Again, Sunnyside is driving a truck that's a little bit older. Given the opportunity, they would certainly take on a new truck. But they've maintained their truck so well that this truck could go in one of our smaller towns, that are not really responding to the highway, to give them better service in their town. So we're just trying to move around some assets. It's not like I'm asking for every one of these to be replaced, it's about moving around some assets and about having enough money there to do that. So that's all I'm asking for there.

We have a lot of industry that is popping up now on the isthmus area with windmills, the refinery being refurbished; we're looking at LNG coming and stuff like that. Arnold's Cove is the second-largest town in my district. Around Arnold's Cove they have four fire departments, but there's so much responsibility put on these volunteer firefighters for looking after the highway and stuff that it's almost impossible for them to react to any industrial kind of purview. There's a lot of responsibility put on them; therefore, I feel that we probably do need a paid chief in the area to set up a regional fire department so that all those towns can work together to make sure that we know there's going to be a response, once there is an incident.

We don't need to ask too much of our volunteer firefighters when it comes to industrial accidents and stuff like that because the training is a lot different. The junior firefighter program, I really think that this should be funded on a per capita basis on the enrollees to the training program per department.

Let's say if it costs \$200 to train a junior firefighter, so let's say five went to the

Marystown brigade and asked for the training, then we would give them \$1,000, \$200 per head. But if somebody didn't show up, then obviously we would give them the \$800. So I'm saying there are ways of doing it, but we have to look at it that way.

We need new training ground, especially for that isthmus area, just for the simple fact that there's only defensive firefighting going on right now, which is still a really great service. But if we could get some offensive firefighting services, then that way we're kind of saving people's memories as well and trying to save as much as we can of the domicile, so that there is something to salvage.

The last thing I will say is that we sit here and we talk about money and everything like that, but I think what we could do, in order to give volunteer firefighting brigades an opportunity to have a revenue stream, instead of going anywhere in these big box stores to buy your fire protection – like your smoke detectors, your extinguishers and stuff like that – it should only be able to be bought at our volunteer firefighting halls. That way, that's a revenue stream for them and that way we know that we have control over what's being sold and what's being taken back in and refurbished.

In my last couple of seconds, I would like to acknowledge my colleague for Grand Falls-Windsor, Chris Tibbs. He's a volunteer firefighter here over on this side. We're quite proud of him.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Lastly, I would like to say thank you, thank you, thank you to all our volunteer firefighters. You are greatly appreciated. I call on the youth now of our communities to step up and to explore if being a volunteer firefighter is the opportunity for you to give back to your community.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

It is indeed a privilege to stand in this hon. House and speak to a motion on the floor this evening. Speaking of firefighters and the work that they do in our communities, from my previous background it's certainly something that I am passionate about, that I've had an opportunity to be involved in and to see it operate first-hand.

I know the complexities that roll into a fire department and how towns and communities have to figure out all the jigs and reels to make fire departments work in their communities. But none of that would be possible without the volunteers. As the Minister of Justice identified, there are upwards of 6,000 volunteer firefighters in our province. I think that speaks, again, to the spirit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and how willing they are to put their lives on the line for their communities and for all the things that matter to them.

Fire departments are largely the heart of our communities; they are the volunteers that always show up. You can count on them for everything from monitoring traffic at a community dinner to providing life-saving service and taking out the jaws of life on the side of the road in a community.

They are a very diverse group. We have men, women and gender-diverse individuals of young and more seasoned ages in our fire departments all across our province. They certainly have stepped up to the challenge. They commit their time and their energy to training and educating themselves and becoming the best at what it is that they do. Often, that comes at the expense of time spent with their families or time spent at activities that they find pleasure in. They volunteer their time to provide support and services to our communities.

I heard it said once before, and it really resonated, that firefighters are the people that you see running in when everybody else is running out. That made a lot of sense to me. They are the ones that step up; their bravery is always on display because they are the ones that are heading head-on into danger when everybody else is running away. They deserve the immense praise and gratitude that we've given them here this evening and continue to do so.

I've been at many appreciation dinners and passed out many awards to firefighters in my district. It really becomes real when you see firefighters sitting with their families. Oftentimes, they bring a spouse or a partner or even their child to these appreciation dinners. You recognize then that it's not just an impact on the firefighter themselves, but it certainly has an impact on their families. Those commitments certainly shouldn't be undersold.

I remember when my brother was young. He was always so afraid to hear the fire truck coming. If he was outside and my mom heard the fire truck, she would always go stand on the bridge and say: it's okay. It's okay, Christopher. Everything is fine. You're going to be okay. He'd be bolting. From wherever he was to, he'd be making for home because he was so scared of the sound of the sirens. He was even so afraid that he wouldn't get out of the car at the Christmas parade to pick up the candies that they were throwing out. I would always have to get out and get the candy for him and for me. He always got less than me, but that's beside the point.

As he grew up and became a contributing member of society, he volunteered for the fire department in our community. He'll always tell the tale of the first call that he went on. Hearing the sirens blaring behind him and knowing that he was the support that was coming, he had an instant change in how he reflected on the sirens. It was no longer a sound to be afraid of; it was the sound of help is on the way. He always took

great pride in being able to represent that as he went out into the community. I'm sure the same is true for the many firefighters in our midst this evening. Again, I commend them largely for the work that it is they do.

Speaker, in some areas there are significant challenges to fill membership roles in our fire departments. In some places where that's the case, communities have come together and they figured out how to make it work on a regional basis. They've done some regional fire service sharing. There are a large number of examples all across our province where communities have come together to fill a need in their communities and in the surrounding areas.

Now, regionalization of a fire service doesn't necessarily mean that they close down a department or they haul out trucks; it simply means an appropriate allocation of resources over a certain area. There are service-sharing agreements in place and mutual aid agreements that come between communities. They figured out how to make it work with limited resources at times, limited staff, limited professionals who can participate in these activities.

So I just wanted to put that out there as one of the key assets that we mentioned in a regional governance model is the service-sharing model, where communities can come together to pool their resources to build a capacity that's much greater than what they could have accomplished on their own. So it's certainly something that we're supportive of and we love to see.

Speaker, for the large number of fire departments in our area, in our province, they are governed under the authority of the Municipalities Act, the *City of St. John's Act* and the *City of Corner Brook Act*. So their legislation applies to the fire departments. The same is true for our LSDs. There is a section of the LSD regulations that would allow them to establish, operate and maintain fire departments.

For that reason, Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, that the private Member's motion currently being debated be amended by adding immediately after the words "that this honourable House urge the government," the words "to work with communities and the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services."

AN HON. MEMBER: Do you have a seconder?

K. HOWELL: Yeah, I had a seconder for that one, the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

SPEAKER: Okay.

So in accordance with Standing Order 69(9) the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs submitted the amendment for a ruling in advance. We have considered it and it is found to be in order.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the Members who are in agreement, recognizing full well that communities all across this province provide that service in that capacity.

We want to ensure that we work with them; they are the gatekeepers for fire services. We recognize that they are taking on that role and they're administering a lot of funds and the requirements for fire departments throughout the province.

That's as much as I had to say today, I know that there are other comments to be added to the conversation. I just wanted to say again a big thank you to all the volunteer firefighters, the fire departments and the staff that make these things work all across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First off, I'd like to certainly thank the MHA for Harbour Main for bringing this very important PMR forward and thank the members of the volunteer firefighters in her district who took the time out to attend here today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: I come from a family of firefighters. My dad was a fire chief, my brother is currently a professional firefighter, a fire captain at the Ottawa Airport, my other brother was a volunteer firefighter and so was I, and I also had a long career in the military so I know what it means to run towards things instead of running away from it and that's what firefighters do every single day.

Semper paratus, it's the firefighter's motto: always ready. It's a great motto but it's not even remotely being true. If you think about Northern Arm out in the Bay of Exploits in 2016, the fire hall out there responded to a fatal car crash and when they got there, they found out that it was one of their comrades. You cannot be prepared for something like that, it's impossible. You certainly can't be prepared if you're a volunteer.

If you think about what volunteer firefighters do on a daily basis, that's precisely what they do. They risk their lives for people who they've never met; they risk their lives for people who they do not know. But sometimes when they respond to those calls, it's people who they knew, it's loved ones, and those types of situations are life changing and life altering. Personally, I don't believe that the provincial government or the municipalities have the wherewithal or the things in place to look after individuals

who volunteer – the key word is volunteer – in those situations. It's sad and it's what firefighters need; they need more.

We've been debating in this House hospitals and ambulances for months now, you know, I would say years. Imagine that you're driving down around Trepassey or even by Whitbourne and you get into a car accident and there's a rollover. I tell you what, you have a few options. If you're waiting for an ambulance, certainly if you're in Trepassey, it's not going to show up. If you're waiting to get into an emergency room and you're in Whitbourne, well the doors are locked out there. What are you going to do?

I can tell you what you're going to do. You're going to wait until the local fire department responds and hope beyond all hope that they've got the tools, equipment and training to respond to that call. Now it's just not as simple as responding to something because the jaws of life are fine to have in the backseat of a fire truck but people need to know how to use that. If you haven't utilized those types of tools, you can cut a seat belt off and kill someone. It's that simple. You can cut a seat belt and gauge an airbag and the person who's waiting for help just got killed because the training wasn't in place.

What volunteer firefighters need is not just recognition, they need the tools and equipment put right in front of them, accessible, by the provincial government so they can get the training they need on a daily basis, not just because they're volunteers but because they are the backbone and the initial response for health care in much of Newfoundland and Labrador. If you leave the overpass and go into rural Newfoundland, it is rural Newfoundland that depends explicitly on firefighters for response. Whether it's a house fire, a car accident or a kid choking in a school, it's the fire department that gets called. It's very simple.

When we talk about what people do, how they risk their lives, we also forget about the people who they leave behind. If you're a firefighter and you're sitting at home and that phone or pager, or however you communicate with your local fire hall, goes off at 3 in the morning, you can be rest assured that you have a loved one in the bed next to you or a child in the room next to you who's worried whether Mom or Dad are coming home, who's concerned why time and time again they respond to these dangerous calls. They have no idea what kind of carcinogens they're going to be breathing in; they have no idea what they're responding to, if it's going to be imminent danger. Sometimes it's a false alarm. That doesn't mean it doesn't create stress.

Again, a firefighter responds to something. They don't always have the supports when it's over. They don't know. I mean I know now, lately, we're doing all of these post-traumatic regroupings and we bring all our Members in, and people that have been affected by a situation, there are counsellors there to talk to them. But I'll tell you from first-hand experience from my time, I served along guys who came back and they had PTSD, zero question. Not everybody looks at things the same way. Two people go to the same scene, not both of them come back the same way. It's that simple.

We try to be tough; we try to hide away our scars. There are not very many fire halls in the province that don't have a bar. There are not many fire halls in the province where they don't go back and their conversation revolves around having a bottle of beer and going home and doing your best to deal with it, cope with it and move on. Those types of services need to be offered on a regular basis, there's zero question about it. Maybe the government hotline for government workers that we already have for people who have insurance, is one way that we could do that.

You look to the municipalities and we put the responsibility on the municipalities to

help pay for fire departments, but I'll put this to you: take away the volunteer fire departments, get rid of them altogether. Now tell me who's going to do the fundraising for the municipalities for a lot of different charities. Take away local fire departments and you tell me how the individuals that live in those communities are going to insurance on their homes. Take away the local fire departments and you tell me who's going to respond to the accident on the highway where your cousin, your brother, your mother or your sister is up there rolled over, caught inside and can't get out.

An ambulance isn't going to respond with the jaws of life. It's not going to happen; they do not have that capability. Air ambulance isn't going to respond in any of these places; it's the fire hall that's the initial people on the ground. They never ever, ever know what they have to respond to. Not a lot to ask for when you say more support – more support. We look at the federal and the provincial tax breaks that they get. There's a \$3,000 tax credit federally and provincially. It's great, it's a great idea, but what does that do?

You've got local fire departments that actually fund their own bunker gear, they're filling their own Scott Air-Paks and their hydrostatic testing is based on someone who can take a tank on a Friday, bring it into St. John's to get it tested. They're no longer allowed to do their own hydrostatic testing. Years ago, they did. Guess what they did on top of that? They filled scuba tanks, but now they're not allowed to do that anymore. So they had a source of revenue but the government took it away from them.

We don't think about those simple little things that make very important things successful and the success of our fire departments is imminent, it's incredibly important for every small community in Newfoundland and Labrador. I have 10 fire departments in my district and as the minister was talking about the shared

services in regional fire departments, we do a bit of that and it works very well.

But I'll go back to a couple of years ago. For three or four years prior to my time in provincial politics, as a municipal politician, our local fire department wanted a ladder truck. Guess when they got it? They got it when it was too late. They got it after the Wave Hotel burned down and their firefighters risked their lives trying to put out a fire. They put themselves in the line of danger when they ought not to have. Somebody probably should have took a large piece of equipment and just drove it through and put a firebreak in. If they had a ladder truck, they would have been able to get up high enough to put the water down through the roof. They would have done exactly what they needed to do.

A lot of people in these regional fire departments or small municipal fire departments, while they're doing their best as volunteers and they've all got that one or two people who do all this extra research and understand what they need, that doesn't mean they know how to use it. In some instances, they don't know what they need. In some instances, they join fire departments and they're utilizing bunker gear that's five or 10 years old. They don't have wash stations for their bunker gear when they come back from a fire and we all know the carcinogens now that are sticking onto these bunker suits. It's dangerous. It's dangerous when you're responding to a fire. It's dangerous when you leave a fire and then it sits in the fire hall, the carcinogens are going into the air, the members come back and they have to put the same suit on to respond the next time.

This isn't rocket science. All volunteer firefighters in this province are asking for is a hand up. They volunteer. You can go to any grocery store in any major community throughout the province once a year and you'll see their boot campaign. That money doesn't go back to the fire hall. That money goes to charity. It's unbelievable the work

the fire departments do and if you can't piece together what they do in your community, you're not paying attention because when it comes to Christmas parades and food drives and all the things that these volunteer fire departments do, most communities wouldn't have anything without them. They are the backbone of small communities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

All of that aside, the one thing we don't talk about is a volunteer fire department, or any fire department for that matter, is like having an insurance policy, nobody wants to pay for it. Nobody wants to use it, but when you need it, you need to know that's it here. You need to know that it has support. You need to know that it has the training that it requires and you need to know that it's going to respond in your time of need because if they don't, no one will.

So volunteer fire departments in this province are an integral part of this community and the whole province, not just rural Newfoundland. I mean, there are volunteers throughout the metro region and other areas, but when you go to rural Newfoundland or Labrador and you have a look at what the backbone of those communities are, I can tell you right now, one of the very first things someone will say is the fire department.

In closing, I'd like to say my hat is off to you, I salute you, thank you for everything you do. I implore everyone to not just vote for this bill, but think about it the next time you're travelling down the highway and remember that if you get in trouble, it's a volunteer firefighter that's going to be the first one there to look after you.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Trimper): Thank you very much.

I now call on the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak to this private Member's resolution and I want to thank the Member for Harbour Main for bringing this forward today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, I represent 14 volunteer fire departments and I can assure you that they are committed to the safety and security of the communities that they represent. Everyone in this room understands how important firefighters are to the towns and communities they serve. As a government, we will continue to work in partnership with communities, municipalities and the fire departments of approximately 6,000 men and women who volunteer their time to protect our families, our homes and our businesses throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is important that we continue to develop a strategic approach to the delivery of services and infrastructure and the protection of public safety. Our commitment to this approach can be seen through such actions as providing presumptive cancer coverage for the province's career and volunteer firefighters. This ongoing initiative helps reduce the financial, emotional and physical impacts workplace incidents may have on injured workers, their families and their communities.

We also turned our focus to another very important issue for first responders in our province, namely work-related mental stress conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder and post-traumatic stress injury. In Newfoundland and Labrador, those covered by the workplace injury system are eligible for presumptive coverage for post-traumatic stress disorder. The legislation covers workers who have developed their diagnosed PTSD as a result of a traumatic event or multiple events at work.

In October of last year, my colleague, the Minister Responsible for Labour, expanded presumptive cancer coverage and provided presumptive cardiac coverage for career and volunteer firefighters. This change brings Newfoundland and Labrador in line with the important movement taking place across the country to update the workers compensation legislation and to recognize work related injuries.

Every firefighter gives their best each and every day and I want to take this opportunity to thank the 14 volunteer fire departments in my district and those throughout Newfoundland and Labrador for their contributions to our communities.

I read an article recently which said: "Firefighters never know what they will encounter on each call, but proceed with the same level of commitment and service." These words hold true for each and every firefighter in this province.

Firefighters respond alongside other emergency responders, at motor vehicle accidents and industrial accidents; firefighters have many additional roles. They assist with animal retrieval and they also assist at vehicle accidents. They assist and help paramedics move injured and sick individuals.

I believe that we, as the Members of the House of Assembly, must work together to reduce the cost that our volunteers bear and that our government continues to work towards improving the facilities, the vehicles and the equipment that they all rely on to do their job.

Each year, Fire and Emergency Services opens an application process on January 1 to March 31, whereby fire departments can apply for firefighting trucks and vehicles under the Fire Protection Vehicle Program and firefighting equipment and other initiatives, such as the regional training programs, the emergency response outside municipal boundaries, hazardous materials,

hazmat response and using the firefighting equipment program.

Mr. Speaker, this is just another way that our government contributes to our volunteer and our career firefighters. I know that my fire departments have been able to maintain their equipment and bring it up to date because of this support provided. I also know that they have applications in again this year and I certainly support them as their MHA because they are providing an extremely valuable service to us.

As I conclude, I want to thank all firefighters for the crucial role they play in helping us feel safe and protected at home and in our communities. It is in part due to their contributions that we can continue to boast that Newfoundland and Labrador remains one of the safest places to live, work and raise our families.

I hope the positive relationship between the fire association, municipalities, fire departments and the provincial government can continue as we work together to support the important work being done by our volunteer firefighters across the province. To every firefighter who serves our communities day in and day out, I say thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: And I say thank you.

I now call on the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always nice to get up here and represent the District of Exploits, especially on such an important PMR as this because I have, like many Members, 10 volunteer fire departments in my district and we count on our volunteer fire departments very, very much and we appreciate them very, very much. I'd certainly like to thank the volunteer fire departments in attendance for

their great work and have appreciation for all of what you do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Our departments, Mr. Speaker, in the Exploits Valley go from Grand Falls-Windsor to Leading Ticks, Norris Arm, Norris Arm North and again, like I said, we always rely on our volunteer fire departments, especially for the duties that they do.

As we're sitting home at night and those volunteer fire departments, the volunteers, are ready to jump out of bed 2 in the morning, 4 in the morning and they're the first ones at your door before we even realize that we need them. It's because probably a neighbour or somebody across the street saw some flames or something coming out of your house and they're the first ones there on a moment's notice, 24-7, 365 days a year. We certainly appreciate what they do.

Mr. Speaker, saying that, the volunteer fire departments, my colleague from Terra Nova mentioned their annual civic events, everything that goes on in the community, the volunteer firefighters are always there to participate, always there to play a hand.

I did a Member's statement on two firefighters in Leading Ticks yesterday, two volunteer firefighters. I believe one had 40 years of service, another one had 30-32 years of service. Two brothers, between the two of them, almost 75 years of service. They contributed a lot and they always raised money for their community through civic events. Every year they raised \$30,000 to \$35,000 just for their fire departments as volunteers. Those are great initiatives that they take on.

Again, our volunteer fire departments right now, probably the phrase has changed from volunteer fire departments to first responders because lots of times now they are first responders. They're the first ones

that go to the scene. Especially for vehicle accidents, they're the first ones out to vehicle accidents. Now, with regard to the health situation, the health care that we're in, they're often called to health care emergencies. The first ones there on the scene to arrive to attend to patients are the ambulance and caretakers on that scene. They're more related to now as first responders. So it's great to see that this PMR goes into some more detail of initiatives that we can do for our volunteer fire departments because they certainly deserve it.

Just going through some of the initiatives that are listed there: reduce costs they bear, both as individuals and as departments. That is a very important one because the cost that's on volunteers can be enormous. A lot of people sometimes want to volunteer, especially in their communities. Most of the time, we're talking about the volunteers but it could be in anything, I guess.

But to get volunteers involved in the fire departments, there's always a cost added to being a volunteer. You've got gas to get to volunteering. When you do your work, if you're doing cold plates or if you're doing something to raise money for your fire departments, there's always a cost there and the cost lies on you. Somehow if there were initiatives there through government, that it doesn't cost you to be a volunteer, that would help the volunteer fire departments and get you fellows, especially for raising monies and that sort of stuff.

To improve the gear, facilities and vehicles: As volunteers you certainly need that, especially the gear, the breathing apparatus, clothing, suits that you need. It's more things that government should be doing and can help in those ways with the volunteer, that you don't have to raise as much money to put into fire suits, breathing apparatuses, other things in your fire department that government should do or can do to help you fellows to have a great

department and to be able to do your work as efficiently as you can.

Enhance and modernize mobility training and equipment: That's another part of it. The ability to get training, government should be able to have training there for you guys whenever you need it or when you feel you need it; someone to come to you fellows. Lots of times, there's a training fellow that you have to go to, especially from the rural areas into the bigger centres, which is another cost. So those costs can be incurred by government, especially, I suppose, room, meals, that kind of stuff to get you fellows from the rural areas into the bigger centres to get that training.

I forgot to mention, as for the volunteer firefighters in Exploits, I certainly would like to thank those fellows for their work last year on the forest fire in Central Newfoundland.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: When the towns were on high alert, ready to evacuate – and it was only minutes – it was very, very serious. I know a couple of Members here who know this. The volunteer fire departments were ready 24-7. Again, ready to do what they had to do to help the people of Central Newfoundland. I appreciate those fellows very, very much.

Debriefing and supports: that's another thing that needed to be done – debriefings for firefighters, especially now, volunteers. Like I say, right now you're called first responders. You go out to more traffic accidents; you see a little bit more involvement in health care, especially in traffic accidents. I know when you return you need some help, you really do. I know this on a personal note. I really, really do. I see all this. The more we can do for debriefing as firefighters, the better we can make you cope with what you do and be a better firefighter.

One other interesting thing I do see there is to promote volunteer firefighting to upcoming generations. I think that's very, very important to get people into the fire departments, to recruit younger members into the fire departments. Because we all know that as we get older, a lot of volunteer fire departments now are having trouble to get members into the fire departments. So we need to certainly put initiatives in there for young recruitment because firefighting can also be rewarding.

I'll tell this story. It's a story that I've told a couple of times now at the firefighters' balls. It can be rewarding. I knew this young fellow growing up in Bishop's Falls. He went through school, same as any other young fellow, young individual; passed his grades. Sat around for a year, didn't know what to do, but I always kept in contact with him. He said I'd like to join the volunteer fire department. So he joined the volunteer fire department in Bishop's Falls. That's where he got his start as a firefighter.

The years went on, a couple of years there. He talked to his mother. He said I'm going to school. I want to go to school and do a firefighting course. So he did that. He did the course out in CBS there. After he did that, he landed a job at the CBS fire department. His parents were very proud of him.

This went on and I kept in contact with him over the years. As the years went on, he has a family of his own now and he's still working with the CBS fire department. But I think the most thing that I respect about that young fellow is that he gave his mother and I three grandchildren.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak in this House, especially on this topic, for a couple of reasons: one is the importance of your fire department and your community's fire department, but also, I was a volunteer firefighter for five years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. BROWN: My father was a volunteer firefighter for many years and my stepmother was a volunteer firefighter for many, many years. So this actually is personal and close to home.

I will thank the Member for Terra Nova for pointing something out and talking about when you show up to a scene when you're a small community firefighter and the person that could be in distress or anything like that is a very close family friend. Well, that happened to me.

The very first fatality that I ever showed up to was a lifelong family friend of ours. The gentleman that had passed, when he was younger and I was really young he would actually take me out on snowmobile. So it is tough. It's a very tough thing to deal with. At the time when we were with the fire department, they were just rolling out initiatives about debriefings and things like that.

It was hard. I was 19 years old when I went to that fatality. I was only just started with the fire department. I didn't actually fully finish my introductory training at that time. That is something that I wasn't prepared for. I'll admit that right now. A 19-year-old kid, you're excited, like, oh, I'm going to join the fire department with Dad. At that point, my dad had a number of fatalities under his belt and we didn't know how to talk to each other about it; we didn't know how to deal with that situation.

So it is hard and that is why this private Member's resolution is asking for more supports. That is important that there is good mental health help for these situations

because, once again, these volunteer fire departments most of the time are in small communities where you know everybody and if you don't know them, you're related to them. So this is very important and it means a lot to me; that line in there talking about that stuff hits me very personally.

I went to three more fatalities in my five years there and as a young person it is really, really hard; it is sometimes hard to talk about and it is sometimes really hard to quantify, but there are people out there that really do need the supports. I do urge government to really consider that line and the importance of that line in this PMR because sometimes people don't know how to ask for help. Sometimes people don't know that there are sometimes help available to them. Some people don't think that the help that is offered may actually help.

But it has to be quantified in the situation that there needs to be a good social net there of people. There are a lot of great people that I served with on the fire department. A lot of people that were there to lift you up and that, so I dealt with it and I still deal with it. Personally, I feel I am okay with the supports that I have and how I deal with it but not everyone is me; everyone is unique and different.

I do want to give a shout-out to my former fire chief that was at there at that time, Jeff Boland. He was a fantastic individual and a lifelong friend of mine. Behind them, we had Mario Berthiaume. He was a great chief as well and very supportive. Currently and to this day still there is Joe Power. Many firefighters and volunteer firefighters remember Joe Power as he served on the provincial firefighters' association. He is a great guy and I have a lot of great conversations with him then when I was in the fire department and I still do to this day; he is a great individual. Then you have Marv Butler in Wabush, another great individual and great fire chief.

Up on the IOC fire and security gate, you have great individuals up there who are always supportive. If there is any need in town, they are always available to jump in and help out too, even though they are part of a private fire department group, I guess, for the mine.

These communities and these things, like the word says, they're volunteer. They're people who give up their time, their energies and their health to help other people. Most of the times they do it without question, without any other thing other than the need that someone is in distress and they're there to help them. At the same time sometimes, you know, they don't ask for help. They don't ask for anything. You've got to, sometimes, read between the lines and listen to what they're talking about and understand that, oh yes, maybe we should do this differently or do that differently. Firefighters are a different group of people and they don't ask for much but when they ask for something, you know it's really serious.

We can up the ante for equipment and stuff like that. That's very important, but it's the other stuff that's also important. It's the help after a fire call. It's the financial cost of that or the financial cost when someone's injured. These are the other things that we also have to look at when we talk about community services and firefighting.

The game has changed a lot, too. It was interesting when I first walked into it that when I was there the province, at the time, and a lot of the training we were doing focused a lot on vehicle extrication and cold-water rescue and all that. I actually did my first initial trainings and stuff. I did a lot of stuff in that before I even got to structure fire. It was interesting that everyone thinks it's the fire department, you know, fire. There is a lot of other extra stuff that they do that a lot of people don't realize.

Cold-water rescue was a very interesting one for me in the sense that I didn't realize

– at the time, I knew a bit about it. I knew Dad talked about it, but I didn't realize how many calls that Lab City Fire and Rescue got pertaining to that. That, for me, was a trial by fire in the sense that that was my first fatality, was a cold-water rescue.

Since that time, I've realized that it sticks with you. One of my pet peeves became people out on the ice and stuff like that it became fixated in my head, telling people to stay off the ice. But that was one of the things that I realized that the name fire department can be misleading in the sense that they do so many other different things that also need supports and equipment. The fire department are expected to go out on the highways in vehicle incidents. They're expected to go out and do cold-water rescue. They're expected to do this and that and a few other things, on top of structure fire.

These supports need to also be there and the training also needs to be there. It's a huge, broad spectrum of things that we ask of them. At the end of the day, for a small rural fire department there is only so much money to go around. Then on top of all that, you have to deal with the mental health challenges that sometimes arise as well.

When we take this PMR away and we talk about working with communities and working with this, realize that it's a big ask we have of these people. It's a massive ask that we have of these people and they're going to make sure that they're supported, they're funded, they're listened to, and that they're also appreciated.

I want to take my hats off to all the firefighters, both paid and unpaid, volunteer and everything in between because there's a lot of weight on their shoulders when it comes to communities and stuff like that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

B. WARR: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to stand in this hon. House as the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay and speak to this resolution as amended regarding what is one of the most important organizations that exist in this province. I, too, want to thank the Member for Harbour Main for bringing forth this resolution.

The over 6,000 volunteer firefighters who give selflessly of their time to make our communities safe are at the core of what makes our communities great places to live and raise families. By the nature of what they do, they put themselves on the front lines when there are fires, accidents, natural disasters and a host of other occurrences that could put a community and its citizens at risk.

How do you recognize and celebrate the work that they do on a volunteer basis? The men and women of our volunteer fire departments are the embodiment of what we envision as great citizenship. I believe we all recognize that we are truly thankful for the work that they do.

Growing up in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, I've been able to observe the countless ways in which my community, and I know all communities with volunteer fire departments are better places to live. Just note, Mr. Speaker, I've got 21 in my district.

Fire departments make communities better places in which to reside because they all respond in times of greatest need for one and all. Aside from their primary role of being first responders to fires, accidents and other challenging events, firefighters are very unselfish individuals. In addition to saving and rescuing individuals from the dangers presented by fires they help with hazardous materials, road traffic incidents,

medical emergencies, floods and any other situation that puts our citizens at risk.

Fire departments also perform an invaluable role in ensuring safety during community events, educational activities around fire safety and inspections for private businesses and public institutions. Fire departments certainly make our citizens feel more secure and safe. Firefighters are a constant presence at community festivals, graduations, bonfires, parades and anything else that brings citizens together as communities. The presence of firefighters lends an air of order and safety that puts us all a little bit more at ease.

How can there be any greater community service than that of a volunteer firefighter? I'm sure everyone in this House shares a similar degree of comfort when we see our fellow citizens in their firefighting uniforms responding or overseeing our community activities.

We all know we want to provide as much support as possible to the women and men who make up our volunteer fire departments and, like you, I believe government has demonstrated support in the past and we're committed to enhancing our support to fire departments in the future.

The significance of firefighters in our communities was recognized in the passing of an amendment to the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act*, Bill 12, last fall which expanded presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters and added cardiac coverage.

One of my proudest moments, Mr. Speaker, as an MHA was the day that all Members across all parties with many members of the firefighting community in the gallery unanimously voted in favour of the amendment. The legislation expanded coverage to include eight more cancers. This new legislation placed Newfoundland and Labrador alongside Yukon, Manitoba and Nova Scotia as having the most

comprehensive cancer coverage in the country, identifying 19 types. In addition, cardiac events that occur within 24 hours of an emergent response will now be covered. With this amendment to the act, the province's firefighters will receive wage-loss benefits, medical aids and other benefits through WorkplaceNL.

Everyday, firefighters put their lives on the line to protect us. An unfortunate consequence of the work that they do is the increased risk of developing certain types of cancer or experience an injury to the heart after attendance at an emergency response. This legislation reflects the valuable, important and inherently risky work fire departments carry out. I am so proud, as I know everyone in this Chamber is, to be part of bringing this into law.

As a government, we have a responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to provide volunteer fire departments with as much support as possible to carry out this vital work. They need, as well as deserve, the best training and equipment.

Recent budgets have seen us maintain and grow our financial support for volunteer firefighters. *Budget 2022* saw our government ensure these groups have the resources they require to provide the protection people expect. Also included in that protection is more than \$1.8 million for fire protection vehicles and firefighting equipment and support for the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services. I am hopeful, in the light of our recent demonstrations of support, we will maintain and grow our support in the future. Budgets, as I know, are a priority for our government and necessary to maintain and grow our communities.

There are other ways that we acknowledge the important work of volunteer firefighters in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Fire Services Division, as part of the Department of Justice and Public Safety, is a source of advice for fire departments on

organizational, technical and tactical issues. The division also provides funding for municipal firefighting equipment and firefighting vehicles under the Fire Protection Financial Assistance and the Fire Protection Infrastructure programs. These programs are application-driven and follow an assessment process to assist municipalities in acquiring necessary firefighting resources.

Mr. Speaker, firefighters are our neighbours, colleagues and friends who live in and with us in our communities and give unselfishly of their time to make and enhance our communities. I think that highlights who they are and the importance of what they do very well. It says so much about those who knowingly choose to fill positions that will and can put their own lives in danger. Firefighters, by nature of the work they do and qualities they possess, represent the qualities we admire and desire in our province. How can we not provide as much support as possible to a group that adds something immeasurable to our communities and our province?

In closing, I realize, like many organizations throughout our province, some volunteer firefighter groups are challenged with recruitment. We all need to be as supportive as possible to them in this endeavour.

I'm encouraged by the novel ways some are utilizing social media and encouraging females to grow the ranks. Many are having success. I recall a recent news story about the volunteer fire department in Witless Bay that over half the volunteers in this fire department are under the age of 30. The average age for that department is just 33 years of age.

In my District of Baie Verte - Green Bay, I am filled with pride as I realize that the Town of Nippers Harbour, with a population of less than 90, 24 are on the volunteer fire department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. WARR: In the Town of South Brook, six members of the volunteer fire department are women. Examples like that remind us of what makes Newfoundland and Labrador such a special place. Volunteer fire departments exemplify our best qualities. We recognize and applaud them for the examples and models they are.

Volunteer firefighters are invaluable. As the MHA for the District of Baie Verte - Green Bay and a Member of this government, I remain committed to ensuring the volunteer firefighters' organizations in this province receive my and our government's total support.

I am pleased to support this private Member's resolution as amended. It highlights one of the most important organizations in our province and one that makes our communities better places to live and raise our families.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I always appreciate that and it is an honour and a pleasure to stand in this hon. House this afternoon to speak to this private Member's resolution on firefighters.

Mr. Speaker, in the short two years that I've been here, it's no secret that I'm very proud of both fire departments in my district. I've spoken to it many times, to both volunteer departments in Torbay and in Pouch Cove.

The Town of Torbay services the Town of Flat Rock and the Town of Pouch Cove services the Town of Bauline. Both departments, I'm happy to say, have a mutual aid agreement signed with the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's in the neighbouring District of Conception Bay

East - Bell Island. So it goes to show the level of training, commitment and dedication that crosses the municipal boundaries when you're looking at the proper service that's needed and required to service the members of the district and keep them safe.

I've also said before my own son Zachary is now an eight-year member of the Pouch Cove volunteer. I'm very proud of him for that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you.

We have heard the tone go off at 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. in the morning when a call comes in for a motor vehicle accident or a fire or for a medical call.

That's something else that both departments are trained in: Code 4 medical calls. That does provide a great service to the district, but as my colleague from Harbour Main said earlier today, when you look at the ambulances that service the area, both of these departments make critical calls, Code 4 medical calls, life-saving calls to the members of my district.

The problem that we're dealing with, Mr. Speaker, is that the Town of Torbay, with a population of 8,900 people – I spoke to Chief Gaudet shortly ago and in 2022, they had 212 calls for their department. For the Town of Pouch Cove, a community of approximately 2,200 people, they had 70 calls. Those are busy numbers for volunteer departments.

As my colleague from Terra Nova said earlier, some could be working away so they could be not in the district at the time a call comes in. It's very important for proper coverage when the pager goes off and these people respond.

The issue that I'm having with it currently, Mr. Speaker, is that Chief Sullivan in the Town of Pouch Cove says between 60 and

70 per cent of their code 4 medical calls result in red alerts. Red alerts meaning that there's no ambulance to respond in a timely fashion. That is concerning when you're looking at what these volunteers are responding to, what they're handling and making life-saving decisions and actions until paramedics get on scene. There have been times when it's been 35 and 40 minutes waiting for an ambulance to arrive from the Health Sciences.

This is concerning and this is what we're speaking to and my colleague from Harbour Main said earlier it'd be nice to add this in there; however, I want it noted to this hon. House that the men and women who respond to the code 4 medical calls, the amount of dedication and training and compassion to this position that they hold. The members of the gallery here today, they know what I'm talking about. They're nodding they're heads; they know what I'm talking about. I'm preaching to the choir here. They know what it takes to be on these calls, and many times in small towns you're responding to family members, to friends, to colleagues and co-workers.

It goes back to my colleague from Terra Nova, the point he made about debriefing and the need for that. I'm very happy to say that both departments do that on a regular basis. They have a gentleman from the Salvation Army come in and speak with them on these difficult calls, and there have been many in my district.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the PMR, we have fundraising. Well, I'm very happy and very pleased to say that the Town of Torbay offers the Torbay Fire Department an annual budget of \$494,000. The Town of Pouch Cove to the Pouch Cove department, an annual budget of \$212,000. Those are big numbers and I'm very fortunate that the towns can do exactly that to support their department because the costs of everything, including running the department, are going up on a regular basis. Both towns have seen the need over

the years to purchase new vehicles, apparatus and gear all on the municipal dime. There has been and I appreciate the funding that's coming from the minister's department and I'm looking for some good news, Minister, with some other funding coming to my district hopefully.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Stay tuned.

But I will close because I know we have other Members waiting to speak. I want to share with you a story that was only relayed to me a couple of days ago. So I had four constituents from my district travelling through the District of Terra Nova and they were coming through Clarenville. They were travelling in tandem and ahead of them was a SUV that swerved off the road, rolled over and went out into the ditch.

So both cars stopped, of course. My good friends, brother and sister, Jennifer and Raymond Langmead and husband and wife, Melanie and Jared Lewis, all of Pouch Cove, all in the Pouch Cove fire department, stopped, pulled over and immediately went to work with the training that they had.

They, of course, started to extricate these two young children from the back seat. Not to take anything away from the chief of the Clarenville Fire Department but when Clarenville chief and his department rolled up and saw that these four individuals were on the scene, thanks to the regional training that's always being done, annually, with the departments, the chief said: B'ys, we can stand down. Pouch Cove is on scene and got this covered.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: That just goes to show their level of education, commitment and compassion to their volunteer position that they stopped on the side of the road to help someone else and used what they learned to help these young children and, of course, when

the ambulance crews showed up, they took them on to the hospital.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very honoured, very glad to speak to this PMR and to support it. I thank my colleague from Harbour Main for bringing this forward and for the entire House for supporting this with the friendly amendment as well to show that the fire department members, the volunteer members throughout our province, that they are well appreciated, well respected, held in high regard throughout the 40 districts of this hon. House. As my colleague said earlier, where would we be without them?

I did want to mention about the Junior Firefighter Program that is in my district as well. It's going well and encouraging young men and women to step forward to take this and to serve their community. I know I'm getting a bit of ribbing here from my own Members because when you're compassionate about what you want to speak about – someone told me I was vaccinated with a gramophone needle, so I will take my seat and let my other Members take some time across the way.

I do want to show my support for this and very thankful and very appreciative of the two departments in my district.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Speaker, it's a great day for me and indeed an honour to speak on behalf of the people of the wonderful District of Burin - Grand Bank. First of all, I'd like to thank the Member for Harbour Main for bringing forward this private Member's motion.

I've heard the word "passion" a few times today. I, too, am passionate about this

private Member's resolution. After being with council for a number of years, 28 to be exact, we have had great fire departments over those years, great members, and they certainly are probably the most dedicated group of individuals that you meet in communities.

The past couple of years in the position that I am in now has afforded me the opportunity to go out to the various communities to visit with fire departments and also to go to their firefighter banquets. The firefighters that I have met with – last week, for example, I met with a couple of fire departments and indeed they are facing some difficulties when it comes to equipment and so on, but they do a lot of their own work in raising funds and so on but this private Member's resolution would alleviate some of that hopefully.

When you go to these firefighter banquets you see a lot of firefighters, of course, their families, you see the community leaders, councils and you see the residents and they come out to support the fire department and they do that with passion.

One of the things that I look forward to each year when I go to these numerous firefighter banquets is the fire chief's report. When the fire chief talks about what they've done in the past year – I remember a few years ago when we had Hurricane Larry, when we just recently had Hurricane Fiona, Hurricane Igor, they talked about pumping out basements. Now, we have a lot of older people who live in these communities, a lot of seniors that have flooded basements and so on, but who were the first on the scene? It was the firefighters with their pumps going.

I remember during Igor – because that was probably the most devastating hurricane to hit the Burin Peninsula – during that time these firefighters went round the clock helping people. Not only helping them with their basement flooding and so on, but bringing them to various locations in the

town, taking care of them, bringing them to a warming centre and so on. So it was just amazing the amount of work that these fire department members did.

When the chief talks, he talks about chimney fires. A lot of people use woodstoves in my district. These are probably one of the most common calls is chimney fires. Also, a number of house fires. Recently, in the community I live in, we had a house fire. Very sad. The fire department did what they could to save the house and the surrounding homes. They did a great job. They are to be commended.

Our fire department also responds to a number of ice and water rescues. They have the equipment and they've been called on – on some occasions, not a lot – to go to these emergencies.

Motor vehicle accidents, it's like some of the Members already said, when the call comes in, you don't know what you're going to face, especially when you're going to a motor vehicle accident.

I met with the Town of Burin last week. They were telling me that they now respond to fire calls and emergency calls in five communities in the region. This is something that we've been promoting for some time on the Burin Peninsula: shared fire services. Right now, their fire department is made up of individuals, not only from the Town of Burin but these surrounding towns as well. It helps them in getting members and recruitment and so on. It's wonderful.

The other thing is fire safety week. We get the fire department members, they go into the schools and they talk to students. You talk about trying to look at successive planning and look at people joining the fire department, being interested in the fire department, kids being interested in the fire department. These fire department members actually go into the schools and

they talk to the students, they show them videos and so on.

I was looking on social media a few days ago and I noticed one of the fire department members in St. Lawrence training other members. I said that's great, train the trainer and then let them train the fire department. Again, great for rural areas.

A while back, as well, we talked about proposed amendments. We talked about Bill 12, a bill that introduced an amendment to the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act* to expand the presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters and the presumptive cardiac coverage.

I had the opportunity of being invited to a number of fire halls to talk about this particular bill, to talk about this amendment and I tell you it went over really well. There were people there that have been on the fire department for a number of years that said this is finally here. This will enable us to attract more members, but it will also take care of the members we currently have. Because if you go to a car fire or whatever, you don't know what you're breathing in. There is some uptake in our area from fire department members.

If you look at what this motion does, it improves the overall fire services in your area and it promotes a collaborative effort among government, firefighters and councils and so on. I always say that it takes a special person to be a fire department member. I also have told fire department members that we all help out in various ways, but somebody in the fire department, a firefighter, is the ultimate volunteer and I stand by that.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I now call on the hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I don't intend to use 10 minutes, only five and my colleague will take five, but I wanted to first start off by acknowledging the volunteer firefighters in the District of Stephenville - Port au Port and take this opportunity to thank them for what they do for all our communities in my district. As other people have said here today, it would be very difficult for our communities to survive without the efforts of these great people and the work they do.

My colleague, the Member for Harbour Main, has introduced a private Member's resolution today which has the support of the entire House. That's important because of the clauses that are here. This is the particular thing, we've heard lots of great comments and stories today, but these clauses that are here, **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, are extremely important for the future of volunteer firefighters in this province and that's why I think they were put there.

The idea of reducing the cost they bear; the idea of helping them balance their firefighting roles and their obligations with policies that better adapt to volunteer individuals circumstances; to lessen their need to undertake their own fundraising activities; to improve the gear, facilities and vehicles they rely on for their work and their training; to enhance, modernize and mobilize training opportunities and equipment to properly prepare them; to care for them and their families more effectively if they are injured or their health is compromised; and to debrief firefighters and better support them after traumatic events and to promote volunteer firefighting and better education. Those are some of the key messages that I think all of my colleagues and colleagues on that side have talked about today and that is why this PMR is so

important and why it needs to be addressed.

You know, I've heard the Members opposite and the minister said stay tuned when it comes to next week's budget. I trust and hope that as part of the stay tuned there will be funding announced that will help improve and work towards some of the objectives that have been outlined in this PMR because that will make the difference.

All of our volunteer fire departments have a need for equipment and training. That's one of the things that I always found when I first visited those volunteer fire departments is the amount of training they actually do. Most people associate a volunteer fire department with a fundraising activity or when you hear the fire truck running down the road. The dedication and commitment to training and keeping your skills up and the hours and hours and hours of time that volunteer firefighters put in to maintain those skills is something that we have to be very thankful for and grateful for. That is a commitment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: The other thing that I've come to realize about volunteer firefighters is the way they are family. They look after each other and they take care of each other. They are some of the most innovative people that you will ever meet.

They can take a piece of equipment or a former vehicle that was used for something else and all of a sudden it's an emergency response vehicle because they've managed to do it themselves. They find ways to do it. Obviously, government has to find ways to fund those type of investments.

I will close by saying thank you to the Placentia and area volunteer fire department. Five months ago my dad passed away. He was a captain and a life-long member of the Placentia volunteer fire

department. They gave him a complete honour.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: They took him from the church to his final resting place with the honour guard being provided by the Placentia volunteer fire department. That's what I mean when I talk about family and that's what volunteer firefighters are. I say to all of them right across this province of ours: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

Certainly great to have this opportunity and we on this side and on both sides would love to get up and be able to speak because it hits home for everybody in all their districts. So it's certainly a great pleasure to get up. I thank the Member for Harbour Main for bringing this forward. It's certainly a great opportunity for us all.

I was just speaking to my colleague here next to me and, again, I'd like to thank the first responders that are in attendance here today. We certainly appreciate your service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: So in speaking on that, myself and the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, next week, have a meeting with the volunteer fire department in Witless Bay, or we are trying to organize one.

One of the emails we got this week, and I'll just put it as something in my district along with being first responders, last year they responded to 290 calls for service in the Witless Bay volunteer fire department. Of that 290, 225 were for medical calls. I'm

trying to tie that in to what they do as their job.

Then, besides that, we have ambulance issues in the district. So now they're responding and taking care of those people until the ambulance gets there. They're the ambulance operators then. They're the people that are doing it. They're doing the paramedic work. So it's very important.

The job they do is incredible. We take them for granted a lot of times, until it happens to us, but we certainly appreciate you, I can tell you that. We certainly do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: So speaking to the chief today just in Witless Bay – and I just texted him while we were doing this. I said it's a nice opportunity to get up here. We only get so much time. We'd love for everybody to have an opportunity, but it just doesn't happen because there's only so much time.

Of the 31 people that are in Witless Bay, he said counting him, six are females, which I thought was a great number out of 31 – it's a great number. Of that, 19 are below 30 years old, which is incredible in my district. It's incredible to have that many. So they have a good youth drive going on. There are young kids there that are in there and volunteering their time.

So somebody that's younger than 30 years old, and even the older ones, just the commitment that they make to answer the calls is incredible. It's absolutely incredible.

I have five volunteer fire departments in mine. I hear the number from Placentia West - Bellevue was 16, I thought he said. That's incredible. That's a big district that he's covering for volunteer fire departments. I got one in Trepassey, one in Portugal Cove, one in Ferryland, one in Witless Bay and one in the Goulds.

B. WARR: Twenty-one.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Twenty-one, wow. The Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay has 21. So they're big numbers.

What they do is incredible in the district. I know for my connection to it, my wife was the first volunteer firefighter in the district in Witless Bay where I'm to. She was the first volunteer firefighter in our district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: And my daughter also served as well. She got a five-year pin. She's now away, but she served as well. So I certainly felt that I had to get up and speak today in all that time. I certainly appreciate the time. Something that we got to recognize is all the work that you do. It's incredible.

Again, the Member for Labrador West was there as well. There are so many more that are volunteering that sometimes you run into these instances and you have to ask for help. I know that my daughter responded to a fire. She had a veteran volunteer fire department at that time and they kept her back from the scene of a fire at a house that somebody had perished in. It was really traumatic for her when she came home. They kept her back from the scene. She was directing traffic, but they did a great job of sort of not exposing her to that as one of her first calls. Let alone responding, just the kind of thoughts that go into that as a young person going in for her first time.

You know, traffic accidents are the same way. They sort of kept her away until you get – I'm not going to say seasoned to it, you never get seasoned to it, but it's traumatic when you go there. It's just something that you never forget.

When you come home and you like to defuse, it's big to be able to sit down and speak to somebody. Even before you get home, it's very important that you do that. Hopefully, anybody that's in the volunteer fire departments will be able to get the help

they need and when they're finished and respond to their calls, that they do get the help they need before they get home to their loved ones and be able to do that.

Again, I appreciate the time to be able to get up and speak. I'll take my seat.

Thank you so much and thank you again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Seeing no further speakers, I will call on the Member for Harbour Main to close debate on her private Member's resolution.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you very much, Speaker.

To hear everyone in the House who have spoken on this important issue, it is very encouraging. I think one of the things that speaks to me is when we look at the last resolution here, the last resolution talks about collaboration. It talks about how important it is to collaborate inclusively with firefighters. I know that some of the Members mentioned that when they spoke.

So I think that this is really important because what we need to do is come together. We need to work together. Yes, we are passionate and we all acknowledge and we all appreciate what our firefighters and volunteer firefighters do, but we need to do more than that. We need to understand government must do more.

I was happy to hear the Minister of Justice say and it's great to see that financial investments will be made and there's a commitment to do that, but what I think we need to do is more than that. We do understand, there's no question, there's a limit on what the provincial government's resources are. We all get that. We understand that. But this is not a service we can afford to be without. The volunteer firefighters in our communities are

indispensable. We need them. So we cannot afford to do better, we must do better for them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: A couple of other points I want to make is with respect to the volunteer firefighters in the District of Harbour Main. Bay de Grave, just yesterday, responded to a fire call in North River in the All Hallows School where over 300 students were there and the staff. They were the first responders. They then enlisted the aid of the Bay Roberts fire department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Together, they were able evacuate safely all of those precious children that we have to keep safe in our community.

They're indispensable. They need to be valued. They need to be appreciated. The cost that goes into being a volunteer firefighter cannot be underestimated. We know that they give of their time freely. We also know that they often spend money out of their own pockets, which perhaps, as one of the Members said, is maybe a deterrent for them in terms of contributing and signing up to be a volunteer firefighter. Yet we see – and what is remarkable here – that really doesn't deter our firefighters in the province.

Because when you look at some of the research in the rest of the country with respect to recruitment issues, most of the provinces in the country have difficulties in terms of getting volunteers to sign up as firefighters. But not in Newfoundland. That is something we really have to be proud of as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We have people that want to step up, that are willing to do that. Although the benefit to them may be at times costly not only financially but with respect to their families, yet they step up to the plate.

I think that is also something we really need to applaud our firefighters for, because we do know it's a rewarding experience. We've heard from so many here tonight and this evening talk about how rewarding it is. We've also heard Members and others talk about the collaborative feeling and the sense of family that exists within fire departments and within the different units throughout the province. I think that is something that we need to educate our younger people about as well, to encourage them to join our firefighter departments throughout the province.

One other final point that I think is important to make, we have a female firefighter here today, Lacey, from Bay de Grave. I notice that our Member for Ferryland mentioned about his female family members who have taken on and gotten involved. I think that's really important because we know that women at times in our communities are somewhat reluctant to join in these organizations.

I know that in most of our firefighting departments in the District of Harbour Main, we have female representation. So, obviously, there isn't any sexism or misogyny going on in the fire departments within the District of Harbour Main, and I think it sounds like that's the case throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I think that's also something that we should really be proud of as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Finally, going forward, I think it's important for us now to implore government to do more, to take note, that there is a responsibility here for us to support our volunteer firefighters. This resolution today, I hope that it doesn't end; that the conversations do not end when we make the vote today. Rather, that they continue on the conversations and that we do support and make sure that our volunteer firefighters are the beneficiaries of this private Member's resolution that we have passed unanimously today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

I thank all the Members for their engagement on this very interesting debate.

First of all, checking on the amendment proposed by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

All those in favour of that amendment, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The amendment is carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

SPEAKER: Now seeking the support of the resolution, as amended.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The PMR is carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move that this House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the 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.'

Carried.

This House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 o'clock.

Thank you.