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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, in the public gallery today I'd like to welcome Martin Croke. Martin is joined by his family and visiting us this afternoon for a Member's statement.

Welcome.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** I would like to take this opportunity to recognize a significant historic event that happened since the House last met: the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty the Queen Consort on Saturday, May 6, 2023.

Those of you who viewed the ceremony can speak to the splendor of the milestone event, which marks the beginning of a new era for the Crown and the Commonwealth. His Majesty King Charles III is an important figure in our Legislature and in our country, and the Monarch's role in our constitutional conventions cannot be understated.

Coronation Day resonates particularly with our province and this Legislature. Their Majesties have visited Newfoundland and Labrador through the years, most recently, as part of the Canadian Royal Tour in 2022, and many of us here were present when they visited Confederation Building.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador, to congratulate His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty the Queen Consort, and I ask all Members to join me in acknowledging this momentous occasions.

Long Live the King.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

### Statements by Members

**SPEAKER:** Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Ferryland, Placentia West - Bellevue, Humber - Bay of Islands, Torngat Mountains and Harbour Main.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Speaker.

Today I recognize a volunteer-based, non-profit social enterprise located in Petty Harbour.

Fishing for Success was founded in 2014 to transmit the intangible cultural heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador's family fishery. They advocate for an inclusive, gender-equitable and sustainable small-scale fishery that can help combat climate change and contribute to food sovereignty through better local seafood access. They provide free or reduced cost programming for women, children, youth, newcomers and Indigenous community members by partnering with other like minded non-profits.

In 2021, they received the President's Award for Public Engagement Partnerships from Memorial University of Newfoundland. In 2022, they were awarded the Sustainable Tourism Award sponsored by Parks Canada and their most recent award was awarded in November 2022, which was the Nature Inspiration Award for Community Action by the Canadian Museum of Nature for its new Sea2School program and its Girls Who Fish program, which now has a sister one in Japan. Girls Who Fish members form the core volunteers who provide access to fishing for those who experience barriers to nature.

I ask all Members of this House to join in congratulating Fishing for Success on their accomplishments and their contribution to the fishing industry of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

**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 give a big congratulations to all players and coaches in the Marystown youth dart league, in the beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue, on another successful season.

On March 11, members of the Marystown youth dart league travelled to Gander to take part in Newfoundland Youth Provincial Darts Championships. Six youth won their way to represent Team NL at the National Youth Darts Championships held in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec.

Representing the junior boys are 15-year-old Jordan Crocker and 16-year-old Logan Connors. Representing the junior girls are 14-year-old Olivia Lundrigan and 15-year-old Shian Crocker. And representing the senior boys are 18-year-old Jack Moulton and 18-year-old Ian Jackman.

I am asking all hon. Members to please join me in congratulating these young individuals and their teams on their accomplishments to date and wish them great success at the upcoming Nationals and their bright futures in the sport.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**E. JOYCE:** This past weekend, the 4-H Rockets of Irishtown-Summerside, the longest running club in the province, hosted the provincial competitions involving 50 youth from around the province. Others

taking part included the Challenging Pioneers from the Goulds, the Zodiac Club from St. Mary's, and the I Sullivan Club from Calvert.

With a focus on learning and fun, the competitions included competing in various demonstration projects and public speaking at the junior and senior levels.

Winners of the various competitions were Amy Bishop and Heather Squires for senior double demonstration and Alyssa Burke for junior single demonstration of the Zodiac Club. Olivia Taylor was the recipient of the senior public speaking and Sophie Lundrigan for junior public speaking, both from Challenging Pioneers club. Bridget Bursey and Molly Buffett from the 4-H Rockets won the junior double demonstration while Sara Taylor, from the Challenging Pioneers, won the senior single demonstration.

Congratulations also to the Rockets leader, Jenelle Bursey, the first recipient of the Minnie Loder Leader of the Year award, a new award just established.

I ask all Members to join with me in congratulating all the participants and the organizers on a great weekend of competition and friendship.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

Educator, coach, community advocate, graduate of Jens Haven Memorial School, Nain, Julie Dicker's parents stressed doing well in school and always trying your best in sports.

A youth's lifetime of competitive sports led Julie to Memorial University's School of

Human Kinetics and Recreation. But the road was long and winding. Julie didn't enter the Bachelor of Education program until she was 24. In her own words, her teenage and young adult years had trauma connected to intergenerational trauma. Her driving force was to graduate and work with her people.

When things were tough, she thanks her life partner, Edna Asivak, for always being there with love and support.

Graduating with a Bachelor of Education and a Bachelor of Physical Education, she first taught and coached in Makkovik. After obtaining a Masters of Physical Education in 2014 and a teaching job in her hometown of Nain, a big part of Julie's dream was fulfilled. Julie is now the principal of Jens Haven.

Julie knows the physical and mental health benefits of sports and spent thousands of hours encouraging youth through coaching, building skills to face the life challenges of adulthood. That is our Julie. You have to give youth hope. Julie will always be a part of that hope.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Joining us in the gallery today is 17-year-old Martin Croke, with his mother, Carolyn, and his father, Gary, of the community of Marysvale in the District of Harbour Main.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Martin has lived with cerebral palsy since birth. This past week, I was honoured to join Martin and his family and friends, along with his fellow students and teachers at Ascension

Collegiate, where he was granted his wish by the Children's Wish Foundation.

Martin received a new Hippocampe wheelchair. This type of chair has the ability to wheel on sand, pebbles, hiking trails and it can even float on water and glide on snow.

Martin's family love the outdoors. His sister, Jenna, and brother, Thomas, are quite active and adventurous. The family enjoy hiking the trails, spending time in the woods on their quad and Side By Side and having fun at the local beaches in the surrounding area. Martin's Hippocampe chair now gives him personal autonomy and makes it much easier for him to be together with his family enjoying the simple pleasures of life.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in congratulating Martin and his family and wish them many happy adventures in exploring our province's beautiful outdoors.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Deputy Premier.

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Speaker.

This weekend across Canada and around the world, a significant moment in the history of the Monarch was observed: the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty the Queen Consort.

We acknowledge and celebrate the close ties between His Majesty the King and our country, as well as the role the Canadian Crown plays in our system of governance and our sense of identity.

Their Majesties are dear friends to Newfoundland and Labrador, having visited

on multiple occasions. We had the pleasure of welcoming Their Majesties during their Royal Tour of Canada in 2022, just a year ago. The visit was an opportunity to reflect on the Platinum Jubilee of the late Queen Elizabeth II and celebrate our province's friendly hospitality, rich arts and Indigenous traditions, as well as our incredible pride of place.

On Coronation Day, we had the collective opportunity to reflect on this once again and celebrate shared priorities that Their Majesties and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador hold close, which includes important areas such as service to our communities, the environment, sustainability and diversity.

Events such as the Royal Tour of Canada and the Coronation inspire a sense of pride and foster a greater understanding and appreciation of uniquely Canadian institutions, like the Crown in Canada and the values and symbols that unite us all.

Long live the King.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

This past weekend I was happy to join Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor and hundreds of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians at Government House as we celebrated the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty the Queen Consort.

The coronation is an important reminder of the duty to public service that all Members of this House has. It is also a moment to recognize our intertwined history and

shared priorities of environment, sustainability, diversity and a duty to others.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge it was the coldest event in my 13 years as an MHA serving the people of this province, and I know the Deputy Premier will attest to that also. I have to give full kudos to Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, who was front and centre in the wind, the rain, the snow and the cold but handled her duties with full professionalism, commitment, dedication and duty to serve.

Kudos and hats off to Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

As these celebrations rolled out across the Commonwealth, at great expense, we are reminded of those without food, safe shelter and access to the basics of life. Furthermore, it is important to remember that Canada's history with the Crown continues to impact our relationships and cultures across the country, most notably in Indigenous communities.

At this point, we respectfully acknowledge the land in which we gather as the ancestral homelands of the Beothuk, whose culture has been erased forever.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

**K. HOWELL:** Speaker, on Friday I had the pleasure of joining our partners, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and the Professional Municipal Administrators, at the MNL Spring Symposium to proclaim May 8-12 as Municipal Awareness Week. The week is an opportunity to acknowledge the many people in the municipal sector, and the contribution of local governments to the province.

At the heart of every municipality are elected officials, administrators, professional planners, staff and volunteers. Municipal governments are responsible for many services that enhance the quality of life for residents.

*Budget 2023* recognizes the essential role that municipalities play in the well-being, safety and security of residents. Beginning this year, Municipal Operating Grants are increasing by \$3 million, bringing the total budget to \$25 million. This allocation will rise again by another \$3 million next year for a total annual budget of \$28 million.

All communities currently receiving a grant will see an increase of approximately 13.6 per cent this year and we will review how funds are allocated in the following year.

Speaker, collaboration, partnership and citizen involvement are essential for active, sustainable and vibrant communities. To help communities build capacity and provide the services that residents need we'll be working with community leaders and stakeholder groups to identify opportunities for regional community collaboration, supported through an initial funding of \$500,000.

Municipalities will be holding special events throughout this week. I encourage everyone to drop by your town hall and see the great work that is happening at the local level.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Speaker.

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

I rise today and join the minister to recognize Municipal Awareness Week in Newfoundland and Labrador. This week is a time to recognize municipal governments in our province and the important work that they do.

As a former mayor of the province's newest municipality, George's Brook-Milton, officially enshrined by the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands when he was minister at the time, I can speak first-hand to the excellent work that municipalities and their dedicated staff undertake on behalf of the communities they serve. Vibrant communities are part of the fabric of this province and are due in no small part to the volunteers, staff and councils who contribute so much of their time to make this happen.

With special events being held across the province throughout this week, I encourage everyone to take part and check out the great work happening here in this great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement and I thank the municipalities for the heavy burden that they carry.

Municipalities have been chronically underfunded for decades. There are infrastructure deficits, lack of access to clean water infrastructure and they're constantly expected to do more with less. If this government truly supported the people who keep municipalities running, they'd prioritize helping them with the deferred maintenance, invest in regional transit, ensure that they have clean drinking water and meet their legal requirements for waste water.

Twenty-five million dollars isn't enough to go with over 270-plus communities. I ask the government to invest more in municipalities.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, last week the Premier repeatedly refused to answer questions about the crab fishery and rejected calls to bring all parties together to find a solution. Yet, he was quick to take credit for a tentative crab deal that quickly collapsed.

Will the Premier personally bring the parties back to the table and attend the meeting?

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

**D. BRAGG:** Thank you very much, Speaker.

I've got to say on Friday afternoon, I was pretty much on the same page that the Premier was on. We were assured that this deal was looking good and it was going to be sold and brought home so that people

can get back to fishing. That did not happen and that is so unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

It's good to be on the same page, but the Premier needs to be in the room to get on the same page with the industry people there to make sure the deal is something that's going to work for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, one contentious issue is the proposal to allow the import of crab for processing here while our fleet remains tied up or subject to other conditions. Government controls the processing licences. Why does the Premier believe this is fair?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Deputy Premier.

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much.

I just want to take a moment to address the preamble. I do want to thank the Premier. This is a very important issue for the people of the province, especially the processors and harvesters here in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's very important to the economy in Newfoundland and Labrador. I want to thank the Premier, the Minister of Fisheries and the Minister of Labour for coming together, for bringing the parties together, for having good dialogue and discussion. I think it was an important advancement and we're going to continue to encourage that kind of open dialogue to reach a settlement.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Premier is correct; this is a very important issue to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is a billion-dollar fishery that is the lifeblood of rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Every day that the parties are not talking is another nail in the coffin of our fishing industry.

Threats and accusations are flying back and forth and residents of the province are looking to the Premier for leadership. Speaker, he was quick to get personally involved in green hydrogen; why is the fishery less important?

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

**D. BRAGG:** I can assure the Member opposite that the Premier was involved. He had spoke to the president of the FFAW last week. He was involved in our conversations. Minister Davis and I lead in a lot of the conversations, trying to get to mediation, get them together. We've been actively involved. We've told them we'll stay actively involved.

It was very disappointing to find out Sunday or Monday that this was not a deal. It was so disappointing, it was unreal because we were assured that afternoon on Friday this was a done deal.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

Now the lobster fishery is slowly trying to recover after stoppage. We have not heard anything from the province on the FFAW's request to allow outside buyers, and

harvesters on the West Coast are now subject to crate limits.

Can the minister provide an update on this important fishery?

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

**D. BRAGG:** Thank you very much.

I'm happy to speak on that. A deal was signed yesterday by all parties. The lobster fishery is ongoing.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**D. BRAGG:** So I'm very pleased that ASP and the FFAW have worked hard together to make a deal on lobsters, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the fishery is critical for the people of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, but so is access to health care. On Friday, the people of Harbour Breton were forced to protest, yet again, the failure of this government to keep their emergency room open. The frustration with health care on the Connaigre Peninsula is something I witnessed first-hand when I attended a protest last summer.

I ask the Premier: What does he say about your handling of health care when your own minister has to join a protest?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know the MHA responsible for the area was at the protest. We have committed to the area to continue with recruitment and



retention. I can say to the House, Mr. Speaker, that the Provincial Health Authority is working with three physicians currently for that area, hoping to have those physicians recruited. We feel very confident about two of those physicians, Mr. Speaker, for sure, with the hopes that the third one will sign on as well.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

For the last eight years, we've been asking that administration, the Liberal administration, to be proactive and not reactive. The issue here of why we lost so many doctors and health professionals out of our rural communities here is because the government hasn't been proactive to keep them there and keep them engaged in their communities, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**D. BRAZIL:** This is not the first protest because of emergency rooms being shut down. Speaker, we've seen it in Harbour Breton, Whitbourne, Burin Peninsula and other communities. Basic services aren't luxuries. They are needed for the safety and well-being of the people of rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask the minister: When will this government finally put an end to emergency room closures?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, we have some of the most attractive incentives across the country to attract physicians to this province. It's a little ingenuous of the Member opposite, Mr. Speaker, when his cousins in Ontario are facing the same

problems. His cousins in Alberta are facing the same problems.

Mr. Speaker, we've got a good, solid relationship with the NLMA in this province. The Medical Association in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, doesn't have the same opinion of the government in that province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Speaker.

When I speak in this House, I speak for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador and we speak about access to health care in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**D. BRAZIL:** When the premier of Nova Scotia can attest to 167 new nurses being recruited there, then that is failure on the government's part here not to be able to do that in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. So I will never apologize for standing up for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to have proper access to health care for what they need in rural and urban Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've got a recruitment initiative in India which is going to bring hundreds of Indian nurses to this province, Mr. Speaker. We have recruited since this time last year, Mr. Speaker, approximately 400 nurses to this province. That is a reality.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, we continue to recruit medical professionals to this province but there is a global shortage and every province in the country, including Nova Scotia, is facing a shortage of medical health professionals.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Speaker.

If they spent more time on retention, then they wouldn't have to spend so much time on recruitment.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**B. PETTEN:** Failure.

Speaker, local producer Bob Hallett has said – and I quote – we didn't know anything about it; we felt kind of blindsided; we were a little bit hurt – when speaking about the Liberal plans for a new theatre. In fact, his company has invested their own private money to reopen a mid-sized theatre in the city.

Why are the Liberals now using public money to compete with a private business?

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

**S. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, we're not building a theatre to compete; we're building a theatre to complement. We're building an industry here in this province that has huge potential. This is seeing further down the road, Mr. Speaker. We think there is lots of room in this city, in this region, for two mid-sized theatres.

I would point out to the Member opposite that we had to signal our intentions of what it is we're planning on doing, Mr. Speaker. Now we will do public consultation which will involve the theatre community. We don't have the ability as a government to publicly consult in private. So we're looking forward to talking to the community –

**L. PARROTT:** (Inaudible.)

**S. CROCKER:** Mr. Speaker, if the Member for Terra Nova would like to ask a question, I'll certainly sit down.

But, Mr. Speaker, again we're looking forward to what this theatre can bring to the industry here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Mr. Hallett already said it doesn't support two theatres in this province.

Is this what this government does? They announce a theatre and then they go and plan for it. Isn't that what you do? Don't you consult, plan, talk to people first, and then decide what you're going to do? They do it backwards, but I guess that is not the only thing they've done backwards, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, in order for the local arts community to thrive, the Liberals must work with them, not compete against them. The minister said on Friday that the next step would be consulting with the arts community and that we still have a lot of work to do. Good point, eh?

Why didn't the minister do his homework before last week's photo op?

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

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

I realize the Members opposite didn't understand public procurement when they were in office, Mr. Speaker. We cannot do public consultation in private.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Well done.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**S. CROCKER:** Maybe the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port would like to ask the question.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. CROCKER:** He will not ask one, Mr. Speaker. I will guarantee you –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**S. CROCKER:** Speaker, I will guarantee you the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port won't ask me a question on this today.

Mr. Speaker, it is so important what we've done for the arts community in this province. This government has done more for the arts community in the last six or seven years than any government in history. The annual grant to ArtsNL has gone from \$2 million to \$5 million every single year. The film and television industry has gone from a \$2-million equity investment to a \$10-million equity investment. I would challenge the Member if he wants to go out, go talk to Artistic Fraud, for example –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**B. PETTEN:** I guess, Speaker, if the minister wants to move over and let one of us come over and do his job, we'll all do that. If he wants to challenge us, no problem. Move on; we'll come on. Yes, change is in the air.

Speaker, we know when public money is being spent without proper consultation; that's what we're worried about. It's proper expenditure of public money is what this government should be more worried about as well.

The minister is backtracking on the Premier's announcement, now saying the renovation is possible. The minister said on Friday he did not think the Reid Theatre fits but they also said nothing was decided.

I ask the minister: What is it? What's your answer?

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

**S. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question.

In his research, obviously, he didn't talk to anybody at Memorial because, obviously, there are challenges around that theatre. I think, Mr. Speaker, there are plans by Memorial to use that theatre, actually, as a lecture hall.

Look, we will talk to the arts community, which we've been doing for quite some time. You would have seen that if you would have took some time to watch the announcement on Wednesday night where Jill Keiley who is actually probably one of the best-known producers, directors that this province has ever produced. She just finished up a stint as director at the national centre for the arts in Ottawa.

We've heard from people like Jillian and others in the community, Mr. Speaker, but we'll do more work because, again, we can't do public consultations in private.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**B. PETTEN:** It's amazing; you can announce a mid-sized theatre in St. John's and make a total mess of it. I mean, it's more than a minister of messes; it's a government of messes across the way, Mr. Speaker. Incredible, incredible. They should've probably asked MUN first. Now they decide, after they announce it, they're going to talk to MUN. Maybe they might call Bob Hallett the next day. Incredible.

The Liberals are competing with private businesses and leaving a half-finished venue at MUN vacant.

Will the Premier and the minister now admit last week's announcement was nothing more than a photo op?

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

**S. CROCKER:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the Member opposite is going to audition for Peter Pan.

Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, they fail to understand the process that we've put in place. We announced a theatre; we're looking forward to building a theatre to support the arts industry in this province.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, Conservatives don't support the arts. Quite frankly, that's why I'm a Liberal, because I cannot get –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. CROCKER:** – to the place where Conservatives are. They continue to attack the arts industries in this province, Mr.

Speaker. They attack the arts on a national stage and, quite frankly, I can't believe that that party would not want to support the arts in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

It's National Nursing Week and I cannot say enough to thank our nurses for all they do on a daily basis.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**P. DINN:** Last month, the Registered Nurses' Union Newfoundland and Labrador president, Yvette Coffey, commented on the retention bonuses by saying: "It does fall short. Very short ...."

I ask the minister: Why does his government continue to shortchange nurses in our province?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've held a Nursing Think Tank, Mr. Speaker, with registered nurses and other stakeholders in the nursing community, including the practical nurses to get a better understanding of some of the workplace issues, some of the issues that had to be dealt with.

Part of what needs to be resolved is money issues. The Minister of Finance is currently at the table with the Registered Nurses' Union going through a collective bargaining process. The finance issues and some of the other issues will be dealt with at that table.

Mr. Speaker, we've put a strong focus on other issues that've been identified in the

Nursing Think Tank, as well as other initiatives that we've undertaken to get a better understanding and to resolve the workplace issues that nurses are facing in this province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

With the lack of an agreement, nurses are frustrated with the lack of a retention strategy that would relieve them of required overtime, lack of vacation and challenging working conditions. Nova Scotia has recently had success with their retention bonuses, resulting in 130 casual nurses becoming full-time, reducing the stress on the system.

I ask the minister: When will we see the concerns of nurses in our province addressed?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, I believe I answered that question in a previous answer, but I will expand on that. The issues that were identified and raised during the Nursing Think Tank, as well as through other measures that the department and the Provincial Health Authority have undertaken over the last several months, have identified a number of issues that need to be worked on and resolved in order to create a better workplace for nurses in this province, both registered nurses and practical nurses.

In terms of the collective bargaining process, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is currently at the table with the Registered Nurses' Union. I do look forward to a resolution between both parties that will resolve many of the issues that are currently on the table.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Nurses are also frustrated with having to work next to travel nurses who are making considerably more money. While nurses fight for fair compensation, the province has travel nurse contracts in place for almost \$100 million.

I ask the minister: What do you say to nurses from our province who work alongside travel nurses while being paid substantially less?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can't wait to get rid of the contracts related to travel nursing in this province. On Friday of this past week, Mr. Speaker, I spoke with the federal minister and other provincial ministers working on strategies to do just that.

Every province in Canada, Mr. Speaker, is having to deal with travel nursing. Every province in Canada wants to get rid of travel nursing because it is creating morale issues with nurses in the provinces where they work.

The travel nurses right now are a necessary evil, Mr. Speaker, because we simply don't have enough nurses. That's soon going to change, we certainly hope, with recruitment initiatives, such as the one in India.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker, and I do hope it soon changes.

Speaker, eight years ago, this Liberal government indefinitely deferred a much-needed high school for Paradise. Class sizes have increased and opportunities for extracurricular activities in neighbouring schools have decreased.

When will this high school be constructed?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**J. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Speaker.

I think with the amalgamation of the English School District, there are enormous opportunities for these issues to be aired in a much clearer way. There are certainly changing demographics, not just in the area mentioned by my colleague opposite, but across the province, along the TCH and in metro. It is my intention that we have a much more robust and data-driven process to decide what schools need replacing and what schools might not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

The numbers are still there, Speaker. Delaying a high school has only escalated many indicators and time is of the essence. Students in the area deserve better.

When will this high school be constructed?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**J. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'd be happy to expand further on the implementation plans for amalgamation. We

need to bring in a whole variety of aspects of operation of the school district. The discussion about infrastructure is determined by data and should be determined by data as we watch the demographic shift.

The discussions will then take place between myself and my colleague from Transportation and Infrastructure who actually holds the pen on new construction and the proper procurement process, which we've actually set in place and followed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Speaker.

As the red-hot rental market continues, landlords are exploiting a gap in the *Residential Tenancies Act* to evict tenants.

Speaker, some landlords are using the 90-day, no-fault eviction loophole to throw people out in the street.

Why is the minister allowing this to happen?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Digital Government and Service NL.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

Our Residential Tenancies office has a full staff of adjudicators who are now hearing things without a big, long wait. So we're very pleased about that and we're able to do that as a result of changes within our residential tenancies and financial services team.

In terms of the no-fault eviction, that's kind of a phrase, I think, that people have made up to make something sound worse than it is. I think landlords and tenants both have rights. Those rights on both sides are very

important. Tenants need to be able to give appropriate notice and leave a rental situation, Speaker. Also, landlords need to be able to give appropriate notice and have tenants leave their property.

I am happy to have that discussion further, but I can't say that landlords have to be able to keep tenants in their properties forever.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Speaker.

I think this needs to be done at a legislative point of view, Speaker, because people are being thrown out in the streets and it is a loophole that needs to be addressed.

Speaker, tenants are being given 90 days notice and then properties are being re-rented with exorbitant increases. According to local household advocates, we are the only province in the country allowing this to happen.

Why is the minister allowing desperate tenants to be exploited?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I want to assure the Member opposite that we do not have a loophole. Yes, landlords are able to evict tenants. That is a very difficult situation for tenants, and on both sides. Both tenants and landlords often put each other in difficult situations when they give a notice of eviction or when they give a notice to vacate or a notice to terminate a lease.

We have very clear timelines that are required to do so. This is something that we

look at all the time. We do not have rent control in Newfoundland and Labrador, Speaker, but we do have a lower rental rate increase than provinces that do have rental control, Speaker. So at the moment, the system we have now is what we have. I'm happy to chat further.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**C. TIBBS:** Speaker, we all saw the case of Shirley Cox in January; a senior with a disability who was given 90 days to get out of her apartment without any explanation.

Again, why are we the only province in the country allowing seniors to be thrown out into the streets with no reason? Can the minister tell me if anybody in this province has ever been thrown out in a 90-day period without any reason or explanation?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I can't speak to individual situations. The landlord-tenant adjudication process as a quasi-judicial board, and they make decisions that can be appealed to the Supreme Court. I will say that yes, there is a timeline in the legislation and in the policies where landlords can give a tenant notice to vacate their property. They don't have to give reason.

Speaker, I understand that's very difficult for a tenant sometimes but if the Member is suggesting that tenants be able to stay in properties forever, I'm not sure what kind of a system that would be.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**C. TIBBS:** Speaker, activists have called for legislative changes to end the no-fault evictions due to the potential to conceal discrimination by landlords on the basis of race, gender, age, et cetera.

Again, why has the minister done nothing on this (inaudible)?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

To reiterate again, in terms of the residential tenancies process, we have timelines when tenants want to cancel their contract or leave a property and also when landlords want to give notice for tenants that they leave their property. Those are clearly outlined in our residential tenancies handbooks on our website.

I do think it's important that landlords can evict tenants with a certain number of notice and that's what we have now. We are constantly looking at what other provinces and jurisdictions do. We do have to weigh the tenant's right and the landlord's right, and I hear from many landlords who are very unhappy with our current situation and I think right now we are balancing landlord's and tenant's rights appropriately.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Mr. Speaker, the St. Vincent de Paul food bank lost their home with the sale of Corpus Christi. The Minister of Children,

Seniors and Social Development said we now will step in and make sure that they do find a home.

Has a home now been found for this food bank?

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

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

As I guess we all know, food banks have become sort of part of our food security response across the province. My department works with, consults with and supports food banks, as necessary.

With respect to the food bank at Corpus Christi, which is unfortunate about the property sold and they had to move. We're working with the MHA for the area and we're still working with the committee to find and secure a location for them – with them, I should say.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** It's sad Mr. Speaker, when part of our food security across the province is having food banks in our communities.

The minister said that he will step in to make sure that the food bank has a home and I hope that he does that in short course. Yet, I remind the minister that there are lots of other communities, rural communities, where no food banks exist.

Will the minister also step in to make sure that every community in the province has access to a food bank?

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



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

One of the things we're doing certainly in our department is, as I mentioned, working with all communities to make sure their issues around food security are being addressed. If that means working with local community groups, charities, churches to make sure that we can support them, then we're there to do that.

We've been reaching out to the food banks across the province to make sure that they are in the position to respond, if and when needed, and we will continue to do that.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

The Minister of Health was quoted this weekend as stating there is no actual provincial coordinator position for the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program, but Eastern Health said just months ago they were waiting on this position to be filled in order to expand the program to other regions of the province.

So I ask the Premier: Can he clarify what exactly is happening to this critical program? Where is the responsible oversight to ensure this vital training for the provincial nurses is properly rolled out?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The development of the SANE coordinator has been initiated. Mr. Speaker. The Provincial Health Authority and the department are looking to put that position in place. There has been training, including

in Labrador-Grenfell, to ensure that the nurses and other staff in the area are appropriately trained to deal with victims of sexual violence. That training is ongoing in other areas of the province.

The desire of government and the Provincial Health Authority is to ensure that we have individuals trained throughout the province so that this is a province-wide process and service that's being provided to women throughout the province who need it.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

The Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality assured us in the House last week that as far as she was aware the \$225,000 allocated for the SANE Program had come out of the Office of Women and Gender Equality budget but could not tell us what it had been used for.

Can anyone on that side of the House tell us what the \$225,000 has been spent on?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Funding is provided, Mr. Speaker, for training of nurses and other health professionals throughout the province. Funding is also provided for the coordinator position. As I've said, that position is in the process of being filled.

This is a program that the province takes very seriously, the Provincial Health Authority takes very seriously. It's a very important program, Mr. Speaker, to the women that suffer from sexual violence throughout the province. We need to ensure that we have the appropriately trained staff

in all areas of the province, province-wide so that we can assist these individuals.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

It's been nearly three years since advocates have asked for this position.

Speaker, I'm regularly in touch with women's groups in the province and they have led the fight for a SANE coordinator position to be hired. Yet, they have not heard from government.

I ask anyone over on that side of the House: Why is the government keeping women advocates in the dark on this important issue?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once the coordinator position has been filled, we will be making that public, who the individual is and ensure that, not only the Status of Women Council but all groups that need to know – because this is an important service. It's important to women throughout the province. That's why, even before that coordinator position has been identified and put in place, the process has initiated, started, but training is ongoing for health professionals throughout the province because it is important that that training is provided.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, it's dust season in Labrador West. It affects the quality of life of my constituents and many worry about the long-term health effects from this.

I ask the Minister of Environment: Will his department finally review the legislation and regulations and hold industries accountable for dust due to industrial and commercial operations in this province

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

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question; I understand how important it is for the people that he represents.

I know we're tasked with this as well in our department and we've already reached out to the proponents, the developers that are up there. I am going to keep the hon. Member abreast of what the discussions are. We're going to try to keep them accountable to making sure the dust is down.

My understanding is that they've moved on a dust control mitigation process earlier than they have in the past. We're going to continue to hold their feet to the fire on this one, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

**Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees**

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

**B. WARR:** Speaker, pursuant to the motion of referral of March 23, 2023, and in

accordance with Standing Order 72, the Resource Committee met on five occasions: March 23, April 3, April 4, April 25 and May 8, 2023.

The Resource Committee have considered the matters to them referred and pursuant to Standing Order 75(2) have directed me to report that they have passed without amendment the Estimates of the Department of Environment and Climate Change; the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture; the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills; the Department of Industry, Energy and Technology; and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, further the Committee recommends that the report be concurred in.

**SPEAKER:** Any further presenting reports by Standing and Select committees?

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

### **Notices of Motion**

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

**D. BRAGG:** Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Lands Act, Bill 40.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Bill 41.

**SPEAKER:** Any further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move in accordance with Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 23, 2023.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move that notwithstanding Standing Order 9(3) that this House shall not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 24, 2023, but shall continue to sit to conduct Government Business and, if not earlier adjourned, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I give notice that I will move in accordance with Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 25, 2023.

**SPEAKER:** Any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### **Petitions**

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

WHEREAS affordable, reliable and safe child care is a necessary component of a functioning society, especially one that expects to reduce poverty, create employment, decrease out-migration and increase in-migration, all of which are essential for a growing economy; and

WHEREAS accessible child care is much as vital and important for a growing economy and flourishing population;

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 ensure that accessible child care is just as much available as it is affordable.

Speaker, I presented this petition on Thursday. It was in regard to an email I had received from a very desperate women, mother, who really wanted us and wanted me to speak on her behalf to show the dismal state of the current child care situation.

She wanted her story to be told, Speaker. This is National Nursing Week. This is very relevant as far as National Nursing Week. The person that called was a registered nurse, primary position at the ER of the Health Sciences complex. She originally took this full-time, permanent position, which is desperately in need in our province, as you know. Her husband is a cabinet worker; he's a carpenter. He has many years of valuable experience. They have a three-year-old toddler; they have one on the way. They moved home to Newfoundland and Labrador from Ontario 1½ year ago with great hopes to raise their family in our beautiful province. They wanted to live near their family, but little did they know, the desperate situation with respect to child care in our province. As she said, the next to no options available for them for child care.

She originally had a home daycare provider, that didn't last very long because the provider had to go on maternity leave. She has been put on wait-lists for our toddler from Seal Cove to Paradise for over a year. Her husband had to quit his job; she had to leave the family home. For what? To

become a travel nurse. We heard the Minister of Health talk about that today.

Well, this is what's happening. We're seeing that we don't have enough nurses, as the Minister of Health mentioned in Oral Questions today. Why? Because this is what's happening, they're having to supplement their income because they cannot afford to pay the bills.

There's no child care. We need action now. We need action from government now.

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

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

**J. DWYER:** Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The closing of the Canning Bridge in Marystown has had a devastating impact on residents, fire and emergency services and the local economy.

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure was well aware of the poor conditions of the bridge, most recently documented in a bridge inspection report completed in January 2020, which confirmed the Canning Bridge was in poor condition.

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 begin the process of replacing the Canning Bridge.

A part of that process, Mr. Speaker, is about making sure that people are not impacted financially because this was not adhered to when it was found out. My take on it is that it's really impacting our seniors and persons with disabilities because, on a fixed income, when we add more travel expenses and tax

expenses and stuff like that, then obviously it's marginalizing them even further from getting their appointments, employment, social gatherings and stuff like that. So I have reached out to the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development with my concerns and hopefully we can get the taxi program or a GoBus in place for the Marystown area.

A couple of proponents that might be able to take on this so that we can get the funding out to them and have it distributed is the 50-plus club and certainly the town council of Marystown and the operations of the town. So, in working with the minister, we certainly would like to realize some relief. There is a need for the relief. These people are on fixed incomes. I know just the seniors themselves and the 50-plus club, they have a gathering which is very good for their social well-being. They do that on Saturday nights.

But, currently, because of the extra charges to go all the way around to go over to their location, where they gather, it's been prohibitive of them being able to participate, which is exhausting on their mental health capacities as well. In working with the minister, I look forward to seeing if we can get some relief, especially for our seniors and persons with disabilities.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I've presented a petition on this before. It has to do with the tuition freeze. I think this would be about 1,000 and counting.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador ended Memorial University's historic tuition freeze resulting in a tuition increase of 150 per cent for domestic students. The cost of a degree is over \$25,000, compared to the \$10,200 students

paid during years when the province froze tuition fees.

The average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 97 per cent, meaning they will pay \$41,810 more for their Memorial University degree than they did before cuts. That means that Memorial University will be the most expensive university in Atlantic Canada for international students.

Students are currently facing unprecedented threats to accessible and affordable education in our province. Young people and families across this province and country are terrified for their futures and as their ability to access even a marginally affordable post-secondary education is being ripped away. Low-income students and folks from marginalized backgrounds are watching as their opportunity to attend university disappears.

Residents of our province believe that historic commitments to funding accessible and quality post-secondary education must be honoured and protected to ensure prosperity for future generations that wish to study in the province.

Investments in post-secondary education and affordable tuition have supported the growth and health of diverse communities across Newfoundland and Labrador for over 22 years. Cuts to post-secondary education have jeopardized the growth of these communities.

Education, Speaker, is a public right that all students, both domestic and international, have the right to quality and accessible education in the province.

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 uphold the province's historic commitment to accessible education by committing to free education for all and

eliminating all differential fees, eliminate all student debt for existing provincial student loans, sustain the College and Memorial University with healthy funding levels that secure good jobs and uplifts the post-secondary sector.

Speaker, we heard it last week at the education town hall, it's very clear where students are saying that the cuts to funding to Memorial University is having a direct impact on them. It's on their backs now that the operational deficit is being made up.

Again, there are more to come, the numbers are mounting to more or less restore that tuition freeze and make it more accessible and more affordable.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Before we move to the next petition, I'd just like to acknowledge I think the youngest audience that we've had in our galleries to date.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Against tradition, we will allow the children, only the children, to participate and show their expressions if they want to.

Welcome.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Speaker.

That's a hard act to follow, I got to admit.

I rise today, Speaker, and these are the reasons for this petition:

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador introduced a 20-cent per litre tax on sugar-sweetened beverages at a time when many families, seniors and residents of the province are struggling with the already skyrocketing increased cost of living in the province.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows –

(Baby coos.)

**T. WAKEHAM:** I'm getting agreement – I'm getting agreement.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to encourage the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to cancel the sugar-sweetened beverage tax at the earliest opportunity.

Speaker, before I start, we all recognize the impacts that too much sugar can have on our physical health. There is no doubt about it that many, many products that are out there on the shelves of our grocery stores contain a lot of sugar. But the imposition of a sugar tax is not the way to go. There are a lot more products that contain a lot more sugar and, right now, if you look at our own Health Accord, the hundreds of pages in our Health Accord, you would hear there is nowhere in that Health Accord that they recommend a sugar tax to improve health outcomes – nowhere.

At the end of the day, what we really need is an education campaign and not a tax campaign. Provincial government last year budgeted \$5 million in revenue from sugar tax. They actually took in \$6 million. So the idea that we're modifying people's behaviour is not working. This is nothing more than a tax.

This year's budget will budget \$12 million in sugar tax. So there's no decrease in the amount of revenue that we are going to collect year over year. So, at the end of the day, I would suggest that all districts represented in this House of Assembly and all people of Newfoundland and Labrador do not believe another tax is the way to go.

We have to stop taxing people. This is simply a tax grab. It is not a health initiative, it is a tax grab and it needs to stop. I would ask the government to rethink the

campaign. Rethink the education – let's educate our people. Let's spend the money on education, not on taxation.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for a response.

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much.

I appreciate the Member opposite continuing to raise the issue around sugar-sweetened beverages. It's certainly part of that education that he talks about. It's certainly raising awareness for the people of the province of how detrimental to their health sugar-sweetened beverages are.

Let me quote a few quotes. The Heart and Stroke Foundation: sugary drinks are the number one source of added sugar in Canadian diet and too much added sugar is not good for heart health. World Health Organization: "Consumption of free sugars, including products like sugary drinks, is a major factor in the global increase of people suffering from obesity and diabetes ...." The Canadian Cancer Society: "Sugary drinks are the single largest contributor to sugar in the average Canadian diet."

Speaker, I will say to the Member opposite, we recognize how important it is to ensure that people understand about adding sugar-sweetened beverages to their diet. That is one of the reasons why we wanted to introduce this tax, to try and help concentrate people's understanding and knowledge. Not unlike what we've done with, what I'm going to call, cigarettes or vaping, we've added tax to those products as well.

Speaker, I will say, he did raise that we took in \$6 million last year on this tax; yes, we're taking in \$12 million. That's because the \$6

million was for half a year; the \$12 million is for a full year.

Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure that vacant Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, NLHC, housing units in Nunatsiavut are repaired and made available to those in need in a consistently timely fashion.

Nunatsiavut communities are dealing with a housing crisis and are facing huge financial barriers to building new houses. A newly serviced building lot now costs \$250,000 without the house on it.

Inadequate housing negatively affects our Nunatsiavut population in a variety of ways, including child welfare, families, health and justice. These areas are highlighted in the Canadian government's Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation final report.

Furthermore, in 2016, the federal and provincial governments committed to follow the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous people, one of which states that Indigenous peoples have the right to adequate housing.

The systemic housing insecurity in Nunatsiavut clearly demonstrates that there is significant work that must be done before Inuit in Northern Labrador can access this right. For example, seven vacant Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units were identified in Nain; some of these houses have been vacant for up to 10 years, despite the desperate need for safe and affordable housing in this community.

Every Newfoundland and Labrador Housing unit is important to provide relief in the housing crisis.

Speaker, the signatures on this petition are over a year old and I just wanted to draw your attention to that. A building lot now on the North Coast is more than \$250,000. It's more like \$275,000 to \$310,000. That's without the house built on it.

Friday was National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I just want to draw the public's attention to this National Inuit Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Inuit Women. This report, chapter one, talks about the importance of shelter and housing. When you look at the Calls to Action and when you look at what happened: why did so many women and girls that were Indigenous go missing? Why did it take so long for it actually to be drawn to the attention to the RCMP so they would properly investigate and note so many missing?

In actual fact, in chapter one, it talks about housing and shelters. It says here: "Access to adequate housing is both a universal human right and a protective factor against domestic violence and abuse." I spoke in the House many times –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The Member's time is expired.

The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development for a response.

**J. ABBOTT:** Speaker, if I can just respond, briefly.

As the Member said, the petition is over a year old and we've been working diligently on making sure those vacant units will be ready for folks to take up residency and contracts are in place to repair most of these units. We'll expect that they will be all housed and ready to go over the next number of months.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 7.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, May 8, 2023.

**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.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** I call from the Order Paper, Motion 8.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, pursuant to Standing Order under 11(1), that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 9, 2023.

**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.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** I call from the Order Paper, Motion 9.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 11, 2023.

**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.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to debate the Estimates of the Executive Council and the Legislature.

**SPEAKER:** It's been moved and seconded that the House resolve itself into a Committee of Supply to consider the said resolution.

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.

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

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Warr):** Order, please!

We are now debating the Estimates of the Executive Council.

**CLERK (Barnes):** Office of the Chief Information Officer, 4.1.01 to 4.1.05 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Office of the Chief Information Officer.

Shall 4.1.01 to 4.1.05 inclusive carry?

The Chair is recognizing the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Minister, did you want to go first?

**CHAIR:** Sorry, I'm recognizing the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

I just have a few opening remarks and then I am happy to answer lots of questions. I also wanted to welcome all the babies and families to the gallery.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. STOODLEY:** I guess, just for the Table Officers, I did volunteer – I told them there was a place they could change their babies in the washroom. I don't know if they have access to that, but hopefully someone can help get them to one of the washrooms with

the change tables so that little babies can be nice and clean.

Just a few remarks around OCIO. Obviously, every company is having to become an IT company and I think that's true for our departments here as well. At OCIO we have a mandate to deliver the IT and the information management to our government departments, several agencies, boards and commissions including the RNC, the NLESD, the Supreme Court, the Provincial Court and the Public Procurement Agency, among many others.

We also support, obviously, Digital Government in Digital Government and Service NL. We do a lot of, kind of, run the business, normal stuff. We're also trying to do some transformational stuff. So one of the new transformational things that we're very excited about is our move to Microsoft 365. So that is started. The OCIO itself is on that now and we're slowing going to be rolling all the departments under Microsoft 365, so that's very exciting.

Some of our core operational activities, we have government's core technology. All of the computers that we use, all the emails that we use, the backup and protection of all this information, and the OCIO gets 120,000 tickets a year from individuals, departments, for requests for action. So lots of stuff going on in the OCIO.

Obviously, cybersecurity is incredibly important. We devote a considerable amount of resources to making sure that our technology and processes are as good as they can be and keep our information safe from external attacks. We continuously work with the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security and Public Safety Canada to continually monitor and improve the information protection capacity of our government.

We have 295 employees in the OCIO. Obviously, we are challenged with recruitment. We don't pay as much as the private sector, but we are working to

mitigate this and we're hoping to appeal to a different sense of people who want to have a sense of public service, and hopefully give some flexibility that the private sector might not offer, but we are working through them.

We made a significant change to some of our internal teams to how we manage projects. We had a group of contractors, and so we recently made a change to reallocate professional services funding to move that money from paying external contractors to, now, we're going to have 13 more internal staff to help with project delivery. That will help us be more dynamic and keep costs down while still reacting dynamically to important projects and priorities of the government.

So, at any given time, we manage a portfolio of over 35 projects across the departments, in addition to all the ongoing stuff. We've been focused obviously on MyGovNL and Digital Services for working very closely with different departments, obviously Motor Registration, driver and vehicle services, MCP, the domestic woodcutting permits, moose licence and all that kind of stuff. So we're always working to add more services online for residents.

We really spent a lot of time – and it's very important to me personally that when people interact with our provincial government, they don't see it as one department or another department, because I think the general public don't really care what department they're working with; they have a need and they come to us to help get that need. I think government is a bit too siloed but we're constantly working to bring things altogether in MyGovNL and have kind of a seamless user experience or resident experience from when they google something, they go to a website, they do what they need to do and then they conclude that transaction. So I think that's incredibly important.

We're continuing to expand our online services. As of April 2023, we have over

350,000 users registered with MyGovNL, Speaker. When I've gone to other conferences and with other ministers of Digital Government, they are incredibly envious of the kind of adoption that we have. We have 98 per cent of people renewing their vehicle online. I don't remember the numbers but the other provinces are in the 10, 20, 30 per cent and they couldn't believe when I told them we had 98 per cent people renewing their vehicle online.

Just a few things about the Estimate's structure in general. We have five kind of buckets, two of those are Capital. We've Corporate Services and Projects, which is responsible for all new IT project work for departments and agencies and for the OCIO itself. We have Application and Information Management Services, so that's the support and maintenance of all department applications in use across government. Everything from Microsoft Word to all the mine's applications, the fines and administration, all that kind of stuff.

Then we have Operations and Security. We run our government data centre, the technology infrastructure, desktops, laptops, servers, networks, emails, mobile systems and all that kind of stuff. Then we have some of the differences from the rest of government I just want to highlight.

In our activity 4.1.03, Supplies, that budget covers all of our software purchases, subscriptions and software support and maintenance renewals. We have more than 190 software maintenance renewals under that line item.

Then when we talk about Purchased Services in OCIO, for example in 4.1.03, that covers the cost of our internal mainframe services and the operational service contracts around that and hardware maintenance for technologies that support all of our departments. Then in terms of the Corporate Services and Projects, these account for the capture and funding

required to implement departmental IT projects.

I'm happy to answer lots of questions. I know it will be quite complicated, but I'm happy to get going.

Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Chair.

We, too, applaud the 295 employees that the minister has in her department under this section. I'm sure they work very hard; it can't be an easy job at all, but they're doing a good job.

I'll start out with some general questions, Minister. How many computer assets are in use and do you know the breakdown of desktop to laptop computers, by chance?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

Sorry, I was up visiting with the babies and I didn't have all my sheets out.

I don't think I have the number of desktops and mobile devices, but we'll certainly get that for the Member.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Last year in Estimates, the minister said they were working with Crown Lands on a project. What is the purpose of the project and what is the status of it currently?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

So if I remember correctly, we worked very hard with the Crown Lands team to streamline the information and make it really easy to use. If you go into the Crown Lands website within our government or if you go to some of the online services section, you'll see that we've transformed the user experience of that information on the website.

It is really targeted, really easy to find what you need to find and we're hoping that we can help a lot of people answer their own questions and get the information that they need to much more quickly, without having to contact Crown Lands when they come to us.

We're always working with all of our departments on upgrading technology, but I believe the project the Member is referring to is our user experience redesign of the Crown Lands information on our website.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Yes, it is very important to make it as user friendly as possible with all these departments. We do have elderly people and people who are not so computer literate, I guess, so it is very important to those people.

Chair, can the minister provide a status of the LaMPSS program replacement?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

I don't have an update on that particular project at the moment, but we can certainly get it for the Member.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Before the cyberattack, there was an initial report about a cyberattack that could possibly take place, which said it was a serious risk in the future.

Is there anything from that report that could've helped us out, Minister, at the time or that we're going to take forward continuing on so it doesn't happen again?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

I believe the report the Member's referring to was from the regional health authorities, that report. I guess we are always trying to make changes that improve the security of our government. I will say, though, I am not responsible for IT within the health authority, that falls within the Department of Health.

It's also important to say as minister, and even in my past background in the private sector, sales organizations would reach out to me regularly trying to sell cybersecurity software and initiatives that they wanted us to pay for.

I just want to make sure everyone understands that any IT organization or company is constantly being sold cybersecurity products and using kind of a scare tactic as a sales tool to make money. That is something that has existed, I got a lot in my last life and we continue to get.

In terms of, though, the one the Member's referring to, I believe that was related to the regional authorities specifically, so I can't speak to that.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

I'll move on to 4.1.01, Corporate Services and Projects, under Salaries: Chair, last year, the budget for Salaries was set at \$4.6 million; \$4.8 million was spent. This year the budget is being set to \$5.8 million.

Could the minister please explain the difference?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

We have an increase due to the signing bonus this past year, the signing bonus and then the 2 per cent salary increase. Then, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we did some reallocation. We got rid of contractors; we were paying them a bit too much. Now we're replacing them with internal staff. We're hiring, I believe is it, 13 additional staff. That higher number would include the salaries for the additional staff we're hiring instead of using contractors.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Under Supplies last year, the spending on Supplies went over budget by \$1.47 million.

Can the minister please explain this?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

As I mentioned, when we talk about Supplies, this is software licence costs. A big chunk of that was we extended our VaxPass extension. We had a one-year contract and we signed a six-month

extension project. So a significant chunk of the cost came from that.

We also are moving to Microsoft 365, so you'll see. We have many line items where we've kind of used money from one area to pay for some of the Microsoft 365 migration.

We also pay for MyGovNL based on users. So we had more users; the more users we have the more we pay so that also is increased in the hosting and licensing fees for MyGovNL.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Under Purchased Services: last year, Purchased Services went over budget by \$969,700.

Could the minister please explain the difference, please?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Sorry, are we still on 4.1.01 because those Purchased Services stayed the same and went under budget?

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

**C. TIBBS:** (Inaudible) move on to 4.1.02, Applications and Information Management Services.

Under Professional Services, can the minister please explain how money was spent in Professional Services last year and where money is being planned to be spent this year?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

I think it's really important that everyone understand that this line item, under Application and Information Management, this would cover the subscription and licence fees for most of the software used by government, if not all. So we spent less this past year; we just had smaller than anticipated requirements for resources. We moved some funds to Supplies and then moving forward, we have a decrease and that's – we're doing some reprofiling to support the Microsoft 365 transformation, as well as hiring internal resources.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Under Revenue - Provincial, Minister, could you please outline how this revenue is generated and what accounts for the variance? I note that last year \$27,000 was expected; \$15,000 was received.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

I think it's important to know we don't go out looking for ways to make revenue. We have many agreements with organizations such as Provident10, the Teachers' Pension Plan, Newfoundland and Labrador Municipal Financing Corporation, Legal Aid, sometimes they need our services and then we bill back. So that shows up here as revenue.

I think there's also a timing here of when we get the invoices for different revenue. So we're anticipating another \$27,000. We don't really know how much those organizations are going to need our help, so

that's why it's hard to predict exactly how much revenue is coming in.

We react when they ask for help, it's not something that we're actively trying to go out and make money on.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Under 4.1.03, Operations and Security, under Salaries: Minister, could you please outline the variance in the Salaries line item? I note that the last fiscal year there was a savings of \$367,400.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

So this is Operations and Security we've moved to. We did have a decrease and that was a result of some vacancies throughout the year and hard-to-fill positions. In particular, we have a security manager role that's been open for a few years now. It's hard to find someone, an experienced security manager with the rates government pays. So we have other arrangements in place to try to manage that, but we do have an open job for a security manager if anyone knows anyone who is qualified and interested.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Under Supplies: Could the minister please outline the types of supplies purchased last year that totalled \$8.9 million and what is anticipated for the \$11 million budgeted this year?

**CHAIR:** The Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to remind everyone that we're not talking about office supplies here. We're talking about software maintenance and licensing costs. So everything from Microsoft Office, the cost of that and all the different software licences that each department would use would fall under this line. Then we also have an increase this year because we're onboarding Microsoft 365. So there's a change in the way we're handling Microsoft.

So in the previous status for Microsoft, we would have gone out and purchased licences for our desktops, Microsoft Word, all that kind of stuff. Moving forward, we're going with Microsoft 365, which is a different model. It's not like a one-time purchase. Now it's an ongoing subscription cost. So you pay every month or every year for Microsoft 365.

We're finding that across government, more and more software suppliers are moving to that SaaS – software as a service model – where you pay regularly rather than you buy it upfront. So that's where the increase is coming from primarily. This also includes the renewals for 190 software pieces across government, software licences across government.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I'll remind the hon. Member that his speaking time is expired.

Who am I recognizing for the Third Party?

The Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Chair.

Can we get a list of ongoing projects that OCIO is currently conducting within core government?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes, we can provide a list of projects.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you so much, Minister.

Can we also get a list of work that was done outside of core government and work that was done for agencies, boards and commissions, please?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** I'm not sure how much we keep track of because the teams don't bill every 15 minutes or anything. We will get the Member whatever information is available.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Perfect.

Can we get an update from the minister on the ongoing – the best way to put it: Is there any ongoing work around cybersecurity and any work that's going to be done to improve our cybersecurity? I know the minister, in the past, has said that we can't go into too much detail but enough to say, like, to reassure us that there's work being done on cybersecurity going forward since everything that happened in the past.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** So there is a ton of work ongoing related to cybersecurity. We are investing in Microsoft 365 which will, hopefully, take us up a level and will block –

again, I don't want to say too much. We have mandatory cybersecurity training now with the public service that we are reviewing and, I believe, we are going to be strengthening to make sure that every public service individual completes a cybersecurity training. I would recommend if any Member of this House has not yet completed the cybersecurity training that they do that.

So yes, we have an ongoing cybersecurity program and we have outside vendors that help us with that as well.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** That was my final question on this section.

Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Going back, 4.1.01 to 4.1.05 inclusive.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Under Purchased Services, Minister, could you please outline what services are purchased here and what accounts for the planned budget increase?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Sorry, what heading was that?

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

**C. TIBBS:** Sorry, it's 4.1.03 under Operations and Security, Purchased Services.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

So the Purchased Services, under Operations and Security, this primarily includes the mainframe. We have a vendor we work with to help maintain our mainframes and the operational support. We also have our data centre being reprofiled in this line item and we work with a partner to manage our data centre. This also goes towards hardware maintenance costs.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Underneath provincial revenue, could the minister please outline where this revenue comes from?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I believe this revenue comes from the federal government. I'll have to just get back to the Member in a minute on that, sorry.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Under 4.1.04, Corporate Services and Projects, Capital, under Professional Services, Minister, could you please outline what the \$5.2 million expenditure was for and what this year's \$2.2 million is budgeted for?

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



**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

Here, some of our projects, depending if they meet certain accounting criteria, can be capitalized, so now we're in the projects capital bucket. This is where we look at the project spending that can be capitalized, from an accounting perspective. I'm not an expert on that.

We had a decrease because with my colleague, the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, we're working on an immigration pathways project. Because some projects ramp up and decrease timing throughout the year, we have to react and move resources on different projects. We spent less than anticipated on that project and other projects.

Then the overall decrease is because we are reprofiling funding – because I mentioned we're spending less money on contractors and we hired the 13 people to work as project managers. That's where we kind of see that taken from. Those 13 people we were paying for contractors are now staff in the other line item.

Originally, the \$5.2 million would've also gone towards contractors working on projects that could be capitalized. Now we're spending less money on projects that can be capitalized. We're spending more money on projects that we have to expense from a current perspective.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Under 4.1.05, Operations and Security, Property, Furnishings and Equipment, could the minister please explain how the \$558,000 is spent?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

This would've been hardware: servers, desktops, laptops, that kind of thing.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Chair.

Just getting back to the security manager, could the minister tell us how long that position has been vacant for?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

I believe it's been vacant for at least two years, but we've filled that other ways with contractors and we have a vendor partner that helps us with our cybersecurity management. I guess the problem is we're competing with all the private sector organizations who almost have limitless amounts of money to pay for cybersecurity manager roles. We do not have a limitless amount of money to pay for cybersecurity management roles.

So I don't think this is a risk, but if anyone who has cybersecurity management experience wants to come in for a government salary, we would love to hire them.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Just one last question, Chair. Did we have a cybersecurity manager during the cyberattack?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

I guess a few things I just want to unpick. First of all, the core government, we did not have a cyberattack. Obviously it was the Health Authority that had the cyberattack.

**J. HOGAN:** NLCHI.

**S. STOODLEY:** Sorry, yes, it was NLCHI. Thank you, House Leader. It was NLCHI that had the cyberattack; it was not core government.

I did reference that one position, the cybersecurity manager. We have a cybersecurity team and we have an executive director and directors all responsible for this. So it's not a one-person role. We have many people dedicated to cybersecurity. I would argue that everyone in OCIO, part of their role is cybersecurity because it's not just one thing. It's not like I'm doing drywall. You can't really compare cybersecurity to drywall and you have different expertise when you're building a house; it's not like that.

Cybersecurity is part of everyone's job and they have to keep that in mind when they are doing everything. So that one particular role, we haven't been able to fill, but everyone in OCIO works on cybersecurity.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West, are you finished with this section?

**J. BROWN:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

If the House is ready for the question, shall 4.1.01 to 4.1.05 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.1.05 carried.

**CLERK:** The total.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Office of the Chief Information Officer, total heads, carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Office of the Chief Information Officer carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** I'll ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheads, please.

**CLERK:** 3.1.01 to 3.1.06 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall 3.1.01 to 3.1.06 inclusive carry?

I'm recognizing the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much.

I appreciate the opportunity again in this House of Assembly to answer questions about Treasury Board. This is the Estimates process. I think it's my favourite part of the budgeting process, where Members of this House of Assembly get to ask very granular and in good detail on every line that's in this budget. I appreciate the scrutiny and I appreciate the accountability. I appreciate the effort that goes into the questioning because I know Members opposite have to

look at every line within the budget so I appreciate that.

So we're talking about Treasury Board Secretariat, I am President of the Treasury Board. I can tell you they are a very hard-working group of people. There are about 256 employees and the Treasury Board Secretariat sets the agendas, prepares committee analyses and communicates Treasury Board decisions. Of course, that is of the Treasury Board, which is a role of the Treasury Board committee of Cabinet.

So it provides government-wide financial management, controllership and oversight to ensure the appropriate use of public funds and financial reporting. Treasury Board is also responsible for the human resource management and functions across government. There are 7,300 employees, plus 40,000 if you look across all agencies, boards and commissions. They provide the human resource management and functions across government; a specific focus on supporting the human resource needs of the public service employees and departments, including the development and management of HR policies, programs and services.

They also offer labour relations advice and services to government departments and public sector organizations. So a very, very busy group of skilled professionals. They negotiate collective agreements; they have grievance arbitrations and alternate dispute resolutions; employee relations training for managers; workplace investigations; they formulate labour relations policy options, as well as recommendations for Treasury Board; they do the administration of government-sponsored pension plans and benefits programs; and the implementation of key accountability structures for the departments, agencies, boards and commissions.

Now, this year, as Members opposite have heard me say, we have developed a new accountability framework. This is part of

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's continued commitment to strengthen oversight and ensure strong linkages between budgeting, performance and planning for departments and entities. A new accountability framework was developed and this framework applies to all government departments, public bodies, public and community-based organizations and, basically, any organization in receipt of public funds, from providing timely analysis and advice to government departments, agencies, Cabinet and the committees of Cabinet, particularly, to the effect of human resource management policy development and delivery of services to support the needs of employees. So, as you can tell, it's a very large and important scope.

Let me tell you some of the highlights, I think, of the year. April (inaudible), we implemented the pay equity compliant Job Evaluation System and processes for core government departments, select agencies, boards and commissions. We were successful in negotiating various collective agreements, which included the implementation of salary increases and one-time recognition bonuses for several thousand employees. We have had another clean opinion on public accounts delivered on time, meeting legislative requirements. We provided cost-of-living cheques to almost 412,000 individuals in this province and, of course, the logistics around the printing and distribution of those cheques was substantial work. I really thank the Office of the Comptroller General for doing so. We also assisted in the professional development of the finance professionals within government.

I can tell you they are a very diligent, thorough, hard-working group that I have the honour and pleasure to work with every single day. I want to thank them for their contributions to this budget. I'm very happy to take any questions you may have.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

3.1.01 to 3.1.06.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Chair.

It is indeed a very busy group, no doubt about that. I, too, am excited about Estimates, to be able to ask questions. When you look at the scrutiny and the accountability, then this is the place, in the people's House, that you would raise those questions and look for the answers. If you didn't have the answers, then you have those people within the Secretariat who can provide the answers for us.

You had mentioned in your opening, Minister, about one of the aspects that you have done was the cost-of-living cheques.

In hindsight, was there anything about the administration of the cost-of-living cheques that you would have done differently?

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

**S. COADY:** Concerning the administration of those cheques? I would say that there are always lessons to be learned about how you can administer and provide even more streamlined service delivery.

It was a Herculean effort, I can tell you, within the department to ensure that those cheques were provided on a very timely basis. You can recall in the fall of 2022, just as I was making my way to provide an update on our financial situation of the province, we were able to discern that we were going to have a good surplus and therefore we could afford to provide those cheques to the people of the province and very expeditiously and quickly, the department put it in motion.

So I'm sure at the debrief – there are always ways we can improve. But I can say that I think the department worked diligently and admirably to get those distributed very, very

quickly for the people of province. As a matter of fact, it was probably only six to eight weeks, within that very quick period of time, when we were able to get those out.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** One thing that was discussed on the Bonavista Peninsula was those who had passed away the year prior receiving cheques.

What was the rationale for those cheques being issued?

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

**S. COADY:** Well, certainly we had to have a mechanism and means to audit. One of the ways that we had determined it was going to be based on the fact that whoever was – sorry, I'm just getting my words straight – whoever submitted their taxes to the year-end of December 31, 2021. So we took that as the cut-off.

There were some people, unfortunately, who passed away. We couldn't determine within that period of time. They might have passed away in January or they could have passed away in October, but we said that we would allow those cheques to go through to their estate.

There are a lot of expenses, I can tell you. Sadly, I've had to settle both my parent's estates and there are a lot of expenses. So we determined, at that point of time, because based on the fact that they paid their taxes up to December 31, 2021, we allowed those cheques to go to their estates. That was the applicable tax year and therefore we allowed it to go to their estates.

Now, if their estates were settled, then those cheques could not be cashed. Unfortunately, the cheque would be returned to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. But I can tell

you from experience, very few would have been settled that quickly.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Minister.

I've got a few general questions of nature before we go to the line items.

Last year in Estimates, you had stated that there were 7,237 core government positions that were filled.

Could you provide an updated number on this? How many core government positions are now filled?

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

**S. COADY:** There are 7,314.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Was it 7,314?

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

**S. COADY:** Correct. So higher than last year. We have more people working within the public service, 7,314, small amount, but we have more people working within the public service.

Now there are vacant positions and if harken back to the Estimates process when we had the public sector, the Public Service Commission before Estimates, I think they indicated somewhere north of 300 positions that they're currently actively recruiting for.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** This is usually a fluid number, isn't it, because you have people arriving and at the same time people are moving on to different positions? What is the range of

fluctuation that you would generally have in the run of a year?

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

**S. COADY:** I'm certainly happy to get you that information. I don't have it because that was under the public service. So I'm happy to provide it. We did in Estimates, but I just don't have it with me. I don't want to make a mistake in the number, but it has been provided.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Minister.

In the previous years, Treasury Board and before them, HRS, would generate a salary detail report to accompany the budget documents. I know this was a point-in-time report, but it has not been generated this year.

I'm just wondering was there any reason why it hasn't been generated this year.

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

**S. COADY:** I don't think it's been generated for the last number of years, actually. I do know that every year, and it will happen again this year in June, we do provide a full salary details for those earning over \$100,000. That salary detail is across government in agencies, boards and commissions.

I do know, if I could harken back a number of years ago when the report, the granular detail of every single person in government – it was a tremendous amount of effort to produce that and I think it just was burdensome. So when we started to provide it at a granular level for those earning \$100,000, I think that was when it was stopped. So that would have been a number of years ago.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Last year's Budget Speech talked about the establishment of a House committee to review financial statements, budgets and the annual reports of Crown corporations and organizations. To my knowledge, that's not in place.

Could you provide some context of why it isn't and would it be a priority now?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

I pledged my support for that endeavour. As I've said right from the onset, I'm very much appreciating of the scrutiny and the accountability that the Estimates process brings. I had pledged my support for bringing other agencies, boards and commissions – and I'm thinking here of the larger ones like Hydro and the university – before this House of Assembly.

That is a House of Assembly requirement. As a minister of the Crown, I can't implement that, it is the House of Assembly and this is what I've answered in the House. I am supportive of it, but the House of Assembly has to determine, through the Management Commission, how that may or may not happen. I would leave it to the House Management Commission to determine the steps in that process.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Has it been placed on the agenda for the Management Commission?

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

**S. COADY:** I'm not on the House Management Commission, so I would leave

that to your House Leader and to our House Leader to have a discussion about that.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** I'm on the House Management Commission, but I know it must have predated me, since I just recently joined. I wasn't aware of it being brought to the Commission.

What is the attrition plan which government is now following?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

We had an attrition plan up to last year; we no longer have an attrition plan. We're actively recruiting for people to come within government. There is no active attrition plan.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Okay, thank you.

Last year in Estimates, you talked about a new process that community organizations could go through to apply for core funding.

Is there an update on that and is this process now available?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

Very important, we did add an additional \$5 million this year to monies available to community organizations and we spend – I'm going off the top of my head here – well over a hundred million dollars in this area. I just can't remember the true total, but it's well over a hundred million dollars.

We have been doing some consulting with – we had a very good discussion with – I’m going to think back, it might have been December – the Community Sector Council and they brought in a number of large organizations that do receive funding from the provincial government. We had a good, robust discussion on the best process.

We had presented, for example, that we would have one portal so that you come in – right now you can apply multiple ways across government and we suggested one portal that will be managed through the Department of Finance. We won’t be the arbiters of who gets the money, but we’ll be the holder of the portal. If you put your application in, it goes into the portal, so you only have to put it in once and then that’ll be disseminated across government. You will identify the core funding, where you get your funding across government. We’ll make sure that it goes there. Departments will look at their budgeting processes and then make recommendations back to a deputy ministers’ committee.

That would allow that we don’t have silos across government so that will allow for good discourse and discussion. I’ll say this as a make-believe example, but there may be a community group that can get funding from Children, Seniors and Social Development; it may get funding from the Department of Justice; it may get funding from multiple portals. So by coming together, there may be ways that we can improve the funding mechanisms for these groups.

So we are still working through that process, but it will be implemented this year.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Member’s speaking time is expired.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, can we get an update on the reclassification program that was ongoing in government for the core government employees, for job titles and classifications? Has that been completed yet?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

You’re talking about the Job Evaluation System?

**J. BROWN:** Yes.

**S. COADY:** Yes, the Job Evaluation System is ongoing and people apply. We don’t have, I don’t think, I’m going to check and make sure, but there was no backlog or there’s, what I’m going to call, a normal backlog. We’ve caught up with all those that had placed work before the job evaluation committee. There is a normal process where there are still some coming through because jobs may change over time.

I can tell you the Public Service Commission, who can provide – trying to remember the word – if you don’t like the outcome of your job evaluation you can go to this secondary group and that group – appeal process, that’s the word I’m trying to think of and I could not get it out. The appeal process is ongoing, but they have no backlog.

I can tell you, I think there are 97 positions in queue. That’s kind of normal process. So the backlog has been fully exercised and, as well, with the appeal process.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Chair.

Under the Job Evaluation System, is it only done by request or do they just take it on themselves sometimes to review job classifications?

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

**S. COADY:** Well, there is a process through collective bargaining where this may be raised, or it may be that sometimes people's positions change and they want to have a review of that job classification. I can tell you, it's mostly on request to have a review, but sometimes it is raised when you're in bargaining.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you.

Minister, can we get a list of how many locals are currently in bargaining or how many are due to start bargaining in this coming fiscal year?

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

**S. COADY:** I can tell you that we're in collective bargaining with teachers, with nurses. I think AAHP. I'm trying to remember all of them now. I'm sure somebody is giving me a quick message on the others. They're in various stages.

The RNC is also on that list and, as you know, we completed NAPE. We have some locals that have to come back from NAPE. CUPE is under ratification now. We've completed the doctors. We completed the dentists. There are a number – ferry captains is the other one that I was trying to remember, but it's RNC, AAHP, nurses, teachers and ferry captains.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** That was my final question.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

3.1.01 to 3.1.06, the hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you.

Just to follow up when we talked about the community organizations, it's nice to streamline it and it's nice to break down those silos, no doubt about that. You had referenced the Community Sector Council and not that long ago we had Penny Rowe here in the gallery. She's done tremendous work in my district, in Bonavista. Everyone in our area and probably here would know the 50-kilometre yard sale. Well, that was through the Community Sector Council.

All the communities over on the Bonavista Bay side of our peninsula, Plate Cove East, Plate Cove West, Knights Cove, Stock Cove, they were all part of a regionalization effort through the Community Sector Council. So there were lots of good things that occurred in my district as a result.

Every year in Estimates we hear about the hard-to-fill positions. It could be a mechanic in TI, or a specialist scientist in the department of energy. Has government done an analysis on the hard-to-fill positions and strategized on methods of recruitment?

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

**S. COADY:** It would have been helpful if you had been at the Public Service Commission's Estimates; I don't think you were able to join us that day, but I encourage you to next year because you have a lot of good questions.

There is a full and a new recruitment process under way. It should be rolled out very, very soon through the Public Service Commission to really make the public service an attractive place to come work, so we're really doing a lot of work around that.

Yes, there are hard-to-recruit positions; we are always looking at those positions. Each



department looks at them, but we look at them overall to see how we can improve our attraction and our retention in those areas. It is such an important issue and recruitment is something that the PSC has really focused its attention on. At the Estimates meeting that we had with the PSC, we really talked a lot about going back in the schools, in to universities, doing a tremendous outreach to encourage people to come work in the public service. So yes is a short answer to your question.

Not only across each department, but also through the Public Service Commission. They are doing a tremendous amount of work here. I think last year I was talking about 500 positions. This year there are 324 that are currently under recruitment.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** I think you had mentioned, previously, that the Treasury Board may be best to have the conversation on the retention. I don't know if there is any other information based on what the retention rate would be for the public service. We asked about the range of those people who may be fluid from one year to another. But what would the retention rate be for government?

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

**S. COADY:** I'm certainly waiting to get that exact number, but I will say to you that there are positions where people are moving. We want to attract people into the public service, that's why we're doing an awful lot of work in that recruitment. But retention is something that we're always looking at. As you saw with one collective agreement, we did have, what I'm going to say, a recognition bonus of the hard work of the public service – a recognition bonus was given.

But I'll get you that percentage. The retention, we'll have to look at specific

groups. I don't know if we have a consolidated number, but we'll certainly try and get you one. But I can say 324 under active recruitment now within the core public service. We have more people employed than we did last year and we'll ask the Public Service Commission if they have any further details for you.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Yeah, maybe we can go to section 3.1.01, Minister?

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

**S. COADY:** Absolutely.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** I notice in Salaries for the Office of the President of Treasury Board, you had budgeted close to \$200,000, but it came in at \$131,000. What was missing in that portfolio for that amount?

**CHAIR:** The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much.

That is an administrative assistant position that when the administrative assistant left to go within government, I had held that position vacant because I do have another administrative assistant in my portfolio as Minister of Finance. So remember that the Treasury Board and Finance were two separate and we brought them together under me. They are two separate departments, two separate deputy ministers, but I felt I only really needed one administrative assistant and one secretary because I do have an executive assistant as well in the department.

So it's just a matter of some salary savings because I don't think I have enough work for

that one particular person. We utilize both my administrative assistant in the Department of Finance, as well as the deputy minister's administrative assistant for my meagre needs.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Now, it seems like in Estimates for '23-'24, your meagre needs, is that that position has been back in place? We went from \$131,000 to \$200,000.

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

**S. COADY:** Remember that I may not hold that position, President of Treasury Board, forever, and you wanted to maintain the secretarial position for the next minister that may come in. So we didn't give up the position; we held the position. It's just that I just don't think for my needs, I need that filled right now. But we continue to hold that position. We may end up using some of the funding for that position for assistance or support throughout the year.

**CHAIR:** If I could ask the Member for Bonavista just to hold.

Recognizing the Member for Labrador West, are you finished with your questions?

**J. BROWN:** I'm finished with my questions, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Chair is recognizing the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** So when it comes to that position there, you're not actively pursuing to fill that at this time; it's just going to be a placeholder with the amount that would include that position in case down the road ...?

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

**S. COADY:** Yes, we'll hold that position and the funding for that position in case we need it throughout the year or in the years to come.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Just quickly, Minister, in the Transportation and Communications, budgeted \$1,000 last year, went to \$4,000 but back to \$1,000 in the Estimates.

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

**S. COADY:** We had a number of files that we were actively working on and my executive assistant and myself and my deputy minister travelled to Ottawa to meet with various ministers. So the money was for those travel requirements of having my executive assistant come with me to Ottawa.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** In the spirit of true accountability, which was in your preamble, can you tell us what that trip was to Ottawa on that particular time?

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

**S. COADY:** Certainly.

I meet with various ministers to encourage certain files for Newfoundland and Labrador. I don't recall exactly what the meeting was about, but it could have been on carbon. It could have been on equalization. It could have been on any taxation issue.

Remember the federal government was bringing in taxation on vaping this year, and we've already had that in place. I can get you a full list of who I met with, if you desire, but those are the kinds of things. So I would

go up and meet with – and I think it's really important, especially coming out of COVID, that we re-establish those connections and have some face-to-face time. I thought it was very important and that's why we did it this year.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Just quickly, Minister, while you're briefing me on that one, we can probably look at the Operating Accounts as well. That is 02, Operating Accounts, in that section for \$1,500 to \$4,200.

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

**S. COADY:** I'm trying to recall all the ministers I met with. I met with the federal president of Treasury Board and we wanted to discuss procurement. I met with ACOA. I met with Intergovernmental Affairs Minister LeBlanc. I met with some people in Finance. Again, really some files that we were advancing.

The \$1,500 is exactly the same as the budget last year, '22-'23. That was what the restated original budget was. So we're going back to that. The \$4,200 was because of that trip to Ottawa. The actual, I think, was \$2,100 to travel to Ottawa.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Minister.

In Executive Support, 3.1.01, again, here in this department there were salary savings of \$330,000. If you can explain those savings and, again, was it a position left vacant?

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

**S. COADY:** No, we've been doing a lot of reprofiling and we had some additional funding, actually, in support of the

restructuring within Treasury Board. I recall that we've done a lot of changes within Treasury Board. We've added some divisions. We've moved some divisions. We've done a lot of restructuring.

So what you're seeing here is really additional money that we have here for that reprofiling and for that restructuring. There were some vacancies. I think there was an ADM position that was vacant for a while but all were under active recruitment. That was for restructuring. You'll probably see some changes there next year as we normalize.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** In the Transportation and Communications, over budget by \$314,000 last year. Are we talking about the same trip part? That wouldn't be –

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

**S. COADY:** No, that wasn't for a trip. That reflected the increased mail costs for the cost-of-living cheques, \$314,700.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** That's good.

The Revenue - Provincial, can you give an overview of the genesis of where this revenue comes from?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

That is really cost recovery from the pension plans, so uniformed services, MHA, judges, some P<sup>10</sup> but that's mail costs and mail recoveries from those pension plans and that's where the revenue comes from.

If I may continue, Chair, if you look, the restated budget and the budget for this year are exactly the same. Really, the bulk was from the mailing of the cheques. That was what the cost was.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Minister, if we can go to 3.1.01.

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

**S. COADY:** 3.1.01?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Sorry, 3.1.03, Secretariat Operations.

It seems like as we progress the savings get more on the Salaries side. The Salaries here, close to \$900,000 less.

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

**S. COADY:** You'll note this even from last year. We actually discussed this very issue last year. It was higher last year; it was \$1.47 million last year. It's \$882,000. These are entry-level positions and because these are people coming in to the civil service, they stay for a while and then they go throughout and they move on for other career opportunities. We see a significant turnover in this area, significant turnover. This is where some of your payroll clerks, some of your really entry-level administrative positions are. We always budget for the full complement, but again, even with last year you'll have seen some drops.

We have about 43 positions that are vacant at any given time there. I encourage people to submit their applications for these

positions. Certainly, we are looking for good people to come into the public service here.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** To your knowledge since you've been in your position, would this be the trend, this significant as far as the —?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

Actually, it's improving. It's actually getting better. It's improved over the last number of years, but we do see significant movement. Look, this is a good thing because people come in as entry-level positions, they move on to other positions within the civil service.

As we've noted, there's been movement within the civil service. It's a good thing. As people retire, new people come into their positions, and this is kind of their mechanism and means that they come into the public service. It's improving, but we're always looking for good people here.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Minister, under Supplies, from what was budgeted last year to what we ended at, \$78,000?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much.

Yes, \$78,500 and, again, that's the envelopes and cheque stocks associated with the cost-of-living cheques.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Professional Services: Would that have anything to do with the cost-of-living cheques?

**CHAIR:** The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** The decrease, you mean, because there's been a decrease in that. It was due to less professional services than anticipated. That was the timing of the update to information management changes. So some of the information management changes didn't occur at the time we thought they would occur. So it's a timing issue.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Those changes are not scheduled for this year, are they, those anticipated changes?

**CHAIR:** The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** So the Professional Services, I'll give you the note on it: Actuarial consulting services associated with various employment benefit liabilities, pooled pension plans, some of the renewal negotiations for OPEBs – I'm trying to read all the information here for you – NLTA rate setting, pension administration, system maintenance and arbitration costs. So it's a full suite of different professional services that are required.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Is it possible to get a list of that, Minister?

**S. COADY:** You can have a copy.

**C. PARDY:** Okay.

Just for curiosity, back to the Revenue - Provincial, again, can you outline how the

revenue is generated and what explains the variance in what was received last year versus what is anticipated?

**CHAIR:** The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** This is payment services provided to pensioner payroll and teachers' payroll, salary and operating recovery. Again, from those pooled pension plans. So we have an arrangement where we can know the expenses with regard to the pension plan are recouped right here. So that's a group insurance plan; recoveries from the group insurance plan fund.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Before I go back, I just want to check with the Third Party that everything's okay with this section. We will be going to the independents when we're finished with the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** 3.1.04, Government Personnel Costs.

**CHAIR:** The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** Do you want me to kind of tell you what this –?

**CHAIR:** The Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** No, I'm just wondering the Revenue - Provincial, if you can outline how that revenue is generated in this division?

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

**S. COADY:** Sure.

Again, that is government personnel costs from the pooled pension plan from the Newfoundland municipalities fund and from sinking fund. So that's where the revenue comes from, again, those government personnel costs.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** So this ties in with the sinking funds? Is it revenue from the sinking funds?

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

**S. COADY:** Only for government personnel costs. So remember when we had Finance Estimates, all the sinking funds you saw them in a different area, in Consolidated Revenue Fund.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Only the personnel.

The \$83,900 from the federal contribution is for ...?

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

**S. COADY:** Sorry, could you repeat your question?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Just looking at the revenue now from the federal side. If we can outline where that \$83,900 –

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

**S. COADY:** It's secondments from the federal government, some secondments.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Okay.

**S. COADY:** If I may, could I be recognized again?

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

**S. COADY:** Just so everyone understands, this is where the benefits are for – this is the payment of the government's share of Employee Benefit. This section is for employees in government departments and retired public service employees. Note the difference sometimes in the Employee Benefits because it's an estimate. It depends on the flow of benefits. So I just wanted to make sure that that's read into the record.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Section 3.1.05, Financial Assistance: Is it possible to get a breakdown of the Grants and Subsidies that was spent and probably in particular any funds that were transferred out to the ABCs?

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

**S. COADY:** They wouldn't be transferred out to the ABCs. They would have gone all through within government. You would have heard, as a matter of fact, a few moments ago, the OCIO talked about the VaxPass. So the \$296,000 for the VaxPass that was not budgeted, that's where that money would come from. So it would be the VaxPass. A couple of days ago we talked about the blind trust for a former premier. That was transferred to Cabinet Secretariat. This is where that comes from.

I remember hearing the Minister of Labrador Affairs and Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs talk about the Beothuk statue. So that is where the money would come from for that and transferred out. Why it's zero in the budgeted years is because it gets transferred into those Estimates.

So if things like the Ukrainian resettlement, for example, that is where money would

have come from to help IPGS with the Ukrainian settlement. So the community initiatives; grants to community organizations, the \$5 million I talked about; the legal settlements that were done for the Department of Justice, that's where the money comes and it just flows through and it goes to the departments. So every department you would have already gone through and seen where that money is. So you would have had that.

Why it's less this year – because that's your next question, I know – is we just think that it's more normalized. We have looked at the last few years and kind of thought that this is more of a normalized amount and budgeted accordingly.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** More normalized based on the historical entries that you would have had on this line? Okay.

3.1.06, I know that in Grants and Subsidies this is capital, there is \$10 million set aside. If you can explain what that is for.

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

More normal post-COVID. So if you look back at 3.1.05, the one we were just talking about – in the post-COVID we're going back to a post-COVID world now.

Financial Assistance: This is the appropriation for any loan equity financing or other payments to support business opportunities. The \$10 million was anticipated revenue from the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper loan repayment. If you recall, and I mentioned it again last year, that during COVID and continuing right now, it has not been repaid so that is a placeholder looking for that. We are working with them to address it.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** So that amount there, the \$10 million, is Corner Brook Pulp and Paper?

**S. COADY:** Correct.

**C. PARDY:** Mr. Chair, that ends the questions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just have general questions. I'm not doing line by lines, they've all been asked. That's pretty straightforward. I have a number of general questions, I guess.

So the first question – and a lot of these are questions that have been posed to me in one shape, form or another from constituents and people I talk to and run into that have questions or concerns or whatever the case might be around the government's finances and so on and how they're being managed.

The first question I have relates to these retention bonuses. We started off, of course, with the incentives to try to attract doctors. Then that also morphed into retention bonuses for doctors who already existed. Then we were trying to attract nurses. Then we were into retention bonuses for nurses. Then Allied Health came along. Now we've had the Member for St. John's Centre bringing petitions to the House of Assembly on behalf of people who might work, I guess, in housekeeping and food services and so on. Now I've been getting some emails – I'm sure other Members have – from people who are secretarial support and so on in health care. We've heard the Teachers' Association and one of the buzzwords that they're using now, I've heard, is retention. I don't know if

that's code for retention bonus or not, but that keeps – retention.

So I guess I'm just wondering, Minister, given the fact that we have collective bargaining – which is how we determine who gets paid, how much they get paid and so on and there's a negotiation process for that. Now we seem to be into a second tier of financing, if you will, to some degree that could continue on right throughout the entire public service. Again, these are the views of some people who I've spoken to who have raised this as an issue or concern.

I'm just wondering, where do you see this going? Do you see this going beyond where it's already to, like, doctors and nurses and Allied Health, is that the end of it or do you see this going into, basically, everybody who works for government looking for a retention of some sort and now we're going to have negotiations here and we're going to have this here and we're going to be doing both and how could we afford it?

I guess that's the gist of what has been presented to me by a number of, I'll say, fiscally concerned citizens because people have their own priorities. Some people are more fiscally conservative than others. So these would be more fiscally conservative people who have concerns about where that's going.

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much.

This is an important question. We are in collective bargaining with some large groups at the moment. So we have to let that go through its collective bargaining process.

But I will say, as we emerged from COVID, there were some positions within government that we really wanted to ensure that we were able to both recruit and recognize as being very important. We have

been very focused on retention within government. But I will say we have to respect the collective bargaining process.

Therefore, I can't be fulsome, I guess, in my full response to you, except to say that in some positions where we're having recruiting difficulties, in some areas, it certainly was something that it helped us to both recognize and recruit and retain individuals. But as I said, we're in the collective bargaining process, so I'll leave it at that.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Minister, for that. Of course, nobody is begrudging anybody fair wages and that's why we have a collective bargaining system, to do just that.

I guess the concern was I think a lot of people would recognize the fact that with our health care system in particular in crisis at the time and the need to try to attract and retain physicians, in particular, it can cause a bit of a snowball effect. We've seen that start to pick up with others. I guess it's just a concern around how would we be able to sustain and afford to continue going down that road if everybody were to come forward. I was asked to ask it, so I did.

Minister, this is a totally different topic now, but I'm just wondering, I didn't see anything in this budget –maybe I missed it there, but in terms of Muskrat Falls, how much money is going into Muskrat Falls out of our budget every year?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much.

It's an important question because you have seen, in previous budgets, where there have been infusions of capital into Muskrat Falls. Now what you're seeing is the potential, and you would've seen it, I guess,



most recently in addressing the deferral account within Hydro. Sometimes there's money that's transferred from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in to cover the deferral account at Hydro. I think that was, if memory serves and I'm going off the top of my head, roughly \$190 million came from the budget this year, transferred into Hydro to cover the deferral account.

What that deferral account was, they were collecting all the expenses of Muskrat Falls. If they would have gone to the Public Utilities Board and asked for that to be included in ratepayers' cost – so by Government of Newfoundland and Labrador covering it, it does not now go to the ratepayers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have been clear, I think, to the people of the province that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador does not want the rates in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, based on Muskrat Falls, to double, and they would. So we have made an agreement with the federal government, an arrangement on the finances of Muskrat Falls, and we do have an arrangement that they are giving us some money to assist with priorities in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and our priority is on rate mitigation.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you.

I guess where I am going to on this one – and I am not trying to downplay the cost overruns of Muskrat Falls and what it means and so on. I'm really not. Even though I did vote for it at the time and regrettably so, I will say, based on the cost and the information. But I guess what I am just trying to get at is quite often in the House of Assembly when anything is brought up from Opposition and so on about programs or services or whatever, the answer you get

back from all the ministers is Muskrat Falls, Muskrat Falls, Muskrat Falls.

I just want, for clarity, it is important to note that, yes, there was a capital infusion; part of the Muskrat Falls Project involved a capital infusion from the provincial government and that was \$2 billion or \$3 billion or whatever. It might have been \$3 billion to \$4 billion. I can't remember. I think it was \$2 billion to \$3 billion went in as a capital infusion. But beyond that, the terms of Muskrat Falls Project, that is a stand-alone entity in terms of, it is there, it has to be paid for and it will be paid for by people when they are paying their electricity bills.

Yes, there was a rate mitigation deal put in place and we can debate how good or not good that was. It was some refinancing on behalf of Ottawa and, of course, the Hibernia shares, which arguably we should have gotten anyway, given the fact that both the federal government under the Conservatives and the Liberals both signed loan guarantees. As far as I'm concerned, they were just as much involved as the province in that regard. They both signed off on it, two administrations.

Of course, we have got to pay back some of that Hibernia share; we're getting it and then after so many years we have got to start paying some of it back to the feds. So it's not as great of a deal as it might have been portrayed, but it is a rate mitigation deal and it does get us to a better place at least for now. I acknowledge that.

When you hear we can't do this, we can't do that, Muskrat Falls, Muskrat Falls. The reality of it is that there's very little coming out of the day-to-day budget. You can't really say, we don't have money for health care today because of Muskrat Falls. There's some deferral money you talked about, but it's certainly not billions of dollars going into Muskrat Falls year over year.

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

**S. COADY:** I would say to the Member opposite, first of all, I know that you could have told me and other Members of this House could have told me what we could have done with that \$190 million, if we did not have to give it to Hydro to cover off the cost of Muskrat Falls this year. We have a rate mitigation plan to ensure that the electricity rates don't double. There will be financial impacts. I could have spent that \$190 million on something else, if I didn't have to give it to Hydro this year.

I will say to the Member opposite, we've had to borrow in this province so the monies that we had to put into borrowing also has an impact on the finances and the availabilities of money. As the Member opposite knows, we spend approximately \$100 million a year – no, sorry, it's more than that – on servicing our debt. If we didn't have to service our debt – it's a billion dollars, I said \$100 million – a billion dollars servicing our debt. If our debt was lower, then we would have that money as well.

So the impact of the Muskrat Falls would be on the rate mitigation, would be on the cost of the borrowing expense that we have in this province and I would also say lost opportunity because we could have used some of that money and time for other projects.

So while you're kind of looking to see – and it's not in this particular piece of the Estimates, it's in another section of the Estimates. There have been transmittals to Hydro, or even if there's not a transmittal of cash to Hydro, even if Hydro can pay for it, it means that we're not getting the dividend from Hydro. It does have an actual cash impact to the finances of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**CHAIR:** Does the Member have further questions?

**P. LANE:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

Just looking for an intervening speaker on the – okay, we're going back to the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** We don't require an interim speaker.

**CHAIR:** I was looking just in case he (inaudible).

**P. LANE:** Okay. I'm just wondering, we don't need to have one, though? No.

**CHAIR:** The Chair is recognizing the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, okay.

Thank you, Minister. I understand it. I guess, I just want to understand. That \$190 million, which is significant – well, first of all, to speak to the debt, we have a \$15.7-billion debt, or whatever the case might be, so you can't associate all of the payments to that for Muskrat Falls. I'm saying there's a portion, but let's be clear, we can't say because we're paying a billion dollars on debt that's Muskrat Falls. Maybe \$200 million of that billion we're paying could be attributed to Muskrat Falls, but not the whole billion.

Yes, because it's easy to confuse these things to make it seem like the impact is worse than what it is. Not suggesting it's a good impact, but it's not as bad as one could paint the picture.

On the money that's going to Hydro – and, again, I just want to be clear and get the facts here – that \$190 million, if there was no Muskrat Falls, would there be any money going to Hydro or is that entire – can you say categorically if I were to call up Hydro tomorrow and ask them: I can say well the minister told me that \$190 million is solely because of Muskrat Falls, or would they say well, some of it's because of Muskrat Falls and some of that \$190 million is for other things?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Chair.

I will say to the Member opposite that this is not in this section of the Estimates. I do not have the value of having the correct officials available to me. I have Treasury Board officials available to me, but I understand – and I will be corrected if I am incorrect – that the deferral account was comprised of all Muskrat Falls – all Muskrat Falls. Therefore, the entire amount that was provided to Hydro, the \$190 million, was indeed for Muskrat Falls. But if I'm incorrect, if it was 90 per cent Muskrat Falls and 10 per cent something else, I will find that out. I just don't have the officials; they're not available this afternoon. It's not in this section, it was in another section; it was in the Finance section.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** That \$190 million that we're talking about, is that an annual thing or is that just like \$190 million this year but next year there will be nothing and last year there was nothing? Or is that like \$190 million or thereabouts every year?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much.

It will vary. We're working on trying to get the correct official for it. It would vary because – I'm going to read to you from the news release: "To limit future customer rate increases and reduce financing costs accumulating in the Supply Cost Variance Deferral Account ... is paying the remaining 2022 balance of approximately \$190.4 million." It doesn't say whether it is Muskrat Falls.

I would say, it would depend on the revenues of Hydro and whether or not they are expecting to have additional monies, or how much money it would require to help with rate mitigation in any given year. I know that we are budgeting for it and there is always going to be a demand for assisting the people of the province mitigating Muskrat Falls.

**CHAIR:** I would just remind the hon. Member, we are doing Executive Council, under Treasury Board Secretariat, 3.1.05 to 3.1.06. This is the section that we have to ask those questions under. Just as a reminder, please.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm finished with that now, but I guess the point I'm trying to make here is the fact that we really don't know for certain how much is associated to Muskrat Falls. Not saying that any money that is going there above and beyond is a good thing because it's not, I certainly acknowledge that. But I would also say that it is very easy to paint a picture every time anyone asks a question of anything: Muskrat Falls, Muskrat Falls, Muskrat Falls. As if our entire fiscal circumstance that we're in is all because of Muskrat Falls.

If the fact that we have a \$15.7-billion debt, which has nothing to do with Muskrat Falls but we're going to call it all Muskrat Falls; the fact we're paying \$1 billion on interest every year is Muskrat Falls. When the reality of it is that, yes, a portion of that may be due to Muskrat Falls – is due to Muskrat Falls, not may be – but certainly not all of it.

I'm just trying to make the point we can keep harping on Muskrat Falls – and I understand why we would, 100 per cent. I'm

harping on it and I have probably more grievances than people on that side of the House with what went on there. I can assure you, I do.

But when we try to always say that every woe we have in this province is because of Muskrat Falls, all of our debt, all of our interest or whatever – which I'm not saying the minister actually said that, but that's the impression that gets put out there by not just the minister, but the Premier and all the other Cabinet ministers all the time is that it's false. That's the point I'm trying to make.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I'm recognizing the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** I have confirmation the entire \$190 million was for the Muskrat Falls deferral account. I just wanted to clarify that. Secondly, I would say to the Member opposite that \$190 million could've done some good for some people in this province. Having to offset the costs because of Muskrat Falls is challenging. A portion of the debt – and you're right, it's not the entire \$15.7 billion we have in debt, but it's a portion of that debt, and therefore a portion of the resulting costs associated with servicing that debt. We could have hundreds of millions of dollars additional to provide for some of the most vulnerable in our province.

I can say I'm saddened that we have to put the money towards mitigating a project that was, as I think even the Commissioner who did the review said was not the proper project at the proper time. But that's for another day. I will say to the Member opposite it will continue to cost us money in this province.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with what the minister's saying; I do. Any money we have to spend on that is money – but there have been a lot of bad decisions made over the years that got us \$15.7 billion in debt. That's not counting all the unfunded liabilities. We can't just rest it all on one project and say that that was what caused all of our province's woes. I guess that's my point.

Minister, I asked about the retention bonus. I've had a number of people as well – I guess some of the same conservative-minded people – asking about the fact that we have this debt. I know we've made progress in terms of a much lower deficit than was predicted and hoping for surplus next year and so on. That's good. I think the fact that we have this fund that we're taking some of that oil revenue and putting in to, that's probably a good move as well. But there are still people out there that would say that we're still not paying enough attention to paying down the debt.

The fact of the matter is that the reason why we're in better shape this year and so on – and certainly it's a big contributor, nobody can deny, is the price of oil and oil production that's created that bit of a windfall that's allowed us to do some things. But given that the fact that we still have a huge debt, some people would question all of the announcements that we've heard, like more road money being spent than ever before in our history; \$500 cheque for almost everybody in the province. Now we're going to be build a new arts centre. It depends on who you ask would say, do we really need it and so on. All the other big announcements, whether it be the penitentiary, new St. Clare's Hospital, renovations to the Health Sciences, a new place to replace – well, not to replace the Health Sciences emergency but a new facility in St. John's where people with nonemergency, like a clinic you can go to, you're going to build. Not saying these things are not needed, but there are a lot of

announcements, a lot of money being spent.

Some people would say are we really paying enough attention to paying down the debt, as opposed to now that we have a bit of money, now we're going to spend it all again and repeat the story that we've seen year over year. I'm not saying this to be critical. I'm putting it out as a question, based on feedback that I've received from some people.

**CHAIR:** The Chair is recognizing the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** I thank the Member opposite for his intervention. I am very focused on ensuring our financial health in this province. We have developed, what I'm going to call, a very solid and responsible financial plan that does a couple of very important things, like responsible debt management – and I'll talk about a few things under that and you've already mentioned a couple – and prudent financial assurance, really governance.

I would say to the Member opposite, I'm just going to use some – I always keep my key performance indicators and you and I have talked about this before, my key performance indicators. So let me just go back two years ago, 2½ years ago. Our debt-to-GDP ratio was over 50 per cent, and that's an important indicator. Today, it's at 37 per cent. So I continue to watch the debt-to-GDP ratio, we have to continue to get that lower. Our debt is lower.

I can remember listening to the former minister of Finance, the month before I was asked to become Finance Minister, talk about having a debt just below \$17 billion. If you note it, it is down to \$15.7 billion. A lot of that debt is made up of deficits; meaning you spent more in one year than you earned and therefore you have to have debt for it. The fact that we are two years ahead of schedule to bring our province's finances

back to balance is critically important. You've seen bond-rating agencies take us from a negative watch, to a stable watch, to a positive watch and that is because we've been so focused on our financials.

But I will say to the Member opposite, he asks about these infrastructure investments and maybe we should be doing something other than those infrastructure investments, like paying down debt. You would have seen last year that when we did have some additional revenues, what we did with it, we took a portion of the money and we paid it down so that we didn't have to borrow as much and therefore the debt came down.

We took a portion of that money, because there was a rise in cost of living, and we gave it back to the people of the province. We took another portion of that money and we put it away in the Future Fund that can be used to pay down debt. We're trying to make, what I think, very responsible and prudent decisions based on the fact that we carry this big burden of debt.

I can tell you that we're working every day to lower our cost of borrowing. That is one thing that I am focused on. In fact, we've brought to the House new legislation that I think that the entire House supported so that we can invest in our sinking funds, which are attached to our debt, to get higher yields so that we take that money and pay it down on debt.

So we're making those, what I call, backroom improvements; they're not the things that we talk about every day, but those are the important things that will help us bring down our debt.

With regard to investments in infrastructure that also helps our economy so that money turns back into our economy and we're going to have a strong economy, strong tax coming from that economy. It makes people want to live here, to work here and to move here; so those are important investments for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So it has to be about balance. We have to make decisions that address our financial concerns and the moment we don't see those being addressed, we should make sure that they are. That's why I am focused on that kind of balanced budget, making sure that we pay down our debt; use the money from the Future Fund to pay down the – being that disciplined around the Future Fund is really critically important.

By the end of this fiscal year, we're going to have \$300 million in that Future Fund. We can use that money to pay down debt. So it's all part of that, what I call, bigger strategic picture of how we're going to ensure a stronger, smarter, self-sufficient and sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador.

So what you're saying is exactly, I think, aligned with what we're doing, both being fiscally responsible, but socially progressive in a lot of ways too.

**CHAIR:** Does the Member still have questions under 3.1.01, Office of the President of Treasury Board?

**P. LANE:** Yes, Sir.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

I recognize the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Moving to something else here now. Minister, I'm just wondering, in terms of the money that we put out – and I raised this in the House there a while back – we put out money to seniors. We have a Seniors' Benefit, which is, I think, around \$2,000 a year or \$1,800 a year, whatever it is – it's somewhere between \$1,500 and \$2,000 a year, how about that? Whatever the exact number is, it's sort of irrelevant to the question, I suppose, but we're putting it out.

Now, I think I heard the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development say that

when you take the average senior on a fixed income and then you add that \$2,000, whatever, that we're subsidizing, the subsidy, then that brings them up to about that \$2,000-a-month range, which is really based on the pandemic. It's what the federal government, as far as I'm concerned, sort of set that bar at \$2,000, that's what you needed to live.

They're not providing that to seniors and here we are subsidizing seniors, really, on behalf of the federal government. I would argue that the federal government are falling down on the job and we shouldn't have to be subsidizing seniors.

Don't get me wrong, anything we can do to help seniors I'm sure everyone in this House agrees with it. We've all supported it and we'd like to do more to be able to help seniors. It's not about not wanting to help seniors, but it's about the fact that it would seem to me, at least, that the feds are falling short and they're getting off the hook.

So I'm just wondering has there been any discussions that you've had with your counterparts or with the federal government around raising the rates for seniors, I guess, across – well, it would be across the country, so that provincial governments like this one would not be forced to have to subsidize what I would argue is a core function of the federal government.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Chair is recognizing the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

This is such an important discussion around seniors and supports to seniors. Allow me just to say for the record, we provide over \$67 million for the Seniors' Benefit. We've increased it now by 15 per cent over the last year and a bit, so over the last two budgets by 15 per cent. We recognize and want to support seniors. We know how it's been

difficult for seniors. This is in addition to – because they can get both the Seniors' Benefit as well as the Income Supplement, depending on the thresholds and whatnot. We provide \$77.5 million for the Income Supplement. Again, we've increased it by 15 per cent over the last two years.

We have to be as responsible as we can to support the most vulnerable in our province. I know the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development is working extremely hard – I know my colleagues in the House know that – to provide as much as we possibly can.

To your point, whether or not there have been discussions with the federal government, there's a constant, ongoing discussion with the federal government supports, especially for those most vulnerable and how important it is. They would say that they have been doing more. Is it enough? I would hope that we would always continue to increase and provide, as money would allow.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you.

So I take it then that there has been no specific discussion around the Seniors' Benefit with the federal government about raising, say, OAS, or CPP or both?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

That would be something that I'm sure the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development would be speaking with his counterparts. I'm constantly speaking with the minister of Finance about how she can support people in this province. So there have been lots of discussions about lots of files in both CSSD and in Finance.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you.

I want to revisit another issue that I brought up with you many times. You did, in fairness, give me an answer in Question Period a while ago, but the scrutiny of our agencies, boards and commissions, in terms of budgetary scrutiny. The fact that we'll be going through line by line here, and at the same time you have Memorial University, the health authorities and so on – and we're talking billions of dollars of taxpayers' money and there's no line-by-line scrutiny like we're doing here. You did indicate in Question Period, the last time I asked really, that I think you said the Management Commission or something could look at it.

Given the fact that the government, by virtue of being the government, has the majority on the Management Commission, then would I be able to get some sort of sense or a commitment, perhaps, that you guys would bring it up at the Management Commission, if that's where it has to go. To bring in a system whereby we can start scrutinizing agencies, boards, commissions, health care authorities, Nalcor and all these places and start doing some line-by-line scrutinizing of their budgets. Because, as I said, that's really where the bulk of the taxpayers' money is going, flowing through those agencies.

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

A couple of things to this. I think the Member opposite knows that I'm supportive of any type of Estimates process, to be quite frank with you. I can tell you that any department who has a reporting entity would do line by line, would bring in and have discussions with these entities, as would Treasury Board.

I would also say to you that we have a new accountability framework that I talked about earlier that would also require deliverables from these entities as well. But I am personally supportive of bringing forward a new type of Estimates process for these entities. It's always valuable when scrutiny is held for taxpayers.

Again I'll say there's scrutiny through departments, through Treasury Board and through the accountability function. If we need further, there is the opportunity, I think, for discussion at the Management Commission as to what the House of Assembly could do.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Again, Minister, given the fact that the Management Commission has a majority of Members who are government – they control all Committees, ultimately – is that something that government would bring to the Management Commission? We've been talking about it for – you told me that you agreed with it three years ago. Three years later, you're still committed to it or you still agree with it, but nothing has changed.

How do we bring about change so that it actually happens in the people's House, publicly done, so that the people know how their money is being spent? Not through reports to Cabinet and deliverables and all that that they're required. That's all good too. But at the end of the day it's the people's money and just like we're talking about the people's money in here and it's in a big book for the whole world to see, then we should be doing the say thing with ABCs. How do we make it happen, Minister, so that actually happens?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much.

I also remind the Member, we do have an Auditor General, whose role is to go into these entities. It's not like they don't have any scrutiny; they do have scrutiny. But I will say to the Member opposite, my Government House Leader is here and the Opposition House Leader is here. I know that there are Members of the House Management Commission that are intently listening to this conversation. I'm sure they'll bring forward, as time permits, to the House Management Commission. It is a House function to do that, so I will leave it to their best judgment.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** I appreciate the answer. It's not exactly the answer I was hoping for, but I'll write a letter to the Management Commission myself. Maybe that's the only way and they can say yes or no, and then we can tell the whole world how everybody feels about scrutiny of public books.

The last question I have, Minister, and I don't know if you would know this, but you talked about the fact that we pay for blind trusts. It's in these lines here somewhere, a blind trust for premiers, ministers and so on. Are you aware or can you say, categorically, that these are indeed blind trusts? Because it's certainly been sort of thrown out to me that they're not really blind trusts. I think the term was used "operational" kind of trust, where in a blind trust the individual has nothing to do with their business holdings. It's a total third party.

They can't have any discussions. They can't have any knowledge or whatever of the business while they're in a Cabinet position. But someone mentioned to me that that may not necessarily be the case. So can you confirm are they indeed blind trusts in the definition of a blind trust, or are they more of an operational trust, where there's more access to information and involvement by Members under the blind trust than perhaps the public would be happy about?



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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

This is a wide-ranging discussion today. The Commissioner for Legislative Standards provides guidance to the Members of the House of Assembly to determine whether they have assets, financial interests or other sources of income that fall within the definition of private interests under the act. So it's under Part II of the Conflict of Interest in the *House of Assembly Act*.

There are specific rules around this that the Commissioner for Legislative Standards ensures are followed. So I would say to the Member opposite, if you have a blind trust – and, in fact, I have a blind trust and I can tell you that mine is blind. So I'm hopeful when I'm finished in politics, it will still be whole.

We have to keep those rules. That's the most important thing – you have to follow the guidance and the requirements of the act, and the Commissioner for Legislative Standards is there to make sure you do.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I would remind all Members that the time for these Estimates has been exhausted. I'll call this final section if the House is ready for the question.

**CLERK:** 3.1.01 through 3.1.06 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall 3.1.01 to 3.1.06 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.1.06 carried.

**CLERK:** The totals.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Treasury Board Secretariat, total heads, carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the Estimates of the Executive Council and the Legislature carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of Executive Council and Legislature carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Chair.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that the Committee rise and report on the Estimates of Executive Council and the Legislature.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

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

**B. WARR:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the Committee of Supply have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have passed, without amendment, the Estimates of the Executive Council and the Legislature.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of Supply reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report that they have passed, without amendment, the Estimates of the Executive Council and the Legislature.

When shall the report be received?

**J. HOGAN:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

**SPEAKER:** Any speakers?

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

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to tell a little story here today. We were discussing the Department of Digital Government and Service NL and I just heard the minister talk about blind trust. I'm going to tell a little story here because, as an MHA, part of your duties is your experiences yourself.

I say to the minister – and I'm going to go back a little tiny bit. Can a few of the ministers over there remember, in Corner Brook, when I was taken out of the Department of Service NL? I think a few of the ministers, I know there were some there at the time that can remember that, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to say to the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, this is why we need competent people in the department and a competent minister, which I'm not saying you're not. I'm just saying that there has to be one – there has to be one.

I'm going to tell a little story, Mr. Speaker, that relates to what the minister just said about blind trust and I was going to ask earlier but the time ran out for it. How many people remember Exit Realty on the Rock and the big kerfuffle about how many people lost their money on that?

I was the minister at the time. This refers back to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. I've got to tell this story because you were in Cabinet at that time in Corner Brook, I'll say to the minister. What happened is there was an investigation started on the report of Exit Realty on the Rock through the department. This is why it's so important to have good investigators.

Part of the process, Mr. Speaker, as you know, when you're in Cabinet, if there's an issue in the department, it goes to the Executive Council and if it's going to be a public issue, they usually give it to the Premier's office. That's the process for the PR.

The minister just said that everything is in blind trust and shouldn't be talked about if it's in blind trust. So when we had a meeting, who walked into the meeting? It was a guy who is the chief of staff now, Peter Miles. He walked into the meeting and I said: What are you doing in the meeting? Well, this is going to be a big issue.

**SPEAKER:** I'm going to ask the Member to get to the point.

**E. JOYCE:** I am. I'm telling the story of why we need –

**SPEAKER:** I don't see the relevance. We're discussing the Government Services Committee today.

**E. JOYCE:** That's exactly what I'm doing; I'm just following up on the minister's comments and I'm saying why we need strong leadership, strong investigators and why we should support that department and that division of it. It is all part of it.

So anyways, Peter Miles showed up, I asked him what he was doing and he said it is a big issue.

**SPEAKER:** And I will ask the Member not to refer to people by names, only by positions, please.

**E. JOYCE:** Anyway, that's a new one, too. That's a new one; I'm not allowed to refer to people by name.

**SPEAKER:** That's not new, Member.

**E. JOYCE:** It's only Members; yes it is.

**SPEAKER:** No, it's not new.

**E. JOYCE:** I'll show you lots where – anyway I'm not arguing with you anymore today.

Can I continue my story?

So anyway, the meeting went on and we got information that there was an issue there. So what happened is they came back again with another report and who showed up was the same person who is the chief of staff right now to the Premier. He worked with the former Premier Ball at the time.

Anyway, in the final meeting, he came over again and I confronted him. I said: What are you doing in here? And the investigators were there and I said: What in the hell are you doing in here? He said: Well, b'y, the former premier asked me to come over. I said jeepers.

Anyway, we walked out and that's when we signed off to go ahead and get it done, shut her down. Nobody else was going to lose any \$15,000 or \$20,000 down payment.

I was pretty upset, so I confronted the premier. Do you know what he told me? I asked him why in the hell are you sending him over –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I ask the Member to watch their language; it is unparliamentary.

**E. JOYCE:** But that's what I did say. Okay, sorry about that.

**SPEAKER:** You wouldn't mind please removing –

**E. JOYCE:** I'm sorry.

But I asked him: What are you doing having someone coming over checking on me? I said: I'm not putting up with that. Do you know what he said to me? I lent her \$400,000.

So I say to the minister – and I checked on it, I had two options. I did check on it, as you mention in your thing, and do you know what I was told? It's personal. It's personal. So I had two options: resign and let someone else take over who may – I told

that former premier, if you want a change, fire me; it's not being done. So I had two options: resign and let someone else who may change it, or stay there and make sure that it was done. I stayed there to make sure that it wasn't changed.

So the people that were in Corner Brook that day – I won't get into what happened in Cabinet – remember the day I was taken out of Service NL, it was retribution for that and I am glad I did it. I am glad I did it. I can get on with more stuff about that, but I am glad I did it.

This is why I say to the minister – this is no reflection on the minister whatsoever. This is why you need to make sure that your staff is strong in the department because that department there starts with you from birth to death and everything in between.

This is why we need to support strong people in that department. I'll say to the minister, you do have a lot of strong people in that department. When you look back at – and I use that –

**P. LANE:** (Inaudible) being in a blind trust.

**E. JOYCE:** I don't know.

**P. LANE:** How did that happen?

**E. JOYCE:** How did it happen? I don't know.

**P. LANE:** He had a blind trust. How did he know there was \$400,000 gone?

**E. JOYCE:** I'm not sure how he knew, but when the minister said it had to be a blind trust, I checked it out. Couldn't discuss it, couldn't discuss it.

It's pretty disheartening when the minister stands up – I know the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board was serious with what she said. But I just want to give you an example of why – and just take this, the Premier of this province is being

paid, yet sending someone over to find out what's going on with something he had in blind trust, not supposed to know anything about. It's pretty sad. This is the issue that I'm saying with the minister.

**P. LANE:** Good thing we have a Commissioner for Legislative Standards.

**E. JOYCE:** Good thing, yes.

This is what I say to the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL: keep that staff strong, keep the people in the department strong. I look at a lot of the regulations that the minister puts out. That's one of the most, if not the most, for regulations in the province is her Department of Digital Government and Service NL. It is highly regulated.

This is the whole issue of this Legislature when we discuss Estimates. Now we find out today – well, I've known before, but the minister said today – that here it is, the government's paying for the blind trust.

I'll make one last suggestion to the House of Assembly. From my experience with that and talking about a blind trust and paying for it for any Premier, is that we need an ethics commissioner outside any dominance or any influence under this House of Assembly. That's a prime example, I say to the minister, because that's an example that I went through. The minister was in Corner Brook when that happened – unceremoniously happened that Saturday morning. The minister is aware of it, that's why it was done. That's why, Mr. Speaker, I'm saying to this government here now, what you need to do is put in an ethics commissioner at arm's length from anybody in this Legislature, who can't be renewed, who doesn't care, as long as he does his job – his or her job – as long as they do what's right for this government. Because I can tell you from my experience that this blind trust –

**P. LANE:** It's a joke.

**E. JOYCE:** – is a joke. It's a joke, it's actually a joke. This is why I say to the minister have strong people in your department to make sure that this doesn't happen again because I had an opportunity to resign. If I did, it may have been turned and I wouldn't do it. I refused to do it. I even sought a legal opinion on that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my seat right now and let other people have a few words, but that's my suggestion to the House of Assembly today. Get an ethics commissioner that's arm's length from anybody in the Legislature, who is not worried about an appointment one way or the other, they're not worried about five years, six years, but do the right thing. There are a lot of capable and honourable people out there that could do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to stand and have a few words on the Government Services. I'd like to reference back to my questions last week when I was talking about the consumer price index and the cost of groceries. Myself and the minister had a conversation after, and I thank her for the conversation, and one thing that I had referenced in my questions was the cost of a basket of groceries in 2002. If it was \$100, then we know that in 2023 that same basket, that in 2002 that was \$100, is now \$159.

I didn't talk about inflation, but I just talked about the figure and the element that was in *The Economy* book in the budget. I know that in 2002, we had inflation and the increase was 6.4 per cent on those groceries. I did reference then that if we went to – the projection was 2027, that same basket of groceries would now cost \$174. My intention was the groceries and

feed and food security will become an issue for years to come.

The minister explained that once we get to 2024, 2025, the rate of which the increase will be is much down to what it would be, a little over 2 per cent. She is correct. I think I was correct as well because I did state what was in *The Economy* book. She's right in that the rate of growth.

The information, I think, Minister, may have come from your assistant deputy minister, from Elliston as well, which has a whole lot of weight in my mind from the District of Bonavista. That gentleman knows his stuff. I know his family well, and several of his cousins went into education. In fact, the principal of Discovery Collegiate was his cousin, who grew up with him in Elliston. That would have been Albert Trask who is now up in Nunavut.

I said a lot of things that I didn't come across in the budget. We look at the bankruptcy statistics and I know they're looking at the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, Department of Finance, we will know that on the consumer side, in January of 2023, there were 50 bankruptcies. In February, there were 62 and I don't have March, because I've had that sheet for a little while and I never got an update, but that was pretty significant. I know in February, on the business side, there were two. Now, January was zero. But I know that two was pretty significant if you look back on the last few years and find out where we were with that.

I'd like to raise about the Future Fund. I can remember when we discussed the Future Fund last year, and I know I raised it up, and the conversation when we looked at the Future Fund, we talked about the value of the Future Fund and what return it would get knowing that we were paying a lot on the interest to service our debt and that was a conversation that we had. The minister had found out at that time, had stated that the expected rate of return on the Future

Fund was between 4 per cent and 5 per cent, if my memory, 5 per cent, 6 per cent?

**S. COADY:** No, the spread I was talking about.

**C. PARDY:** The spread? Okay.

I know that we've had it for one year and when we look at the one year in the Future Fund, at the \$157 million, it might be nice to know what the return was on that \$157 million, even though it's only a short, one-year term.

**S. COADY:** It hasn't been a year yet.

**C. PARDY:** It hasn't been a year.

**S. COADY:** No, it was only the fall.

**C. PARDY:** Okay.

So in the fall, we might be able to see what that first year – and I know that a long-term investment, you can't isolate and extrapolate one year and take any real meaning out of that. But it would be nice to know where we are in relation to it, if it did meet that projected return on that investment.

I know it would be nice that if we had a Future Fund, much the same as Norway would have the Future Fund. In Norway's Future Fund, the dividends that come from that fund, I think are passed out to the residents; they get a dividend share each year from their Future Fund and what interest is gleaned from it. I am sure if that is not quite 100 per cent, then we'll hear about that a little later.

I'd like to bring up the commission of inquiry of Muskrat Falls very shortly. I want to bring it up for a reason and it comes up from time to time that we have it; not often, but I am going to raise it. One thing that is often discussed in the District of Bonavista is they'll ask: If we have so much debt as a province, how can we go about with all the

construction and what we are building? I understand that. How can we go and construct so much and do so much when we've got a high debt load? Because in the household, they would put certain things in the household off if they had a high debt load until you got dug out of debt a bit until you had your finances in order.

I would say that if we have services out there that we need to have capital construction, we surely need to do that. But the question would come down to, how do we do it? Maybe at some point in time, or when the minister concludes, she may be able to discuss this and give a little more insight into it. But we use the P3, the private-public partnership. That will mean nothing to those residents watching in the District of Bonavista but it means that we'll have some public entities work with us, look after the construction and we will pay them in due course or we'll pay them over a 30-year period. The term may vary, but I'll just use 30 as an example.

I have a document here from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and they were pretty condemning, I think, of the P3 process. Here is what their explanation of the P3 process is. The said, "Although government doesn't have to pay for construction before the facility is completed, the P3 deal will lock the province into a 30-year contract that includes capital costs and costs for maintenance."

If we, as a government, built a new school, a new hospital, a new long-term care, we own that right away on our debt line. We have it immediately. But this one here, and just to repeat it: The P3 model states the government doesn't have to pay for construction before the facility is completed. The P3 will lock the province into a 30-year contract that includes capital costs and costs for maintenance.

The next question that many people would ask is: What have we spent recently and what have we built? All these structures are

needed. We had the Corner Brook hospital, I think, which the project cost was \$750 million. We had the Corner Brook long-term care, which was \$120 million. The Waterford Hospital replacement, which is ongoing, being attached to the Health Sciences complex, is \$330 million. That's ongoing. The prison, even though we're still discussing that, it was listed in a document here about \$200 million initially, but it's over \$300 million now. We had the long-term care in Central, which was \$60 million in Gander, and the long-term care in Grand Falls-Windsor in Central was \$60 million.

Now, if you add all that up and add the total list to that, that comes to \$1.52 billion. That's a fair, fair cost. We've announced some more this year that may be a P3, may not. But that's a fair bit. Keep in mind that is stretched out and spread out.

Let me get to the inquiry, and I mentioned it before. When we look at the \$1.5 billion, that equates to about 30 \$50-million amounts of money. We have invested over 30 \$50-million projects, we'll say, that we have. Speaker, \$1.5 billion is 30 \$50 million, roughly. Now comes *Muskrat Falls: A Misguided Project*.

I know the Minister of Justice and Public Safety would know this quite well because I think he was quite involved with the Muskrat inquiry. Key recommendations, number one: "The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador should never undertake, on its own or through one of its Crown corporations or agencies, the planning, approval or construction of any large project, meaning a project ( meaning a project with a budget of \$50 million or more) without: a. Engaging independent external experts to provide robust review, assessment and analysis of the project" – that's sound – "b. Providing well-defined oversight after consideration of oversight processes instituted in other jurisdictions."

The question I would have for the minister would be: Where was the oversight on all this spending?

We do the P3s. Would it be Cabinet only that would be the oversight? My understanding is that the Auditor General does not get to look at these contracts or what happens or to pore over them and find out as to whether the taxpayers' money has been efficiently and properly expended.

If I'm wrong, I look forward to being educated on that, but that's the \$1.5 billion in P3s. I would think P3s can work, no doubt about that. The only thing being would be we need to know that if we have large expenditures – and keep in mind \$1.5 billion and more, that is 30 \$50 million lots of cash of the taxpayers and the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador are putting out.

Would it require oversight? I think we would agree in the House that we should have oversight over that money. So if we don't have oversight, what are the checks and balances that Cabinet would have in place to make sure that this money has been expended properly, efficiently because sometimes that's what's important on the oversight part?

Do we need capital construction? Yes, 100 per cent. We need it badly. We need it dearly and nobody is going to argue against that, but the thing that we've learned from our past mistakes was that we need oversight; on any expenditure that we have, we would need oversight.

I'm trying to think of one of the last briefings we had a question was asked, and I don't know if the Member for Mount Pearl - Southland asked a question about what our cash requirements were and they stated look at statement one in the Estimates book. If we look at that, that is what we need to borrow money for to make sure we secure what's here. So I'm assuming we've got a current account that we've got here, that's \$8 million. In our capital account,

under the budgetary contributions, that's increased by \$600 million. Last year, it was \$299 million and this year the gross expenditure in the budgetary contribution is \$885 million.

Now I just assume, and the minister will correct me if not, I would assume that \$600 million more will be for the construction. That will be for the P3s and for the construction of the capital costs that we've embarked upon. So \$600 million of this would be coming up here.

In our non-budgetary transactions, we've got the contributions of the Future Fund, which this year is at \$127 million. We had \$157 million last year. We got the Debt Retirement of \$589 million and then we have the Contributions to the Sinking Funds, which is about \$53 million. I would say that would cover what we need to borrow would be outlined there.

If we turn to the next page when it comes down to the Expenditures, statement three in Expenditures. The General Government Sector in 2023 was \$647 million. No, I'm sorry, that's the Transportation and Infrastructure. Overall expenditures, last year was \$8.5 billion. This year it's \$8.9 billion. I would say that would be the expenditure increase this year.

If we looked at our revenues, our revenues are down. In fact, there might be two or three lines there which may be an improvement over last year, but generally it's down in even all sectors with that.

So in looking at that, that's just a little overview and a few questions I would throw out that can be addressed a little later.

I noticed the Minister of IET when he was here had talked about, on this side of the House, looking for an equity stake. I think he might have said if that side of the House had their way, we would have an equity stake in the last oil project.

I understand that the equity stake that was taken out for Hebron in '24-'25, all the capital costs associated with Hebron are finished. Our royalty regime moves from between 1 and 7 per cent to 1 to 36.5 per cent. That's a significant return because when you take an equity stake out into an oil field, which we did with the Hebron, then your royalties greatly increase when the capital costs of that project is done. It's expected to be done this year.

So next March, it would be interesting to see what is the royalty return on Hebron with the equity stake and what it returns to us and that should be a significant increase over what we currently receive. That's because we had an equity stake. I know there's a bigger picture associated with it, but we ought to be getting a good return next year when it comes down with that. In fact, probably six times greater than what we currently received.

So I would say, Speaker, not very often do we get the *Commission of Inquiry Respecting the Muskrat Falls Project* cited in this House, but at least the key recommendations, number one, is to make sure that if we spend large sums of money, there would be oversight. It would be nice to know what is the oversight that we currently have for all those capital expenditures that we have and how does the government make sure that they're protecting and monitoring the dollars of which the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador are supporting in these ventures? If it's only Cabinet that is aware of it, then I think that would raise the ire of a lot of people in the District of Bonavista.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker.



I wasn't planning on getting up, but I know some of those questions that were asked by the Member for Bonavista, I actually have a couple of answers. When you got a chance to say something that's coherent and may be correct, you take it and I'm going to do that right now.

He held up the report from Justice LeBlanc, *Muskrat Falls: A Misguided Project*. Let's not forget why the report exists.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**J. HOGAN:** Let's not forget why the report exists because it was a misguided project, and I did spend a lot of time at that inquiry listening day over day, witness after witness, document after document, about errors that were made, lack of oversight into that project.

The question that he posed is: How do we pay for this project when we have so much debt on our books? Well, when you back it up all the way to 2010, when they conceived with the project, you look at the *Electrical Power Control Act, 1994* – and I'm going to read it out, because it's important. It says: "... all sources and facilities for the production, transmission and distribution of power in the province should be managed and operated in a manner" – and it has a list of things, but the one that's important: It should be operated in a manner "that would result in power being delivered to consumers in the province at the lowest possible cost consistent with reliable service ...."

So two things: Power in this province is supposed to be at lowest possible cost, and it's supposed to be reliable. Now, what I learned at the inquiry was the normal way to build these utilities is not to do a great, big, giant project that you plan over 50 years, which is what the life of the Muskrat Falls dam was conceived to be when you're doing your financial allocations in your delivery of power. You do it in increments.

You do it in increments because then you see how much power you have. So you might build out, for 10 years, a small hydro project and you'll say, look, our population in this case, we know, has gone up so we need some more power, so you build another hydro project and you build in increments to manage what's in the province and what you need at the time. You don't overbuild, which clearly, in this case, we overbuilt. We only needed about 40 per cent of that power, and we built this great, big dam.

So that was one mistake, building too much, when it wasn't needed and we didn't know what we needed. That ensured that we weren't going to have the lowest possible cost, because we didn't manage that part of the project properly right from the start when it was conceived.

The question was: Well, how do you pay for this when we have a lot of debt on our books? Well, the answer to that was not to follow the rules and the law in the *Electrical Power Control Act, 1994*, which would say make sure it's the lowest possible cost. What they did was legislate the fact that every single ratepayer in the province has to pay for that project. They have to pay for that power. So the money for that project, the money for the power, doesn't come from the Department of Finance, from the Treasury; it comes from every single person in this province, including everyone in this House. We were the security. The same way you get security on your House when you get a mortgage, the bank will come and take your house if you don't pay the bills. In this case, we were the security; the ratepayers were the security. The lender said, we'll give you the money. We'll give you \$13 billion because we know that 500,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are going to pay for it. So we were the security. That's what they did. Never been done in the history of this province. Never how Hydro was built in this province. Never how power was delivered in this province. They put the ratepayers on

the hook and they put the ratepayers on the hook without knowing what he cost was going to be and not caring what the cost was going to be, Speaker.

The question was asked, right up to the Premier's office, how much is this going to cost, and it didn't matter – \$ 8 billion, \$9 billion, \$10 billion, \$11 billion, \$12 billion, \$13 billion, Speaker, and it didn't matter. No, you're not going to see it in the books from the Treasury, but you're going to see it in everybody's pockets when they get their electricity bill every month. Except – except – someone stepped in.

When the cost was going up, your rates were going up 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 cents a kilowatt hour. But the Premier went to Ottawa, used his connections in Ottawa, talked to the people in Ottawa who he meets with on a regular daily basis, whether by phone or in person. I know some people think phone calls aren't sufficient, but I can tell you what they are in this case. Because the Premier got \$5.2 billion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**J. HOGAN:** He got \$5.2 billion to offset the rates that were going to go up because it was not built with the lowest possible cost in mind, Speaker. That's the answer to the question; that's how we're paying for it. We're paying for it because this Premier had the ability to go to Ottawa to get \$5.2 billion to help the ratepayers of this province.

I can't help but talk about the other part of the *Electrical Power Control Act, 1994* that it had to be delivered in a reliable fashion. You think about it; the majority of ratepayers are on the Avalon Peninsula. The scheme was the most reliable way to get power to people in St. John's, CBS, Paradise was to build a dam in Labrador, to bring it across Labrador, underwater, down the Northern Peninsula all the way across 1,000 kilometres to St. John's. That is the most reliable way to get power.

Of course it wasn't, and that's why you now see when there's an issue with the poles on the Northern Peninsula – because guess what? It snows there and it's windy and we get bad weather and ice; the power can fail. Of course it can fail. It's not reliable. It was never going to be reliable. But we did it anyways. Why? Because there wasn't oversight of the project and poor decisions were made.

Now you talk about oversight of projects, yeah, we'll have oversight of our projects that we decide to construct. But oversight of the financial budget that the Minister of Finance controls, this House is the oversight for that. This is what we're doing right now. We're debating Estimates. We're debating every single department; we're talking about them. We spent 75 hours talking about them. In fact, 74 hours and 45 minutes, to be exact. That's how much we've spent on them. That doesn't include debating the budgetary policy and the amendments and the subamendments. That is the oversight process for the budget, Speaker.

But I did want to stand up and answer the questions about Muskrat Falls. I think it's very important that we understand where the money is coming from. It's not coming from the Treasury; it's coming from ratepayers, unfortunately. But fortunately, the Premier delivered big to the ratepayers of this province to the tune of \$5.2 billion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

It's again a pleasure to get up here and talk any time in this House on behalf of the residents of Topsail - Paradise. My main focus here would be on transportation and infrastructure, especially as it relates to a couple of pieces of infrastructure that I would hope to see up in Paradise; one of them being a new high school in Paradise.

As we heard today, when I asked questions of the high school, the Minister of Education spoke to how the amalgamation of the school district would create enormous opportunities for school issues. They would be able to look at the change in demographics. In fact, he went on to say that his colleague for TI, the minister, would hold the pen on procurement of these. He went on to talk about how there would be a much more robust and data-driven process. I hope that's all true. I really do.

I'm not quite sure how the amalgamation of the English School District changes the demand for a high school in Paradise. The demographics, the numbers are there. They were there eight years ago when this current government had deferred the school indefinitely.

Now I've got to say, I have had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and staff to talk about the high school. It was a good discussion, no doubt about it. Again, no decisions made. It was just following the budget. I had hoped to meet prior to the budget coming down but it is an issue that's not going away up in my district. A new school in the district will help address the shortcomings I'll say, for a lack of a better word, of the neighbouring schools that are overcrowded, high class sizes and less opportunities for extracurricular activities.

So this is piece of infrastructure that is in dire need in the area. Yes, I know there would be a process to look at other buildings, bridges, school, hospitals, whatever is needed. I know there's a process for that. I think, when you look at it, and again I go back to what the minister said earlier today about a data-driven process. The data that supports a new high school in Paradise has not changed. In fact, depending on how you look at it, it would get better because the population will go up but get worse as you need those seats filled in a new school, because there are going to

be no seats available in the other schools as we go along.

So, again, amalgamating the English School District into one; yes, may be a positive towards deciding, whether a new school is needed here or a new school is needed there. I know I do have a little, I guess, lack of trust when it comes to a data-driven process because, as we know, last year there was a brand new school announced, a brand new high school to be built in a neighbouring community for which nobody, not the English School District officials, anyone, no one could tell me why or anyone why. Where was the data supporting that? In fact, I'm after speaking to a number of those from the district and some parents actually would prefer to have it all, you know, (inaudible).

But my point being is that you have a process that is going to be data drive, that's going to be based on facts, that is going to be based on need and you have these lists that the English School District had in place listing off schools and priority, where they should be, where they should go. I know the Member across the way got the school at Coley's Point that was announced and that was on the list as a need.

I do hope that moving forward there will be an announcement for that very much-needed piece of infrastructure in the Town of Paradise. It is going to help with the population.

Again, we talked about demographics, we know the housing starts in and around my district are up. I can tell you by just going around to Christmas brunches and brunch with the Easter Bunny, I can guarantee you that there are so many young kids up in that area. So many young kids and they're going to want to go to school in their own community. They're going to want to. Not overcrowded classrooms; they want the gym to be used as a gym; they want the cafeteria to be used as a cafeteria; they want a band area to be used as a band area

and not something else. That's what they want.

I'm hoping that this new process that the minister alluded to, the amalgamation of this school district, and the minister from TI said he will hold a pen on this. I'm hoping to have more discussions with the minister on this as we move forward. I know it's not going to happen this year, but it has to happen sooner rather than later.

While I'm still on the topic of school infrastructure, I'll have this chat with the minister, as well, but I have been getting a lot of notices – I won't go as far as to call them complaints – on Topsail Elementary up in my district, a K-to-4 school. They've sent me many pictures as a school. The building is leaking. The ceiling is leaking. There are so many of those tiles that are sogged out and falling. It's just amazing. You've got plastic and duct taped up to redirect the water to somewhere where it's not going to be a hazard. I understand, again, from people telling me, it's a flat roof on the school and they have heard from staff that okay, they're going to look after it. I guess the real issue here, too, they claim to be safety issues because some of these tiles have already fallen.

Also, what does this dampness do but create mould. This school, from what I understand, is lacking proper ventilation, like we heard about many of our schools in the province. There was a commitment to install proper ventilation in these schools. So I'm hearing from parents and those who work there, volunteers who work in the school, that it is not up to standard and there are so many things that need to be corrected.

Now I did allude to them, I said perhaps the department is waiting. There are six or seven weeks, I guess, left in the school year, maybe they're waiting until the school year ends to do proper renovations, proper maintenance. I hope, at the very least, that's what's on the agenda. But, again, you would

want to have it done as soon as possible because you certainly don't want any student injured. Keep in mind, this is K to 4. These are children in this school that are there on a regular basis and you don't want the ceiling caving in on them.

Well, I guess related to school, related to infrastructure is another piece that I brought up in this House many times and I have had discussions with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure on this as well, that's the condition of Route 60 through Topsail. Route 60 through Topsail, in particular, I'll say from the soccer club, up around the bend, up Topsail Hill, the roadway is in deplorable condition.

In my chats with the minister and with the mayor, I know they're trying to work on some agreement to look at how that road is looked after in the long term, but right now it's still in deplorable condition and it still falls under the purview of the provincial government. It's a real danger area. This is an intersection that's close to Topsail Elementary. It actually has crosswalks going across some of these sections of the highway, Route 60. Some of the crosswalks are painted right through the ruts and crevices in the road.

I mean, you could walk across that crosswalk, no problem to break an ankle if you're not watching where you're going. It's like we talk about people out painting potholes. Well, this is what it looks like when you go across the crosswalks in this school zone. The road is cratered and pitted; you have crosswalks painted through there. So this is a serious issue that needs to be resolved.

I've frequently taken long walks along there and up through Route 60 in the daytime and it's a chore, it's a danger. We have sections of sidewalks that are completed, curb and gutter completed. There are other sections where there's no curb and gutter. In fact, there is hardly a shoulder to the road in some sections. After any kind of rainfall or

runoff there are always huge craters running down the shoulders of those roads.

I don't mind saying, I was out walking one night the winter along there. No one saw me but you'll all know now, like that, off I went into the gutter. Anyway, I broke nothing but my pride, I guess, I hurt nothing but my pride in crawling up out of the gutter and nothing broken, but it could easily have turned out with a broken ankle or something else broken. It was in an area where the sidewalk ended and you went to the shoulder of the road. There were crevices in it and not sufficient lighting on the road.

I do know of one resident who actually broke an ankle walking the same section. So it really is a safety issue. When you think about it, how close these areas are to the school zones, and you have children walking along those roads. In particular, I noted earlier in the year, about walking those roads in the winter, when there are no sidewalks. It's a real danger.

If anyone knows the section that goes up Topsail Hill, well there is no sidewalk on either side. In fact, the properties are pretty close to the border of the road. On the other side, there's a guardrail, of which, again, there are huge crevices along that road – huge crevices. I have reached out to the minister and I will applaud him, he's been very quick in getting someone to go out and look at those areas and repair them and fill them. But my point being is, it needs something more permanent for people walking those roads.

I know we talk about health and wellness and more fitness and that. Well, you have to have a place to walk. You have to have a place to get out and do that. This is very close to a pretty big tourist attraction, being Topsail Beach of which they have many events throughout the year, the summer down there. Cars are parked everywhere trying to get to these events. So there's actually nowhere for them to park along the

shoulders, it just becomes such a safety hazard.

Coming up around that bend, I mean, if you're out walking, and I've been out and I know to walk facing traffic. But I can tell you, when they come around those bends in the middle of the night with their high beams on, I know what they're doing, they're trying to see what's head of them, but it's very difficult if you're a walker to see the crevices in the road.

I see the Speaker rolling me along. I guess you're all getting hungry.

**SPEAKER:** No, actually the time for debate has expired; the 75 hours has expiry.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The motion is that the report from the Government Services Committee be concurred.

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.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I move that the House do now recess until 6:15 p.m.

**SPEAKER:** This House do stand recessed until 6:15 p.m.