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HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, for leave to introduce a bill, An Act to Amend the Liquor Control Act and the Liquor Corporation Act, Bill 62, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill, An Act to Amend the Liquor Control Act and the Liquor Corporation Act, Bill 62, and the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Liquor Control Act and the Liquor Corporation Act," carried. (Bill 62)

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Liquor Control Act and the Liquor Corporation Act. (Bill 62)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 62 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 2.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that An Act to Amend the Mineral Act, Bill 59, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third 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: A bill, An Act to Amend the Mineral Act. (Bill 59)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do

pass and that its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Mineral Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 59)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 3.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader that An Act Respecting Quarry Resources in the Province, Bill 58, be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this bill be now read a third 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: A bill, An Act Respecting Quarry Resources in the Province. (Bill 58)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and that its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting Quarry Resources in the Province," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 58)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs that An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts, Bill 54, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that Bill 54, An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts, be now read a second time.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HAGGIE: Thank you.

I'm pleased today to speak to the proposed *Towns and Local Service Districts Act*, Bill 54.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HAGGIE: It's been much anticipated, as you can hear from the roars of the crowd at the back here. It's a beast; there are 350 sections here, Mr. Speaker, which makes it one of the largest statutes in the province. It will in turn be a foundation piece for further legislation governing cities in our province.

It's substantive; it's important. The first part of this, in actual fact, was already delivered to the House and passed last year, which was kind of removed and placed under the

title of *Municipal Conduct Act* and that's been in operation now for a year.

So that with this and with a couple of other pieces of legislation the department has, essentially form a suite of legislation, which are a constitution, if you like, for another layer of government, municipal level of government. The current legislation governing municipalities in this province is the *Municipalities Act, 1999* and it's got problems. It's old and there is a need to replace it, and that's why we're here today.

The current act, in the *What We Heard* document, is prescriptive, it's top-down, limiting a town or a municipality's authority and flexibility, it's written for a different era, and the needs and desires of towns have changed. The language is outdated, it's cumbersome, it doesn't fit with best drafting practices and it's not gender neutral. There's unnecessary ministerial oversight in the old act. The processes are outdated; it doesn't specify what towns should do, what towns may do. For Local Service Districts, again, the practices are outdated and there's little or no accountability or oversight measures for it.

In contrast, the new act will deal, we believe, with the problems that have been highlighted to us by a variety of stakeholders over a fairly lengthy process. We know from our discussions yesterday, for example, that there's an interested audience out there looking at what this new legislation will be. We've had comprehensive formal consultations which go back some time now. Since then, we've had multiple discussions at a formal and informal level with individual councils, with chairs of LSDs, with stakeholders, particularly and repeatedly with the PMA – the Professional Municipal Administrators – and MNL as recently as yesterday, in actual fact.

This bill will address those issues that they've highlighted. It's enabling for towns. Modernizations have been made for both

towns and Local Service Districts. It's, we believe, written to allow them to succeed.

In contrast to the list I read out about the *Municipalities Act*, the *Towns and Local Service Districts Act* facilitates autonomy and flexibility for towns. It provides increased accountability and oversight for Local Service Districts; it provides towns with broad powers to enact bylaws. It does actually outline mandatory services. In so doing it specifies the broad purposes of a town. It increases the opportunities for public oversight, specifically around documentation that needs to be available, but also around closed and public meetings of the council.

It's very readable. In actual fact, it flows in a way the old one didn't. Its language is gender-neutral. It allows towns significant increased flexibility to generate tax revenue and provide tools for tax affordability for its citizens, which currently don't exist.

It eliminates or minimizes regressive taxes; it creates additional flexibility for enforcement – a common request from municipalities. It reduces the need for legislative amendment, and by removing unnecessary ministerial oversight it cuts down on red tape. It provides discretion around feasibility studies, and there's clarity and additional tools to help with economic development of towns.

The proposed legislation moves us from a prescriptive environment to an enabling one. Essentially, that means where prescriptive legislation would only allow towns to enact bylaws that are written in the legislation, as allowable. Enabling legislation is interpreted broadly and is based on the purposes of the municipality, they're clearly defined, but under that, the towns have considerable flexibility about what bylaws they would choose to pass, with a focus – and that is stated in the act – on safety, health and well-being of the people and protection of property.

As an example and a very topical one, this broad power could be interpreted to allow town councils to enact and force bylaws to address nuisance matters, such as the use of outdoor lights on properties. Whereas, under the current legislation, municipalities would have to request that the department amend the legislation to allow those authorities. We are lining ourselves up with other jurisdictions in Canada, most of whom have enabling legislation.

The second pillar of this legislation is that it has been drafted in modern, plain language and done in a readable way. It increases accessibility to the readers by actually avoiding technical terms, archaic language and where possible – given the fact that it is or will be a piece of law if accepted – it avoids legal terminology.

It clarifies the intent of the legislation by providing more and improved definitions. It is also, as I say, gender neutral, it avoids gender-exclusionary language and acknowledges and reflects gender diversity.

There are some significant, substantive changes in the bill. I am just going to take a little time to highlight those at a very high level, understanding that the time to go through all these 350 sections will be in Committee later and I look forward to that.

So for towns and Local Service Districts, towns get limited natural person powers. It avoids them being bound by the requirements of legislation in a way that puts them on par with good governance principles.

We've already discussed, or I have already mentioned that the *Municipal Conduct Act* was actually originally intended to be part of this bill, but it was moved by my predecessor, for very good reasons, and has now been up and running for a year with 100 per cent of councils now having a code of conduct in place and 98 per cent of councillors having been trained on the mandatory components.

It defines town purposes, apart from good governance, as a provision of services, facilities or things needed for the community such as public or affordable housing, where there is a gap in the private sector. The development and maintenance of safe and sustainable communities and its accent is on fostering well-being whether that be economic, environmental or social.

The increased autonomy falls into several changes. The requirement for ministerial approval for the acquisition of property, sale and lease or disposal of property at less than fair market value, now simply requires a two-thirds vote of council. It is not ministerial.

The act allows costs of property remediation performed by the town and charged to the property owner to constitute a lean on that property. Something towns have particularly been asking for. It also extends ticketing authority for bylaw violations to all towns and allows towns to create and enforce bylaws for non-moving traffic violations.

Under the heading of accountability, it's important to note that greater autonomy also brings the need for greater accountability.

So the bill goes into some detail around criteria for closed council meetings. It requires all meetings including committee meetings to be open, except where closed for the purposes that are recognized in the act and usually this is things like contract employment or legal matters.

It removes the requirement for mandatory newspaper advertising for public notices in line with other legislation and recognizing the fact the media environment in this country and the world has changed. It requires notices instead to be posted physically in two conspicuous places and at least one of other method, so that could be radio, that could be social media or it can be whatever the town prefers, based on their own experiences.

Under the heading of revenue, we have made some important changes in taxation. Again, those were requested by municipalities. Property tax will be mandatory. Towns will no longer have the option of collecting a poll tax. Communities require stable and predictable tax base, which is best achieved, more fairly achieved, through property tax.

Poll taxes are regressive and shift a disproportionate burden to low income individuals. This government has been keen and has followed through with a variety of maneuvers to alleviate expenses for people on low income. This is another one.

This will take some time to put in place, both of the towns to shift and also for the municipal assessment agency to finalize assessments on those properties that they haven't previously assessed.

To encourage economic development, the act gives towns the discretion to impose or not a business tax. It also retains provisions from the old act, which allows towns to establish classes and subclasses for the purposes of calculating a business tax. It does not allow a town to tax one business differently from another in the same class. It's equitable.

The other interesting thing that came out of our scan was that we are the only jurisdiction that actually has currently a mandatory municipal business tax. Increasing flexibility is also provided on how business taxes are applied and that allows tools for economic development. Towns will also be authorized to implement, if they wish, a tourist accommodation tax of not more than 4 per cent of the room charge. This has been requested by both municipalities and tourism accommodation operators, and the fees generated there are primarily used for tourism related and marketing activities.

It also provides tools to allow taxes to be made more affordable. Towns can apply

discounts for demonstrated hardship financially, if they wish, and for charitable and community organizations. So a social enterprise can have a break on its taxes, either permanently or as part of a start-up initiative. They're also authorizing towns to offer equal payment plans for tax bills so it's not one big chunk of money at one time in the year.

Under services and programs, Mr. Speaker, these are things that we realize, and have been informed very clearly, that can be used to facilitate economic development. So economic development is specifically stated in the new act as a purpose for towns. It defines economic development in relation to maintaining and increasing the town's municipal tax base. It uses language to reflect the active role of a town in facilitating economic development and it ensures integrity purposes of a town in that they are not allowed to compete with the private sector. It specifically prohibits towns from acquiring equity or holding securities in private for-profit development and from providing loans or guaranteeing loans to private corporations.

It also identifies four mandatory services that towns must provide: waste collection and removal, fire protection, maintenance of local roadways and snow clearing of local roadways.

There are changes also for Local Service Districts, strengthening their accountability but acknowledging their role in providing services for their residents.

So we've changed their election cycle. It's now four years and it will be tied to those of the municipalities – less onerous. They must make official documents available to the public on request. It will be mandatory for Local Service Districts to have insurance on assets and to provide mandatory garbage collection. Those are the only two things mandated.

They will, however, if they choose, be able to establish, own and operate recreational facilities and, under certain circumstances, they may be required to supply audited financial statements. The intent of these decisions, these options, is to ensure that Local Service District committees are accountable for the decisions and the fees that they collect and that residents actually get the services that they are being billed for.

Certain matters have been moved from regulation into legislation for Local Service Districts and this is to ensure consistency with our approach for municipalities. It will help avoid confusion in the future that inconsistent approaches have done in the past. We've heard from Local Service Districts that clarity is really important.

This is being done for provisions that relate to meeting procedures so they line up; for financial matters so there's a similarity of process; for staff, service delivery and the election procedures. So that really is a high-level taster of the bill.

This act, I think, will impact the deliveries of services of the daily lives of everybody in the province and it must reflect, really, both the way towns currently operate and the way they wish to empower themselves to operate in the future and meet the needs of their residents. It's enabling. It's flexible. It's modern. It's what we heard and, on the other hand, it provides levels of accountability and transparency for the residents' money that they use.

So I look forward to the discussions in Committee and hearing from Members opposite and I'll take my seat.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 54. The minister had 17 minutes. I'm going to take, maybe, that amount of time if not more.

So going through this bill, are there good things in it? Maybe. Are there bad things in that people aren't going to like? Maybe. But the fact that we got a 146-page, front-and-back, 350-section bill, 24 hours ago to go through and discuss with our caucus, with the Opposition, to figure out if it's going to be best for the people that we represent, it's absolutely impossible and it's disgraceful. It is. This is a huge piece of legislation that doesn't affect one section of the province, or another section, or rural. It affects every man, woman and child in this province, this piece of legislation will.

And again, is it for the better? Who knows? After 17 minutes, I don't know if anybody knows in this House. That right there lies the problem, what the Opposition have to deal with a lot of times. You know, we're all 40 Members elected in this House; we all bring something different, we all bring something from different corners of this province and to get this 24 hours ago, Speaker, it's a lot – it's a lot – 350 different sections over 24 hours.

So I'm looking forward to the robust debate today, from all Members, and we know that here in the Official Opposition, we're not going to be satisfied until we've gone through this bill and we have everything answered and we know what we're dealing with.

It would have been nice to take back to our towns, our Local Service Districts; unfortunately we can't. Maybe roll out some of this legislation, or a briefing last week on a Thursday or a Wednesday, so on the weekend we could have gone back and talked to our constituents. Unfortunately we weren't given the opportunity for that. Not only are we robbed of that, our constituents

are robbed of that. And that is absolutely terrible.

Again, that's the bill, 24 hours ago. This act will repeal and replace the *Municipalities Act, 1999*. The bill will incorporate many of the provisions of the *Municipalities Act, 1999* as well. I hope that this isn't the alternative to the regionalization plan that we've been talking about, discussing throughout our districts for the past four years. Because if it is, it's lacklustre, there's no doubt about it, and we need more. We need more answers.

This new act is modernizing and updating legislation incorporating many of the things municipalities were asking for in recent years. I have no doubt about that. This act is more enabling versus prescriptive in nature, allowing municipalities more flexibility enacting bylaws that suit their community. Listen, we here in the Official Opposition know that for the most part, when the government takes their fingers out of the pot, sort of thing, that can be a definite, positive thing for any municipality or LSD, and we support a certain amount of autonomy for towns, especially if it lets them develop their own economic diversity moving forward, their own plans, there's no doubt about it.

What we don't want are towns or LSDs being left high and dry by a piece of legislation that was not given the proper time to go through. And we won't accept it. The act is simpler in language making it easier for individuals to interpret sections of the act. That's something that we could have discussed with our towns, our mayors, our councillors over the weekend if we had the time. The new act will have more definitions and improve definitions once again making it easier for municipalities to work with the legislation, when necessary.

The act clarifies the intent of some sections, again, making it easier for councillors to interpret and implement. A significant change in the act is the incorporation of

Local Service Districts in the act versus, previously, being part of regulations of the old act. We spoke about regulations here many, many times over the past couple of years. To be moved over, now, into the act itself, what does that mean? We don't know. We haven't been given the proper time to go through this, do proper analysis and bring it back to the people that really count and, unfortunately, again, that opportunity wasn't given.

Just getting into some of the pieces of the bill that we did manage to pull out, analyze ourselves last night, this morning, yesterday evening and yesterday. It now provides broad powers of municipalities to enact bylaws. A lot of municipalities across Newfoundland and Labrador – I know that we in Grand Falls-Windsor are lucky enough to have bylaw officers as well and this would give the opportunity for bylaw officers to have more power when it comes to doing inspections with regard to municipal bylaws or for housing.

It's great to have bylaw officers in your town. In the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor, I know that they do an absolutely phenomenal job. They have so many jobs to do. They have so many responsibilities. At the same time, they are always up for it. They get the job done and we are thankful. They make a difference. They make a difference in the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor. Just the police presence alone, it's actually fantastic to see and I wish more municipalities had municipal bylaw officers.

It changes the way a towns notice to the general public – the old act had published in the newspapers and that now allows for avenues like social media. I was a little bit put off yesterday when I heard that that hasn't been changed yet. As the minister said, everybody's on social media now. The newspapers are dying out one by one sort of thing. I know a lot of people still miss them. A lot of people still read them but there's no doubt the times have changed. So to put any of those notices in a

newspaper, today, some towns may not even have access to a newspaper.

To see that change, that one change, it was good to see. Don't get me wrong. We're open to change if it's going to be for the betterment for the LSDs and the towns that we represent, absolutely. We need change as we move forward to ensure the successful future of our towns and our LSDs, but we want to make sure that there's nothing hidden in this act that is going to hamper an LSD or hamper a town, and that is exactly what we will be looking at here today.

There will be a three-year phase-out of poll tax to be replaced with a real property tax. Well, what does that look like? What's that going to mean to our LSDs? What's that going to mean to our towns? Is this going to take more money out of people's pockets who quite frankly can't afford it right now? They can't afford it. When you're paying for your gas, your groceries and everything else, to reach into your pocket and asked to be taxed again? That is unacceptable at this time so we want to make sure that this, in real time, works for the people that we represent.

A new tourism accommodation tax of up to 4 per cent. Yesterday in the briefing we found out that that will also apply to Airbnbs. Now this does give the town the opportunity to go to any business accommodation in their town or an Airbnb and charge up to a 4 per cent tax, which will then go back to the town. I'm sure there might be a lot of people that are going to be in favour of this, some people are not. But any revenue stream that can be brought into the town, as long as it doesn't hamper the most vulnerable or those who truly can't afford another tax, that's okay. A 4 per cent tax comes in, that is something that we can definitely look at.

Once again, talk to the accommodations in our town. Has the minister's department gone and talked to the accommodations throughout the province to see if that works

for them? If that will hamper their business, if that will make their business better for the town? If that money, that 4 per cent, goes into something in the town that is going to bring in more business, that's going to bring in more people to stay at their accommodations, well, you know what? That 4 per cent might be a good idea.

Flexibility to make allowances over hardship cases in terms of paying your taxes in instalments, discounts or partial payments. Well, you know what? A lot of people are finding it extremely difficult out there – extremely difficult. So any way that we can defer or help somebody out, it's great to see. Especially seniors throughout our communities; we know now that they struggle with the price of fuel, gas, medication and all kinds of stuff throughout their communities. So if the towns now can work with these people to ensure that payment gets in over a period of time, that's definitely something that could be a positive for a lot of people throughout our towns.

Improved tax sale provision for owner-occupied homes who are in arrears on taxes. Another thing that this act will allow will be a lien on property by towns. So in Buchans, for instance, it's a mining town and their mining is picking up now with Valentine Lake again. They have a lot of row houses that were built for mining families back in the day.

Unfortunately, there are some houses now that have become dilapidated, that have got mould in them. Up until this act right now, the town had little recourse when it came to putting a lien on that person's house or tearing it down and absorbing the cost. So I know right now that when I go back with this piece of legislation, once we get through it a little bit further, this could be something positive for Buchans.

But, again, we haven't had the opportunity to really go and talk to them about it, let their council take a look and see what would work for them. But this could work for

Buchans and, again, the autonomy part of it that goes back to the town, that's not something that we have an issue with that we see thus far. No doubt, towns want some more autonomy to develop their own economic development moving forward, to develop the best strategy for their town.

My Town of Grand Falls-Windsor might want something different than the minister's town of Gander. We need to ensure that each town does the work that will individually make them their own, that will make them successful. Again, what works in one town might not work in another, it might not work in an LSD. That's been the conversation since I've been in this House. Not everything works for everybody.

So to pull out 146-page, front-and-back legislation over 24 hours and think: You know what, this is going to work for everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador – absolutely unacceptable. To sell property at under market value, that could be something that could be good as well. I know that before, ministerial approval had to be given to any town that wanted to do this, which you can see why to an extent.

We just want to make sure – and we'll have questions – that there's a policy in there about conflict of interest. We want to make sure that nobody's going to sell – not that they would but we just want to make sure that everything's on the up-and-up and the way government should be, whether you're on a municipal, federal or provincial level. We want to make sure that a councillor's not going to sell their brother a house or a piece of land for a dollar. We need to make sure of that, and we hope that there are stipulations in place for that.

The LSDs move from regulations back into the act now. It could be good, and we're going to find out. Elections are now held every four years versus every two years. Well, we know that a lot of these LSDs have a lot of great people that step up at that

time, voluntarily. They step up to do this voluntarily at that time.

Is this going to take away some people that might want to do this? If they look at this and say: Well, you know what, two years I could've contributed to, four years on a volunteer basis to do what we're going to do, that might be a little bit long for me. Now are we taking good people out of the equation that can run an LSD? Again, where is the analysis? This is something that we didn't get a chance to talk to our LSDs about. We have a lot of good people running LSDs throughout this province, a lot of good people. Thank God that we have them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Because without them, a lot of this work wouldn't get done.

Again, a lot of them may have stayed on for two years and thought to themselves: You know what, two years is enough; that's enough for me. Now to sign on for four years, they might have issue with that, and if they take issue with that, then we take issue with that. But again, how were we supposed to know?

Mandatory waste collection for LSDs – mandatory waste collection. Now listen, we all know that we want to keep Newfoundland and Labrador as clean as we possibly can. But what does that mean? Are the LSDs going to have to pay for this? Are tipping fees going to be more in one LSD than the other? Are government going to help out with any subsidies, if needed? Those are questions that need to be asked. Can LSDs afford to do this?

Taxes on vehicles have gone up. Taxes on fuel have gone up. Fuel has gone up. In order to run garbage through LSDs it's going to be a price tag. Again, it's just: here you are, out to the fire, there you go. It's not good enough, Speaker. It's absolutely not good enough.

Any assets must be insured in LSDs. LSDs can also establish and operate recreational facilities. That could be good as well. That's something that we could look at inside of our own LSDs. We know that a lot of children live in LSDs that could use recreational facilities. Instead of travelling an hour down the road to the next town, who knows, maybe an LSD could share some facilities or some recreational places. I think that's the way we need to move forward.

The LSD chair and the fire chief cannot be the same individual. Of course, we know that anyway, which absolutely makes sense. The goal was to reduce legislative amendments and reduce some ministerial oversight.

Road maintenance: I know that the minister brought it up earlier for towns. A lot of LSDs, they need some roadwork done. They desperately need some roadwork done. I've said this before and I'll say it again when talking about LSDs, we have Millertown, Buchans Junction, of course, up my way; and the amount of traffic that they have on the road due to these big logging trucks, and now all these big mining trucks, it's tearing up the road. It's absolutely tearing up the road. I've said it before – and I would like to see a discussion on this one day about a certain percentage of the revenue that comes into the province be spent on those roads and that infrastructure for LSDs because they have to drive with their families on the roads.

Do you know what? There is a huge difference between rural and urban here in Newfoundland and Labrador. There absolutely is. But I will say this, the LSDs and the small towns in Newfoundland and Labrador, they are at the pit of the stomach of Newfoundland and Labrador. They are what drives Newfoundland and Labrador. That's where our culture is found. That's where our heritage is found. We need to ensure that we do whatever we can so the

LSDs are successful as well. It's very important to have them.

I know some people have said it in here before that geography can be troublesome here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Absolutely, there's no doubt about it and we can be thought of more as a territory sometimes. But these little towns that dot around Newfoundland and Labrador and inside the interior, we need to ensure that we preserve their way of living. We need to ensure that we preserve their success moving forwards.

It's so important. It's so important to the people. It's so important to our tourism throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. The Speaker has great tourism in his area. We have great tourism all over Newfoundland and Labrador and whatever legislation we bring to the floor, that lens should be put onto it. How, first of all, is this going to affect the people that live in Newfoundland and Labrador? Secondly, how is this going to affect the people that visit Newfoundland and Labrador? I want to make sure that this piece of legislation goes further.

I mean, what a great opportunity to open a piece of legislation to have full debate, full support from everybody in this House with this piece of legislation. It would have been a great opportunity. But can I support it? I don't know if I can – I don't know if I can. The simple reasons I can't support it is because it will affect the people in my towns and LSDs and I don't know how it's going to affect them. Is there something in here on page 131 that's going to come back to my town and again hamper the way they do business; take more money from their pocket; reduce their services?

We don't know. I guarantee you, if we don't know, they don't know at this point. That's where the travesty is. That's it right there, Speaker.

I'm looking forward to everybody else taking their five or 10 and everybody can speak about this. Again, it's a huge piece of legislation that affects every man, woman and child in Newfoundland and Labrador, but to have gotten it 24 hours ago is completely unacceptable. I would like to see this bill dragged out for a little bit, or maybe given some time to fully debate, to fully look at, possibly bring back to our districts and ask them does this work for them. Go with them, sit down with our councillors, they may have something to add.

I'm sure that the government put out their portals or whatever for debate to get more information from the LSDs, but I guarantee you not everybody was given that opportunity or not everybody knew about it. So unless every LSD or every town was consulted about this, we need to dig into it. We need to take the proper time, whether that's the next two hours, whether that's the next couple days, we need to take the proper time to dig into this, find out exactly what it's all about and ensure that it works for the people that we represent at the end of the day. Because if there's something in here that needs to be changed or amended to work for the people, that's what our job is to do, everybody, collectively, 40 people in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: I will take my seat, Speaker, and give some more people the opportunity to speak because I'm sure that there's a lot to be said here today. I look forward to further debate and questions in Committee.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I echo the concerns there from the Member for Grands Falls-Windsor - Buchans about the timeline on which we received this and

expect to debate this and stuff. Even the minister said it was one of the largest pieces of legislation we have. The Member for Grands Falls-Windsor - Buchans is correct, it does affect every single individual in this province. It has an effect on their day-to-day lives.

Everyone understands that municipalities affect everyone's day-to-day lives; it's the most direct service that government provides to anybody is municipal government. It's the water, sewer, roads, everything. Even where your house is situated, it is a very direct service. Twenty-four hours, I didn't even have a chance to go and talk to my municipalities about this and how they feel about this, given the speed that they want to push this through.

First I'll start, that the original Municipalities Act was enacted in 1999 and was intended to be a service manual and a framework for how individuals operate. Since that act was put in, it was amended every single year since it was first introduced, every single year at least one amendment was made to it.

That just shows how much of a live document that the Municipalities Act was. Going forward, I'm going to assume that even this act will be a live document in the sense that I'm sure it will probably be amended every single year as we roll it out.

For decades now, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador has been calling for the original Municipalities Act to be changed or repealed and replaced and also some of the LSDs wanted some input on that.

So looking at this now, this will repeal and replace what they have now. There was a lot of input put in from municipalities asking for changes to be made. I know speaking with my municipality in Labrador West, they kept talking about how they provide services and also how they tax the residents of the

municipality themselves, both municipalities have asked about that.

Another thing they used to ask about a lot, too, was about enforcement and the use of their enforcement officers because they've always had issues when ticketing or enforcing bylaws. There was always some conflict there, there were some issues with the court, with how the process was. They wanted changes made there as well.

They also wanted to be able to increase revenue through taxation. They also wanted a bit more leeway on how they collected revenue into the municipalities because running a municipality is extremely expensive and giving Municipal Operating Grants and taxation stuff, it's sometimes really hard to raise the revenue to operate these municipalities and every year it gets more and more expensive to run a municipality.

I can only imagine outside of places like Labrador West, how much harder it is to run a municipality. Currently, there are 275 municipalities and 78 per cent of them have fewer than 1,000 residents. So if you're running a municipality, and so far what I've seen in this act, it's in prescribing more services that are required to be delivered; 78 per cent of these municipalities are under 1,000 people, how are they going to operate? Are their Municipal Operating Grants going to be risen to accommodate the expense of what's required of them? A town of less than 1,000 people, the tax space for collecting taxation is pretty small and some of the service and stuff that they are required to provide is just getting more and more expensive.

So how do we bridge that gap? It's hard to say. Is it somewhere in here? I don't know, I haven't had a chance to go talk to municipalities about that. But, at the same time, is government prepared to give municipalities more Municipal Operating Grants to bring them up to actually provide

the services that are now required of them even more so.

This is the conversation we need to have because we have an aging population. We have a dwindling tax base for residents. Economic development in some of these smaller municipalities, in order to spur economic development, the municipality needs money to do the thing and unless they're actually getting some influx of an Operating Grant, they might not even be able to get the economic development drawn into their community because they don't have the upfront capital to do it.

So these are things that have to be taken into consideration. Is this government prepared to make sure that they have the capital, the money that they require to do these things? Just to go back there now, my municipalities are trying to spur housing development. The municipalities are trying to find ways to encourage housing development, but it's expensive. Is government going to help them spur this development, and try to get this economic development going?

Like I said, with an aging population and a dwindling tax base, 78 per cent of the municipalities have less than 1,000 residents. These are things that we need to have a conversation about and discuss how this act is going to positively affect that, or negatively affect that. So I'd like to see that the government be prepared to actually help these smaller municipalities fund these things that they're asking of them in this act.

The goal of this bill is to change the tone of legislation in governing municipalities from being prescriptive and providing towns and LSDs with more enabling language. That's another thing, too. Municipalities do want to have a bit more autonomy in how the bylaws and things work and, at the same time, that we make sure that they have protections and stuff in place.

So giving them more leeway in the bylaws, my question would be: What potentialities open them up to litigation? How is the province going to be there when it comes to bylaw enforcement, but also the negative comeback when it comes to potentially opening up a municipality to litigation from a resident, or a business or something in there based on how their bylaws are operating? What framework is there to make sure that no negative impact happens when it comes to those situations?

Especially now with the bylaw enforcement officers and that, is there going to be mandatory training for bylaw enforcement officers and inspectors to make sure that they're carrying out their jobs correctly? Because inside of that you're asking them to go in and do more investigation, have a bylaw enforcement officer. Is the province going to have more mandatory training for them?

Now they've also got the powers with that non-moving traffic violations. So is the bylaw enforcement officer going to have to do increased training now? Is the province going to make sure that they do that, or is it going to be downloaded onto the municipality to make sure they have it? Current bylaw enforcement officers, will they be qualified or is it de-qualification?

So here's the thing that I need to find out: Is that going to be the regulations or is that even something that was thought of? I don't know, haven't had a chance to talk to my municipalities about because I only got this 24 hours ago.

Regarding municipalities, the new act provides the following changes: there's the purposeful design of a broader manner to allow the municipality to govern the affairs of the municipality as it sees fit, with the purpose of providing good government; managing service facilities; ensuring health, safety and viability of a town; and fostering economic, social and environmental well-being of a town.

So there's some stuff in there you're talking about the well-being and everything of a community and you're trying to foster those things. We'll go back to it again: 78 per cent of the municipalities in this province are less than 1,000 people. So you want to do these nice things, you want to foster these nice things. These nice things come with a cost and if you have a town of less than 1,000 people, your tax base is very small.

So, once again, these are nice things you're asking of them, but if you don't put the funding and the capital behind it, it's absolutely pointless. They can't achieve this because they don't have the tax base to work from and they don't have the funding coming in to them to foster these nice things.

Once again, I ask: You wrote this nice thing, but unless there are actually some resources and tools and everything for the municipality to access on a regular basis, not just one time, here's a nice little grant to get it started because once you start this, you also have to continue to pay for it down the road.

So my question again is going to be: Where are the smaller municipalities, which are 78 per cent of the municipalities in the province, going to find the annual funding to make sure that they can achieve these things that you're trying to put out there? Unless it's a continued stream of funding to maintain these things – since it's less than 1,000 people, not a big tax base there – it's dead on arrival, right? You can't achieve it without that.

Towns are specifically enabled to pass bylaws for the above purposes so that the new town act will not have to be amended every time municipalities are faced with unforeseen issues that they are legally prevented from addressing as an occurring case.

So we'll go back to what I said earlier, the current act was amended every single year

since its inception. Now, I know the understanding of what we're trying to see here is that you're trying to prevent that and have something a bit more open ended. But at the same time, without the ability to go back to our municipalities and discuss this with them, how is that to be foreseen? We need to have a good conversation about this going forward because it's a massive piece of work. It's a massive piece of work that affects so many people. So we're now seeing here it is but the road of good intentions takes a right or left turn, sometimes.

Vest towns with limited natural person's powers: a measure given to the town's ability to exercise various corporate powers not specifically mentioned in the legislation. They are now able to enter into contracts and other agreements. So here is another thing, does this open up a municipality also to potential litigation? What is going to be there to help a municipality do this and go down the right path with this without opening themselves up to blowback?

This is another question I have: Where is the town's ability to help protect themselves when doing these kind of things. Especially, like I said, when we go back to a town, 78 per cent of the towns in this province have less than 1,000 people. How do we give the resources and tool kits to smaller municipalities who try to go down this road? Where is the protection there for that? At the same time, where is the capital and the money for training and abilities and all this stuff?

Some of this stuff here, a small town council is not well versed on. Are we going to staff up Municipal and Provincial Affairs to make sure that there are people there to help these small towns navigate these new powers and navigate these new abilities? Because if we don't train them up to make sure they're doing things in a correct manner that we hoped that they would do it in, once again, dead on arrival. We have to have the resources; we have to have the

people there to help navigate down through these changes because smaller municipalities, 78 per cent of them don't have the power, the resources, and the staff to sometimes navigate this.

Prevents towns from operating for profit: that is a given, a municipality is supposed to operate as a not-for-profit. They are just supposed to be able to be there for the people of the province and to make sure that they're fostering an environment for the residents that are there. That makes sense; a town shouldn't be a for-profit business, it's a town.

List of subjects on which the town must have by-laws, such as rules, procedures at town council meetings, fire prevention, arrears sales, et cetera; gives the minister the direction to order a feasibility report before recommending that the Lieutenant-Governor in Council incorporate a town, amalgamate towns, establish or alter boundaries or disincorporate them. Current feasibility reports are mandatory in these cases even though some listed circumstances are routine or require little examination before approval. The goal is to reduce paperwork and administrative burden on the municipality.

Before it was mandatory, obviously, for feasibility; now it's just at the direction of the minister. So given that we've had this grand chat about regionalization, amalgamation, a bunch of different things over the last number of years when it comes to municipalities, is this a positive or a negative when it comes to regionalization or amalgamation and/or such?

So my question is, given that we never really went down the route of regionalization, it was kind of, you know, quietly put to bed, but there are still a lot of municipalities out there who still talk about the ideas of regionalization, amalgamation and stuff like that. So are we going to foster that environment for when they want to come to a greater degree, or are we just

going to hope that some towns just do it on their own, organically?

My question with this is, is there anything in the act here that could possibly foster or nurture the idea of working together, or is there anything in the act that might, kind of, sway the other way? I don't know, I never had a chance to go talk to my municipalities about it because I only got this 24 hours ago. But at the same time, I think we have to have a broader conversation on where do we want to go as a province with this. Once again, 78 per cent of municipalities are under 1,000 people. Many of these municipalities are very small operations, how do we make sure that they are actually given the tools to manage this and other topics that are brought up because of this?

I know communities, they have two employees and now they're expected to do mandatory things that they have to do. With two employees, how do you have the resources to, you know, do most of those things that are prescribed in this legislation. These communities are going to have to staff up. Where are the resources for them to staff up? The tax base is really small; they're very elderly communities.

This is the conversation we're having; are we going to download a lot of burden onto communities? I don't know, only got this 24 hours ago. Couldn't have a good chat with any communities about it. Are we actually going to be downloading more burden on some municipalities? Are we actually going to make municipalities have to do more work with less staff? Are we going to make sure that they have adequate resources, because from what I'm seeing here is, we're going to ask them to operate on shoestring budgets, give them a big list of prescribed things they're going to have to do, and cross our fingers and hope for the best. That's what I'm seeing right now.

At the same time, I think that if we're going to do this, it has to come with some kind of assurance that they can do this; 90 per cent

of these councils in these communities, they're all volunteers. They're doing it for their community, there's no other reason they're doing it; they just want to better their communities.

So we're going to have a group of volunteers go through this prescribed amount of legislation, there's a list of things that are being added, how are they going to get through it? How are they actually going to be able to manage all of this when most councils have one, two, maybe three employees at most, maybe a part-timer?

So I'm really concerned for these smaller communities, these 78 per cent of the communities in this province who are under 1,000 residents, with an aging demographic and a laundry list of things they want to get done but they just don't have the capital, they don't have the money to do it.

Just look at the boil-order list in this province. There are a lot of communities that just can't afford to maintain their water system so they end up on a boil order. Many of these communities are just trying to get by. But we're going to give them a big prescribed list of things we want to see them accomplish and not give them the tools or the resources to actually manage that.

We really to stop and have a good look at the Municipal Operating Grants. I know they went up a little bit, but is it actually enough to get them across the finish line and make their community what these councillors dream their community to be.

Many of these people go on these councils and dream, do you know what? I want to be able to make this the best community in this province. When they get on the council, they realize I have no money, I have no resources, I'm just yelling at a wall because there's no one listening to me.

At the end of the day, these 78 per cent of communities that are under a thousand

people, can they actually get through this act? Can they actually accomplish what's in this act? Do they have the resources, the training and the ability to get through this? What I'm seeing here is great intention – possibly, don't know, just got it 24 hours ago – possibly great intention, but without any resources, without any capital, without any of this stuff, is it even possible?

You talk about good health, good social well-being, good all that stuff, that costs money. Without proper funding, without a proper way to actually do it these communities won't be able to accomplish that. It's going to actually be disheartening to these councils because it's in the act, these are the things we can do, but I can't do it, my community can't do it because I don't have the money.

These are things you have to think about. It's great to have a plan, but if it has a poor execution, it doesn't work. I really feel for these communities, the small ones. I feel for my own communities and some of the stuff they have to deal with. I understand that the tax base is a little bit different in Lab West, but at the end of the day, there are a lot of great little communities out there who just want to do good by their residents, just want to have all the nice things that they dream of when they get on council. But if they can't achieve it then I think we're missing the mark, I think we're missing the point. I really would hope that we have the ability to take this back to all of our communities.

I only have two communities in my district. A massive geographical district, I only have two communities. There are some Members in here who I think have 40, 50 communities, LSDs, everything like that. That's a lot of consultations they have to do themselves as their Member and they only got 24 hours to do it. They must've been some busy on the phone because I don't think you can contact 40-something communities by phone in 24 hours.

At the end of the day, I think it's disappointing that we don't have a real opportunity to go back and take this back to our residents.

I'll just clue up with this, Speaker, in really simple words: great intention, poor execution.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to stand up and discuss this bill today. I agree with my colleagues who spoke before me that it doesn't give adequate time in order to address it properly and to drill down on what's important. Like every bill that's presented, there are lots of good things that would be contained in a bill. I have some reservations about some of them and if I can engage you for a short time to illustrate those issues, that would be great.

Speaker, I had the benefit, back in 2015, of working with two other individuals to bring George's Brook-Milton, which was a Local Service District, into an incorporated entity in 2018. It was a piece of work. A three-year-plus journey to bring George's Brook-Milton into becoming an incorporated town. We had opposition in the local community when we wanted to bring George's Brook-Milton to an incorporated entity.

So where is George's Brook-Milton now? Well, we are a town since 2018. We are the 77th largest town in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and how many people? We're a little less than 800 people, but the 77th largest town in the province. We're not a large town.

But in three years, in the journey, we had a lot of resistance on becoming a town. The thing that residents feared the most was property tax. We did our initial survey and in

our initial survey we were down to less than 10 per cent interest in becoming a town. When the vote was cast in 2018, we settled in on 66.8 per cent of the vote in favour of becoming incorporated with the promissory note that we would not utilize property tax because they were spooked about property tax.

It may have been us three as messengers that failed in adequately informing them about property tax, but they were spooked. I would say to you, now we have legislation on November 1 that once it's passed every other LSD out there is going to have property tax. I had a three-year journey with three individuals, three years to try to convince and talk about becoming incorporated and property tax.

But we're going to do it now in one morning and in one afternoon, and we're going to decree to those people out there in Newfoundland and Labrador, those LSDs: You've got no choice now. In this democracy you've got no choice. The poll tax is off. You have to pay property tax. Now, whose responsibility would it be that we've got to inform them of that?

I want to state one thing: When we began that journey in 2016, there was a misconception about what LSDs are about. We had a consultation that went around the province. I fail to recall what that consultation was. There was a round table on municipal governance in the province and they went around.

We had one in Clarenville that I did not attend. When they sent out the list of all those round tables, the first one or second one on every list in every centre they went to were that LSDs ought to pay their fair share of taxes. That was the misconception. LSDs ought to pay their fair share of taxes, and that is a misconception.

If you're in an LSD in Newfoundland and Labrador, you are paying every tax in Newfoundland and Labrador that someone

in a municipality is paying, except for your local governance. Every tax is the same except your local governance. That is the difference.

I just want to repeat that again for effect. Third time: People in LSDs pay every tax that people in municipalities pay, except for their local municipal governance. No difference. So people pay for what they want or people pay for what they get. The default in those municipalities, in leaders and in decision-makers would be: Well, we plow their roads. The province plows their roads – true. That is true. The province plows their roads.

But let me tell you what difference it made in George's Brook-Milton becoming a town from an LSD. You're an LSD; you receive no funds from government unless you apply for municipal capital works, which you've got the option to do. But you receive no funds from government. You're out there, you receive no funds.

I can see that these House Leaders, MHAs and residents are going to say: Well, you're caught now because you receive no money from government, but we're plowing your roads. That's the only thing that we hear. But let me give you another thought in our debate. We became a town. When we became a town in George's Brook, we received the Municipal Operating Grant from the government because now we're a town. So our Municipal Operating Grant is approximately \$54,000.

So now as a town, in 2018, we're receiving a Municipal Operating Grant of \$54,000; not bad. Every year, \$54,000 as a Municipal Operating Grant. As an LSD, you're out there for governance, local governance, but you didn't receive that. You receive zero dollars. You pay gas tax out – and I want to be clear, people in LSDs pay gas tax, too, same as everybody – but you don't get your gas tax rebate back in an LSD. You don't get it back.

So what difference in George's Brook-Milton did it make? Well, in gas tax rebate, probably a little under \$300,000 in gas tax. That's over – I stand to be corrected – a four- to five-year period. So if you average that out, I would assume \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year. Do the math. Do the math now. LSD, zero. Thus far in a municipality, we're up to \$100,000 per year. But it doesn't stop there. Remember, that's \$100,000 we didn't have, but the province plows their roads. That is the thing that comes up all the time: The province plows their roads.

Then we're allowed to get a rebate on all the power consumed, or 2.5 per cent of the HST paid on our power. We can get that back as an incorporated town. As an LSD, you can't get that back; 2.5 per cent of the power expended per year in our town, we get back. So my hon. Member now for Ferryland is saying how much is that? I just heard him say it. Well, the Town of George's Brook-Milton receives every January, a rebate cheque for that 2.5 per cent from Newfoundland Power, to the tune of between \$19,000 to \$20,000 to start off their year in January.

Do LSDs get that back? Absolutely not. They don't. Do the math. Now you're up to 120. I don't know as I stand here what rebate we get back from the tech companies like Bell, Eastlink that offer that service in our community. I don't know, so I can't speculate. But if you did the math and said: LSDs are a drag to the province because we plow their roads – that is wrong. That is wrong, and that is a misconception, and I'd like for us to make sure we clear that up here now.

LSDs aren't a drag to the province; they're a benefit to the province because in George's Brook-Milton before we got incorporated, there was \$130,000 a year that we didn't receive but somebody else did. Did we have an entitlement to it as a Local Service District? I bet we did and we ought to have. It's not corrected here. There's nothing in this legislation to look at that imbalance.

But one thing that comes up in this legislation is that you may have to look after your roads now. LSDs, you may have to look after your roads now and we'll hear more about that in the future. There's nothing wrong with incorporated entities looking after their roads. Nothing wrong with it. The roads may be in better quality and be better maintained if the towns looked after their roads. No doubt about it.

But you cannot leave it to towns or anybody else if you're not going to bring those roads up to a standard that's presentable. If they got to come up with a massive amount of money to bring them up to a standard before they've got to maintain them, that's an injustice. I'm not sure I see that here and I don't know where we're going with that and what the regulations are going to say in relation to the upkeep of roads.

But I would say to you, the minister stood on his feet and gave the preamble to us and we did our consultation with the chairs. I think the minister will correct me if I misspeak, but I would say they did the consultation with the chairs of the LSDs. Well, in my district, I have the second largest Local Service District in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Lethbridge and area LSD, serving eight communities, a picture-perfect textbook example of regionalization.

So I took the liberty to text to see –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: – as to whether any consultation occurred: none. In fact, I was asked: What's all this about? Again, I disclosed nothing because this is going to break out in the media very soon. I would say to you, every one of us in this House are going to have to respond to what this does to the residents of which we serve.

I'm not only talking about Lethbridge. It could be Cannings Cove, Burgoynes Cove, Smith Sound; it could be Summerville-Princeton-Southern Bay. Those are LSDs in my district. So when I say about government making decision on the bills, you have the legislation to either further empower LSDs and give them the ability to adequately govern, or not.

I presented a petition a short time ago in the House and I said that I have one unincorporated area and one LSD who is enquiring about becoming incorporated, and they are not getting much traction. We were over three years. We found in the third year, to become incorporated, we had to hit the *Open Line*.

My first time speaking to Paddy Daly was back in about 2017. That address that I just had then was about the same thing that I told Paddy Daly. LSDs weren't a drag to the province. LSDs are not a drag to the province. If you believe that, absolutely incorrect. But by golly, we'll move legislation to make sure we hit them or we affect them.

We're not saying that we're going to give them funds to help them out in their governance. We are the 77th largest town in the province, George's Brook-Milton, less than 800 people. Lethbridge and area LSD has 1,500 people, twice the size. They would settle around the 40th largest in the province, but they're an LSD. You add up the math of what we received as an incorporated entity in George's Brook-Milton and double it for Lethbridge and area, I would think that they should be entitled, if they were a town, to \$250,000 a year coming back to their community. But what do they get back? They get zilch. They get nothing back and this legislation won't do anything for those people living in those communities.

The regionalization document that was driven by MNL. Those viable LSDs ought to have a pathway to incorporation. Now, if I read what's presented here, the pathway

you've presented was that the minister may have discretion in ordering a feasibility study. He may. He may not.

That is the only thing I can glean from the notes, when we're looking at trying to create a pathway for those viable LSDs out there to become incorporated. Because becoming incorporated, the LSD in Lethbridge, it means a quarter of a million dollars coming into the coffers to help them better govern. No different than what it is in Clarendville, no different than what it is in Bonavista, no different than what it is in George's Brook-Milton. But there's nothing in this provision to monetarily help Local Service Districts manage or govern their residents, nothing. Not for me to see, unless the minister highlights it in an upcoming address.

So I do have concerns. I have concerns about the roads and you heard us all talk about the condition of our roads in rural Newfoundland. I've always stated that we probably have the worst roads in the province in the District of Bonavista.

AN HON. MEMBER: No you don't.

C. PARDY: I believe we do.

The only thing I would say: Where is government's thinking with taking over the roads? Because you can put it out there to say, here's what we're headed towards. What is your thinking as to passing these roads and giving them the ownership to maintaining their roads in their jurisdiction? Because that's not something you would spring on somebody. It's something that's process oriented.

Will government make sure that the roads, before you pass them over, are brought up to standard? Because if you do the Town of Trinity Bay North in the District of Bonavista has been trying to take over a road in Melrose that is in horrendous condition. They said we will take it over if you bring that road up to standard. That was way back before I got elected.

I've had conversations with the minister, not the current one. I think I may have mentioned it to the current one, too, but I think I might have mentioned that we need to make sure that those who want – like in the community of Port Rexton and Melrose in Trinity Bay North – to take their roads over – the problem is that government either financially or whatever is not going to bring them up to standard to pass them over. I know that's a big undertaking. I know that's not easy. It's a big undertaking. But when you throw something out in this bulletin that they're going to be responsible for the roads, that's a little unnerving.

Tomorrow morning, I'm going to wake up after this hits the media and when I wake up, I'm going to be inundated with calls tomorrow on this, I guarantee you. Not only my frequent callers, but there are going to be a lot of other ones calling and saying where did this come from? I'm assuming that if Lethbridge and area, the second largest LSD in the province, were not consulted or were not engaged, I'm assuming all the other ones in the District of Bonavista were not. If the largest one was not, I'm assuming all the other ones.

So I would say to you, I know I can't make that assumption, but I would think I would have heard if there was a conversation about this particular bill.

The only thing I can relate to is back in the UK when Margaret Thatcher was in and they had the poll tax, property tax. Listen, it brought our government down. I don't know what's going to happen with the LSDs in rural Newfoundland where we're going, but we need a little more clarity on this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll just take a few minutes to make a few comments on Bill 54.

First of all, Speaker, I will say that from my perspective as the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, this has no impact on me whatsoever. I know one of the Members talked about this is going to impact every single person in Newfoundland and Labrador, but unless I'm missing something, this is not the cities act. I think there's going to be a separate cities act. It's certainly not indicated in this bill that this would be the cities act so anyone living in the City of St. John's, Mount Pearl, Corner Brook, this does not impact them. This is all the towns and LSDs and so on, but not the three cities.

Where I represent St. John's and Mount Pearl, this has nothing to do with me. Other than, of course, I would have residents and so on who might have summer homes or whatever in a Local Service District or whatever and there would be some impact there. But in terms of the actual act itself, obviously, I would be anxiously awaiting to see what the new cities act is going to look like.

With that said, I will echo the point that it is 146 pages long. Besides the fact that we only just received it yesterday and it's a lot to digest and analyze and so on, my bigger concern or certainly equally my concern is not just the fact that Members in this House of Assembly, particularly those Members who represent the towns and the Local Service Districts, would not have adequate time to do their research and really pick this apart and understand all the implications, my bigger concern would be for the towns themselves.

I'm not sure if the minister said it in his preamble or not but I'm pretty sure that MNL

definitely would've been consulted and I would think would've had a big role to play in the creation of this. I'm not sure about the Local Service Districts and so on, if they had any consultation. Because we know on the regionalization document that it was the Local Service Districts and unincorporated areas who came out in opposition to it. They indicated at the time that there were no consultations with them; they felt it was a pure MNL document of which they had zero say. Of course we know what happened with that regionalization document.

My concern would be the same for this particular document. Did the Local Service Districts have any input into the creation of this? Also, it's one thing to say that you consulted with them. That would be like the *Buildings Accessibility Act* that we had a disagreement about in the House yesterday, where you had an advisory board and you did consult with people with disabilities, but then you did something totally the opposite of what they asked for.

Again, has MNL and have Local Service Districts seen this document? Did they see this document last week or the week before that or a month ago? Did they have a chance to, not just give input into what you're going to do, but after you did it, did they see this document? Did they have a chance to go through it or are Members on this side of the House, and probably Members on that side of the House as well, going to be inundated with phone calls once they actually see this? All of a sudden they're going to say, my God, I don't agree with this, I don't agree with that, I don't agree with something else. This is going to have implications for me. Nobody asked me, we didn't recommend this. Is that what's going to happen? I don't know.

I suspect that is what's going to happen, though. I have a sneaking suspicion that there are going to be town councillors or there are going to be people on Local Service Districts that are now going to be looking online, they're going to see this

document and they're going to say what the heck is this all about? There are going to be issues raised. I have a feeling that's going to happen.

That's why in terms of process – and it's been brought up in this House before. I'm not dumping on this administration because it's the way it's always been done – doesn't mean it's right. It's one thing to consult on a document and a piece of legislation, but once you've done your consultation and you've now created a piece of legislation, why not then take that in draft form and say here's what we heard, here's the document we've drafted, what do you think of it? Does this meet your needs? Did we get it right? Before it comes in this House of Assembly.

That's what we should be doing, really, with all this kind of legislation that's going through this House. We should be consulting, then drafting a document and then taking that draft document and going right back to the same people we consulted with and say here's what we've drafted based on your feedback, what do you think? That's what needs to happen. I don't think it happened on this piece of legislation. I'm pretty sure it didn't. That would be a concern I would have with it.

Now, with that said, there are a lot of good things I see in here. I did serve on the board of directors with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador in a former life as Avalon director. I had a lot of rural municipalities that would've been in my region. The region went right up to the Isthmus, I guess, and included Trinity Bay, Conception Bay, Placentia Bay, the Southern Shore and so on. I know that there have been concerns raised over the years for the need for an updated Municipalities Act. I'm sure that is welcome in general and I'm pretty sure that having more enabling legislation, I see that as a positive as well. I see that as a positive having enabling legislation.

I'm not going to speak for the Minister of Municipal Affairs because I know he's been listening intently and I seen him there making notes as everyone has been speaking. I'm sure he will have a lot to say. But my colleague from Labrador West, he was talking about the fact that all of this is being put on municipalities and they need more money, more resources and so on to do it. That's not how I read it. I'll be looking for clarification from the minister because the way I read it is that we are enabling them to do things. That doesn't mean they have to do them.

Just because we can enable someone to have municipal bylaws and municipal enforcement, that doesn't mean that we're forcing them and saying, now you need to have municipal enforcement and municipal bylaws. The only thing we're forcing them to do, I believe I heard the minister say, was pick up garbage, I think. I might have missed something else, maybe fire protection, but there are a couple of things they have to do, which they're likely doing already anyway, but most of these additional things, this enabling legislation is giving them the ability to do it, if they choose to do it, if they want to do it and if they're able to do it.

It's not necessarily a matter of resourcing because a town can say well, now I have the ability to do this, it's something we wanted to do. It's something we can afford to do, we're able to do; we're going to do it. Another smaller municipality might say, we just don't have the means to do it. We haven't been doing it for the last 100 years; we won't be doing it any time in the future because we don't have the money to do it. If our circumstances should change where the population should grow, some business should come in, someone discovers a gold mine in our backyard that we can get some taxes from or whatever and now we're able to do it, we have the money, then we can do it at that point in time.

Alternatively, something that I didn't hear really brought up a whole lot is just because that regional governance document is dead, so to speak, in terms of forcing regionalization, that doesn't stop towns and Local Service Districts from getting together and sharing services. It does not stop it.

So now I have the ability, as an example, to have bylaws and I want to have enforcement. Okay, we can't afford enforcement officer, but maybe the 10 communities that are all sort of next to each other for this particular geographic area, we all get together and we say do you know what? We can afford a municipal bylaw inspector between us. We'll all chip in on it and then we will do it. We could do the same thing for animal control.

We all have problems with wild cats and roaming dogs or whatever the case might be. We can't afford a dog catcher, or animal control person, to use the right term. But 10 of us can get together and we can chip in and we can all pay for an animal control person. You can do the same thing with water; we talk about the water systems and testing of water systems, and you train someone and then they leave and now your water, you have no testing – you could do that same thing. You could get together and say, we're going to train a person and pay the salary of a person to test all the water systems for the whole region, and we'll all chip in on it. This person will do it for all of us. Waste water, no different. You can do it for all these things.

So just because the regional framework – which was thrown out there, which was basically forcing LSDs and so on to do it. They can still do these things on a voluntary basis, where it makes sense for them and their residents. I see all these things in terms of enabling these things to happen and encouraging these things to happen – and I'm sure the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the government would be continuing to engage in conversation and encourage municipalities to share services

where it makes sense. You're not forced to do it, but where it makes sense.

But I would say to my colleague from Bonavista, about some of the issues he's raising, I understand that concern that as well. We cannot be saddling people – and this is why I had a big concern over the regionalization plans. You cannot be saddling people with all these extra costs and so on, particularly if they're not getting the services, or they don't need it or they don't want it.

If I'm living in a small area, and I'm saying as much as I'd love to have a recreational facility, as much as I'd love for us to have animal control, as a group we've decided we can't afford it, and we don't want to pay extra taxes to have it, that should be their choice. I think where the issue comes in for people in the larger towns and cities, is that they take offence to the fact that there's a perception that you don't want it, but you want me to pay for it.

As long as people are getting what they pay for, and as long as they're not having to be subsidized by someone else's taxes then sure what odds. That's how they choose to live, who cares? As long as they're picking up their garbage and doing the basics they need, and they're happy and it's not costing me anything and I'm not having to take my tax dollars to pay for them, then why would we care? Why would we be forcing something on them they don't want? That's how I would see it.

Now, if they're asking me to subsidize it, that's a different discussion. I do thank the Member for the education because I've heard people in my area, it comes up from time to time: Why am I paying for the road? They do see it as a drag, they're not paying anything. But when you put it in perspective, if they all came together as a town it would cost more, actually, than what it's costing now. So I think if people understood that it would cost more, they might have a different view on that matter.

At the end of the day, I don't see this as a bad thing. There's a lot of good stuff in here. I like the fact that it's enabling legislation and it's something that's been asked for, for many years. So I definitely see that as a good thing. I do understand the concern my colleague has, but the bigger concern I have, as I said from the get-go, this is not impacting me per se; it's not impacting the residents of Mount Pearl and St. John's directly, like I said, unless someone has summer cabins.

But it is impacting potentially the towns, the Local Service Districts, and again, for a document that is this comprehensive, this large, I really believe that when you did your consultation you came up with this, you should have then taken this in draft form, brought it back to those people and said: Here's what we're proposing; what do you think?

If they were satisfied with it – and I know that no matter what you do, there are going to be people that are going to be for and against. I understand that, too. You'll never please everyone – impossible. But at least give the opportunity for feedback from the people that are impacted, to say: What do you think?

Gather that feedback and then we could have a much more informed debate in this House, knowing what the people impacted the most, how they feel about it. That way the Members who represent those people could do so in a more informed way, based on the feedback from their constituents. By the time we do this now and feedback is received, it's going to be too late, probably. It'll be a done deal and that's unfortunate.

Anyway, with that said, I'll take my seat.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER (Warr): Thank you.

The Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, thank you so much. It's certainly a great opportunity to get up and represent the constituents of the Ferryland District.

I've got to say, just to get this this morning just before you come in the House and try to discuss this, knowing that the people in my district, certainly LSDs, have no idea what's going on here right now – they didn't include the MHA to go to the meetings to be consulted. They didn't consult us as MHAs over here when this was coming out this morning. We did a briefing yesterday; 24 hours ago we got this. Now we get up and have to speak on it and not sure how to speak on it. That's the problem.

You're trying to represent your district, your whole district, and you have municipalities, you have LSDs. You're trying to get in here and trying to get the right information. You come in here, first thing you're waiting for is to get up and say something that's wrong in a debate that you don't even know if it's right or wrong. That's the first thing you're going to jump on, the first opportunity, one of those MHAs on the other side are going to jump up and correct it. Mark my words. If I say it, you'll certainly hear it back. You'll certainly hear it back.

That's the most disappointing thing in this House of Assembly, is the consultations. You never hear back. You never hear on this side. I'm tired of bringing it up. It's so hard to represent your district when you're on the outside looking in. Twenty-two runs 18, 22 runs 40, basically. There are no consultations. If somebody can argue with that then I'd like to hear it, because I am tired of talking about it. It drives me mad, I have to tell you. It drives me mad when you can't speak to people. We've got no information on this, none.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. O'DRISCOLL: Oh, sit over here and you're showboating now because you get up and you're speaking. Well, I'm going to

tell you, I'm going to represent the district I'm in and I am tired of this garbage. Tired of it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Every time I get up it's the same thing. You get over here, oh yeah, well we'll speak about it later. I think the Member for Bonavista mentioned that they don't pay a property tax and the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure said: No, that's wrong. We don't know if it's wrong. Really, you have 24 hours to get briefed on it. Why can't you have this before? That's the problem. Now you're going to talk to us. Why don't you talk to us before it gets here? That's the problem I have with it. That's the problem.

You get in here and you try to represent your district and you listen to that every time. This is the information we have and we get the chirping every time we get up when they don't like to hear what they don't want to hear. But they're going to hear it, because we're not letting this go. I can name roads, you go in and you have to call to get them graded. They're going in and grading nothing. They need to put soil down or rock down or whatever they have to do. You're going to go in now and hopefully take them over and this is going to be accepted, the way the roads are? It's not acceptable. I can just imagine the phone calls I'm going to get tomorrow from these LSDs.

Now, there is some good stuff in it; don't get me wrong, there is some good stuff in it that's going to help municipalities, no question. There are lots of good things there that are going to happen, I acknowledge that. That's the way it should be. You consulted with municipalities. Yes, you might've consulted with a certain group of LSDs.

Whatever happened to town meetings that you could go together? I live in a district, I can call every LSD and if we're going to

have a meeting in two weeks' time, if they're not there, then they don't get represented, but if they're there, the minister can come out and speak to them and tell them what's going on and how it's going to affect them.

Now I have to try to bring that back to them, and there's no way it's going to happen based on 24 hours. I don't know, I don't know. I'm sitting here thinking the amount of calls that's going to come from the LSDs and the people in the districts, thinking that they're going to get taxed. They don't know if they are; we don't know. So that is the problem that I have trying to pass that on and not knowing the information that I'm passing on properly.

So I'm going to say, hold on now, relax a second, let's talk this out. We'll get together, whether there's a committee on our side or we sit in our caucus and say here's what we'd like to have asked, if you're going to sit down and be on a committee, then we pass that on. Then they come back with some suggestions, okay, we'll have to pass that on to our LSDs.

That didn't happen, exactly as the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said. We bring it back. We had no consultations. I haven't met with anybody. I have LSDs. If they met with them, maybe they did in a single one, but they didn't include the MHA to know that. I haven't heard anyone say, b'y it's great that the minister came up and met with us when they were talking about regionalization, because that's when it all comes out. It's a backdoor way of doing it by the sounds of it to me.

Do you know what? There's lots of good stuff here and I acknowledge the good stuff, I really do. Some of the ministers I've been dealing with have been great, when you call them, they call you back and there's nothing better. You are representing a district that you're in and there's nothing better when they call you back. If it's a bad answer then we'll try to get around it, or it is what it is. It's the rules. You can only operate by the rules.

This is not operating by the rules, in my mind. Not getting consulted is my problem.

I was only going to touch on it for a minute and I'm six minutes in talking about consultations. Every piece of legislation is the same way, every single time. You go in and get one sheet of paper, it might be good, we might go in and have a look at it; somebody went to the briefing. You get consulted on it. Yeah, it seems like it's a good thing, yes.

One hundred forty-five or 146 pages in this and they try to read the WHEREASes. It's unbelievable how to understand it. What are the changes? Are the changes highlighted that are there? That would be nice if you sent us the briefing with all the changes that are made from the previous one so you know what you're reading or what's changed. That hasn't happened, ever. That would be pretty easy – not easy to understand but it would be easy to read and understand what's changing. Wouldn't that be something, highlight what is changed in the act. That would be great. That doesn't happen.

I see some of the Airbnbs. I heard from municipalities, there were places in our community, in all communities that were getting Airbnbs. They were getting paid and didn't have to pay any taxes to the town councils. So the people in the towns that had apartments and everything for rent, yeah, they were ticked off. They were paying taxes so why shouldn't he if he's in the next building? It makes a lot of sense. It's a good change. I think that's a good thing. So the Airbnbs have to pay the same as the people that got apartments or whatever they're renting. That to me is a good change.

As I said, it's not all bad, but to get this the way we've got it, is so disappointing, I've got to tell you. Again, I'd love to hear the correction on when the minister said no, they don't get charged property tax. Do they? How does it work for them?

I've got people calling me in the Local Service District with a small road, they'd like some brush cutting done. They can't get it done. Really, the Department of Transportation doesn't do their own brush cutting or very minimal. They're doing some in my area. They've got a nice small mini excavator doing it and it's been great. In certain areas it is done.

Again, as I said before, it's about maintenance. So the Local Service Districts don't get any of this. They get in, they plow the road and they go on. If they have a washout, they go in and fix it. Now, they pay for their own garbage collection and they pay for their fire fighting fees in certain areas. There are certain places in these places that there's a group that takes up their own garbage collection, their own fees for garbage collection, their own fees for fire fighting service and there are towns next to them that they don't service them. So they get their own collection done, like two minutes outside of town. So there is a lot of stuff that needs to be discussed and it hasn't been discussed.

You're talking about cellphone coverage. In this area, it's just so frustrating, I've got to tell you. It's so frustrating. The cellphone coverage, for some of these Local Service Districts, they don't have it. So now you're talking about bringing them together. Who is going to collect for the Local Service Districts or who collects it if there is property tax or what is it all about? We haven't had the explanation. We need to get the explanation.

Again, I looked to the minister, when the previous minister brought in a code of conduct, they really wanted that in the towns and they got it. They got what they wanted, 100 per cent of the people are on board, I think they said, and 98 per cent of the people have completed it. So that's a good thing that they did. It's a good thing that they did. They brought it in here. We discussed it. They did and they got 98 per cent of the people on board. So good for

them and that's a good piece of legislation. That's in there. That's added. But this here with the 145 pages.

With municipalities or towns, I use towns as an example, there are some towns that still don't meet in their town council office. They meet online, still today. I'm not saying everything is back to normal, but some of these towns have got to be forced to get back to their offices to hold their meetings. That's got to happen. It just has to happen. So they're still operating online, doing meetings online. We have to get back to normal here; we have to get back to normal in some of these places. In these towns, they have to get back and have general public come in to the meetings, if that's what people want to do, but they don't have that opportunity in some of these places. Some they do; some they don't. Some of these people are trying to do it online; it can't happen online. They don't have the capability to do it, they just don't.

They're talking about poll tax. We had a big discussion on poll tax this morning in our caucus. One of the communities I have says they have a poll tax. Now, it's not a poll tax, it is a property tax, but they call it a poll tax. They just pay poll tax. The Department of Transportation comes in and cleans the roads, they collect the poll tax, of course, and they get their garbage collected and they got their firefighting.

But the Department of Transportation, in a lot of my communities, is doing the roads and to put that back on a community, I'll use St. Shott's, I don't know how this is going to work so this is why I'm bringing it up. St. Shott's has 50 or 55 residents, 14 or 15 kilometres from the main highway of Route 10, you go down 14 kilometres or 15 kilometres and you have to plow that road. Now you're going to leave that on 50 residents that are paying a poll tax. You tell me how that's going to be done.

They pay taxes the same as we do; they should get the same things. They're getting

charged sugar tax down in St. Shott's so why shouldn't they get their roads cleared? They're getting charged every other tax. They're getting charged taxes; you're putting that in your revenue. The Department of Transportation has to clean it. That's what got to happen.

So when you charge a tax; they are paying taxes. They should get their roads cleared and that's what should happen. They're getting their garbage collected. So what are you telling them now? Fifty people, are they going to have to put out a tender to clean the roads all the way down? Is that what's going to happen? We don't know. I don't want to keep repeating that, but I am going to have to because we don't know.

So where do these answers come from? We get in Committee, you'll be here for a month of Sundays by the time this is passed with the questions we'll have on this. There is no question about.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yes, I know it is good, great. You can make a joke out of it; it is not a joke in my district, I can tell you that. It is no joke; it is pretty serious.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. O'DRISCOLL: No, it's not a joke.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. O'DRISCOLL: Well, you all know, you all should get up and speak on it. No one over on that side yet got up and spoke for the minister. Did anybody else get up yet? You'll have your chance, I suppose, after you hear everything over here and pick out the stuff you want to throw back at us. No problem. Bring it on; I got no problem with it.

Anyway, Speaker, when I get another chance, thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The Chair is recognizing the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to say it's a pleasure to get up to speak to this bill, but quite frankly it's not. The reason is the lack of consultation on this bill is disgraceful. I'll start off first with an assessment of the minister's summary of this legislation – this 146-page legislation. When he spoke, he talked, first of all, about how it's a beast and it is a beast, that's for sure – 350 sections, 146 pages.

He, himself, said it's the largest statute in the province and he gave us an approximately 17-minute gloss over of this major legislation. He, himself, said it's very important. He, himself, said it's very substantive. He, himself, said it's a beast. Yet, we got this legislation approximately 24 hours ago and we are expected to analyze and discuss and debate this in a very short period of time without proper consultation.

Now, I heard the minister say that he had consultations – or I should say conversations with chairs of LSDs. Well, I have several LSDs in my District of Harbour Main and I have not heard from them that they had conversations about this piece of legislation. I've reached out to one of my chairs today to try to get the assessment from this chair of what her views are on this because this is important. We need to have consultation.

Whenever I speak on a bill, Speaker, and analyze whether it's good legislation for the people that I represent and I guess for the people of the province, whether it's going to improve the lives of the people I represent, whether it may need amendments to make it better, and will I vote and support it or against it, I look at the legislation and analyze it. But that cannot be done if we don't have the opportunity and the time to do proper analysis.

That is the concern that all of our MHAs here in the Official Opposition have with this bill. How can we properly assess it? How can we properly analyze whether it's good legislation? We don't know. Yes, we will debate it, but how can we really get into the merits of the legislation without having proper analysis of it?

Speaker, it's a major concern. I heard the minister say, in his 17-minute analysis of this legislation, that it's replacing the old Municipalities Act. That's fine. It needs to be replaced because it was written for a different era, he said. He said that the language is outdated. So we have no problem with avoiding legal terminology. As a lawyer, I know that that can be very negative and in terms of not being user friendly. We're all in support of that, in having user-friendly language.

We're all in support of having gender-neutral language. There's no problem with that. Updating language is good, but that's superficial. That is not what we're concerned about over here. We're not concerned about the language or the fact that it needs to be modernized. We're all in favour of bringing legislation into the times and bringing it into the proper era that we are in; there's no issue with that. But what we have issue with is when there's substantive changes like, for example, that there will be a real property tax for all towns and LSDs within our province –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: If that is not the case, then I'm willing to hear what are the facts. So if that is not the case, that there will not be property tax for towns and LSDs, I stand corrected and I look forward to hearing and look forward to clarification on that, because that is a very important point. That is the substantive point, I would argue. That is the crux of our concerns, that for our LSDs and towns, whether they're going to be subject to property tax.

That was not made clear in the minister's 17-minute summary of this legislation. That goes to the point that we need more clarity, we need more discussion and we need more analysis, because we don't know. That's why we are concerned about this, Speaker.

The minister has stated that they engaged in comprehensive, formal consultations and conversation with chairs of LSDs. In his initial summary of this legislation, that is what I took from what he said: comprehensive, formal consultations and conversation with chairs. If that has happened, then we want to know about that. But I am concerned that that is not what happened.

Why is public consultation so important? It is important in a democracy, Speaker. In any kind of democratic governance, we need to have proper consultation. It doesn't mean sending out invites to try to get opinions; it's more comprehensive. It has to be an exchange of information. It has to be an exchange of opinions. It has to be a process which encourages the public to give meaningful input into the decision-making process.

I know that one of my four chairs of LSD was not consulted. That, in itself, is very concerning. Were the others? We've heard from the Member for Bonavista who referenced one of his chairs of LSDs, who also was not consulted on this important piece of legislation. How do we improve our democratic governance? How we have more of an inclusive democratic society is by having consultation, public consultations that are meaningful, that provide meaningful input and we are not getting that with this piece of legislation. I have not heard it.

Now, we will find out in questions, when we question the minister, about exactly what consultations were involved, and we need to know exactly what consultations. Were people given the opportunity to give their input? Because we know, Speaker, that any

trusting relationship between a government and the people they represent has to have this strong foundation of consultation.

Without that, you're not going to have a trusting relationship between government and the citizens that they represent. So why is that important? We need to build and maintain and ensure that consultations happen. I don't believe that it has happened here.

Speaker, we're very concerned about this. I can only say that what we've heard so far is inadequate. It does not give us the understanding that we need in order to be able to support this very important bill, this very important piece of legislation, Bill 54. I must say that unless I hear a lot more about what this entails and how it's going to impact the people that I represent in the District of Harbour Main and the LSDs that I represent, and the towns, because it has implications for all of those entities.

Make no mistake about it, at least from what I can tell from a glossary review of this legislation, it will have serious impacts on these entities in the district that I represent, as it will for all of the MHAs, not only in the Official Opposition, but as well in the government.

Again, Speaker, major concerns with this beast and we need to hear more. We need to have proper consultation. That has not been done and until I'm convinced that that has been done, I'll have very serious problems with this legislation.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to get up in the House of Assembly on a bill, especially such an

important bill as this. It relates to a lot of communities, a lot of LSDs. In my district, I'm probably combined with LSDs and municipalities. When it comes to some of the municipalities, I know there are probably LSDs in some of the other districts that are probably just as big as the municipalities that I have in my district. It relates to a lot of them.

I was going through the bill here. Again, I have to agree with my colleagues, I really do. Twenty-four hours to receive this bill, 350 sections, 145 pages within 24 hours, to make an analysis on such an important bill, such recommendations in it that – I'm sure the intent of the bill is good. I'm not disputing that part. I'm sure the intent is good, but I do see that it poses a number of questions as well. I think once we get to Committee we will have a number of questions pertaining to all our districts because it's very important. In a piece of legislation like this, it certainly poses a lot of questions to make sure that we understand what's really happening in this piece of legislation.

It is An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts, it seems like it's a combined act, towns and Local Services Districts, seem to be in the same category. It's probably good for some of the towns. I'm sure the towns will appreciate some of the legislation that's in here. Some of the LSDs will probably look at it in a different light.

That's the thing that concerns me. What is really happening here? It does support some challenges to the LSDs and when I was looking at the notes in the legislation on page 3, this bill will require that towns provide waste collection and removal, fire protection, and snow clearing and maintenance to all local roadways. Now is that going to compel the LSDs for maintenance to all local roadways? That's one of the biggest questions.

I've got a district that's Department of Transportation – and thank you, Minister,

you do the roads right down through our district with regards to snow clearing and maintenance. When you do a good job on it, you do a good job; that's when they do it. There are a lot of potholes in the district, anyway, that need to be fixed and needs attention at all times.

So with the tax base for LSDs, with the tax base for some of the smaller municipalities that I do have in the district, if that's a requirement, that snow clearing and maintenance to all local roadways, does this mean that the LSDs in smaller towns will be required, if they're getting the extra tax base somewhere? A lot of them don't have the tax bases. A lot of my smaller municipalities don't have the tax base. That's why they rely on the MCWs; they rely on the ICIPs and the programs and things that government have to offer.

So that's why this one does concern me with regard to the roads in the district. Like I say, the province does the roads, but if that's turned over to the municipalities to fend for themselves, I think that's going to create a great problem in my district. I would certainly have questions on that alone; just on that alone, I'd have a number of questions with regards to knowing exactly what's in this piece of legislation.

Again, the intent might be good and I am sure it is, but it poses a number of questions and that one would be, because I know there are small communities right into the end of my district that certainly wouldn't be able to maintain the roads.

It's almost like back last year, I think you were looking at regionalization to have those roads, so that everything could be combined in one certain municipality, certain LSDs band together to have that done. At that time, that was banned because of too much cost to government. So is government just relaying this back now on the smaller communities, smaller LSDs, to fend for themselves? Like I said, that's a big question.

So when they said we're not having anything else to do with regionalization, we'll scrap that, or amalgamation, whichever words they did use, government had a lot of challenges with it so government ignored it. Now they're coming in with those challenges to the smaller communities and the LSDs. A lot of the larger communities, a lot of the larger towns, yes, can absorb it. They've got tax base. They can utilize a lot of tax base.

Some of those towns that are still growing towns. They've got buildings and units that they can use. They can provide property tax and they can put buildings in their properties. The only thing is, again, some of the smaller communities, when it comes to Crown lands in their communities and having access to the Crown lands, how they use it; it's got to be done by government.

When it comes to taxes, just looking at a piece there on page 61, number 120: "Where real property is occupied and the owner is not known despite a reasonable investigation by the town," – they still don't know who the owner is – "the occupier is considered to be the owner for the purpose of the imposition and collection of the real property tax." So the act says yes, they can pay the tax, they own the land, but Crown Lands can say no, the occupier doesn't. It's a bit confusing.

So that kind of stuff is a problem there as well. But, again, I agree, if they're going to be responsible for their roads, for the upkeep of their communities – and a lot of towns take pride in their communities. They really do. I know the Town of Bishop's Falls in the past few years have taken a lot of pride in their community and our community is doing well. They've put in boardwalks. They've put in street lights. They've done well on their walkways. They've really beautified communities and that comes from a tax base; that comes from government supports. We know we have to have a tax base to get all that stuff done. The properties, to be able to charge taxes on;

yes, they get a lot in from that and government supports as well. But the LSDs, I think, and some of the smaller communities are going to find a big lot of trouble to do that.

Again, like I say, even with the gas tax money, they can't spend their gas tax money in the way that they would like to utilize it. There are lots of towns, lots of communities that would like to do things in their community but they're challenged on the way they spend their gas tax money.

That is something that I'm sure this act can look at and the department can look at in order to – if they're going to be challenged with regard to their roads, because, like I say, that poses a big, big question to my district and I'm sure a lot of communities. If they're going to be challenged with doing their roadwork, snow clearing, maintenance alone – we know it's a big cost, even the government knows, to get this done, to maintain those roads.

The municipalities, some of the smaller towns and LSDs would need access to other funding if that were to happen. I don't know, again, I'm just going by what the act says here, so I don't know for sure. Again, we'll ask a question on it and try and get some confirmation of that so that I can go back to the LSDs, some of the smaller communities and say look b'ys, this is what's happening, get ready for it. You're going to have to find ways to absorb this cost. I tell you, they're not going to like it. I know they're not going to like it.

Again, to the bigger towns, bigger municipalities, yes, they will be able to absorb some of this because they have access to a lot more funding. They have access to the ICIPs, they have access to the MCWs and they have access to how they spend their gas tax monies. That will help those communities, along with some of the tax bases that they have already.

I do know that they need a tax base, that's what builds our communities. That's what takes pride in our communities. They can probably offer incentives to communities, especially volunteer groups, some volunteer sectors with regard to their own buildings and what the volunteer sectors themselves can do for the communities. They really do a great job in our communities. I know the Lions Clubs, the Knights of Columbus, even the church groups, they can provide a lot of incentives to the town, do a lot of work in the town. Maybe some tax breaks that way, which can be absorbed by the town. It certainly helps those groups and those individuals that can also help the towns.

Like I say, there are some good things in this act, no doubt, I can't say that it is not there to help some. But I think, again, with that, some of the smaller communities, some of the LSDs will find themselves very challenged in the work they can get done.

Water in some of the small LSDs. I've gotten calls, they can't afford – I know they can put in those PWDUs, I think they're called, but that's a cost. There is a big cost to them. When you have no water in those small LSDs, the water is dirty, you can't drink it; it is a big cost to those LSDs. They just don't have the tax base; they don't have the resources to be able to even have clean drinking water in those small communities.

I know we can have some water put in but that's a cost to the town. The LSD has to absorb some of that cost. Again, they have no access to the gas tax money. It relies all back on the government to provide the monies for that, so it's challenging on both ends, I know, but it has taken a big lot of challenge to those LSDs to even have clean drinking water. Without government supports, they'd never have that drinking water, even the tax base that they had to provide.

You take some of those LSDs that can't even get the tax base to get clean drinking water. You force them to have to snow clear

the road, do the maintenance on the roads, upkeep the roads – again that’s going to be a question – if that is happening, then how are they going to survive? How are they going to stay there, they haven’t even have water? Because they won’t be able to have water, they won’t be able to keep up the road maintenance, they won’t be able to support their own communities.

That is probably even some of the bigger municipalities. My colleague mentioned George’s Brook-Milton, I think he mentioned somewhere between 700 and 800 people, I think that was the number that he used. So some of those small communities, they’re incorporated as municipalities. I’ve got a lot of them in my district, 700 to 800 people. I can look at every district here, our 40 districts, and I can see where each one of us has those sized communities. For the individuals to gain just from the tax base from their own communities, to absorb all those costs, especially to have roads, water, maintenance, upgrade, upkeeps, those are a big lot of challenges. I don’t know where they would really fare out in regard to doing this kind of stuff.

So that is going to be one of the bigger questions that I would have with regard to what’s really the intent of this legislation. Again, 350 sections, 145 pages, there have got to something in here good. It’s a big bill, no doubt about it. I’m not just here saying this to pick some bad situations of it. I’m just trying to wrap my head around it as well as we all are. If this is good for our communities, it’s good for our districts and good for our province when it comes to that, of how this is going to work.

I’m sure, like I say, the intent is good but there seems to be a lot of challenges there for the smaller communities. Again, like I say, even the small government supports like CEEP and that kind of stuff, even this year, they probably had different rules in them that people couldn’t even get access to CEEP to do up some of those smaller Local Service Districts, some of those

smaller communities. They rely on that. They rely on these programs.

Like I say, if government had the programs, the MCWs, the ICIPs, the gas tax monies, CEEPs, all those programs are big initiatives for any community, especially my communities. I know that the smaller communities, they rely on them. They want to try to beautify their towns. Every town takes pride in their communities. We see it. We see the signs, well-kept communities, well-maintained communities. Municipalities get awards and that kind of stuff for communities – great initiatives. That got there through a tax base of the municipality, probably, even programs. Especially, even keeping their communities clean. They need those small programs to keep those communities clean.

If they’ve got to rely on their own tax base, their own supports just to do their roads, their maintenance, their upkeep, they’ve got no extra money left over. They’re not going to have none left over. They’re going to have less. Some of them, probably, won’t even survive but it’s communities that take pride in their own communities and they want to stay there in those communities but it seems to be getting tougher for those communities to survive in some of the rural areas.

That, Speaker, would be some of my concerns. I guess that’s probably the biggest concern is how this will be kept up. I mean, the act is there – it is written there. Again, it says: “... require that towns provide waste collection and removal, fire protection, and snow clearing and maintenance of local roadways” That’s going to be required, and this act as it combined there, An Act Respecting Towns and Local Service Districts – so is that all one compiled act? Is everybody going to be responsible for it? Are there some sections there that divide the Local Service Districts from a different size town? Is the amount of people in that town going to make a difference to the amount of monies coming

into that town, or what they're going to be required to do?

Those are some of the questions that I would like to have answers and I'm sure we will be asking those questions in Committee. But there are going to be a lot of questions in Committee because this is a big act and there's a lot to it.

With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat and hopefully get a chance to ask some questions in Committee.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that we adjourn debate on second reading of this bill. I also move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that we do now recess.

SPEAKER: First of all, on the first motion regarding debate, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

This House do stand recessed until 2 this afternoon.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Before we begin, in the public gallery I'd like to welcome Alex Ryan, who will be recognized this afternoon in a Member's statement. He is joined by his parents, Frank Ryan and Carolyn Shepherd, as well as friends Derek Ryan and Nathaniel Besso.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also in the public gallery today, we're joined by a number of Grade 9 students, who are here today participating in the national Take Our Kids to Work day.

Welcome, everyone.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the District of Placentia West - Bellevue, Terra Nova, Exploits, Ferryland and Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I stand in this hon. House to recognize the Kidney Foundation and their annual Kidney Walk to celebrate the strength of our kidney and transplant community.

On September 17, I had the honour to join the Kidney Foundation at their Kidney Walk, located at the Marystown YMCA, who raised a total of \$4,056 for this year's walk. When you participate in the Kidney Walk, you're joining a passionate community with the shared belief in doing all we can to provide hope and support to those living with kidney disease.

Our support helps them provide the reliable information and support that they need to

stay safe and healthy, and to raise funds that go into research that improves lives affected by this disease in every community across Canada. In 2023, the Kidney Foundation has achieved \$2,031,828.20 in donations to date.

I ask all hon. Members of the 50th General Assembly to please join me in congratulating the Kidney Foundation on their remarkable achievements and helping raise awareness for kidney disease.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The War Memorial monument in Shoal Harbour was originally constructed by the United Church. Its location was too close to the road and unfortunately salt and sand ate away at the monument, causing considerable damage. The monument had to be moved this past year to a more suitable location. After securing the new location, the cost of the removal and relocation was the first hurdle that they had to overcome, so fundraising began.

The Town of Clarenville, its staff, the community, the Legion and local businesses began to put their plan in action. Donations to install the monument started coming in and the work began. Two of the four storyboards are already there, benches are installed and the security fence will soon start. Funds for one of the benches were donated by the Wiseman Family, and funds for the second bench were also raised by the Wiseman Family Reunion in July of 2023.

The rededication of the Shoal Harbour War Monument will take place on the 11th of November at 3 o'clock. As a proud veteran I will be there for the rededication of this

sacred place and to remember our fallen comrades.

Please join me in thanking all the individuals who made this a reality, and honour our veterans.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I would like to recognize the Lion Max Simms Memorial Camp. On October 19 the camp was inducted into the Business Hall of Fame by the Exploits Chamber of Commerce.

Named after Lion Max Simms, the camp opened its doors in 1981 after many years of planning by Lions and other groups to accommodate a place to go for individuals, regardless of their abilities. After 42 years and fully funded by Lions Clubs of Newfoundland and Labrador, the camp continues to be a rewarding experience for both campers and Lions members throughout our province.

Speaker, I would like for all Members to join me in congratulating the Lion Max Simms Memorial Camp on being inducted into the Business Hall of Fame.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today in this hon. House to recognize the athletes of the Ferryland District who were recipients of the 2023 Premier's Athletic Awards.

It's an honour to stand here today and congratulate Jack Walsh of Goulds and his award for bowling; Michael Gosine of Tors Cove on his award for boxing; Rachael Tuff of Witless Bay on her award for figure skating; and Ryan Maher of Petty Harbour on his award for softball.

Being chosen to receive such an award as an athlete proves the dedication and hard work that each individual puts forth in their chosen sport.

I also want to take this opportunity to recognize the coaches and parents of these kids for the amount of time and financial assistance they put into supporting their kids in receiving their goals and becoming successful.

Please join me in congratulating all the individuals from the Ferryland District, as well as from parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, who were recipients of the 2023 Premier's Athletic Awards.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I recognize a young accomplished athlete, Alex Ryan, from Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove. Alex joined karate at the age of six and since then training and competition have been his focus. Alex's first major tournament was the Montreal Open in 2018, where he won silver. From there, his training and dedication have led him to winning gold, silver and bronze medals across our province and country, and onto South Africa, Ecuador and Las Vegas.

Alex's most recent accomplishment was gold at the Karate Canada Nationals this past July in Quebec, securing his spot on the national team, which travelled to

Santiago, Chile this past August to compete at the Pan American championships. In addition to his karate achievements, Alex was promoted to senior Shodan – 1st Degree Black Belt level – by Chito Kai Canada.

A well-rounded athlete is also complemented by being a top student, as Alex is currently on the Principal's List and has achieved the Bronze Standard of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award.

Speaker, I ask all of my hon. colleagues to join me in congratulating Alex Ryan on his outstanding achievements in karate, and we certainly look forward to his future competitions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise to recognize the Provincial Indigenous Women's Reconciliation Council and the work being done to establish a collaborative, ongoing working relationship between Indigenous women and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The goal of the council is to coordinate and lead meaningful action, address existing challenges and obstacles in the areas of culture, health and wellness, justice and human security that will lead to lasting changes in legislation, policies and procedures that impact Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

The creation of the council is historic for Newfoundland and Labrador. It was proposed by the Provincial Indigenous

Women's Steering Committee as a foundational component of their *Hear Our Voices* report. It includes five government representatives and six Indigenous members. There are three co-chairs; one representing government, and two Elders appointed by the Steering Committee.

Through *Budget 2023*, our government provided nearly \$400,000 to support Indigenous-led violence prevention initiatives, including the Indigenous Violence Prevention Grants Program, the annual Provincial Indigenous Women's Gathering and support to the Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network. By working in partnership with Indigenous women, their governments, and organizations, we will make positive strides together.

I thank the council members for being a part of this important and very necessary work.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

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

The Official Opposition is pleased to see the creation of the Provincial Indigenous Women's Reconciliation Council. It's a very important step in building the relationship and a positive working relationship between Indigenous women and the government.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report, called *Hear our Voices*, put forth 196 recommendations to implement some of the most urgent Calls for Justice. This is one of the many recommendations which was the call on government to create a reconciliation council and we see it implemented today.

Another vital recommendation was a proposal to create a police oversight board, along the lines that the First Voice has been calling for. If this government truly wishes to see meaningful, systemic policy change to advance truth and reconciliation, then a concerted action must be taken to address the remaining recommendations to implement the Calls for Justice.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

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

The Provincial Indigenous Women's Reconciliation Council was established to play a pivotal role in acknowledging the historical injustice experienced by Indigenous communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have high expectations. We look forward to substantial action coming out of this council that will require government to respond with meaningful legislative changes that will improve the quality of life for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ persons and their families.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

E. LOVELESS: Speaker, farmers and producers are known for their strong work ethic, positive attitude and deep connection to the land.

As they work to harvest homegrown, healthy food, the provincial government is with them every step of the way.

Newfoundland and Labrador's agriculture sector has access to more than \$42 million in federal-provincial funding through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership – known as Sustainable CAP – over the next five years.

Sustainable CAP invests in smart, innovative projects that focus on agricultural growth and address environmental challenges.

The provincial government also invests \$2.25 million annually through the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program. Every project funded through this program helps a farm enterprise or community garden thrive.

To quote the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture: "Whether a farmer is investing in new land development, upgrading on-farm technology, or working to improve environmental sustainability, this program responds to challenges."

Speaker, we offer solutions and support new opportunities in agriculture – and it shows.

Commercial horticulture producers have exceeded our goal to double food self-sufficiency in fruit and vegetable production from 10 per cent to 20 per cent.

Dairy and livestock producers are enhancing environmental stewardship and improving animal health.

Thank you to them, and to everyone who has volunteered at a community garden, shared a backyard harvest or supported a local farmer.

Together, we can increase access to good food and support the well-being of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Despite their strong work ethic and positive attitude, farmers in Newfoundland and Labrador are struggling like never before. The rising cost to operate, which is directly related to the Liberal carbon tax, is forcing many farmers to throw in the towel. The added cost of fuels, fertilizers and equipment are unmanageable.

Though promising, in theory, access to funding, programs are fraught with bureaucratic red tape, dead ends and enormous up-front costs. The fact is, since 2001, the province has seen significant decline of 50.7 per cent in the land being farmed, surpassing every other province in the country. Considering that Newfoundland and Labrador is losing agricultural land at a rate nearly seven times higher than the national average, a new, drastic action plan is needed to create any real food security in the province. Whereas the inconsistent interpretation and enforcement of provincial plans, bylaws and financial penalties are interfering with food production and creating conflict.

I call upon the minister to bring new legislation to the table, this fall, to fix the problems in the Department of Agriculture, to give hard-working farmers a chance at creating true food security in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

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

This is great news. Now let's keep this going. Unfortunately, food costs in this province continue to rise. We must continue to expand investment in agriculture to boost local production, make more land and resources available to farmers. Until then, we will not see nutritious food meet the price levels that the people can afford. Let's keep farmers farming and let's add more to the roster.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, yesterday the Liberal government released its fall fiscal update.

I ask the Deputy Premier: How much money have you collected from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for carbon tax and will you rebate this money back to them?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

As the Member opposite knows, we collected carbon tax for the first quarter. As of July 1, we had the federal backstop. So the first quarter, we did indeed collect carbon tax and all of that has been rebated back to the people of the province.

We have a cost-of-living plan that is over half a billion dollars, Speaker. We've reduced the price of our gasoline tax by over eight cents per litre. All of that money is going back to the people of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, great measures indeed, with expiry dates. This money was collected since then; it is all new money collected this year.

Again, I ask the Deputy Premier – yesterday you shut the door on any help for working-class families and the seniors in our province. Once again, I ask you: Will you rebate back the carbon tax?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Here's the man who doesn't think we should have a plan to pay down our debt. This is what he was talking about yesterday when I brought forward my fiscal update.

As I've said to the Members opposite, as I say to the people of the province, we've contributed back; we've put money back into the pockets of people in this province, about a half a billion dollars. Including lowering our gas tax; including increasing our Seniors' Benefit; including increasing our Income Supplement; including, for example, cutting by 50 per cent the cost of registering one's vehicle. We eliminated the tax that we had on home insurance.

Speaker, we've done a tremendous amount for the people of the province. We're going to try and continue to help the people of the province, unlike the Members opposite who didn't vote in favour of any of these things.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me talk about fiscal realities here and fiscal policy. This is the same Member who believes that you should take an advance on your credit card to open up a saving account, because that is exactly what they have done: Borrowed money to put it away.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: I ask the Deputy Premier: When did you realize that carbon tax was hurting the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, before or after you took \$35 million out of their bank account?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Well, first of all, allow me to kind of educate the Member opposite. First of all, you can have a mortgage and have an RRSP at the same time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: Speaker, this is about ensuring that we have a plan to pay down our debt. Now, we know the Member opposite is not in favour of the Future Fund and, by alignment, then he is not in favour of having sinking funds. We've heard him in this House talking about how he doesn't support balanced budgets. That is why the former Progressive Conservative government left us in such a financial mess. We are doing much, much better and he doesn't understand that is the reality.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I am glad to hear the Deputy Premier say that they're doing much, much better. Tell that to the families in Newfoundland and Labrador who are struggling because of carbon tax, sugar tax and all of this. In the meantime, they are stashing away –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

T. WAKEHAM: – money for a rainy day. Well, for most people in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, it's raining right now –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: – and they want to know: Why doesn't the Liberal government believe in putting more money back in people's pockets where it belongs?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Speaker, as I sit here listening to the Members opposite talk about fiscal responsibility and constraints, I feel compelled to stand to remind Members of this House, on behalf of my district, of the fiscal decision-making that was employed when the Member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, was the CEO of the Health Authority in my district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

K. HOWELL: Speaker, we want to recognize that decisions and fiscal responsibility then involved everything –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Education, 20 more seconds.

K. HOWELL: Fiscal responsibility then included everything from removing sandwiches from day surgery to hauling nurses out of our vulnerable communities in the remote and rural areas of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I would think that the Member opposite needs a little bit of an education on how the budget process works.

So not only did the Liberals come to power, they didn't come to power to revive health care, they came to power to cut health care. They cut 30 per cent out of health care. They took nurses out of the Labrador-Grenfell. They closed clinics in Central Newfoundland. They laid off OR nurses in Western and they cut over a hundred jobs in Eastern.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That's the record from the Liberal government in health care in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SPEAKER: Move to your question, you have 15 seconds.

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, housing starts are down 34 per cent over last year, yet the Liberal government is projecting to build less than 10 per cent, why?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, the Deputy Premier doesn't need a lecture from the Leader of the Opposition about fiscal management.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: When we formed government thinking it was a billion-dollar deficit, it was over \$2 billion because of the debacle on that side. Yes, we had to find efficiencies and that Member thought the best way to find the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. DEMPSTER: – 30 per cent efficiencies were to reach in to the most vulnerable, isolated community and take the only medical services they had; 100 per cent of the nursing in that community to be removed.

We do not do that, Speaker. We find ways to navigate and have a better service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I will continue on.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes, I'd get off that, too.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

T. WAKEHAM: I would, too, because clearly the Liberal government decided it, a Liberal minister implemented it; no problem there.

Speaker, how much have expenses increased for homeowners in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in the last 12 months?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: I'm sorry, Speaker, I didn't quite understand the question, but I can say that things in this province – I can read you some of the current status of the Newfoundland and Labrador economy. Our employment numbers are way up. I

announced them yesterday; they're going to be up by 2.2 per cent. We're at, as of October 6, 243,200 people employed in this province. Our unemployment rate, Speaker, is well down to some of the lowest we've seen since records were being kept. Our food services and drinking places sales are up; our new motor vehicle sales are up; our retail sales are up.

Speaker, our economy is working very, very well and I think that we should celebrate the fact that we're doing well in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me provide the answer. The answer according to Stats Canada is 6.9 per cent. That's how much expenses have increased. That is well ahead of the other Atlantic provinces and the third worst in the entire country.

Does the minister know the cost-of-living increase for those renting in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Allow me to correct the Member opposite. He's either mistaken or confused, but allow me to tell him that in yesterday's fiscal update, I certainly said that we're the second lowest in the country when it comes to the inflation rate – second lowest in the country. The only one better than us is Prince Edward Island.

We'll have an annual inflation rate of 3.2 per cent, much lower than the Canadian average of 4.1 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Again, Speaker, I'll answer my own question. The answer according to Stats Canada is 11.3 per cent – 11.3 per cent increase in the cost of renting in this province. The worst in the entire country. That is students, vulnerable people and the elderly who must contribute more and more of their hard-earned income to pay rent.

The housing crisis has been raging for over a year. Yesterday, we learned housing starts are down by a third.

Why did it take so long for a Liberal government to implement a housing plan?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'll go back to the budget again. I keep having to go back to the budget and use the exact words from the budget: \$140 million, of which \$70 million is for an affordable housing program that will help construct over 850 affordable homes, with a focus on seniors. The Member opposite didn't vote in favour of it. Twenty-five million for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Member opposite did not vote in favour of that either. Seventeen million dollars to maintain and modernize provincial social housing. The Member opposite did not vote in favour of that. He certainly hasn't been supportive of us addressing affordable housing either.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, the CBC is reporting on a single father who was forced to choose between a Newfoundland and Labrador Housing option and his own son. The man said: "My worry is him. He can't sleep outside"

I ask the minister: Why does this man have to choose between a home and his family?

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

P. PIKE: Thank you for the question.

Our government certainly recognizing that a number of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are challenged when it comes to finding housing that is affordable. We are committed to helping them and we will. We certainly empathize with the news story today and the tough navigating that they're having. However, we work very closely with individuals through the Housing Corporation and we provide funding for those who have issues getting rental properties. This is in addition, by the way, to our own housing. The wait-list for rental units is prioritized under a couple of factors, one being women and children –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, empathy is not what this gentleman is looking for. If the Liberal government was building houses instead of tearing them down, this situation could have been avoided.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: I ask the minister: How does tearing down housing units help this particular individual and his son?

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

P. PIKE: Thank you for the question.

I assume what you're talking about is the houses in Corner Brook that we are planning on taking down, because of the fact that we did a cost analysis. As a matter of fact, I was out there this weekend, on Sunday, and had a look at those units. The only possible way of doing anything out there and creating an environment where people can live and work and they can certainly feel safe is if we take down those units and we put new units back there and do the proper landscaping.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: So people will feel proud of where they're to.

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

J. WALL: Speaker, the people of this province are at a breaking point. When a father is left to choose between giving up his son or having his son living outside in a tent, something is seriously wrong.

I ask the minister: Will you do the right thing and step down?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker, for the question.

I'm sure the Member opposite is very concerned, as we are on this side of the House, about that particular father. We all saw it in the news today.

I will say that there are priorities that are set within Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, but allow me to tell you some of the other things. I told you some of the things that we have been doing in terms of helping people with the social housing situation. He, I'm sure, will be prioritized; he certainly has a child.

But we've also done things like increase the targeted basic income for youth. We've

done things like increase the Seniors' Benefit; we've increased the Income Supplement. We certainly launched and expanded the Employment Stability Pilot. We're doing an awful lot to try and support those that are vulnerable, and I hope that this gentleman gets the support that he needs very, very soon.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, companies in this province are paying gasoline roulette with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Is the Liberal government okay with the fact that we've almost run out of fuel on several occasions?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I would say as I answer the question, I can't remember if it was earlier this week or before, we keep in close contact with distributors, suppliers, you name it when it comes to this. Now, we haven't had anybody come to us recently on this with any concerns, but I would invite the Member opposite, if you have a specific concern, we would love to hear it. Again, we all want the same thing here.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I would say the minister heard from Joe Brewer for sure, and read the CBC article.

Speaker, we pay carbon tax, we pay gas tax, we pay HST and the new five-cent tax on gas was implemented to ensure that we have supply. Shouldn't we be holding both the companies and the PUB to account?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I say to the Member if there are specific concerns, come to us. We keep an eye on this; we don't just rely on one story that we hear. In fact, I do talk to Joe Brewer quite a bit. He always calls to let me know what a good job I'm doing, so thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: What I would say is we always take measures, and one of the things is when we mention the PUB, we do know they are a quasi-judicial body; we do know they have an important job, but we do not direct them. Now if we want to get into legislation which directs them, that's a different conversation.

What I will say is there's a new chair, there are new resources going into it, we all realize the importance and we'll continue to work with them and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Maybe we could get the Premier to write him a letter.

Speaker, propane is no longer manufactured in Newfoundland. Many people heat their homes with propane; restaurants and businesses, skating rinks, all rely on it.

Again, what has this government done to ensure that we don't run out of propane this winter?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I point out that one of the issues with living in an isolated province like we do, is we do have to deal with supply issues all the time. It's not just with propane; it's with a number of our goods, which is why we work constantly on issues such as Marine Atlantic and other things.

I will point out though that some of the issues that we dealt with, especially early on in this mandate in 2020, we came in and we had oil projects down and we had a refinery down. I will say that with the investments we've made, we've got a complete refurbishment in Come By Chance with thousands of jobs, hundreds of millions of dollars worth of investment. Terra Nova is hopefully going to be rehooked any time soon, and there are a lot of differences between now and three years ago.

So again, we're going to keep doing the positive things that we do to make sure that men and women in this province are continuing to work.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, a year since receiving the financial plan for the new penitentiary, government has finally come clean in a CBC story on the real reason for the delay: money.

Why is it taking years of delays and excuses for Liberal government to finally tell the people the truth?

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

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

The replacement of Her Majesty's Penitentiary – or His Majesty's Penitentiary now, new owner – is a priority for this government, a priority for my department and certainly a priority for me. We are working through the details to see how we can finance and deliver on this project. It will happen and it will happen under this administration. Stay tuned.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

We're staying tuned eight years now. The prison should be built by now. Even your Liberal friends cannot get a blank cheque on this one.

Speaker, a \$200-million project has ballooned over \$550 million. When are the Liberals finally going to come clean on this project?

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

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

I don't think this is a matter of coming clean. It's a matter of making sure we spend the taxpayers' money to the best effect. We know that the cost of all our public infrastructure is increasing because of cost of inflation, particularly when it comes to large infrastructure projects such as the penitentiary and some of our other projects.

So we are working very closely with the design of that particular project, with the costing of that project, before we make the final decision to move forward. That will be happening in a very short order.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

At least one minister is trying to come clean with it anyway.

The story goes on to say there was unanimous support put into government to replace the 164-year-old facility.

Speaker, if that is the case, what is the hang-up? Lack of political will?

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

J. ABBOTT: Well, I think if I just quote back, there is unanimous support on this side of the House and I do believe there's unanimous support in the entire House to make sure we replace the penitentiary as soon as possible. It is long overdue. It's been promised for almost 20 years, if not longer.

We are seized on this project as one of our significant priorities for infrastructure for this province. We will be moving forward with it. It's important, certainly for the inmates, for the staff that work there, for the families that are also having to deal with their kids that are in that facility.

So it's important we get it right and we do this in the most cost-effective way, and that's what I'm focused on and we will be announcing our plans in due course.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Minister, you spent several years doing due diligence.

When are we going to get the answer? That's what the people need to know.

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

J. ABBOTT: I don't know if the fourth time will get through.

As I said earlier and as I said to the media and we have said internally and said to my colleagues here on this side of the House, we want this project to move forward. We want it to succeed. We owe it to our society to make sure if we are going to have prisons, they meet today's standards.

The current one doesn't in many respects and the staff there are compromised in their ability to deliver the effective and safe programming that they want to do. We've heard many media stories about the conditions there at the penitentiary. We're making sure we keep that facility functioning, that it is safe while we plan and build the new facility.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

We are cognizant of the impact of the delay in the start-up of the snow crab fishery this year. It is critical that we have the process ready well in advance of the 2024 season.

Can the minister update the House, hopefully with some specifics, on the status of the price panel deliberations?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am glad that I got the opportunity to jump up a little quicker than my colleague in Fisheries this time.

It is a very good question. The review committee is completing their work. We expect that to be submitted as of yesterday. I have not seen it yet. I'm expecting that that'll be submitted. As soon as it's submitted and gone through by staff, it will be made public.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: As soon as you receive it, it'd be nice to table it in the House, Speaker. Table it in the House for us all to see.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Norway's commercial mackerel fishery in 2022 was 298,000 metric tons, while Iceland's was 140,000 metric tons. The daily fishing data reported last year, Norway, in week 28, caught a new record of 63,000 metric tons – the same migratory stock that we have access to. We in Newfoundland, ourselves, are in a moratorium: zero metric tons.

How often has this Liberal government made representation to your federal cousins to open the mackerel fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Many times, I say to the Member opposite, and I'll be meeting with the federal minister in short order and I'll make that very clear that we're not happy with that and we will continue to do that. It's not my ultimate decision. If it was, it may be a different solution involved here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Again, the opposite is talking about transparency many times. It would be nice for them to table those letters and the responses from the federal government in relation to the mackerel fishery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, we know the impact of seals on our ecosystem, and that we are not capturing our entitled provincial quota. In addition, we continue to lack new markets for our product.

Can the minister brief this House on the actions and the initiatives undertaken by this government since coming into power of 2015? And is he disappointed with the results?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yeah, I'm disappointed with the sealing industry and how it provided for Newfoundland and Labrador many moons ago is not where it is today. But you said in your question and I reference that in terms of markets, we have small businesses in this province that are involved in the sealing industry, I visited one. I can see we all recognize the potential involved but, again, it goes back to the markets.

We're working with the federal government. It's a topic that's always of vital importance

in those discussions. We'll continue to have them. Hopefully, we can come to some kind of resolve that will expand the industry and we'll see, like it was years ago, jobs and return coming to this province in that industry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Speaker, it's been over a year since the explosion at the Come By Chance Refinery that claimed an employee's life.

I ask the minister: When will the union, community and family see the report into this tragedy?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Our government certainly extends our condolences to the family, friends and coworkers of those impacted by the explosion. Our Occupational Health and Safety team are working with many levels of law enforcement to undergo an investigation. I believe they have a two-year timeline in the legislation to complete that and lay charges, Speaker.

That investigation is ongoing. They operate independently. It is the top priority within our Occupational Health and Safety division and I can assure the Member and anyone watching that that investigation is receiving any resources they need and is the highest priority of the division.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

According to this government's own stats, this year we will have the lowest number of housing units built in over two decades.

I ask the Deputy Premier: Is she proud of this, as we see the highest record of homelessness in this province, because we have over 60,000 houses to build in six years to even keep up with the current demand?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

As has been reported across the country, not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, housing starts are down, but we are doing our utmost. That is why we put a \$70-million allotment for this year's budget to build new, affordable homes.

Speaker, it's very, very important. We want to have those 850 homes built but we've also put in other supports. This is a very comprehensive program that we have. So it's not just on the social housing programs and the fact that we've put a record amount of \$140 million, but it's also on making sure housing is affordable and that's why we've put forward our five-point plan.

I think it's very, very important, Speaker, that we recognize both.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Speaker, people in Labrador West are pleased to finally hear a direct answer to my question when the Premier committed to rebuilding burned units in Labrador West and to have it started before the new year.

I ask the Deputy Premier: What is the government's plan to house the other 30-plus people in my district who are on a Newfoundland and Labrador Housing list?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

Very important question and that's why we've put the \$140 million into social housing.

I will say to the Member opposite, I'm sure he's working with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and I'm sure he understands the supports that we have been able to provide. I have all ready provided in this House the amount of money that we're spending to try and ensure that we have social housing available and to ensure we have the supports available.

It is truly unfortunate this is occurring, not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, but everywhere in our country, Speaker. That is why it's very important, not just in social housing, but also to ensure that housing is affordable.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I've been calling repeatedly for vacant Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation houses in my district to be repaired and put back into service. Some of the houses have been vacant for up to 10 years and 25 per cent of the total number of the houses left vacant are falling into disrepair. Previous ministers have committed to getting vacant houses repaired without really any substantial success.

So I ask this minister: Will he commit to a housing maintenance plan for my district? It's badly needed, not only for houses being left vacant, but also for houses that are in

use being left without years of any sort of maintenance or repair.

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

P. PIKE: Thank you for the question.

Mr. Speaker, we've certainly addressed this in the past and we are certainly committed to investing in housing in the Northern communities.

We have a number of units now that we have under tender, but our problem is getting people to work there in those particular areas.

I talked to the Member previously; we talked about being able to identify contractors in the area. We will certainly put in place a plan to repair the units as people leave them. We have people leaving our units all the time. So we'll put in the plan to make sure that we address any issues with those units right away and then move on to the next ones. But we are committed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, there are several dangerous areas on Route 450. Rocks are continuously on the road due to lack of maintenance of the gabion baskets. I've written several ministers of this dangerous situation, as did the town councils in the area. No action was taken.

Through access to information, I learned that for the Humber - Bay of Islands there was – excluding a bridge that was approved in 2019 – \$454,482 spent in two years, in comparison to the Premier's district there was over \$30 million in the same period, leaving residents driving on unsafe conditions.

SPEAKER: Move to your question, you're running out of time.

E. JOYCE: I ask the minister: Will you immediately release the funds to have this dangerous area fixed immediately to make Route 450 safe for the travelling public?

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

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

The Member and I have had several conversations around the roads in his district. We've committed roughly \$2 million this year to improve roads in the area. We will continue to do so.

In terms of the specific issue that the Member raised, we are constantly monitoring, repairing and fixing that section of road in his district. It's a particular challenge but one we're very mindful of and we will certainly keep maintained as necessary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Minister, your mandate is to keep all residents of Newfoundland and Labrador safe in all areas.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: By pork barrelling the Premier's district while letting residents of the south shore of the Bay of Islands, students and tourists travel on unsafe road conditions is not acceptable. Many ruts are in the roads, it's washed away, 30 kilometre signs there for two years. When there's rain, tractors are placed in the area to clear rocks off the road, Minister.

How can the minister justify keeping Route 450 unsafe for the residents using these roads?

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, I will challenge the Member in terms of keeping the roads unsafe. It's anything but the truth. Our highways crews, their mandate is to make sure our roads are maintained, that they are safe to drive on and that is something we're committed to.

I appreciate there are challenges, whether it's the roads in his district, the roads in your district or anybody else's. We are working through it. We have \$1.4 billion set aside to upgrade, improve and expand the road structure in this province. That's what I'm working on, I'm committed to and we will continue to invest as required in each of the districts in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I give notice of the following resolution:

WHEREAS subsection 16(1) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* requires that an independent Committee called a Members' Compensation and Review Committee be

appointed at least once during each General Assembly; and

WHEREAS in accordance with subsection 16(2) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, the Speaker has consulted with the Government House Leader, the Opposition House Leader and the Third Party on the appointment of the said Committee; and

WHEREAS the Government House Leader, Opposition House Leader and Third Party have agreed with the introduction of this resolution; and

WHEREAS under subsection 16(4) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, a Members' Compensation Review Committee appointed under this resolution must report to the Speaker on its recommendations within 120 days of the appointment;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED (1) that Heather Jacobs, KC is appointed to the Members' Compensation Review Committee with the appointment to be effective on December 1, 2023; (2) that in accordance with section 16 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, the Members' Compensation Review Committee shall inquire into and prepare a report respecting the salaries, allowances, severance and pensions to be paid to the Members of the House of Assembly; and (3) that in particular the Committee shall: (a) recommend the annual salary for Members of the House of Assembly; (b) review and make recommendations regarding additional salary provisions for positions identified in subsection 12(1) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*; (c) recommend a formula or means for making annual salary adjustments for salary amounts referenced in clauses (a) and (b) above; (d) review and make any recommendations regarding the current severance pay policy for Members of the House of Assembly; (e) review the

current provisions for Members' pensions and provide any recommendations for adjustments;

AND THAT as part of its inquiries, the Committee may consult with appropriate persons who can assist the Committee with respect to its required duties and shall consult with current Members of the House of Assembly and the House of Assembly Service regarding any issues identified in the current regime as well as any administrative, legislative or other impacts or proposed recommendations;

AND THAT the House of Assembly shall conclude any contractual arrangements required to carry out the intent of this resolution;

AND THAT the Members' Compensation Review Committee deliver its report to the Speaker on or before April 1, 2024.

SPEAKER: Further notices?

We do have tabling of a document.

Tabling of Documents

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, I'm pleased to present the third report of the Public Accounts Committee for the 50th General Assembly, outlining the Committee's activities throughout the second session since October 5, 2022.

The Committee has been quite active and I wish to thank the following Members for their diligence and hard work toward fulfillment of our mandate to ensure accountability on behalf of the Legislature and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador: the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, the Member for Cape St. Francis, the Member for Exploits, the Member for Labrador West, the Member for

Lake Melville and the Member for St. George's - Humber.

The Committee also wishes to acknowledge Auditor General Denise Hanrahan and employees of that office for the exceptional support and guidance they provided us. Additionally, the Public Accounts Committee acknowledges the work, dedication and leadership of two former Chairs who served on the Committee during the session: the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port and most recently the Member for Harbour Main.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

The list for the number of people in need of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in Central has increased in the past couple of years. This leaves people in vulnerable situations, most times in the cold, while waiting for a placement.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to upgrade and increase the number of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units in the Central area.

Speaker, I know this has been a continuous conversation in the House, but in the past couple of years in the Central area we're after seeing a rise in housing situations in Central; I know there are over 300 names

on a list for housing. I've mentioned this before in the House. I've dealt with people sleeping in sheds; I've dealt with people sleeping in vans and cars, all throughout the summer. There are lots of times they're held up in hotel rooms while waiting for housing. We've got units in different communities in the Central region that all they have to do is upgrade them and we can have people in there for the winter months.

They say that in 2018. They realized that they had a problem, they really did. They said they'd put money in the budget and all we hear is housing options. Living in sheds, living in vans, living in cars are not options. We need housing. We need the units upgraded.

Mr. Speaker, we call upon the minister and the government to certainly increase housing in Central Newfoundland, especially the units that are already there. Get the people off the streets and into those houses.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

The reasons for this petition:

WHEREAS in the District of Harbour Main there are many residents who are concerned with the deteriorating cellphone service that they have been experiencing in recent months. There has been a significant decline in the cellphone service through the district where calls are being dropped; residents are unable to get their calls to go through for no apparent reason.

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 work and partner with the various cellular providers and telecommunication officials to stabilize and improve the cellphone service within the region so that citizens have a reliable service that they can depend on.

Speaker, this is the fourth time that I've brought this petition or a similar petition to the House of Assembly: in November 2020, October 2022, April 2023 and now today. The situation has been getting worse.

Speaker, the recent Auditor General of Canada report, which was tabled in the House of Commons back in March, said that Newfoundland and Labrador has the worst in Canada for rural cellphone coverage.

Basically, the report said being connected is no longer a luxury but a basic essential service for Canadians. Yet, people living in rural and remote areas are not being treated in an appropriate way without access to fast, reliable and affordable Internet and mobile cellular. They do not have the same opportunities as people residing in urban areas.

This is very concerning. I raised this the last time in October of 2022, when I raised it, the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, he responded, he agreed that the service was bad, when I mentioned Holyrood in particular. He indicated then that they were partnering and looking at working around three small cell projects that would be applicable to smaller communities. He then indicated as well that they're investing, that there was \$25 million in the budget. That was back in April he said that, going forward.

Then just yesterday, when it was brought up by the Member for the District of Bonavista, the minister addressed it as well, which we are appreciative of, and he said that it's hard, that's it's federally regulated. They can't take full responsibility, there also has

to be responsibility by the feds, by cell service providers. We all understand that. But there is a partnership here and there is a responsibility on the part of the provincial government to address this serious problem.

The minister started to talk about 70 communities that applied, that they had a list with respect the small cell submission. We would like more information because the people want to know: When can we expect better cellphone service in rural communities like in Harbour Main?

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Happy to stand up here and speak about cell service. I know what it's like to stand on the other side. I stood there for four years and entered petition after petition after petition. The difference back then is that the government didn't answer petitions; didn't get up and speak, so you could do it all day and they weren't even going to listen to you.

So at least we've got a start here, where I'm actually listening to these petitions.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

A. PARSONS: Okay. Fair ball. I say to the former Leader of the Opposition, he would have, but they didn't change the rules. We did.

So, again, what I would say is this: I'm happy to speak to this issue but the answer stays the same. The reality is there is multiple responsibility. Now, if there's a desire by Members opposite for us to spend hundreds of millions in this, we can have that conversation, but I don't believe in

taking on full responsibility for something that doesn't just belong to us. What I can say to the Member, though, is that I have been speaking to Bell Canada, in particular actually about the Harbour Main District, brought those concerns forward. It's challenging. I know that there have been advancements there.

Back to the other issue, again we've got 70 communities there. We have hooked up multiple rural communities in the last number of years. It takes some time. We have made \$20 million to \$25 million worth of investment. We're going to continue to do so, but I don't think the day is coming where I can stand up and say the problem has been fixed like the flick of a switch but I can tell you what, Speaker, we are certainly trying our best.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, I call upon the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands to present his private Member's resolution.

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands, the following private Member's motion:

WHEREAS there is a housing crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS there are many vulnerable residents who need social housing; and

WHEREAS families are split, as residents are in emergency shelters or hotels; and

WHEREAS in Corner Brook, the mayor of Corner Brook stated publicly that the 12

housing units in Corner Brook are not adequate;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge the government to immediately take steps to reduce the lack of social housing in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, this issue has been ongoing now for a number of years and this has been raised, and I wrote the previous minister on this also. This is an issue that must be resolved.

As I said in my previous statements that there is a community group, they all got together and 14 people living in tents in the Corner Brook area – 14, living in tents. Many surfing and many got no place to go for the winter. It saddens me because I like to see things done and we all work together. I heard the minister say today that he was out in Corner Brook, and I know he was out in Corner Brook. I know he wrote me earlier saying that when he comes out, we're going to sit down and look at the plan. I never got a call. Never got a call. I spoke to a couple people from the town council and said: Did you guys get a call? This is the saddening part of it. We've got to work together.

The minister spoke – I don't know if it was the mayor or the deputy mayor. I think it was the mayor, who said: Yeah, we can meet Sunday morning. Which was agreed upon. And then the minister, they got a call 11:30 Sunday morning, to meet 2 o'clock, when they already stated they couldn't meet in the afternoon.

We've got to work together. This is too serious to play politics with. If the minister was out in Corner Brook, like he said to me: I'll come out and explain what we're going to do. I'd love to sit down; I'd love to work with you. I really would. But this kind of stuff, this is the kind of things that I ask the minister, just put it aside and let's work together on all this, Mr. Speaker. Because when we've got vulnerable people who are in need,

we've got vulnerable people who need this social housing, as we see the story today, it was raised in this House today.

There is one person I spoke to out in Corner Brook who's in a hotel. Their child is living somewhere else because he can't take him in to the shelter at the hotel – can't take him in. So not only St. John's, are families being split. It's happening in Corner Brook. And I heard the minister talk about the 32 units up in the Dunfield Park area, and I know when I brought it up, I raised it last year, I raise it again this year, and I heard the minister say that the federal government refused the federal funding towards it.

But I heard the minister today, and I stand to be corrected, I'm sure he'll stand and he'll have his few words about this also, that they're going to go ahead with this now, provincial funding. I don't know if I heard that properly – if not, you can clarify that – up in Crestview area, if it is actually going to be done now by the provincial government.

Because while you wait for the federal government – and on many occasions we heard the government stand up and say, well, we can't wait for the feds; we've got to do it alone. What better reason to go and do a project than give people a stable house to live in, to raise their family, to bring back their dignity, to start a new life. What better way to do that? There's no better way.

I know in the health study that was done, one of the biggest outcomes for health is housing. When you have the housing, then you can start having a prosperous life. You've got stability. You've got a roof over your head; you don't have to worry about where you're sleeping that next night. So if I'm wrong on that minister, I ask that you – and I just heard that you're going to move ahead with the Crestview. I don't know if that's with or without the federal money, because the federal money was already rejected; as you mentioned, it was already rejected.

As I said before I wrote MP Gudie Hutchings, to ask Gudie Hutchings why the funds were rejected. So I wait for that response from the minister.

This is not just Corner Brook. I'm speaking on behalf of Corner Brook. I say to the minister and the Member for Corner Brook, last week when he mentioned Corner Brook as being the hub, I just wanted to put it on the record that half of the Humber - Bay of Islands is Corner Brook. All the Humber Mouth, Humber Heights area, all the Curling area, all the Curling East area, is Corner Brook.

So we've all got to work together because the districts are so intertwined that we must work together for all the residents, no matter what district you live in or if you live in Corner Brook. I'm even getting calls from up in Pasadena, people wanting to come down, especially seniors who want to come down to get closer to the hospital. There are even calls from there. I've been getting calls from all over. All over Western Newfoundland want to come to Corner Brook because of the medical.

So this is just not an issue for the Humber - Bay of Islands; this is an issue for Western Newfoundland that we must resolve. I mentioned last week to the Minister of Finance that she should take it back to the Treasury Board. If the federal government refuse funding for those 32 units, well then they should step in and do it. There are other units that can be available. According to the minister's department's own statement that I received, there are another 32 units that can be repaired.

So that's over 60 units. That's over 60 units that can be done. So once we get that done, then you can give that to 60 families. That's 60 families that we could take care of in Corner Brook and the whole Western Region. So it's important for the minister to act. This never came up all of a sudden on this minister's shoulders. This never came up all of a sudden. This has been ongoing

for years. But we need to find the solution to do this. We need to find the solution because it is a crisis.

When you hear stories from all over Newfoundland and Labrador – we hear from Labrador also, a lot of issues up in Labrador with the housing crisis. We heard today, the Member for Cape St. Francis brought up a story about a man today that's got to make a decision about splitting the family up, or where to live. I mean, that's gut wrenching. None of us wants to see that. None of us in this House of Assembly wants to see that done. Absolutely no one wants to see that done. But we have to take concrete steps and one of the concrete steps that we can do, there are 32 units, the federal government won't step in. Well, it's time for the province to step up to help out.

Our office gets a lot of calls from people looking for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing; we have a file that thick. Just files upon files of people trying to get social housing. With the economy these days, Mr. Speaker, with the economy and the cost of living, more and more people are falling down in that gap where they need it. Where the rent is after increasing, where some people can't afford it, a lot can't afford it, the problem with the cost of living, food, oil, electricity, a lot of people now – the demand for social housing is higher than ever before.

This is why we all have to come together somehow to try to find a way to fix this problem, make concrete solutions, so that we can take it and move forward. We have to make these decisions and if the government comes up with the \$5 million, \$6 million or \$7 million to finish off the Crestview area in the Corner Brook area to put in 32. I know the minister mentioned, and I agree, that the one- or two-bedroom units, that's what people are asking for now instead of the larger three or four bedrooms when it was initially built and I think some were even five bedrooms. They're more the one or two bedrooms that people are

looking for; to establish the one and two bedrooms, I think it's great.

So that is the kind of solution that we need to do, but we need it done now. So if the minister goes to Treasury Board and gets the funding, then we could start right away with the Crestview. We have to tear it down – we have it tore down, we have it demolished and we can start construction. We could even start some construction now if the money comes from Treasury Board to start that area.

There are other units out in the Corner Brook, Bay of Islands area that right now need repairs. I offered to show them to you; I know the area, I want to get this done. I'll work with anybody to get this done, because if we can get 50 or 60 families off the street, away from the tents, away from living on – it is a win for all of us. That's what we're elected to do. I'm willing to help out to do that, Mr. Speaker.

I urge the government to come up with a concrete plan and this is one way for the Corner Brook area, and I know as we go through all the speakers today, each area is going to have different solutions for the problems that they need. I am confident that if we all work together that we can find a way to get this done and make this a better place for many people who need the social housing now. We need the social housing now.

I'll take my seat and I will listen to all the other comments that are being made today about the different areas and I know the minister is going to speak also. I look forward to the comments of the minister and every other Member here who makes a comment today on this very important issue.

Thank you.

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

P. PIKE: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this private Member's resolution this afternoon.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands for bringing this forward. I'll address his concern about what we're trying to do in this area.

What we've been working to do is working with our MPs for Newfoundland and Labrador to try and get this decision reversed. We don't want to go out there and do half the job. We know what's needed out there. We know the number of units that are needed out there. We really want to do what we set out to do, and that is replace them and put 32 brand-new one- and two-bedroom units out there that people will be proud of. Not only that, we will also do the landscaping.

I had the opportunity to go there this weekend and when I looked out over, it's got a complete view of Corner Brook. It's one of the most beautiful areas in Corner Brook, but in order to make it work we're going to have to do some preliminary work there, some landscaping and so on. That's our plan and we're hoping to – we'll move this as quickly as possible, I can tell you that.

As you know, access to safe, adequate and affordable housing is one of the primary social determinants of health. We all know that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, like other Canadians, are facing housing challenges. The housing landscape – significantly over the last several years, with many factors leading to the pressures experienced today: the largest and sustained growth in our population in 50 years; record high immigration; COVID-19; urbanization; an aging population who are staying in their family homes for longer; more individuals living by themselves; higher interest rates and sluggish housing starts linked to inflationary pressures.

Mr. Speaker, since I became minister I've had the opportunity to meet with many valued community partners to see first-hand what great work is happening, and what can be achieved when we work together to address the varying housing needs throughout the province. I've also had the opportunity to meet with the dedicated staff of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing who work tirelessly to deliver housing programs, including staffing a 24-7 emergency shelter line.

I'm very pleased that *Budget 2023* provided a record level of provincial investment in housing to help ensure that everyone has a safe and affordable home.

Through *Budget 2023* our government is investing in the delivery of vital programs and services that address a diverse range of housing needs throughout our province.

Budget 2023 announced a significant investment of over \$70 million over three years for our new affordable rental housing program. Through partnerships with private and community housing sectors, this program will see the construction of new affordable homes throughout the province. With focus on seniors, the new program will also serve other vulnerable populations.

This \$70 million program also presents significant opportunities to contribute to the economic activity throughout the province through the engagement of contractors, building suppliers and others.

I am happy to report that a strong response was received to the summer 2023 proposal call with a focus now on the selection to get those units under way as soon as possible. I might say that we've just about completed our review and within, hopefully by the end of next week, we'll be able to make an announcement on these units. Our applications came province-wide.

Mr. Speaker, this investment builds on the many tangible actions that Newfoundland

and Labrador Housing Corporation has advanced since 2021, including implementation of the new Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Benefit, which to date has helped and supported over 420 individuals and families in accessing affordable housing in the private rental market.

Investments for the construction of new Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation units, strong partnerships with our community sector and the federal government that moves us all forward, helping to reduce barriers and gives more people a safe and supportive place to stay and a real and fair chance for success.

This includes, for example, construction of new transitional and supportive housing units at The Gathering Place, along with additional low-barrier emergency shelter beds. Support for the opening of supportive housing units at the Centre of Hope, St. John's, and expansion of staffed non-shelter emergency shelter beds, including over 100 new beds throughout the province with further expansion under way.

Cost-shared investments in *Budget 2023* have continued to support operations of our public rental housing portfolio, as well as partner-managed and co-operative housing throughout the province, providing homes for over 13,000 low-income individuals and families. *Budget 2023* provided over \$17 million to repair and renovate public rental housing, including vacant units. In *Budget 2023*, government continued the investment of over \$9 million to further support housing affordability through the provision of heat subsidies to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation tenants.

Budget 2023 invested over \$18 million to provide rental assistance in the private market, expanding available housing options with over 50 per cent of these clients being seniors; an investment of over \$10 million for home repair support programs, which will allow low-income

owners throughout the province – most of whom are seniors, by the way – serving over 2,000 households this year, these financial assistance programs support much-needed home repairs and improve housing accessibility and energy efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2023* also includes investments to work with our many and valued partners in addressing homelessness throughout the province, to provide emergency accommodations, food, transportation and supports to individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness; an investment of \$7 million for the Supportive Living Program for community-based partners and to prevent homelessness and provide individual supports to foster long-term housing stability.

Budget 2023 also includes the investment of over \$30 million for the construction of an Integrated Health, Housing and Supportive Services Hub to support those experiencing homelessness in the Happy Valley-Goose Bay area.

Additionally, an investment of \$9 million will continue to support the work of 10 transition homes throughout the province to provide safe accommodations and services to support women and their children fleeing intimate partner violence; a further federal-provincial investment of \$4.8 million was announced to support the Hope Haven Transition House in Labrador City to construct a new seven-unit, second-stage housing project, which will open in 2024.

At this point, while I have time, I'm going to propose an amendment. Speaker, I would like to propose the following amendments:

In the first WHEREAS clause, inserting immediately after the word "WHEREAS" the words "similar to the experience across the country."

In the third WHEREAS clause, deleting the words "families are split as" and inserting

immediately after the word “residents,” the words “experiencing homelessness.”

In the fourth WHEREAS clause, inserting immediately after the word “WHEREAS” the words “of the over 600 Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation units.”

In the THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED clause, delete the words “to immediately take steps to reduce the lack of social housing” and inserting immediately after the word “government”: “to continue with all orders of government and community partners to take steps to address the housing need.”

SPEAKER: Your time is up.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: A seconder for the amendment?

P. PIKE: Seconded by the minister.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member’s time did expire before he had the complete –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Can I make my ruling, please?

The Member’s time did expire before he completed the proposed amendment so we’ll move forward.

Next speaker.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I applaud the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands for bringing this forward. It’s very important.

I’ll just focus on the first line: WHEREAS there is a housing crisis. When we talk about crisis here in the House, we did it with the health care; it took us forever to get government to realize there was a crisis and to begin to address that.

If you want to look at the definition of crisis, it is: A time of intense difficulty, trouble or danger. That’s a crisis. It’s also a time when a difficult or important decision must be made. So I think that very readily applies to where we are with respect to housing in this province, not just Corner Brook, but throughout the province – throughout the province, we have a housing.

I believe the minister who stood up had alluded to the social detriments of health, which is a big part of the Health Accord. It would include things like food security, proper education, affordable or a sufficient income. Of course, under that falls housing, having a place to lay your head, a place that you know you can go to at the end of a day.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands had talked about the people in tents. I know yesterday in Question Period, one of the Members across in answering a question spoke to the fact there are only 11 tents across the street now. But we know those tents have moved somewhere else, down by the Colonel Building. So it’s sort of that out of sight, out of mind mentality when it comes to suggesting that because there are less tents here in front of the building, there’s been progress made.

But you just need to go out and talk to these people. There is very little, if any, progress made when it comes to finding housing units, housing options, call it what you want, but finding solutions that address the issues of these individuals who so desperately need it.

We've heard the stories. I spoke to a young lady over there a couple weeks back who is struggling to keep her children because they can't afford or there's no housing available to them. Again, as the Member talked about safe, affordable housing and you can list off the excuses or reasons for it: COVID or we have an aging population and more living at home. You can go on and on with the excuses or the reasoning behind it, but we know that this didn't happen overnight. This has been here and this government has had eight years to address it.

Then when you talk about, as has been the practice now, picking up the budget document and listing the promises that were made. They are promises, but whether they're kept is something else. We know that there were promises made the year before and the year before that are still yet to be acted upon and to have that document and go down through the list of all the things and the money that government has put forward to solve this issue.

I can bring that across the street. Do you know where that document is going? It's going in their fire barrel. Not because they don't respect the document, but because the few minutes extra heat they get from that document is more valuable to them now and that's where we've come.

You can name, oh, the biggest investment we've made this year. We all know the cost of living has gone up. We all know you cannot find skilled tradespeople. We know that building materials have skyrocketed. We know that building houses is not just dropping it on a piece of land because there's other infrastructure that has to be hooked up to that house.

So it's a very simplified approach to say, well, look, here's the money we threw at it, this many million and this many million; but, at the end of the day, what are the targets? What are the timelines? What are the short-, medium- and long-term solutions that you have to deal with this? Because if you talk

to individuals, it's not working. You truly need a plan to address this.

To address it now, eight years in, makes – I don't know what kind of word to put on it. I'm sure the people across the street would have many adjectives to describe what they think of this plan or this action that's eight years delayed for sure. You can talk about the global market. You can talk about international issues, but we're all elected here to worry about and work for the individuals in our districts and across our province.

When you talk about facts and figures and we can increase this and decrease that, but we also know that the housing starts in this province have declined, have gone down. Is that good thing? This obviously isn't because it becomes an issue for people who can afford the homes that are built and those who are living in poverty, those whose dollar does not go as far as it should and those who have to decide on: Do I turn up the heat? Do I eat? Can I take my prescription or should I split my prescription? These are actual questions that people are starting to deal with on a daily basis and I can't imagine those whose are out in shelters and sleeping in tents what their decisions are.

We hear about individuals – again, I go back to out of sight, out of mind. When you're basing your success on counting the number of tents across the road, I don't know how you answer that. I don't know how you answer that when a Member of government gets up and I think he said there are only 11 tents across the way. I stand to be corrected; it was yesterday anyway.

That's not addressing the issue, because this problem is still there. It's under the walkways at the Hub, as we found out; it's down in front of the Colonial Building; it's in people's cars; and it's people living up in the woods up in Pippy Park. They're all over the place. But out of sight, out of mind. We've

solved it because you can't see the issue. But there are people who are experiencing it on a daily basis – a daily basis.

You talk about social determinants of health and you talk about housing being one of those and how that leads to other issues. We've heard them talk about shelters and going in there and some of them are fighting a battle with addictions, and going back into a shelter does nothing for them. It does not help them. Those who are battled with violence, putting them in areas that are insecure, it does nothing to help them.

This is when you really have to get a grasp on the people with lived experiences. I'm not saying this is an easy issue to deal with. It's not, but you really have to get a grasp on the people with lived experiences, what do they need?

Yes, it's great to say we've invested \$140 million or \$150 million. That's wonderful. That means nothing to them. They want to know, how does that affect me on a daily basis? How does that put a roof over my head? How does that allow me to keep my child? This is what we're really talking about here. This should not be political; this should be what we're all elected to do: to serve the people in this province and give them an opportunity to be the best they can be.

Right now we're just not seeing that. Right now until it's recognized that this is truly a crisis, only then can you start to make those difficult and important decisions. That's where we are with this. There have to be some decisions made that have targets, that have timelines and that have results.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I was paying close attention to my colleague across the way from Topsail - Paradise.

Several good points and I couldn't agree more. This cannot be a political issue. It cannot be a wedge issue. As much as I say about climate change and the need to move and make progress there, people deserve to live in society in dignity. They deserve to have an opportunity.

I heard Ed Broadbent this morning in an interview with him. He spoke about the initial values of what got him into politics and I think of what a great national leader he was. He spoke about the need to provide a society where one can live in dignity and where one can actually get ahead, where one can be productive and contribute back. I think we need to keep that uppermost in all of our thoughts.

I want to speak a little bit and I want to follow up on the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development's comments just now when he spoke about what's going on across the province. There is, in fact, a lot going on across the province. Are we done yet? Absolutely not. Is there a lot more to do? Absolutely.

We also though, I think, need to take stock of the fact that there are great efforts happening and we are drawing on – and I'll reference the former Member's comments – that lived experience, that expertise that exists on the front lines. I wanted to start and I wanted to take a few minutes just to say thank you to all of those on the front lines. I can look at all 39 of my colleagues here and I'm sure we can all think of those groups.

I'm going to list off some of the ones that are active just in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, just in Central Labrador and the Lake Melville area: the Innu Round Table, the Nunatsiavut Government, The Salvation Army, Health and Community Services, the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, The Housing Hub, The Labrador Inn, the

Housing and Homelessness Coalition, the Ministerial Association in Upper Lake Melville and many others. Many of these groups are on the front line every day helping people who really need a lot of assistance, being very compassionate and providing them that dignity that I spoke of at the start.

As I said, this is very personal for myself. In my last few years, in particular as the issue has become more serious, more individuals obviously struggling with homelessness, addictions and so on, I will not do it in this hon. House, but I can name former employees and I can name friends, neighbours from my community, from elsewhere in my experience in Labrador, who are struggling right now, who are not in a safe place in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. On occasion, sometimes they are and sometimes they're not, but I think about them every day.

Therefore, I am very proud of the fact that government has announced in its recent budget to proceed with a very extensive facility known as the Health, Housing and Supportive Services Hub, in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. It's a \$30-million allocation, and I want to talk a little bit about what exactly is going on in there.

For the last 2½, almost three years now, there has been a coalition of folks, the Minister of Labrador Affairs and Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs oversaw its establishment. They have been working independently of all of the debate over who is doing enough and so on. They are drawing on that lived experience. They are drawing on lessons learned from across the country and there are indeed many of them.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay is not a unique situation, but it is a hub community. This I have found as I've spoken to folks in Whitehorse, Yellowknife, Prince Albert and even the City of London, if you're watching the national news just last night, a lot of these areas are hub. People, as they

struggle to find a way in life or for whatever other reason, are being drawn into larger centers. We see it right here in St. John's and some of the struggles and, as Members have said, we are seeing people across the road.

Here we are in Happy Valley-Goose Bay with a golden opportunity. I'm very excited to represent that area with a solution. I just want to mention quickly what we are looking at developing is – and it's all designed, we're rolling it out now with the contractor – a 30-bed emergency shelter, 20 transitional housing bedrooms and 20 supportive housing units.

It's going to be staffed with health care services, people from the Labrador-Grenfell zone and, of course, it will be culturally consistent with so much of what's going on. Again, I think about where the Premier is right now, on his feet delivering apologies to the Nunatsiavut beneficiaries in Labrador. In a couple of days, he'll be in my hometown of Happy Valley-Goose Bay. I wish him well. I wish all those who are struggling with this intergenerational trauma and the amazing complexity that they're dealing with, which has unfortunately precipitated itself into the housing crisis that we see in Labrador.

There is opposition, unfortunately, and I think it's well known that there is a voice in my town that is concerned and I get that concern. We've been listening, paying close attention, but I would ask them to pay close attention to the fact that this is not a political proposal. Politicians are involved in raising and finding funds to go forward, but this is certainly based on the expertise of those front-line workers, people with lived experience and so on.

I would ask everyone back home who's listening to my words today to step back, park your concerns and go speak to some of the front-line workers, especially in Health and Community Services in our new amalgamated health care system across the province and hear what they have to say.

Speaker, because of the particular flavour that I see in the PMR today, I think it's important that we go forward with some proposed amendments to the wording of it. It is not to change anything, but I think it is important to go forward and point out the work that is also happening.

So therefore, I would propose – this is going to sound a little bit like an echo, but we're following procedures – seconded by the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, I move the following amendment:

First of all, in the first WHEREAS clause, inserting immediately after the word "WHEREAS," the words "similar to the experience across the country."

Second point, in the third WHEREAS clause, deleting the words "families are split as" and inserting immediately after the word "residents," the words "experiencing homelessness."

In the fourth WHEREAS clause, inserting immediately after the word WHEREAS the words of "over the 600 Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation's units."

Then, finally, in the THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED clause, delete the words "to immediately take steps to reduce the lack of social housing" and inserting immediately after the word "government": "to continue to work with all orders of government and community partners to take steps to address social housing needs."

Therefore the PMR would word as the following: WHEREAS similar to the experience across the country, there is a housing crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS there are many vulnerable residents who need social housing; and

WHEREAS residents experiencing homelessness are in emergency shelters or hotels; and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. TRIMPER: WHEREAS of the over 600 Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation's units in Corner Brook, the Mayor of Corner Brook stated publicly that the 12 housing units in Corner Brook are not adequate;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

If the Members have issues, take it outside, please.

The hon. the Member of Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's too important to get into a political debate.

Here is the final resolution: THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House of Assembly urge the government to continue to work with all orders of government and community partners to take steps to address social housing needs in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

Again, Speaker, I moved it and seconded by the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

In the interest of time, advance notice was given of the proposed amendment, we have made an advanced ruling, and it is found to be in order. Table staff will circulate the new proposed amendment to all Members.

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

I am very pleased to hear that. As I said, I won't belabour it because I feel that all Members should have a chance to get on their feet to speak, only to say that these important changes were to reflect the effort that, frankly, I don't care who's in charge, but I feel we all get the point and we're all making our best efforts. Let's work on those strategies together.

I thank you for that ruling; I thank the minister for bringing forward the amendment and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always an honour to represent the people of Placentia West - Bellevue here in the House of Assembly. In my shadow cabinet ministry for the last four years, I've dealt with a lot of housing issues. I've dealt with a lot of Children, Seniors and Social Development issues and I have to say that the housing thing is very encompassing. I don't think that we really give it the light that it needs because in my district, just in the Marystown area alone, there's a wait-list that has been extensive for the whole four years that I've been here representing the people of Placentia West - Bellevue.

I checked with my people on the Burin Peninsula and just to bring forward what's

going on there, we have 94 on the wait-list. So if there's a wait-list of 600, then I have one-sixth, basically, in my district that are waiting on houses. How is that fair? How has it got to this point is my problem with all this?

I know we can do better but it takes effort. It's not about giving yourself a pat on the back because the way I look at it right now, I have 40 units awaiting refurbishment. If I get one of those done every three days, which I know it takes longer than three days for many of them, I'm still got four months before I can even exhaust the list and that's still leaving 54 people on the list. How does that make sense? We are not addressing this properly.

We can throw money at it all we want, but you know what the issue is? Labour. It has nothing to do with materials because we can afford the materials. We can get the materials. It's labour. We can't attract people to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing or, if we do, they're not staying long enough and I don't know why. I will not go any further than that for the simple fact that I respect the people that are doing the work, but I have two people in Marystown that are tasked with doing everything for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing from Terrenceville to Point May in the minister's district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: They can't do it. It's not possible. Two people can't do it. They're tasked with moving lawns, taking care of windows, replacing fridges and doors and all that. So do you think that anybody is getting serviced in Terrenceville if they've got to go hang a door in Point May? It's not happening.

We can be better. We – not just you – we want to partner with you. That's what I think the Member's PMR is trying to indicate. So let's not sit here and play semantics and sit here and play a blame game and get politics

involved and all that, let's get down to the human factor of looking after Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, today. That's what we need.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: I had enough. I've dealt with it for four years, Minister. You deal with it in my district; you might not have that problem in Cowan Heights.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. DWYER: Oh, wow, I guess that's what we're doing, we're putting a lens on it where we're going to deal with urban and rural in the same light. Is that what we're saying?

SPEAKER: Please address the Chair.

J. DWYER: I will, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

J. DWYER: One every three days, it will still take me four months and I'll still have 54 on the list. I hope you got that stat. That's in one community in our province. It's the hub of the Burin Peninsula. I guess if you wanted to put an urban lens on it, Marystown, I guess amongst all these smaller communities, would be the urban area. So why are we not tying up our bootstraps, hiring people, and if we're not going to hire people for the work at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, then let's contract it out.

I bet you I can find a contractor today that could have, I'd say, those 40 units fixed before Christmas. But we have to put our elbows to the table. We have to have the initial will to want to do it. The problem is labour. It's not about throwing money at it.

We saw what happened when the minister threw \$25 million at Crown Lands, it fixed nothing; moved the office out to Corner Brook, it fixed nothing. But right now what we need is the will of the people in this

House to work together on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have 40 Members that have to look after 530,000, end of conversation, period. That's it, but we have to look out for that. It's about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When I hear people talking about the budget and how good the budget was and all this kind of stuff, the problem is that we're falling short. We're only coming up to the bare minimum, that's the problem. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve more. I know that we have issues of demographics and geographics. The average age right now on the Burin Peninsula is 54. We aren't getting any younger, but the same issues are still in Arnold's Cove and everywhere. I can only speak for my district, I know everybody else has the same issues. But why are we not trying to do something about it in a positive manner?

For \$140 million, we ended up getting 11 units. The math on that, to me, is that we almost paid \$14 million a unit. That's what we got out of our housing options. I don't think that's very impressive.

To me, we can be better, but it takes everybody to be better. I commend the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands for bringing this forward because it is, not only a sensitive issue, but it's a very important issue that we should all be dealing with.

Everybody has it in their district. I'm just highlighting the fact that it's predominantly more in my district. It is what it is. I can't express that any further.

The thing is, I had a situation with housing that a lady was offered, for a housing option – I think her budget was \$600 to get an apartment and that wasn't heat and light included. She found an apartment that was \$650 heat and light included but we still said: No, no, no, your budget is \$600. She was in the Marystown area.

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing – God love them – they did their job and found her an apartment. It was in Grand Bank for \$600, but that young lady had drug addiction issues and had to get trucked back and forth to Marystown every day for the methadone program; \$3,600 a month and she could have been in an apartment right next to the drug store where she would have went and got her treatments.

We have to get the bureaucracy out of all of this. We need the labour. We need to get people. We need to get the contractors' boots on the ground. We need to invest in them. We need to talk to them. We can do better. That's it.

I'll leave it at this: Let's do the right thing because it's the right thing to do, not because eyes are on us. We all know with this we all get the same scrutiny. Let's do the right thing because it's the right thing to do, not because there are eyes on us.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER (Warr): Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

First off I want to say, I've been dealing with housing, especially Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, since the first minute I walked in this House of Assembly in 2019. At that time, we had about 12 people on the wait-list, we didn't have a shelter at that time and housing prices started to rise rapidly. People were being renovicted. It was tough.

In that time, we did manage to get a three-bed shelter; it's been full ever since it opened. People are still living on people's couches, garages, sheds, everything like that, and the wait-list has now grown to over 30 people. Since that time, a few units did get renovated and people moved in, but it just keeps growing.

There hasn't been any real solution put in place to try to combat the need for affordable housing. We still have the downward pressures of the mining industry making purchasing a home out of reach for most people, especially those who do not work in the mining industry, purchasing a home right now in Lab West for them is not a reality right now. It's just too expensive.

But then I wonder: How did we get here? How did Lab West get to that point? So in 1996, the Liberal government mandated the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to get out of competing with the private sector. In that time, in 1996, 50 per cent of the units in Labrador West were sold off.

Under questioning in *Budget 2019*, the CEO of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing stated that every policy directive of (inaudible) a long list of properties had been sold off. Critically, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing used to own tracts of land for other development; it was all sold off. In 2005, the Progressive Conservative government, at the time, did not change the 1996 directive and more units were sold off, and the NLHC continued to divest land and other properties.

So this is a long time coming. This did not just happen yesterday. This is not some storm that came out of nowhere and caused all this. This has been a storm that started in 1996 with a mandate from a previous Liberal government to start selling off Newfoundland and Labrador Housing properties. So that 1996 directive basically set in motion everything we're seeing today: properties not getting repaired, being sold off, why our stock is so low in social housing. This is a culmination of problems just snowballing. Right now, we're sitting here asking for units to be built, everything like that, and we're actually getting resistance.

This is what boggles my mind. There is a need, but there is nothing coming upfront to

help the need. I know we understand the Deputy Premier coming out and talking about options and shelters and stuff, but that's not the root of the problem. The root of the problem is people have no safe home to go home to.

Yes, there are shelters, but that shelter is a temporary, binary solution to a bigger problem, which is housing and also supportive housing for those who need it. We're not getting to the root cause. The root cause is a stable home that is theirs. Not a bed in a shelter that is temporary, but something that someone can go home to. It also will help with a lot more of the other issues that people are facing socially right now.

So we go back to something that happened in 1996, but at the same time, that is what set in motion to why we have no stock. Even the previous Progressive Conservative government kept the 1996 directive and they continued to sell off properties. I know some of the ministers will say well, they were empty and everything like that. It doesn't matter if they were empty or not at the time; it's the idea that we make sure that they were there when we needed them, and we need them today and they're not there. They're sold off or left to rot.

When we want to talk about housing and what's being done, maybe some internal self-reflection as well as poor decisions made in the past. But right now, there are no real solutions. I don't see any real solutions there. I know the Deputy Premier mentioned the 850 units we'll build. When is the timeline for that? When will we see that? Because we have rapid homelessness in this province right now.

As of this moment, the amount of homelessness in this province has bloomed to unprecedented numbers. This is not what we want to see in this province. As a province that is a very close province, as a people, we're very close to each other. We think very highly of others and we try to do

our best. We're a very kind and caring province. But at the same time, how did we let this happen? How did we let it get to this point? That now we're sitting here trying to figure out what to do.

The real solution is we have to get people under roofs. We have to get people into homes that they can call home. Not a shelter, but an actual home for someone. Now we are seeing homelessness, but on top of that, we are seeing it coupled with children in the situation; parents that can't find a home for them and their children.

So this is where I think we have to go: We have to just build housing. We have to increase Newfoundland and Labrador Housing stock. Not try to hope and pray that a developer will come along and magically (inaudible). I think at this point right now is we need to increase Newfoundland and Labrador Housing stock. We have to trust our public Housing body. We have to put trust and faith into them to help increase their stock. Not hope that a third party or some developer or a P3 or something like that, no, we have to trust into our public body. We have to put trust into Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to get this done.

Here's the thing: If you look at CMHC, CMHC says we need 60,000 homes built in this province in six years to meet demand. That's not just social demand; that's demand as a populous. We need 60,000 homes. The most this province has ever built in one year is 1,200. So I think we have a big situation coming up. We have a big situation that we have to deal with. This year, we're not going to get even close. We're going to have the lowest housing starts in over two decades.

On top of what the social housing need is, we also have other housing needs that have to be addressed. My conclusion of all that is that we need to give resources and funding to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to increase their stock. They are the body that

was created to make sure that no one in this province goes homeless. That's why they were created. That's the whole principle of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and we're not even putting faith and trust in them to actually increase their stock. We're going around it and getting community partners and the run around of it, but actually Newfoundland and Labrador Housing stock, the most we can do, 11 units. That's what they got in the last couple of years, 11 units.

When there are wait-lists in my district of over 30 – the Member from Bellevue was talking about the massive number was 90 I believe he said. How many, 90?

J. DWYER: Ninety-four.

J. BROWN: Ninety-four on a wait-list down in Burin.

This is ridiculous to think that we have these such high wait-lists.

I understand, overall, it's over 2,000 people on a wait-list and I understand within the city, in the urban area, it's higher. But for a place like Labrador West, about 10,000 people, 30 people on a wait-list for social housing are a lot when you look at that. The Member (inaudible) talked about 95; that's a lot of people on a wait-list for an area of his size.

This is where we really have the big concern is: How do we get these numbers up? The answer is our public Housing body. The reason it exists is to keep people from bring homeless. The reason it exists is to make sure that nobody goes without a roof over its head, and we're not giving the due attention it deserves to solve the problem. Instead, we're going around it. Give them the mandate. Tell them to build houses. Tell them it's their responsibility to get this done. Give them the resources to do it. Instead, we see all these convoluted plans, 750 houses – no, it wasn't houses; it was

options. This is getting absolutely ridiculous right now at this point in time.

You just go back into 1996 when the government at the time said to tell them to stop competing with private housing. This is a storm that was in the making for decades. This doesn't happen yesterday. This is something that was building for years and years and years in this province and nobody had the forethought or the thought to stop and say maybe that was a bad idea; let's correct course. But we haven't corrected course, instead we kept crashing.

Right now we have people camped out just out on the lawn there, we have people set up down at the Colonial Building and I think right now a lot of people that were up there, they didn't really get into Housing out on the Parkway, I think, from my understanding of talking to some of them, is they got out of the wind and decided to move down towards the Colonial Building to get out of the weather. I don't think any of them did find the Housing that they were promised.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

J. BROWN: Thank you.

SPEAKER: I'm recognizing the hon. Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

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

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion and, in particular, the opportunity to speak to housing and the development of housing in Newfoundland and Labrador and the government's efforts to stem what has been a perpetual problem for some time that's been long in the making.

Mr. Speaker, I will speak more specifically about the Corner Brook situation that's been

highlighted in the news, and rightfully so. Any reasonable person, Mr. Speaker, looking at this issue would quickly come to a conclusion or an affirmation that this is very much a movie. It's not a single frame; it's not a single picture. Every real story, if you were to look at it from the point of view of a movie as a collection of frames of individual stills, individual pictures which create the full picture, that's exactly what this is all about.

I'm going to say some things, Mr. Speaker, which may not necessarily meet with the satisfaction or applause of Members of the Opposition, but there is a requirement to speak truth and to say the situation as it exists.

In Corner Brook, not unlike many other communities and large communities, towns and cities in Newfoundland and Labrador and across Canada, we are facing some significant housing challenges. It would be fair – any fair-minded commentator would say that these challenges really have exponentially grown in a very, very short of period of time within the last number of years. But they do have foundations in more systemic nature, system policies related to housing. I don't think any fair-minded person would refute that.

Mr. Speaker, in Corner Brook, there are four particular units which are the subject of much discussion, and rightfully so. Twenty-seven Wall Street, 29, 33, and 35 Wall Street, all in the Dunfield Park or Crestview Complex. These are four eight-unit buildings. Thirty-two units which are not in service today.

I think it's just intuitive that you'd ask the question: What exactly happened there? Why, exactly, are 31 units not in service in the Crestview area at 27, 29, 33 and 35 Wall Street?

The answer, Mr. Speaker – you find out very quickly it was just buried, just take one layer off the onion. Thirty-five Wall Street – I've looked into this, 35C – that apartment is

a three-bedroom apartment. The last time any tenant ever lived in 35C Wall Street, a three-bedroom apartment, was 2008. The last time any tenant lived in 35H, a four-bedroom apartment, was 2009. There has been nobody living in that apartment since 2009 – no one. In 35B, a four-bedroom apartment, nobody has lived in that apartment since 2011. In 35A, a five-bedroom apartment, nobody has lived in that apartment since 2014; 35E since 2014.

So these apartments have been without any tenants in them for a significant period of time. The same would be true of 33 Wall Street. The last tenant that ever lived in 33H was in 2007, Mr. Speaker. The last tenant who ever lived – nobody has lived in 33C Wall Street since 2008 because the demand was not there at that point in time.

So when we look at that situation, clearly there was a demand, an expectation of action that should have been taken at that point in time, as these buildings, which are subject to the focus of such scrutiny – what actions were taken in 2007? Well, I'll tell you what those actions were, Mr. Speaker.

The government of that day recognized that there was an issue; there was a serious problem. So the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, a Crown corporation – which at that point in time, in 2007, was headed by Len Simms, and the government was the PC Government of Newfoundland and Labrador – they commissioned a report. They said: How can we solve this problem that we clearly have, that's clear and present in the Corner Brook area related to the Crestview and Dunfield Park area?

So they commissioned a report and I understand that this was difficult to get. I was not aware that this was done but I did find out that it was done. In 2006-2007, I understand about a million dollars was spent on commissioning a study for the Dunfield Park-Crestview area. That report started out with these conceptual

conclusions: The configuration of the Dunfield units no longer meets the market demand of today's smaller families, the aging population and persons with specialized needs. The buildings and sites are in need of mid-life refits from physical, energy, energy use and styling perspectives. Layouts need to be changed to suit the current and future market and the styling needs improved to remove the stigma of social housing, and to enhance the visual quality, create visual variety, which will help integrate the Dunfield area into the larger urban context and restore pride in the neighbourhood. Dunfield needs to be esthetically matched to the city and brought into the mainstream of the community. Significant work needs to be done.

Mr. Speaker, while Members of the Opposition didn't decry that, they said in today's Question Period: If the Liberal government was building houses instead of tearing down these units, the situation would be different. In 2007, this report recommended the entire demolition of the Dunfield area and restructuring of the Dunfield area. A 10-year plan in 2007 was created – a 10-year plan. That's at a time when the budgetary surplus of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador was at \$1.4 billion to the good, to the surplus.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: They produced a plan. The hon. Len Simms, president and CEO of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation – a hand-picked person, I would suggest, from the governing PC Party at the time – put forward a 10-year plan from 2007 to 2017.

Do you know something? In the years that followed, not one dime was spent on this plan – not one dime. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, you ask the question and it would be the right question to ask: Why is it that in 2008, 35C was made vacant, never to be

occupied again? At 35H in 2009, a 4-bedroom apartment was made vacant, never to be occupied again. At 35B Wall Street, a 4-bedroom apartment was made vacant in 2011, never to be occupied again.

Why is it, Mr. Speaker, that we're now in the situation where the buildings must be knocked down. It's because there was no action taken when the problem was clear and evident, when there were billions of dollars in surpluses available to that government, to that administration, to do the job that was required.

Mr. Speaker, we are here today to talk about a problem that needs an immediate solution. While this administration has scarce few resources to be able to do it and do it with, we're taking actions because housing is our priority.

We wish we had \$1.4 billion in one year of surpluses – in one year – followed by successive years of surpluses. We wish we had that, but you know what? They had the bounty of oil at that point in time. We do not. They took that money and they spent it on other things rather than housing.

For any time that they come forward and talk about Corner Brook and the 32 units, I would ask the hon. Members of the Opposition to explain why they commissioned a plan to totally change the structure and outlook of Dunfield Park, to create one- and two-bedroom apartments there that were badly needed, to reverse the years and years – in 2007 there was years and years of neglect. They had a plan to be able to fix it; they chose not to act on it. So any time that they want to bring forward the image of Corner Brook, please explain the Len Simms plan.

Mr. Speaker, I'll carry on; we've got precious few moments. We are doing what we can with the resources we can. We need the federal government to participate with us in that plan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: Instead of doing half the work in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker, we want to do the full amount of work. We're asking the federal government to join us as a partner in that work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I recognize the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

I am glad to speak to this motion. I do appreciate the history lesson there from my hon. colleague; I didn't know that. But I would say in fairness, I don't think we can blame the people here anymore than we can blame the people over there for the Upper Churchill or the rubber plant or anything else. They weren't there, in fairness.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, when I'm looking at this motion – and I have to say I have seen a lot of private Members' motions in my time in this House of Assembly that were very, very heavily charged politically. The Opposition would say whereby the government has failed on this, and whereas the government has failed on that and whereas the government is not doing this and not doing that.

I just have to say, I just want to read the original motion. It is about as benign a motion as you could possibly get, from what I'm reading:

WHEREAS there is a housing crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador – okay, we all agree on that.

WHEREAS there are vulnerable residents who need social housing – we all agree on that.

WHEREAS families are split, as residents are in emergency shelters or hotels – we've heard stories in the news about that.

WHEREAS in Corner Brook the mayor of Corner Brook stated publicly 12 housing units in Corner Brook are not adequate – that happened.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge the government to immediately take steps to reduce the lack of social housing in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That is very, very reasonable and given the crisis that we have, I find it amazing that we would be wasting time on meaningless political amendments, as opposed to debating the issue itself. Maybe I shouldn't be surprised, given the fact that there were three motions for emergency debate on housing that all got shut down. As a matter of fact, on the last one that was made, we shut down that motion and then we proceeded to close the House of Assembly at 3 – 2½ hours early. So there was no priority given to it.

Now, here we have a motion today, which can't be shut down, and instead of just going with this very benign motion and having a debate, we're over here now trying to change the wording of it to somehow give a little pat on the back for whatever has been done.

I will be the first to say that there has been stuff done; although, when we talk about the housing programs, like the Provincial Home Repair Program, as an example, or the Home Modification Program or the other one for energy efficiency grant, that's nothing new. That's a standard program that has been there for years. It's much appreciated and I've had a lot of people who have availed of it, but that's nothing new.

I do realize that it's not easy. You can't just create houses overnight and I realize that there is a cost. There is a cost. And the

Member is right when he talks about if you had a billion-dollar surplus, you could do more. There's no doubt about it you could do more and there's no doubt about it that the government is strapped for cash, so to speak. We're still running deficits.

So I think we all understand the challenges that are there but, by the same token, we also know that there are vulnerable people out living in tents. That's undeniable they're there. We've seen them. They're across the street, they're at Bannerman Park and now we understand they're at the Hub underneath the bridge, or whatever, that's there at the Hub. We know that these things are there, these situations exist and I think it's incumbent among all of us to truly work together to try to resolve some of these issues. That's what needs to happen.

I know there's a cost to it and I know there are no easy solutions. I appreciate that if the minister gave the go-ahead tomorrow and built 100 houses, they're not going to be built tomorrow. The process in terms of putting out tenders and to get someone to come in and design them, build them and all that, this isn't going to be resolved in a day, a week or a month. We're still talking time to get this done, but I think there has to be an urgency to try to get as much done as possible. I think that what a lot of people feel and what I'm hearing from some of my colleagues and people in the general public, particularly advocates, is that they don't feel that sense of urgency is there. They don't feel that sense of urgency is there.

I do encourage the minister, whatever you can do to expedite the creation of more housing units, then I certainly encourage you to do it. I know the minister's heart is in the right place. I feel bad for him, because he just came in this portfolio. I mean, he inherited this situation. I do understand that. I know that you can't legitimately blame all this on this minister who just came into this position. That's ridiculous, really.

It has been ongoing for a long time and it has covered several administrations. But it doesn't matter; we can all point the blame. My colleague just talked about 2007-2008, the PC government, Len Simms and all that stuff. Well, my colleagues here, yes, Muskrat Falls, you can talk about that. Over here we can talk about the fact that you've been here for eight years, that you had eight years to take action. That's also a legitimate point as well; you had eight years to do something and you didn't either. It's not about pointing the blame; it's about where do we go to from here. That's really what it should be about. Where do we go to from here?

One of the things I've raised – and I want to bring it up again to the minister to look into, because it's all sort of related. I wonder when we talk about having the resources to build new houses and so on how much money – I'm just wondering – is going out the door – and I'll use one program as an example. There's a program – I'm assuming it's still there. If it's gone, that's fine; you can let me know. Certainly there was a program for a number of years within NLHC where a private developer could get his hands or her hands on \$400,000 to build units, affordable seniors' housing. They could build an apartment building or whatever, units. They could built 30 units or 40 units and 10 of those units have got to be at a discounted rate. Say it takes \$300 or \$350 off the rent for 10 years and, in exchange, we'll give you \$400,000 cash to build the units.

I know that they exist; there's one in Mount Pearl. I know there have been issues with one in Mount Pearl in terms of living up to their end of the deal. I've heard from people who had concerns about whether they were living up to their end of the deal. There's another one over on Blackmarsh Road that we would all know who owns that one, or did own that one, and who availed of that money.

I wonder how much money has gone out through the door on those programs.

Because I can remember when those programs were on the go, going to Estimates and asking about it. I said: Do we have any charitable organizations that want to avail of this money? Because they're going to offer truly affordable units, as opposed to giving it to these businesses to do.

I was told, oh yes, there's a mix. I said: So you mean to tell me that we've got charitable organizations out there, whether it be like CHANAL, co-op housing, the Lions Club, SaltWater association – I think it's called the SaltWater Inc., or whatever it is, in Bonavista – groups like that that do affordable housing and their applications are being turned down because you're only going to do so many of the charitable groups and then you're going to hand out \$400,000 grants to private developers for these projects? Yes, that indeed was what was happening.

I had to ask: Is it good value for money? I've heard from people who would tell me that we have people living in, whether it be these shelters or apartments that we're told are really not inhabitable. People with complex needs, no doubt, and the landlord is getting up to \$3,000 a month rent – \$3,000 a month rent. That's not in a home care facility with staff, with this person looking after them. This is just paying the rent; \$3,000 a month in some slummy apartment somewhere.

Is that good value for money? Could that money be spent more wisely to provide housing for people? I have to ask that question, Minister. I encourage you to look into it. I understand as well, Minister – I'm running out of time but I know you said you were going to get a consultant to look at the shelters but, again, you need to expedite that. I have to ask the question why we need a consultant. I do. I find it hard to believe we don't have someone in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing capable of doing it but if we are going to use a consultant or if you're going to do it in-house, get it done ASAP because some of

these shelters are not fit to live in and we saw that on the news.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I wasn't going to talk to this but when the Minister of Immigration and the Member for Corner Brook stood up and got back in his hot tub time machine I figured I should get up and have a few words. 2008 is when he references the report and he very clearly said it's a 10-year plan. He came in office in 2015, seven years after that report, three years still left to a 10-year plan. Now we listen to you guys talk about your plans all the time and how you're putting them out and how you're going down the road. These are your words, not mine.

So three years left, eight years sitting in the Chair and now the problem is worse. The problem is worse and nothing has been done. He wants to go back to a report from 2007 that he's had since 2015 and he hasn't done anything about it. It's great. The time machine is really good over there. It always works the same way.

He talks about money and where do we get money to do things. We all know that the province is cash strapped, but I can tell you there is \$42 million from the mental health facility that you wanted to give to your buddies. We could have used that. We could have went with a different facility, saved the \$42 million and put it into housing. Simple solution.

This morning, as I was driving in here to the House of Assembly, on the radio they were talking about new housing start-ups in this province for this year. The number they put out was 892 – 892. Now, I've listened to the

Minister of Finance come in here every single day and talk about how this government is going to build 850 new houses.

It's obviously not this year because there has to be more than 42 houses being built by private builders, there's no question. So if it was this year, then the new housing start-ups are way off the mark. Speaker, 892, we're building 850. That leaves 42, so someone's math is wrong. I would say maybe it's not 850. Maybe it's 11. I don't know. That's the number that was thrown around last time.

We have come into this House all this term and we've asked for an emergency debate. We've talked about the crisis that's out there and then we got these amendments today basically deflecting from the real issues that not just the people in Corner Brook face, but people from Newfoundland and Labrador everywhere. It is rampant. It is terrible.

I had a young lady in my district – and, listen, to the minister's credit I will tell you this: When I reached out to the minister, they did their best to help us – who had a baby that was just over a week old, waiting to get into a house and none of the repairs were done. His department reacted very swiftly to make sure that she got somewhere to go.

We shouldn't have to do that. I'll tell you, when I reach out to the minister I get a response from him; he's doing what he can, but at the end of the day he inherited a major problem. It's a problem that has grown exponentially over the last, well, let's say, eight years. Let's see how well my time machine works.

Since 2015 until 2023, we've seen a steady increase in homelessness. We've seen a steady decline in people's ability to survive in this province and the cost of living has risen exponentially. We all see it. We all know it and if we don't hear it in our districts, it's because you're not listening. If you don't

feel it, it's because you're not going to the grocery store. If you don't see it, it's because you don't open your own bills. Everybody in this province is suffering. The housing crisis is real and we need to make solutions.

My colleague from Labrador West – I've said this a dozen times, I grew up in Labrador and my problems in Terra Nova are no different than they are in Labrador West, than they are in any other part of the province. We have two issues in Labrador West: teachers and doctors. They can't get them to come there because there's nowhere to live. We have a bunch of individuals, widows, people who have now decided to stay in what was once a very transient town.

What do they want? They want seniors' accommodations or long-term care facilities. They can't move out of their own houses because there's nowhere to go. What is the solution? There are builders and there are people who are ready to go up there and do things, but the government doesn't put a lens on rural Newfoundland. They don't look at and understand the fact that it costs more to do business up there. So why not give an extra amount on the daily amount, so someone can go in there and open up a home, which would in turn open up houses.

I can tell you there's a list of people who want to go into these kinds of accommodations up there – a long list. It would solve a problem quickly. It would open up houses and it would allow seniors to stay where they've spent their whole lives. It would help the ability to recruit doctors and teachers. It solves everything. It's simple. I don't know what we give for long-term care now. Seventy-six dollars a day is the subsidy maybe? If you need \$96 to do it in Labrador or \$106, isn't it well worth it? Isn't that value added? I would think it is.

It's different because it's actually different up there; it costs more to do business. If you

don't know that, you have never been there or you don't listen. You haven't listened to the Member for Torngat Mountains and the Member for Labrador West. I'm sure that most of you have been there and you know.

When we have people sleeping in tents across the road from the House of Assembly, or down at a historical site at the Colonial Building because they can't get anywhere to live, or because they're afraid to go to some of these places, or because these places are far below standards, we should be hanging our heads in shame. We failed. They didn't. We're the ones that failed.

Our solution is to take credit for the work that charities do. I was appalled last week when we talked about the 750 units or whatever we called them. First, they were houses and then they were units. Then, they said, I don't know. Nobody knows what the actual –

AN HON. MEMBER: Options.

L. PARROTT: Options was one too, yes.

So there were all of these words used, but those options don't necessarily exist outside the Avalon Peninsula. I tell you if any of these charities were to say we're no longer going to operate like this, what would government do? Where would they go? We are a province that depends on charities to house our most needy people. It is ludicrous.

You come out in my district and I'll tell you what, there are no options. Now, we have REACH out there. Again, I'll go back. When I lost funding for REACH, which was a federal funding stream – and I didn't understand that, but when I talked to the minister, we got it straightened out. The former minister and the current minister worked with me and we got it straightened out. We got REACH going.

Four years ago, when REACH started and I started helping them out on Fridays every now and then, cooking and helping people, we had 16, 17 people that would show up. That's it. You go to Clarenville now and on Fridays they're doing 100 to 150 people. That's how many people are in need. That's how much it's grown in four years. That's Clarenville.

You take the outlying regions around Clarenville – and you understand that because of carbon tax and other regressive rural taxes, people can't afford to drive to Clarenville to get a hot meal or they don't have anywhere to stay. You think about that. How big is that number actually? We don't even know how big this crisis is. We don't understand the number. We don't know how many people are living with Aunt Sarah or with their mom or with their cousin and we're not asking the question. We have a major crisis in this province and the government has failed, make no mistake about it.

So the minister wants to get in his hot tub time machine and talk about a report that came from 2008. Well, Minister, you failed too, because in 2015 when you took that office, that same issue was there. Eight years later, it's no better. It's actually worse.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have nothing else to say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

I guess there are three points I want to make, if I could. One is really responding to the last speaker in terms of the crisis and how this has evolved over the past number of years. If you listen to – and we quote back from the NLHC's data, in terms of the pressure on the Housing Corporation in

terms of finding social housing units, shelter beds and the like, that has only become a very stark issue and reality for them in the past two years.

We have seen the numbers grow exponentially. Why is that? It is around COVID and post-COVID, what has happened in society at large, what has happened in the economy at large. What's happened in terms of our social networks in the province, across the country and across the world. We're all having to deal with this particular reality. Fair enough, we are struggling to keep up with the demand. That is true right across our social services, whether it's health, education and the like. So we're making best efforts to do that.

For me, looking at this in the time frame, it's really the past two years. What are the factors that are contributing to the pressures on our social housing program? Affordability, obviously, is one of that, one of those issues.

The other immediate issue comes around the role of the private sector in the context of building housing in this province, building affordable housing. Again, if you look at where we were before COVID, we were on a reasonable trajectory in terms of the housing stock here in the province. Through COVID, nothing got built. We lost a minimum of two years of any real new, substantive housing stock in this province. Again, we're playing catch-up and we're seeing that play out in real time.

So that is a factor, and I, in my previous portfolio as minister of Housing, had a lot of conversations with developers and contractors and the like. They're trying to find their way through and the opportunity to invest in this province, to meet the needs of the private sector and private market, but also the affordable housing market. They impressed upon me, and then subsequently now the current minister, to make sure we invest in affordable housing, and that's what we did in the last budget. So we're on the

culsp of investing and building those 850 units.

Now, to my third point, and really what I just wanted to build on was the comment the Member for Corner Brook ended on: Where is the federal government? They, too, have missed opportunities here and we had, in the past two years, a lot of conversations with the federal minister, with CMHC, on the need to invest in social housing, affordable housing and supportive housing in this province. They have been and continue to be slow to the table.

I know the Member for Labrador West referenced, if not today but earlier, around housing, about the significant and very quality proposal that had been put forward by Pioneers up in Labrador West. A very specific, well-documented proposal addressing a very specific need around seniors' housing in Labrador turned down. Proposals from Labrador, Goose Bay turned down. Proposals from the rest of the province turned down. All meeting the needs that we have identified.

We had a lot of conversations with the various MPs from the province. They're frustrated by the lack of attention by their own government to meet the needs here in this province. So we need to continue to impress on the federal government their obligation, their responsibility and their fiscal capacity to help this province out.

Through the piece, some of the success stories have been working with our community groups. The former speaker talked about charities. I don't view them as charities. They don't view themselves as charities. They view themselves as social agencies with a mandate to deliver social services. Many of them are delivering housing. Choices for Youth are delivering housing for youth here in the capital city. Stella's Circle is one of the biggest landlords and social supportive housing agencies here in the province. They have received

some funding to expand their enterprise in the supportive housing role.

We are expanding on The Gathering Place, again, with the Sisters of Mercy, with the province, with the federal government in this case investing in a significant capital redevelopment of a facility. At the end of that we will have an improved shelter, improved supportive housing, as well as apartments to service this part of the province.

We have other opportunities, other proposals to go forward. Again, when we talked about Dunfield Park out in Corner Brook, the Housing Corporation had worked with different community groups to develop a very substantive proposal to redevelop that property to meet the immediate needs of that community of Corner Brook. Again, turned down by the federal government with no significant rationale provided to us as why that happened.

If we're going to advance around the needs of affordable housing in this province and to make inroads for the individuals we talked to that are currently living in tents – I was down on the weekend to talk to the folks in tents down at the Colonial Building. All they're asking for is a place to call home. The other reality is they are going to need supports to live in their new home when it comes about. I know talking to the minister, talking to my other colleagues, we are as a government committed to working with those individuals, with those families to meet their housing needs. Will it happen overnight? Not necessarily, but it will happen and we are striving to do that.

We cannot let the federal government off the hook here. If anything else, we need to impress upon our federal MPs, our federal minister in cabinet, the prime minister, the House of Commons, anybody else, that they need to invest in social and affordable housing in this province and in this country. They need to move away from an urban lens to a community lens, a rural lens and in

this case a Newfoundland-and-Labrador-made solution, which we have.

I'm hoping somebody in Ottawa is tuned in to this debate today, because this is playing out right across the country. They can help us meet our challenges here in the province. We have the know-how, we have the will, we have the experience, all we need right now is more funds from the federal government, supplemented with provincial funds, and those 850 affordable housing units, that we will be rolling out over the next year or two, can be easily doubled.

With that, Speaker, I'll end.

Thank you.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm not going to take a lot of time, but I did want to follow up on a couple of comments that my colleague from Placentia West made. Earlier – well, I guess it's been since we were back in this House, we have talked about an emergency debate on housing. We talked about the idea that this should not be about a blame game because the people who are out there in tents or the people who are homeless don't really care whether you're Liberal, Conservative, NDP or any other party. They just want help.

For most people, I think we all want the same thing; we want to be able to help people. But in order to do that, we need to focus in on how we can make that happen. I don't disagree with my colleague on the opposite side, the Minister of Transportation, when he tells us how bad a Liberal government is, because we're experiencing that here in our province as well as in Ottawa.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: But despite that, one of the things that my colleague from Placentia West made a comment about was labour. That was an important comment that he made about labour. About the lack of the fact that we do not have employees. That is one thing that we should be able to control.

We have a Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, which employs a significant number of people. Before we start looking to others to say they should do this or they should do that, I'd like to understand exactly where we are from a labour perspective with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Perhaps the minister can table in the House the exact number of employees that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation has in its budget to allow people to actually do repairs and maintenance on the units that they control and do that over all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In doing so, also point out, how many of those positions are vacant? What types of positions are vacant? How long have they been vacant? Let's produce that. Let's bring it in. Let's table it. I'd like to understand why. Why are they vacant? How long have they been vacant? What do we need to do to get them filled? Because, ultimately, that's what we should be talking about. We should be talking about making sure that the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation has the resources, has the manpower that it needs to be able to get the job done.

We all know organizations can turn around and build houses in very short periods of time. We have houses being built in Stephenville right now, tiny homes. So what I want to know is how can we make sure that the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation is able to fulfill their mandate and actually get people working?

Because when we talk about Labrador and places, maybe what we need to be looking at is: Do we need teams to go in for a period

of construction season and repair those homes or build new homes? Because those are all of the things that matter to people in Newfoundland and Labrador. They don't really care about whether it's a Liberal idea or an NDP idea or a PC idea. They just want to get the work done.

So, again, let's start with something that we can control. Does the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation have the resources to get the job done? Because if they do not have the resources to get the job done, then we wind up with situations where houses go in disrepair. When units cannot be repaired on a timely basis, we wind up with situations like we've seen. So let's start with that. Let's start with fixing that problem. Let's get Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation fully staffed, get those staff to work and let's get those repairs done on those housing units that just need to be repaired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That's where we start.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: If we want to turn around and build new units, then great. Let's build new units, too. But let's get Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation staffed up so they can get to work and get these units repaired. There are lots of issues right across the whole province in every single district. So that's what my request is: Let's find out exactly how many positions are vacant. What type of positions are they? Let's really ask ourselves that question: Why are they vacant? Why are they not filled? Because at one point, the government was an employer of choice. Why are these positions vacant? And if we answer that question, then we need to do something about it.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to spend a few minutes. I put in this motion to be a friendly motion, to say that we all work together. So by the time it got changed that there are no people living in hotels or no family's split. I made a friendly motion here so that we all can get behind it.

There are a few things the Member for Corner Brook said: history is a great thing. One thing he mentioned was back in 2007. Well, I can tell you back in 2007 there was a hospital announced in Corner Brook. I started on that and by the time we got it finished in 2017, the hospital was announced in Corner Brook with a radiation unit, so I have a habit of not giving up. Because if the housing started in 2007, let's get the housing done now, I don't mind waiting.

The second thing I heard a lot of Members mention is the fact that the federal government needs to be a part of it. The federal government should be a part of it. The initiative that he is talking about with Len Simms went to the federal government. Who was the MP for Long Range Mountains who was representing Corner Brook at the time? Who was the MP? So if we want to start playing the blame game, we can, but this is not worth playing the blame game. Let's not go playing the blame game; let's start looking at all the issues that we can work together. Let's all look at all the issues that we can work together on.

Because as I said to the minister when he wrote me and said let's meet and then discuss this, let's discuss all this together. Let's discuss it; let's sit down and discuss it. I have no problems sitting down and working with you, because if we can get

people in the housing unit – if I am working with anyone, I have yet to – not one person over there can say it, that if I had conversation when we were working on issues that I ever divulged the confidentiality of the discussion. I have no problem working together in all this, but I am not going to stand here and then water down this motion as if it is not reality. The motion I put in there is reality. The motion I put in is reality and I put it in there just so we could stand up and we all say, yes, there is an issue. Yes, let's all work together.

I said to the Minister of Housing before, this is not your fault. I said it to you before, this is not your fault. This housing has been going on for a nice while. This has been going on for a nice while. So I said what we have to do now is try to work together and let's get this done. This is the issue with all this, Mr. Speaker, we have to work together. If we can't work together for the common good of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, what are we doing as politicians here? That is the issue.

I'll take my seat and I know we're going to vote against – I'm going to vote against the amendment, but I will vote for the motion because it is such a critical issue. It is such a critical issue that we need done for the housing in the province and this is why we all have to come together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

All those in favour of the amendment, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

SPEAKER: The amendment carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

SPEAKER: All those in favour of the amended motion, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.