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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin, I'd like to welcome in the public gallery today Lina Bouziane and her mother, Nadia. Lena will be recognized in a Member's statement this afternoon.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

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

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, on November 13 of last year, at the young age of 52, Edward Nash lost his nine-month battle to esophageal cancer. The son of Carmel and the late Mike Nash, he lived his life in Branch, St. Mary's Bay.

He was loved by all for his constant acts of kindness. He held many titles: son, brother, husband, family man, crab fisherman, skilled hunter, biker, volunteer firefighter for 36 years and a community hero. He was dedicated to his role as first assistant fire chief.

On September 9, two months before he passed away, he stood alongside his fellow firefighters, in pain, for over eight hours, battling a blaze that threatened the community. He was a man of faith who embraced life. He enjoyed hunting, playing cards and darts. He loved volunteering with the Christmas parade and Easter Bunny visits.

He helped rescue 18 people, over his short life, who were lost in the country. He was a leader. Known by his Irish nickname, Googie, he is missed by his wife Melissa, two sisters Lucy and Kelly, brother Al, his mother Carmel and numerous family members and friends.

Speaker, today I pay tribute to Edward Nash.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, today I rise in this hon. House to recognize constituent Michael Power of Mooring Cove, who is promoting the importance of workplace health and safety training.

On February 27, 2022, while having supper at a work camp in Northern Labrador, Mr. Power started choking. As he started to panic and lose consciousness, a co-worker, Peter Foster, started to perform the Heimlich manoeuvre. While Peter continued to work on Mr. Power, another co-worker, Curtis Green, called medical first responders for assistance.

Within a couple of minutes, Mr. Power was at the on-site health clinic. With the training and professionalism of Mr. Bob Garland, Roxanne Hickey, Sheldon Bowles at the clinic, and co-workers Peter Foster and Curtis Green, he is able to share his story on how fast life can change and how important training is, especially on work sites.

Speaker, I am asking all hon. Members of this 50th General Assembly to join me in acknowledging all parties involved in their heroic actions that led to saving the life of my friend, and their co-worker, and promoting the importance of workplace safety and training in the workplace.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. REID: Speaker, every year I like to make Members and, indeed, all listeners aware of a special cultural event. The Bay St. George Powwow will be held in Flat Bay on July 14, 15 and 16.

A powwow is a unique event signified by social exchange, cultural sharing and ceremonial rituals. Indeed, the powwow is a time for teaching, learning, singing, dancing, feasting, sharing and healing. Powwows are an expression of culture, pride and identity. It is a significant ritual for the young and the old, a recollection of the past and a celebration of the future.

The Flat Bay Powwow is the showpiece of the cultural revival which is happening among Mi'kmaq people in this province and it is an event for Indigenous people who want to reconnect with their heritage and for everyone in the province who wants to be more fully understanding of the multicultural nature of our province.

Speaker, I invite all Members of this House and the general public to attend the Bay St. George Powwow held in Flat Bay on July 14, 15 and 16 of this year.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I stand here today to recognize the hemophiliacs in my district, in this beautiful province and all across our great country.

World Hemophilia Day occurred on April 17, 2023. In our province, each year, we mark the day by lighting the Confederation Building in red to represent the struggle of those with the inherited bleeding disorder. People in workplaces and children in schools honour the day by wearing red.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Chapter of the Canadian Hemophilia Society is a grassroots, not-for-profit organization committed to improving the health and quality of life of all people with inherited bleeding disorders and, ultimately, to find a cure.

The goals and objectives of the society are to ensure that all persons with hemophilia and inherited bleeding disorders have ready access to the highest possible level of care, to raise awareness and provide education and support through delivery of information to patients and their families across our province.

The Hemophilia Society organizes family fun events, educational opportunities and participation for its members in scientific and medical symposiums across the country and around the world.

I'd like to thank all the people who give their time to improve life of hemophiliacs in our province and in my District of Stephenville - Port au Port.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, 12-year-old Lina Bouziane is a Grade 6 student at Bishop Abraham Elementary. Last November, Lina was invited to attend camp at the Sobeys Atlantic Tennis Centre in Bedford, Nova Scotia with the best under 12 and 14 tennis

players and coaches from the Atlantic provinces – quite an accomplishment.

Even more so, Lina moved from Morocco to Vancouver in 2020 with her parents and brother. Shortly after, her father left and returned home. Nadia, the mother, determined to provide the best life possible for her children, moved the family to Newfoundland and Labrador. Nadia, an accomplished chef, works at a local restaurant.

Lina began playing at age three under her aunt's instruction, who was president of the tennis club in Morocco. Soon after she arrived, Lina joined the Greenbelt Tennis Club. Coaches recognize Lina's talent and soon she advanced to a high performance level. The club is very supportive of Lina and believes she will be successful at the 2025 Summer Games.

Lina loves the competitive and fun nature of tennis. She says the Greenbelt Tennis Club has been very welcoming with lots of experienced coaches and young volunteers.

Please join me in wishing Lina a successful future in the game she loves.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

E. LOVELESS: Speaker, I was pleased to join the Premier and federal ministers yesterday to announce significant infrastructure upgrades that will increase traffic capacity and improve safety and security on our province's highways.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: With support of over \$300 million between both governments,

approximately 55 kilometres of divided highway will be added along the Trans-Canada Highway to help increase traffic capacity and ensure better separation between opposing traffic lanes.

The project will also include a 15-kilometre section between Bishop's Falls and Grand Falls-Windsor, as well as a section of approximately 40 kilometres of highway heading west, beginning at Whitbourne. These improvements will support reliability and security of access between rural communities, strengthen year-round transportation connections, improve transportation safety and enhance the Trans-Canada Highway's resiliency to climate change.

Speaker, we are proud of our continued commitment to road infrastructure improvements in Newfoundland and Labrador, including the upcoming completion of the – wait for it – Team Gushue Highway.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: A bit of confusion on the other side, as I understand.

As part of our government's historic investment of almost \$1.4 billion over five years, support of \$20 million will add 15 kilometres of passing lane near Port aux Basques, which is very important. This will create a continuous passing lane for the first 30 kilometres leaving the community so traffic can flow more efficiently during peak periods of ferry traffic.

Speaker, providing ample notice is very important for significant projects like these that allow road builders in the province to plan their expenditures, scale up their operations and hire more crews, which results in more highway and road construction being completed for the benefit of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for an advance copy of his statement. Speaker, anything we can do to improve on road safety is important. My colleagues and I join the minister in recognizing this significant announcement, but hold on – however, aside from a photo op I'm not sure what historic announcement was yesterday.

As we learned in Estimates this morning, there was no plan done yet, no costing, no engineering work or even studies. We are, literally, years away from seeing a single tree being cut to clear the right-of-way.

Perhaps the minister can take some of the \$18 million in roads carryovers that he could not get out the door last year to fix the ruts in the roads we have now. Again, we cannot spend the money we put into roads now and the minister says he can do so much more.

It is wonderful to announce generational projects, but without any details, timelines and costing, it will become laughable like the Gushue Highway, which will not see any construction for the next two to three years.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. This is good news for regions that it does impact, but where is the lobby to Ottawa for regional transportation and increases to municipal infrastructure funding that is desperately needed? We are way

behind in infrastructure spending and we have a lot of decaying infrastructure in this province that also needs desperate work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before we start Oral Questions, I just want to remind Members, it's hard to hear when someone is doing statements and everybody else is talking. So I ask everyone to please keep the level of conversation down a bit.

Question Period.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

Premier, you said yesterday: "... the people in Ottawa do take our calls"

So has Ottawa taken your call to ask for support for the harvesters, plant workers and businesses that rely on the fishery or did you simply not make the call?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course we've engaged Ottawa with respect to support for plant workers, in particular. The Member opposite continues to suggest that we have other mechanisms available to us with respect to the global marketplace, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Member opposite, does he suggest that we subsidize the crab fishery and subsidize the harvesters, subsidize the processors?

This is a global marketplace. It's an unfortunate price. The Minister of Fisheries has engaged, regularly, daily, with both

sides to try to get this fishery going, Mr. Speaker. That said, we will be there to support the plant workers, in particular, if they continue to be caught in the crossfire, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

What I'm suggesting is that you take a leadership role here and be proactive versus reactive to make sure a multi-billion dollar industry is vibrant in Newfoundland and Labrador and meets the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and keeps rural Newfoundland and Labrador and urban Newfoundland and Labrador alive and well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: If it's good news from Ottawa, the Premier's front and centre. When it's bad news, he's missing in action.

Premier, the fishery is in crisis. Life as we know it in rural Newfoundland and Labrador is on the line.

Premier, what are you going to do to help it?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'd like for the Members opposite to know and everybody in this province to know that we've been very active into the negotiations and the conversations with both the ASP and the FFAW. As a matter of fact, Friday afternoon I missed a graduation from Change Islands, which I've yet to apologize for, because I stayed in to meet with Greg Pretty and we thought we had a deal to get the fishery open this week.

Earlier today, (Inaudible) the ASP would have given more details to that. Let's see how the fishermen feel about that and let's see where it goes from here. But they are working on trying to get this open.

We all realize the price of \$2.20 is way lower than what we've been used to the last three or four years, but it's very reflective of what the markets are today, Mr. Speaker.

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

D. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, it's good to be proactive here but every day lost in this industry is a loss to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, in particular rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Bad news in the fishery, not the Premier's problem. Bad news from Marine Atlantic, he's scrambling to save face.

Speaker, last week his government promoted a 25 per cent discount for Marine Atlantic customers. This week, the Premier is reacting to a 4 per cent fee increase.

Why was the Premier caught off guard?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said in the House yesterday, we don't agree with the Marine Atlantic increase. That is a federal agency; it's not a provincial agency. We've been discussing with the federal minister of transportation, our local federal ministers, Mr. Speaker, Minister LeBlanc, we've discussed with all of them to make sure that they understand how important and critical this piece of infrastructure is for the people of the province for goods and services.

I can tell you that the minister of Transport, the federal minister of Transport took our call and heard our voice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll keep saying one term: proactive versus reactive. That's what people need in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Premier is reacting to Marine Atlantic's 4 per cent increase, but he's supposed to be best friends with the prime minister and the federal Liberal Cabinet ministers.

Premier, why don't your federal Liberal friends seek your input before they make decisions that have a negative impact on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

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

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

First, let me go back to the Member's opening question when he talked about the 25 per cent reduction in shoulder season fares.

Mr. Speaker, that's a very important program that Marine Atlantic has in place. They had it in place last year. I think it was 22 per cent last year. They raised it to 25 per cent this year. They've heard our request on that and that was also a request that came from Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, because we know we have lots of work to do in this province, especially around our shoulder seasons.

But, Mr. Speaker, as I said here quite clearly yesterday, we've been proactive on this file. Quite frankly, my colleague, the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, actually met with the federal minister of transportation, I think back in December, to talk about this very matter.

One that we understand all too well, Mr. Speaker. As you heard the Premier say quite clearly yesterday, he's expressed his displeasure to the federal minister of transportation and we will continue to bring that message to Ottawa.

SPEAKER: Your time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: I doubt if you've been proactive, but I know you haven't effective at all for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: If the Premier was serious about lowering the cost of living in our province, he would have acted before the increase made it to the media. With six Liberal MPs and two Liberal Cabinet ministers, the Premier should be on top of these issues. He should stand up for residents before the decisions are made, not after.

Was the Premier ignored or did he neglect to stand up for this province?

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

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite understands, or should understand, how government works. We have a group of people over here that works every single day for the priorities of this province. We have a Premier, Mr. Speaker, that has been clear and delivered more from Ottawa in his two short years here than we've seen in quite a long time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day we will continue to advocate for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as we go forward. We have been clear to Ottawa that the Marine Atlantic decision was ill timed and a wrong decision, and we will continue to bring that message forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

There is no doubt that we all accept what Ottawa has sent us, the carbon tax and now the Marine Atlantic tax. We welcome those with open arms.

The MP for Avalon tried desperately to defend the role in the Marine Atlantic rate increases saying – and I quote – it is not necessarily driven by the federal government.

Which of the six Liberal MPs did the Premier lobby before now to prevent this fee increase?

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

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important matter when it comes to the cost of living and it is also an extremely important matter to the tourism industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm not sure about the Member opposite but one of the first things I did when we became aware that this was actually going to happen was to reach out to Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador and offer our assistance in anything we can do with them to actually lobby Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, this was a decision that Marine Atlantic has, I guess, imposed by Transport Canada based on the cost-

recovery model. The Premier was quite clear in his remarks again yesterday in his conversation with the federal minister, that cost measure – actually, by the way, I need to point out, Mr. Speaker, it is something that came in under the Stephen Harper administration. Quite frankly, it is one that we have told Ottawa that it is outdated and it is time for it to be reviewed.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: The Premier failed on Marine Atlantic rates. The Premier's blunder will cause the price of groceries and goods to increase. He also failed to keep the carbon tax off home heating fuel, meaning residents in this province will have to pay more to heat their homes.

Why does the Premier allow Ottawa to force the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to pay more?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I think perhaps we need to have a civics lesson, perhaps a technical briefing for the Member opposite. We don't set the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker, just like we don't introduce –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

A. FUREY: I am happy to address the question, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

A. FUREY: Just like we don't –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

A. FUREY: I'm happy to address the question, if you'd like. Am I able to address the question, Mr. Speaker, or not?

SPEAKER: Order, please!

You have 25 more seconds, Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you.

We do not handle the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker. I've been very clear as has the official Leader of the Opposition, federally, I don't agree with this right now, Mr. Speaker. We've made it very clear, it's the wrong instrument for the wrong time and it's punitive to people who live in this province with respect to the cost of living, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) last May, you said it was great.

A. FUREY: I never said it was great last May, Mr. Speaker, and I don't say it's great —

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I heard the question and I want to hear the response. If this continues Members are going to be named, on both sides.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

D. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier one question. The \$35 million that's budgeted in your budget, are you going to give that back to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador if you say it's not your doing here? It's in your budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker. This gives me an opportunity to talk about our incredible budget that hopefully is

making its way through the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: I know the Members opposite have said they're voting against supports for the cost of living, voting against historic investments in transportation and voting against historic investments in health, in education.

Speaker, I will say to the Member opposite, the money is allocated in the budget. I would assume he has read the budget. I would assume he's supportive of the measures that I've indicated.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: I guess the question is: Yes or no, did you vote for the carbon bill? That's the question.

During Estimates this morning, the minister confirmed further delays to the Team Gushue Highway. Additional detailed engineering work has not yet been tendered. No construction this year or next.

Speaker, what year will work resume on the Team Gushue Highway?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

His first, probably, 10 words were false. I did not say that in Estimates. I listened to the Leader of the Opposition in scrum yesterday. The problem here is this is good news. We're actually going to get it done, because we know when he was minister involved in the former PC government, they couldn't get things done. We're getting it done. They can't handle the truth and they can't handle good news.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: We're only wondering what year – that's what we're wondering – will it be done. They're only at it now eight years.

Speaker, this government has been planning and studying for five years – yes, five years – and nothing has been done. Now we spend more years of engineering and analysis. The project has become a punchline.

When will the Gushue Highway be completed? In this decade, maybe?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, he can't handle good news. I get it. We understand and the people of the province – your constituents are appreciating it, I can guarantee you that. But we promise we will do this; we will deliver.

You want to talk about delays, I have it here and I'll table it, too. When the Leader of the Opposition was Transportation and Works minister trying to get the hospital in Labrador done, it was delayed for over a year and cost the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador an extra \$20 million. You don't want to talk about how we get things done, we'll get things done; he didn't.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, maybe he should give his answers to the questions that are asked, not to the former minister.

Speaker, in Estimates the minister also confirmed the replacement for the prison is way over budget and government may go back to tender.

Will he now admit the sole-sourced, Liberal-friendly process has failed?

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

E. LOVELESS: Again as an example, I guess, we're going to build buildings and whatever; he just can't handle good news. I get it; we understand it, Mr. Speaker. He asked a question yesterday and my answer is the same as it was yesterday. We're going through the process and hopefully have a decision made on that in the near future. So stay tuned for good news.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Maybe he'll take our advice that we had last year and retender it – maybe.

Speaker, if the minister's process is so great, let him award the contract and break ground. Otherwise, will he take our advice and go back to the market in a fair and open process to ensure we get a new prison in a timely fashion and taxpayers' money is well spent?

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

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, I can only conclude that they're confused over there, because you have some Members over there that are visiting the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

E. LOVELESS: I can understand being interrupted when it's good news; I get that. But we're talking about a very important project that needs to get done, Mr. Speaker, and we're trying to get that done. I know, because there are Members over there who visited the facility and said it should've been done yesterday. Some want to cancel, delay it for another two or three years. We don't know what's going on over there. They don't either because they don't have a permanent leader yet.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yet again, emergency services in St. Lawrence have been shut down.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yet again, emergency services in St. Lawrence are shut down. This is an all-too-familiar situation for the people of St. Lawrence and the surrounding area.

I ask the minister: When will the people of the area not have to worry about their emergency room being closed?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are a couple of responses that I will provide to the hon. Member across. First of all, we have a meeting this week with the council in St. Lawrence, Mr. Speaker. Myself and the MHA for the area have been

working with the community looking for solutions.

The other is we have set out a very aggressive and very focused recruitment campaign. The Member opposite knows that the incentives we put in place are the best in Canada. We are seeing some success from those incentives and will continue to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I would suggest there are going to be a lot of meetings coming up.

Last week, we saw emergency room closures, again, on Bell Island, in Whitbourne, in Lewisporte, on Fogo Island, in Buchans, in Harbour Breton, in Baie Verte and in Springdale. It's almost impossible for local residents to keep on top of it when their local emergency room is closed.

I ask the minister: When will the failures of this Liberal government to staff emergency rooms finally stop?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've seen reductions in the closure of emergency departments throughout the province. In December and January, we saw an increase in the closures, Mr. Speaker. We've started to see reductions again.

The initiatives and the incentives that we've put in place, working with the Provincial Health Authority, Mr. Speaker, we are working on a virtual RFP that will ensure that every individual in the province has

access to a physician virtually. If they don't have access to primary care, that through virtual we'll be able to keep the emergency departments open with the proper staffing in those emergency departments throughout the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

A recent report estimates that 90,000 people in the province live in households that are food insecure, meaning that these residents cannot afford food. The cost of living because of the Liberal decisions, like the carbon tax and the ferry rate increase, is just too high.

Will the minister commit to finding a way to lower local food prices?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker, and I appreciate the question.

It has been very difficult for people especially with the cost of living. That's why we've put in over \$500 million of cost-of-living supports and we've continued those into this year, into this budget. Speaker, we've lowered the price of gasoline. We've included an increase for the Seniors' Benefit and for the Income Supplement. We've included a \$500 stipend for those who heat their homes with oil.

We've done a tremendous amount to try and support the people of the province, recognizing the concerns that there have been around the cost of living, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the interventions that were used and what the budget had put out, but if they're not working, we need to come up with something different.

In the government's own The Economy document, it says the consumer price index for 2002, \$100 paid for groceries, today is \$160 and their forecast for '27 is \$175. Mr. Speaker, 26.4 per cent of children live in food insecure households, more than the national average.

Why do children in this province have to rely on program such as Kids Eat Smart and breakfast clubs?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Again, a very important topic. I know that the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development is working very incredibly hard and there are extra supports in his department to do so.

I will say to the Member opposite, the cost-of-living increases have, thankfully, started to decline in Newfoundland and Labrador, indeed across the country.

As he knows, the Bank of Canada made interventions in the markets and that has seen the cost of living decline now to 3.4 per cent. It's one of the lowest in the country, Speaker. I will say that the Canadian average is 4.3; Newfoundland and Labrador it's 3.4 per cent. We're expecting it to continue to decline.

Speaker, I will say to the Member opposite, there are still a lot of supports under the Children, Seniors and Social Development Department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, when we look at the budget, The Economy document, we don't see that decline. Even in the government's projections, we know that basket of groceries is going to cost \$175 in 2027.

Food bank usage is up on the Liberal's watch and that's a fact. Families, children and seniors are being forced to line up at food banks because they cannot afford to go to the grocery store. One-time payments won't help people go to the grocery store year-round.

What is the minister going to do going forward to help lower the cost of putting food on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians' tables?

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

S. COADY: Thank you.

To address the preamble, I will say to the Member opposite, these are the latest statistics from Statistics Canada that show a decline in the cost of living. It's now 3.4 per cent year over year, versus in Canada it's 4.3 per cent. I know that's cold comfort to those who are struggling. That's why we've put the extra supports and the direction that we've given through the budget to Children, Seniors and Social Development, who are doing an incredible job of assisting people in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Speaker, Atlantic farmers pay more for fuel than farmers living in other provinces on a year-over-year basis. With

this price rising at the faster pace in this province, as costs rise to farmers, so will the cost of groceries on our shelves.

How does government to expect local farmers to feed families if they are continuously disadvantaged by poor Liberal policy and inaction?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's a great opportunity to get up and talk about the valuable work of our farmers. Last year, we met our target of over 20 per cent food sustainability for this province. Milk, eggs and chicken right now are fully sustainable. So we are doing our part.

Not only that, in our department, we realize the price of fuel has been up. Last year, we helped them with the limestone that was much needed. So we dug into one of our programs and rather than putting money into some other aspects, we helped them with their limestone costs, which cut down on their costs for their fertilizer, Mr. Speaker.

We offer land to farmers for a 50-year lease at \$4 per hectare, Mr. Speaker. We're doing our part. Any farmer out there who needs assistance, I ask them to reach out to our department and we'll help them where we can.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: We were self-sufficient in milk, eggs and chicken long before the minister got there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Speaker, prices for fertilizer are the highest they've ever been in Canada, up 80 per cent since 2021. That's before the rise on the Marine Atlantic ferry. Farmers can barely afford to plant this year and we will see a 4 per cent increase on the grocery shelf.

Why do the Liberals plan to worsen our food security crisis and further raising the cost of goods when it gets here?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I've got to tell you again, we have affordable, viable, farmland available; we have a limestone program; we have a vegetable transplant program. Two bucks for 200 plants; 100 per cent success. The farmers absolutely love it. It is fully subscribed to, we put extra money into it this year and it's fully subscribed this year. We are doing our part to help our farmers in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, the mayor of Happy Valley-Goose Bay spoke out in the media this morning expressing concern with the issues of violence and crime in this community. Recently the town issued a statement saying – quote – government is aware of the public safety concerns in our community, yet continues to ignore calls for immediate and meaningful action.

I ask the minister: When can the people of the town feel safe in their own community?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank you for the question and, of course, I had a recent conversation with the mayor of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, I think it was within two or three days, after the great budget that the Minister of Finance presented in this House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Included in that budget – which everyone on this side of the House of Assembly supports – was almost \$500,000 specifically for the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay as it relates to security and safety in that part of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: That \$500,000 was allocated at the request of city council and the mayor and other people in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

We've met with the mayor very recently – that was last week, I think – to set a date to sit down and talk about how that money can be spent, how they feel it should be spent in their town, because it's important to have their input about where they feel it's needed. But, again, half a million dollars in this budget to support the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, as of today, the mayor has indicated their frustration and their concern and their disappointment with this government's inaction and constant delay.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: It has been reported that children enrolled in daycare, Speaker, in the Happy Valley-Goose Bay are unable to go for supervised walks because of potential safety risks.

Can the minister inform us on when children in daycare can simply go on walks in the community without safety risks?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I look forward to meeting with the mayor as soon as we can arrange a time to discuss how the \$500,000, the half a million dollars, can be allocated toward public safety in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Of course this is not a recent issue. We have been dealing with this issue over the past year with the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, with Indigenous groups, with other stakeholders in the area and Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Labrador. Because, of course, it's not limited to just a public safety issue, it's an issue with addictions, addictions with homelessness, all sorts of things that are very complex that can't be solved with a stroke of a pen.

So we look forward to continuing the work with stakeholders in the area, and look forward to everyone approving the budget so we can get the \$500,000 to Goose Bay as soon as possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday in Question Period, the Premier said his government will work with the NLTA and others to make sure that his government is providing sustainable education opportunities for children across this province. There are some, such as the

parents of Carter Churchill, to would challenge such a statement.

Would the Premier clarify what exactly he means by sustainable education opportunities for children?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Delighted to take the question. I'm meeting with the NLTA, again, on Thursday of this week; it's part of regular meetings that we do have.

Our approach is many pronged. We are working on a renewed education action plan. We have curriculum renewal and curriculum development on the agenda. We have recruitment and retention, in particular, to bolster our teaching population and we have a variety of approaches with the Faculty of Education to try and enhance recruitment of Bachelor of Education candidates, Mr. Speaker.

There is a lot going on. There's \$1.4 billion nearly in the budget, which they don't want to vote for, which will help this situation.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I do hope that the minister actually listens to the dialogue.

The Carter Churchill human rights case is a cautionary tale for government. Speaker, there are court cases waiting every day in our schools as a result of unfilled teaching positions, a shortage of substitutes and a

lack of classroom supports which all add up to an unstable learning environment.

Specialized teachers such as IRTs must cover other classes, sidelining vital student services, not covered by your budget.

I ask the Premier: Will his government do more than just take the issue under advisement and take concrete steps to address fractional units, unfilled teaching positions, the shortage of substitutes and the lack of classroom resources?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Happy to stand and address some of the questions the Member opposite raises. We have a disabilities and supports program within the department, which is undergoing revamping. With regard to teacher numbers, we have for the last year been working with the Faculty of Education and with the NLTA on recruitment and retention.

We offer significant incentives for teachers to go to rural, remote and Labrador schools. We are conscious of the difficulties in recruiting support staff. But there are labour challenges across the whole market. We continue to work with the stakeholders involved and progress is being made.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the minister stated that there'll be an ADM heading to Labrador West to see the situation. But I've heard from teachers in

Labrador West that there will be no opportunity for them to speak to the ADM.

I ask the minister: Will he make sure that the teachers of Labrador West and their representatives will have an opportunity to provide factual information to the department and the minister?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm glad the Member opposite brought up the issue of Labrador West. There is a significant amount of misinformation out there in the public generated by the Member's comments. These are factually inaccurate, are thoroughly misleading and are demoralizing the teaching staff in Labrador West. I would ask him to actually stick to the facts, stick to the numbers.

With regard to teacher concerns, in any school, they have their principal. There are district staff who travel out there on a regular basis and my departmental staff make periodic visits to regions of the province to see boots on the ground. I would suggest the Member opposite is making mountains out of molehills for his own advantage.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

On Thursday in my response to a call for the return of the freight boat, the Minister of Transportation said his consultations with stakeholders in Labrador show great work has been done. I have a letter from the Mushuau Innu First Nation to the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation, Speaker, supporting my calls for a return of the freight boat service from

the Island. I also have a brand, new email yesterday sent from Chief Nui stating: Lela, please use the letter as proof that we in Natuashish would love to have the freighter back. So who could we believe?

I say to the Premier: Premier, my people have called for a return of the freight boat. Now you have a letter from the Mushuau Innu Nation. I can send you a copy of Chief Nui's email if you want.

Will you take action on addressing food insecurity and economic marginalization and return that freight service to the North Coast of Labrador?

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

The Member raises very important matters from the area of Northern Labrador when she talks about food insecurity and the high cost. We're experiencing that all across the province and the country and beyond right now, Speaker. I would say that it is exasperating in places that are isolated. I know I experience it in the northern part of my constituency in places like Black Tickle. We're helping them now.

I think what the Member is talking about when my colleague, the Minister of Transportation, references the effectiveness of the boat is that we are seeing an increase. For the first time people are able to take their vehicles and go on that boat. They're coming back with vehicles filled with freight, Speaker. We're seeing an increase in the data in the number of vehicles, in the number of passengers travelling.

We are actually having a meeting with the leadership on the North Coast in the very near future to have further discussion about how the service is rolling out year over year and how improvements –

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

J. BROWN: Point of order.

SPEAKER: Point of order.

J. BROWN: During Question Period, the hon. Member for Gander said that I was using misleading and false information in this House. I know that has been ruled on in the past by yourself that using misleading was a thing there.

I ask if the minister would withdraw those comments against me.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The numbers that the Member is quoting, massive retirements, massive resignations; there are two resignations out of 101 teaching units in Labrador West. There is recruitment under way. These are for term contracts which have to be renewed at the end of each year according to the collective agreement. They cover –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HAGGIE: These are the facts, Mr. Speaker. These are the facts. To go out there and say there are massive problems and no work is being done and no one is interested is patently false and I would not withdraw my comments.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Petitions

I am going to review *Hansard* and the audio after and come back with a ruling.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

The residents of Noels Pond are concerned with the increased ATV traffic on Wheelers Road, a 0.8-kilometre stretch of road that runs through the community.

P. PIKE: Speaker, pursuant to the motion of referral of March 23, 2023, and in accordance with Standing Order 71, the Government Services Committee met on four occasions on: April 26, 2023; April 27, 2023; April 28, 2023; and May 2, 2023.

Wheelers Road is mostly a dirt road and it connects two highly travelled ATV trails in the area. Residents, particularly in the summer, have their homes covered in dust and in the spring and fall the road turns to mud.

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

The road was last paved in 1976 and only 0.3 kilometres was paved at that time. The road is a mess and needs paving and upgrading in a desperate fashion.

Thank you.

Therefore we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to pave Wheelers Road to ensure the safety of its residents and ATV users.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Speaker, we all know the province wants to encourage tourism and ATV and off-road tourism is becoming a very popular form of tourism in our province. People from other provinces travel here to take advantage of the trails that we have and the great trails that exist throughout the province. In this particular case, we have a trail that runs through Wheelers Road to connect on the other side of the highway.

SPEAKER: Other presenting reports?

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

As it says in the petition, most of the road is dirt. It is a road that is the responsibility of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure; 0.8 of a kilometre. Of all the millions that the minister has announced for a road, surely the minister, in his budget, will see fit to find 0.8 kilometres when

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

they're paving out in my district – 0.8 of a kilometre, Mr. Speaker, that's what we're talking about.

I look forward to the minister visiting the district and getting to see Wheelers Road in person on his ATV.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

The reasons for this petition:

WHEREAS individual residents have spoken to the serious concerns they have about the decline in their own mental health and/or the mental health of their family members in and throughout the District of Harbour Main; and

WHEREAS many of these residents have expressed that the mental health care system in Newfoundland and Labrador is not providing access to adequate mental health supports; and

WHEREAS since this is Mental Health Week, it is important to think about mental health and tackle biases and stigma, as well as learn how, together, we can support people to prevent and/or manage their mental health and well-being.

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately take the necessary action to provide increased support programs and services for individuals who are suffering from mental health issues in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, my petition follows after my colleague from the District of Topsail - Paradise, who, yesterday, presented a petition on this very important issue. Some of the statistics that he referenced yesterday, I think bear repeating: approximately 100,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador live with mental illness. That is a shocking statistic – a shocking number, Speaker.

What's even more disturbing as well is that only about 40 per cent of people affected by mental illness and addictions seek help. What does that tell us, Speaker? That tells us there are so many others and so many more people out there who actually don't reach out, who are affected, yet it's unreported. So obviously the number of 100,000 is much, much higher.

So that, to me, begs the question of, together, what we can do. Well, clearly as the Member from Topsail - Paradise indicated in the petition yesterday – and I urge and implore government to immediately address this – is to provide access to long-term mental health care, Speaker.

When I hear the wait-lists that are ongoing and that go into, not only months but years to see a psychiatrist in this province, that reality that you have to wait years to actually see and consult and meet with a psychiatrist is really shocking indeed.

Speaker, we need to give this attention. We need to address this immediately. I know there are emergency and short-term measures in place, we've got to do more than that. Let's look at providing access to long-term mental health care.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is a request to return Nain High School courses back to in-class learning.

The reason for the petition:

The Newfoundland and Labrador English School Board's decision to move teachers from Nain High School academic courses to other responsibilities, thereby placing the high school students in online learning. Parents and students are demanding a return to in-class learning for academic math, English and science high school courses.

WHEREAS the Internet wasn't adequate in Nain for students to do classes online, and Nain students have never done CDLI courses in the past online; and

WHEREAS the removal of in-class teachers in a community without the capacity or experience to deliver effective online education has deprived these students of equitable access to education; and

WHEREAS limiting Nain students' academic options impacts their potential for post-secondary education opportunities, perpetuating the socioeconomic marginalization of the Labrador North Coast;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to advocate for a return to in-person education to the students of Nain High School now.

Speaker, this petition was actually signed in October. It's become pretty obvious now to basically advocating for a return for in-class learning for the students of Nain that a lot of people are aware of it. But what a lot of people don't realize, the attention should also not be on just the fact that they took the high school teachers from those Nain students and forced them online so they

could go and teach the junior high courses and fill vacancies, at the time and still a very, very pressing problem for Nain and Northern Labrador is lack of access to good, quality Internet.

The Internet is still really, really slow. It was quite embarrassing to have photographs posted online of 10 to 12 students huddled around one computer as the solution. But, for me, the problem goes much further than just this year. This year has really put a lot of undo stress and pressure on these students to try to fulfill their academic requirements so they could go on to post-secondary. But, more than that, is what happens now when they do go on to career opportunities and goes to post-secondary. Because in actual fact, Speaker, the biggest problem is these students have been robbed of the education that they could have had this year, if they had their in-class teachers. It's going to impact their ability in post-secondary. It could derail their career paths.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

The residents on the Bonavista Peninsula applying for a big game licence must now do it online, as paper applications are no longer accepted. Many residents and seniors in the District of Bonavista do not have Internet access, nor email. The department assists these individuals by mailing them the password to get into the application system, and leave it to the individuals to find a computer.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to allow an ordered paper copy, especially for seniors

of the province who have significant hardships in applying online.

I thank Barry Mesh from Keels for bringing this petition and getting other signatures on the petition to the office. Barry is one of those seniors that do not have Internet access but he always applied for a big game licence. He would suggest to government: Until there is everyone who has access to the Internet or access to a computer, paper copies ought to be available so at least they can access a big game licence. I would say to you to initiate a practice or a policy that leaves out a significant group of Newfoundlanders or Labradorians, in particular seniors, is wrong. It's incorrect.

So I would say revisit that. On behalf of Barry Mesh, the other signatories and the other people around the districts of Newfoundland and Labrador, revisit that. I would say that should be characteristic in every part and every aspect of governance in Newfoundland and Labrador. We can move the driver's examination or testing out of Bonavista and move it out of the area. We have people travel then to do their test in other areas. It should be in Bonavista.

Year's ago, we closed the Advanced Education and Skills office and that is where people went to do online work and get help with things. They closed that office. So we would ask government to have a look at that, make these paper copies, and I would hope that you've got data for those people that do not have Internet access or computer access and that number can be looked into.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture for a response.

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's a great opportunity because moving online to the moose licence application has been an overwhelming success. Listen to this: 74,000 applicants in this province. This year, we had 104 complaints. All were dealt with, all are answered to and everybody, as I know, got their application filled out.

It's a great success story, moving this online. I thank the Minister of Digital Government for assisting in any way she could, to bring us more digitally friendly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for the petition:

All schools in Labrador West are dealing with massive substitute teacher shortfalls. There is need for more teachers, IRTs, guidance counsellors, school psychologists, support staff, maintenance workers, bus drivers and custodians. We regularly hear about potential teachers who could fill these vacant positions but cannot accept the job because they cannot find affordable housing in Labrador West. Government assured residents it would work on existing teachers' apartments and add units to the empty floor of the former Labrador School Board building but it was never carried out. Potential teachers cannot take jobs if there is no affordable housing in the area.

The CSFP has extra challenges, as, unlike the NLESD, it does not own housing in Labrador West. Labrador West's housing shortage is a recruitment hurdle for them.

Maintenance on all schools has fallen behind and is leading to a poor learning environment.

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to meet with the teachers in Labrador West and the support staff and create a plan to address these issues of staffing, maintenance and teacher housing.

Once again, I'm asking the government to work with the teachers of Labrador West. To go up and see their issues and have a talk with them and understand the challenges that they're facing. We just have to go on the recruitment portal and there are guidance counsellors missing. There's a gym teacher missing. There are different positions missing and it's been going on for the last number of years. The teachers are burnt out. They're doing internal coverage.

I got the numbers from one school today: 75 per cent of the school year, they were under internal coverage because there was not enough teaching staff. So kids are missing gym, kids are missing art. IRT teachers are being taken to go into other places.

This is a serious issue that needs to be seriously looked at. I know with the back and forth and everything in Question Period is fine, but this is something that is absolutely serious. The teachers of Labrador West have been reaching out to me. The parents of Labrador West have been reaching out to me. They're at their wits end and they want something done to address this because they don't want it to carry on for another school year. Like I said, this is important, it is serious and it should be taken seriously.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the province's population has aged much more rapidly than any other province in the country over the last 50 years.

The number of persons over 65 years of age has more than doubled in the past 30 years.

Many aging couples have been assessed and deemed eligible for a placement in a long-term care facility and require different levels of care and are being separated into different facilities in order to get the care they require in a timely manner.

Having support and assistance as close to their home and community as possible should be a key objective in developing and providing services to our seniors. As well, individuals want choice in living in a place that maximizes independence.

Couples who have supported each other should not have to face being separated when they enter long-term care. Keeping them together ensures a better quality of life.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to enact legislation that allows couples to stay together even as they age and even at the highest level of care.

Speaker, I have presented this petition a number of times and it's only recently, this week, I asked questions on the Health Accord in actually addressing some of the specific calls to action that address the elderly. Action 8.1: "Develop and implement a formal Provincial Frail Elderly Program to address the critical need of our population." No response on that. No action on that.

Action 8.2: "Implement and support an integrated continuum of care to improve the

effectiveness and efficiency of care delivery, improve health and social outcomes for older adults and older adults with disabilities, and support older adults to age in place with dignity and autonomy.” Of course, we know they’re doing another eight-month survey on that consultation.

Action 8.3: “Take immediate steps to identify and respond to the ageism in our province” Again, nothing happening there.

Action 8.4, which is the crux of this piece of this petition: “Develop and implement provincial legislation, regulation, and policy required to provide appropriate, quality, and accessible care and protection for older persons in Newfoundland and Labrador.”

So there are four action items, at least, in the Health Accord dealing with this. We all stated in this House that we’re well aware of our demographics and how they have changed; the Premier said it many times about our ageing population. Yet, we still drag our feet. Government drags their feet on implementing some real immediate programs and services that can allow our seniors to live their final years, their golden years together with autonomy, with dignity and respect.

They do not have time on their hands. These are people who deserve better and should have better.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Dr. William H. Newhook Community Health Centre is located in Whitbourne and provides services to residents of the area in addition to incidents which may happen on the province’s largest highway.

The Dr. William H. Newhook Community Health Centre’s emergency room has experienced frequent and numerous closures over the last year.

The emergency service offered by the health centre is often not available for residents, leading to a significant amount of concern and worry among residents, in addition to residents having to drive to another emergency room.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately enact a plan which ensures the Dr. William H. Newhook Community Health Centre is fully staffed, open and able to provide emergency health care services.

This one here is signed by someone from Heart’s Delight, someone from New Harbour and someone from Whitbourne, so we can see the catchment area that’s really available that these people rely on.

For myself and the people of Placentia West - Bellevue, our concern is that it’s not going to be available for, not only the people that helped staff it from my district, but the people who would utilize those services. Going further down the road is really not an option, kind of thing, because, of course, we know with the cost of living and everything, what that’s creating.

But the biggest thing for me, too, with this health centre is for a senior who needs a prescription refill, we’re sending them to Carbonear and St. John’s and stuff now, when I don’t think that’s really necessary. It’s really wasting people’s money that they don’t really have in the first place.

When we see another divergent emergency room this past week, I would call upon the government to make sure that we get this right. Because as we saw from the list in Question Period, this problem is not going

away any time soon and it needs to be addressed ASAP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Memorial University, Bill 39, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce the *Memorial University Act*, Bill 39, and that the said bill now be read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Education to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Memorial University Act," carried. (Bill 39)

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act to Amend the Memorial University Act. (Bill 39)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 39 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

It is again a pleasure and a privilege to stand in this hon. House this afternoon and represent the fine people of my beautiful district. I'm happy to speak to the main motion for *Budget 2023*.

Speaker, the last two times I spoke in this hon. House, I spoke on education with respect to debating the budget: education, health care, violence prevention, the cost of living, seniors, our volunteer community and early childhood educators.

Over the last couple of days, I've had the opportunity to speak to hundreds of people in my district and I have to say, like my colleague from Bonavista says, there's always someone watching that are thanking me for bringing up the issues in this hon. House during budget debate and I appreciate their attention to the work that goes on in this hon. House.

I was asked by several of my constituents if I had another opportunity to speak to the budget, that I would speak to health care once again and the retention bonuses for

support staff. I've received several emails from residents and I'm sure all hon. Members of this House have received emails on retention for support staff. If I'm not mistaken, approximately 24 per cent of those working in health care are in the support staff field and they were left out of the retention bonus that was offered of some form to other health care professionals in our health care system.

So we're aware of the retention bonuses for doctors and nurses. The nurse practitioners were mentioned in this budget, but, as far as I know, there was nothing for the front-line workers in our health care field with respect to retention bonus. So I ask: What is the retention and recruitment plan for those front-line workers in the health care system?

As I said, those from my district, my constituents reached out to me with respect to their displeasure on not receiving a retention bonus, as I said, approximately 24 per cent of those working in health care. Speaker, it's very safe to say, and I'm sure that all will agree with me, that the front-line workers, the support staff in our health care field are integral workers. They are integral workers with respect to the ongoing care in any capacity in our health care system.

So I go back over the last number of years, Speaker, and I look at what has happened. What has happened in our province over the last number of years with respect to impacting health care workers that provide the care to you and I and everyone else in this province?

Well, I'll go back to Snowmageddon and what our health care workers had to work through, at that time, with respect to what was going on in our province. The major one is COVID-19 that we dealt with and continue to deal with going forward, what all of the hospital staff, the professionals with respect to the doctors, nurses, the nurse practitioners, all the staff in the hospitals, what they had to go through during COVID-19 and what they're continuing to do, with

respect to keeping the patients safe in our various institutes of healing.

My colleague from Terra Nova said: heroes. I couldn't agree more. Thank you. I should have had that in my notes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: They are heroes no doubt. I appreciate that from my hon. colleague.

We also look at recently, in the last year or so, the cyberattack. The cyberattack that we felt in our health care system here in our province certainly had a major impact on our staff and what they went through with respect to dealing with the cyberattack. I spoke to several constituents who had hand-written reports for days on end.

I do know all that makes a huge difference, Speaker. All the while, health professionals in our province are being recruited by other provinces, by other health professionals in other provinces; they are certainly being recruited elsewhere. All of this leads to stress and strain within our health care system, within our staff, and many of those did not receive retention bonus when it came to bonuses that were being given out this year.

Speaker, the support staff many times are working short staffed while keeping the work flowing so doctors, nurses and other health professionals who are treating the patients get the treatment they deserve. I can tell you, unfortunately, Speaker, I have had the opportunity of spending too much time with loved ones in the hospital over this past year. Speaking on a personal note, I've witnessed, first and foremost, what our health professionals, our people in these positions, what they do, what they do day in and day out. What they do time after time for the benefit of the patients that they're dealing with.

Many times, Speaker, I've spoken to people – I'll take one example – a lady from the

Southern Shore who worked a double shift because they were short staffed and couldn't leave her co-workers to pick up the slack.

I speak of the young man from Mundy Pond, who is part of the support team on the floor, who works through his breaks, his lunches, his super breaks and then stays late until midnight in order to see that the work is done. These are the people who we should be supporting, who didn't receive a retention bonus when it came to this budget.

Speaker, one of my hon. colleagues said it earlier this week and I wrote it down, I'm not sure who said it so I won't quote, but they said: the support staff are the glue that holds the place together – support staff are the glue that holds the place together.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: You can't word it any better than that, Mr. Speaker. They are the glue.

I'll go to a sports analogy because many of my colleagues here in this hon. House are sports fans and there is no health care, Speaker, without all players in the game – there's no health care without all players in the game. So, when we're looking at it, Speaker, the support staff, they're facing burnout. They're facing being stressed and now, of course, they're being recruited globally for positions outside of our province. Many of them are taking positions, which adds to the further stress and strain on our system and the further burnout of our other professionals.

If there was a retention bonus in place, they might be staying here, Speaker, for the benefit of you and I and all Members of this house and members of this province. That's something that we need to think on going forward, and with respect to the 24 per cent that's there, I do know that would be appreciated. So I would want to know what the plan is, Speaker.

Speaker, I'm going to share with you and this hon. House some lines from an email I received from a constituent. She is a registered pharmacy technician at one of the tertiary care centres here in St. John's. She is concerned about her ability to perform to the best of her ability in health care. She feels, as she states here, that her and her colleagues are not being supported by government. Her department has lost numerous valuable technicians over this past year and with no break in sight. She goes on to say: the lack of staffing has impacted our department, as our operating hours had to be decreased.

Speaker, with a very busy department, at one point, worked until midnight, but due to staffing shortages, were reduced in hours to 9 p.m. and because of a lack of recruitment and retention and, of course, other provinces reaching out for our skilled workers here in Newfoundland and Labrador, their hours are now reduced to 6 p.m. They were open until midnight, worked until midnight to support the ongoing care at the hospitals, moved back to 9 p.m. and now at 6 p.m. So there are six hours every day that registered pharmacy technicians are not working because of the lack of available staff.

Right now, Speaker, you can only imagine how that has impacted on the care that people in our hospitals are receiving. I can tell you, again on a personal note, if it wasn't for a pharmacy technician at the Health Sciences Centre, my father would not be here today because she picked up on the medication interaction that he was suffering –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: – through no one's fault. It was a list of medications that he was taking over the years and a new medication was prescribed that was working against him. The pharmacy technician picked up on it.

I applaud her for doing that, I applaud all pharmacy technicians for doing the job that they do, but they're feeling stressed and strained because of the lack of staff that they have in their department and being cut six hours a day. Some staff are being forced to work overtime in order to get the work done, but it just goes to show, Speaker, the level of care and commitment and professionalism that these individuals show to their position, to the patients that they serve and to the general public. They need, ought and should be supported in every way, shape and form going forward.

So with respect to the 24 per cent, as I said earlier, Speaker, with respect to not being supported with retention bonus, that makes a difference. It certainly makes a difference with respect to the attendance when it comes to our staff in the hospitals.

Speaker, if I may continue, it goes on to say: If these issues aren't addressed soon, I fear we will not have much of a pharmacy department left. That is a heavy, bold statement when you're looking at the care that they provide in conjunction to supporting the nurses, doctors, LPNs and overall health professionals in the hospital. There is not going to be much of a department left. Many of us are getting daily offers to leave.

So when it comes down to it, Speaker, when it comes down to the cost of living and what everyone in this province has to do to survive and you're looking at the dollars and cents that come into your household and you're getting offers from other provinces, from other health care institutions for large salaries, better bonuses, all this makes a difference, Speaker. And you can't blame the individuals for taking these positions when it comes to what they have to face in the run of a year.

She said: It is truly an unfortunate event, as the ones who will suffer in the end are the patients. Well, that's what this House needs to see, Speaker. That is the real, personal

stories that we see in health care day in and day out from our constituents. As I've said many times before, this is not a Tory issue. There are 40 districts in this hon. House, Speaker, and I'm sure that we all hear from our constituents on the level of health care and, at times, the inability to access health care.

Once you're in there, I can't speak good enough about the care that has been shown and given to my loved ones, I can't say enough. But many people are having difficulty accessing health care and it comes down to a lack of staff.

The question she asks: When will government see how important pharmacy technicians are within pharmacy and health care as a whole? That's a question that I want government Members to hear, to listen to and I'd like for them to respond to it as well.

Speaker, she ends off by saying: I am tired. I am tired, as many of my colleagues are; however, due to the nature of my position, I can't abandon my patients. That says it all, Speaker. That is the real life story, the dedication that they show day in, day out. That's why government needs to support these individuals with respect to a retention bonus, of course.

I thank this lady for reaching out to me; I do. It shows the level of care that she is committed to and I'd like to see the same level of care with respect to government and this 24 per cent.

So I will ask this Liberal government: When will this be rectified? When will this disparity be rectified? Is there any plan going forward with respect to the retention and recruitment bonus for these individuals? I have to ask.

I hope I have the numbers right, and someone can correct me if I'm wrong, the signing bonus for an RN is up to \$3,000; an LPN, a licensed practical nurse, up to \$1,950; and for a personal care attendant,

up to \$1,650. I believe those numbers are accurate. I stand to be corrected if someone wishes to correct me. For a new RN coming into the province, into the health care system, I believe it's \$8,000. These are signs of respect and gratitude shown. The same needs to be shown overall for all of our workers.

Speaker, I don't have to speak on the amount of stress that support staff are under. But the amount of stress that they are facing is adding to the overall crisis being felt in our health care system and that's in any corner of our province, if you want to look in any of the health care facilities.

We can go back to speak to the availability of family doctors. We can speak to that with respect to the over 100,000 people in our province who don't have one and cannot access one. We can speak to, as my colleague from Stephenville - Port au Port says, the access to a nurse practitioner and having to pay for access to see a nurse practitioner.

You can speak to the ER closures. We spoke in the House today, Speaker, of emergency room closures in Bell Island, Whitbourne, Lewisporte, Fogo Island, Buchans, Harbour Breton, Baie Verte and Springdale. This is ongoing as we are stood here in this hon. House. This is ongoing, day in, day out, Speaker.

It's not frivolous. It's not something that we're grandstanding on. It's not a political issue. This is something that 40 of us have to work through and make good decisions for and keep the people first and foremost in mind.

Speaker, we look at the wait times we have in emergency rooms. I've been there myself, 28 hours my father was on a stretcher in an emergency room waiting for assistance. We were there and provided whatever care we could and saw others who didn't have supports laying by

themselves. That's unfortunately becoming commonplace.

So when we look at all of that, Speaker, we can look at ambulatory services. We can look at having an ambulance respond in a timely fashion and not being in code red. Unfortunately, code red is becoming more and more common. It's happening in my district regularly, unfortunately.

I do thank, as I've said many times before, both fire departments in my district who are trained to answer code four medical calls. They are providing lifesaving assistance and support to the family members on an ongoing basis when you look at what's going on there.

Speaker, of course, I have to mention about long-term care. People who are waiting in hospital beds for weeks and months, paying their amount per day to stay in the bed, waiting for a long-term bed to open. It's happening far too regularly because we don't have the staff to keep all rooms at the hospital open and get people out quicker and, of course, then to get more people into long-term care.

Speaker, I do want to say that 24 per cent of the health care staff should not have been left out of this retention bonus. As we always say: this is about people. This is about our people from Newfoundland and Labrador, hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, who deserve better and we do need a plan going forward for that.

Speaker, in the last couple of minutes I have left, I do want to touch on the big game licence as was spoken about by my colleague earlier. I'm doing the same thing in my district with respect to seniors who are having difficulty. I know the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture stood up and praised the program as it is. No doubt there's a benefit to the program he has. But, Speaker, the people of our province – and most often it's seniors – have to have the

access to the Internet and they have to have the device to do so.

Many times I've sat at their kitchen tables or in their front rooms – because it's a privilege to get in the front room, I can tell you – and sat down with them and filled out their moose licence application because (a) they can't afford to purchase Internet or have a device and (b) they can't afford to purchase the beef to put in their deep-freeze. They're looking forward to a moose licence as you and I, Speaker, appreciate very much.

Speaker, I just want to give a plug to my colleague here who raised the concern. Again, I know that the minister has a good program there, but it's not all encompassing; it's leaving people out. That's what we want to remember. We can't leave anyone out when it comes to that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, with that, I will take my seat. It is always a pleasure to stand in this hon. House to do so and represent the people of my district. Of course, I thank them for the trust that they have put in me.

Speaker, thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Warr): Thank you.

I recognize the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I think I want to pick up, actually, where my colleague left off, because I wasn't going to go there at the first of my address talking about the budget, but I'll go one further and talk about the big game licences. I agree with him that seniors shouldn't have to jump through the hoops that they have to jump through. They should have somebody that's able to advocate on behalf of them and catch that moose for them. They shouldn't

have to be within 500 or 700, whatever it is, of the shooter and all this kind of stuff. I don't hunt so I guess I don't understand how we can't do this.

But I'll go one further: What about people with disabilities? I had a young cousin that wouldn't have the capacity to go in the woods or to hunt with her father or go trapping or catch salmon or anything like that, but she loves it all. I'll tell you right now you'd be hard pressed to keep her from a good bowl of stew.

But I will tell you right now that it wouldn't be safe, really, for her to be going with her dad to catch a moose or a caribou or angle a salmon or anything like that. I think we can go one step further in noticing that as long as somebody's assigned as the advocate, this person should be allowed to apply for a licence as well. They don't have the capacity, necessarily, to do it on a computer themselves, yet they have a capacity that somebody is interested in them. Somebody is cooking for them and if they like moose, they like caribou, they like salmon and they like rabbit, there is no way that should be denied them either.

Again, to put it all online is kind of marginalizing people that are already marginalized. So I would expect that we could do things different to be more inclusive, as my colleague for Cape St. Francis has said.

Of course, it is my honour to stand in this House every time that I get the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of Placentia West - Bellevue. A couple of things that are going on right now in Placentia West - Bellevue that is discouraging but, again, it is stuff that can probably be tackled when we do the right budget and stuff is cell service.

We talk about another \$25 million coming for cell service. We all know that the \$25 million last year went into giving people that already had cell service higher speeds. How

is that inclusive? I still have people in Brookside that were promised years ago through other people, not me, that they were getting cell service. They put poles up right through their community and still never gave them any cell service. A total shame – a total, total, utter shame.

But the thing is that we are here in 2023 and we're talking about \$25 million last year and \$25 million this year to connect the province. Well, I guarantee you one thing; we're not seeing any connect the province down on the Burin Peninsula and we're not seeing a lot of it in the isthmus area. The only thing we have going for it in the isthmus area is that we do have a couple of towers that are spread apart just far enough that you can get a slight signal, even on the highway.

But down on the Burin Peninsula we have more dead space and more dead areas than you can shake a stick at. This is not safe when it comes to Fire and Emergency Services; it is not safe for the travelling public that don't really understand that the highway itself.

We got opportunities that we can provide services to people through the budget process, but again it is about choices. It is about what we decide we're going to do. One of those choices was about the 5 per cent increase that was given to seniors. I would contend that it just doesn't go far enough when you're talking about \$6 a month or 19 cents a day.

But if you accumulate that money and you give people benefits that don't have benefits, now you're giving somebody something. Now you're giving somebody a leg up. You're not taking money out of their pocket so that they have to turn around and pay \$2,500 for a hearing aid. But if they had insurance or they were afforded assurances or they were allowed to be a dependant of their child that has services, then that is how we can get down the road with this. But we're leaving our seniors short. We gave

them 5 per cent in the cost of living to try and help them out but inflation was already at 5.2 per cent for the year. So we really didn't do any favours to anybody.

We kept our foot on their head just far enough so their nose can stick out of the water and keep breathing, but they're still splitting medications. We're still shutting down emergency departments and hospitals where they have to go to the next town or a much farther town to get a prescription even refilled or to get their blood pressure checked and all this kind of stuff.

So what we proposed in the last three or four years is about opening up the purview of pharmacists, which is nice to see, but also let's do it for nurse practitioners so that they can directly bill MCP. It just opens up the system so that we have more individuals that are available to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We all know the demographics and geography are the biggest issue facing our province today when it comes to health care services, but that's also the biggest obstacle we have to jump over when it comes to any department. I would contend Transportation and Infrastructure. I would contend certainly the fishery and certainly about cell services.

These are things that, in the year 2023, we shouldn't have to be discussing about how we can improve it. It should already be there and in place and ready to go. We should never have to rob Peter to pay Paul. What we need to do is we need to put our people back to work in an industrial district like my own, which has Kiewit, Grieg, which I'll get into now in a second. Then you have Vale down in Long Harbour. You have the refinery. We have Whiffen Head. We have Bull Arm. We have a plethora of industry in my District of Placentia West - Bellevue. If we can fill up all those, then there's not much chance that we'd have anything to talk about when it comes health care or cell service or anything like that. Just for the simple fact that we are looking long term in the decisions that we make today.

That's the whole point of it. I've said it in this House before: What's the best time to plant a tree? Twenty years ago. What's the second best time to plant a tree? Well, if you don't have one already planted, today is the best time to plant that tree.

So what we are doing here in this House of Assembly, with this kind of a budget, is we are trying to plant seeds that we will probably never see the shade of. But plant them we must, because that is what's going to help with the longevity of our people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

One of the big things, seeing we're on health care, talk about cataract surgery. We have an inordinately amount of people that are seniors in our province. They are going to have seniors' issues. Cataracts are one of them. Their eyes are deteriorating. But instead of taking away their licence, why don't we get them the cataract surgery instead of making them limited and giving people the opportunity to get back their quality of life?

That to me seems like a no-brainer. For the amount of calls my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands has brought up, that's a pretty miniscule amount of money – when you're talking about a \$10-billion budget – to make sure that people can get back their quality of life. I just think it's a no-brainer. But, again, this government, we probably give them too much credit on thinking about no-brainers.

When it comes to brush cutting and ditching, I was lucky enough to secure some money for brush cutting and ditching this year but they done 10 kilometres on Route 210, the Burin Peninsula Highway, which I would contend would probably be the last 10 kilometres that I would do on the whole highway, seeing as how sparse it was and how barren that area was. What was building up there was a natural snow fence that was keeping the snow off the highway.

But we went in and tore it all up and now we're back to square one, and there was very little ditching done on that job, too. I will contend that there are still alders in the ditches. So we'll be back to the same situation again next year, I guess. I did notice that in my colleague's District of Burin - Grand Bank, when you get to the area of Bay L'Argent, where brush cutting is needed tremendously on the highway, it's gone into branching on towards the towns. So what I was asking for was done in that district and what he needs was done in my district. It just seems to be kind of cart before the horse kind of stuff and just makes no sense.

I got the bridge in Boat Harbour. We've been after it now for three or four years. I understand – and for the people watching – that bridge will be replaced next year. But, again, let's just hope that we get through this year and maybe with the crab fishery not going ahead, that might take a little bit of the weight off of the bridge because \$9 million worth of crab came in over that little bridge last year. To me, that's certainly helping our economy in an economic strife.

The next thing I'd like to touch on is the five cents per litre that was put on it at Come By Chance. From our understanding, that was put on there to sell the Come By Chance oil refinery. I don't know if the process that was used was correct, but that five cents is still in place and the refinery is sold. The refinery incumbents now have secured another \$300 million to get their project over the finish line and start producing product. So I'm not sure why the five cents still needs to be in place. It just doesn't make sense.

It's like the Marine Atlantic increase, if you know the 4 per cent is coming – but now I want people to understand. The 25 per cent in Marine Atlantic was only for the shoulder season. The 4 per cent that got added by the feds is for the whole year.

So this is not just a shoulder season where you look at it for about a month at the end of

April or the first of May to probably around the middle of September to the middle of October. Their 4 per cent is going to be for the whole year. For every person that's travelling to and from Newfoundland, that's 4 per cent on them for the whole trip; whereas, the 25 per cent that we have taken on as a province is only for the shoulder season. So I just want the general public to understand that before we start touting anybody for taking 25 per cent off Marine Atlantic.

The next thing I would like to talk about is Bull Arm. I've been presenting a petition here since 2019 when I first got elected and it's about getting a long-term tenant for Bull Arm. We've seen some short-term tenants there but it's not really improving anything in our economy. All we're doing is shuffling them around some money. We're not even employing our own crowd. We're bringing in unions from outside the province and stuff like that, but, again, there's not a great deal of surprise in that when it comes to this government. They seem to let these things happen.

I mean, we're talking about a new industry with the windmills. If we look at this new industry, then we want to be leaders in this new industry and we want to make sure that we are very proactive when it comes to setting up this industry. So if we need a requirement for all these windmill blades that are carbon fibre and made with different materials and stuff like that, how come we're not producing them here? Isn't that the next step? Isn't that the secondary processing part of what we missed in fishery, what we missed in forestry and mining? Why couldn't we try and do something like that? We could be affiliated with the company that does produce them, just do them here on our shores so (a) there are less transportation costs and (b) we've got more of our people working.

When it comes to wind and hydrogen, I just want to make sure that I do reiterate something is that we get it right. This is not

about granting land and making sure that we're on the hook for any remediation that ends up having to occur or anything like that. I just wanted to see it be a long-term benefit to us.

I think that leasing the land would be where I would come from on that to the companies, so that we can be partners with them because no longer do we want to be a partner because we're a stakeholder and we own the resource. We want to be a shareholder because we own the resource and we want to get benefits for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador and, of course, my District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

We just announced that we're going to do a new ambulance system through this budget. The \$10 million that came from NL911, I think, will certainly help bolster that. But we have to get that right as well, for the simple fact that this is a communication process that's going to bring so much more confidence to our volunteer firefighters, our paramedics and any of our first responders that have to go out and face something that they have no control over but they have to control.

So the thing is communication is paramount. I've been saying it for years, but, again, that comes down to – you're not going to get down to the Bay de l'Eau area and worry about making any phone calls, let's just put it that way. We need to get that right.

To touch on something else with health care, with the ambulance service, it came to my attention, not recently, I guess, but within the last couple of months, that it's mandatory in an arena to have an AED, which I applaud. I think that is a fabulous idea because there are some fellows like myself that are out there that are not in the best of shape, they're still trying to hang on to the NHL dream.

I certainly don't do that anymore, but, in the meantime, I have had a couple buddies that

did have cardiac scenarios that presented while they were on the ice. I applaud it. I think it's a great idea because it is a lifesaving device, there are no two ways about that. I applaud that. I think that's a great idea.

But why don't we do that for our seniors' homes? Why don't we have AEDs mandatory in seniors' home? How many lives would that save over the long term? I couldn't believe it; I thought it was already mandatory to be quite honest. But when I represent seniors and a senior brings this to my attention, then it's probably – and I should never have assumed, I guess, but I somewhat did assume, I guess, that AEDs are mandatory in seniors' homes. I think that should be something that we could look at in any budget process for the simple fact that it's lifesaving.

It's a no-brainer. It's something that should already have been thought about. I shouldn't have to bring that up here today because I was just as surprised to hear it, as I am to say it. It just doesn't make sense. These are the most vulnerable people. They're all concentrated in one area and these AEDs are made so simple now that anybody could use them. I think it's time now that we look at AEDs in our seniors' homes as being mandatory.

I don't know if I'm going to do it justice, but I'm going to talk about Grieg for a minute and talk about contracts. There's supposed to be great benefit to the people of the Burin Peninsula for a salmon farm to come to the Marystown area. It was agreed upon by the people of St. Lawrence because they were going to get the benefit of processing the fish itself.

We know now that there are 5,000 metric tons going to be ready to go. Unfortunately, I just found out through the media that's not going to be processed in St. Lawrence now, it's going to be processed in Bay de Verde.

One thing that we can do here in this province, and I think everybody will agree in every district, is we all know how to gut a fish. I'm not a big angler, but I can gut a fish. I don't know if we need to bring in people to gut fish and put up drywall out in the new hospital in Corner Brook. I mean, these tasks seem to me that every time something like this comes up, we're selling out our own people.

The people of St. Lawrence deserve to do the head-on, gut-out of any operation that Grieg has. They're using up Placentia Bay. To go over and use Quin-Sea or Royal Greenland, they could've done that in – but it's going to another Liberal district, I'll give them that. But that could've been easily done in Southern Harbour. That's a Royal Greenland fish plant. Why wasn't Southern Harbour considered? Coming right out of Placentia Bay, right into Southern Harbour. I don't see a problem with that, if it's not going to St. Lawrence.

That's what was agreed on, that was in the MOU. That was a part of the contract of why we gave Grieg \$40 million. Where's the benefit to the people of the Burin Peninsula? They had stickers on their helmets saying: If you're not from Lawn you can't get on. I had them removed, because that was an egregious – that's not representing anybody.

Then we had a situation where the department of labour sent back the union cards to the management of Grieg and consequently people got fired. Another group, they were stood around having a chat. Somebody went up in the office and said, oh, do you see all them down there congregating and talking about union stuff. They got rid of the whole works of them. Unfortunately, I had a gentleman that was a part of the group, but he wasn't part of the conversation. I had to go back and try and get him reinstated, but to no avail, the rest never. Anyway, more to come. Stay tuned on Grieg.

In my last minute, I want to tell a little story about a senior. I was at the gas station in Goobies. I just made some small talk with the lady and I said: Hi, how are you today? She said: Oh, not too bad. As we spoke, she put \$10 worth of gas in her car. I said: Where are you going, my love, on \$10 worth of gas? Because I was thinking if you're living in Arnold's Cove, you're only getting home.

She said: I have an appointment in Clarendville. I'm hoping that it gets me down there and gets me back. I said: My love, I don't think that's possible. I don't want you to get broke down on the highway. She said: No sweat, hopefully, but I had to cancel my appointment for tomorrow. I filled up her tank and I said: You go to that appointment tomorrow as well. She still does not even know that it was her MHA that filled up her tank, I will guarantee you (inaudible) –

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Motion 1.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call the Concurrence Motion report of the Government Services Committee.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Again, it's a pleasure to talk on Concurrence today, which goes along with our budgetary speech and processes, I guess. During the

Estimates with the minister, we come to find out – and I want to thank everybody who showed up for the Estimates for Service NL and any other Estimates. I mean, we look across the way and we see a full department come on down and help the minister with any answers that they may need. The work that they put in each year, all year, all 365 days, is immense and I want to thank all the public service sector workers out there that give it their all behind the scenes because those are the true, real workers and we want to thank you very much on behalf of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: When we had our Estimates process, we learned that there was over \$300 million owing to the provincial government from the minister's department. With a salary of \$1.1 million for collection services, we'd like to see some of that money come back to the province. It was good to talk about, it was good to learn the numbers and it was good to see where we're headed in the future. But there's still a decrease of about 20 per cent for collection services and we'd like to see those positions filled, as well as many other positions within government's department. There are so many positions right now that are unfilled that can dig in, get the work done and hopefully we see those positions filled in the future.

Speaker, I want to take a moment and talk about agriculture just for one second. I touched on it last week. Mr. Fred Card, out in Badger, called into *Open Line* this morning and it was a great call. Just to freshen up the story here: Fred has had the same piece of land for 43 years. Donkeys, horses, hens, chickens, goats, tons and tons of potatoes over the years this man has done. Unfortunately, this government is asking him to pick up his homestead, get the heck out of dodge. That's not fair. For a man in his 70s who has been on that homestead for almost 43 years now, his kids grew up there, many neighbours from

Badger came around there, and it's a beautiful little homestead that he's so proud of, that he made –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm going to remind the Member to stay relevant to the department. This department doesn't cover the FFA, Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture. That's under another committee.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

I apologize for not staying relevant.

Within the department, it covers so much stuff, including our cyberattack back a little while ago, last year or the year before, whatever. We all know that, for instance, cybersecurity needs to be taken very seriously. We believe that the government are going to do that in future, hopefully, but we do know that many people have had their personal files and information has been accessed, unfortunately. That's something that you can't really get back. Once it's out there, it's out there.

So it's something that we've touched on for quite some time now. It's something that needs due diligence on a daily basis. Again, there are people behind the scenes that continue to do this over and over again and try to take care of people's personal information or access to that information.

We did ask some questions in Estimates about the cybersecurity attack and what the government is doing in the future to hold that down and to hold them to account and ensure that this does not happen again. Because again, once that information is out there, it's out there and it's not like you're going to get it back. It's going to be out there; it's going to be for sale. People are going to take advantage of it and, unfortunately, that can last for years and years and years. It's not something that goes away after six months or a year. Five or 10 years down the road, some of that

information can get accessed and we want to make sure that it doesn't anymore.

When it comes to our services in Newfoundland and Labrador, whether it be Motor Registration services, or Vital Statistics services, we know how important it is to the people of the province to ensure that they are taken care of as well. I know in Grand Falls-Windsor we have a department of Motor Registration. It's a fantastic department and we have some great, great people working there, just as they do across Newfoundland and Labrador. We want to ensure that all those positions are filled as well so people aren't in line waiting.

I know that there's some hesitance when it comes to doing it online, which is completely understandable. Like my colleague said a little while ago or a couple minutes ago, some people don't have the money for Internet; they truly don't. Some people don't have the money for a device, a computer or a telephone to do things online like they wish to do. It an absolute great convenience and we're happy to see it. But unfortunately it doesn't work for everybody.

So instead of just having the ledge drop off to, okay, everything is online now for government services, it needs to be taken into account that there are some people who are not comfortable still working online. You know we have an aging population of people in that circumstance, whether you're applying for a moose licence or registration for your car or anything even health care based. We know that there are some people out there who are not comfortable using these services and still enjoy talking to somebody on the phone or meeting with somebody in person, and we want to ensure that there is something there for these people.

When it comes to online stuff, I just want to make sure – and I'll give you another instance. My son just moved to St. John's because he is starting MUN in September and he went to call to hook up his cable; 18

years old and went to call to hook up his cable and his Internet. They told him, nope, in Newfoundland and Labrador, you have to be 19 years old to be put on an account to have Internet.

Right there, if you're an 18-year-old college student or a student that is moving out on your own and you want to hook up Internet, unless you're going to do it in your parent's name –

AN HON. MEMBER: Interesting.

C. TIBBS: Yes, I found it very interesting, too. Unless you're going to do it in your parent's name or whatnot, you can't get Internet. You cannot get Internet with this particular company. I won't name the company, but they told me yesterday that he can't get Internet so me and his mom had to get it for him. But do you know what? How many people would that affect?

When you think in a world that everything is Internet based, everybody has access to the Internet, it is just not true. There are lots of services that are online but, again, we want to make sure that the older folks or people who are just not comfortable with the Internet that they have a place that they can go to as well.

We applaud the government. It is moving in the right direction to have Internet services online for any services that you may want throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, but at the end of the day we need to ensure that everybody has access to services offered by the provincial government. That is just not it right now, so we need to want that as well.

Getting back to the fines that are owed or money that is owed to the government, that is \$300 million. I mean that is not chump change, as they call it.

AN HON. MEMBER: No, that is not chump change.

C. TIBBS: No, that's not chump change at all. So with the outstanding debt that's there right now, we want to ensure that some of that money comes back to the province somehow and to have 20 per cent of workers' positions not filled – if those positions were filled would they recoup some of that money? That's something that we have to ask ourselves throughout the process.

The Estimates process was very enlightening for myself. I enjoyed it immensely. We learned a lot. We learned a lot about the department and what it has to offer and its downfalls in the past and what they've done wrong. That's something that we're very interested in to improve that department or any other department moving forward.

It's very important that they're open to suggestions. It's very important that ministers or MHAs know that you don't know everything. So taking the time to listen to anybody else out there, especially the constituents, because they're the ones that rely on these services so we want to ensure that they're taken care of in the future as well.

Anything that comes across to the government, I hope that their ears are open and they can take advice from other people as well because, again, it's not like we know absolutely everything and neither do the ministers. That's something that we're hoping to work with the government on in the future as well.

We talked about the carbon tax. I'm sure this is relevant to Finance. The carbon tax we talked about yesterday and the fact that the full government side did vote yes for the carbon tax. We all, over here, voted no for the carbon tax. That's just a fact. That's not my opinion. That is just a fact at the end of the day. The fact of the matter is we cannot afford any more taxes in this province or in this country whether it be the Marine

Atlantic stuff or whether it be the carbon tax itself.

My colleague from Terra Nova talked about how much it was to fill up an oil tank from scratch and how much carbon tax is going to add to that, it was an absolutely astronomical amount. When you have very little, when you're talking about \$100 here, \$100 there, it takes into account, you know, that's a lot of money for a lot of people.

We heard from the Minister of Finance a little earlier that the cost of living has gone down by 3.4 per cent. I don't see where it's reflected. I guarantee you the price of food has not come down. It has not come down. It continues to go up. It continues to rise and, unfortunately, too many people are finding it very hard to put food on their table and in their cupboards. Unfortunately, that's the reality we have to live with now.

I can't see it coming down. I can't remember the last time I went to the grocery store and I said oh my God, look, \$2 off a pack of wieners, ever in my life, I've never seen – besides a sale or whatever – I've never seen food come down.

So when we say the cost of living is coming down, I'd like to see where that number is reflective within our society because 3.4 per cent and the cost of living coming down, I just don't see it. So whether it be you're trying to fuel your vehicle, you're trying to heat your home, it's not reflective of what people are going through in Newfoundland and Labrador today, unfortunately. They have a lot to go through and that affects everything, every facet of their life: their mental health, the way they take care of their kids, the way they go about their day, sort of thing. So you can see how people can spiral when they look at this.

Everybody talks about a carbon tax; they want to put a tax on our carbon. Well, do you know what? That's not going to prevent future use of carbon; it's just not. It's absolutely not. It's just so different; different

pretenses when it comes to rural Newfoundland and Labrador compared to the Greater Toronto Area, for instance.

So when they brought in the carbon tax for Canada and I'm living in Toronto, for instance, and I say: Well, do you know what? My God, I can take a bus downtown for \$3, a subway, or a train for \$4 or \$5 across the city. My God, that would be fantastic. But there are no busses leaving Buchans to go to Grand Falls-Windsor for groceries. There's no train. There's no subway. I think that's the issue here. It's a blanket approach to the largest country on the planet, the geography is huge, and we get a blanket approach to all of this. That is just not the way to do it.

The people in Newfoundland and Labrador, especially the rural places, I mean, even in St. John's there are more options. You've got the GoBus and the Metrobus and stuff like that. The fact of the matter is, people in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, they have no other option except their two feet and a vehicle. That's it. Nobody is going to bicycle down from Badger to Gander to go catch a show. It just doesn't happen.

So, again, to put a blanket over the entirety of Canada is absolutely the wrong approach and I think it's something that we need to talk about. I heard from across the way – I'm not sure who it was – talked about they've requested Ottawa; they've made requests to Ottawa about this and that sort of thing. I'm going to say it: I think it's time for requests to slide out of the way and start demanding. We need to make demands. I know people are going to say well that's futile. That's futile. We can't start demanding.

Well, yes, we certainly can because that's the difference in putting up with something and fighting for our province. You can request all day long, but I guarantee you, once the money comes out of the province and into the feds' pockets, it's not easily

coming back. So this 4 per cent on Marine Atlantic, whatnot, it's not coming back.

So when it comes to requests and demands, I believe we need to make a distinct evaluation of both of those words. You can request all day long, but we have to start demanding better. We have half the population of the City of Edmonton right now in a humungous geographical area. I don't know how many people are in Labrador right now, maybe what my hon. Member could help me out there.

AN HON. MEMBER: Thirty thousand.

C. TIBBS: About 30,000 people in all of Labrador and we're going to put a carbon tax on those people. It's absolutely shameful. It's a sin. You know, how much more can people take?

The infrastructure: we heard the minister say yesterday, announcement, announcement and announcement. Announcements are great. By the way, I think the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure stood up today and said they're waiting for applause from over here, waiting to see if we're happy about this.

It's not us that you have to make happy. It's the constituents that we all represent. It's the constituents that we all represent, that's who needs to be happy here. So don't look to us as reader sort of thing. It's the people of the province that we need to make happy and we need to ensure that they're taken care of as well.

This announcement for Grand Falls-Windsor, if it improves the safety of Grand Falls-Windsor, I'm in. We've had some road tragedies out there like you would not believe, absolutely unreal.

AN HON. MEMBER: And you've spoken to them.

C. TIBBS: Yes, and I've spoken to it many times. I'm hoping if this gets done, I'm

hoping that it improves the safety for the drivers throughout Grand Falls-Windsor, Central and all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have so many visitors throughout the year; I want to ensure that there are no tragedies, no tragedies no matter what. But if you're visiting this Island, I can only imagine you can get a little bit confused through our roadways. It's completely understandable, but let's just take our time and, hopefully, we prevent as many tragedies as we can, because I believe it's going to be a very busy summer.

Out in Port aux Basques, same thing, I've gotten off the boat many times and I've seen you're stuck behind a transport truck for the first 40, 50 kilometres. So that's a great initiative out there and I hope it works.

The divided highway going past Whitbourne. Obviously, divided highway, many people think it's safer and whatnot and that's fantastic. I agree, it can be safer. But at the same time, when you get on the divided highway, what's the first thing most people do? Better bump her up to 120 kilometres an hour. No cop coming this way is going to get at me, sort of thing, so that's what you see a lot of people do. Unfortunately, that's a bad approach and it can cause an accident later on down the road.

I just remind all the drivers out there just because it's the divided highway doesn't mean you can bump up your speed. I know everybody creeps up a little bit there. I want to make sure that people just watch their speeds on the road.

With all this new roadwork coming up, the biggest thing, of course, is our construction workers on the road. We want to make sure that they go home to their families each and every day. Keep them all safe.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Even if you're going through a construction zone and it's 11 at night and there's nobody around and the signs are still up, those signs are still enforced. So make sure you take that extra 10 minutes, that extra 15 minutes. It's not going to mean a thing off your drive, but at the end of the day it could be the decision between somebody going home to their family or not going home to their family.

Believe me, you will feel terrible if there is ever an accident and you'll feel terrible if you're slapped with one of those \$2,000 fines as well. So we want to make sure we keep our speeds down over the summer and pay attention. Stay off the cellphones, wear your seat belt and watch your speeds. That would be my message to the province this summer moving forward. I know what it's like.

If I could touch on health care for one second, Speaker. I'm going to touch especially on mental health for one moment. I think it's very important. I have a friend of mine in Central. Her name is Donna Dalton. She asked me to speak here today.

Her son, Michael James Dalton, took his own life on Friday. It's only a moment but it's very important. Four days prior, he sought help and he was sent home. This is not a reflection on the health care workers. They are doing the best job they can with the resources that they have. But if this is still happening – and this young man was 29 years old – there is something wrong. We need more resources put towards mental health in this province, so people like Michael can have the help that they need and more people like Michael will not do this again.

Whenever I try to be as empathetic as I can, I reverse the roles and put myself in that situation. I have two sons and they're beautiful sons. If this happened to me, I don't know what I would do. But as a grieving mother today, my heart is with

Donna. We'll say a prayer for Michael James Dalton.

I'll continue to speak on mental health no matter what. If that's what I can do for the rest of my career, that's what I can do. But I will do everything in my power so this does not happen to a young person in my community again.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a privilege and an honour to get up and represent the District of Ferryland again. I thank the people for putting me here.

Today we had Estimates this morning in TI on roads and infrastructure and it was certainly a pleasure. I'd like to thank our researchers for the job they did on Estimates. I'd also like to thank the department's people who were here today, and I'm sure the people in the offices that prepared all this work. It's a lot of work that goes in to getting this done, there's no question. The budget just doesn't start and come out in April. I say it starts in November and December, for sure, to get this stuff done. It's a lot of work and a lot of preparation. They have to answer a lot of questions that we're certainly asking or inquiring about.

It's a very important department and it's a question that everybody in here has gone to that minister and asked for something in roads or some sort of infrastructure for sure. Whether it be bridges, roads, ferries and we're talking about water bombers. The department is so big. There are P3s, all the buildings that they own and represent. It's a big task to take care of that.

But in speaking on that today, some of the suggestions – I mean, I probably threw out a suggestion that maybe the department might go back and look, but I worked in an industry that we took care of vehicles. The department has a lot of vehicles, whether it be heavy equipment, light-duty trucks. When we took care of vehicles where I worked before, we did an analysis on a cost per kilometre on vehicles in our fleet. We had a fleet of about 50 or 60 vehicles. They ran from transport trucks to vehicles that were in Clover produce and TRA. There were also beer trucks that were in the city as well. We were doing a cost-per-kilometre analysis on that.

Sometimes I just threw it out there this morning to say that looking at that, it took us a long while to figure it out. As a matter of fact, the computer couldn't figure it out when we were doing it. You couldn't put the information in the computer to give you a presentation. We had to use walls and boards to be able to put up maintenance schedules. The computer would not generate it because there were so many different vehicles. Now I'm sure – that's a long time ago; well, 20 years ago – that there are computers that can do it now. But we could not get the computer to produce what we were trying to do on a cost-per-kilometre basis in the vehicles.

In saying that this morning, there are probably vehicles that they have in their fleet that they're using as heavy equipment. I'll use a salt and sander that's on the road, and we see them all the time during the winter. I mean, there might be some of those vehicles right from the factory that could cause you issues, could be engine troubles, could be transmission troubles and they have a year's warranty. But a lot of times we know these vehicles are not a year old. These vehicles are nine or 10 years old and may be older. I'm sure there's a time that they pull them out of the fleet, but sometimes when you look at them they could be four or five years old and you might look at that vehicle – well, we did at

that time. If we looked at a vehicle and the cost per kilometre was six cents a kilometre on a vehicle, that was a good ratio that we were using; you knew that was a good number.

When it got up to 25 and 30 cents per kilometre, we knew to have a look at that vehicle. We knew we either had to do something to fix that problem or we had to pull the vehicle out of the fleet after a period of time. It just caused you trouble upon trouble upon trouble, the same stuff. Maybe it's something the department can certainly look at.

As they say, well, give us the solutions. We're giving you some solutions or giving you some suggestions. It's probably difficult to do, but you got to start somewhere. Some of that is cost savings. If you're doing your maintenance – and I'll say on the vehicles and I'll get to the roads in a second – on your vehicles, then it's saving you money. If you neglect to do your maintenance, it's costing you money. It's the same as your own personal vehicle; the same thing goes with department vehicles as well. We see some around here, as well, when we're coming into the building.

If you do the proper maintenance, then you're going to have, I'm going to say, a longer life and less costly repairs – if you do the proper maintenance. Sometimes they can slip through the cracks, but if you have a good schedule set up, then that's something that you can certainly touch base on for sure and be able to keep your costs or look at your costs to be able to – you're looking at saving money. That's what we're put in here to do, as 40 elected Members, is to make everybody's lives better and more money available for programs. So that's something that we can do or certainly can try to help.

In touching on the department – and I went through this in some length yesterday, but I looked at winter hours versus summer hours. We all look at it. We drive the roads. I

drive in my district. I drive out this way and I'll see a road that's washed out or see a sign that's down or a guardrail that's beat up. We always look at it and say: I must make a note of that to see if we can get that done. Anyone coming from the west and coming east on the Trans-Canada and you come past Witless Bay Line, you do notice on the exit leaving the Trans-Canada to go to Witless Bay Line there's a section of guardrail here that's fairly a long length of guardrail that is totally side on, on the ground and it's been side on, on the ground over a year and a half for sure. If a vehicle goes out over that, I'm telling you that's a big drop. It's a safety concern.

Now, if the guardrail there, it's going to keep you to some point; it depends on your speed that you're going off on that ramp. But if the guardrail is there, it's going to keep you on the road hopefully. But with no guardrail there lying on the ground, when they go off the road now they're going down over that embankment. It's a safety concern. We've certainly reached out to the department. It's not in my district, but it affects my district. A lot of people are using the Trans-Canada going over to Long Harbour, going to Bull Arm, going to Argentia and on their way back coming back in the nighttime, foggy and rainy. Every time I drive by this, I can't believe that's not done. There are reasons for it, they were trying to get posts and they're trying to get rails so there's lots of stuff there that can be done.

Maybe they can contract it out. That's some way to get some of this stuff done because it's not easy to get it done when you're in the department and they went from winter hours to summer hours. They lay people off in the summer and they have less staff. As I said yesterday, it takes about five people to do a repair on the road. If you're just doing a simple repair, you need flag people on both ends, you need a backhoe driver if that's the case, you need a superintendent and then you have people who are working there to hold on to the guardrail or do whatever

you're doing. If you're just doing a ditch then you have a backhoe driver.

But these are some of the things you can see when you're travelling the roads in your district. I'm sure you all see it. We're all here, we see that as we drive through our districts and we'd all love to see everything done that we make a request on, but that doesn't happen. But that is our job to make it a little better, so that is certainly something that we look at.

Some of the things in my district I have certainly been speaking on are the roads and I'll touch on the Witless Bay Line. It is certainly one that I have preached about since I have been in here. There is a section left; we did four kilometres and they did good brush cutting on it. They did a great job on it, I'll say that.

The far end of Witless Bay Line is done as well, but we have a section that is, I'm going to say, 8 or 9 kilometres. I'm after clocking it off but I can't remember what it is now but I'm after clocking it off a couple times when I drive by it. It's something that should be done. You drive there in the daytime now, if you're going in there on a motorcycle today, or a better day that is sunny out, you're zigzagging all over the road to avoid the bad pavement. It is a bad stretch of road. As I said last week, I made a joke out of it, if you're driving along you need a sippy cup to drink a coffee because it's that bad. That's not a lie; it is that bad.

People that have campers, they're driving over there and it is hard on their – if they drive back and forth every weekend, it is not easy on their vehicles. It is not easy on your own vehicle if you come across that. Anyone that is out west and you're coming up here and you want to get to St. John's, drive the Witless Bay Line. I can tell you, I'd ask you to drive it. It is a main thoroughfare, it's considered a secondary road but it's not considered a secondary road in my district, I can tell you that.

Any time we go west, we go the Witless Bay Line. Even from the Goulds, they go out and go through Mount Pearl and catch the Trans-Canada, but anybody from Bay Bulls, up the Southern Shore are using the Witless Bay Line, no questions asked, other than in the winter. When it gets to a point in the winter they just don't clean it or when it is really stormy they keep the gear off it and certain spots in there are really bad, until it gets to a good point and then they go in and clean it.

So it is one of the last roads – I'm not going to say last road, but it is a road that is not cleaned as the main thoroughfare in a winter storm. But when the main roads are done, then they'll go in and try to make a cut through. It is just an area that you go through that is very, very bad in the winter.

But you go there now and the road is deplorable, there's no question about it. The road is deplorable. The joke up our way is they must have laid the pavement down with a water bomber, that's how bad it is in there. It's just like you're lying down – splat. That's how bad it is. It's really bad. It's an ongoing joke and that's a joke in our group.

They go in there and they do the best they can with the equipment they got because they're only patching. They're only laying down patches, laying down a patch of cold patch and they run over it with a machine. Not every department has the proper gear. So you think about my district, if you need that same gear and they only have a couple of sets of that gear and you might need it out in Baie Verte - Green Bay when you go to do a section of road. Not everybody got the same equipment and can use it. So we'll say, well, why can't they do that? Because they don't have the equipment in every single depot to do it. They got to share them amongst themselves, I'll say. Sometimes they say there's a piece of gear out there, I'd like to get that, but they're not giving that up.

That's where we got to communication in some of these depots to get that stuff done, because you may need a spreader for cold patch or a bit of asphalt. They got another machine that goes along and spreads the asphalt; you'll see that in certain sections. Not the same as cold patch. With cold patch, you go in and just throw it on the ground, you try to stamp it down and go on. The next heave of frost or the next rain, the plow goes in and all that's coming up when the plow hits it. It doesn't stay there. It's just some of the stuff that happens in some of these districts. They're in every district. It's not only mine; I know they're in every district.

I'll go to St. Shotts. I sent pictures – I've certainly gone from one end of the district to the other but I go to St. Shotts because I remember a piece of guardrail down up there for over a year. It was right near a bridge or a culvert that went through and a pretty steep embankment as well. We made a couple of calls.

Even when you get up there and you think on it, now you got to wait five minutes to get back to cellphone coverage to make a call to the department and say b'y, somebody come up and look at this or let's see if we can get that done. It's a safety concern.

If you drive up there, you're going up through the district, you go up one time, you go up another time and it's not done, you say what is taking so long? Now, when you get up in that area, will you need five people on to do it? No, probably not. The traffic is not as much there, but the guardrail is still a safety issue and something that should be looked at and it's not.

Again, I will touch on the road from St. Shotts that goes over towards Peter's River, I think it's called, over to St. Vincent's, in that area. Myself and the Member for St. Mary's, we have that argument of who owns what up in the area and what we get done. We are working on it. Hopefully, the announcement – and I'm trying to find out if

the announcement that he made for some pavement gets up in that area, but it's not. I see the Member shaking her head. It's a bit for Trepassey. We're going to take everything we can get, but they didn't cover the area. That's what I'd like to see sometimes, too.

They got engineers; they got people going out to make these decisions. Who best knows your district other than you? You're the ones that are trying to get the pavement in the area. I'm not saying that we should make a decision that it should go in his community or my community, but if I'm in my district, I'm sure that pavement in St. Shotts is just as important as the pavement down in Bay Bulls or the pavement in Witless Bay or the pavement in Fermeuse. I'm not making that decision, but they should go up as a group and look or an MHA representing – you're there to represent the people in your district. Maybe you should be there just to say, this piece of road is torturous to ride over.

The Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, she knows, she's driven it. She's had roads in her area that have been done. She's got a fine lot of paving in her district. I wouldn't apologize for it either if I was her. I'd have to apologize to my people in my district for not getting as much as we should get and everybody will be the same. We all feel the same about not getting our fair share sometimes, but I'm sure he's got a budget. He's got to spread it out as best he can, but that road – I'm trying to say which is worse between the two: Witless Bay Line or St. Shotts. The road area in St. Shotts is 37 years old, the pavement is and I don't know if I'd call it pavement. Right?

I remember driving through the Speaker's district one time when I was down your way on a visit and there was 22 straight kilometres of pavement. I thought that was great. I just wasn't the person – I might try to get back at the Speaker now. He had a couple of cracks at me. I'm only trying to get back at him.

But he did have 22 straight kilometres of pavement when we went through the district in the summer because I was driving with another Member and all he could do was saw was just look. He was broken hearted. I nearly had to take the wheel to go over and drive, he was that disappointed. But that is one of the cases that it does happen. It got to be done and sure it had to be done. As a matter of fact, the people in my district said they took up pavement that was better down there than what we got up here. The stuff they took up was better than what we've got.

So it's amazing how it all works, but we certainly try to do our best for our districts. Just getting into the pavement issue, I'm not saying it's something that we should have a say in but we should be able to go up and meet with the department. Do they know how bad this is? Let's come up and have a look at it. Now you make your judgment. I'm just saying, we'll drive these seven or eight kilometres and we'll drive these other seven or eight kilometres. We come down in this community that's a main thoroughfare and see which one do you think should be best. Not just go and say, okay we're going to give you eight kilometres. We're going to put it right here.

Let's have a look at it and see where it should go. Again, not for me to make that decision. That's their decision, but we should be able to have a look at it collectively. We're all in it for the same reasons.

I'm not saying the minister has to go but somebody from his department could meet me and we'd go through the district. I've got no issue with doing that.

AN HON. MEMBER: You could go to Lewisporte.

L. O'DRISCOLL: I'd love to do it. Yes, we could over to Lewisporte but we don't need to look at any roads over there. They're all

good. They're best kind, 22 straight kilometres. They're all good.

I've got a section down in Petty Harbour. We're talking about tourism and I'm going to say the roads, but going down into Petty Harbour in the Long Run it's called, government owns some of the roads and the City of St. John's owns the other roads in the community.

So it gets a bit tangly in regard to who's doing what and who's responsible for what, but when you go down in through Petty Harbour, I would venture to guess, because we always say, Bonavista has the most tourists in the province, I bet you any money, no, definitely not. I bet you any money there are more tourists pass through Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove than anywhere in this province. It's just that it will be under St. John's and it's not really captured.

They're coming into St. John's; they fly into St. John's. They go to Signal Hill, they go to Cape Spear and they come up through the loop through Petty Harbour. I guarantee you there are more people who pass through Petty Harbour than any place in this province. I'd like to see a stat on it and I don't know if it's even kept. It's probably not kept. They're just leaving St. John's. They fly in, probably here for a couple of days. They're not going to drive for four or five hours to go down to Bonavista. They drive around and it's the most scenic spot you'll ever drive.

With regard to community, there's the zip line: there's everything down there. Hard to find a parking spot, to be truthful, when you go down there. It's a scenic area. Anyone who comes in here, if they're going to see what rural Newfoundland looks like 10 minutes outside the city, well, that's your spot to be. I'm telling you it is busy down there. It's really busy.

Also, I spoke on it before – I spoke in Estimates this morning and I spoke on it yesterday – the signs in our areas. We all

see them in our districts. You see them driving along the Trans-Canada. The minister spoke and he certainly acknowledged it, I will say that. When we look at it, it's a tourism area. This is coming to tourism – that should be done this time of the year, something that should be definitely looked at.

We should definitely be replacing some of these signs. They're rusty. They're falling apart. Not all over but, again, as MHAs, we probably should be sending our lists in to the minister and he putting it on to the right departments and probably having a look at it. He's probably doing that anyway. I'm sure his superintendents are on the road looking at it.

I will say that in an area in Tors Cove, I had a request to the department – or for the superintendent – to look at we have a bit of a blind area. There's a road comes out here, comes around a sharp turn and up over another turn here, so there's a blind hill on both sides and it's pretty dangerous. I had a couple of requests in to try to get those speed signs.

Now, there is no school zone there, but I tell you it's one of the – when he requested it I said: B'y, I'm surprised somebody hasn't asked for this long ago or something hasn't been done, it's a bit of a dangerous turn. But these signs that we put out in the school zones, I see them in my district. I see in Bay Bulls the town itself had their own speed signs.

When you're coming down that road and the sign says it's 50 kilometres and you're coming at 72, 73 and it flashes red, let's say at the nighttime, the first thing you do is hit your brakes. So you're conscious of it. You really are. You're not intentionally going down – we know we have roads where you're driving 50 and you nearly have to drive backwards to go 50 some roads, it's that straight ahead. You're going through a community and it's hard to drive 50 sometimes, but coming around a sharp turn,

the signs should flash. They're coming fast. They're not just coming 30 and 40 kilometres, they're coming through a community – if you were there it would be easy to explain. Again, taking somebody out there from the department to stand on the end of this road and watch trying to haul out in traffic, looking both ways, it's certainly a safety concern.

A lot of people got these requests in some of these small, rural areas but, for one, they're safety-oriented and they're something that we should definitely be looking at. It's a great safety feature I've got to say; it slows you down. As soon as you see the lights, you touch your brakes and it's something that really, really works. There's one in Bay Bulls and there's one in Mobile before the schools. The school is a very important area to have it because in that community, even though the speed limit is I'm going to say 40 or 50, no one is going less than 70.

The police get calls from residents and people around the area that they'd like to have more of a police presence. You go up a couple of times during the year and the police will be there, because you're coming right to a community or right to a school. These road signs are very important for sure. It's something that the department – and they did it. They went out and put it there and there was a good reason to put it there for sure.

Going through these communities, as you say – and if you drive around the loop and you go right around, you're driving through some of these communities – the houses are right on the road. You're going more than 30 or 40 kilometres, it's just our nature, but you slow down. Sometimes you're going 60 or 70 kilometres in a 30 or 40, which you're driving through.

AN HON. MEMBER: We've got potholes for that.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yeah, you've got potholes for that. Yeah, right.

I'm going to be out of time now. I'm out of time, sorry.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

As we spend this afternoon taking some time to debate Concurrence under the Government Services Committee, a number of departments are housed there; it includes the newly formed Department of Labrador Affairs. So I'll just take a little time to talk about some of the things that have been happening in the Department of Labrador Affairs.

It's certainly been an active year for us, Speaker. I guess I'll start by saying as a part of the budget process, *Budget 2023*, Labrador Affairs, which was housed in Executive Council, became a stand-alone department. I'll speak to all of the old programs moved in, but there are some new programs that have been added as well.

The 25th of June will be 10 years for me, that I was elected a decade, to represent the people of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair. I've been around a Cabinet table for about six years, but near and dear to my heart the last couple of years that I get to be the minister that represents a very beautiful part of this province. We haven't even begun to tap in to the potential that we have in Labrador. Whether it's continuing on with mineral development, whether it is expanding and building upon the Indigenous tourism potential, there are just so many areas.

My grandfather – most in the House know I was raised by my grandparents – who's

since passed used to call it Canada's last frontier. We were slow; little by little we're getting opened up to the outside world.

When I listen to my colleagues talking about road challenges in this province, I sit here and I think about my time in Opposition. I was quite fiery and passionate about the issues. The road we drive on today, the picture and the progress that we have made in just the last 10 years is absolutely incredible. Speaker, if you flew into Blanc Sablon and you crossed the border into L'Anse au Clair, those first four or five communities you were driving on 40-year-old pavement. It was being reconstructed with cold patch. Absolutely terrible.

When I left Red Bay on the Trans-Labrador Highway, driving down the next 200 or 300 kilometres was a gravel road. The House sits spring and fall, as my colleagues know, and that is when you get your rain. It was just absolutely terrible. I would come back, I would get up Monday morning all fired up in petitions, and I would say when I was leaving the door, leaving the house from the driveway, my husband would say, stick to the high points on the road. I wondered what other people were asked to stick to the high points. It would be thawed and frozen and it was just terrible. Now, we have a road that stretches from the border in the south to the border in Labrador West. It was 30 years in the making; it was a billion-dollar investment.

July 5 my colleague joined me and we walked the last kilometre of that together. It was an incredible day. It has really, really made changes for the people that live in the south, Speaker. If you want to see a doctor now, you do have the option, with a voucher program, to get on a plane and still go to St. Anthony. Or you can drive down to Forteau on a nice paved road and see a doctor. Or you can actually go to Goose Bay where you can get X-rays, you can do some of your cancer treatments, et cetera. Speaker, I am fully aware that we are not there yet. We've completed border to border, but the

infrastructure in transportation in Labrador is not finished.

Just today, before I came down, I saw a post in Makkovik actually, where as we move forward on the prefeasibility study to look at potential routes, to talk to people in the communities where my colleague from Torngat represents, how they feel about the road. There's a lot of potential and it would change the lives and many of the hardships that those people now face in isolated communities, once a road goes through. So consultations are actually happening as I'm standing here right now. I did see that several are taking place each day in some of these communities.

So just referencing some of the changes that I've seen across Labrador. The expenditures that go into Labrador crosses a number of different departments, whether it's Transportation, the ferry network and all of that in Transportation, programs out of Tourism, mining supports through the Department of Industry, Energy and Technology and right across.

I'm just going to start by referencing some of what the budget held for the Department of Labrador Affairs. We just went through the Estimates process, I believe it was one night last week and my hon. colleagues had lots of questions for me. We went about 2½ hours and I thought it was a great conversation. Estimates are such an important part of the budget process. You know, we work for months and months and months, Cabinet colleagues, preparing a budget. It's never easy.

Each department starts with, I'll call it, maybe a wish list and as you move through that process over weeks and months and Treasury Board is a part of it, at the end of the day you come down with a budget. You do the best job you can for the people that you represent. I think we felt pretty good about Budget '23, recognizing that we are navigating an unprecedented time in our province's history, Speaker. Not just here in

Newfoundland and Labrador, I'm quite closely connected, as you know, with places like BC where I have immediate family and Alberta.

No matter where you are in leadership right now in this country, as we emerge from a global pandemic and we deal with a war, we know that cost of living is high. We know that the sanctions have caused volatility in oil prices. Yet, we have found a way to do some of the things that we did in the budget like keeping the gas tax off at the pumps. I think that was a cost of \$64 million as an example, Speaker.

So it is important that we are able to sit and that we are able to have Opposition Members scrutinize the work of government. I sat in Opposition; I was there for two years. I'll also say, Speaker, that when I look back at my two years in Opposition, I believe that I was very fortunate in that I was able to deliver a fair bit for my district in Opposition because I built relationships with government. I came and I sat down with the ministers of the day and said here are the needs. I know that you can't fix them all or address them all but here are my priorities and I had some great success that I can point to.

You know, there are some wonderful people that are no longer here in this House that I served with and we did some good things for the area of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair and for Happy Valley and I could list them.

So that is an important process. You question us; there is a democratic process. But I think it's also important, Speaker, that we work together for the greater good of the people that we represent. I think all of us here are here for the right reason, that when we leave, we want to be able to look back and point to little things that we made a difference in.

I mention the Medical Transportation Assistance Program just to give the hon. House a little update. I know that is an

incredibly important program, Speaker. It came in under my purview just the 1st of April and then the House broke and there was a little gap, but we are knee deep, perhaps waist deep, quickly going through a review of the Medical Transportation Assistance Program.

So for someone who might be listening – perhaps from Bonavista today – there are actually two programs. There's the Medical Transportation Assistance Program and the Income Support Program. So, Speaker, if somebody has to travel, if they're referred to see a specialist, especially rural, remote areas, especially places like Labrador West and Central Labrador, where the cost of airfare is very, very high. I'll mention COVID. We know the airline industry was practically decimated during the pandemic and airfare and things have gone up and so people are unable to travel without those supports. The Medical Transportation Assistance Program is a payer of last resort. What I mean by that is we do have some folks that are working and that have insurance and they're able to use their insurance program, but then we can certainly come in and help close the gap on their expense.

So we are doing a review. I have reached out to all of my colleagues here in the House. I know MHA's offices get lots and lots of calls. My office is a very, very busy office. I represent a rural riding and I know that some of my colleagues here, your day certainly doesn't end at 5 o'clock. It's almost like a 24-7 when we step up and we offer ourselves to serve the people that hire us in those communities. So I'm hoping that in very short order we will be able to make some positive changes.

We've got an extra million dollars to start to work with. This is all about the user, making things better for the user, trying to alleviate some of the financial pressure, and not all of it is financial. We are looking at: How do we turn around the processing times faster? How do we make the application process

more simplified? When I was asked to take the program, I was told that it needed a more heightened focus.

Well, I can tell you, I am giving it. Because it's not just for the people of Labrador and my colleagues in this hon. House across the way, a number of them reach out to me on a regular basis, but, in particular, Labrador, the Big Land. We know that they use the program 5½ times more than people on the Island. That is just because of geography because we live so far from specialized services.

We're certainly working to bring those changes in. I'm hoping – I hope I don't have staff watching – even before the end of this month, we're hoping to be in a place to make some positive changes that I know will be received.

Even though it is a provincial program and it is housed in my shop, Speaker, I think I can certainly say that Labrador Affairs has a perspective on the rural and remote challenges around this province.

I also want to mention the Labrador Transportation Grooming Subsidy. While we applaud the completion of the road from border to border and that some 1,100 stretch of beautiful highway that you can now drive. I already referenced that we know we are not complete yet; our transportation network across Labrador is not finished. So, meanwhile, we have to ensure that we do what we can to keep the trails that communities in the north use, Black Tickle and in Torngat area, to keep them safe for the travelling public.

So we maintain, under Labrador Affairs, some 750 kilometres of groomed trail. That is a lot of trail and that is a lot of equipment, groomers and things. In working closely with the AngajukKâks, with the leadership over the last year, we heard different things. We heard that we have a groomer that is too big, it is too heavy. They're certainly seeing the impacts of climate change and therefore

they're looking at potentially working with groups like SmartICE, who is doing some incredible work housed out of Nain. They need smaller groomers because the ice is not as thick as it used to be. Sometimes we've seen tragedy take place in places on the trails between Hopedale and Natuashish, for example. I heard that we need more shelters for people that may be travelling on those roadways.

I went forward with a pretty ambitious request, prior to budget, and my team supported me. So as a part of *Budget 2023*, we have more than \$3 million allocated, Speaker, to enhance safe snowmobile travel for residents of Labrador's coastal communities. So that's kind of divided in an equal half: some will go into equipment, new groomers and things, and some will go into garages, emergency shelters, trail markers, et cetera.

Also under Labrador Affairs, we have the Labrador Sport Travel Subsidy. That provides air travel support to Labrador athletes age 18 and under. This is so important. As a parent, I can tell you how important this is. My daughter is long moved on and finished post-secondary and working but when I look back to her participation in school sports through the years, it's definitely among the best memories of our lives, whether it was the Labrador Winter Games or travelling out to other events.

When we talk about health care needs and I think when we support our children getting to sporting programs, we're helping to grow a healthier population. So we have allocated \$800,000 for the Labrador Sport Travel Subsidy for Special Olympians, sport organizations to participate in provincial competitions, development camps, Indigenous Games and junior varsity sports school athletes. So we also increased the budget this year, Speaker, recognizing the cost of airfare, as I mentioned earlier, was gone up. We also included an extra \$100,000 in the budget for that.

Another exciting thing that we did, the Premier and I, when we were in Ottawa at Northern Lights in February – and we had been working on this for some time in our shop – we signed an MOU with Nunavut. So it was the Nunavut premier and his deputy premier, and myself and our Premier and drew quite a large crowd. They weren't prepared with the space they provided and it was standing room only. Everybody and media was wondering, what's this MOU about? What does it mean? It means a whole lot of things. We just actually had a meeting on it this morning and I'm hoping to go there sometime in the foreseeable future.

Newfoundland and Labrador and, in particular Labrador, in particular Inuit communities, we have personal, cultural, social relationships. There are people from my constituency that I know that have gone and are making their life up in Nunavut. Both jurisdictions have a strong Indigenous population and we certainly share a like-minded approach to safe and sustainable Arctic developments.

We're going to work with Nunavut and focus on achieving mutual benefits for Northern and Indigenous communities and, as a part of that, we'll certainly be reaching out to groups like Nunatsiavut Government to seek their input.

I should say, while it's in my mind, I want to toss a bouquet to Nunatsiavut Government. I know that it was a tough slog for them as they worked for years and years toward land claims. We finished it in January, but in September myself and my staff travelled the North Coast. Actually, the Member was in some of the meetings with us. We travelled the North Coast and to see, in every single community, the investment by Nunatsiavut Government, it is commendable. I thought if I get an opportunity, I'm going to give them a shout-out for some of the work they're doing in the community.

We visited places like Makkovik and went into the education building and to see that

they started with providing seven different types of support for their post-secondary students that leave and they're now up to 25 different types of support – the difference I've seen in recent years of their own people coming out of those isolated communities, getting educated and going back and working, it's really a good news story that we don't talk about enough.

Even in Southern Labrador where I represent – I've spent 23 years as a career and employment counsellor and I can tell you when I started working there in '91, I believe it was – a long time ago; I'm dating myself – folks would come out of high school and we would probably only have one or two people that went away to get a degree or go to college. But it's because the fishery was so lucrative. Then they went right out of school and into the fishing boats. We've certainly seen a big change in the number of our people that are going away and thanks to the NunatuKavut Community Council making incredible investments in communities, in particular Cartwright and south and in Goose Bay to support those students to go and to build better lives for themselves.

Speaker, this summer we see that we are – I'm looking at the clock because I always run out of time – doing some work to make improvements to the road between Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Sheshatshiu and North West River. I know that's going to be well received. I drive it myself every summer a number of times and I know that it was in great need of repair.

The plans for a new school in Cartwright, it's pretty special to me because it's something that I have wanted for a long, long time. I know that it's incredibly exciting for the community as we move forward. Cartwright is a community that I have seen sacrificed to the nth degree so that their own students, their children could have a better life. So I know that it's very meaningful for them that finally, at long last, the school is coming.

In the budget also – not in Labrador Affairs, Speaker, but a geoscience program. I think it's a million dollars housed in my colleague's shop, Industry, Energy and Technology. That geoscience is going to be so valuable to Labrador because we'll go in and do exploration and collect data and it will make it more viable for companies that may be looking at considering going in to Labrador and doing some work.

Right in Southern Labrador, I would be remiss if I sat down without mentioning Search Minerals and all of the promise that they're going to be mining critical minerals, that that holds.

So much more I could talk about, Speaker. My colleague mentioned mental health. I know I was part of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions and we came out with a report *Towards Recovery*, with a goal to improve access to services and to reduce wait-lists. We have moved the dial. We're not where we need to be yet and we're going to continue to work on that. Because if our communities aren't well, if our families aren't healthy and strong, then the rest of the work that we're doing really doesn't matter, Speaker.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you for the opportunity.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, I must say it's an honour to, again, stand in this House of Assembly and speak. This, just for the benefit of our viewers, is the Concurrence debate and I'd just like to explain a little bit about the Estimates process before I get into any further discussion. The procedure in the Standing Committees reviewing Estimates

really, in essence, what it involves is when the minister and her officials – they appear at the Committee meetings. They're usually held in the House of Assembly. The Opposition will question the minister and their officials on some of the expenditures and their departmental Estimates.

So with respect to Labrador Affairs, for example, last Wednesday, on April 26, is when the Estimates for Labrador Affairs took place in this House of Assembly. I'd like to first of all thank the minister and her government officials for their answers to the questions that I, as the shadow minister for this department in the Official Opposition, asked and I, as well, had my researcher with me. I would like to thank him, Bradley Russell, and all of the individuals in our research team that helped prepare me for the questions that were asked on that day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: As well, my colleague, the Member for Torngat Mountains, was also present. She, as well, asked a series of questions of the minister and the officials from the department.

First of all, I'd like to acknowledge one of the important facts that the minister mentioned earlier, that now Labrador Affairs is a stand-alone department. I must say, I think that is very important. It was necessary and I think it's very much welcomed because only with that department as a stand alone, I think will it really be possible to have a strong, sustainable, vibrant Labrador. We need to ensure that people in Labrador have that opportunity to prosper and develop and to contribute to their communities as well. So I think this is a very important first step and I was pleased to see that.

When we look at the budget process, such an important part of the entire budget process is to have Estimates. Now what we're seeing, in essence, is we're seeing this come back to the House of Assembly

and there's a report to see basically if everything will be approved in terms of the Estimates. I think that exercise is so important. It's not as adversarial, if you will, when I ask questions. It's more of an investigative process or procedure. It's very educational. It's an opportunity for us to really probe and really explore and scrutinize the expenditures of the particular department that we are responsible for questioning and asking important questions in their department.

So it's a very important process because it gives us more information and it's really key to having transparency. I like that process because I find that it's very collegial and it's about us all trying to really improve the state of affairs for the particular people that we're responsible for in whatever portfolio it is.

When we look at Labrador Affairs, we ask many questions and there are so many questions. We're allowed to have three hours for – well, we can have more than three hours but typically it's three hours that we ask questions, up to three hours. I find that time goes very fast. When we ask questions about Labrador Affairs, there are many, many issues that we address.

As the minister have mentioned, for example, with respect to roads and infrastructure, we asked the government and the department about the road to Northern Labrador. I think that was important to find out that there is a prefeasibility study that is going on. There is a contract for that prefeasibility study that was awarded, I think, back in January. So we see that is in the works. I think that was important to find out that information directly.

I mean, we always have ways of questioning government, for example, through Question Period. That is an opportunity every day for us to ask questions to the ministers. But this, in addition, is another opportunity when we have Estimates to really probe and get into

the particulars of what is happening. What is government doing? How are they spending the money that is involved in whichever department?

When we look at, for example, Labrador Affairs, we see that the total program Estimates or expenditure was \$19,412,000 and that was basically a summary of the expenditures for the fiscal year 2023-24. So we see that is the expenditure, that is the amounts, and then we go into asking question about various things. We ask questions about Salaries, for example. We ask questions about Employee Benefits, how much for Transportation and Communications, Supplies, Purchased Services, Property, Furnishings, all of those things.

This is our way to find out, for example, how much was budgeted and how much was actually spent. We need to know that. That needs to be explained to us and each one of us in the Opposition get the opportunity to ask questions of our respective ministers of the portfolios that we are assigned.

I previously had asked questions when the Department of Justice and Public Safety had their Estimates. I, as the critic, asked many questions throughout a three-hour period of the Minister of Justice and his officials who were present.

So we get breakdowns, line by line, comparing last year to this year. It just helps us get a better understanding and a better grasp of exactly what government is doing in terms of different programs and different policies and how much money they're spending and so forth. So that is very important for us to do.

We also learned many other things. The minister referenced the MTAP. That is, of course, a very important issue for us in this province. We've learned now that the MTAP has come under the umbrella of the Department of Labrador Affairs. This happened, I understand, April 1. We did ask

many questions about the MTAP and we were told that it's divided now into two parts: the Medical Transportation Assistance Program as well as the Income Support Program. So it now has two various departments.

Really, in terms of finding out exactly what's happening with that, we really didn't get the answers yet that we were wanting to hear. I suppose in all fairness, the minister has explained that there is a review being done. I did catch the statement she made that she's hoping we'll see some positive changes before the end of the month. We will all be waiting and listening very carefully to see what those positive changes are, because not only is going to affect Labrador, as well, it's going to affect the entire Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

However, as the minister correctly pointed out, Labrador uses the MTAP approximately 5½ times more so, obviously, that is very significant as to what those positive changes are going to be. We look forward to hearing about those before the end of the month, as she stated.

Speaker, it is interesting, as well, to see, when we look at this important department, what's happening in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Earlier today, we asked questions about this in Question Period. What is happening with respect to government's response to the problems that are occurring there?

I think it's important to note – I will say this – that, right now, the communication does not appear to be a very positive one, I would venture to say, between government and the residents' town council of Happy Valley-Goose Bay. I say that based upon what I've heard just from media today, at which time the mayor of Happy Valley-Goose Bay expressed his concerns about the issues of public safety in the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

There seems to be frustration there and concern with the delays and with the lack of really meaningful and immediate action. In conjunction with that, it's not only that, but it's about keeping the people and the town apprised of what's going on. So there's not a good reciprocal relationship there. At least that's from the assessment that I can make from what I've heard, the people that I've talked to in the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay and from what I'm hearing as well in media.

So I think that is something that really needs to be addressed immediately. This is of an urgent nature and before things start to escalate even further in terms of the problems that are happening right now, this needs to be addressed. That is an issue I think that, as far as Labrador Affairs is concerned, the department, that needs to be first on their priority list as well in terms of addressing this issue.

Speaker, I also want to talk about mental health. Since this is Mental Health Awareness Week, I think it's really important that we look at some of the issues that the people in Labrador, specifically the Indigenous population are facing when it comes to mental health challenges. My colleague, the MHA for Torngat Mountains, addressed this issue very effectively and brought attention and shone a necessary light on the concerns that exist in Labrador right now, in particular with the Indigenous peoples as far as suicide is concerned. I think that was very important that there had been a light shone on this and more attention needs to be focused and directed to address the serious issue when it comes to suicide, in particular with respect to the Indigenous peoples in Labrador.

So what are we asking for? Well, we know that right now when it comes to mental health care services, they are just substandard. They're inadequate. Whether we go to the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans recently revealing, prior to one of the speeches just today,

mentioned about a personal experience or a friend of his who did take his own life as a result of mental health and the failure of our mental health system.

Speaker, this is not an isolated incident because in the District of Harbour Main as well, in the last number of months, we had a case of a reported individual who also took his life and it can be directly linked in terms of the fact that he was not getting the services. Although there was a cry for help, yet there was no help forthcoming.

We hear this so much and we're concerned about this. But when I go to what the Member for Torngat Mountains had indicated, the Indigenous peoples are experiencing even higher rates of suicide. So what do we do? Yes, there are supports in place. There are emergency and short-term supports in place. But we need to do more with that. When we look at the budget that we had, the billion-dollar budget, surely we can see that more money needs to be allocated to areas like this where we see that there are many of our people throughout not only Newfoundland, but Labrador who are not getting the help that they need.

So what is that? That, I would submit to you, is looking at more long-term supports, long-term mental health care; looking at making sure that people that need this help with respect to mental health challenges don't have to wait years to access a psychiatrist. We need to look at that. As well, we know that there are many community groups out there who also provide supports, yet we also know that they're not getting the support that they need.

When we look at the fact that, for example, the Jacob Puddister Memorial Foundation had opened up bookings for youth mental health services and in six hours – six hours, Speaker – they had 106 requests. This demonstrates an obvious backlog in being able to access mental health care. So there's no question that we need to deal

with this and especially when it comes to our youth.

When we look at the Health Accord, I was reviewing the Health Accord and one of the important pieces within the Health Accord with respect to mental health, it was very interesting and, of course, sad to see that mental health was the most named issue linked to factors like stress, COVID-19 and family issues when it came to the voices of young people. Health Accord NL had heard the voices of young people and listened to them express their concerns related to health care and mental health care. The communications that came from these youth, basically said to the Health Accord, is that the youth were really concerned that help is so hard to get, with such long waiting lists.

Speaker, I have a constituent in my district and I am so saddened when I recall what his experience is. He has said that he's 19 years of age and he's struggling with mental health for a while. I've talked to him about this and he wrote a letter as well. Since 2019, to be exact, he said: I got so fed up with the system here. He knew that there was such a long wait-list that he started seeing someone out of the province. He had to get a referral from a doctor in Ontario because he didn't have a family doctor.

He was seeking help in the province before he turned 19. He was asked if he would like a referral to Doorways. He went to the one session but he said it was basically the person referring him to online resources. His point, Speaker, in summary, was that we need – he said: Young people like me need human interactions. In other words, we need to be able to speak one-on-one, not go online, and we need quick action for mental health, because I cannot predict what can happen to me in 30 minutes.

Speaker, we're hearing about this with our youth. It's a crisis in Labrador with our Indigenous people, yet we're not acting on it. Surely, with the billions of dollars in the

budget we could have, and still can, look at this, go back to it and allocate money to people that need it, who are our vulnerable people who are suffering from mental health in not only the Province of Newfoundland, but also Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy again to take a few minutes to speak, this time on the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and what it entails. I guess every time you get a chance to speak here, you say thank you to the people of your district for the opportunity to represent them. I speak on their behalf and how proud I am to be here to do so.

I did hear the Member for Ferryland speak, passionately, on roads and everything else. I won't rebut because him and I had the opportunity this morning in Estimates and it was a good process; some good interactions back and forth. When you go through a process and you can take away, that's important. If you can take away things from that process, then that's important and we certainly did this morning.

I just want to talk a little bit about Labrador. I've said it before, I had the opportunity of being there for the completion of the Trans-Labrador Highway. I actually walked the last kilometre with the contractor. It was a good day to hear the contractor talk about not just laying the pavement, but all the spinoffs coming from the investment that was made, nearly a billion dollars in Labrador.

I told the story this morning of visiting some of the workers there. There was one lady from, I believe it was, Deer Lake, she's been there for two or three years, cooking in the kitchen and enjoying it there, and was

sad to leave. It was stopping and she would have to go home. That's been her family for the last three years and she was a big part of it as well. The workers needing food and accommodations, she was providing that. So that's a big part of it as well, Mr. Speaker.

That day the Trans-Labrador Highway, what it meant to Labrador was a lot. I stood with my colleague, the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Labrador. It was emotional for her and I can see why it was emotional because it's a form of connection. The media asked me that day in terms of what this would do for Labrador. I mean, it will bring economic benefits to Labrador.

No matter what good news you have, there are always the naysayers. So some had asked in terms of what will be next for Labrador. We didn't conclude the Trans-Labrador Highway and say, okay, we'll see you later.

I think the former speaker for Harbour Main referenced the feasibility studies that are being done for the road to the north and also the one with NG that we cost shared with the federal government. It's investment in Labrador, \$3.5 million of the \$7 million to do a further study. So that's all investments in Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Member for Torngat Mountains talks about the ferry being reinstated. I'll make it unequivocal here now: I'm having no conversations around that, so I can stop talking about that right now. But the ferry successes in Labrador, if I can find it here, in terms of numbers – and this was late fall of last year where we saw from 2019, just passengers alone, has carried in the ferry service there, supplied by the LMI and doing a good job, passengers of 4,008 during that year and to 2022: 5,331. That's passengers. Vehicles from 2019 to the end of 2022 saw a very big increase, from 336 to 1,025. That is good news from a transportation perspective, not roads, but from a ferry perspective.

Also, it was referenced in the Estimates this morning about a wharf rehab project in Nain that I'm told will be completed in 2023. That's further investments in communities, in infrastructure and in our transportation networks. I'm proud to be a part of that.

To move on to transportation and the processes. I listened to a scrum by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday. Some of the words, some of the comments were unfair, not correct. Some of the information they used was not correct. He talked about not having enough engineers in the department to do the work. He never had faith in the minister to do the work of the Team Gushue Highway; he was a non-believer. Well, it's going to get done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: It does take time. I know the Member for Mount Pearl is glad to hear that. I had to clarify things for him, too, that it will happen. It all takes time.

One thing I ought to point out, he referenced carry-overs. I wish I could say that there are never any carry-overs, but it will not happen. You could have a project that's two years in order to complete, there are going to be carry-overs. It goes to the capacity of the contractors, too, their ability to do the work.

L. PARROTT: They shouldn't bid it if they can't do it.

E. LOVELESS: They shouldn't bid it if they can't do it. I agree with that.

We upped our budget, we're providing the money for them to get the work done. We try to work with them, but I'm not – so the Member for Terra Nova, you're doing the same thing your leader did. You attack those industry people.

L. PARROTT: That's not what I said.

E. LOVELESS: Yes, it is, it is attacking. The non-ability to get the work done.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Address the Chair.

E. LOVELESS: What's that?

SPEAKER: Address the Chair.

E. LOVELESS: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

But I think it's important to clarify that. The carry-overs are not what were referred to in the scrum, it's not referred to in many a times, and it's not true. There needs to be clarity to it. That's why I felt that I should clarify that because carry-overs does happen, it's a reality. I wish that every contractor could get 100 per cent of their work done, absolutely, but, don't forget, we have a very short season as well. There are challenges for contractors, but I pat them on the back for the work that they do.

In our Roads Plan, it does take a lot of input from staff and I meet many, many, many hours, talking with them. I think the Member for Ferryland said we should be listening to whomever. I do listen to Members on the Opposite side. I do listen to the general public. But, at the end of the day, there has to be a balance and the balance that's important to me is certainly the consistent emphasis on bridges and culverts because I always say what lies beneath is important before the blacktop goes down.

I use an example in my own district with the superintendent of the depots there. I know him well, I've known him for years and years. He said to me if we don't replace, and he identified, him and I, we drove the roads. I said you tell me where they are. It was like 20-odd culverts. If they don't get done this year or next year at the latest, you're going to have floods, we're going to have floods. We're going to deal with a lot more. So we got them done.

The Leader of the Opposition always likes to use the word "proactive." We were bring proactive in that instance, but we need to do

more of that in the province. That's why we targeted, we've been targeting and we'll continue to do that on a consistent basis. Fifty-eight million dollars was earmarked in 2023 for bridgework, repair and replacement. So it's important. By the end of 2022, we saw more than 40 bridges were rehabbed and work done on them – very important.

Another part of the department that's important to, I know, all Members, especially the rural parts of the district, is brush cutting. Brush cutting is very important. I get it from paramedics and I get it from ambulance operators: Listen, thank you for the work you did. Because we're going over the Bay d'Espoir Highway late at night and you can see, from a distance, if there are any animals, moose. They've seen them. They've sent me pictures and said that's an example right there; 2 in the morning there's the animal. If the brush had not been cut, we wouldn't have seen that.

So it's important to them, it's important to me and I know it's important to all Members in this House of Assembly. We try to do our best in terms of cutting – I would like to be able to do it all in one year. I've heard from Members and I've heard from the general public as well: Can we spray it to last longer? We're looking at that right now, but it's not just as easy to say cut it, spray it and we're done. From an environmental perspective, we're working with the Department of Environment on that to improve on it. That, therefore, will make our roads safer for ambulance operators and other just general public driving our highways.

Just to touch a little bit on the Infrastructure division as well in the department – and I know how important the infrastructure dollars are to our municipalities, because they are for water projects; they could be road projects. A lot of investment goes into communities.

The Member for – what's your district? He's referenced it many times in terms of municipalities needing help. We're there as a department, in terms of staff, helping them along, whether that may be to help them with an application for a project to get done because sometimes it does come down to capacity. When people say money rolls over, sometimes it's capacity of municipalities not being able to do the work. So if we can help them out, we will. We strive to do that every day. As I said, the water projects are very important to communities. I said we certainly work with the communities.

The budget this year, the plan – *Your Health. Our Priority.* – we saw increases in MOGs and that was important. I know when it was announced that Members across applauded so much, I looked over there and they were like a church choir. They were clapping. So they were happy. They were happy with the news in the budget. Then I thought, but they're not going to support it.

I was happy and then I was sad because they're not supporting the good things that are happening in the budget and we've got many things happening in the budget. I cannot understand why they're not supporting the budget, but they'll have to explain that to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador when they go to their doors.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: Well, it's nice that you wake people up. I mean, it's always fun.

But very important on the MOGs and also buildings, whether it's our schools or the hospitals. It is very important to students and I know it's important to the Member for Bonavista who talks about schools all the time and teachers and our students. It's important.

So \$13 million for the redevelopment of the emergency department at the Health

Sciences Centre is very important, and that comes from doctors themselves to say that's important. Speaker, \$7.8 million for the planning and procurement of a new hospital to replace St. Clare's Mercy Hospital and a new cardiovascular and stroke institute.

It also includes the demolition of the former Grace Hospital nursing residence, and that's important. That's something we said we were going to do and we're going to get it done. I say to the Leader of the Opposition, it's going to be done and I'll let him know when it's done, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: Thank you for that protection there, I say to the Member opposite.

Also \$250,000 for planning for a new long-term care facility in the Bay St. George region and \$150,000 for planning of a new school of nursing in Western Newfoundland.

A high school for Paradise, yes, you made your plea and you told me that if it was in the budget, you would vote for the budget so that's very interesting – very, very interesting.

This infrastructure, whether it's a school or a hospital, is important to our workers. As I said yesterday, I have a daughter who is going to graduate next year from nursing, hopefully, and I'm sure as a young person going in to work in a new facility it would be important to her as well. But we know the balance has to be there for not just the worker, but for the patient. I believe, as the Premier said many and many times, it goes hand in hand in terms of building the infrastructure and the workers. I believe that advertising a new facility will entice people to go there to work, and that is important.

Mr. Speaker, I know it has been asked many times and I think it is important. In terms of work on our buildings, whether it is

buildings or whatever we are doing in Newfoundland, we always strive to do 100 per cent for Newfoundland and Labrador workforce. The Corner Brook Acute Care Hospital had 92 per cent Newfoundland and Labrador workforce. Would I have liked for that other 8 per cent to have been Newfoundlanders and Labradorians? Absolutely.

The new adult mental health and addictions facility: 99 per cent Newfoundland and Labrador workforce. So that is important; we always strive for 100 per cent. I said this morning, too, that sometimes people come from without, from other provinces, and sometimes it may be specialty work that might not be found here that companies avail of other expertise outside. The work gets done, but we strive for 100 per cent of workers from Newfoundland and Labrador.

I just want to touch on climate change and how it is important to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. I witnessed first-hand the devastation in Port aux Basques and other areas. Not just that devastation, but we had fires last year. I had my district cut off – the main vein down into the district cut off. We know it is due to climate change, warmer temperature, drier temperatures; we're seeing it even in aquaculture in terms of the difference in water temperatures.

As a department if we are replacing bridges or culverts and any of the projects, the scope of it, we take a look at it in terms of a bigger culvert because it is an environmental challenge there, then a culvert can be 30 per cent bigger and that is because the climate change conversation was considered within the scope of the project. I know when I attended the FPT meetings, that was a big topic. Climate change is real, not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is real in the world and we have to tackle it for now and for the future for our children.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to clue up there and say that I'm proud and honoured to be the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and I'll continue to do the great work for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I'm going to stay relevant to the subject headings here in the Estimates that we're covering right now. But when you look at Labrador Affairs, Digital Government, Transportation and Infrastructure, in my district it's all relevant. One of the things I was just going to speak a little bit on is the social determinants of health and how they relate to all these broad departments.

Because, in actual fact, when I talk about the social determinants of health, I talk a lot about access to health care, such as transportation; the failure of my people to be able to access health care. I talk about access to education. A lot of my petition the questions are around, in my district, high school students, junior high, elementary students still having trouble accessing quality education, the same that the rest of the province takes for granted.

I also want to talk about food. How transportation impacts our access to food security. I talk about housing, how we have a huge housing issue in Northern Labrador. Not just about being able to actually access housing, but the quality of housing and the conditions we have to endure in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and also people who own their own houses: mould, mildew and repairs. All of this is related to government services in the different departments.

So the social determinants of health: When the Health Accord was actually coming out, I had a lot of hope for it. A 10-year plan to rewrite the way we look at health care in the province, access to health care, quality health care, a 10-year plan. The biggest hope that I had was the fact that they were going to include the social determinants of health, make it a priority when they actually were addressing health care.

In the government's own book, the Health Accord, in the report, it says: "The Health Accord process includes two distinct perspectives." So it's based on two distinct perspectives. "Its vision is rooted in the belief that improved health and health outcomes of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will only come from bringing together social, economic, and environmental factors (the social determinants of health ...) with a rebalanced health system (community, hospital, and long-term care services)." In actual fact, those should always be a priority.

But, for me, when I look at this report, it talks about the social determinants of health and it goes a little bit further. I'm going to take my time now to talk about the Health Accord and social determinants of health and how it applies to the different departments that are supposed to actually improve the quality of life for people in my district.

Labrador Affairs: My district is in Labrador, Northern Labrador and I have trouble with transportation. Transportation is listed there. I've got lots of issues with some of the things that actually are under the Department of Digital Government.

So one of the categories that social determinants of health fall into is Social Exclusion. There are two categories. This book says social determinants of health falls into two categories: Social Exclusion, that's based on the factors of identity; and Social Safety Nets, that's the other category.

“Social exclusion refers to specific groups being denied the opportunity to participate in social life with limited access to social, cultural, and economical resources. Indigenous peoples ...” – the Inuit and Innu of Northern Labrador, the Indigenous peoples – “are especially likely to experience social exclusion.”

So what’s the problem with being socially excluded? You might be saying, well, growing up in high school I knew people who were socially excluded and they seem to be okay. “Socially excluded persons are more likely to be unemployed and earn lower wages. They have less access to health and social services and means of furthering their education.” So as an MHA, Speaker, I have to advocate for people in my district to be able to access employment, to be able to access education and quality of health. “Excluded groups have little influence upon decisions made by governments and other institutions.”

Actually, the Minister of Labrador Affairs talked about people actually graduating from university. As the MHA for Torngat Mountains, I am quite proud to say that I grew up in Makkovik and I am a graduate of university who is actually advocating for my people. What we’re seeing now is, not just me, there are more and more people from my district who are actually being able to successfully – despite the barriers that are put up by this government – graduate from high school and go into post-secondary.

It is so important. Not only that, but what really, really impacts our quality of life is socially excluded groups, such as the Innu and Inuit of Northern Labrador. “They have less access to health and social services and means of furthering their education. Excluded groups have little influence upon decisions made by governments and other institutions.”

In actual fact, it’s only when we graduate, we become educated, we go back and we actually advocate for our own people

because there is little influence on decisions made by governments. Our problem was Joey Smallwood and every other premier that came after Joey Smallwood, every government that came after the first Liberal government because, in actual fact, nobody was advocating for us. Nobody was fighting for us. We saw people come in who were actually elected to represent us that took advantage of us and we see that in the failings for our services and our infrastructure.

When you look at transportation, you look at Labrador Affairs, and I was actually quite pleased to actually have the Member for Harbour Main advocate for Labrador. When we went through the budget Estimates, she asked questions, alongside of me, we asked questions about Labrador Affairs.

Now, unfortunately, I was a bit disappointed, and you can go in yourself and check the *Hansard*, the minutes that were collected when we actually did the budget Estimates about Labrador Affairs. There were quite a few times we asked about like what is Labrador Affairs doing to advocate for this, for actually trying to improve this? The answer was well, you need to check with Transportation, you need to check with Municipal and Provincial Affairs. But in actual fact, Labrador Affairs is supposed to be ensuring that Labrador is advocated for because of its geographic isolation, its large geographic area in terms of resources, health care and transportation. So those are all very important issues.

What is the other thing we are talking about? The other thing in the other category for the social determinants of health is a Social Safety Net. So what falls under that? Early childhood development. Early childhood development is a huge indicator of the social determinants of health and quality of life. It’s actually here in the Health Accord: Early childhood development.

Where are most of our children? You look at the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s, a lot of our children

ended up in care. Then those children grew up to be adults and the cycle continues. We have to ensure that we have access to early childhood development, early childhood experiences – and I'm reading again from inside this book: "Early childhood experiences have strong immediate and longer lasting biological, psychological, and social effects upon health."

So what happens in your childhood impacts how you're going to actually be when you grow up. Are you going to be a healthy person or are you actually going to have disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, mental health issues? Early childhood development.

Education is another one, social safety net. Even now, in 2023, I'm talking about what happened in the last few years since I got elected, how our students in our communities have been denied equal access to education. In 2021, what happened? I got calls from Makkovik, from Rigolet, from the coastal communities saying that we went to school and we were told that we were going to be in the Newfoundland time zone, all our CDLI courses.

What's the problem with that? It's not only did you miss a half an hour of your in-class lecture because you had to go online on the Newfoundland time zone and then come back, you missed another half an hour of your in-class lecture. That was bad enough but what about all the stress that you were put under doing these courses, trying to make up for all this lost time when the Internet wasn't working. The Internet wasn't working because what happened is you're there, you're trying to load your course and it's just timing, timing and timing and it would lock up.

Last year, what happened? Nain – all the high school students that were doing their core academic requirements to graduate so they could go into post-secondary, all their teachers were taken from them. Their

teachers were there in Nain at the beginning of the school year, forced online, never did online courses before and then that bad, bad Internet. The parents in Nain actually protested. I was so impressed and had so much respect for the parents because I know how hard it was for them to actually go down to the school and physically protest, be interviewed on the news, that I actually wrote a Member's statement honouring their courage to protest because it goes against the grain of their being. I wasn't allowed to actually present it here in the House of Assembly. But do you know something? I still have a lot of respect for every single parent that actually went and protested.

They said they weren't only doing it for their kids; they were doing it for next year so that their friend's children wouldn't have to go through that – social determinants of health. What happens in Northern Labrador? Even with this book, even if they implement it properly, do you think we're going to have access to proper health care, equal access? We're not, until decade after decade we actually have more and more people from our communities graduate and be able to advocate, to have that voice in government.

Another one: Housing Security. Canada's Federal Housing Advocate came to Nain and talked about her nightmares that she had from her experience. Abominable she called the housing conditions that she witnessed. I think also human rights violations. The social determinants of health – housing security for us.

Really, honestly, I'll go on – Food Security. Now, that relates to Labrador Affairs, to the Department of Transportation, food security, because we look at our high prices. I realize that there are high prices for food all over Canada. In Newfoundland and Labrador, even when you go into Sobeys or Dominion, if you're in St. John's, the capital of Newfoundland and Labrador, you look at the increased cost of price. In actual fact, I don't think anyone can dispute that northern

community stores have really some of the highest prices in food.

It's got nothing to do with the pandemic. "Food is one of the basic human needs and is an important determinant of health and human dignity. Food security is defined as physical and economic access to adequate amounts of nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate food to maintain a healthy and active life."

What about the land? Forget about the store; what about the land? Going out hunting ducks, seals, salmon and char in the summer. We still have that. We still have access to that, but we couldn't afford it the summer. I had a lot of people calling me saying that they couldn't afford the gas to go off, trying to get gas buddies – social determinants of health, food security. In the winter the same thing, hunting. In actual fact, for me, it can be discouraging; I have hope but then reality sets in.

I was listening to an interview I did with VOXM last year. The journalist who interviewed me had won a national award for it. It was about reconciliation. It was a news award. I started listening to it and even though I was the one being interviewed, I have to say that I was actually emotionally affected about the things that I was talking about. I was sitting here listening to it with my earbuds in and I got teared up, I had to leave. What I know now is I don't think that we are going to be able to get past all the things that impact our quality of life until we actually take control.

Now, I have to commend Nunatsiavut Government working directly with the federal government. Bypassing, a lot of times, even their MP, going directly to the federal government to try to access funding resources that would improve the quality of life for the people. I have to commend the Innu Nation. The Innu Nation wrote a letter supporting me on the advocacy for the returning of the freight boat and sent another email.

At the end of the day there are a lot of things that impact us. I listened to the Minister of Labrador Affairs talk about the signing of the MOU in Ottawa at the Northern Lights Conference; a proud moment. But, in actual fact, when I was talking to the members of Nunatsiavut Government that were present in Ottawa, they were told that they weren't properly invited. It was last minute; they didn't even know where it was. When they showed up, they were quite surprised because the things in the MOU with Nunavut, all the nice things listed was what Nunatsiavut Government and the Innu Nation was trying to obtain with this provincial government.

So maybe this provincial government should go back to Nunatsiavut Government and to the Innu Nation and say: We actually have an MOU with Nunavut. Is there anything that you would like for us to actually engage you on? Because I am sure they would say, yes, those are all things that we would like as well.

Looking at the road challenges, there has been a lot of progress in the last 10 years. I know there is a prefeasibility study that is being undertaken in the last month. But the problem with the consultations is that it is continuously being interrupted because of travel being impacted by weather. That's the life that we actually experience. So for me, it's really, really difficult to just be able to talk on issues in my district without any emotion.

Climate change: We see the impacts of climate change. But at the end of the day, I think the most important thing for us is we have to identify that nobody is going to help us here. The thing is, people have come up to me and said: Lela, we don't really know what we're going to do. Is there any way – maybe we could approach Quebec, Northern Quebec. Maybe they could actually help us. Nunavut – maybe they could help us. Maybe we could actually become independent. Northern Labrador could actually become independent and

we'd be able to access federal dollars that are supposed to be available to us via the province.

For me, at the end of the day, people have to have quality of life. Quality of life is so tied to the social determinants of health and that's why I'm speaking on it. When we talk about the budget, the first thing I talked about was our suicide rates.

Why would I talk about suicide rates when we're talking about the budget? Because the fact that colonialism and the failure to address the harms done in the past – the continuous failure to address the harms done to us in the past for the Inuit and Innu of Northern Labrador, those harms have resulted in a lot of suicides.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The level of chatter is getting a bit too loud. I can't hear the Member speak.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Speaker, for my last 36 seconds I would also like to talk a little bit about the smell of soup. Why would I talk about the smell of soup?

When I was growing up, one of the things that really impacted me was one of the health care workers with the Labrador Inuit Association told me: Lela, I can't stand the smell of soup, because every time we have a suicide we bring food to the house of the person, the family who is suffering the loss. She said one of the staples has always been soup and she said, I can't stand the smell of soup because of what it reminds me of.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Member's time has expired.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Perhaps the Estimates process is one of my favourite parts of budget and I know most people will find that strange. What I find is it gives incredibly important scrutiny to every line item of government spending. I think that is valuable, I think it's important and I think it should reassure the people of the province that there is really line-by-line scrutiny.

The Members opposite get the opportunity to ask us, as ministers and responsible for departments, any question they wish regarding the budget Estimates and a lot of times on policy itself. I know that I would be happy to answer any question that's ever posed to me by Members of the Opposition and therefore I'm very happy to be able to do that.

Speaker, I would say that at the Estimates for Finance – I'm also responsible for the Public Service Commission and I'm also responsible for the Consolidated Revenue Fund – we spent well over three hours really doing what I think is an important job of going through every expenditure and understanding those expenditures and why they're making those expenditures.

But behind all the expenditures of government, behind all the work that is done, are an incredibly talented and important group of public servants. I want to recognize them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: I know all of my colleagues want to recognize their incredible professionalism, their hard work, their

extreme and extra efforts that they make and their dedication to great public service.

I know that I have the honour and I can say that. I work with incredibly smart people in the Department of Finance, in the Public Service Commission, in the Treasury Board – incredibly talented. I'm thankful for them every day, not only for their hard work, not only for the extra efforts, not only for their professionalism, but also their friendship. They truly love this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and they truly ensure they do their utmost every day in providing public service. So I know my colleagues would join me in thanking them.

Now, we had an opportunity to talk about the Public Service Commission and I'll just take a few moments. I know that we're concluding soon for the end of the day, so I'll just take a few moments and talk a little bit about the great work of the Public Service Commission.

There are about 141 people now in the Public Service Commission. As you recall, a couple of years ago we decided to amalgamate and coordinate the Public Service Commission into a bigger and stronger entity. They're responsible for merit-based appointments; they're responsible for the Employee Assistance Program, the training and development across the entire public service, strategic recruitment, safety and wellness, the Harassment-free Workplace, adjudication of management and bargaining unit classifications, the Opening Doors Program, which is an employment equity program – an incredible amount of work and talent.

I will say, for example, that the Public Service Commission has also assumed the role of the new pay equity officer. The Commission will provide the integral support to the *Pay Equity and Pay Transparency Act*. I want to recognize, again, my colleague, who was a first mover in Newfoundland and Labrador. I want to recognize my colleague Responsible for

Women and Gender Equity for her diligent efforts in making sure that we have a *Pay Equity and Pay Transparency Act* in this province, so kudos to her.

The pay equity officer is in the Public Service Commission. As I said, they are talent seekers and now we have a Graduate Recruitment Program. Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to welcome the new graduate recruits to the public service. It was launched last spring by the strategic staffing division and I can tell you the incredible new graduates that have joined the leadership teams. They'll be mentored and have leadership positions throughout government and hopefully they'll enjoy their time with the public service and go on.

I know that the clerk, for example, first entered the public service – for those that are listening, the clerk who's responsible for all of the public service, the implementation of the public service, she first started as a graduate recruit and we're so proud. I can tell you there were beaming faces in that group, but the level of knowledge, the level of education, the level of commitment of these graduate recruits is outstanding. So we're really, really very pleased to have them and welcome them to the public service.

I should also say that the staffing division completed over 1,300 competitions for core public sector positions in the last year.

While I have a few moments, I also want to recognize the incredibly hard-working people at the Department of Finance. If you come here at any time, day or night, weekends – I've come here at 4 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning, there are people working in the Department of Finance. They're an incredibly hard-working team. There are about 141 people working with the Department of Finance. They have outstanding dedication and very important, diligence, professional and hard working.

Did you realize that approximately 50 per cent of the legislation that goes through this House of Assembly comes through the Department of Finance? I mean, I know I stand here quite a bit, but when I look back over the last years, some of the bills that we've done, we had I think almost 20 bills last year and I think that was about half of the bills that went through this House.

But they're also responsible for things like Treasury management, so the establishment of the Future Fund, the establishment of the European borrowing program, the development of new investment policies for sinking funds. Members of this House will remember that we made some significant changes to the sinking funds in the last year through the House of Assembly, amendments to the *Financial Administration Act* to ensure that we can have some diversification in sinking fund investments.

They are also responsible for taxation, tax credits, rebate programs, implementation of the manufacturing and processing of tax credit, implementation of the Green Technology Tax Credit, the largest ever cheque disbursement in the province's history – 412,000 cheques through the cost-of-living rebate program we had last year – the cannabis policy framework review, the Film and Video Tax Credit extension, the implementation of the All-Spend Film.

I mean, there are so many things here, achievements and accomplishments. The Home Heating Supplement Program, where we had 28,000 applications. We're about 95 per cent of the way through disbursement, Speaker. It is an incredible amount of work that goes on in Finance. I want to thank my teammates in the Department of Finance for their diligence, for their professionalism, for their hard work, as well as through the Public Service Commission.

I know that time is drawing near. It is almost 5:30, I believe, Speaker. I can continue on if you wish. I can't see the clock.

SPEAKER: It's 5:26.

S. COADY: I have a few more minutes?

SPEAKER: Four more minutes.

S. COADY: I have four more minutes. Oh, I got lots of time here. I have so many things to talk about, but I can't see the clock with the new lights.

Speaker, I will say that we also had a really good discussion in Estimates last Friday on the Consolidated Fund Services. That's managed jointly between the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. I am responsible for both Finance and Treasury Board. Great people in both departments. The Consolidated Fund Services represent the interest cost and management expenses related to the servicing of the public debt of the province and the funding of the pension plans for government and government agency employees.

Speaker, why is this important? I've been speaking for the last number of years about how important it is for us to drive down our debt. Our debt was going to be \$17.1 billion. That's where it was headed. Now, we've been able to make some interventions and we've been able to lower our debt. It's now at \$15.7 billion.

Speaker, that's still a tremendous amount of debt. I am very proud of my colleague that is responsible for Population Growth. Minister Byrne is doing an incredible job of bringing more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, welcoming people from across the country and around the world, and I'm thankful for that, but we do need to address our debt.

Speaker, being able to lower our debt and lower our cost of borrowing, something that we focus on almost every – well, I know it is every day. We have incredibly smart people, a good team of people in the Department of Finance that are looking at the Consolidated Fund every day and we

are really focused on driving down our debt, driving down our cost of borrowing. Things that I just spoke about in the Department of Finance, things like the European borrowing program, things like addressing some of the sinking funds, making sure that we're investing them well, addressing pension plans and making sure that they're able to be funded correctly, and that is through the department of the Treasury Board.

All of those things are important, because when it comes to our budget, by lowering our cost of borrowing, by lowering our debt, we're able to free up money and making sure that we don't have deficits. We're able to free up money so that we can make some of the big strategic investment that you're seeing in this budget: investments in infrastructure, investments in transportation, the \$1.4 billion that we're investing in provincial government roads, very, very important; the monies that we're investing in health care, record investments in health care, how important it is as I've talked about many times in this House of Assembly, how your health is the priority of this government; being able to make some of the largest investments in health care, critically important, Speaker.

The reason why we're able to do that is because we are addressing some of the financial challenges that we faced in this province.

On that note, Speaker, I'm recognizing the time has come to a close. I know that I will have a chance to speak again in this House of Assembly to the budget and to Estimates.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: If you want to save your time, you have the ability to adjourn the House now.

S. COADY: No, I thought it was 5:30. I can't see with the lights.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

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