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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA*

Wednesday

May 10, 2023

The House met at 10 a.m.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

Admit strangers.

**Government Business**

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

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

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

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

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that notwithstanding Standing Order 9(3) 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:** 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:** 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

pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 23, 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:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 8.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 25, 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:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 3.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole

on Ways and Means to consider a certain resolution and a bill relating to the raising of loans by the province, Bill 37.

**SPEAKER:** The motion is that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of Ways and Means.

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 related resolution and Bill 37.

### Resolution

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

*"That it is expedient to bring in a measure to authorize the raising from time to time by way of loan on the credit of the province a sum of money not exceeding \$1,500,000,000."*

**CHAIR:** Shall the resolution carry?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to the Members of the House of Assembly for their involvement in debate of budget 2023-2024.

Chair, *Budget 2023* was tabled in the House of Assembly on March 23, 2023, and identified a borrowing requirement of \$1.5 billion for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024. Today, we are introducing the *Loan Act, 2023*. Under the authority of the *Loan Act, 2023*, and section 38 of the *Financial Administration Act*, we'll raise by way of loans not exceeding the amount of \$1.5 billion.

The *Loan Act, 2023*, will continue in full force and in effect until the \$1.5 billion limit is reached or replaced by a subsequent loan act. The last loan act passed by the Legislature was the *Loan Act, 2022*, which provided long-term borrowing authority of up to \$2.7 billion. So as of March 31, 2023, the province borrowed \$1.7 billion in long-term borrowing. This is significant as it shows that we lowered our anticipated borrowing for last year by a billion dollars.

The *Financial Administration Act* authorizes new borrowings for the purpose of redeeming or retiring debt, making sinking fund contributions or for retiring unfunded pension liabilities. The *Loan Act, 2023*, is required in order to provide specific long-term borrowing authority to meet the 2023-2024 budgetary requirements.

Now, I'd like to point out that of this \$1.5 billion in new borrowing, \$900 million is required in order to allow the province to meet its financial commitments. This includes capital account spending for things like infrastructure, including roads, health care and capital assets. Some examples of that are the construction of the new regional hospital in Corner Brook; the adult mental health and addictions hospital in St. John's; renovations and improvements for the health care facilities in the acquisition of new health care equipment; redevelopment of the Health Sciences Centre; planning and construction of three new schools: one in Cartwright, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and Kenmount Terrace, as well as the redevelopment of the school in Pilley's Island; for the planning and procurement of

the new hospital to replace St. Clare's Mercy Hospital; the new Cardiovascular and Stroke Institute; as well as money to advance work on a new correctional facility to replace Her Majesty's Penitentiary. That's over \$7 million allocated for that alone. And debt repayments coming due in '23-'24 consist of \$600 million. That is important to note that we're not just borrowing exclusively to pay down our debt.

Government continues to be committed to improving Treasury management. Monies borrowed are used to pay for government programs and services or to service the existing debt. Like all Canadian provinces, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador funds its borrowing requirements by issuing bonds in capital markets. We issue publicly traded debentures through a syndicate of investment dealers. These bonds are publicly traded and primarily held by a broad base of institutional investors.

As part of our debt management plan, earlier this year we officially launched the province's European borrowing program, though there has been no debt issuance to date. By establishing the European borrowing program and listing with the London Stock Exchange, Newfoundland and Labrador has the option to issue bonds in the European capital market, in addition to existing domestic Canadian market to meet its borrowing requirements.

Diversifying the province's investor base and broadening the reach to international markets provides an opportunity to continue to lower borrowing costs. This is part of the government's strategic financial plan to return to balanced budgets, lower the cost of borrowing and decrease the debt.

It includes fixing the financing of the Muskrat Falls Project through a \$5.2-billion rate mitigation agreement with the federal government; prudent fiscal governance, including transformation and modernization of government; strengthening the role of the Auditor General and balanced budget

legislation; and responsible debt management, including effective Treasury management, optimizing investment performance and establishing a Future Fund.

Chair, our plan is working. We are seeing results through such things as stable credit ratings, improved financial outlooks and the GDP ratio of approximately 37 per cent in '22-'23. In 2020 it was well over 50 per cent. We are continuing on a path to achieve a stronger, smarter, self-sufficient, sustainable Newfoundland and Labrador.

With that, Chair, I'll take my chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

Again, it's an honour to stand here. As we are in the final debate stages of the 2023-2024 budget of Newfoundland and Labrador, nearly a \$10-billion budget process and as the minister had outlined and I've spoken to it, myself and my colleagues, and other Members of the House, about the protocol and the process here on a budgetary process. We've spent 75 hours in debate.

We've had Estimates continuously where we drilled down on particulars in line departments on the financing, the expenditures, the change in policies, what they reflect and the change in financing from last year to this year, what was spent, what wasn't, what is new spends, what is carry-over spends as part of the process here. We wanted to do that so those who are watching would have a better understanding of exactly the accountability for spending the taxpayers' money.

The second avenue was we wanted to make sure that everybody in this House is seen in a transparent and open light so that

any questions that people may have – and we've had them where on a moment's notice someone will send an email or a text to one of us when we're in Committee and say I don't understand this. What will happen with this program? Then we get the opportunity to ask about the line to ministers.

I'm happy to say the ministers were extremely co-operative in this process and they had very professional and talented and experienced bureaucrats with them to be able to get the line items – because there is no way any minister would know the integral workings of every program and service within government.

I remember one time as minister of Transportation and Works, at the time, and being in Estimates and having one of the Opposition Members continuously asking me about culverts, the size of a culvert in a drain in a particular area. You know, while I found it comical at the point, it was a bit agitating because I wanted to talk about the bigger picture, how we would get to improving infrastructure and what were the priorities in infrastructure as part of that. While I understood it was a priority for that Member in a particular area but that's why we have regional offices to be able to deal with specific things on the ground and address those particular issues.

So I am glad to say, from our perspective – and I have watched my caucus shadow ministers here do a very professional job in working with the line departments and the ministers to ask questions that were relevant to explaining exactly the expenditure items and the revenue items in some cases, and then making it clear from a minister's perspective and their staff to the general public of exactly where the money was going to be spent and, hopefully, what the benefits would be for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Now, there were times that my colleagues here, and even myself, didn't agree with the

approach that was being used by a particular minister in a program or service that we didn't feel was the priority. But that is the rights and the privileges of the House of Assembly; we're not always going to agree. But we will agree that whatever programs and services are put forward, they should be thought out and they should reflect the particular needs of the majority of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It may not, and you'll probably never be able to do this no matter what administration is there, be able to address all the particular issues, needs and wants of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and we understand that.

I echo that to any future person who wants to get into politics, to think that you can come in and address every issue that you have heard from people, unfortunately it is not possible at any given time. You may be able to address them all over a period of time, but there has to be priorities put in play and that is where the budgetary process comes in.

Line departments will sit months in advance based on issues, programs, policies, expenditures and revenues from the previous year, look at what our continuous programs and services that need to be maintained – and there are certain things that need to be maintained. Our health care system needs to be maintained, our education system, our infrastructure system and supports for the most vulnerable. If it is seniors, if it is special needs adults and children, all of these particular things and there is a multitude of other priorities that have to be.

We have to find ways to drive our industries. If it is the fishing industry, particularly, if it is new innovative industries, if it is the IT industry, if it is the mineral industry, if it is the oil and gas industry, if it is all the other things that need to be done, programs and services must reflect exactly what is there. To do that, you obviously must have a

budgetary process that generates the amount of money you need to do it.

In some cases – and I know economists might question you're borrowing money above and beyond what you're generating from a revenue perspective, but there are times, particularly if you have a long-term plan, where you know you're going to get to a balanced budget and you're probably going to get to a surplus, so it is beneficial and it is a good investment, the economy of scale process, to invest by borrowing in a program or a service necessary so that you're in a better place to generate more revenue and actually have a surplus that you can then put into either other programs or pay down on the debt that you borrowed against to minimize that.

There is a moving part that is continuous in the financial operations of any government as part of that process. One of them, and what we're talking about here, is Bill 37, to authorize the raising of monies by the way of loan by the province. Monies have to be borrowed. The expenditures and the revenues that are generated in the budget are for a whole 12-month cycle. Now there's always carry-over because at times it's impossible to spend all the monies based on contracts that may go out, things that get delayed and things that get deferred as part of that process. In other cases, there may be emergency spending that may have to take place that you didn't anticipate. So there has to be contingencies built into that.

But while you're waiting to generate your revenues, you have to be able to have the ability to continue to have the civil service work and provide the services, make sure that we have our health care and our education, our infrastructure as part of that. So initially, you have to borrow monies quicker and immediately, and you have to borrow beyond what you're probably going to generate from a revenue perspective. In some cases, if there's a revenue going to be generated from another outside entity, like the federal government, then obviously the

payment process there it may be quarterly, it may be once a year and it could be later in the year. So there are monies that need to be done upfront.

So it's a standard process that is used by every administration. It varies on the amount that has to be borrowed upfront and that obviously has a bearing on the budget that's being put forward. This is a very, very substantial budget at nearly \$10 billion. One of the highest budgets that we've ever had in Newfoundland and Labrador's history as part of that process. We, on this side, have had the privilege and the responsibility of ensuring that that \$10 billion is going to go to benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So we've been very diligent and my caucus Members have been very diligent here and the staff that work for us in doing research and digging down deep to get clarification on exact programs and services and how it's going to benefit individuals who may be able to avail of certain programs and services, and to ensure that there's proper accountability on every cent that's been spent of taxpayers' money by any line department in Newfoundland and Labrador while, at the same time, ensuring that we stand up for our equitable, fair share from Ottawa when it comes to transfers or program development or partnership development, depending on what's happening here. But also to find ways to expedite the spending because people need immediate interventions.

The Minister of Infrastructure will understand while you can tout, very quickly, we're coming out with early tenders and it's great – I liked the concept; it was administered there. We had started that in the last year that I was there to move those along because the industry said we could do it. But now the industry are telling me the problems we have with that is there's not enough support staff within the department from an engineering point of view to be able to sign off on all the contracts that come in

in an expedited way so that the majority of that work can be done and completed within the fiscal year. But particularly in the construction year and, in some cases, the paving year because it's shortened by four months, or almost five when it comes to a fiscal end, so there are some challenges there.

That's not necessarily on the minister or his department; it is because they're responsible for it, but in some cases there are just not – and we're running into a number of shortfalls in every profession – enough professionals available to be able to do it. They're either gone on to something else or, in some cases, maybe there's a lull in not being proactive in training more people or encouraging more to go into specific areas as part of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I only say that to outline the fact that at the end of the year people will say: How did the government carry over a billion dollars? Well, do you know what? Unfortunately, circumstances, sometimes in the control of the government, sometimes not, dictate that not everything gets done. I've had it a number of times, projects in my own district, where people expected there was a completion date that didn't get done for a number of reasons, either there was a shutdown on being able to get certain pieces of equipment or materials you needed or certain professionals weren't there or our priority became relevant to somewhere else. So that becomes an issue.

It's very important that monies can be borrowed as quickly as possible and put in play so that the programs and services that we offer here are immediately put in play; there's no delay on particular infrastructure projects because they are so important. If it's the process of completing a road, fixing a bridge, building a school, upgrading a clinic, whatever it may be, particularly around those things, contracts have to be signed and initiatives have to be put in play as part of that.

But the primary objective here is to ensure there's no delay in the civil service, who provide the service, being able to get their pay. It's the longevity of including the money upfront as we start generating revenue as we go through the whole process.

I'll take a few minutes to talk about some of the money that's going to be spent in this budget that will be beneficial. Myself and the minister have had some open discussions. Sometimes we disagree on where the priorities may be. I understand that and I respect the work that's been done by her and her department. I respect how they prioritize things. As the minister might say, we're voting against what's good in the budget, and that couldn't be further from the truth. We respect, support, encourage and will promote what's good in the budget here that will help improve people's lives and will fill a gap, particularly if it's an economic one or access to a program or service. We are very much supportive of that. But we still have some issues around gaps in services for people that are going to be hit hardest by the financial downturn in our economy, but particularly the financial costing on the individual citizen when it comes to the cost of living.

There are a number of things that we talk about here. Last year, it was welcomed, the \$500 cheque. We supported that. I would have thought we would have done it; the threshold would have changed had it been our administration so that people who were more vulnerable and had more financial challenges would have gotten a bigger part of that. Those in a different tax bracket, which I realize everybody was hit by the increase in cost of living, but there would have been a more equitable way for those who could absorb the additional cost in one end versus supporting those who can't in the other end and have to make some life-altering choices around health safety, food security, about their medications, about their warmth in a given period and even about their own mental stress of being able to be active with their kids or grandkids or their

neighbours or social organizations as part of that. So some challenges around what we would have prioritized as part of the process there.

Some of the other ones would have been around a recruitment process for our health care professionals. I give full kudos, there's not one program that the administration have announced that we don't support when it comes to recruitment for nurses, for doctors, for other health professionals, not one. We encouraged that. Our criticism has been around how we would have done it a bit differently. How we would have prioritized certain things. How we would have gotten ahead of the game and being more proactive than reactive on a number of things. How we would have prioritized the immediate student going into a health care, post-secondary training program, an institution.

The day they went in there, they would have known the provincial government are ready to hire them when they come out and here's all we ask of you. We ask that you commit to your studies, you come out as a certified professional in whatever category that may be, if it's a medical school, if it's a nursing school, if it's the physiotherapist school, if it's the respiratory therapist, if it's a pharmacist or pharmacy tech, whatever it may be that we need in the multitude of sectors in Newfoundland and Labrador to improve health care, we would guarantee, we will have employment.

Now, if you want to do some specific things and you want to go to a more rural or remote area, or you want to specialize in the specific area that we may need you to help offset access or improve access to health care, we will give you some additional incentives. Here's what we'll do: Not only will we treat you fairly but we want to show the value of the work you do and the skill set you have and the commitment you have for the next 30-plus years in the health care profession and the ability. If you want to retrain, if you want to change your scope of

work within the focus of health care, because it's easy for one health care professional at one level to want to decide that I'm comfortable here but I think I could move to another level, I'd be comfortable retraining to something else, offering another skill set and provide another health care service to the people of this province.

There are a number of things there that we would have prioritized as part of our processes in the budgetary process here. We would have been a little bit more explicit, open and transparent about specific areas and what we would have been offering. Because the minute you hold stuff back, the more people get suspicious or the more people think, well, maybe there's more favoritism to one sector than the other sector. We can't do that in our society.

Every component of every program and service we offer is very important. If you neglect one part of it, it's going to have a negative effect on the chain of providing services in this province. So there are a number of things here that we've endorsed, but there are a number of things here that we would have suggested that we felt, from what we've heard from our constituents, what we've heard from constituents from our colleagues on the Liberal side and from the Third Party and independents that would have been beneficial had it been addressed in the budget process.

But I will say, there a number of things in the budget that we support, a number of things that we would have liked to have seen that would have improved people's lives. We'll keep continuing to push that because we know there are alterations that can be done as government goes through its process.

I will say, we will be supporting the bill to borrow the money now so that Newfoundland and Labrador can move in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.



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

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

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

I only have 10 minutes so I'm going to speak a little quicker than normal, but I want to recognize those viewers watching from home. I'm sincere in saying that they are watching from home, like Mr. Ben Tippett who is watching this morning from Bonavista tuned in to see what the *Loan Act* is all about.

Then we have Sandra. You've heard Sandra's name mentioned many times. She is interested in the *Loan Act* and she wants me to correct the record because she said I misrepresented her income. I stated \$637 a month is what she's getting on assistance, but really is it \$632. So I just want to correct the record. She's still struggling to make ends meet and I know the budget has made efforts but in her mind not enough.

The other one would be Cyril Abbott. This gentleman came into my office when we had constituency week. I would say Cyril Abbott is the longest-serving veteran in our province, conceivably. One would say: How would you know that? Because as soon as he was finished service, he joined the Newfoundland Rangers which is a continuation of this service. He figures that at this point in time he may just be the longest serving veteran in our province. I'm sure that we can check that out officially to find out Mr. Cyril Abbott.

What a gentleman and a future Member's statement will be for Mr. Abbott.

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

**C. PARDY:** The other one when we look at the budget and the *Loan Act* are the workers at the Ocean Choice International fishery products plant in Bonavista which employs 400 people, of which now, I stated

a week ago, there were 30 whose Employment Insurance benefit had elapsed. There are more than 30. I can't give you an exact number but I know we've exceeded 30. They are in a tough spot.

A question we would ask the government: What pursuits have you taken to make sure that these people have income until the fishery dispute is resolved and we get out on the water so these people can get back to work where they want to? That's a fair question we ask.

Instead of asking the question, sometimes it's nice for a government to stand and say here are the initiatives we took and here are the steps we've taken to make sure that people are looked after, that their benefits have continued or are going to continue until the resolution. We haven't heard that, but that's a good question to ask.

We look at the *Loan Act* and the minister has stated that it was a celebration. Any time you borrow less than what you forecast is a good thing. So I think she had referenced that we had borrowed \$1 billion less than what we had anticipated, which is good. We're still borrowing a fair amount of money and that money that we borrow is to make sure that we can provide the services. Our question with the budget lots of times is what may not be in the budget that we think ought to be there.

The minister also says and uses the word "balanced." I shared a story with you about this couple that had a twin one time. One was an optimist and one was a pessimist. Remember the balance? We all agreed that balance was important. So we agree fully with the balance. In order to be balanced, we need to be fiscally responsible. Management of our resources or finances are the way they ought to be and we need to make strategic investments.

I overheard Nancy Snedden. I'm not a frequent or avid listener to it and I probably should be but I noticed that they had stated

last night, when she looked at the Canadian statistics she said that Canadians, for every \$1 they make, they owe \$1.82. That's an alarming statistic: Canadians, for every \$1 they make, they owe \$1.82.

What that's indicative of is they cannot make ends meet. They're out there in the economy with the cost of living, they cannot make ends meet, and that's an issue. That's an issue that the budget is supposed to address. If we've got people out there that can't make ends meet, the budget is supposed to adequately address it so that we see a direction and a pathway where people can make ends meet, and that's fair. That what we critique the budget on, to make sure that it's strategic that people out there, under the pressure of the cost of living, can make ends meet.

Our debt servicing cost this year will be \$722 million, closer to \$723 million. That means that that's the amount we're going to need to carry forward on interest to pay off the interest on the debt that we owe. That is down from the year before, which is a good thing. But when the minister says that we need to make sure of the management of our finances – I spoke yesterday about all the capital construction we have in our province. I mentioned it was \$1.52 billion-plus. That's new investment. It's new investment in capital construction that we badly need. Nobody is doubting that we don't need top-notch buildings like hospitals and long-term care homes.

The only thing that was questioned that I had stated was the fact that I don't see where the oversight is on that spending and those contracts that would be under the title of P3s. The oversight rests solely with Cabinet. I stated the Muskrat inquiry where the Muskrat inquiry stated that anything in excess of \$50 million we ought to have external oversight. Whether it be the Public Utilities Board, whether it be an all-party Committee or something that would provide a bit of oversight to say we endorse, we think the direction and the contract you just

signed for this \$1.5 billion-plus expenditure is spent wisely.

While we have trust, oversight is integral to sound fiscal management and sound strategic investments. Nobody argues that oversight is not needed. When the minister stood in this place yesterday and reflected back on the Muskrat commission, he mentioned we have oversight in our House here, that we bring it to the House and the budget and we have oversight. But when you look at that we have debt that would be \$600 million related to, I am assuming, capital construction that we'll need to have cash for, the question would be, what oversight do we have on that \$600 million?

Chair, I would say that would be a fair question that the minister, maybe when she stands, would say we have oversight; it is only through the Cabinet that has oversight. Or is there another oversight provided that provided that we're not aware of? And that would be a good question.

I also stated to the point where I'm really interested in the equity stake that's forecasted or that comes in '24-'25 from the Hebron royalty structure. Remember, we go from 1 per cent – between low percentages and now with all the capital costs being paid off, we're going to jump to 36.5 per cent. How much money does that equity stake forecast to bring us in in '24-'25? That's another nice question that the minister can note, that she can inform us, because I'm sure her department would have an estimate on that equity stake that she has there.

The cost of living that would be out there and getting people back to work is important. That's the functioning of government. Every time that our leader would have stood up and asked is the Premier been in the room face to face with these parties in the fishery to get them back to work, that's an important question. That's an important question that the Ocean Choice International workers at the plant in

Bonavista would want to hear and would expect that the Premier is part of. Because, to them, there are not many things more important right now than getting back to work and make sure they can provide for their families. That is paramount for the fisheries workers in Bonavista and the plants that would be in my neighbouring District of Terra Nova and so on, a very important question.

Thank you, Chair.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair is recognizing the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am glad to have an opportunity to speak to this. I guess, first of all, just to say I'll support the motion. It's good to see that borrowing requirements are going down. That's a positive thing. I think we would all hope for a time that it would be unnecessary altogether.

Although, I suppose it will never be unnecessary until all of our debt is paid off because a lot of this is not new money, and sometimes people get confused. I know when I first came to the House of Assembly I was a little confused as well. When you'd hear about government is borrowing a \$1 billion or \$2 billion, you say oh my God, that's another billion or another \$2 billion on to the debt. That's not necessarily the case because a lot of it is where loans, of course, come up and they're renewed and we're just borrowing at a better rate to get our interest payments down. For anyone who's listening and might think that, oh my God, we're borrowing all this money, more debt, that would not necessarily be the case. So it is heading in the right direction, there's no doubt, but obviously we got a long ways to go to dig ourselves out.

I will also say, as this is part of the overall budget, I will certainly restate, I suppose,

that I will support the budget. I do have concerns. I don't know about so much concerns, but I understand my colleagues and the Official Opposition, the concerns that they have around what they would view as not enough planning or at least the plan is not made clear enough to everybody, perhaps, in the public. I get that. Plus there's sort of that tradition as well that the Official Opposition holds government to account so they likely wouldn't support it even if they did support it, out of tradition more than anything else. We know it's going to pass anyway because government has a majority. So that's kind of where that stands and that's where I stand on the budget.

One thing that I did not bring up in the past that I'm going to bring up here now, something that's not in the budget and something that I think needs to be considered, that's the position of an ethics commissioner. I think that's an important piece of business that needs to happen in this House. I mentioned this the other day to some degree. I had an individual reach out to me a while ago, and the person wanted to remain anonymous. I know who the person is, but I would say a very reliable source who indicated to me that the individual had significant concerns around how government deals with blind trust. That blind trust in the traditional sense of the word, as people might want to portray it that you totally separate yourself from your business, that there's no way possible that there can be any conflict of interest and so on, is really not the way it's operating.

That's not to say that Members past and present are not following the guidelines as outlined by the Commissioner for Legislative Standards; nobody is suggesting that. But it is a case of perhaps the expectations that may be there under the policies and what has traditionally been required by the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, it was suggested to me, does not go far enough to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest

that could occur with Members who have business interests that are in high office.

So certainly one of the things that I think I would like to see is for us to be able to have a review of that process, because I honestly don't know and understand that process myself. I don't have any businesses or anything myself, I'm not in a Cabinet position anyway, so there is nothing really that I could influence in any regard. I don't have that situation so I can't honestly say that I have a true understanding of what standards are being set and what are all the checks and balances to make sure that there is no conflict of interest when it comes to these blind trusts. I think that the time has come, because I don't think it has been done – certainly not since I have been here – any sort of review by an outside, independent party to ensure that whatever protocols are in place is protecting the public and ensuring that conflict of interest cannot occur.

I would further say, we were here on Monday evening and this raised a real red flag to me. Nobody seemed to be paying attention to what my colleague for Humber - Bay of Islands was saying when he spoke, nobody even flinched. It was a red flag to me immediately when he spoke of this in the House of Assembly. It kind of surprised me a little bit. He talked about the fact that there was a situation whereby – this is all public anyway – we had a high profile real estate business, we all know it was all over the media, resulted in charges being laid, an individual was sentenced for two years, less a day, for I guess what was deemed by the courts as being a breach as it relates to money and the handling of money and so on.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands – and I don't have the *Hansard* in front of me because it is not prepared, but I know what I heard him say. He said that at that time he was a minister, Service NL, that would be dealing with the real estate licensures and so on and that the premier of the day sent

his chief of staff or one of his staff people to the office when this whole issue was being discussed because, allegedly, he had his own involvement with that particular company.

So if that is the case, I'm only going by what the man said, I'm only going by what the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands said, I have no reason to think he would lie about it. But if what he is saying is correct, then if you were in a blind trust and you have no idea, supposedly, no idea what's going on with your business interests, because it's with a third party, and you have no idea what's going on, then why would that have happened? Why would that have happened?

That is a concern. I don't know how others feel. I mean, nobody over there was involved in it, so I'm not making allegations about anybody over there, or over here for that matter. I'm just saying what the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands said is a red flag; it's concerning.

It points to the fact that maybe we have an issue with how blind trusts are being dealt with and how it's being policed. If breaches occur, how it's being dealt with. It is a concern.

I know there was also a complaint that went into the Commissioner for Legislative Standards about a Newfoundland and Labrador Housing project, which the former Member had involvement, his company had involvement with that. It came back and they said, well, only the seniors benefited, which I have to question that decision-making of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, at the time, to suggest that you give taxpayers' money to a program, to a business, that's operated by a Member of the House of Assembly, the seniors benefited but the business didn't benefit. It's all in the report, public, but it's concerning about how this stuff is being interpreted by that office and so on.

I think the time has come that we do a review of blind trusts, conflicts of interest; an independent, outside view of how it's being dealt with now to make sure it's being done properly, to recommend ways that we can improve it. I also seriously think we need to consider bringing in an independent ethics commissioner to ensure that if things are not being done above board in the way they should, that there's someone that we can report to, outside, with no skin in the game, who can ensure that the public purse is protected and that things are operating the way they should. It should all be going to this House of Assembly, 100 per cent.

So I would recommend, I guess, and to tie it back into the budget, this is something that's not in the budget, but it's something that I believe should be part of the budget, that independent review and an ethics commissioner to report to this House of Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Chair is recognizing the hon. Member for Lake Melville.

**P. TRIMPER:** Thank you, Chair.

I wanted to speak a little bit to this Loan Act here this morning. I guess, by way of an analogy, I thought it would be useful to go back a few years. I like to a lot about my in-laws and some of the ways that they look at the world.

Back in 2015, when I was first elected, and frankly, a lot of the Members here were first elected, and then that wonderful first budget of 2016 and what we all went through on the government side – the rushing debt, the very close call. We came very close to trying to determine whether or not we could even meet payroll. It was a shocking reality. One is not able to speak a lot at what goes on in a Cabinet room, but I certainly

remember when I first heard that news as to what the fiscal reality was.

Anyway, about late April or so of that year my mother-in-law, Lan Hong, formerly of Hong's Take-Out, she felt very sorry for the situation I was in, the government was in, the province was in. She presented me with a money tree. It was a small plant at the time and – bless her heart – she put some nickels in around the little tree and it was about a foot high and we called it Fiscal. Fiscal has been with me throughout my whole eight years of political journey, different locations, different places in this room. Anyway, Fiscal is doing well and I checked on him this morning. I'm going to come back to that in a second.

Back at that time in 2015-2016, the deficit that occurred was some \$2.2 billion. Following the election in November of 2015, that first budget that came out in 2016 the actual deficit was \$1.1 billion. We managed to cut it in half. Anyway, the point I want to make is that there has been a plan – I keep hearing the Opposition and others will often say there's no plan. Well, in fact, there's been a very good plan and it's been tough. It's tough to explain. It's complicated. But let the numbers speak for themselves.

Let's go back in time and just track – and I just asked the Finance Minister if she could just provide me with a snapshot of some of the key parameters. It's fascinating to look at the deficit, year over year, from 2015 at \$2.2 billion to this year's projection of \$159 million – quite an improvement. When I hear terms like accusations that we're somehow being reactive, not proactive, I can only go back to the big scheme of things and back in 2015 when we walked into this room and the foresight and the planning to be at the point that we are now where, by next year, we're actually forecasting a surplus. Not based on big windfalls or one-off situations, but on strong, fiscal management, on paying attention to the books, but also raising so many other aspects and quality of life for the people of this province.

Again, the Finance Minister kind of overloaded me in my 10 minutes of some of the key parameters. But two that I'd like to pick up on that I think are quite interesting is one, first of all, from an employment perspective, our employment rate is going up; the unemployment rate is going down. Our labour force is growing; our population is also growing. I'd like to speak a lot about the Ukrainians and what they're doing for our province. I certainly see what they're doing in our community of Happy Valley-Goose Bay and some other parameters.

But here's a good one that I find is very telling: Total revenue per capita is now \$19,780 projected for 2022-2023. The average for all Canadian provinces is \$14,000 and change. It's not often that Newfoundland and Labrador starts to exceed or is exceeding that national average. More and more, as you look at some of these benchmark parameters, you're seeing that.

Here's another key one: Total revenue is a percentage of GDP – and I know she likes to speak about this a lot – our total revenue as a percentage of GDP is 24.5 per cent. The average for all Canadian provinces is 20 per cent. So that means that our population is kicking into gear. The folks that are contributing are contributing well and on balance as our population grows, as we get our fiscal house in order, we are starting to really see a big difference.

Three things happened to me this morning, and I was kind of thinking about them as I thought I might have a chance to speak about it. At first I was just speaking and thinking about the progress in the last eight years. There's going to be a little hanging here, so I was reflecting back on my last eight years and I just look at some of the key things that have happened in the District of Lake Melville and across Labrador and across this province. Things like completion of the paving of the Trans-Labrador Highway; finally getting this highway started.

I talked a lot about this 520. The last time it really had substantial repairs and pavement to it was when the Queen came in 1997. I remember the running joke has been – between different administrations – is perhaps it will take another monarch to show up before we get our highway paved again. Well, I'm pleased to say the work is under way and some \$7.5 million allocated this year to fix a sorely needed but very important highway.

Things like that that you see – the six-bed mental health addition to our hospital is going to make a huge difference for folks who are struggling with mental health issues and being able to secure and seek that support right there in the community of Happy Valley-Goose Bay in Labrador. The additions to the Labrador Correctional Centre and I can go on and on. So many good things are going on both in the district and across the province.

Back to this morning. So I'm listening to the radio and one of the first things I hear this morning was the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology. He's over in Rotterdam. He's with a delegation, I think, of some 75 representatives of our province at the world conference on hydrogen.

Here we are, I often describe us as the sub-national government. Well, I tell you, we're punching well above our weight. There's a delegation right now in Western Europe that has just signed a deal with the Port of Rotterdam and we are there. This isn't just a little passing fade. The world is realizing we need to find a cleaner, greener way to produce energy and consume it, and I'm very proud of the way that Newfoundland and Labrador is responding. So that was a wonderful little thing.

About an hour ago, I walked into a briefing on one of the bills that we're considering and some of the researchers in the Government Members' Office were saying – and they were a little bit frustrated because they keep hearing both Opposition or critics

are saying things like crisis. We're in crisis. The fact is, as you look across the country and certainly around the world, you can see that Newfoundland and Labrador is actually doing very well. Do we have problems? Oh yes, we have some serious problems. Are we working on them? I believe we are and I believe we're working collectively and collaboratively to solve them.

We will get there and we can't take our eye off the ball, but I looked out again across the country and I'm saying we're doing quite well. Then I think back eight years and I say we're doing really well.

The third thing that I did this morning, before I came in here, was I walked down the hallway to see Dianne Randell. She said: I think we need a new pot for Fiscal. So I walked into her office, and for those who are in the Government Members, you'll know as you walk in – that money tree that used to be about foot high some eight years ago is almost starting to look us in the eye. I just measured his pot this morning and I've got some friends in town and, anyway, we've got to go find a new pot and some potting soil for him because Fiscal is doing great.

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

**P. TRIMPER:** I thank my mother-in-law for, again, helping with that foresight. I've got some of these rusty old nickels there. I'm going to give her one or two there. She's going to be here shortly. She said: Do you know what? You take care of that plant and you make a plan and it will grow for you, and it has.

I'd like to thank my mother-in-law. I'd like to thank government. I'd like to thank all the MHAs and legislatures across the country because we are here doing our best and we're going to keep doing it and Newfoundland and Labrador is going to shine.

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

So let's start off with fiscal deficit, that seems to be the gold standard, but in doing so it triggered a memory in terms of some of things I talked about when I was first elected in that in solving a fiscal deficit have we just simply transferred or created an infrastructure deficit, a social services deficit, a resource deficit, a health deficit, an education deficit. We think all these other deficits come without cost but they don't. So whether at your food bank and your finding an increased need and you're finding fewer donors – I volunteered with Saint Vincent de Paul for many years, you can see the trends, there's a cost that's not always reflected in the books of government about priorities and planning.

Now, the Minister of Finance listed the new school in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, and I'm coming back to this from an education point of view because, on one hand, say what I will about the –

(Disturbance.)

**J. DINN:** I guess it's that emergency alert.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**J. DINN:** I know, very alarming.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** You said something wrong.

**J. DINN:** I must have said something wrong.

But here's the thing, I'm assuming that this school district had done the projections, had determined the need and decided where schools must be built and what ones weren't a priority. Yet, I've heard the minister talk about, well, once we get the data and the facts, we'll have a better understanding of

where the needs are. Yet, this new school was going to be built, Chair, without – well, we haven't seen any facts, figures or details. It was decided outside of the district's priorities.

But here are some of the questions I'm concerned about with regard to resourcing, because I taught my last few years in Holy Heart. I also taught in a small school up in the Ferryland District. I can tell you that at Holy Heart, the programs that were available in courses, in the services you had, that students had at their disposal, was night and day compared to what I had in some of the smaller schools. By virtue of the large school community, the large numbers there were able to offer the different courses, a variety of courses and extracurricular and so on and so forth.

My fear is that it doesn't take much detailed investigation to realize that if you split a school like Prince of Wales Collegiate, a population of 624 and you split that in half, that you're going to impact the availability or access to school counsellors, instructional resource teachers, learning resource teachers to secretarial support, you name it.

I know the other part, too, it's interesting, despite my various stances on this and the media, I've yet to have anyone come to me and say well, that's a bad idea, don't rain on our parade. Because I know when I taught at Holy Heart, when the students from Shea Heights were transferred into Holy Heart, there was certainly an adjustment period because they were losing their high school up in Shea Heights. But it didn't take long – I would say within a few years, Chair – if you asked any of the students and the parents, they didn't want to come back. They wouldn't settle for a small school. The opportunities that were available to them in a larger school were significant: the opportunities, the new friends they met, the integration, you name it.

So I think here when we're talking about budgetary decisions and looking at money

that's set aside for a new school, somewhere along the line there is going to be hidden costs and ramifications to what's offered to students and to that school community. It's going to be devastating to both schools, I would argue. That doesn't speak to me of a plan or a priority. Yet, we have Frank Roberts intermediate – and that's not the only school, by the way – that is in desperate need. The facts just speak for themselves. They are in desperate need of some renovations or just a new facility.

We have the need for a new school out in Topsail - Paradise. That's probably the fastest growing community right now, one of. In many ways, if we're going to look at the bang for the buck, if that's what this is about, then that's probably where the investment is needed. But if we're also looking at the fiscal restraint, if we're looking at making sure we don't have a fiscal deficit, what we are doing is we are creating infrastructure resource deficits in our school and other parts. Make no mistake, there's a price to be paid and someone's paying for it, often the most vulnerable.

I go back to Holy Heart because if any of you have been through it and gone through it, to me, it was a remarkable school in terms of the Sisters of Mercy and the Presentation Sisters, I'll give them credit for this, the forethought in terms of a full-sized auditorium on par with the Arts and Culture Centre, an AV room, music rooms, science labs, you name it. They had forethought. The only school, I guess, I've ever been into that would approach it was my first year teaching and that was in St. Lawrence central high school. That was a dream school; that was absolutely amazing with the resources they had. That showed you what you could do with the infrastructure investment.

I remember a few years when I was at Holy Heart they were looking at, well, we're going to close this school and build a new Holy Heart school for \$50 million. But we knew that for what you were going to get for \$50



million was not going to be the Holy Heart with the resources we had there. There was opposition and the money was reinvested in the school. I would say that's probably one – not the, but one – of the flagship schools that are in the school system in terms of what it has here. The theatre arts programming, there are spaces to do that. To me, it shows what you can do.

But I would strongly object if someone said let's move half the students from Holy Heart somewhere else because automatically you would undercut and decimate the resources. When we're talking about fiscal deficits, about planning, about priorities, let's keep this in mind as to what the investment is.

I will say this, with dental visits – I need to point this out again – I've indicated that from 2018 to 2022, 21,000 people visited the emergency rooms for dental gum problems. Probably multiple repeats. Yet, I don't know if it was the same period, 2019 to now, we've underspent the adult dental surgical plan by some \$12 million, if we look at the budget lines.

Now think about that, we've underspent. I can't help but think that a fraction of that money invested in making sure that seniors who were without dental care who need a tooth extraction who are having severe gum disease would be better served and it would save hospital visits to the emergency room and probably save applications to the adult dental surgical plan. That to me would be an investment.

Now it might be argued, someone would say, well, where are we going to get the money for that? Well, the money is already there in the fact that we've underspent. It's going to have a payoff.

I'll finish on this, I'll probably have more to say later if I get up, but with regard to this, even the process of having to bring people together, Chair, of someone applying for the adult dental surgical plan, you have to

authorization, more or less, from a dentist. A dentist has to approve it. A doctor has got to say yes, this is needed. A board has to meet. They have to do the necessary deliberation and then it's going to be yes or nay. Then there's this surgery itself in a hospital under anesthetic.

So I've got to ask the question: Is that money that's better spent? Or is it better spent heading off that problem and taking care of that before we get to that need? I don't think many people want to go into hospital, under the knife, under anesthetic, for a problem that could be taken care of in a dentist chair. That's what this comes down to.

When we're talking about priorities, plans and fiscal deficit, let's make sure that we're not creating health deficits for vulnerable people of our population and deficits in our other services.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair is recognizing the hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

It's certainly great to get up and have a few minutes to be able to speak on some of the issues in my district as well. Something that I've certainly spoken on before, but I do have some letters from a school in Trepassey and some Grade 7 and 9 students that had written me some letters. I just wanted to read them out. I've been speaking on the doctor issue in the district in Trepassey. I've been speaking on ambulance issues. These are coming from kids that are in Grades 7 to 9, some of these letters.

I'm not going to read them all out. I'm just going to read some of the lines that are in it. He said: I'm a resident from Trepassey and have some concerns with my town. I'm very

concerned about the situation. Back last year, the second ambulance got removed from here, so now we only have one, and that's really bad with us having an aging community. We spoke about that many times here.

When you have an aging population, there are a lot more medical issues that happen at that age. A lot of people I know have diabetes, including some family members, and having that could mean a lot of things that could happen. What happens if a person runs out of insulin and needs it and they can't get medical attention and our ambulance is already on the way to St. John's? So very concerning.

I mean I can bring it up, but now I'm putting in the perspective where kids in high school are talking about it or kids in Grade 7 to 9. It's not just the medical care I'm worried about here; I'm worried about the younger people too. What happens when the last shop closes here? The problem is there are no businesses or jobs and the government needs to help our rural communities by keeping these ambulances and these doctors as well. That is just one letter.

Another one, she said, there are some major issues in our town; I'm sure you're aware of it. We certainly are. One of these issues is the ambulance that will soon be leaving in the next few months and our town really needs this service. We're an aging community. We're two hours from a hospital and what will happen if there's an emergency? I know that Premier Furey has promised to replace the private ambulance company but will this actually happen? We hope so.

That's a statement that a kid has made from Grade 8. So it's concerning for them. I'm sure they're listening to their parents and the people in their community talking about these issues, so it's pretty concerning.

I mean, they're pretty logical. We have two nurse practitioners replacing our doctor,

which they're doing their best to accommodate all the people in the community. The problem is that the nurse practitioners are only in Trepassey two days a week. Why not have one nurse practitioner here for four days? Wow, coming from a kid in Grade 8. That's pretty logical.

We get up here and speak – I know that they're listening, but sometimes these are pretty logical answers that we don't seem to implement in our districts. There are lots of suggestions that we make and sometimes they're accommodated. Again, with ambulances when I dealt with Cape Broyle, there is certainly something that we dealt with and hope to deal with.

They said, or bring back our doctor. Something that was certainly brought up here many times. We had two doctors that went up there, three or four years ago, that put the health care and the system for registering people and they went up and recorded all their names and did everything that they needed for the community, these two doctors. They went up for six months. They stayed there three years.

After three years, one doctor was retiring and had her own practice and is now moved on to go to Fogo. That's her choice to do that, but there was another young doctor there and she wanted to stay in the community but Eastern Health didn't think it was something that was needed. So they set up nurse practitioners there for two days a week and they could go together.

She had come up with all kinds of solutions that she could help. She could travel with the nurse practitioner if they wanted. No, they couldn't do that. The nurse practitioners in the area take appointments every half hour. They see a person every half hour and there are two of them there. A doctor, sometimes, if a patient only comes in for five minutes, then they take the next patient right away and not wait for the half hour to expire. They're taking a patient right

away. They're seeing as many as they can. There are issues – and I have spoken to the two of them and it's incredible that the Eastern Health cannot see some way to get a doctor in that district when there's one that wants to go there.

I have said in here and I thought for sure that it was something we could sit down and be able to iron out and get a doctor in the district. It hasn't happened yet and I thought for sure that would happen. Certainly with somebody that's interested in being a doctor in rural Newfoundland and they can't make it happen.

Well, maybe it's because when the former minister was in, they came out and spoke publicly about the minister and it seems like she's been on a list now that's it not happening. It's not happening. She spoke out against them and said things that could happen in the area. She wrote letters. She is after doing everything she can to get in the area. They don't seem to want to make it happen. I've dealt with it and I can't understand how it doesn't happen.

We have somebody that is interested in going into rural Newfoundland and you're talking about doctors and retention and recruitment and we have somebody that wants to go in the area, has a vested interest in the area, and they can't make it happen. That is incredible.

Also, a couple more sentences out of another letter, another student said: Anything can happen. If somebody broke their leg or arm or go to the clinic and there is no nurse, what are you going to do? Then you'll have to drive two hours into town and you'll have to wait to get into the Janeway for an hour or two just to get X-rays to tell you it is broken or fractured. Then you have to wait another hour or two to get a cast. I should know because I broke my bone six years ago and had to wait hours upon hours to see a doctor to get an X-ray and a cast. I didn't get home until 2 in the morning – this is a personal story.

Another problem in our town that is very concerning to me, as other people in the town, is the fact that we're losing our ambulance service. Again, everybody knows in the district about the ambulances. Trepassy has two to three ambulances but now they might be going, which means somebody might have to wait 45 minutes to an hour for an ambulance to come to Trepassy from St. Mary's or Ferryland. Which basically when they say Ferryland, Cape Broyle is where the ambulance is stationed. My baby brother stopped breathing one night – he was one – and it took an ambulance from Trepassy 15 minutes to get to my house. If they weren't at my house in time, he could have died. I hope you look into this more to try to keep our ambulances here and get a doctor for our clinic.

I got a couple more letters that I am going to read out later on. I'm not going to read out all the letters, just notes that they sent to me. It is not like I haven't said it; it is not like I haven't come out and spoke about it. It is just something that is very important in our district. The doctor is incredible; the doctor wants to stay there. They want to go up there and practise and they won't make it happen.

I spoke to the previous minister and this minister and it still hasn't happened because Eastern Health has seen some reason why they don't. It is like a personal thing that is going on, and I don't mind saying it. And I'm going to say it until it gets done; it is something personally going on with Eastern Health. It is not the minister. They got to get the situation fixed. I'm definitely not giving up on it; it is not going away. They need a doctor in that area and they have someone that wants to practise there and they can't make it happen. It is just mind blowing.

I'm going to move on to students and I am going to talk about this. We talk about education a little bit and I am going to get another chance later on. But I will talk about

education and putting an educational program in the school. I always thought about this when I sold cars. We have kids that leave high school in Grade 12 and I always thought, as a salesperson, I would go into a Grade 12 class and speak to them about credit and how credit works for you as an individual.

You may leave and go to St. John's and there are three or four students that live in the one house together. So when they live in their house together, somebody's going to have the phone bill in their name, somebody's going to have a light bill in their name. There could be three or four and then a couple drop out. Now, all of a sudden, they're not going to pay the bill. You know now, they're 18 and 19 years old, they don't understand about credit. But the credit happens; you put that in your name, you're the one that's responsible, you're the one who's paying the bill. Then you say I'm not paying that bill. They didn't pay me, I'm not paying the bill. But the only person that hurts is the person with it in their name.

So in the school structure, I think we should be in putting a – it could be a one-month course or a two-month course explaining to kids, because their parents never got that explanation and they have credit issues and whatever the case may be. But if they're in school and they learn or they at least understand how it works for them, personally. I know that when I sold cars, if somebody comes in, a young kid comes in and wants to buy a car, they don't understand that they don't have any credit.

I know when my daughters were in school, I made them apply for a credit card when they were 16 – a \$500 limit – and if they put something on it, they had to understand that the money had to be paid back.

But they're the kind of things that we can do in the education program that will help society along the way. If people understand credit, then they're going to understand that you can't spend \$500 when you've only got

\$300, or you can't put it on a credit card and not pay it off because it's going to hurt you in the long run.

That's just something that I thought when I was selling cars that we could touch on to help society, really. That would help society, if you got in and explained that in a course. It don't have to be a whole year-long course, but it's a course that kids could get in and understand; Grades 10 or 11 or 12, they understand the value of money and how it works for credit in their life situation later on.

That will help us when we get to our budget and you won't have as much money spent in society that they're overspending. That's what's happening in today's society from a lot of areas. But, again, I'll get a chance to speak on that later.

Thank you, Chair.

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

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against?

Motion carried.

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

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

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

**B. WARR:** Speaker, the Committee of Ways and Means have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have made progress and ask leave to sit again.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and reports they have made progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Presently.

**SPEAKER:** Presently.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again presently, by leave.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I move that this House do now recess until 2 p.m.

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

### Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

In the public gallery, I would like to welcome Roger Downer, Executive Director for The Vera Perlin Society. He will be the subject of a Member's statement this afternoon.

Welcome.

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

**SPEAKER:** Also in the public gallery, welcome to Ty Simms, Alex Mercer and Luke Mercer. They are also joined by their parents this afternoon. They are also the subject of a Member's statement.

Welcome.

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

### Statements by Members

**SPEAKER:** Today, we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of St. George's - Humber, Placentia West - Bellevue, Bonavista, St. John's Centre and Topsail - Paradise.

The hon. the Member for St. George's Humber.

**S. REID:** Speaker, I rise today to let everyone know that the 2023 Codroy Valley Folk Festival will happen on July 29 and 30 of this year.

The Codroy Valley Folk Festival takes place in Upper Ferry. That's Route 406 off the Trans-Canada Highway at the recreation complex behind Belanger high school.

The festival was first introduced in 1982 and it will celebrate its 41st year in July. Throughout its history, the festival has played host to the best local talent the Codroy Valley has to offer and provided a venue each year for both residents and tourists to come together and celebrate the unique culture of this area.

The Codroy Valley is one of the few areas of the province with a prominent Scottish

heritage. The music of the festival often includes a distinct Scottish flavour with bagpipes, Scottish dancing and fiddle playing, as well as other traditional and contemporary music.

The festival will be going ahead rain or shine under the big tent.

I commend the volunteers and encourage everyone to come out this year and enjoy all that the festival has to offer. It's July 29 and 30 in Codroy Valley.

Thank you.

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

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

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

Speaker, on May 5, I was honoured to attend the graduation of the 2023 graduating class of St. Joseph's All Grade school located in Terrenceville in our beautiful district of Placentia West - Bellevue.

The five graduates are as follows: Abigail Bolt, Jayden Vaslett, Lucas Crane, Emma Francis and Kendra Hackett.

This is a remarkable achievement that marks the culmination of years of hard work, dedication and perseverance. Embrace the opportunities that lie ahead and never stop pursuing your dreams. Spread your wings and soar toward your dreams because the sky is the limit to your potential.

I would also like to thank all families, teachers and the community for their continued support, as it was very evident at their beautiful ceremony.

Speaker, I am asking all hon. Members of the 50th General Assembly to please join me in congratulating the 2023 graduating class of St. Joseph's All Grade school and

wish them great success in their future endeavours.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Mr. Speaker, in granting Gus Etchegary an honorary doctorate, Memorial called him a stalwart knight who spent his life defending these waters, equally frank with ministers, union officials and harvesters.

At Fishery Products, Save Our Fisheries Association, the Fisheries Council of Canada, and as a former Canadian Commissioner to the International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries, he won the fight for the 200-mile limit and didn't stop there, fighting to protect our resource and our people.

How better to honour Gus than with his own timely words: "We elect people to our federal parliament and provincial legislature so that they may safeguard our fish resource – which not only can keep communities alive, but provide badly needed jobs for our province teetering ...."

"About 10 years ago, when there was a downward trend in fish resources in Iceland, it came up with a plan to restore their fishery and today, Iceland is one of the most successful fishing nations in the world."

Well said, Gus. Your fight is ours to continue.

We extend our deepest condolences to Kay, Glenn, Grant and his entire family, as well as the enormous circle of admirers of this giant of the Newfoundland and Labrador fisheries.

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

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

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

John C. Maxwell said that "Every person has a longing to be significant; to make a contribution; to be a part of something noble and purposeful."

That statement encapsulates a fundamental conviction of the eponymous founder of The Vera Perlin Society, which believes that individuals with developmental disabilities must be provided opportunities to achieve independence and full participation in all areas of community living.

Vera Perlin founded the society in 1954, believed that children with intellectual exceptionalities should be nurtured, and attend school.

The society – we have members here today – partners with government and community organizations to address employment challenges facing adults with intellectual exceptionalities. The W.O.R.C. program matches employer needs with client abilities. The Supported Employment Program provides individual support workers for clients. The Career Education and Exploration Program at CNA seeks to develop pre-employment skills. The Button Shop creates a safe, secure work environment for those who need it.

Individuals express their creativity through the renowned Perlin Players and participate in structured day and summer respite recreation programs.

We can help promote the Vera Perlin Society's vision of a more inclusive and prosperous society by supporting its 28th annual walk around Mundy Pond fundraiser on Saturday, June 3, and check the society's website for details.

Thank you.

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

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

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

The Salt Beef Junkies are three local musicians consisting of 16-year-old Ty Simms, 14-year-old Luke Mercer, and 11-year-old brother Alex Mercer, all from the District of Topsail - Paradise.

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

**P. DINN:** Since 2019, they have been playing together as a group – think about that, 2019 – and between them play a variety of instruments, including the guitar, banjo, mandolin, bodhran, harmonica and accordion. The boys' traditional Irish-Newfoundland music style is a fan-favourite of locals and tourists, with having held regular spots downtown at O'Reilly's and Shamrock City and, just last summer, were the cultural ambassadors for the City of St. John's as they greeted tourists arriving on cruise ships.

These young men are rising stars on the folk arts scene and have played at many summer festivals, including the Brigus Blueberry Festival, the Lantern Festival, Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival and SunSplash in Paradise. The bands most exiting venture to date was an appearance on HGTV *Rock Solid Builds*, where they performed their own tune called "Cellar on the Hill."

They are currently filling up their booking spaces for the upcoming summer and I would like to wish them congratulations and all the continued success.

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

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

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

**J. ABBOTT:** Speaker, it is an honour to rise today in this hon. House to highlight our government's commitment to create a more inclusive province for all.

*Budget 2023* includes \$725,000 to support the community of persons with disabilities through program grants under our Disability Policy Office. These include the Accessible Vehicle and Taxi Grants, as well as the Inclusion and Capacity Grants. These programs are instrumental in improving accessibility.

In December 2021, the province's first *Accessibility Act* came into force and in June 2022 we established our first Accessibility Standards Advisory Board.

This board plays a pivotal role in advising on the development of standards, regulations and policies to identify, prevent and remove barriers for persons with disabilities. The first standard to be developed is a Customer Service Standard, and once implemented, the next one will be a Communications and Information Standard.

We continue to work closely with organizations, both of and for persons with disabilities, as well as advocacy groups and individuals to create a province that is inclusive and accessible. Speaker, we are also working collaboratively across departments including a review of the Buildings Accessibility Regulations and an assessment of government buildings to ensure enhancement of public access.

Speaker, our government embraces inclusion and diversity so that all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can participate in, and contribute to, their communities.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I would like to thank the hon. minister for the advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, anything we can do to improve accessibility should be applauded. Far too many residents struggle with inclusion and barriers to daily living. Accessible housing and transportation are critical necessities to ensure residents are empowered to participate in society.

It is very unfortunate government has lagged behind on improvements to basic services like accessible housing. Hundreds of housing units sit empty, Speaker, while thousands of seniors, low-income families and individuals with disabilities sit on a wait-list. Even worse, a tiny fraction of proposed new housing will be fully accessible.

Speaker, we are not even meeting the minimal demand. I do hope, Speaker, the new Accessibility Standards Advisory Board will be empowered to do their work and government will act on their recommendations.

Unfortunately, that has not been the track record of the Furey government. Our caucus also renews our call for government to finally establish a long-promised disabilities advocate to work to examine the systemic barriers facing individuals and families.

Thank you, 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 the advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, all people in this province regardless of disability have the right to access and to live in their communities. We remind this government to look inward for what they can do with their policies so human rights are protected and top of mind instead of an afterthought. A deaf student should not have to go to the Human Rights Commission to access fully inclusive public education.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

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

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

I ask all Members to join me in recognizing May as Motorcycle Awareness Month, and next week, May 16-22, as Canada Road Safety Week.

The chilly weather is slowly subsiding, mild temperatures and sunshine mean that motorcyclists are enjoying our scenic landscape and are using our roadways in greater numbers. All drivers should be looking, listening and ensuring they are safely sharing our highways and roadways with motorcyclists.

Canada Road Safety Week, an enforcement-driven initiative led by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, is designed to increase public compliance with safe driving measures. The focus of the campaign continues to be on the elimination of impaired driving, distracted driving, aggressive driving and driving without a seat belt.

This year's theme is Take the Wheel. This is a reminder to drivers that they should be always mindful of their behaviour in order to keep themselves, other drivers, passengers, motorcyclists, cyclists, construction workers and pedestrians safe.

Speaker, our government takes road safety and enforcement very seriously. Last year we increased fines, demerit points and the number of days that a vehicle may be impounded for excessive speeding, street racing and stunting offences. We have also increased penalties for impaired driving.

I remind all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to always practise safe and defensive driving, especially this upcoming Victoria Day weekend.

Thank you.

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

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the hon. minister for an advance copy of her statement as well.

Speaker, I join the minister today in recognizing May as Motorcycle Awareness Month and next week as Canada Road Safety Week.

As we see better weather on the horizon in our province, we also see an increased amount of motorcyclists on our roads enjoying our beautiful province. We wish to remind vehicle drivers and motorists that safe driving and riding practices and co-operation from all road users will help reduce the number of injuries and fatalities on our provincial roadways this summer.

With fair-weather days approaching, we wish all people using our provincial roadways a safe and enjoyable experience. Also, to keep an eye out for our road

workers to ensure they go home safe to their families at the end of the day.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

We, too, call upon people to be aware of walkers and cyclists, drive sober, put away your cellphone because I too see it way too often on our roadways: distracted drivers.

For enforcement to be effective there needs to be resources available for enforcement officers. We encourage this government to ensure that highway enforcement is adequate, staffed to keep our roads safe and keep all the people, pedestrians and drivers alike, safe.

Thank you.

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

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

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, we're 35 days into the crab fishery standoff and the Premier is nowhere to be found. Harvesters and plant workers are at the forefront but family-owned businesses, like trucking companies and corner stores, will be next to feel the pinch of the deadlock.

I ask the Premier: How will businesses who rely on the spinoffs from this industry survive?

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

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

Great questions. It's very unfortunate that the fishery is not up and going this time of the year. Unusual dispute between wages and people willing to go fishing is what we're dealing with right now. It's my understanding both parties are dealing and talking as we speak. I don't even want to guess and say how close we are. I'm just hoping soon we come to a resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I know the Official Opposition and the people of this province would like to see the Premier directly involved here to move this along as quickly as possible.

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, the impacts of the deadlock is already being felt. Trucking companies are issuing layoff notices, workers are scrambling for options and there is silence from the Premier.

Premier, what are you going to do to get this industry moving?

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

**D. BRAGG:** Thank you, again.

And, again, Speaker, I assure the people of this province, the people in our fishery, we

are involved. We're doing our part. The Premier is being involved. Minister Davis is involved. I am involved myself.

We want to see this standstill come to an end. We want to get people back on the water. We want to get people in trucks. We want to get people in fish plants. We want people making ice. We want people offloading, loading, you name it. We want to get our industry open, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

**SPEAKER:** Just a reminder not to use names, use the titles of ministers.

Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

We all want things to happen in this industry but somebody has to take the lead, and it's the Premier's responsibility as the Premier of this province to take the lead and get this moving, Mr. Speaker.

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, snow crab fishery impacts all of us. It impacts the small stores, those on production lines and the people in every single corner of our province. It's time to get both sides talking so people can get back to work.

Why does the Premier believe he's needed more in Europe there than during the largest crisis facing our fishing industry since the Moratorium?

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

**D. BRAGG:** Mr. Speaker, let's not look at the theatrics of all this here today. The onus

is on two parties to solve this: the ASP and the FFAW. We've put avenues in place. We have mechanisms in place to help them to solve this issue. Because of social media, threats of violence and everything else, we are still not fishing this year. We have mediators. Last year, we changed the procedure. We brought in people. We brought in professionals. A change of administration at the FFAW and that doesn't seem to be good enough. Eight weeks they worked on the formula – eight weeks, Mr. Speaker. Now if you look at social media, everybody has a formula.

So we need a solution. We need our fishery opened. We don't need the Opposition picking any more holes into this. If they have some great, plausible reasons and ways to solve this, bring it forward. Help out the FFAW.

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

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

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

I guarantee you the Opposition are not picking holes in negotiations here, what we're saying, their leadership has to be shown here to broker a deal. The former Liberal premier took the leadership here and brokered a deal to make sure the last time there was crisis in the fishery, why can't this Premier do the same thing here?

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Speaker, during the cyberattack, the Premier wasn't around. As Fiona approached, the Premier wasn't around. As the fishery crisis comes to a crisis again, the Premier isn't around.

When is this Premier going to stand up for the fishing industry here and broker a deal

that works for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

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

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

I thank the Member opposite for the question, because it gives me an opportunity to allow me and my colleagues in this House of Assembly to recognize the Premier for the roles that he has taken on Fiona, the role that he has taken in the fisheries.

The Member opposite is fully aware that the Minister of Fisheries, the Minister of Labour and the Premier were heavily engaged last week. I can assure the people of the province that he continues to be engaged. He is in Europe, yes, Speaker, at the World Hydrogen Summit because we're –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**S. COADY:** – growing and diversifying our economy in Newfoundland and Labrador. But allow me to again say to the people of the province, the strong leadership of the Premier is very much engaged in the fishery.

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

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the way it works from our perspective, you prioritize what your immediate things should be done. The priority here should be the fishing industry and this is where the Premier should be here dealing with this initiative right now and this crisis, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**D. BRAZIL:** Both Suncor and Cenovus have now removed production from the Terra Nova platform from their 2023 projections. This is confirmation that the Terra Nova won't return to production this year.

Has the Premier asked their project partners when the Terra Nova will pump oil again?

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

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

I thank the hon. Member for the question; it's a very important question. As we know last evening, I think the partners did remove the oil production from their forecast for this year. Obviously, the Department of IET is looking further into this, Mr. Speaker.

We made a substantial investment into this project during COVID when the project actually was practically doomed, Mr. Speaker, we came on board, and I think this entire House supported that decision of the time. It's very important that it gets back to work, but it's also important to note that there is work currently happening in Terra Nova on this. We look forward to it getting back out there, but the reality is also that the oil is in the ground and it will be pumped.

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

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

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

I know this side of the House stood with the workers in Newfoundland and Labrador asking the government not to let the Terra Nova go to Europe to be done because they knew what was going to happen. It was

going to slow down production and there was going to have to be more money spent to put it back into production, Mr. Speaker. They didn't take our advice or the people of Newfoundland and Labrador's advice.

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

**D. BRAZIL:** Suncor told its investors the vessel needs more maintenance before pumping can resume.

Is the Terra Nova going to follow the Premier to Europe again?

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

**S. COADY:** Speaker, allow me to say that there are 742 people working in this province on the Terra Nova Project as of the end of December 2022, so there is a lot of work happening on the Terra Nova Project. We are very pleased to have the Terra Nova Project continuing; it is the efforts of the minister and the efforts of the Premier that allowed the Terra Nova Project to continue.

I will say to you, Speaker, that this project has now been extended by 10 years; it will not have a fiscal impact in Newfoundland and Labrador's budgetary processes this year because a minimal amount was budgeted this year in our budget for the Terra Nova. There will be no major impact, but I will say to the people of the province that there is a huge impact because there are 742 people in this province working on the Terra Nova.

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

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

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

Speaker, Memorial University continues to make headlines for all the wrong reasons. Now the senate has voted, to the shock of the province and I think to us Opposition

and especially to me, to continue not singing the "Ode to Newfoundland."

Speaker, is government going to intervene?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** When sun rays –

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

**S. CROCKER:** Mr. Speaker, I would join in the chorus but I can't sing.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member opposite for this question today. Quite frankly, I believe it was that hon. Member that brought forward a resolution last year, I think in November, quite frankly that – at that time I was sitting as Government House Leader – and I borrowed the Member's motion that day that we could unanimously vote in this House for you, Mr. Speaker, to write a letter to Memorial University and I'll conclude with the BE IT RESOLVED and I hope I get another question.

Mr. Speaker, that day the House urged, "Memorial University to include the 'Ode to Newfoundland' and the 'Ode to Labrador' in all future convocation ceremonies, so that Newfoundland and Labrador's one great university will properly honour the people, the legacy, the beauty, the potential and the fallen of Newfoundland and Labrador."

Mr. Speaker, I am as disappointed as the Member opposite is today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I appreciate the minister's response and I am glad he supports it.

But I guess the question I got, it is out of touch with the majority of this province, and government does have an ability here to step in and make this right.

So I'm asking once again: Will the minister or will the government or will the Premier or Deputy Premier make this an issue? This should not be, Mr. Speaker – this should not be. It's an insult to the people of this province and it needs to stop now.

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

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

**S. CROCKER:** Again, Mr. Speaker, I've been here for nine years and very rarely do myself and the Member for Conception Bay South agree. But I can tell you we agree today, Mr. Speaker.

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

**S. CROCKER:** I spoke to Mr. Bose's office earlier this morning. I brought forward my profound displeasure with the lack of respect, quite frankly, for this House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

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

**S. CROCKER:** There are 40 of us here in this House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and we sat here last fall and unanimously agreed that the "Ode to Newfoundland" and the "Ode to Labrador" should be played at our university. We're elected by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and, Mr. Speaker, I think the decision should be reversed and we will continue to bring that message forward to Memorial University.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** I thank the minister for that response and we'll stay tuned. We certainly

hope that that decision is reversed because it's wrong. I will be there May 31 and I may stand up and sing it. I'm not much of a singer, but I may get up and sing it on my own.

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

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Let's do it.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** When sun rays  
crown thy pine clad hills,  
And summer spreads her hand,  
When silvern voices tune thy rills,  
We love thee, smiling land.

We love thee, we love thee,  
We love thee, smiling land.

As loved our fathers, so we love,  
Where once they stood, we stand;  
Their prayer we raise to Heaven above,  
God guard thee, Newfoundland

God guard thee, God guard thee,  
God guard thee, Newfoundland.

(Applause.)

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Dear land of  
mountains, woods and snow,  
Labrador, our Labrador.  
God's noble gift to us below,  
Labrador, our Labrador.  
Thy proud resources waiting still,  
Their splendid task will soon fulfil,  
Obedient to thy Maker's will,  
Labrador, our Labrador.

(Applause.)

**SPEAKER:** For the record, I did pause Question Period time for that.

We'll resume Oral Questions.

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

**S. CROCKER:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I just want to respond to the Member for CBS just

quickly. He said he's going to be there proudly on May 31. I'm going to be there proudly as a parent on June 1, and, quite frankly, don't be surprised if I don't stand up and sing.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** It's hard to follow questions after something like that. We actually get along at times, too.

**SPEAKER:** Keep it going that way, please.

**B. PETTEN:** It's not all bad, Mr. Speaker, take it.

Speaker, pictures continue to surface on social media of furniture and school supplies chewed up rats at Frank Roberts Junior High. Children are afraid to leave their lunch bags on their desks and parents are threatening to keep their children home.

I ask the minister: Why are children being forced to go to school in such conditions?

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

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

Obviously our concern is the well-being of students and staff at the school. We are working with the district on pest control measures. We have active discussions with them and I will be meeting with the NLTA on this tomorrow.

This is an old school and there are problems with intrusion from rodents at this time of the year in a variety of large buildings across this city. It is a problem and we are making sure the school district has sufficient resources to deal with it.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

I appreciate the minister's response, but you can't compare this to the Health Sciences, because if this was at the Health Sciences it'd be closed down.

You're dealing with an issue, it's a rodent issue and it's in the walls of an old building. Just look at the prime minister of Canada's residence, they had to come in and shut down and tear the walls out. The place was condemned. I challenge anyone to go up and tear the walls out of that school. I have videos of rats running through heaters, in the walls, teachers are complaining. It's just beyond and I don't want to be talking about this, trust me. I have no time for a rat. I don't, and it's not a comfortable situation, believe you and me, but it's an issue I have to deal with as MHA.

Speaker, rats, mould, overcrowding and lack of ventilation is simply unacceptable. There are 650 children crammed into a 54-year-old building. The NLTA president I spoke to earlier share my concerns. Teachers are questioning whether OHS rules are being violated.

Has the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL opened an investigation into this?

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

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

We are convinced there is no mould currently in Frank Roberts Junior High. We are aware of the rodent situation and we are working on it with the school district and the appropriate services and resources to deal with the rodents concerned.

The Member opposite references concerns from the NLTA. Literally, before I walked into the House, was my first communication from the president of the NLTA. I'll be meeting with him tomorrow morning at 9 to discuss it.

Thank you.

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

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

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

The Minister of Transportation is hemming and hawing again on the plans for the fifth provincial water bomber which was damaged way back in 2018. Speaker, first the minister said we didn't need it. Then he said they want to fix it. Then they wanted to sell it. Now they're just not sure.

As the wildfire season picks up, can the minister explain the plan for the fifth water bomber?

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Mr. Speaker, we have four water bombers that are serviced by people that are equipped to do the job on those water bombers, which is a specialty, because I had a greater appreciation for what they do when I visited the facility. I say to the Member opposite, maybe he should visit it as well.

We do have a fifth one. I'm not going to apologize to him or anybody in this province to do due diligence around that fifth asset that we have that's very valuable. Yes, we were looking at selling it. Then the forest fires caused us to pause. That's not irresponsible; that's being responsible.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** We have a fifth unit; I'm doing my due diligence around it. It's very valuable. Also, from an operational perspective, which my colleague will answer in terms of where the water bombers go in terms of the operational piece, we do have an agreement with outside provinces. We share that agreement. We help each other out and that's a good thing.

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

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

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** That sounds like (inaudible). It took five years to hear it. Speaker, much like the Team Gushue Highway, five years waiting for action.

Speaker, forest fires in Central Newfoundland led to a state of emergency last year and evacuations. It now appears the fifth water bomber will not get off the ground this year.

Do we have enough pilots and crew for our four water bombers that we have here now?

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

**E. LOVELESS:** We have four units that are complemented with staff for those four units, Mr. Speaker. We know there are challenges around, and I say there are challenges around because what they do as pilots with these assets is specialized. I commend them for that because they're doing a good job.

We're equipped; we're ready to go for this season. As we know, climate change is real. We don't know what we're going to face as a province, but we're ready.

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

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



**L. O'DRISCOLL:** We certainly didn't claim anything about climate change. We know there are forest fires every year.

Speaker, the province has already recorded 48 forest fires this year, compared to three for the same period last year. We see the devastation in Alberta. Four water bombers were not enough last year and we had to call in outside assistance.

What is the minister going to do this year?

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

**D. BRAGG:** Thank you, a great question.

People need to be careful. Every one of these forest fires so far has been –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**D. BRAGG:** – through neglect – absolutely through neglect. For the most part, 90 per cent, grass fires. People start to burn grass and it gets out of control. You need a permit right now. People need to be very cautious in the woods, around their own property this time of year. Grass can light up in an instance. It can rain in the morning, be dry enough in the afternoon to cause enough damage. We've seen it in the Codroy Valley. We've seen in Central. Luckily there's enough rain, snow and fog on this coast –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**D. BRAGG:** So, Mr. Speaker, yeah, lightning last summer. Well, you're talking about the number of forest fires so far this year, all have been caused by people out either with a burn barrel – the Members don't want to listen; I guess that's the problem why we have as many fires.

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

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

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

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

Always an opportunity to get up, especially during Nurses' Week, and thank our nurses for all they do.

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

**P. DINN:** Speaker, the minister said that the nursing vacancy rate in this province is increasing but won't admit that this means the problem is getting worse.

Speaker, are increasing nursing vacancies a sign of this government's success?

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

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

I think the 200 RN grads from the Bachelor of Nursing program that have signed on to work with the Provincial Health Authority is a sign of success. I think the mission to India, Mr. Speaker, where we are expecting our first nurses to arrive as early as September, and hopefully hundreds more to follow, is a sign of our success.

Mr. Speaker, the number of people actually working in positions in this province has remained steady over the last five years. That has not lowered. In fact, it has remained steady. The nature of the workforce, with casualization and nurses going to agencies, is what has changed.

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

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

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

We hear from the Nurses' Union that 750 vacancies exist; 700 minus 200 is still a shortage. I don't know where the math is, but it doesn't sound successful to me.

Recently, Nova Scotia has had success in convincing nurses to switch to full-time. Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, our minister can't answer how many nurses have left the system to switch to casual.

I ask the minister: How can people trust you to fix the problem if you don't know how big the problem is?

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

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

We are fixing the problem. This problem has been years and years in the making. The policy for casualization was put in place about 20 years ago, Mr. Speaker, when we had more nurses than were needed in the province at that time, or more nurses than could get permanent jobs, I should say. So a number of nurses were casual.

The rate of pay that we give nurses – a 20 per cent premium – is the highest in this province than any other province in the country. We have the higher rate of casual nurses in this province than any other province in the country. That is a concern for us, Mr. Speaker, but we are working through it. I know the Minister of Finance is negotiating with the RNU, and we've been working with the college on other initiatives that will help alleviate the situation.

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

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

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

Our nurses, we know, are the lowest paid in the country. The lowest paid in the country. When asked why nurses are leaving the

province or switching to casual, the minister simply couldn't answer. I have a simple solution for the minister on this one, Speaker.

Will he instruct the Health Authority to ask nurses why are they leaving or switching to casual, make the responses anonymous and publish the results?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, we've asked the Health Authority to do exit surveys for all areas where there is a vacancy factor, where there's a problem with vacancy. The Health Authority are endeavouring to start the process of doing exit surveys with individuals that are leaving the high-demand areas, Mr. Speaker, but we have been working with the college, where there are regulations now being worked on back and forth by the college. We are working with the college to make things easier for licensure for nurses in this province. We've already made great headway with the college. They are a great partner, Mr. Speaker. We will find solutions to this problem.

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Yesterday when I asked the minister to fix her inadequate pay equity legislation, the minister said – quote – it's important to hear from all stakeholders, not just one particular group.

Speaker, the Provincial Action Network on the Status of Women, representing every status of women council in our province, called for a rewrite of the legislation. If the minister won't listen to one group, will she listen to 10?

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

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

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

I also thank the hon. Member for keeping this very important topic at the forefront.

Again, I'm happy to say we're the first administration in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador to introduce legislation on pay equity. We know that's happened now in the public sector and we know that our consultations have successfully concluded now to inform regulations of the bill.

We are going to consult with all of our stakeholders to put forth the best legislation that we can. But not only that, Mr. Speaker, we're going further with concrete initiatives to close the gender wage gap because we know pay equity is only one tool in our tool box.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** On that point of consultation, Speaker, the Provincial Action Network on the Status of Women wrote: Consultations and regulations alone are not enough to address the gaps, and continued – quote – we submit that Bill 3 be redrafted to better serve women and marginalized workers.

Why won't the minister take this advice?

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

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Speaker and thank you, again, to the hon. Member and another opportunity to talk about the wonderful initiatives that we are doing to make change here for women and gender-diverse people here in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's concrete initiatives to help close the gender wage gap.

We can look across the country, we see what works, we see what wage gaps are still in place, and we know that pay equity alone won't solve that or close that gender wage gap. Concrete initiatives will, such as making space at leadership and decision-making and making spaces at those tables, Speaker, and that's what we're doing. Investing in our growing tech sector, in particular, investments in women and gender-diverse and I can go on.

Also access to child care. It's a number of initiatives, Speaker, and that's what it's going to take and that's what this government is going to do.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Speaker, the minister continues to fail to listen to the stakeholder groups. The Provincial Action Network on the Status of Women said – quote – our current pay equity and pay transparency legislation is not a piece of progressive legislation that we can all be proud of.

Will the minister do the right thing, listen to these stakeholder groups and let them help rewrite the legislation?

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

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

Again, our consultations have just concluded, and that's only one piece. As we know, introducing pay equity in the public sector and the agencies, as well as pay transparency in both private and public, and we also know that the next phase is to introduce pay equity in the private sector. It's going to take consulting with all stakeholders, including individuals and, of course, the aim of this legislation is not to put anybody out but to put forth the best legislation that we can for the people of the province and, again, those concrete initiatives that are going to help close the gender wage gap.

I invite the Member to come and join the table and sit at the table to be part of the solution, Speaker.

Thank you so much.

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

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

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

Much singing took place this afternoon in the House of Assembly, but I want to say people in my district would gladly put aside their pride and sing for their supper if it meant being able to feed their children.

The provincial Health Accord is riddled with references to access to nutritional food as a social determinant of health. Yet, many residents in my district can't afford enough food to keep their families from going hungry, let alone being able to fend off illness and disease by being able to purchase nutritional foods, Speaker.

So I ask the Minister of Health: Will he commit his government to reverse their erosion of services to my district, such as the removal of the freight boat, so people are not being harmed by malnutrition in my district, Speaker?

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think I made that clear the other day that I have had no discussions about returning the freight boat to Lewisporte, so it's a non-issue. I'm not having a discussion. I hope that's clear because she's asked it seven or eight times. The answer is, right now, I'm having no conversation. So I hope I put that to bed right here today.

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

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

**L. EVANS:** No conversations, but no relief for the high cost of food, let alone nutritional food in my district, Speaker, but erosion of services and policies of this government.

In my district patients do not have timely access to adequate medical care. Patients are often bumped off medical flights so they can't even get to their appointments for cancer, heart disease, diabetes, broken bones, et cetera. Returning home is even much worse because they're no longer considered a priority and can be delayed for days and days. This causes great mental and financial hardship on the people, the patients.

Will the Minister of Health commit adequate resources to ensure patients have proper access to medical care in my district?

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

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

The Health Accord, which is a 10-year plan, outlines a number of initiatives, Mr. Speaker, including initiatives for Labrador. We have put a number of initiatives in place already through the Health Accord. We'll

continue putting initiatives in place, including initiatives for the Labrador region.

The issue of transportation is one of a contract with the provider. I know that contract is coming up soon. I did have a meeting with the Member regarding the transportation issue, the contract for the Labrador area, Mr. Speaker, and that is under review in the department.

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

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

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

Labrador West still struggles with housing and our only shelter only has three beds. The Housing and Homelessness Coalition asked for funding to expand the shelter and core funding so it could staff it 24-7.

I ask the Minister of CSSD: When will this group get its core funding and the funding to expand so people can find shelter?

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

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

I've had several conversations with the Member for Labrador West around housing and homelessness. We're working with the community and the agency that is overseeing the shelter. We are committed to expanding the shelter services in Labrador West. We will be allocating the money. We just have to finalize the details and I'm hoping that will be much sooner than later.

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

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

**P. LANE:** Speaker, I've had a credible source reach out to me to express concerns

over the way blind trusts are managed through the Commissioner for Legislative Standards for Members of Cabinet. Not necessarily specific to this administration, but in how it has applied to past administrations as well.

It's been suggested that there's more of an operational trust than a blind trust and does not provide the type of safeguards most appropriate to ensure no conflict of interest exists between ministers' portfolios, knowledge of Cabinet matters and any personal business interest they may have.

To the best of my knowledge, there has been no review of blind trusts and how they are being managed in my 12 years as a Member of this House of Assembly.

I would therefore ask the minister if he would commit to having an independent review of the current procedure for managing a blind trust to ensure they are indeed eliminating the possibility of potential conflicts of interest with a report to come to this Legislature.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to answer the question.

This was discussed, I believe, yesterday or today, it's all starting to blend together, but we did talk about blind trusts. The Member talked about blind trusts and I think the answer was provided that the oversight of that is by the Commissioner for Legislative Standards.

The Member also talked about an ethics commissioner so I think it is a great opportunity to advise Members who aren't aware that there is a review of statutory offices being undertaken. I encourage every Member in this House, particularly the Member who has shown interest in this issue before, to make a submission to

Judge Fowler, who is in charge of that review, to get your expressions of any issues you may have, any suggestions you may have of how to make this process better. I'm sure he would appreciate it and I'm sure we will appreciate it, too.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**P. LANE:** Thank you.

I will be making my comments known for sure.

Speaker, this past Monday my colleague for Humber - Bay of Islands recounted a troubling story from when he was minister of Service NL. He was dealing with the very serious matter involving a real estate company and the individual was later convicted of misappropriating funds. The Member indicated that while he was meeting to discuss the matter, the former premier's staff person showed up uninvited to his offices to sit in on the meeting with investigators. The Member further stated that it was later revealed to him that the premier of the day had a business involvement with the individual in question as it related to the matter at hand. This should raise a big red flag in this House of Assembly as it relates to blind trusts and conflict of interests.

I therefore ask the minister: In addition to conducting a review of blind trusts, will he also commit to a process for the establishment of an ethics commissioner, totally independent of government and this Legislature?

I know the minister said there is a review being –

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

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I think you started answering the question for me. So he said he knew what I said before and I will just reiterate it again. There is a review of the statutory offices that is ongoing right now. I encourage the Member and any members of the public as well that are interested in this to make their submissions to Judge Fowler. We look forward to receiving his report in due course.

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

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### **Tabling of Documents**

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

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

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I am tabling four orders-in-council relating to funding precommitment for fiscal years 2024-2025 to 2032-2033.

Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** Any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

**Answers to Questions for which Notice  
has been Given**

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

**D. BRAGG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier today in Question Period, I reported it twice that the FFAW walked away from negotiations and talks with the ASP. I'd just like to update now and say this is the third time in which talks have broken off within that department. So if anybody has any suggestions from the opposite side, please bring them forward.

Thank you.

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

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

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, Speaker, I have answers to two questions to be tabled.

**SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Any further answers to questions for which notice has been given?

Petitions.

**Petitions**

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The reasons for this petition are as follows:

The residents of Gambo and Terra Nova are upset that areas 27 and 42 received cuts to their resident moose licence quota while non-resident hunters remain at the same level as previous years.

Residents feel if there are reductions in quotas it should be shared between the residents and non-resident hunters.

Many local residents use moose meat as a primary source of their protein for meat supply and cannot afford the rising cost of beef in local stores and supermarkets.

Mr. Speaker, these quotas were cut this year. Area 42 has been cut down to 56, that's a cut of 50 licences with only 56 licences being issued; 50 cut, 50 being issued. Area 27 is reduced by 50 down to 138, while the non-resident licence has not been touched at all.

Now science has come out, and I'm not disputing science, there is no question, but this is a highly unfair cut in the moose licence for the residents, people who depend on it. I know that the minister is going to stand up and say that I'm against non-resident hunters coming in and all that stuff; not one little bit. But here's the truth of it, when a non-resident hunter comes in, their kill rate is somewhere around 80 per cent. They don't depend on this meat for life. In Newfoundland, moose hunting is a way of life.

Two years ago when COVID happened, there was no moose hunting for non-residents. The moose hunt didn't exist. So the numbers, the science for these statistics came out prior to a year where there was no non-resident hunt.

Mr. Speaker, these residents of Terra Nova in my district and Gambo in the District of Gander, these people are asking for simply one thing: They want the numbers to remain exactly as they are for this year alone, until the science can do the proper study to see if it's a necessity.

You go right across the road and there are plenty of moose. So these moose are there, the science is flawed. The reality of it is these people depend on the moose hunt. If you go out, for example, to the East Port

Peninsula, most of these hunters are elderly hunters. They want to hunt in their own area. They don't have the means, certainly with the price of gas and the cost of going out to do these moose hunts, to go anywhere else.

If you think of those areas and you think that there are only 56 licences being issued, it's shameful. Everyone knows the amount of moose that are out there. It's absolutely shameful.

So we're asking the minister that he reconsider the cuts of 50 to each area, for this year alone, until a proper study can be done and once that study comes in, he can do as he sees fit.

Thank you, Minister.

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

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

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

Many residents in the District of Bonavista travel over Route 230A, particularly through the municipality of George's Brook-Milton. Residents are concerned about the condition of this major route and conceivably it being the most travelled route in the district. There have been numerous vehicles damaged on potholes that currently exist and have existed throughout 2022.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide the required maintenance and implement a better operational plan to bring Route 230A up to a safe and acceptable standard.

Mr. Speaker, I presented a petition about the roads in the District of Bonavista several times. This is one of the entry points to the District of Bonavista, 230A. Any traffic from the populated Avalon that's heading into Bonavista, they need not necessarily be

going to watch the Disney filming or Ben Stiller's *Severance* filming or *King Tide* over in Keels, but whatever would bring them to Bonavista, quite likely they'll have to travel over 230A or they'll have to travel over 233 from Port Blandford to Bunyan's Cove coming from the west.

Both of those entry points into the District of Bonavista need some attention. I would venture to say that on Route 230A, there are probably three to four TI pickup trucks that travel over that stretch of road in George's Brook-Milton daily. The residents in George's Brook-Milton would be aware that TI are aware of the road conditions of which they travel over. But in all of 2022, there were no repairs on this entry point into the District of Bonavista.

We would like for this government this year to have a better operational plan to make sure that as soon as the hot asphalt becomes available, in the following week or two, that road and the other roads are addressed like the entry point on 233; that when people visit the District of Bonavista, they can do so over a road which will not damage their vehicles.

This particular petition has over 100 signatures and they would like to see a resolution and a commitment from government that those entry points into the district and many of the other roads, which are tourist-attractive sites, are done in a very timely manner.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:



WHEREAS the residents from Cape Broyle to St. Shott's are lacking a full-time family doctor; and

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

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

WHEREAS the Trepassey region has only one ambulance and the Cape Broyle ambulance service has major staffing concerns, the region can be under a red alert for multiple hours at a time;

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

Now I did speak on this this morning as well, but the first thing, it's two hours away from the Health Sciences Centre, that's the first thing, when ambulances leave the area. Now, with no doctor in the area and nurse practitioners are there only a couple of times a week, it's vital that we have a doctor that's going to practice in the area three or four times a week.

In that area, they service Trepassey and Ferryland area. That's where nurse practitioners service now, Trepassey and Ferryland. There's a doctor that was willing and able to go to the area, but they didn't see fit to be able to put her there. It just doesn't make sense.

Residents in the area are concerned that nobody will be there to take care of them in their time of need. Some residents are going to emergency rooms in St. John's just

to get the care because they don't have access to a family doctor. There are people who live in that area and because they haven't been to a doctor in three or four years, they're telling them that they don't have a family doctor anymore. So now when you're healthy and you don't have to go to a doctor, they're going to go and tell you that you're not a patient there anymore, who should be able to get the doctor's care because they haven't been there.

Now what sense in the world does that make? To me, it makes no sense. You have nurse practitioners there, but because you've been healthy and you haven't been there for three or four years, they're going to tell you you're not a patient there anymore. It makes no sense.

Along with the ambulance issue and Eastern Health not accepting a doctor who's willing to go to the area – now think about that, they're willing to go to the area, but Eastern Health doesn't think that they're needed in the area.

They went up and met with the council in the area and they said, well, two nurse practitioners can do the work. They do great work, don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining about the nurse practitioners. They need a doctor in the area. When they go there and they go to book an appointment the day after they left, the first person who went to the clinic, it was nine days to get an appointment, or a phone in, nine days. The next time someone called, it was 23 days. Don't tell me they don't need a doctor in the area when they do.

That's what I'm trying to push for here, for this government to look at that. They're always saying we can't find doctors. Well, she's willing to go there. That's the problem.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

The province's population has aged much more rapidly than any other province in the country over the last 50 years. The number of persons over 65 years of age has more than doubled over the past 30 years.

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

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

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

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

Speaker, I have presented this petition a number of times. We do hear bits and pieces of work being done. If I look at action item 8.4 in the Health Accord, it says this – this is their action item – “Develop and implement provincial legislation, regulation, and policy required to provide appropriate, quality, and accessible care and protection for older persons in Newfoundland and Labrador.”

That's right in the Health Accord and it's something that we should be looking at. I look at some of the more immediate items that are identified in the Health Accord. Action 8.1 – hopefully initiated in the first year – talked about developing and implementing a formal Provincial Frail Elderly Program to address the critical needs of our population. Yet, there's nothing started on that.

We've mentioned it so many times. The Seniors' Advocate has mentioned it so many times that we have to support our older population, support our older adults to allow them to age in place with dignity and autonomy.

There are so many things we could be doing. Yes, the minister has started another expert panel to give us a report in another six to eight months' time. Right now, we already know the needs of our older population and this government needs to start acting because these individuals do not have the time on their hands.

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

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

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

I'm responding in my capacity as Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Seniors coming out of the Health Accord. Many of the items and issues that the Member raised are under active consideration and review by the Cabinet Committee. We have given direction to the Provincial Health Authority to prioritize seniors' care as it's mapping out its work plans and health care plans for the new Health Authority and addressing the needs of our frail, elderly uppermost in that list of things for them to address.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

This petition calls to reinstate the marine shipping services between the Island portion of the province and to our Northern Labrador communities. This is the petition:

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to return the marine shipping service between the Island portion of our province and our Northern Labrador communities.

This marine freight service was removed in the spring of 2019, resulting from freight being trucked to the port of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, then shipped to our northern communities. Since then the additional shipping has directly impacted prices of food, building materials, vehicles including trucks and off-road vehicles, household goods and many essential services for our communities.

Our Northern Labrador communities are totally isolated with no road access and marine transportation services are limited to just five summer months on average. With the cancellation of the direct marine freight service from the Island portion of our province to our communities, residents are witnessing exorbitant price increases of basic needs impacting overall quality of life.

Now, Speaker, this petition is not about me. This is not about me as the MHA for Torngat Mountains. It's about the people on the North Coast and I am being swamped with prices for food. The minister may say he's not going to look at reinstating it but, in actual fact, Nunatsiavut Government actually claimed this government to violate the land claims agreement. So why didn't it go to court, Speaker? Why didn't Nunatsiavut Government take this Liberal government to court for violating the land claims agreement by not negotiating or

consulting in terms of the removal of the freight boat? Because it cost too much? Basically, they can't afford to go to court for most things.

But the removal of the freight boat, now we're looking at a small jar of jam, 500 millilitres, \$8.99; a one-kilogram jar of peanut butter is \$9.59; Crisco cooking oil, 1.5 litres of regular cooking oil, \$21.49; a little box of cream crackers, \$9.99. This is what's happening.

Now, I listed off those things because a lot of people can't afford to eat. They're basically taking those cream crackers, the peanut butter, putting it together and just basically making little sandwiches. At the end of the day if you can't afford to feed your children, you will lose your children. How can you get your children back from CSSD if you can't afford to feed them?

I have to tell you; luckily, I only experienced hunger when I was a university student because I didn't have much money when I was going to university. A lot of students experience hunger but not the chronic hunger of the people on the North Coast who can't afford to buy food every day so their children and our seniors are not going hungry, Speaker.

That's what happens when decisions are made –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

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

**SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 14, An Act to Amend the Lands Act.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, that Bill 40, An Act to Amend the Lands Act, be now read a second time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that Bill 40, An Act to Amend the Lands Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Lands Act." (Bill 40)

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

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

I won't take a lot of time today because this is a brief amendment, Bill 40, An Act to Amend the Lands Act. It is basically going to allow the minister to charge a fee for the reservation of Crown lands and incorporate gender-neutral language.

So section 8 of the *Lands Act* grants the Minister of FFA the authority to reserve and set apart Crown lands for a specific purpose and a set period. The proposed amendment is necessary in order to provide the minister authority to charge a fee when we reserve land and administer Crown lands under section 8 of the act. As I said before, it incorporates gender-neutral language.

I am sure there will be some questions from the Opposition, Mr. Speaker. It's eight or 10 sections. I think I will take my place and look for somebody to speak on the other side.

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

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

It is certainly good to get up here today and talk about Bill 40, An Act to Amend the Lands Act. Of course, as we know, this act gives introduction into industry, wind industry I guess, into the province. As we know, new industry is always being introduced. We welcome new industry and, with that, comes some priorities.

On December 14, 2022, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador established a temporary Wind Energy Land Reserve Order under the *Lands Act* to be placed for one year. The purpose in order to ensure that the available Crown lands, as continued in the Schedule, are available for the purpose to call land bids being conducted by the industry.

On February 23, 2023, IET announced the Wind-Hydrogen Fiscal Framework and included the introduction on an annual land reserve fee of 3.5 per cent in market value for Crown lands use prior to the project development. So these are initiatives. This is, of course, new industry and, with that, we've got the land nominations for new industry. Leases are very, very important, of course, to lease the land for new industry which is very important that we own our lands and that there are leases there and that we maintain our lands in those cases.

I think we did see a slide regarding the introduction of the industry. It says Crown lands reserve lands leased at 3.5 per cent, which any land that's leased like that, you know, for those purposes at certain percentages – I don't know what percentage it would be, but I guess probably that's something that can be debated of the price or whatnot. This is a new industry. We welcome new industry, but we have to make sure that we are the beneficiaries of that industry and introducing the Crown lands right now to that industry, we have to make sure that we receive the best benefit, best bang for our buck.

To reserve the land at 3.5 per cent until the company gets up, that's the proposal right

now on the table, so that's good. At least we're getting something for the land. Maybe there's another way we can look at that as well because after it is leased and it's operational, then it's proposed we get 7 per cent on that land. I don't know if that's a good proposal. I am sure there have been some discussions. I hope that the minister and the government have looked at other jurisdictions. I know there are other wind projects out there and I'm sure they've already addressed other wind projects in other jurisdictions to see if that's rational, reasonable or whatnot. We do need, yes, to get some framework down. We do need to get some fees and funds from this project, which, again, is greatly needed.

It gives the Crown land wind resources; it says they have 3.5 per cent. That's the two basic initiatives to it.

I do have some questions when we get to Committee, Speaker. We'll ask some questions; there are a couple, but for this right now, we certainly need to get this act in place. We need to get this bill put through so that we can amend the *Lands Act* so we can get this stuff in place.

I will have some questions in Committee, but I will certainly support this amendment, yes.

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

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

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

I'll stand here and speak about the *Lands Act* amendment. Coming out of the change in industry and also the proposal of wind energy in this province, kind of leading to some of these changes, giving the minister the power to actually charge for land that's reserved for this. It was a 3.5 per cent market value.

This is a change, I guess, to go with the times and also the mass amount of land that's going to be reserved and possibly used for wind energy and to actually make sure that people do develop it and use it for the purpose intended.

I do have some questions going into Committee about the process. I know there's no real stipulation, this is only used for this. There's a possibility that the reservation land and the fee could be applied to possibly other types of reservation of land, but I'll ask the minister those questions when we get into Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Seeing no other speakers, if the minister speaks now he will close debate.

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

**D. BRAGG:** We're going for a record. Only if we could settle the fishery so fast, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to hear from the Member for Exploits and the Member for Lab West. They seem to be both onside with this. This is not anything more than we need to get our best bang for our buck. The Member for Exploits mentioned the 3.5 per cent of the reserve. That's an annual fee. The same as the 7 per cent will be an annual fee on the lease.

I look forward to this going into Committee.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 40 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Motion carried.

**CLERK (Barnes):** A bill, An Act to Amend the Lands Act. (Bill 40)

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Lands Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 40)

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

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

I move that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 40.

**SPEAKER:** Did we get a seconder for that then, sorry?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Seconded by the Government House Leader.

**SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, '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 (Trimper):** Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 40, An Act to Amend the Lands Act.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Lands Act" (Bill 40)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** On this bill, I do have three or four questions. I will probably ask the four of them all the one time and get it in there.

The first question I have is: Crown Lands will provide a lease to wind and hydro energy, if or when the site is no longer used for wind energy or if the site doesn't get used, the land reverts to the Crown.

Are there any financial protections in place so that the Crown, province and taxpayers are not left on the hook for cleanup of these cost sites?

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

**D. BRAGG:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The idea of the lease would be that whoever leaves, cleans up the mess behind them. That's why a lease is better here than a grant. You get a grant; you would have a problem with people leaving things behind on granted land. You have to look for the (inaudible.) A lease, one of the conditions can be you must clean up the site before you leave the site.

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

**P. FORSEY:** The bill notes that there are reservations of Crown lands, as ordered by the minister; the minister may set fees for the purpose of the reservation.

Can the minister provide a list of these fees currently charged for Crown land reservations? Are there additional fees in addition to those required for wind energy projects?

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

**D. BRAGG:** So the reason we're here, Mr. Chair, obviously is because this is brand new, brand new technology, brand new opportunity for our province. Three point five per cent is based on the market value of the reserved area. There's a process they go through, through IET. IET will then work through them. When they decide the actual area they want, then we will do a lease on that actual area, which I'm assuming will be much smaller than the leased area. Then we do the value on that area and then all the rest of the land that they don't need, comes back into the fold of the Crown Lands.

Right now, if you see our map, you see a lot of green areas plotted out.

I don't know if that answers your question or not. When they don't want it, it goes back.

The reason we've done this in an area is you wouldn't want to have an opportunity to bring in a billion-dollar company and

someone put one cabin in the middle of it. That's why we reserved the area. That's the logic behind it, right?

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

**P. FORSEY:** In the case of a decommissioning of the project, say it didn't last as long as it was supposed to; something went wrong, in the case of decommissioning it had to be torn down.

Are there things put in place that the company itself are responsible for the decommissioning of the project, the removals of the units or whatnot? Is there set-up a bursary each year or something that makes sure that our province is not on the hook? Because instead of that, if they do have to decommission, they're gone, they have no money; they can't even clean it up. Is there something in place to protect us, financially, on that part?

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

**D. BRAGG:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Right now, I don't have that in front of me. I'll get that for you, but most of these have to go through an EA. An EA process would be the construction and the deconstruction, should be there. We would hope, we're looking at 40 or 50 years out. I don't know what the life expectancy would be, but let's look at a minimum of 40 or 50 years.

My concern was the same as yours. If something went up for a couple of years and all of a sudden it went sideways, who cleans it up? The cleanup is the person on the lease.

If you do the math, 7 per cent in 15 years would have the full market value – 14.5 years we'll have the full market value. Anything after that is all money in the bank, so to speak, on Crown lands.

The same now if you had a cabin. You have an LTO on a cabin and you want to get out of it. You must clean up the site before you can cancel the LTO, the lease.

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

**P. FORSEY:** Again, as the minister just mentioned, we also find ourselves in a position right now where there's a lot of debris in those areas where even this wind energy project is supposed to be, there's some debris in that area now already.

In the plans of that project, will the companies that are going in there now be responsible to clean up those areas as part of the agreement?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you very much for the question.

I just want to assure the people – and the question is a valid one – we want to ensure that the sites are cleaned up if and when the decommissioning happens. Whether it be 10 years, 15 years or they don't become economically viable.

This is an industry that's very much taking off in many other jurisdictions. We're going to be very focused on ensuring the environment is put back to the way it was before, as best we can. That's what the environmental assessment will do. That's what we're going to continue to hold the people accountable for.

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

**P. FORSEY:** I don't know if we understood each other on the question, but the stuff that's already there, there was some debris left over from previous companies that went in. Let's take Abitibi, the old Abitibi stuff, there's still stuff left in the woods right now in our environment that's there.

As those companies are going in there now, the wind projects, will they clean up those sites as they move in? That's what I'm asking.

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

**B. DAVIS:** Very valid question from the hon. Member.

We have learned from those mistakes of the past. Obviously, prior to the environmental assessment process those things did happen in this province. We see that around our province in some of the pristine forests that we do have. There are things left behind by companies that didn't do their due diligence at the end. That's why we hold them accountable through the environmental assessment now. Most of the cases where this has happened has happened pre-environmental assessment in this province.

I hope that answers your question. I know you're asking about Abitibi and places like that, but that was pre-environmental assessment.

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

**P. FORSEY:** Yeah, so that was pre. In order to give those agreements, will government put in a stipulation there that we want you to clean up those areas as you're moving into the area?

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

**D. BRAGG:** Thank you.

Yes, we can't have people going into the environment and leaving a mess behind, not this day and age. What was done 40 or 50 years ago is not acceptable and we won't stand for it today, to be honest.

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



**P. FORSEY:** You're answering the question, but I'm not getting the answer that I'm looking for and I guess I'm probably not going to get it.

My question is: The stuff that is left there from Abitibi and those places right now, how are we getting it out? Are we going to do it ourselves, really?

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

**B. DAVIS:** Sorry, it took us a second to get to where you were asking the question for.

We can't expect someone to go in, although some companies would go in and clean up the site, because that maybe what they need to do for their own benefit, but we're not going to expect them to go in and cleanup the site of somebody else.

Obviously, that is not ideal for any situation, but as we've said, and the Minister of Fisheries has said, that's what the environmental assessment is doing now. It is going to create the fact that this won't happen again in the future. We can't go back and right the wrongs of the past, but we can make sure those wrongs don't happen any more in the future.

I hope that answers your question. I know we're not going to force people to go back in and clean up the site that someone else did before.

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

**P. FORSEY:** We finally got to the question.

To get this project up and running, companies will install bridges and roads in the area that they lease. Will the infrastructure remain or be removed when the company folds or is gone?

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

**D. BRAGG:** We hope no one leaves any time soon. We hope this generates employment for years and years to come. We hope that this is a new wave of employment for a lot of areas in this province that need it.

But to your question, if they leave, they should take the bridges; I don't know about roll up the road, but they should reforest it, walk out and clean up the footprint as if they were never there.

Is that the answer you were looking for? That's the answer I want to be clear on. We can't leave a mess behind like what we did years ago. They walk up, they put up one met tower and they prove that's no good. You go in and what they've cut down, they reforest, take down their tower, take out their culverts and come out.

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

**P. FORSEY:** Okay. Yes, thanks, Minister.

So the life expectancy on the windmills: Is it 15 to 20 years or more?

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

**D. BRAGG:** I wish the Minister of IET was here; he would be the expert in that field. I would anticipate much more. I can remember years ago, going to PEI and I saw the wind towers. I don't know if it is the same ones, but it looks like their cousins if they're not because that's been there for 20 years or more. I think you're looking at longevity here.

**CHAIR:** Any further speakers to the bill?

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

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

I just have a question I want to ask about the fee of 3.5 per cent of market value on Crown land prior. I know the idea of this is

to go along with the wind hydrogen energy framework, but are there any talks of using it in any other industry at this point in time?

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

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

At this time, wind energy is the only one that has come forward and this is why we're changing the bill here today. There may be others in the future that are unbeknownst to us right now, but this is where our industry changed.

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

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

Thank you, Minister, for your answer.

The only other thing I want to ask, because it's not explicitly stated in the act, that it's for any particular industry so I just want to ask: Is it possible that it could be used for agriculture, forestry, mineral lands, anything like that? Is there any possibility that this could be used for any other thing or is there any anticipation to use it for any of those current industries in our province?

**CHAIR:** The Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

**D. BRAGG:** So we already have legislation in place for agriculture of land; we have it in for forestry. This will be any industry. I don't know, it could be creating moon dust 40 years' time, right. Who knew about hydrogen 20 years ago? This is why we're doing this today. This is only for any development on provincial Crown land. That should be known, too. This is about Crown land. If people already own the land, for argument sake, if IOC want to put it up and it's on their own land, then they're not paying the fee because it's on their own land. This is for Crown lands.

**CHAIR:** Seeing no further speakers, shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against?

The motion is carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

**CLERK:** Clauses 2 through 12 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall clauses 2 through 12 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Against?

Those clauses are carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 12 carried.

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

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Against?

The enacting clause is carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

**CLERK:** An Act to Amend the Lands Act.

**CHAIR:** Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Against?

The title is carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the bill carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Against?

Carried.

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

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 40.

**CHAIR:** It is moved that the Committee rise and report Bill 40 carried without amendment.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Against?

Carried.

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

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

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

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

The Committee of the Whole have reviewed the matters before them and have asked me to report Bill 40 carried without amendment.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed that Bill 40 be passed without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Tomorrow.

**SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

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

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

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

I call from the Order Paper, Order 15, An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Bill 41.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that Bill 41, An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act, now be read a second time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that Bill 41, An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act." (Bill 41)

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Speaker, Digital Government and Service NL is responsible for enforcement of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, which imposes certain minimum conditions on all workplaces to help ensure workers are provided with an environment that neither impairs their health nor imperils their safety.

There were requirements under the act for employers to establish occupational health and safety committees, depending on the number of workers at a workplace, or to identify worker health and safety representatives or workplace health and safety designates.

Currently, occupational health and safety committees are required at any workplace with 10 or more workers. Where fewer than 10 workers are employed, the employer must ensure that a worker not connected to management is designated as a worker health and safety representative to monitor the health, safety and welfare of workers in the workplace.

Where there are fewer than six workers engaged at a workplace and the designation of a worker health and safety representative is not practical, the employer may appoint a workplace health and safety designate. This person can be connected to management or be the actual employer.

The goal of this bill is to amend section 37 of the act to raise the threshold for an occupational health and safety committee from 10 or more workers to 20 or more workers, and to amend section 41 of the act to expand the threshold for a workplace health and safety representative from less than 10 workers to less than 20 workers.

Both the Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council and the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour requested this change, with the Employers'

Council noting the current threshold of more than 10 workers is burdensome for smaller businesses, particularly as those numbers fluctuate throughout the year. Speaker, I also spoke with the current president of the Federation of Labour who is also supportive of this change. The Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council are also supportive of this change.

So while the amendments will likely lead to a reduction in the overall number of occupational health and safety committees, it will not reduce worker safety or worksite safety. Workplace health and safety designates and worker health and safety representatives still have legislated duty to monitor and support health and safety in the workplace. Any workplace without an occupational health and safety committee would still have a designated person for this purpose whose duties are the same as those imposed on an occupational health and safety committee.

I also want to point out the act is a minimum standard and workplaces with fewer than 20 employees can still form a committee. Those who have committees do not need to abolish them. The optimal situation is to have a committee with management and labour working together to address worker safety. A shift to a representative would still require a non-management employee to participate; it would just present an option where employers themselves cannot identify a management person to take part.

Oversight to ensure compliance with requirements for occupational health and safety committees, representative and designates is achieved through the Occupational Health and Safety Division, as well as WorkplaceNL. When conducting inspections, occupational health and safety officers confirm compliance with the requirements for a committee designate or representative. WorkplaceNL offers discounts on premiums paid by employers through its PRIME program when they have active committees, representatives or

designates, offering other means to encourage compliance.

These amendments will also harmonize our legislation with most other Canadian jurisdictions, including the federal government. The bill would come into force on March 1, 2024. This would provide time for WorkplaceNL to make some changes to their policies and systems prior to the commencement date. Newfoundland and Labrador workplaces have accomplished many positive health and safety outcomes over the past number of years. Work-related fatalities have declined, more workplaces are injury-free and health and safety awareness is increasing.

We also have one of the lowest lost-time incident rates in Canada. We must continue to champion a culture of safety in our workplaces, enhance programs to address the changing workplace, leverage partnerships, provide timely education, training, technology and strengthen the enforcement management process. No person or organization can achieve success alone. Safe and healthy workplaces require a collaborative effort.

I look forward to answering any questions in Committee and looking forward to seeing the comments of my colleagues.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

Again, it's a pleasure to stand up and speak on legislation today brought forward by the minister and I thank the minister and her department again for the hard work that they do each and every day.

The proposed changes to the act primarily modify worker thresholds with respect to an occupational health and safety committee from 10 to 20 employees at a workplace.

Quite literally, the only substantial additional housekeeping changes to the act: updated definition, replace department references, correct references to the Supreme Court, update statutory references and incorporate gender-neutral language, which we all agree is very important to any act that comes forward to the House from here on out.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council and the Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council have all been consulted and agree with the changes that have been brought forward here today and so do we.

Along with Newfoundland and Labrador, only Saskatchewan has the low threshold of 10-plus employees at a workplace which triggers the establishment of an occupational health and safety committee.

We all know how important occupational health and safety is to any workplace. It can't be understated, by no means. The evolution of OHS is extremely important as well as we move forward and it's evolving every single day from where it was 20 years ago, 10 years ago to where it is now. We all want everybody to go home safe at the end of the day. It doesn't matter which workplace you work in, whether it's out on the highway or right here in the House of Assembly. I'm sure that we have our own procedures here which keep everybody safe.

If I could just touch on how important it is for occupational health and safety, whether it be for training. I've worked in the oil and gas sector, I've worked in construction sites, I've been a firefighter-paramedic and I know for a fact how far OHS has come throughout this country and throughout this province. It's very good to see, from even where I just started 20 years ago in the workforce, 10 years later and to today. Whether it be the training that is provided through OHS, the standard operating procedures on each and

every work site that keep those workers safe, it's extremely important that that doesn't get lost in the shuffle.

The equipment that is provided by the employer that gets passed through OHS is very important to any workplace as well to ensure that. As well, make sure that you're fit for duty. That's one of the biggest ones here. You don't show up to work tired or impaired or anything else and we want to ensure that OHS has a good handle on that as well.

We all know throughout the province how important it is and how important these committees are. If you go into a place, that smaller business that has just 10 people in it sort of thing, five of those might be management, that just leaves a decreased amount of people that can serve on an OHS committee. We know how important these committees are.

I look forward to further discussion on the OHS Act coming up here, but before I finish off here I just want to remind everybody that it's not just your right to refuse unsafe work, it's your obligation. Anybody out there who's watching, if you see unsafe work for you or anybody else, it's not just your right to refuse it, it's your obligation. You have to say you're not going to do that.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you.

We hope that everybody goes home safe to their families at the end of the day.

I look forward to having some questions for the minister when we get to Committee.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

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

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

I'm just going to speak briefly on the amendment. I think a lot of the bases were already covered by the minister and my colleague from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

I just want to note it's easy to recognize a worker who has worked, especially in industry, because safety is always the biggest priority.

When I saw this proposed change, I didn't like it. I was really, deeply, deeply concerned because I just assumed that this was another erosion of safety. We have to make sure all the safeguards are in place in the workplace. Also, there's an obligation for government to ensure that the companies are making it not only a safe place to work, but a safe, friendly place to work.

This amendment was very concerning for me, from a health and safety perspective. I realize how hard it is to get people on the committee. Basically –

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

**L. EVANS:** There's a lot of background noise, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** As the minister said, the biggest changes will be when a company has more than 10 or more employees what was going to happen. Normally, what would happen is if a company has 10 or more employees, they have to have an occupational health and safety committee put in place. At least half or more of those committee members have to be made up of workers to represent the workers in the workplace and bring forward their concerns.

But what a lot of people miss is that also brings the criteria for an occupational health and safety program, not just a policy. That

actually has to make sure the company has addressed all the unsafe work conditions; has an inspection program in place; has a reporting program in place; has a training program in place; has an orientation program in place.

So the occupational health and safety program is very, very important to ensuring not only that workers know about the hazards but they know how to identify them, they know how to report them and the company has the responsibility, but has a program in place to make sure that those hazards that can harm workers or anyone coming in to the worker area is protected. So it's so important here.

Just looking at the changes now; the changes are going to go from 10 employees up to the larger threshold of 20. Like I said, I was really concerned with this, but just listening to the minister and also just to our own reaching out to the stakeholders, we learned that unions were consulted and other stakeholders. This is something that they think will be a solution to a problem, where in the smaller companies they have trouble actually getting the workers to sit on the committees.

This would be a solution because what happens with smaller companies, sometimes if they can't actually have the occupational health and safety committee established and have the workers' rep sitting on the committee, they're in violation, through no fault of their own. So that's really important.

But one of the things that I'd like to address too is why is it so hard to get people to sit on these committees? I think there's still a lot of work that needs to be done to ensure that the workplace is a place that actually respects safety, encourages workers to participate in safety and that there is no bullying. Because in my experience – and I'll speak from personal experience working in an industry – there are a lot of times when there were unsafe work conditions

and there was bullying going on where workers were actually intimidated from reporting or actually trying to get something done to address those safety concerns.

Speaker, that's something that shouldn't be tolerated and it also puts a lot of responsibility on the committee members because if there's a safety violation or unsafe condition, if the workers can't get it resolved with their supervisor, they have an obligation to go to the health and safety committee. That puts a lot of pressure on workers. So that's some of the things that really, really need to be addressed.

Just looking at some of the things that were done, it looks like there were good consultations with the unions and relevant stakeholders. They seem to confirm their support of this amendment. So that is a positive thing.

But one of the things we have to look at is to make sure that there's no intimidation of workers. It's very, very important. A lot of times what can happen is employers will tend to try and put people on an occupational health and safety committee or to be the workers' rep that actually will do their bidding.

Now, I've actually experienced that myself when I was a manager and I was working with a company. I was responsible for occupational health and safety and we were getting ready to form the committee. We had more than 20 employees in our workplace. We were getting ready to form the committee and the manager there wanted to make sure certain individuals got on the committee, he wanted to appoint them. He didn't even want an election. I had to say to him, no, no. In actual fact, the workers' representatives put their names forward in a volunteer manner and then they're elected by the workers to represent them.

So even though this is very straightforward legislation, this amendment is very, very

straightforward, I have to stand here and say that we have to be really, really careful when we change legislation that's been hard fought for.

Even though changing the number of the employees from 10 up to 20 to ensure that smaller companies will have the proper representation so they're not in violation of the act, we still have to be mindful of some of the problems out there that workers face and safety in the workplace.

One of the other things that I'd like to mention and bring attention to, since we're discussing the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, is section 42.1. Section 42.1(1) talks about where there are less than six persons engaged at a workplace. The employees are less than six and you can have a designation of a workplace representative, but if that's impractical, the employer may designate the health and safety designate to monitor health and safety in the workplace. That's actually in the legislation, so less than six workers. That can be really, really troubling.

I'm just going to read the legislation out: "Notwithstanding section 41, where less than 6 persons are engaged at a workplace and the designation of a worker health and safety representative is impracticable, the employer may designate a workplace health and safety designate to monitor the health, safety and welfare of workers employed at the workplace."

The first thing you have to do is ask: Why is it impractical? If the employees just want to actually be the designate for safety, that's one thing, but if the workplace has an atmosphere that's not receptive to safety or not receptive to actually having hazards addressed, and there might be some undermine bullying going on, then that's not acceptable. We have to make sure that employers are not designating the person who's going to be there to monitor the health and safety and welfare of workers employed at the workplace.

Even though it's law right now, I do realize some smaller companies do have trouble. But we have to change the way safety is perceived in the workplace. We have to make it as a positive thing. Because when somebody is injured, it's not only costly to the person who's injured and their families, it's also costly to the companies. We've actually gotten the statistics and the research on that, how much it costs the company to have somebody injured, disabled or worse, even killed. So it's so important.

Even though this is a straightforward amendment that seems to have a lot of support and it will help with the smaller companies, we have to make sure that health and safety is always a priority in the workplace, Speaker.

With that, I'll sit down.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Seeing no other speakers if the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL speaks now, we will close the debate.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker, and thank you everyone for their important feedback and comments.

I guess I just want to clarify, this change isn't something that I thought we should do. I didn't initiate this. This was brought to me by both the Federation of Labour and the Employers' Council, so those are the two big partners in safety. This was brought to us as a change that we should make, so I'm very happy to be here and support the change that was requested by both the Employers' Council and the Federation of Labour.

Thank you, Speaker.



**SPEAKER:** Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 41 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against?

Motion carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act. (Bill 41)

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 41)

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I move that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 41, An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

**SPEAKER:** And a seconder, please?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Seconded by the Government House Leader.

**SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against?

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 considering Bill 41, An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act." (Bill 41)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

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

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

Minister, specifically, what groups have been consulted on this change?

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

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

So I was originally contacted by the Employers' Council and the Federation of Labour. Also, it went to the Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council who concurred with the recommendation and then I reached out to the new president of the Federation of Labour who also concurred with the recommendation.

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

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

Have any workplace health and safety investigations in recent memory highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of a particular occupational health and safety committee or made comment on them in any way?

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

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

That's quite a broad question that I don't have an answer on hand to. There is a new workplace health and safety report that is public now that my department did, in consultation with WorkplaceNL, that has a new strategy. I will show it up, just to show you what it looks like. The *Workplace Injury Prevention Strategy 2023-2028*, which, based on what we see in occupational health and safety investigations and the injuries and accidents, then this is kind of where we should prioritize moving forward and where we're putting our efforts in moving forward. The changes that we're proposing today are in alignment with that.

Thank you.

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

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

Were all provinces and territories included in the department's jurisdictional scan?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Yes. So there are two different places I've gotten this information. My team tell me that all provinces, except for Saskatchewan, have what we're proposing today: 20 workers required for a committee.

The document from the Employers' Council says that all provinces, including Saskatchewan, but my team tells me that Saskatchewan does not. So I have conflicting information on Saskatchewan, but other than that every province, I can confirm, from two different sources, have the changes that we're proposing today.

Thank you.

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

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

Saskatchewan is beautiful province.

Can the minister share the various thresholds for the provinces and territories that the department have compared?

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

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

Newfoundland and Labrador currently is 10 employees; New Brunswick is 20; Nova Scotia is 20; PEI is 20; Quebec is 20; Ontario is 20; Manitoba is 20; Saskatchewan, my team says is 10 and the Employers' Council says it was 20, so I'm not sure about Saskatchewan. Alberta is 20; BC is 20; Yukon is 20; Northwest Territories is 20; and the federal government is 20,

Thank you.

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

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

The act isn't set to come into effect until March 1, 2024.

Minister, why the delay?

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

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

In enforcing the rules we work very closely with WorkplaceNL and so we would have to consult with WorkplaceNL on the changes because they are the ones who have policies and documentation and systems in place that workplaces and councils and committees use in keeping everyone safe and managing people's responsibilities.

In consulting with WorkplaceNL, they would like until March 1, 2024, to give them enough time to make the changes to their systems and policies and procedures. I challenged that. I think it was later. We brought it forward to March 1, 2024. I would love to see it earlier, but we're trying to be respectful and pragmatic to how long it would actually take them to implement those changes at WorkplaceNL.

Thank you.

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

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

How many employers in the province will this new threshold affect?

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

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

I don't think I have that number here, but I'd be happy to get that number for the Member.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

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

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

Subsequently, how many different workplaces will this threshold affect?

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

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

So I did just get an answer to the first question – 2,000 approximately this will affect.

Thank you.

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

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

Had there been any complaints to the department regarding the current threshold?

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

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

I believe, in the letters that I received from the Employers' Council and from the Federation of Labour, they had both received feedback from both their members and employers that this was an issue and that's why they raised it to me as an issue to change.

I'm not aware of any direct feedback to my office but it makes sense. The proper channel to funnel that information was the Federation of Labour and the Employers' Council.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

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

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

What specifically spurred the department to introduce this legislation?

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

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

This is not something that I thought I should bring forward. I was approached by a series of joint letters from the Federation of Labour and the Employers' Council. That then went through the Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee who concurred with the recommendation.

So I'm trying to be a good minister, acting on behalf of my stakeholders, and it makes sense given wherever else in the country. So I'm pleased to bring this forward as a result of the request from the Federation of Labour and the Employers' Council.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

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

Just one last question, Minister: Has there been any push back by any groups or individuals to this legislation?

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

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

There has been no push back that I'm aware of.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Further questions?

The Member for Labrador West.

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

With regards to the review before the act was done, did the department review the one through five employees and the idea that management can delegate someone for the role in that, compared to being elected amongst your co-workers?

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

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

We didn't go out seeking to make a change to the act. In terms of this piece of legislation, we didn't go out and do broad consultations. We were approached by both the Employers' Council and the Federation of Labour jointly to make this change. So there were no complaints from the designates on that issue that the Member raised, so that's not something that we changed at this moment.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Member for Labrador West.

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

Is there any consideration to change 42.1, seeing as it has been in the past brought up by the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour that they do have concerns with an employer appointing someone for an occupational health and safety role?

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

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

I'll certainly take that back with my team to review for future change. I can imagine if I operated a small business with eight or 10 employees, I think it's very realistic that you might have six employees who just don't want to participate. I don't think that's unreasonable, but I haven't looked into that in-depth.

I just wanted to mention that that is only an option if none of the employers are interested. So if an employee is interested then that employee will be the occupational health and safety rep.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

**J. DINN:** A question with regards to how this applies to schools.

Originally, when occupational health and safety committees were established, the district at the time argued vehemently that it was the employer so there should only be one occupational health and safety committee for all schools. A lot of fighting and negotiating, eventually it was determined that no, each school would be an employer site.

Now there are schools with small staffs. I'm just wondering what effect will this have on small schools that are part of a larger organization or have you considered that?

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

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

A school is a workplace, so this applies to each school as it would a private employer workplace.

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

**J. DINN:** Will this impact, then, their ability to form one or to maintain one?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Committees are still allowed and are still preferred. If they're not able to form a committee, they're certainly welcome to have a representative. But committees are welcome to be maintained.

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

**J. DINN:** I guess what I'm trying to make sure is that if it's a difficult time to get these committees going and get the recommendations implemented, my concern is that in a small workplace, whether a school or elsewhere, if it's not mandatory or if there will be even a movement by or if an employee decides we want to strike a committee, that there will be less of an inclination or discouragement of that. I'm just trying to make sure of the mechanism is here so that if employees do want to have it they will still have that option and somehow the employer will say, no, not necessary.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** I will reiterate, if a workplace, including a school, has 20 or more people or employees, it would still need a committee. Committees are still welcome for under 20 employees, it's just only mandatory for 20 or more.

**CHAIR:** Further questions?

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

**CLERK:** Clauses 2 through 47 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall clauses 2 through 47

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 47 carried.

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

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

**CLERK:** An Act to Amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

**CHAIR:** Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

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

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 41.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 41.

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 the Committee.

**B. WARR:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 41 without amendment.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed him to report Bill 41 without amendment.

**CHAIR:** When shall the report be received?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Tomorrow.

**SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

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

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

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 3, and further move that this house resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider a resolution relating to the raising of loans by the province, Bill 37.

**SPEAKER:** The motion is that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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 (Trimper):** Order, please!

We are now debating the related resolution and Bill 37.

### Resolution

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure to authorize the raising from time to time by way of loan on the credit of the province a sum of money not exceeding \$1,500,000,000."

**CHAIR:** Shall the resolution carry?

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to stand in the House and speak to Bill 37. It's a bill to raise money, and it's also a money bill and it's an opportunity, like we always said, to speak about issues of importance to us. I guess it's a great opportunity sometimes to speak about your district as well. We do it a lot; sometimes we don't do it enough. Sometimes we get caught up in the bigger issues.

I find sometimes in the heat of debate here and so many other things, I know from a personal perspective, there are so many things on your agenda, sometimes you forget. I should say, you never forget about your district, but sometimes you feel like you're neglecting what's most important, that is the people that put you there. So in my 10 minutes today, I think I'd like to focus more on the district than I normally probably do because, again, there are so many other issues.

One thing I'd like to pay homage, respect, whatever, highlight is last evening myself and my colleague from Topsail - Paradise, we went to the Salvation Army Church in Long Pond, I know a lot of people in this Legislature and throughout the province have heard tell of the Mercer family and the tragedy that followed them. They lost two of their children to horrendous cancer. Chair, this affects every one of us in this province, in this Legislature and it's difficult times.

I was awestruck by them; I've always been. We attend all the events. They have the toy drive. There's a food drive. There's a ride for Riley. There are walks for Riley and Alex. They do these things; it's how they deal with the sorrow. They bring good news out of bad news, I always say.

I spoke, actually, this past year at their toy drive and it was a privilege to speak. As much as you speak, as we all speak a lot as politicians and MHAs and sometimes you just get up and you grab the mic and you go on, it's like it's any other day. This past year, when I did the Christmas one, I know that my colleague from Topsail - Paradise did it before, the mayor the year before, and a former leader, Paul Davis, I remember me and him talked about it – we did a lot of things together, of course, in the community – that was always one that was a heavy load on you every time you get it. It wasn't bringing greetings; it was a totally different issue and you felt it.

I remember for two days prior, it was weighing on me, what am I going to say? What are you going to say? Of course, everything worked out fine and it went great, but because of the magnitude of what they're doing, you can't go there, you're trying to envision the pain or what these people have gone through and there is no way of going there. You try to bring yourself even remotely close and we can't do it. It's unimaginable.

Last night, when the House closed, actually, we went there and it was amazing. The

community of Conception Bay South – we all have great communities, every one of us in this Legislature – they never cease to amaze. I mean, the amount of food that was donated, it was absolutely incredible. It was for the community food bank, absolutely incredible. We filled up a cube van or a truck; I guess they're called a cubed truck. It had a trolley with pallets, it was amazing. Me and my colleague, we left the Legislature as we were dressed and before we knew it we were with a crowd of firefighters, the church, the community and the Mercers, and that's what we were doing, loading up food.

I have many emotional debates in this House and sometimes I wish I wasn't so engaged or, I guess, emotionally attached to some issues, but that's who I am. I can't apologize for that. After today, when you go home, you go up and you do that on your way home; you want to go home for supper but you go in and do that, what a feeling. The feeling is, you feel good about doing it because every time we volunteer we all feel good; I know I do. But that's beyond volunteering. You go in there and these people are up there bringing greetings last night, talking to people, along with all the rest of us.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** They were emotional.

Their hearts were breaking because it was the birthdays of the children. Yesterday, was their children's birthday. So you can't put into words what they go through on a daily basis. Yet, through their sorrow, they do good things. They raise money for all causes. They're big supporters of the Jack Hand Legacy Foundation, which is renowned. He died of the same disease as their children did.

I could go on for days about them and they should be talked about. I know NTV every



year carries their story. Bernie and Louise get up every year and talk about it. I can't put it into words, and my colleague can say the same thing. But that's the district we live in. That's the community we live in.

When I'm in my district I always like to say the pride I have in representing your hometown, that's me, that's where I've been all my life. I'm proud to say it and I'm not going anywhere, not now anyway. I've raised a family and I'm married, that's who we are. To go down and see those things on a daily basis. We see it, sometimes you do it and you don't take enough time out to really realize how wonderful the people in your community you live around are. I mean, it's incredible.

But I'd like to go a step further. I think this province is incredible, right throughout.

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

**B. PETTEN:** You look no further than what happened with the disaster of Fiona out in Port aux Basques. My colleague, the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology was well acquainted, well aware and the mayor at the time. Look how this province came together. There were concerts. There were fundraising concerts. People are giving; they can't give enough. It's incredible. Yesterday, it was \$5,000 or \$6,000 in cash. People just donated cash and food cards, let alone this truckload of food. That's incredible. We go across all the disasters happening in this province and Fiona was the most recent one.

We should be very proud of where we live, Mr. Chair. I know you live in the Big Land and you're very proud of where you're from, so we all should be. It's that pride sometimes when I say your emotions run over in this House, I think that's who we are as people.

I'm not the only emotional one in this House. I think we all can be, on any given day we can do that. But I never lose sight,

sometimes I feel like I do, but I never lose sight on how important it is, the job we do in the House. We don't always agree, but there are times where – and today was one of those days that maybe gives you that mindset that brings you back to here. We're in the House and we debate. I think we have good debates; sometimes they can devolve into not so good, but I think, ultimately, the issue we're debating is important.

Today in the House I know we debated the "Ode to Newfoundland" not being included in MUN's convocation. I know we're all passionate about it; of course I can't shut up about it, but that's me again. Here I go again; I'm invested in that, too. But the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Tourism, they responses then. The Deputy Premier, to stand up and stop Question Period to sing the Ode.

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

**B. PETTEN:** In my option, it's probably, arguably, one of the more powerful moments – I've been at a few in this House. We got elected together. One of the most powerful moments I've been in this House. When I leave politics, that will stand out as one of the more powerful moments in this House of Assembly.

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

**B. PETTEN:** I said this before and I'll say it again: Decisions of MUN should not divide us; they should unite us. If you want to be inclusive, which I know that's the crux of this issue, you can't be exclusive.

I'll even go a step further on this. It was brought to my attention today that the Premier has actually said this himself and I think it's a great comment. I'll give him credit actually; sometimes I've been accused of being hard on him too. When they changed the words to "O Canada," we continued on with "O Canada" until we settled in on the new version of "O Canada." We never just

cancelled “O Canada” because it was being exclusive. We continued until we got the right one.

What’s wrong with continuing on with the Ode until we get it right? We should include Labrador.

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

**B. PETTEN:** I don’t agree with excluding anyone. If Labrador is the problem or any other group out there, I have no issue. I don’t think anyone in this Legislature or province do. You can’t exclude the Ode to be inclusive, it’s dysfunctional; it makes no sense. I do certainly hope, and I keep speaking about it because I think we all have proven that today, this administration, they’re tone deaf. They got to come out and listen to what the people are saying.

When the Legislature of this province, this government, and we all here are responsible for \$9.6 billion in spending that funds this university 80 per cent, passes a unanimous resolution, the Speaker of the Legislature writes the president and the Board of Regents and the Senate: We want the Ode back. It’s loud and clear. Then we find out no, we’re not going to do it this year because we’re not ready to proceed. I mean, that’s outrageous. I am outraged. It’s unbelievable and I’ll say it again.

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

**B. PETTEN:** I’ve got lots of issues. I can talk all day on lots of issues in my district and I’ll go back to that. But I can’t let this one go because, again, it’s who I am and I can’t make any apologies. I feel like I’m apologizing, but I can’t let it go because it just blows my mind.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** You could apologize for a lot of other stuff.

**B. PETTEN:** Yeah, I can’t on this one, Chair.

I’ve gotten emails actually from MUN this afternoon. Me and the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, and I’m sure maybe the Deputy Premier is probably getting them, I mean, we’re getting them and they’re very happy that we’re making a stand and we’re making a united stand. I hope that MUN follows suit and supports what we’re doing.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you, Chair.

Again, it’s good to stand in the House of Assembly to represent the people of Exploits, the people that put me here and it’s good to speak on Bill 37. Of course, Bill 37 is a money bill. It gives you a chance to speak on some issues in the district. I’ll touch on a few of them today, but I just wanted to continue with the “Ode to Newfoundland” as my colleague so passionately brought up from CBS.

It is something that we all cherish when we go to functions and we hear the Ode. I know in the Lions Club at our dinner meetings, as we say grace and we get ready for dinner, we sing the “Ode to Newfoundland” before we have dinner.

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

**P. FORSEY:** It’s good to see. We still do that. It just pays respect to our province and the beautiful place we live.

Some of the issues, and I’ll just go on to the industry basically that’s in the area, I’ll touch on those right now. While I’m doing that, we do have two or three great industries actually in our district. We have Hi-Point Industries. Hi-Point Industries in our area is a great export facility. It sends out a lot of

peat and safety equipment like absorbents, absorbent booms, all over Canada, all over the States, and it's a great export facility.

Newfoundland Styro, again, it's a great facility, employs a lot of people in Central Newfoundland. It's certainly tied in with the aquaculture, fishery; they make all the Styrofoam boxes for it. We need to get the fishery back up and running because of Newfoundland Styro, even those plants are being killed. They're being forced to layoffs and cutbacks. They should be going 24-hours service right now.

Same as Hi-Point Industries. I know that the booms and everything are there for safety reasons for oil leaks, but things have to happen. People have to be on the water. There has to be spills and that sort of stuff for that to happen, but if people are not fishing and people are not on the water, then those companies, they don't survive. Now, I know we're not looking for spills. I'm not encouraging that part of it, but that's what happens to businesses.

Superior Glove, another great industry in the district. Employs basically 150 people around the clock, 24 hours. Most of their gloves go to export outside the province, all over the world, in the United States, everywhere. They make a lot of fishermen's gloves, same thing. A lot of fishermen's gloves and farmer's gloves and that sort of stuff, so as the season is coming to a quick beginning and it should be already started, we need certainly emphasis put on the fishery. We need probably some aids put into the fishery, some conversations, that sort of stuff because without the fishing industry right now in my district, some of that industry is starting to hurt.

Having said that, we do have some great industry in the district and I commend the industries in the district for being there.

As for the fishermen in the district, we got fishermen down in the lower part of the district, especially in Leading Tickles. Right

now, the fish plant workers, their EI is almost up. They need their EI fixed up; they need some help that way.

Fishermen need to get back on the water. It needs to be addressed so that fishermen in my area, especially down in the Leading Tickles area, can get some EI, something to maintain them until they get back on the water and get back into fishing again. Because there are a lot of people in that community who rely on the fishery right now. They're starting to hurt. They need pay; they need some sort of income to help them along.

Again, like I mentioned, the industries in the area, even in Grand Falls-Windsor and Lewisporte, the boat builders, the engine repair people, they're missing that type of business right now, especially in the fishing industry because they rely on the industry from the fish. They supply the motors. They supply the boats. They supply the engine parts. That all runs through the Central Newfoundland area. A very important industry. The fishing industry is very important to the rest of the industry in Central Newfoundland. So we certainly need attention paid to that to get those people back on the water.

Farmers in the area: I've talked to a couple of farmers already. They feel that the high cost of parts, maintenance right now, even to get a piece of ground cleared off for the summer so that they can put their root crops in the ground is costing them an enormous amount of dollars already in the farming industry. It's feed. Fertilizer has gone up almost double. So that stuff is causing havoc.

Only to have probably another 17 cents put on the carbon tax now in July month, farmers are going to have to absorb that. By the time this gets to our tables, if it can get to our tables, then we will certainly be in trouble. Not everybody will be eating Cheezies when the time comes. We need

some root crops on the table when that time comes.

We certainly need some help with the farming, Chair. They find that parts and everything in the farming – so we do need to help those farmers out so that they can get the lands cleared, get the farms back and get some crop on the tables; get the potatoes on our plates.

Forestry: another big industry in our province. I know I mentioned this many times, that we have no secondary industry in 10, 11, and 12, but last year we learned a big lesson. The foliage, dry areas, can catch very, very fast. We know climate change is here. We know it's real. One lightning strike last year caused millions and millions of dollars. We lost acres and acres of fibre, acres and acres of timber, wildlife displaced. We learned one big major problem last year, that we're not ready for that sort of event. We learned that we're certainly not ready for that sort of event.

To even know that right now we had five water bombers, only four in place to fly. We're not sure if they're able to fly adequately or if they're all ready to fly four at one time or we can only fly one, or we can only fly two. But we learned a big lesson last year that we can lose our forests very, very quickly and that would be another industry in the forestry, if it failed in Central Newfoundland, which could have made a devastating impact on our forests last year, a lot of people would have been in trouble. Not only the people of Central Newfoundland, but all across the province where the permits are allotted, allocations are allotted to those companies and they want to come to Central Newfoundland to get the fibre.

I'm not saying that they can't have any permits. I mean, we have to be fair about it. But we've got to protect our forests. We've got to be able to protect our forests. We need ground crews. We need a full complement of ground crews. We need a

full complement of pilot crews for our water bombers. We need to be able to respond to those fires immediately and attentively when the calls come in, because if we don't have our forests in the long run, we're going to lose a lot of industry, we're going to lose a lot of wildlife and we'll never be the same in that area.

So forestry needs to be looked at in a different view; I mean in the forest fire protection areas. We certainly need adequate forest fire protection areas, we need to get our complements on the forest fire ground crews and air crews be able to fight those forest fires so we can save our forests and have our forests for years and years to come. It's a resource that we can use years down the road. We do need to put some more forest fire protection action in place.

Thank you, Chair.

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

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

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

**B. WARR:** Chair, I'm very pleased to stand in this hon. House as the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay to speak about my district, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and how *Budget 2023* provides support for the people, our challenges and a financial blueprint for a bright future.

The fact that we are forecasted to achieve a balanced budget in 2024-2025 – two years ahead of schedule – speaks to diligent work of our government in general and our Minister of Finance, in particular. Being able to deliver a budget that addresses our most pressing needs in respect to health care and cost of living is no easy feat.

We live in a world emerging from a global COVID-19 pandemic, reacting to Soviet aggression in the Ukraine and the resulting

strain on global supply lines affects everyone. To address those challenges with a budget that has no new tax or fee increases, that is something to be commended. Thanks again to the minister and her department for delivering a budget that is realistic, supports our citizens and enables us to put the necessary pieces in place required for a vibrant future without mortgaging the future of our children and grandchildren.

Chair, there are a number of items in *Budget 2023* that I would like to address. Foremost is the focus on health care. I know that all Members agree that is our most pressing concern and rightly deserves to be our number one priority. The fact that we've announced the largest ever investment in our province's history in health care, which is \$3.9 billion, which is \$300 million more than in the previous year's budget, highlights the importance to our government and the people of this province.

I also believe, and I am sure the people of this hon. House and the people of the province believe, that we cannot keep addressing health care challenges in the same way and expect different results. We all know that this is not a recipe for success. We also know that throwing more money at the issue is not the only solution. There needs to be a plan and that's why I commend our government with one of its first initiatives empowering Dr. Parfrey and Sister Davis to undertake a professional and thorough analysis of our health care system to study, analyze and develop a plan to address our health needs going forward.

Health Accord NL is such a plan. Dr. Parfrey and Sister Davis did an incredible job of putting forward a significant piece of work with approaches to reimagining our health care system for better outcomes. We are now addressing our health care system needs in a manner that reflects the reality of 2023 and beyond, not the 1960s. The reality of today can't be addressed through the approach of the '60s and '70s. Our

population today is much older and has high rates of cancer, heart disease, diabetes and numerous other health conditions that require significant attention and resources.

Two of the key messages of the report that resonated with me were that our health care is not as good as the health of the people in other Canadian provinces. We also have unfair and unavoidable health differences among us for social, economic, age-related or geographical reasons and our health care is influenced by the conditions in which we are born; live, eat, exercise, learn, work and play is influenced by our feeling respected and safe and by our being able to age with dignity. To the lesser degree, it is influenced by our health system and our biology.

The words social determinants of health have become part of our everyday language and, most importantly, we realize that there must be a reimagined approach to health care. I believe we have known this for quite a while but it has not been acted on in a proactive manner. The can was always kicked down the road. This government has a plan, Mr. Chair. It is being proactive and putting physical and human resources in place to move to a health care system that reflects our new reality and works for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

While there has been and continues to be challenges, I believe we are all starting to see changes occurring that will be lasting. New initiatives like meaningful investment: \$3.9 million in health care in our province to ensure timely access to care, it's the largest investment ever; the establishment of primary care teams across our province to provide primary care for up to 80,000 people; consolidating 60 road ambulances into a single, integrated service; \$5 million for a new virtual care program that will expand primary and emergency care in all areas of the province; \$3 million for a new cardiovascular and stroke institute that will enhance care for the residents of our province; very significant investments in recruitment and retention of health care

professionals in the province that are being modelled by other jurisdictions across the country; a commitment of \$31.8 million for seniors through actions such as \$7.7 million this year and \$9.3 million next year for health care professionals who support self-managed care in the home; \$6.1 million annual increase for personal care home professionals; \$47.5 million increase for community care professionals; \$43.1 million to cover driver medicals for seniors 75 and over to support continued independence; continue to address mental health services with initiatives such as \$5 million for community-based wraparound mental health and addiction services; and \$4.4 million for flexible assertive community treatment.

In addition, we have added 12 new drugs to the provincial drug program; provided \$2 million for provincial oncology program; \$1.4 million for the hepatitis C treatments; and piloting a program for continuous glucose monitoring for diabetes patients.

Chair, I've just covered a few of the initiatives and programs supported in the 2023 budget on health care alone. This government, in my opinion, is the most proactive government we have seen in addressing what is our most important and pressing need, an effective and efficient health care system. We are seeing the changes starting to have an impact and I'm sure we will see the momentum grow.

Chair, there are so many things that I'm excited about in the recent budget that reflects a brighter future for our province and we'll see these things highlighted daily in local and provincial news coverage.

Our population is growing, our unemployment rate is declining and our school enrolment is increasing after decades of decline. We are on the precipice of a world-class wind and green hydrogen industry. We have major mineral exploration and development and this is only expected

to increase with the need for rare earth minerals and our enormous potential there.

In addition, we're on the cusp of major growth in hydroelectric demand and our potential there is also world class. Our oil industry is coming back on stream and there should be four fields in production this year. The West White Rose expansion is progressing in Argentiya. Bay du Nord is on the horizon. This summer we've seen companies spend major dollars on continued exploration off our coast.

On so many levels, we see optimism and from my personal experience in the business world, this is a proactive sign because companies do not invest money upfront if there is no promise. I think many industries in the oil and gas industry, mine industry, renewable energy, high-tech industry, tourism and arts community and many more see promise and a bright future in Newfoundland and Labrador.

On a personal level, I am so pleased to see Newfoundland and Labrador buck trends that have characterized our province for decades, such as high unemployment, declining population and out-migration. Unemployment rates have declined significantly and continue to drop to levels not witnessed for decades and it is a trend we anticipate continuing.

The second aspect of that is seeing our population growing again at rates not witnessed in a long time. For instance, since 1971 there has been 10 quarters where the total positive change in population has exceeded 2,000 individuals in a quarter. The second and third ranked on that list were in 2022 with plus 2,929 and quarter three also in 2022 with a plus increase in population of 2,846. Coming out of a pandemic and facing worldwide inflationary pressures, that's pretty impressive, Mr. Chair.

Chair, data always gives us a clear picture of an issue, while emotion and rhetoric can

often cloud an issue. We have always heard about the significant out-migration of people from our province and the data has shown that to be true for much of the past 30 or 40 years, especially after the closure of the Northern cod fishery in 1992.

We all know that if we are to progress as a province, we need to reverse our out-migration, grow our population and retain the younger workers who work and pay taxes to fuel our economy and society.

Skeptics and critics would have you believe that this is still occurring at alarming levels. That is not true and reality points to the fact that our out-migration is far less than the numbers returning to the province.

Mr. Chair, there is a lot of positive news in *Budget 2023* for the people of the province. Is there work left to be done? Yes, and our government is committed to continuing that work. Our doubling of support for fire protection vehicles and firefighting equipment, increasing Municipal Operating Grants by \$6 million over two years, are just two more examples of that work to create stronger, safer communities in our province.

I see, Mr. Chair, that my time has expired so I'll continue on in my next opportunity to rise in this hon. House.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Your time has expired.

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

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

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

It's a privilege to speak here now. I want to thank the lovely people of Labrador West who sent me here to speak on their behalf and raise issues of concern for them.

I want to start with a little bit of optimism and stuff. We have a growing economy in Labrador West. We have a lot of opportunity heading our way. We have a lot of great things to look forward to, especially in the coming years. The outlook looks wonderful for us, from an economic point of view.

But it still faces its challenges. One of the biggest ones we have is housing, not only just in the social sector, but also in the private market as well. In the last number of years, we haven't had any growth from a housing point of view but we have continued to face housing challenges. Not just for low-income people, we actually face housing challenges for people who actually work in the mines. They can't find anywhere to live. They're facing challenges that way and some of them actually have to resign their well-paying mining jobs because they just have nowhere to live. We've seen a spike in, what I call, reno evictions, where a lot of landlords have actually evicted people under the guise of renovating. When they renovate they rent back to private companies from fly-in, fly-out contractors, leaving the locals stranded without any housing.

We've seen a lot of this stuff go on in the last couple of years and looking forward, when it comes to the private sector, unfortunately, they don't seem to want to invest in the region. We're seeing a lot of people being forced into choosing to find a way to live or not. Lots of land has been offered up for development and stuff like that and it's forcing Lab West to almost act like a mining camp, versus a vibrant, beautiful community.

This is one of the concerns that we have is we look forward and we talk about all this development stuff, but we look up our way and not a single house has been built in Lab West in five or six years. We haven't had any increase in units and this is a very serious concern.

Now, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing renovated a number of units, but we're still short because two burned down and haven't been replaced yet. So we're still short units. It's a net negative, actually. We lost housing units in Lab West, compared to growing. That's our thing, I'll keep pushing to actually make sure those two units are replaced with accessible units so people with disabilities who need the housing can also afford Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

That's another thing, too, when you look at units in the region, disabilities were never, ever considered in the picture. That extends over into the school system in our area in Labrador West and public buildings in Labrador West. Accessibility was never really a big consideration. The cost to make these buildings accessible is large. Once again, we call upon government to take into consideration and start giving money to municipalities to actually meaningfully change their facilities to be accessible facilities.

You just take our recreation centre. A wonderful asset in Labrador West, not accessible. The cost to make it accessible just far exceeds the operating budget of places like Labrador West and the municipalities. This is where government needs to come on board and actually make these recreation facilities and other facilities accessible. Because do you know what? People with disabilities want to use these facilities just as much as anybody else and they should not be excluded from the community in such a way.

These are things that government needs to consider when they're making their budget: How do we make these buildings more accessible? How do we work towards this? It is big money, it's not cheap to make these buildings accessible, but it's something, both from the municipal point of view, CSSD, Transportation and Infrastructure, these are the departments that need to take it into consideration. People with disabilities need to be participating and a building that's

supposed to be public is not truly public unless everyone can enter through the doors. That's how we can impact our community in a positive way.

You look at infrastructure as a whole. We do have an infrastructure and maintenance deficit in this province. I hear it about it in my own community. The Arts and Culture Centre in Labrador West has issues with its roof. It needs to be done. I've got schools that have issues with equipment when it comes to, once again, accessibility, lighting and just general maintenance. This is where we look at the thing and go, we talk about building all these new things, but, at the same time, what about the maintenance for all these facilities?

Right now, I've got issues in schools with chair lifts, issues with lighting, issues with electrical. Then I turn around and hear about stuff being announced, all this new stuff being announced and I go: What about the maintenance? What about the repairs? What about the upgrades that need to be done on other buildings? It kind of hurts when you hear about, you know, we're going to build a brand new theatre somewhere. But what about the theatre that they already built that needs maintenance, that needs serious work done and it's getting pushed off, pushed off and pushed off?

This is where I have to ask: What about the maintenance deficit to a lot of our public buildings that are already existing? A lot of work that needs to be done to repair all these buildings. I hear more and more every day about buildings that need work that belong to the province. Housing units that need work done and so on and so forth.

So this is where we have to take into consideration, we have a lot of assets that need work, but the longer we put it off to repair these units, the longer you put it off to repair these buildings, the longer we put it off making these buildings accessible for those who need it, it's just going to cost



more and more and more money down the road and the deficit builds up, the maintenance of these things.

These are where we really need some action items on. We need action on the items that we already have and take it seriously, take the bull by the horns. Actually, get this maintenance done, get this work done that needs to be done on all these wonderful assets that we have that we'd love to use.

I know in my region, like I said, it's a far-flung place with 10,000 people, but when it comes to the actually being there, we're so far from the other urban centres of this province that we need these assets in our community because it's just not reasonable to drive six hours to Happy Valley-Goose Bay to go to a pool.

These are important assets for us. Our theatre is important to us. Schools are important to us, but we're just like any other rural community in this province where we have these assets, we'd like to keep using them but they need some TLC and they need some love.

Another thing I'll touch on, too, I go back to housing; we'll go back to the housing aspect of it. We have a lot of newcomers who want to move to Labrador West but they can't find housing. We've got lots of work in our region. Lots of help wanted signs around, but they can't find a place to stay and that's the biggest hurdle right now.

It's something for the government to take back, especially for consideration, are places that are going through economic growth, a place that can actually help grow the province, help grow the economy but also grow the personal lives of many people that come here who are local and from away. Work with the communities and stuff on how to get houses built. Work with communities on how to get these assets acquired because, at the end of the day, we want to keep growing this province in all

corners. A community without adequate housing or housing availability is just not going to grow, it's impossible.

This is something I want to put back when you're looking at communities, when you're looking at – when the community comes out and says, we want to build housing, we want to do this, we want to do that; work with them and not just platitudes, not just like a high-five, good job champ but actually not do anything that actually benefits.

Both of my communities, as I said, the hardest aspect about housing is the infrastructure. Most developers and everything like that talk about how it's the cost to put in the infrastructure and things like that, but the communities don't have any programs they can say to actually expand. There are programs to repair and fix what we have but there is no real funding that they avail of to actually expand a road or expand a section of town to allow for development, the further work of a community.

This is where we find the stumbling block is. Most people find, it's like well – and I call it an excuse because I don't really see it, I think it's just more of an excuse than anything else – costs of shipping to Lab West and all this stuff. When in reality, we're connected to the province with two very good highways, both through Quebec and through this province. So I think, in my opinion, the excuse is getting worn out now. But at the same time, we need to work together to actually grow these communities because do you know what? We have over 200 years of ore left in the ground. We're not going anywhere. We're a big contributor of the economy of this province. We're a big contributor to the well-being of this province.

We just ask that we should be able to avail of something like that. This is where considerations, I think, going forward are: How do we make it to improve, to move forward and help to grow communities like Labrador West?

Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Again, it is an honour to stand here today and speak on behalf of the people of the District of Harbour Main. Just for the benefit of our viewers, this is Bill 37, the *Loan Act, 2023*. Just to summarize really the essence of this bill: it gives the government the ability to borrow up to \$1.5 billion in long-term borrowings. So this bill essentially authorizes that new borrowing.

What I want to talk about with respect to this bill and, in particular, what the Minister of Finance had said in her opening remarks introducing this bill is basically she said what is significant here is that this is really the fact that they've lowered the borrowing from last year. With all due respect, that is definitely not what is significant here. I would submit to you one of the things that is very important and significant is with respect to the capital expenditures, for example, and the priorities that this government has taken in terms of capital expenditures, government programs and so forth.

There are many that the minister mentioned, but one capital expenditure that I'm going to speak about for a few minutes is the new hospital to replace the St. Clare's hospital. Is this responsible debt management plan, as the Minister of Finance has suggested? I would say no, this is not a responsible debt management plan. Let me explain why it is my view that it falls very short of having any kind of responsible plan here.

We've heard in media reports, I believe it was in *allNewfoundlandLabrador*, they did an article not long ago and they summarized some of the things that are of

relevance here. One of the things that they highlighted just recently was the \$840,000 to replace the elevator in the hospital. So that begs the question: Why is government still putting money into an aging St. Clare's hospital, even though it is a planned replacement of that very hospital? That certainly is something we have to question and we have to question the legitimacy of that.

We also need to look at the cost to replace St. Clare's hospital. Chair, it is going to be more than \$1 billion. We've heard that even in the recent provincial budget, \$7.8 million have been allocated for planning and procurement of the hospital and there are provincial consultants have been hired, government consultants to scope out the design of replacement of the hospital.

Chair, I need to ask the question, as this decision that was made, we have in our health care sector so many expenditure demands; we have so many needs: I wonder how – and this comes to the point of transparency, which we have to ask about – is it that this particular capital expenditure rose to the top, a top priority above all of the other health care sector needs and demands that we know are evident and exist with an eroded health care system that we have, a broken health care system. How did this happen?

The question has to be asked: Why wasn't there public engagement on this issue? In my understanding, there was no public engagement, it came out of nowhere. We heard about it in October of 2022, a press release. But in that press release there was no justification for this \$1 billion expenditure of the people's money. The government provided no evidence that I can see, that I'm aware of. Correct me if I'm wrong, but how is this good use of health care money when we are in such dire straights with our health care system right now?

So the question has to be asked: Is this the best use of our scarce health care money

and resources that we have? I would suggest that it's not.

So, Government, I'm very concerned about this, when I look at, in general, the budget, my major concern – and I heard the minister talking about the fact that the borrowing has lowered from last year. But really is that, as she claims, the significant, the really significant thing here? I would say not. I would say what's really significant, and my major concern here, is the amount of borrowing overall. I mean, we're spending more than we're taking in in revenue. If we are to have a sustainable fiscal environment, Chair, it's my position that we have to get our fiscal House in order.

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** I do not see that with this budget. I do not see this. I will go to the point of whether this government is actually in touch with the people it governs. I would say it is not.

When I spoke about the budget before, I talked about the seniors and how the seniors feel ignored, Chair. The Seniors' Advocate got viewpoints and feedback from seniors across the province in a very extensive report. Basically, it said that seniors cannot afford the basic necessities of life. They are suffering. I would say that this government is out of touch with the people that it governs. That, for me, is very troubling.

But it brings me, in the few minutes that I have, to the issue of transparency. Earlier today, when we saw the hanging of the portraits in this hon. House of Assembly, the portraits of the previous Speakers, the current Speaker said that this House of Assembly is the focal point of our democracy in Newfoundland and Labrador. I would say that transparency is one of those important pillars of democracy.

Chair, we only have to look at the annual report from the Office of the Information and

Privacy Commissioner, Michael Harvey, that came out, it was released in September, in the fall of 2022. He also raised questions about transparency and about a government that needs to prioritize its policy decisions and must do that in a way that's open and transparent. Therefore, if it doesn't, the Commissioner was very concerned about the decisions that are being made, the policy decisions, and that there would be poor decision-making that would occur.

He talked about the access to information system and how, when it came into force in 2014, I believe, it was acknowledged across the country to be the best access to information act in the country. But the Information and Privacy Commissioner said that in the last year there have been signs of strain in our system and he's concerned that it's eroding and that there are things we have to worry about. Chair, I'm very concerned about transparency.

I also want to finally conclude on the point of taxes. We have to ask with respect to the budget that's coming down and that's essentially going to be passed, which I cannot in good conscience support because of many of the reasons I've stated already. But I ask the question: How has government helped the middle class? How has government helped our most vulnerable population? I think this government needs to be reminded who they work for. They work for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and they have to –

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** – properly answers questions in Question Period. In this focal point of democracy, they have to listen to the people that they serve. Whether it's the Seniors' Advocate, whether it's our Information and Privacy Commissioner, they have to listen to these important people who have an important stake and have an important role to play in our democracy.

On that note, I see I am almost out of time, but I thank you very much, Chair, and that concludes my speech.

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

**CHAIR:** And I thank the Member.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report progress on Bill 37.

**CHAIR:** It is moved that the Committee rise and report progress on Bill 37.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Motion carried.

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

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville and the Deputy Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means.

**P. TRIMPER:** Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have directed me to indicate that we have made progress in reviewing Bill 37 and ask leave to sit again.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred, made progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Tomorrow.

**SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

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

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, at 1:30 p.m.