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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA*

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Admit strangers.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I would just like to take this opportunity, right now, to withdraw my comments in response to a point of order on March 12 from the Member for Torngat Mountains. Not only would I like to withdraw them, I publicly said some of those statements are incorrect and I'd like to publicly apologize, again, for those incorrect statements.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** In the public gallery today, I'd like to welcome guests that are joining us this afternoon for a Member's statement, Kim Coveyduck and Lori Greene. They are workers with the Community Supports Program and are joined by family members: Darryl Howell, Zachary Greene and Maria Greene.

Welcome.

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

**SPEAKER:** Also, joining us is Joe Tilley, honorary life member of the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department, as well as Fire Chief Rodney Gaudet and Fire Prevention Officer Ray Clarke from the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department.

Welcome.

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

**SPEAKER:** We'd also like to welcome members from the Topsail United Church men's club.

Good afternoon and welcome everyone.

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

### Statements by Members

**SPEAKER:** Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Terra Nova, Bonavista, Topsail - Paradise, St. John's Centre and Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

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

Mr. Speaker, I stand to congratulate a group of junior high students, along with their teachers, from Holy Cross School in Eastport.

On April 3, they attended the Atlantic Canadian Brilliant Labs Innovation Fair in Miramichi, New Brunswick. The Brilliant Labs Innovation Fair for 2024 challenged participants to tackle real world problems and issues.

Holy Cross School in Eastport was one of only two Newfoundland schools that were invited to attend. Their project represented one of 160 projects and it was titled: Eco Eastport Powered by Magna Motors.

Eco Eastport Powered by Magna Motors is all about encouraging young families to move to a futuristic, self-sustainable community that has many eco-friendly and delightful things to offer new residents. Families can work remotely, all the while enjoying the benefits of a low-cost, renewable resource in a picturesque community.

Sounds like a great future.

Stand with me and congratulate these students. They represented their school, community and the province with the utmost pride, respect, patience, enthusiasm and ingenuity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

Reg Butler of Bonavista is a third-generation fish harvester who started fishing at age nine when his mom passed away and has been fishing for 51 years since. Reg also serves as deputy mayor of Bonavista and has given 10 years of service to this council community. To have committed for 10 years is truly commendable, but to have received the most votes in the recent 2021 municipal election, out of a field of 18 candidates, speaks to the respect the general population has for him.

What is maybe most impressive, though, is the fact that at any charitable function or funeral service in the Bonavista area, you will often see Reg bringing music to the event. Whether it be the Bonavista Relay for Life or the Anglican Church concert at the Garrick Theatre, where Reg recently serenaded a packed house with his version of "On the Road Again," which was tremendously enjoyed at one of the oldest surviving theatres in the province. Reg appears to never say no when asked to partake in such important community events.

I ask Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the commitment and service of Reg Butler.

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

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

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

I wish to acknowledge the Topsail United Men's Club for the great work they do in support of the community in faith and the

community in general. They serve and work out of the Topsail United Church: The Church by the Side of the Road.

Formed in 1982-83, this group consists of 20 to 25 dedicated men who fundraise for the church and programs in the community. Special occasions you will find them serving breakfast at the well-attended Breakfast with the Easter Bunny, Thanksgiving Breakfast, Breakfast with Santa and, one of my favourites, the upcoming Flipper Dinner.

Proceeds go to support the work of the church and related groups such as: Stella's Circle, Burry Heights summer camp and, when needed, are happy to jump in and fundraise to support other worthwhile community causes.

In addition to the fun and fellowship that is enjoyed while preparing these meals, the Men's Club enjoy a monthly dinner meeting where they have a game of darts, cards and a sing-along with their in-house musicians and some who sing in the Topsail United Church choir.

Speaker, I ask you all to join me in thanking and congratulating the Topsail United Church Men's Club for all they do and wish them so much more continued success.

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

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

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

John O'Donohue's poem "For the Dying" states:

"May death arrive only after a long life  
To find you at home among your own  
With every comfort and care you require."

The end of life is a time of anguish and uncertainty for the person and the family. Compassionate, professional care so that a loved one can die home is essential.

The interdisciplinary team of nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, rehabilitation assistants, behavioral management specialists and dieticians at the Newfoundland and Labrador Community Supports Program strive to improve the quality of life for palliative clients in the community and make the transition from independence to total care as stress free as possible.

When Jim Small was diagnosed with terminal cancer, his companion, Steve Motty, looked after him. When cancer robbed Jim of his mobility, clinical nurse Lori Greene stepped in, visited their home, arranged a hospital bed, supplies and 24-hour care. Lori cared for Jim like one of her own and even cried during one of her visits. Her compassion was comforting. Lori helped Steve and Jim meet the many unanticipated challenges thrown their way.

Compassion exemplifies Lori and her colleagues. Please join me in recognizing the professionals at the Community Supports Program.

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

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

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

Speaker, I rise today to recognize an outstanding community volunteer, Mr. Joe Tilley. An original member of the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department in 1974, Joe served for 31 years before stepping down due to illness. Today, as an honorary life member, Joe continues to serve the department as well as constituents throughout my district as he organizes an annual event, the Special Needs Christmas Party.

Since 1995, Joe has been the heart and soul of bringing together families of those with special needs to enjoy an afternoon of food, music and fellowship; a meal and

dessert are provided along with facepainting and a Christmas gift bag for each individual. With assistance from the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department, municipal councils and donations from the business community, Joe has made this event possible at no cost to the families.

Speaker, I have witnessed the smiles, the laughter and the appreciation of those who have attended this annual event and it's clearly evident that all are welcomed, respected and valued.

Speaker, I ask my colleagues of this 50th General Assembly to join me in thanking Mr. Joe Tilley for his volunteerism in the community. We look forward to the 29th annual Special Needs Christmas Party this coming December.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

#### Statements by Ministers

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

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize a special and historic moment in the history of our great province.

Our agreement to enter into Confederation on March 31, 1949, was the next chapter of our unique political evolution from a colony to a Dominion to a province of Canada.

In every city and town throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, this subject still rightfully sparks lively debate, 75 years later.

Speaker, we may be the youngest province in this federation, but our history proudly

spans many centuries before Canada even became a country in 1867.

And so, when the Terms of Union were signed on December 11, 1948, our steadfast and resilient people chose to become a part of Canada – enriching the country with our remarkable culture ever since.

Today, Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be an important part of the Canadian mosaic. This is anchored by our profound sense of cultural identity and our incredibly rich cultural heritage, which continues to enrich the very fabric of Canada as a whole.

So, Speaker, today I acknowledge and celebrate the 75th anniversary of this marriage of economies, culture and people. Perhaps we should reframe and, instead, celebrate this 75th anniversary of Canada joining Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**A. FUREY:** As we look forward to the next 75 years, let's do that with a sense of optimism, innovation, resilience, pride and flair that we've shown for the past 75 years, as we continue to make our mark, Newfoundland and Labrador's mark, on the country that we now love and call home, Canada.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I would like to thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement.

We, on this side of the House, are proud to mark the 75th anniversary of the year Canada joined Newfoundland and Labrador

in Confederation. In 7½ decades we have never lost our rich identity, which actually extends back long millennia to prehistoric times when Indigenous people first arrived.

In the years since then, those First Peoples have been joined by others from every country of the world; drawn here by the fishery and oil, by our geography and beauty, by our indomitable spirit and our warm hospitality.

We pride ourselves on being an equal partner in this greatest country on earth, contributing wherever we go; serving under the maple leaf; always punching above our weight; and always welcoming people to join us in Canada's youngest province.

The Terms of Union were not perfect, but we have since improved on them under the Atlantic Accord thanks to visionaries, like Brian Peckford, Brian Mulroney and Danny Williams. Now, more than ever, it is critical that we continue to improve the nature of our federal relationship with Canada. We must continue to champion our province, by advocating in the interest of our offshore oil and gas industry and fisheries. We must make it clear that Confederation has been a net positive for Canada and that Newfoundland and Labrador offers Canada limitless opportunities when we are treated in an equitable manner.

We must now set our sights on making future advances in the decades to come in fisheries management, energy, ocean technology, every sector, so that we can once again take our rightful place as the definitive economic leader in this federation – proud, resilient and mighty.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement.

We have many reasons to celebrate being part of the federation we call Canada, and many of my relatives would agree. On this 75th anniversary, however, I see, at every turn, examples of how this opportunity was squandered by successive governments: crisis in health care; homeless people living in tents on the grounds of the Colonial Building; seniors splitting pills and skipping meals; people unable to bury their loved ones.

We can and must do better so that all people benefit from our union with Canada.

Thank you.

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

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

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

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

Given the substantial impacts of the wind turbine projects, can the Premier outline what community benefit agreements have been negotiated with the impacted regions?

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, we celebrate new industries throughout the province as we continue to reinvest and reimagine traditional industries within the province, Mr. Speaker. Reimagining the traditional ones in combination with new ones will allow us to chart our own economic course.

As the Member opposite is aware, I have recused myself from any decisions with respect to that particular proponent, but we are excited about the wind and hydrogen development throughout our beautiful province, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Mr. Speaker, residents and municipal leaders want more than short-term construction jobs.

Again, I ask: What framework has been developed to ensure communities receive maximum local benefits for employment and financial considerations?

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

**A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly happy to stand up and talk about the wind-hydrogen space and where we play a role in this global endeavour. Obviously, we know a lot of this stems from the fact that the first proponent in this province just passed the environmental approval stage, I think, in the last week.

What I can say is this –

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

**A. PARSONS:** – everything for this stems from our fiscal framework, which was launched last year in February 2023, that all proponents had to live by. That had a number of parts to it, including community benefits, including gender equity and diversity plans. All that was laid out within the framework which every company had to apply, has to go through and will have to maintain updates and outcomes as they move through this.

Again, we see a very good space for this province, and we'll continue to work towards having more of these set up in the future.

Thank you.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, I thank the minister for his answer, but I would again ask: Will government be a party to making sure and signing so that these community benefits agreements are in place with local communities that are impacted by these developments?

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

**A. PARSONS:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we've said from the beginning of this endeavour, going back a few years now, is that anything that happens must be for the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Especially given the market right now for these projects is export. If we're doing export here, what is it that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are going to get?

I will point out that part of the approval last week was that community benefits must be maintained. That was one of the approval conditions that was just put out there.

What I can say is we work closely with every project, with every proponent to ensure that we get community benefits, and I can say that the response we are getting from these communities is certainly positive. They recognize the positive impact that it's going to have on the communities and the positive impact on the Treasury and GDP for the province as well.

Thank you.

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

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

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

Again, these projects have the potential to be game changers for our province, but it's about minimizing impact on the environment, maximizing benefits. Good to hear that that's being addressed.

The Premier's sugar tax was supposed to modify and change behaviour – people's behaviour when it comes to a consumption of sugar. But the actual revenue taken in from the sugar tax is not going down, it's actually going up.

I ask the Premier: Do you believe your sugar tax is changing people's behaviour, or is it simply draining their pocketbooks?

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we're fully aware of the health outcomes in Newfoundland and Labrador, we know that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, unfortunately, have the highest rate of diabetes, the highest rate of cancer, the highest rate of stroke, the highest rate of heart disease across the entire country, Mr. Speaker.

We have to make sure that people are actually looking at healthy options. The revenue that it is generated from the sugar tax – let me be perfectly clear – we wish that we generated zero dollars from the sugar-sweetened-beverage tax.

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

**A. FUREY:** That said, the revenue that we do generate, Mr. Speaker, goes to pay for things like the Physical Activity Tax Credit, insulin pumps and glucose monitoring and food lunch programs for schools. These are all good things and expenses that this government wants to make sure that we're

investing in to change, fundamentally, the behaviours of people.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, it's obvious that the plan isn't working so the easiest way, if the Premier wants to collect zero revenue, is to cancel the tax – simple as that.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Let's use education and not taxation to help people.

I find it ironic, too, that when it comes to this particular funding, the government says the more it collects in sugar tax revenues, the more it will have for glucose monitors and fitness programs to combat diabetes.

How does it make sense when increased funding for diabetes relies on increased sugar consumption?

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

**S. COADY:** Speaker, I appreciate having the opportunity, again, to talk to the people of the province about how many people support the idea of a consumption tax on sugar. Let me talk to you about the British Medical Journal who have come out very much in support of making sure that the drink industry levy has reduced the number of children –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**S. COADY:** – needing teeth removed. The Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Association support healthy choices for oral health and overall health. The World Health Organization: "Consumption of free sugars, including products like sugary drinks, is a

major factor in the global increase of people suffering from obesity and diabetes."

Speaker, we are trying to ensure the people of this province are one of the healthiest in the country, unlike the Member opposite.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, we all agree that sugar consumption should be reduced but turning around and taxing the people who can least afford it is not the way to do it. It's through education.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** The fact that they're collecting more money tells you, simply, that their plan isn't working.

I can tell you that the people of Fogo Island - Cape Freels do not like the sugar tax.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Order, please!

**T. WAKEHAM:** The Premier says he wants the carbon tax delayed – he wants it delayed because this is not the right time. I believe the carbon tax should be scrapped.

So I ask the Premier: Do you agree?

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

**A. FUREY:** I'm always happy to talk about the federal carbon tax, Mr. Speaker. As we have said many times, and I'm happy to table the many different letters dating back four years now. If the Member opposite would like to –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I heard the question quite clearly; I'd like to hear the response.



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

**A. FUREY:** I said I'd be happy to table them so they're not necessarily a prop. If they want me to table, I'm happy to table.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times, I don't think it's the right instrument for the people of this province. I've been standing up for the people of this province against the premier minister.

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

**A. FUREY:** We'll continue to do so.

The Member opposite would like to try to revisit history and revise history. He can revisit it all he wants; he can't revise it. I have always stated an opposition to the federal carbon tax, Mr. Speaker, to the point where this government lowered the gas tax to offset the federal carbon tax.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, the Premier should refer back to *Hansard* when many of his own Cabinet Members in this House had stood up in favour of carbon taxation.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** I simply ask the Premier: Premier, do you believe that the carbon tax should be scrapped?

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I've said many times, this is not the right instrument right now. The prime minister is very much married to this, so we proposed that he pause it to allow us to put together different alternatives.

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

**SPEAKER:** When Members are ready, we will continue.

The hon. the Premier.

**A. FUREY:** Different than the Member for CBS who said: "Am I worried about climate change? No."

We are worried about climate change on this side, Mr. Speaker, but we don't think that this tax is right for right now.

That said, we are happy that the prime minister has suddenly changed his mind and is welcoming different solutions. So we'll make sure we will put together a plan that stands up for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, while addressing climate change.

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

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

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

The Premier should have stood up for Newfoundland and Labrador three years ago when this side stood up for them.

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

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** He is three years too late, Mr. Speaker, three years too late.

While registered nurses wait for payments owed under their collective agreement, the Furey Liberals paid out over \$80 million in just nine months for private travel nurses.

Can the minister, or the Premier, pay lucrative private agencies but he cannot pay nurses working here in the system?

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

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

We are looking forward to getting that payment made to the nurses who so deserve it. I know the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board and the Registered Nurses' Union put this deal together to recognize the nurses that provide a valuable service to this province.

It is complex. There are the legacy health care institutions throughout the province who used several different processes in calculating service provided to the province. The health authority is working through that to get the payments as quickly as we can in the hands of the nurses who so deserve it.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, I would like to ask the minister: Was he not aware of that extra \$40 million when you stood in your place –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** – several weeks ago and defended the \$36-million overspending and said: What would you do if you were in the same position?

Minister, were you aware of that \$40 million or do we have to wait for another ATIPP to expose what this Liberal government is doing behind closed doors?

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

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, the amount that was reported during the four- or five-

month period is obviously not consistent with a full year of service. The agency nurses are still in the province, Mr. Speaker, ensuing that services are provided to people throughout the province. Without the agency nurses, we would have emergency departments closed.

I am just as anxious to see agency nursing reliance go back to pre-pandemic levels, but the Member opposite ought to have known, himself, that if we were looking at five months of spending, when you calculate that over 12 months, it would be reflective of 12 months spending.

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

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

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

It's quite astounding, \$80 million over nine months, so we can only estimate we're well in excess of \$100 million. Toaster ovens, vacations, coffees, cabs and we don't know what else is included and this minister can stand up and try to push this aside like we're asking crazy questions. Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** You wonder why people are turned with them.

Speaker, while government has shelled out over \$80 million, the nursing crisis has gotten worse. In fact, some 715 positions are vacant according to the Nurses' Union. Rather than line the pockets of private agencies, why did the Liberals refuse to address the retention issues in the health care system?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the agreement with the Registered Nurses' Union looks at retention issues. I believe that the Think Tank that was put in place about two years ago, Mr. Speaker, address some of the retention issues.

We've been working with the Registered Nurses' Union. We've been working with the health authority to address the retention issues, Mr. Speaker. As the Member knows, we had, at one point, about 750 vacancies. We're down to 715. Far too many, Mr. Speaker, far too many, but, that in and of itself, without agency nursing in this province, if we have a number of vacancies, services would be closed.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** I guess we'll get a minister's statement on the decrease in 35 nursing positions; we still have 715. It's very comforting, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, it's not good having nurses coming through our front door and leaving out the back door, numbers don't lie, we're still losing more nurses than we're recruiting.

Does the minister acknowledge that paying one nurse six times the rate of others – that's six times the rate of others – is bad for recruitment and retention?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, I have said many times in this province, in this Legislature and in the media that I am not a fan of agency nursing. I never have been. I never will be. I am looking forward to the day when we are able to reduce the reliance on agency nursing to prepandemic levels.

Mr. Speaker, there's always been agency nursing in this province, for decades. There was agency nursing in the region represented by the Leader of the Opposition when he was CEO of Lab-Grenfell. We know that agency nursing is needed and it provides a valuable service, but the number of agency nurses we have in this province, it is too many.

We want to recruit; we want to retain. We are putting incentives in place to do that; we are putting retention initiatives in place to do that. I am looking forward to a further reduction in agency nursing.

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

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

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

I got a simple question – the minister can get up and say all this stuff: When is that day coming, Minister? When can the public expect this issue will be no more?

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

**B. PETTEN:** It's a simple question: When can you tell us that's going to happen? Words got to matter, Speaker.

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Words do matter, Mr. Speaker. Words from the premier of Nova Scotia and the minister of Health in Nova Scotia who also have agency nursing; the premier of Ontario, the minister of Health in Ontario who also have agency nursing.

Every province in Canada has agency nursing, Mr. Speaker. It is not isolated to this province, as the Member would have people think.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, it is a problem across the country. There is a shortage –

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

**SPEAKER:** Are the Members ready?

Minister, you got 20 seconds.

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

Agency nursing is a phenomenon across the country because of a shortage of registered nurses across the country. It is globally challenging to recruit registered nurses, but we are working on it. We have incentives in place, we are putting retention initiatives in place, Mr. Speaker, and we are starting to see headway.

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, while at the doors in Fogo Island - Cape Freels, a senior called me into her home and laid out her bills on the table: \$200 for groceries; \$500 for oil, not a full tank; and almost \$300 in gas receipts in one month alone, all before the latest increase in the carbon tax.

I would ask the Premier: How are you going to address this senior's situation, which is representative of so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

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

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

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

A very important question. This government has been very focused on cost of living. We've put in well over \$500 million – half a

billion dollars – into supporting the people of this province.

That's why we increased, by 15 per cent, the Seniors' Benefit. That's why, in this budget, we have \$10 million for a seniors' wellness plan. I'm sure the Member opposite will be happy to vote for that budget.

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, another man in Fogo Island - Cape Freels said he was forced to drink unfiltered tap water because he can't afford to keep up with the costly Liberal sugar tax. After eight years of Liberal taxes, he cannot afford a soft drink, let alone milk.

Premier, after two years of your sugar tax, which earned more tax revenue than initially forecast, why do you continue to pick the pockets of our residents?

I don't think this one gentleman is one of the ones who the Deputy Premier states appreciate the consumption tax.

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

**S. COADY:** If there is one thing I really dislike, it is people that put words in my mouth. I don't think I said that, Speaker, but I will say this, we have money in this year's budget to support clean drinking water – very, very important.

We ask people to make responsible choices and to lower their consumption of sugar because we know through multiple international and local studies, doctor after doctor after doctor after doctor, all the groups out there, from the dental association, from the heart association, from the cancer association, all say to lower our sugar consumption. That is what we have asked people to do. That's why we've said

there is choice. Please do not drink sugar; please choose an alternate.

Thank you.

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, my understanding is that the Deputy Premier referenced earlier that Newfoundlanders appreciate a consumption tax in an earlier response, but that could be checked.

We also know that there are other options than to tax. We don't know of any other provinces lining up behind us to follow suit, which is enough evidence to look at that maybe it's not where it ought to be.

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, the bodies stored outside the Health Sciences complex are making national headlines with stinging condemnations by seniors and poverty advocates of the failure of the Liberal government.

It has now been two months since the minister apparently learned of the problem. Can we get an update?

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

**S. COADY:** I'm terribly sorry to have to interrupt this line of questioning, but I have to address the preamble. The Member opposite talks about the sugar tax and says no other province has it. I can tell you that 50 countries around the world – 50 countries around the world – have this kind of tax, Speaker.

And the reason why –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

If this continues, I'm going to start naming Members and they'll be losing speaking privileges.

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

**S. COADY:** The Canadian Paediatric Society, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the World Health Organization, the Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, I can keep going on and on.

All we are asking people to do is be responsible to their health, make a better choice than a sugar-sweetened drink, Speaker. We're taking any money that we're collecting – as the Premier said, we wish we didn't collect any money in this – and putting it towards programs to make sure that we're a healthier society.

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Mr. Speaker, I never referenced any other country outside of Canada. I just asked about the other provinces, if any are following suit. I'm not aware of any and I'm just saying you can take a little bit of validation due to that.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**C. PARDY:** The question was, and the serious question would be, Mr. Speaker, the bodies stored outside the Health Sciences complex are making national headlines with stinging condemnation by seniors and poverty advocates of the failure of the Liberal government.

It has now been two months since we had this conversation in the House of Assembly,

since the initial discovery of it, I ask the minister: What is the update?

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

**P. PIKE:** Mr. Speaker, my department (inaudible) is to help the families with funeral costs associated to funerals and, as well, those families that are experiencing low income. The current rates cover the cost of a basic funeral for income support recipients and others who financially qualify.

Last year in 2023, there were 360 funerals funded by our department, with a total cost of \$2,800 per funeral. We are now in the process of reviewing the rates. We're reaching out, as a matter of fact within the next week or so, to funeral home operators so we can discuss with them what they feel are fairly reasonable rates. That's what the Department of CSSD is doing, Mr. Speaker.

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

**P. PIKE:** But there are other departments involved in this as well.

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Clearly, Mr. Speaker, no update on the numbers from the minister, unfortunately.

The Minister of Justice and Public Safety said he didn't "want anyone in this House to mislead what's happening in court here with regard to sexual assault victims." Yet, that is exactly what the Minister of Justice and Public Safety did when he stated that it is impossible for lawyers to retraumatize survivors of sexual assault in a courtroom.

After criticisms from sexual assault survivor groups and public outrage, the minister finally apologized, and he apologized again here earlier in the House.

But I ask the minister: Now that he has apologized for these hurtful and inaccurate statements, does he feel that this is enough, despite calls for his resignation?

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

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

No, of course, a statement by me is not going to be enough to address the issue of intimate partner violence and sexual assault violence and retraumatization of individuals that go through the justice system. Lots of work needs to be done. I, hopefully, can be some small part of that.

I took some time in the last couple of weeks to meet with groups who were advocating for better systems, better supports, better discussion around this very important issue – groups from PANSOW, groups from The Journey Project, End Sexual Violence NL and Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador and they were very good conversations.

Lots of reading material I have been provided with, and I look forward to learning more and doing what I can as minister to help move this issue forward so women are safer in this province and so individuals who have, unfortunately, faced violence and have to go through the justice system have the courage to do it because the justice system is easier on them.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** So, Speaker, the minister references conversations and discussions, but what specific and concrete steps with respect to reforming the criminal justice system for its survivors does he envision?

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I can just come up with a couple of quick examples. I know the Member knows that we've worked with the chief justice of the Provincial Court of Newfoundland and Labrador to institute, train with regard to traumatization for sexual assault victims. I certainly have seen some cases where I believe that training has been helpful and come to fruition.

I've also written the federal minister several weeks ago, before any of this became an issue, Speaker, asking the federal government to look at bail provisions for individuals who are charged with assault of intimate partners. I think that the bail conditions need to be strengthened to ensure that people who have been charged with those incidents are not released unnecessarily to, unfortunately, commit further and worse-off crimes.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Speaker, we know that much damage has been done as a result of this situation that the minister has created.

I ask the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality – she is aware that there's an overwhelming number of sexual assault victims that never report their sexual assault. Minister, are you concerned that the statements made by your Cabinet colleague, Minister Hogan, Minister of Justice and Public Safety, will deter other victims from reporting their abuse?

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member, of course, for her question.

I will say that I have true confidence in my colleague and –

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

**P. PARSONS:** – the compassion that he has shown in the meetings that we've attended together, of course, with stakeholders. I will also say that we're working together with our federal government as well, and we just negotiated a bilateral agreement of \$13.6 million to go to stakeholders to help, of course –

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

**P. PARSONS:** – prevent systemic change and, ultimately, arm our stakeholders with the resources they need.

We're having conversations all the time across government. We're a team and we believe in getting things done the right way and, of course, we always welcome the Members across the way to come and be part of the solutions.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

Speaker, on September 14, 2019, a blog post written by our Premier was uploaded to his personal website where it states: "Home crosses my mind again. It's more than a sense of place, it is a basic human right. In the pursuit of a better life for our children, we all need a place we can call home."

So I ask the Premier: Now that he has the power to make change, will he finally

declare housing a human right here in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Our federal legislation and international law recognize the right to adequate housing as a fundamental human right. We agree with those principles and with those statements.

We're working with our federal partners. We're working with our provincial partners. We're taking action to provide adequate housing for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, especially those who need it, who find themselves in vulnerable positions.

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

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

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

Speaker, some changes were made to the Medical Transportation Assistance Program earlier this year; some of which were useful. However, there are still some gaps. For example, the coverage for amputees who must travel to the Miller Centre is not covered – the only place that some prostheses fittings can be done in this province.

Will the government make the necessary changes so that patients are not left paying out of pocket to go and get their limbs fixed?

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy that the Member opposite recognizes that some of those changes are good.

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

**A. FUREY:** There is always room to improve. If that is truly an issue, I'm happy to address that with the minister to ensure that amputees get the care they need.

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

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

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

Speaker, apologies and words only go so far. Action is needed for changes to happen. We presented actions in our petitions on helping survivors of sexual assault.

I ask the Minister of Justice: What concrete action is he taking to ensure that he never again revictimizes survivors of sexual assault?

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, so I think that was a similar question from the Member for Harbour Main, but I will say that lots of work is being done, including that we've met with the chief justice of the Provincial Court to institute sexual violence training for judges there – new judges as well as old judges. I've written the federal minister with regard to bail conditions for individuals who commit assault against their intimate partners and will continue to work and listen and read and have all kinds of information come forward.

What I'm doing, is doing that work, Speaker. I can say that to the Member for St. John's Centre. It's certainly something that falls within the Department of Justice, work with my Cabinet colleagues and my caucus colleagues to learn as much as we can to bring forward initiatives to ensure that the justice system is easy and accessible for everybody, especially not to retraumatize people who have been through something as serious as intimate partner violence and sexual assault.



Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance, what allocation increase has been made in *Budget 2024* to support the next of kin and family members –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**J. DINN:** – unable to afford funeral services for their loved ones and avoid overcrowding morgues?

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

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

I did listen with interest the day of the budget where the Member opposite called the budget ho-hum.

I can tell you who wouldn't call the budget ho-hum. That would be the thousands of seniors who will benefit from the Seniors' Well-Being Plan.

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

**S. COADY:** I can tell you it will be the thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who will receive benefit under the Poverty Reduction Plan, and it will be the thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – I think it is \$265 million allocated for housing in this province.

This is the first question I've taken today on the budget and I'm glad it was asked.

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

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

**J. DINN:** If I understand it correctly, the minister is saying the Seniors' Well-Being plan is about burying seniors; is that it? Maybe she can answer that one.

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you for the question.

What I did say is that the seniors of this province didn't find this budget ho-hum. I can tell you 50,000 seniors in this province benefit from the Seniors' Benefit, which we have increased by 15 per cent over the last couple of years.

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

**S. COADY:** I can tell you there are thousands of seniors waiting to hear details on the Seniors' Well-Being Plan, Speaker. I can tell you that there is a tremendous amount of investment in this budget – record investments in health, record investments in housing, record investments in infrastructure.

I'm glad the Member opposite is asking questions about them because he wasn't here the day it was presented.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Speaker, the director of communications for seniors, Mohamed Abdallah, said: Like we have stated, building a bigger facility will not fix the problem that is leading to the overflow of bodies, necessitating the use of freezers. It means more money for seniors and families on fixed incomes to help with funeral expenses for their loved one.

I ask the Minister of Finance: What additional funding can these families expect to help their loved ones, and will it be indexed to the cost of living?

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

**P. PIKE:** Again, I would like to say that we are working on a review of the amounts paid for funeral expenses for basic services.

What we have already started is that we were in the process of setting up meetings with funeral home operators. We have reached out to them, and we will be starting our consultations in the very near future. This will enable us to come up with the rate that will be suitable.

We're also looking at other expenses that we also take care of like burial expenses, cost of clothing, cost of cremation and these types of things. So everything is on the table as part of our income support program review.

Thank you.

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

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### Tabling of Documents

**SPEAKER:** I do have a couple.

Pursuant to section 34 of the *Citizens' Representative Act*, I hereby table the Citizens' Representative Annual Digest for 2022-2023.

Secondly, pursuant to paragraph 20(1)(f) and section 51 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity, Administration Act*, I'm pleased to table the House of Assembly Management Commission annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2023. This report includes a summary of the work of

the Commission for the period of April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

Are there any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

### Notices of Motion

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: That notwithstanding Standing Order 63, this House shall not proceed with Private Members' Day on Wednesday, April 17, but shall instead meet at 2 p.m. on that day for Routine Proceedings on the conduct of Government Business.

**SPEAKER:** Are there any further notices of notion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

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

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

Approximately 100,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador live with mental illness. Only about 40 per cent of the people affected by a mental illness and addictions seek help. Seventy per cent of mental illness development occurs during childhood and adolescence and most go undiagnosed. And less than 20 per cent receive appropriate treatment.

Emergency and short-term care isn't enough and it's essential that more long-term treatment options are readily available.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide access to long-term mental health care and ensure continuity of care beginning with psychiatric and neuropsychological assessments being more accessible to the public so they can access proper mental health treatment and supports on a regular and continuous basis.

Again, this is a petition I've offered many times. I've been unable to advocate as much as young Kristi Allan and her advocates are doing on a weekly basis for 176 weeks now – 176 weeks in silent advocacy for better supports for long-term and continuity of care for mental health.

The Association of Psychology in Newfoundland and Labrador, they agree there's good access to quick and early access, but it does not provide intensive, long-term, evidence-based therapies needed by many and typically provided by psychologists. They go on to say that access to ongoing, long-term treatment and specialized services has not improved.

When I look at a report that was done, Embracing Experiences, done by the Canadian Mental Health Association Newfoundland and Labrador, they talked to people with lived experiences. They have concern about access to and the navigation – the navigation through mental health and addiction services. They want continuity of care. They want proactive initiatives rather than reactive. They talk about the difficulty in locating and accessing services. They've even said – this comes from people with lived experiences when they approach this system – I'm not the right kind of crazy. Think about that. I'm not the right kind of crazy to get the help I need. They're lucky to get the service.

So I applaud Kristi Allan and her group out there for what they do –

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

**P. DINN:** – on a weekly basis. This government has to do more.

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

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

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

I'll read the petition.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to amend the *Limitations Act* to remove the limitation periods for civil child abuse where the abuse complained of occurred against a minor (a) within an intimate relationship; (b) within a relationship of dependency; or (c) where the defendant was in a position of trust or authority.

And amend the *Limitations Act* to state limitation periods do not run during any time a defendant: (a) willfully conceals or misleads the claimant about essential elements of the claim – i.e. the fact that an injury, loss or damage has occurred, that it was caused by or contributed by an act or omission, or that the act or omission was that of the defendant; or (b) willfully misleads the claimant as to the appropriateness of a proceeding as a means of remedying the injury, loss or damage.

Mr. Speaker, I stand again on this petition, I have on several occasions. I mentioned it several times to the minister and the minister said that it's before the courts. I understand that it is before courts, but let's just take it out of the courts. The government can take it out of the court and say we're going to go ahead and we're going to amend the legislation. It can be done. I understand it's complicated. I understand it's about money, but we have to look at the abuse that happened.

I told this story; I was the youth counsellor and the young fella did a lot of damage down in Whitbourne and I asked him why. His comment: I want to get out because of the abuse. I know first-hand, from his testimony. That young fella, when he got out, graduated from university, because he got his due; he got his time.

This is what we're dealing with here. We're supposed to protect people. So when a situation arises and comes to our attention, it's our duty to find remedies for it. It is actually our duty. This is something that we all know happened. This is not something, Mr. Speaker, that someone along the lines said this may have happened. We know this happened, and what are we doing? What are we doing as legislators, the 40 of us in this House, what are we doing? I know it's complicated; I understand that. But I know complicated situations can be resolved in this House of Assembly.

So I call upon the government again, for the sake of Jack Whalen and other people that were injured so bad that it is a life-long mental suffering that they have to go through, that we do something. I urge the government because I know. I seen that young fella; I heard his stories. And what are we doing? Sitting back and saying we have to let it go through the courts. Let's take it out of the courts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

St. Shott's road, on the Southern Avalon, is in need of major repair. These roads are in deplorable conditions, to the point that it is a safety issue. This road is relied on by residents and visitors on a daily basis. With

a World Heritage UNESCO site in the area, this has increased the volume of traffic in the region.

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly to upgrade this piece of infrastructure for the safety of the residents and visitors to allow a safer commute on this roadway.

Speaker, I've certainly got up and spoke on the condition of the roads before in Budget Speech, probably. But this stretch of road goes from St. Shott's to Peter's River is deplorable – absolutely deplorable.

Highway maintenance crews are doing the best they can to put band-aids on it in order for people to be able to not blow out tires. I spoke to a gentleman, only a month ago – maybe 1½ months ago – that there was a person that came in there on vacation and had three blowouts on one vehicle.

So, you know, it's not acceptable. This road is 37 to 38 years old. It needs to be replaced and we need to get people out to look at it. It keeps the Irish Loop connected. I know on the other side that they have some good stretches of pavement, but we need some in this area. In the summertime, very soon, in June, you'll see the tourists go up to St. Vincent's for the whale watching, right on the roads and there's a big crowd that goes there. That'll be the time you see a lot of complaints from people who say I'm never going up that way again, to go around the loop.

We need to have this stretch of road looked at. There are so many dips and holes in the pavement it's unbelievable. You try travelling that on a foggy night and not knowing if you have to go right or left or if you go right, you hit a pothole if you don't. But this road certainly needs to be looked at and hopefully the minister can have a look at it.

Thank you.

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

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

**P. LANE:** Mount Pearl - Southlands, Mr. Speaker.

I say to my colleague for Ferryland, Witless Bay Line is wicked, too. I was there the other day.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to amend the *Limitations Act* to remove the limitation period for civil child abuse claims where the abuse complained of occurred against a minor (a) within an intimate relationship; (b) within a relationship of dependency; or (c) where the defendant was in a position of trust or authority.

And amend the *Limitations Act* to state limitation periods do not run against any time a defendant (a) willfully conceals or misleads a claimant about the essential elements of the claim; or (b) willfully misleads a claimant as to the appropriateness of a proceeding as a means of remedying the injury, loss or damage.

The above-mentioned legislative changes should be retroactive and applied regardless of the expiry of any previous limitation period.

I've presented this a number of times as well and I just want to join with my colleague, the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, in appealing to the Minister of Justice and the government to do the right thing, to make the necessary changes. My understanding is that we're the only jurisdiction in the country – I stand to be corrected, but I think we're the only jurisdiction in the country that is allowing this to happen. All the other provinces have what is being asked for here. We're the odd province out. I don't understand it.

I can remember many years ago, as I'm sure a lot of people can, watching the Hughes Inquiry and how horrified I'm sure we all were when we watched the Hughes Inquiry and of all the abuse that took place and everything else with Mount Cashel and so on. I can remember the one thing that really stood out to me was the fact that what came up in the inquiry was that people knew. The Department of Justice knew. The chief of police had been told, apparently. The Minister of Justice had been told. People in Justice knew what was going on, but they allowed it to happen anyway. That was the most mind-boggling piece of that for me, was that people in authority knew what was happening but they didn't do anything about it.

Now we have a case of we have information, Mr. Whalen and other people, of physical abuse that took place. The crazy thing about it is in one of those people, in Mr. Whalen's case or others, if it hadn't of just been physical abuse – and it definitely was. Locking someone basically in a cage for 24 hours on end is psychological; it is physical abuse. But if someone had have just done anything at all that was in any way sexual, we wouldn't have to worry about it. We could deal with it.

But someone could literally take a child, they could pound them to a pulp, they could lock them up like an animal in a cage, but because there was no sexual element, we are just going to pretend there's nothing we can do (inaudible) –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. Member's time is up.

Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

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

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board that Bill 44, An Act to Repeal the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission Act, be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and second 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 (Hawley George):** A bill, An Act to Repeal the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission Act. (Bill 44)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Repeal the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 44)

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 4.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board that Bill 67, An Act Respecting Recognition of the 75th Anniversary of Confederation, be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and second 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 Respecting Recognition of the 75th Anniversary of Confederation. (Bill 67)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting Recognition of the 75th Anniversary of Confederation," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 67)

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 5.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister of Education that Bill 69, An Act to Amend the Memorial University Act No. 2, be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is 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 Memorial University Act No. 2. (Bill 69)

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

On motion, a bill "An Act to Amend the Memorial University Act No. 2," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 69)

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

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister of Education that Bill 70, An Act to Repeal the Economic Diversification and Growth Enterprises Act, be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is 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 Repeal the Economic Diversification and Growth Enterprises Act. (Bill 70)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Repeal the Economic Diversification and Growth Enterprises Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 70)

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

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

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

It gives me great pleasure to stand here in the House of Assembly today representing the District of Stephenville - Port au Port, a district that has tremendous opportunities in front of it and one we all look forward to.

But in saying that, my district, in this past two weeks, was hit with a major event in terms of a significant rainfall that caused significant damages, especially in the Cape St. George region where a number of people have seen their properties significantly damaged. In one case, a home was complete destroyed. So while we've got the roads repaired and stuff, I think it's important to make sure now that government is there to assist homeowners with helping them to get their homes back to the way they were.

Many of these homeowners spent a lot of money over the years on their properties

fixing them up. It took years to develop them and to see it simply destroyed in one event causes a lot of harm and a lot of frustration and a lot of expense. So I'm hoping that government will do what it can to make sure that all of those homeowners are helped out and assisted by the government because, essentially, that's what government does, it helps people. That's exactly what all of us are here today, at any given time, it's about people. It's about not being just about politicians; it's about helping the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This budget was a little different, I guess, in terms of delivery. I heard one of the ministers make a comment earlier about not being here. Yeah, we were not here because, quite frankly, there was a significant event that was happening outside of the House of Assembly that involved a significant industry for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm talking about the fishing industry. The industry that has resulted in and results in more than \$1 billion in new monies every single year coming to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We often refer to it as a renewable megaproject. That's exactly what it is, it is a renewable megaproject. The question is not whether it should be \$1 billion. The question is: How do we get it to \$2 billion? How do we maximize out the processing of all of the species that we're eligible to fish and harvest?

To see a repeat of what happened the previous year, happen again this year, is not only frustrating, it's very disappointing – disappointing to harvesters, disappointing to processors, disappointing to plant workers and, I would argue, disappointing to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, all who depend on the fishery or a significant number do.

The disappointing part and the frustrating part because we were told last year by the government opposite that this wouldn't happen again, they had a plan. They were going to deal with this, so we wouldn't have

a repeat of what happened last spring. But as everything else we've seen, when it comes to plans, there are no plans.

That whole consultation process turned out to be nothing more than a photo op. We found ourselves on the other side of this Chamber, outdoors, standing with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, with the 15,000 people that are represented by the fishing industry in Newfoundland and Labrador to make the point.

I bring all this up because the word "fish" – the actual word "fish" in *Budget 2024* – appears five times in the Budget Speech – five times. That's exactly how many times the word "fish" is mentioned in the Budget Speech; an industry that brings over \$1 billion in new revenue every single year.

So what we should be talking about is: Where's the plan? Where are the investments to grow this fishing industry, to double it or to triple its value? I didn't see that in the Budget Speech. I had not seen that in the budget.

There was a line, actually, in the minister's written Budget Speech that she did not read, which says: "To further grow our seafood industry, we are providing \$3 million to the Association of Seafood Producers for increased marketing of the seafood sector." Now, I don't know if by not reading that was the minister signalling that this money will not be provided or was she simply embarrassed to do it at the time?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Good try.

**T. WAKEHAM:** But that line was not said in the Budget Speech. It's in the speech but it was not read so I don't know why it wasn't read.

Why is there no budget –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!



**T. WAKEHAM:** Why is there no budget messaging or effort to drive joint fisheries management? That's not mentioned in the budget. If we can have an accord for our offshore oil, why can't we have an accord for the fishery off our shore?

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** That was a clear recommendation in the Blackwood report and other reports, and a policy, of course, that this House of Assembly affirmed other times under most previous premiers, but no word of it, not a word; not a word about it in the Budget Speech.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**T. WAKEHAM:** At the same time, as our province is recognizing 75 years of Confederation, the federal government continues to tell people what their quotas are, what the size of their boats are and the type of gear they could use.

It is time we took back our fishery and did an accord for our fishery. That is what we're looking for. We want to see an accord for our fishery. Again, we want to make sure that this House of Assembly supports a joint fisheries management, supports an accord for our fishery and supports in the same way that we have an Atlantic Accord for our oil and gas.

That's some of the things that we are talking about in our fishery, but the bottom line in all of this is the fishery is the backbone of Newfoundland and Labrador and has been for many, many years. It deserves the full attention of its own minister and that's exactly what we're going to do when we form government.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, support for seniors. Caring for seniors is a moral

obligation that a government bears on behalf of the society those seniors spent a lifetime building. Advancing age leaves people vulnerable. Abandoning seniors in their vulnerable years is morally apprehensible.

The 2021 red book said, and I quote: "Our Government understands the struggles faced by our seniors" and will "ensure it provides vital support to seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador."

It said: "Under the leadership of Premier Furey, we will build on existing efforts made by your Liberal Government, such as the creation of the provincial Seniors' Advocate, to make life easier for seniors in our Province."

That was the promise; that was the obligation. So when we look around, how have seniors made out in the last four years since that Budget Speech?

All we have to do is look around us and realize that this government has failed our seniors. The Seniors' Advocate presented the report, most of the report wasn't listened to. It wasn't acted upon. We have thousands in poverty.

The Seniors' Advocate's report found a third – a third – of seniors can't afford to make ends meet. Two-thirds of those seniors skip meals and can't afford prescribed diets, medicine and medical devices. Many live on – quote – toast and tea, to use their advocate's own words and many split their medicines, compromising their own health.

Seniors' benefits under this government have become impoverished. They're worse off than when the Liberals came to power. The government has no plan to deal with it.

Now, the budget document refers to a plan, a seniors' plan, but in the Health Accord, the 2022 Health Accord, it said our seniors are among the most frail in the country. The Accord said: They need a program

specifically designed to address their needs including care, recreation and social connection so they are stronger, more healthy and more independent.

Recommendation 8.1 of the Health Accord demanded that this government: "Develop and implement a formal Provincial Frail Elderly Program to address the critical need of our population."

So I ask: Where is the program? We talk about a plan in the Budget Speech, but we've all heard about lots of plans. What I want to know is: Where is the program? Has it been written? Is there a document that talks about this? That's what we need to be focused on. It's one thing to stand up and talk about what we're going to do, it's another thing to do it and, unfortunately, this government just hasn't done it. They have failed to do it.

The poverty plan that they announced and released last year claiming to be a poverty reduction plan was only a paltry plan. There was little to it and although it mentioned seniors, it had nothing announced in it to help them at the time.

The November news release on the plan stated: "A targeted poverty reduction plan for seniors will be released in the coming months ... and it is anticipated that further measures to help seniors manage the higher cost of living will soon be released." That's it, stay tuned. After four years in office, wait longer.

So, again, this budget is another missed opportunity to address that negligence. Some funding is allocated, we acknowledge that. Something is coming, but it will come four years too late for many seniors who need the help.

We talked about and we imagined that the Seniors' Benefit will finally be indexed, as the Seniors' Advocate has recommended, but look at how late this has come. So much ground has been lost to inflation and since the benefit was implemented that indexing

at this level will probably only leave seniors struggling.

Here's the irony. We brought a resolution to the House last year calling for indexing of the Seniors' Benefit. We actually brought the resolution to the House calling for the indexing of the Seniors' Benefit, but the Liberals opposite voted against this. They voted against it. It wasn't even binding; it was a resolution. Yet, the Liberals wouldn't recognize the importance of doing this and voted against it. That shows just how low seniors rank in priority with this government.

I think it's time that we take action, that we take further action. All you have to do is look at the face of a senior when they go to the grocery store or a supermarket and the sticker shock that comes from having to see what the cost of food is and how much they have to pay at the grocery store. Watch them at the checkout putting food back in the cart because they're over their budget, they're over the dollars that they have in their pocket to be able to pay for it.

These are real people, real seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador, who are suffering and can't afford because of the high cost of goods and services in our province. That needs to be addressed. We need to be taking action on all of those.

Again, as a party, we will turn around and not only index the Seniors' Benefit, we will continue to raise the Seniors' Benefit.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** We will review all support programs to improve how they're delivered and stuff. We will review every fee and tax that we charge to make sure and eliminate those that are hurting people. Taking and making the social determinants of health a priority is something that we will certainly do. We will be accountable, attentive, engaging, adaptable and, above all, we will listen. We will listen to the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador who are telling

us that they need government's help. That's what we would do.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, a poverty reduction strategy is something that we've talked a lot about in this House of Assembly. We all know – and I'll go back in history – that when the PC government came to power in 2003, Newfoundland and Labrador led the country in child poverty. That was the legacy of 14 years of previous Liberal governments. The PC government back then announced the bold strategy to move from the worst to the best in the country in addressing child poverty and to do so within a decade.

The PC's Poverty Reduction Strategy was a comprehensive, cross-departmental, collaborative, flexible, multi-faceted and very well-invested strategy to address poverty in all its many forms. It was not a cobbled-together list of things the government was already doing. It was targeted measures, focused on delivering the greatest results and, most importantly, it was focused on giving people the means of escaping the grip of poverty and achieving a measure of self-reliance, freedom and independence.

National anti-poverty leaders called this the model for the entire country. A decade later, in 2015, the province reported the lowest child poverty rate in the country on objective measures. The plan succeeded in delivering for the people in need.

Where's the proof? The proof is with Statistics Canada information. It confirmed that Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest level of poverty in Canada – the lowest level of poverty in Canada. In fact, there were almost 38,000 fewer people living in poverty in this province in 2015 than there were in 2003. The percentage of our population receiving income support at 6.4 per cent was the lowest ever recorded in this province.

But along came 2015 and that was the year the government changed and the Liberals came into office and whether out of spite or whatever, the Liberals cancelled the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Unfortunately, they replaced it with nothing. After nine years of Liberal government, we are no longer Canada's leader in addressing child poverty. Children in this province are worse off than when the Liberals came to power.

All these years later, there is still no Poverty Reduction Strategy. For four years, this current Premier has failed to produce one, despite his promise. Again, as I said before, in November of last year, there was a brief, cobbled together and it was released, barely a page long. It was full of holes; nothing for seniors; nothing for persons with disabilities; nothing for Indigenous, Northern or remote communities; nothing related to health care needs in education; nothing that pulled together community groups and changed lives through targeted measures, tailored to do the most good. These were mostly existing initiatives Scotch-taped together, with some quotes tacked on. This was not a model for anyone in the country to look to or be excited about; this was nothing but a camouflage for inaction.

It took us 10 years to build it so we were the lowest in the country; 10 years to destroy. It took a decade for the PC strategy to change lives and achieve its bold objectives. Because, addressing poverty, takes time. In the Liberal decade, without a strategy, those gains have gradually been lost. We are no longer a model for anyone. We are the cautionary tale. We are the scary photo and the cigarette pack, the sad result of bad decisions.

There is no one to blame for this, other than Liberal's bad decisions, but the Liberals themselves. This was their choice, deliberately made, deliberately continued on their watch. They own the consequences of those decisions. You would think *Budget 2024* would be better but after a decade of doing the wrong thing and seeing the

consequences that the Liberals would be ready in this budget to do the right thing, especially since they promised to, back in 2021, in their red book; but, no, in this year's budget, the Liberals have simply added up the normal social spending and pretended it's a comprehensive strategy. It is not. There is no planning, no collaboration, no targeting and no accountability. It's just more words on the page.

Instead of shifting people out of poverty, this government has overseen an increase in the ranks of the poor. The unaddressed affordability crisis is leaving more people unable to make ends meet. Food banks have never been busier. People go to food banks because they are desperate. Lineups at food banks remind people of the Dirty '30s, and all of us in this House of Assembly have heard people having to go to food banks that never went to food banks before, and it continues to happen.

So after much pressure on March 15, 2022, the Premier and Finance Minister announced a five-point plan, saying this was the solution to people's financial crisis. It was so ridiculous; it was insulting – a mere \$22.2 million, including such things as a rebate on costly electric vehicles, as if struggling families could afford a Tesla; and a rebate on home renovations, as if struggling families could afford to renovate.

There were minor increases in the Income Supplement and Seniors' Benefit and an extra Income Support cheque. The minister called this enough, but we continued, on this side of the House, to press for real action on affordability and real relief.

A month later, on April 7, 2022, the minister was shamed into announcing some additional relief, but offsetting those measures with the increased carbon tax and the provincial sugar tax. Again, we continued to press on this side of the House for real action on affordability and real relief.

On May 26, 2022, the minister introduced two other measures we had been calling for: relief on gas tax, though months after it was needed, and a one-time payment on furnace oil. But there was still no action to halt the sugar tax or tuition hikes and no effort, at the time, to get Ottawa to back off the carbon tax.

As a matter of fact, we know the history of carbon tax here in our province in terms of it being introduced, being passed, voted and supported and voted and increased. Again, we continued to press and ask for real action on affordability and relief.

October 5, 2022, the day the House opened for Throne Speech, the Premier and the minister announced one-time relief cheques we had suggested. The relief cheques were not targeted to the poorest families, though, but were spread out, of course, to everyone who made \$100,000 or less.

Had we not continued to press for more, the government would have been content to do nothing, or next to nothing. Little more than electric vehicle rebates and home renovation subsidies, showing just how people could not afford to take advantage of those measures.

When 2023 came, the government's pandemic help ended, even as the affordability crisis worsened. Now 2024 is here and as financial analyst Larry Short pointed out, there is nothing really in the way of relief for people hurt by the affordability crisis which is still crushing people.

He said on *The Signal*, March 22 – quote – there is not anything in there specific to the cost of living. It's true; taxes are rising, inflation remains 50 per cent above the target rate of 2 per cent, sticker shock at the grocery store continues to leave people underfed and insolvencies are rising, but relief is lacking.

Those are comments made by a financial analyst, so again, what could or should the government have done? They have taken no action to axe the sugar tax. We continue to call for it. When you talk to people, whether it was the people in the District of Fogo Island - Cape Freels when we met them in the convenience store who talked to us about sugar tax – we didn't need to talk to anybody about sugar tax; they keep talking to us about it.

I have cited on numerous occasions the examples of people here paying \$11 in sugar tax for the purchase of a \$4 can of powder. Those are the kinds of taxes that are being applied. It all depends on how many litres it makes. How is that helping anyone? How is that helping them to get away from drinking sugary drinks?

This same lady walked into the store while I was there and bought two, two litres of milk. It cost her \$12. It was \$6 for a two litre of milk, and I asked her: How long will that do you? She said: Two days and I'll be back again to buy another two, two litres.

Six dollars a two litre, that is a significant cost for young families trying to make better choices. So again, that's where we need to be putting our efforts, not in taxation or trying to tax people into making better choices, but into finding ways to help them make better choices – not through taxation but through education.

Again, the red tape reduction – we've all talked about the amount of red tape and, as we know, our province certainly leads the country, or one of the worst, in terms of red tape reduction. Those are statistics. Those are not my numbers. But what was the answer in the 2024 budget to red tape?

We are going to hire more people to help you navigate through red tape. We're not going to reduce red tape; we're going to hire people to navigate to help you through the red tape. That's not what we need. What we need is a reduction in red tape.

We need a reduction in the length of time it takes for businesses to get open, for people to get access to their Crown land, for people to access other services. That's what we need to be finding. We need to be investigating how do we reduce the length of time it's going to take, that's what we need to be doing. We need to be reviewing our income support programs to make sure that they are doing what they were meant to do. Are they continuing to provide the value to people because it's meant to help support people? We need to be doing reviews and all that.

Again, where's the poverty reduction strategy? I'm not so sure that we have one. I still haven't seen a poverty reduction strategy. Instead of leading the country, as we once did, in addressing child poverty, now we have one in four children living in poverty and food insecurity with many going to school hungry. Food bank usage, as I said, is way up and some sites even closed. They couldn't keep up with the demand. They didn't have enough to hand out to people. Food Banks Canada actually ranked this province with a D minus. Memorial University's food bank was overwhelmed. Imagine, students going to MUN, going to university, who can't afford to eat, having to use the food to try and help them get through their programs.

The cost of living in this province rose at a higher rate than the national average, leaving people to fall further behind; 77 per cent of people now identify as living cheque to cheque and seniors, of course, are being forced out of retirement to make ends meet.

Grocery inflation, of course, we've all seen that, has put healthy food out of reach for many. I just talked about the example of the 2 litres of milk. The cost-of-living expenses for Newfoundland and Labrador homeowners have increased 6.9 per cent and for renters it's actually gone up by 11.3 per cent. People in this province are now paying 30 per cent of their income on housing with little left for food. Food prices

increase, if we look at Statistics Canada information and the data they've published, they're quite shocking.

For example, I won't read through all of them, but ground beef per kilogram in 2017 was \$7.79; in 2022, it was \$10.28; December 2023, \$12.85 – a huge increase. A dozen eggs: \$3.49 in December of 2017; \$4.79 in December of 2022; and in December of 2023, according to Stats Canada, \$5.12. A dozen eggs will now cost you \$5.12. Infant formula: 2017, \$24.95; in 2022, \$36.45; December of 2023, \$41.67 and we wonder why people are struggling and hurting. One again that we all use, different types and I don't know what type people use and what brands they do this on, but laundry detergent is listed here: a 4.43 litre of laundry detergent, \$8.11 in 2017; \$15.65 in 2022; and \$16.14 now in 2023.

So when we talk about costs and doing reviews of our programs and services, we have to do those thorough reviews. We have to be committed to digging in and doing the homework and making sure that it's not simply about just building on, we need to do those reviews and that's what we're committed to on this side of the House.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** The report that was done showed that food insecurity was the lowest in Quebec at 14 per cent and guess who was the highest? Newfoundland and Labrador at 23 per cent, the highest in food insecurity.

The report said Newfoundland and Labrador was among the provinces to experience the greatest increase in food insecurity between 2019 and 2022, ranging from an increase of three to four percentage points. The report also found that 40 per cent of families in this province, where the major income earner has a disability, experience food insecurity. So, again, the question becomes: Is the government comfortable that so many

persons with disabilities are being left insecure?

The report also found in this province, if the major income earner in the family is female, that family is significantly more likely to be food insecure: 26.7 per cent if female; 19.7 per cent if male. Again, I ask: Is the government comfortable that so many female breadwinners in this province and the families that depend on them are food insecure?

The report also showed that in this province, 19.2 per cent of families above the poverty line are food insecure. That talks about the high food prices and the high taxes in this province making it difficult for people to feed themselves. So, again, the government has choices here: it can reduce taxation, it can eliminate the sugar tax, for example, and put more money back in people's pockets. The government needs to bring in a real poverty reduction strategy to address this food insecurity.

So, again, the government doesn't have a poverty reduction strategy. It appears to have what some would call a poverty production strategy. You've created the perfect conditions for people to get poorer and poorer. And even so, this government, like the ostrich who puts its head in the sand, continues to hide from reality and rhyme off cherry-picking statistics to make it seem that things are just hunky-dory here. They've cited statistics that show inflation is less of a problem here than some other provinces, ignoring the reality that people are living on a daily basis. They forget the glaring stats on suffering from insolvencies, to impoverishment, to child and senior hunger.

Of course, in some places, they ignore their own Health Accord, quoted from page 81 of the Health Accord report it says: "Children who experience poverty have an increased likelihood of chronic illnesses and a shortened life expectancy. Poverty creates and widens achievement gaps. Starting in

infancy, gaps are evident in key aspects of learning, knowledge, and socio-emotional development.” So those are some of the reasons.

It goes on to say, again, in the Health Accord: “Children living in poverty lag behind their peers at kindergarten entry and ultimately are more likely to drop out of school or fail to obtain post-secondary education.

“Poverty leads to poor physical, emotional, and behavioural health. Children living in poverty are more likely to experience food insecurity and are less likely to receive preventative medical and dental care. Children living in poverty are more likely to live in neighbourhoods with concentrated poverty, which is associated with numerous social ills such as academic underachievement; more social and behavioural problems; worse health and physical outcomes; exposure to environmental toxins; and other physical hazards, including crime and violence.

“We also note the reality of intergenerational poverty, that is, poverty transmitted from one generation to another, with children from families living in poverty more likely to become adults themselves living in poverty. The consequences of intergenerational poverty include food insecurity, birth and developmental issues, unsafe living conditions, and increased risk of violence, incarceration, and victimization. Every consequence of growing up in poverty acts as another barrier for someone to rise above the poverty line.”

“This province has a higher percentage of families and unattached individuals with after-tax income less than \$40,000 compared to Canada as a whole ....”

Those are the statements from the Health Accord and clearly speak the need for a poverty reduction strategy. To think, at one point, 10 years ago, we were the best in the country – we were the best in the country.

For whatever reason, that Poverty Reduction Strategy that was working was abandoned and it has not been replaced; 10 years later and it has not been replaced.

I can guarantee you, Speaker, that on this side of the House, our government, when we form government, will deliver a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy and once again –

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** – make our rate of child poverty the lowest in the country. That is our goal, that is our mission and we intend to make it happen.

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

**AN HON. MEMBER:** We were there.

**T. WAKEHAM:** We were there, exactly.

Persons with disabilities: Let’s consider the situation of persons with disabilities. Are you better off now than you were four years ago or nine years ago? Again, what we do is we look back at some of the strategies and the inclusiveness and delivered results. Again, under the PC Poverty Reduction Strategy spanning the decade up to 2015, investments focused on the needs and opportunities of persons with disabilities.

The progress report of 2014 highlighted in that year over \$170 million was being invested to support the strategy, the highest annual investment ever. Over \$1 billion in new funding had been budgeted through the strategy since its launch in 2006 to implement a broad range of initiatives. Progress included a 50 per cent – 50 per cent – drop in the number of persons living with low incomes from 2003 to 2011, according to Statistics Canada low income cut-offs; median family income actually increased by 26 per cent and in 2013, only about 7 per cent, as I said earlier, of the province received income support. Again,

the lowest level ever recorded and a trend that was expected to continue.

The 2014 progress report stated the following: "... priority areas include removing remaining financial disincentives to employment, particularly those for persons with disabilities, continuing to increase supports for early learning, child care and vulnerable youth, and addressing the impact of increasing costs of necessities, such as housing, food and heating, on people with low incomes."

The news release on the report – we don't know the current status of these, but there were people who were identified and examples of people who were helping during the progress report, and I'll just read out a couple of them.

Bradley is deaf and has cerebral palsy and is proud to have been raised as culturally deaf. During his Independent Living Internship, a program provided by the Independent Living Resource Centre and funded through the Poverty Reduction Strategy that we used to have, he was responsible for creating alternative formats of documents for individuals who read in Braille and large print. He also coordinated volunteers to create podcast files. The Independent Living Internship provides employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in different regions of the province and has a positive impact on Bradley.

Bradley is now employed as a sales associate in an electronics department at a local retailer where he is responsible for customer sales and services.

So during its tenure, the PC government also conducted public consultations in collaborations with key groups in 2010 to produce the Provincial Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador, entitled: Access. Inclusion. Equality.

Before I leave talking about the hard of hearing people who are deaf in our province, I recently met with the association and one of the key things that was brought up to me, the things that we do not think about ourselves, is access to health care.

They gave an example of a gentleman who was deaf, who needed to go to the emerge department at the Health Sciences Centre and nobody could understand him, because nobody there understood sign language and, obviously, this gentleman couldn't speak. If it wasn't for a family member coming in with him, he would have been left abandoned.

I think there's a real opportunity here – and I bring it up simply because we have done a good job over the years in terms of language at our tertiary care centre and making interpreters available for different languages. I would suggest that perhaps one of the things that ought to be looked at is somebody available to interpret sign language, because that's an important element (inaudible).

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** So again, when we continue on and talk about the challenges of the lack of a poverty reduction strategy, again, the 2021 red book stated, "All people have the right to access services and participate fully in their communities without barriers. The Liberal Government affirms an ongoing commitment and partnership with the Provincial Advisory Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities NL. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure equitable access to services and opportunities for people with disabilities."

But are persons with disabilities really better off under this Liberal government? As a matter of fact, the coalition refused to celebrate with the Premier over treatment. In November of 2023, the Coalition of



Persons with Disabilities NL dropped out of the Premier's international day celebration because of the government's regressive actions on the *Buildings Accessibility Act* on compliance with accessibility standards. The government ignored the recommendations of an advisory board.

The government has also removed some disabilities from protection. Advocates have used terms such as backwards, outdated, and an illusion of elusion to describe the changes. This is the opposite of what the Premier had promised: equitable partnership and communities without barriers. It is the opposite of what the Premier owes the persons with disabilities in this province.

Lip service and photo ops do not lead to inclusion. Only targeted, tangible investments, developed in collaboration with persons with disabilities lead to real change, and that's why our approach will be different. Our poverty reduction strategy will fully include persons with disabilities in its development, implementation, monitoring and improvements and we will fully engage with the community through a meaningful advisory committee that actually listens and acts on what we are told.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Let's consider the plight of caregivers of children with medically complex needs. In October, the Citizens' Representative presented a report to this House saying caregivers of medically complex children are at the breaking point financially and emotionally and under supported by their government.

The report made 12 recommendations to do something urgently about that. There's a whole list of them that we can talk about here. It includes developing a policy for acute care admissions of medically complex children; that home support workers be introduced to acute care admissions to provide optimal support for the family;

respite care should be based on the needs of the child and not family income; engage with post-secondary institutions on the potential to review and develop curriculum to professionalize respite work.

Engage with Memorial University on the existence and/or potential development of a co-operative program that would provide a work term for students to work with families; and to report to OCR semi-annually on its study of the upcoming residential support needs for medically complex children and adults, together with results on cross-jurisdictional research on innovative models that exist elsewhere.

It goes on to talk about conduct consultations with those affected by rare disorders to work toward better standardization of eligibility criteria; facilitate the creation of a ministerial advisory committee with significant parental/caregiver representation to establish clearer lines of communication between parents, caregivers and policy-makers.

Undertake a meaningful study and develop an action plan on programming options for medically complex adults and increase support for the community sector to develop and deliver enhanced programming. Likewise, the provincial government should look favourably on any other existing or emerging community-based or business organizations that can fill these existing gaps in services to medically complex children and adults.

Resources need to be found and allocated to increase the availability for therapeutic counselling and referral options for parents and family caregivers who are facing burnout; to augment Recommendation 8, HCS should develop a central Internet hub for information for this subset of our population. A provincial care and special needs support system where all resources and links for all associations and organizations that offer programs and

supports for medically complex children, their parents and caregivers, can be found.

Work to draft and sponsor caregiver recognition act legislation that raises awareness and recognition of caregivers and to support them in their role. We regard Quebec's Act to Recognize and Support Caregivers as the current national benchmark legislation.

So, again, I would like to ask where, in this budget, is their action on these 12 recommendations in recognition of the terrible plight of these families? I can speak personally of a situation that I had with a gentleman recently. A single parent and his son is autistic, non-verbal, came into my office one day. This gentleman has cancer, but he wasn't worried about his cancer. He was worried about who's going to care for my son when I die.

And that was a legitimate question he had and, quite frankly, I didn't have an answer for him. But that's a situation that many people find themselves in. People are getting older. They have children who are getting older. They need our help, and we need to find a way to make sure that we follow up on the recommendations that are outlined in this report.

Again, I can tell you that we will commit to implementing all 12 of those recommendations.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Housing – we can talk housing. If you were to have slept for the last nine years and all of a sudden woke in our province, you'd be shocked at what you see when it comes to the housing situation in our province. Thousands are on the wait-list for homes. People who want to buy homes can't afford to. People who want to actually get in somewhere, the vacancy rates are impossibly low.

People are couch surfing for lack of a place to stay. Our shelters are full. We have homeless people living in tents in the fall and winter cold. We've seen them down by Colonial Building and other places. And, again, they were across the street here until they moved. Grassy fields are all we see at the sites where the government boasts of constructing new social housing.

There was a period of time when the government didn't exactly know how many units they had created or how many new housing units had been started. Current units owned by the Housing Corporation have sat vacant and unrepaired, because government didn't get around to fixing them, despite the severe housing shortage. Vulnerable people are living in unsafe dwellings, because the alternative was a tent and post-secondary students are being told to give up their studies and go home because there's nowhere for them to live.

What is government's response to this? The government's response has been to say that we need to move the Housing Corporation into core government. At a time when the entire Housing Corporation ought to be focused on building social housing for people in need after last year's fiasco –

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** – under this (inaudible) direction, it is now decided to focus instead on – quote – rebranding within core government, under a strange Cabinet directive, that has absolutely nothing to do with rebuilding and renovating housing. I don't know whose bright idea it was to cause such chaos at a time when doubling down on meeting the needs of people was supposed to be a higher priority than building a new minister and giving him a portfolio.

It is the same with school boards, the same with health boards and now the same with housing. At a very time that these professionals need to have no other interest

in the world, but meeting unmet needs, they are diverted into changing letterhead and logos, signs on buildings and brands on vehicles.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Again, how much is this transition to core government going to cost, not just in terms of money, but also in terms of lost focus and wasted time? Again, this wasn't even a well-planned move. CUPE President Sherry Hillier, who represents workers at NL Housing said she was shocked to learn of major changes for the agency minutes before they were announced in the budget. She said: Everyone is shocked because we're all hearing it for the first time, adding she got a call about the move 15 minutes beforehand. Some of the other unions are saying: Like you didn't know? And we were: No, we didn't know. Even the people who work at the Housing Corporation had no idea that this was about to happen – none.

The Budget Speech contained a whole lot of new numbers for social housing, which, again, mixes units and rooms and beds into one confusing mishmash that leaves no one better informed. In last year's fiasco, many hundreds of new units turned out to be a grand total of 11 – we all remember that – and celebrated new homes, turned out to be grassy fields like the one across the street where homeless people were camped out.

How can anyone trust the latest housing information in the budget? How many of the new housing initiatives announced in the budget are things already announced, continued over some past years, and how much is actually new money on top of that annualized funding? Somebody told me that this was a great budget for recycling because that's exactly what they have done. They have recycled announcement after announcement after announcement.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** What about Labrador? How much new money is being invested this year to create urgently needed homes in Labrador where homeless leads people particularly vulnerable to bad outcomes because of the climate?

What about building capacity? Has the government estimated the capacity of the construction industry to build all the public and private housing units the market needs? What could bottlenecks in the workforce mean for getting new housing available before the normal construction season ends?

What about coordination with municipalities?

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** We announces all of these new homes for St. John's, only to find out St. John's turned them down, turned down development – no infrastructure. Unable, of course, to meet the needs, the government entered into a contract totalling \$6.9 million a year for three years to house the homeless at the Comfort Inn. Again, the most effective use of public money? I'm not to 100 per cent sure about that.

What about the victims of violence? Is there adequate funding in this year's budget to meet the needs of women and children needing to access transitional shelters and post-shelter accommodations when they are escaping violence at home? When people cannot find safe and secure places to turn to, one of the terrible consequences is that women and children living in violence may opt to stay in harm's way for lack of a place to go.

We not only need temporary shelters that serve as places of refuge, but targeted strategies to find permanent accommodations for those escaping violence and unhealthy living conditions. Are you placing a gender and violence prevention lens on the housing crisis and

having constructive conversations with experts about the extent of the needs and the best way to do it?

The lack of housing, of course, also affects released inmates who find themselves returning right back to the circumstances that led them into addictions and crime. They need alternatives so they can break the cycle. Is the government working with groups like the John Howard Society and others with a specific mental health addiction and rehabilitation lens so we can help people in need and keep our streets safer? Some dwellings are essentially drug dens where people with addictions and those who supply them are creating unsafe spaces and unsafe neighbourhoods. What resources will you give police who are dealing with the consequences of community drug abuse to protect neighbours from living and raising their children in environments like this?

Renovictions: Last year, the minister pretended renovictions aren't happening, when in fact they are. Is this government ready with a policy that will make it more difficult for landlords to evict their tenants just to seek new tenants who will pay them higher rents? We've actually seen this happen in our health care system when it comes to those travel nurses where people turned around and evicted a long-term tenant so they could turn around and rent the apartment out to the health care authority at twice the cost and at a guaranteed four-year contract.

The government has heard various arguments on rent control. Is the government ready to provide more protection for those who rent and live cheque to cheque? What is the uptake so far on the government's program – which we recommended by the way – to help homeowners add their own individual sub-units like basement apartments and in-law suites that people can live in to address the housing crisis home by home?

Hearing of the federal plan, did the government take the case to Ottawa that rural communities might benefit more from home-by-home apartments than larger apartment complexes?

Seniors' housing: The government promised a Poverty Reduction Plan targeted for seniors sometime soon, which is interesting, coming in the last year of its mandate. Will that plan include measures to help seniors find safe, secure, accessible and affordable places to live?

Persons with disabilities: Will the government's Poverty Reduction Plan, which didn't even mention persons with disabilities, be expanded to address the higher rates of poverty many persons with disabilities face, and will that include help to find affordable and accessible housing?

Post-secondary students are having a terrible time finding places to live, and it's distracting them from their studies. International students, who can still afford to come here, are being advised to take a year off until the housing market improves. Does the government have any concrete plans to address the student housing shortage?

Insolvencies: We have seen the rising statistics on consumer insolvencies in the province, bankruptcies and consumer proposals, and that often means people needing to find places to rent if they have lost their homes. Is the minister confident the rental market can absorb new tenants when the vacancy rate is so low?

According to last year's Economy document, new housing starts were forecast to be 1,412 units in 2023; 2.4 per cent higher than 2022. Did that forecast pan out? No. In fact, housing starts were down to 978 –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How much?

**T. WAKEHAM:** Nine hundred and seventy-eight, a decrease of 29.1 per cent compared.

Is the new forecast realistic? The budget says that housing starts are now forecasted to be 1,300 units in 2024. Is the budget for 2024 realistic or will it also fall beneath expectations?

Again, I say, we can do better, we must do better and we will do better.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** We will take a planned approach to housing. We will forecast the need more accurately through consultations – imagine, consultations – and prepare early to address it so people are not left with nowhere to live. We will not exclude regions outside of metro and we will be sure to include Labrador.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Our plan will be multifaceted to help deliver many kinds of dwellings from homes to apartments to social housing to shelters.

Crime, addictions and mental health care: It is impossible to talk about crime without talking about mental health and addictions. They are intimately connected in this province.

Following several deaths in secure custody on this government's watch, Marlene Jesso was commissioned to investigate the systemic issues that may have led to these tragedies. Her report was eye-opening.

The 2018 Jesso report estimated that 77 to 87 per cent of inmates have either mental health issues, substance abuse issues or both, but she also found that measures to help them were sorely lacking. Six years later, what has changed? Why hasn't the government properly implemented the

recommendations of the Jesso report all these years later?

Recommendation 15 of the Jesso report called on the Justice and Health departments to "implement a comprehensive mental health strategy which includes screening and assessment, management and intervention strategies, communication, and training."

Is the minister telling us he believes this recommendation has now been fully implemented and what Marlene Jesso called for is now fully in place?

The Jesso report's first recommendation six years ago was to proclaim the *Correctional Services Act*. It has still not been proclaimed. When will that be done?

Of course, we've heard about the new penitentiary in another announcement. This had been recommended, of course, in the Jesso report and in 2009, in speaking to the press, a local defence lawyer, Mark Gruchy, had said: "Anyone who goes into Her Majesty's Penitentiary without a mental health problem is going to have one within about two weeks. Because the facility is going to generate mental health problems, and it's going to generate addictions, and it's going to generate crime."

How could this government justify an approach to corrections that is generating more crime?

A great many of the people caught committing crimes these days are also being charged with breaches of release conditions. They have been sent back on the streets without any rehabilitation and are cycling back into the correction system through a revolving door. Shockingly, to get sent back to prison, they are committing crimes that traumatize the community. Police officers are left to pick up the pieces of the government's failure to address the causes of crime in terms of untreated mental illness and untreated addictions.

Again, the 2021 red book had promised a modern correctional centre with construction of a new penitentiary set to start in 2022 and completed by '24-'25. So now, this year's budget will say we're going to now start a penitentiary and I'm not sure when the completion date will be. Again, we've seen a significant delay on the promise of a modern correctional centre.

We recently learned that visitors were prevented from coming into the penitentiary because of potential hazards to their health. That leads people to ask about the health of correctional officers and the inmates who live in this facility.

Recently, a 35-year-old inmate at HMP reportedly died after contracting viral influenza and pneumonia that progressed to a bacterial infection, sepsis. People are shocked that the health of this young man could have been deteriorated so catastrophically while he was in the province's care and some are calling for a public inquiry.

The budget this year contained more promises of help for inmates. After nine years, it's a long time coming. With the long wait-lists for mental health and addictions treatment across our province, we are left wondering if this latest commitment means that all inmates needing mental health and addiction assessment and care will receive that care on a timely basis and benefit from rehabilitation programming prior to their release so they are less likely to find themselves in the revolving door back to prison. We will wait and see.

Every part of our province has seen the impact of rising crime. It was reported in February that – quote – the RCMP is asking the Newfoundland and Labrador government for additional help to bolster its law enforcement efforts in Conception Bay North following a surge last year in crime and mental health related calls. In response, the Justice Minister said the RCMP is

already – quote – very well staffed in the region.

At a meeting of the Joint Council of CBN of February 1, concerned citizens heard RCMP statistics showing calls for police assistance in the regions spiked by nearly 14 per cent in 2023 – from 6,824 to 7,778. For the Bay Roberts RCMP detachment, the number of calls in December was up 36 per cent compared to December 2022. Sam Slade, Carbonear's deputy mayor, described the data as frightful and admitted the region is not quite as safe as it used to be and said he would like to see more officers around.

According to the data, police officers in Conception Bay North are responding to mental health calls on a daily basis, with 43 such occurrences recorded by the Harbour Grace detachment just in October. Council believes this proves the need for a Mobile Crisis Response Team in the region, which pairs mental health care workers with police officers when responding to mental health crises – a model used elsewhere.

The local RCMP said the call volume is being driven by the actions of chronic and prolific offenders, many of whom are trapped in addiction or crime cycles, and they will use violence and intimidation to threaten people into compliance with what they want. That is frightening for everybody in this House.

The budget promises more than \$1 million for Mobile Crisis Response Teams. However, that amount of funding is supposed to cover the regions in and around Sheshatshiu, Stephenville, Twillingate, New World Island, Burin, Clarenville and Conception Bay North – a huge area for \$1 million to address.

The question is: Will the police of Conception Bay North and other regions facing challenges be getting sufficient extra police resources and mental health supports to address the needs urgently raised by the

police, people and councils of these regions, issues they have raised long before the budget was finalized?

Can we get a commitment from this government that crime related to mental health and addictions will be treated as a health issue so police and correctional officers are not left to address the consequences of this government's neglect?

What about retention and recruitment? The budget spoke of the new Adult Mental Health and Addictions centre opening with expanded options for mental health and addictions care, but we only have to look at the province's emergency rooms to know that infrastructure alone doesn't treat patients. It takes health care professionals to do that and the wait-lists for mental health and addictions treatment are very long. When will retention and recruitment measures enable those wait-lists to come down to reasonable numbers so people in crisis can get care instead of a cab ride home?

With new and more dangerous drugs flooding our communities and with other jurisdictions offering shocking lessons about potential consequences, even worse than what we're already seeing, shouldn't this budget have offered a more intense collaborative interagency effort to tackle this drug issue head on, providing the police with all of the resources they need to tackle the sources of these drugs and also providing support and treatment to users and prospective users on the streets, in schools, wherever, and to their loved ones who are caught up in these tragedies? How bad do things have to get before we see this government lead such an effort before more lives are lost?

Again, I say to you, our commitment is we will commit that a mental health and addictions crisis must be treated as a (inaudible).

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** We must find a way to get offenders treated and rehabilitate them before releasing them. We must stop saddling police officers with issues that demand interventions by health professionals and we must instead equip police to go after the drivers of crime with the personnel and resources that they need to take down these trafficking rings.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Health care access: Again, if you were in a coma in 2015 and woke up 10 years later, what a shock you would now have. You would wonder what went off the rails. Even our own current Premier acknowledges – quote – things have gone off the rails. Since he is the conductor of the train, we have to wonder what's going on.

No area of public policy is more important to people than health care access. No area of public policy requires the Premier's oversight more so than the one that requires by far the largest investment of public doctors.

The 2021 red book promised a new approach to health care to provide better outcomes, to increase patient satisfaction rates and to best deliver services to meet the needs of people in communities across the province.

So, what's the reality check? Well, under this government, life expectancy in Newfoundland and Labrador has fallen and is now the worst in Canada in almost every age group. A quarter of our people have no primary care physician. In numerous communities, people have no access to local emergency rooms on weekends. Patients are not satisfied, many are suffering, waiting extensive times for care and paying for care out of their own pockets.

Instead of delivering better health care, this government has delivered a full-blown health crisis and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve better.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** The 2021 red book promised it would be expanding health workforce development by attracting new physicians and other medical professionals to the province. Since then, physicians have left their practices, saying their administrative burdens are unmanageable and they are not receiving proper support from the government.

Nurses are insulted that temporary travel nurses from outside the province are paid more than the nurses who already work here. The government refuses to offer jobs to in-demand medical professionals at the start of their programs of study when they are planning where they will practice and live after graduating.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association says 136,000 people in this province do not have a family doctor; ERs are regularly closed because of a lack of medical professionals; health care in this province is in a crisis and people needing care are suffering. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve better.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Nurse practitioners: The 2021 red book promised to expand health workforce development by – quote – increasing the number of nurse practitioners to provide care in our communities.

Reality check: This Liberal government have refused – refused – to cover the costs of the care that nurse practitioners provide in their clinics, meaning patients needing this primary care at a nurse practitioner's office have to pay out of their own pockets.

By contracts, the family doctors are covered by medicare; however, with the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association saying that 136,000 people in this province do not have a family doctor, many people count on nurse practitioners to provide their primary care. Sadly, because the government forces people to pay for this care, those who cannot afford it must do without it. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve better.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Medical transportation: The 2021 red book said the Liberals will continue to support families who must travel for medical care. We will work to simplify and streamline the application process and we will finance increased support for the Medical Transportation Assistance Program.

Let's do a reality check. Many people needing medical transportation assistance in this province cannot get it and cannot afford their share. No one is suffering more than Labradorians whose flight costs within the province are more expensive than flights to Europe. People are skipping appointments because they cannot afford to get there, and that is placing their health at risk. Our province has a dispersed rural population, so adequate coverage for medical transportation is essential if we are to ensure people get the care they need. They need it.

This government's failures are undermining the health of our people and life expectancy in Newfoundland and Labrador is falling. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve better.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Long-term care: The red book said Newfoundland and Labrador, in 2021, can lead the way nationally in seniors and long-term care delivery and will work with the federal government, tapping into a



recent \$1-billion announcement for provincial long-term care improvements, to create a set of best practices for long-term care in Canada.

The Seniors' Advocate released a report demanding a complete review of long-term care system, saying the stories she was hearing were gut-wrenching, in her own words, with long wait times for admission, some beds sit empty for a lack of available staff. Spouses have been separated. Patients needing long-term care are waiting in acute-care beds, meaning people needing acute care are left to wait.

Another report said unpaid family caregivers are stressed to the breaking point without proper support from the province. When I think and read the news, the budget contained \$2 million in increased funding to the College of the North Atlantic, but then we hear in the news and when you talk about long-term care and the people that work in long-term care, the majority of staff in long-term care are licensed practical nurses.

At the same time as the government says they're providing more money to the College of the North Atlantic, the College of the North Atlantic announces that they're cutting the licensed practical nursing program in many parts of this province.

How can we be cutting a licensed practical nursing program at a time when we can't open long-term care because we don't have the staff?

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** That should not be allowed to happen.

Mental health and addictions, I spoke about earlier. The 2021 red book promised to address mental health and addictions needs saying: The Liberal Government has made enormous strides in delivering much needed mental health services in the province. From

reducing and eliminating wait times for counselling and addictions services to delivery of online care, the Liberal government has shown the ability to be innovative, responsive and adaptive.

That was from 2021. Now, what we find, people needing addictions treatment are literally dying from a lack of options. Protests in 2023 drew attention to the reality the Liberal government is denying. Young people and others needing emergency mental health care have also been turned away in their time of crisis.

Although most people incarcerated for crimes are suffering from mental health and addictions issues, they are not receiving proper treatment in rehab while incarcerated and are being released without proper support. Again, we need action, and we need better outcomes.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Let's look at how badly Labradorians are suffering when it comes to medical transportation and access to health care.

*The Telegram* and the CBC have done some important investigative reporting to show some of what has happened on the ground and how it's impacting people's lives. Here are some of the examples that I have from that.

On January 22, a teenager was run over by a snowmobile in Nain. The accident left her with a broken pelvis and internal bleeding and screaming in pain. Her parents pleaded with doctors and nurses at the community clinic to medevac her for treatment but were told she didn't qualify. When she instead took a scheduled hospital flight to Happy Valley-Goose Bay, they discovered the extent of the damage and immediately flew her to St. John's. Is this acceptable treatment for patients in Labrador?

If Nain does not have the capacity to rule out serious injuries because it lacks an X-ray department, why is a clinic taking a gamble that an injury is minor? Does Nain need better infrastructure? Why are northern and Indigenous Labradorians getting third-rate, third-world treatment instead of care they need?

On January 22, a four-week-old was sick and struggling to breathe. When her family brought her to the hospital in Blanc-Sablon, Quebec, doctors recommended she be medevaced to the Janeway and put her in ICU. Her oxygen levels were falling critically and she continuously stopped breathing. Hospital staff were panicked, the medevac never came and, eventually, she was transported by search and rescue; 22 hours after medevac was first requested and 11 hours after a search and rescue flight was requested. How is this acceptable in 2024?

*The Telegram* interviewed her mom who said she blames this government for her daughter being treated as if she were not sick. She said the doctor told her what she went through was not out of the ordinary and that Labradorians must be prepared to wait. Is this acceptable treatment for the people of Labrador?

As I have said earlier, the life expectancy figures from Statistics Canada are shocking. Even with COVID-related deaths left out of the equation, life expectancy in Newfoundland and Labrador is still lower than the national average, sometimes by a factor of years.

When will this government acknowledge that failing to address the social determinants of health with measures like a true poverty reduction strategy means that people in our province will continue to die younger than people elsewhere in the country?

If you dig into the numbers, you will not find every province seeing the drop in life expectancy that ours is. Based on the

statistics, if you live in Newfoundland and Labrador, you can expect to die younger than people in almost every other province. No matter what age you are right now, in every age category, our life expectancy is not just below the Canadian average, sometimes by nearly three years, but for people of every age group from 23 to 97, people here have the lowest life expectancy of people in any province in Canada. Is the Liberal government concerned? They should be.

You would think with advancing medical care, people would be living longer but, in fact, in most age groups life expectancy is lower now than it was in 2015 when the Liberal government first came to office. That's when it began. They ended the decade-long Poverty Reduction Strategy and started slashing health and other social programs. Again, why doesn't the Liberal government draw a connection between its own policies and the decline in life expectancy of our people? It's not just seniors who are more likely to die younger but young people who live here, too.

Again, it's time for the government to stop applauding itself long enough to recognize this downhill slide that is happening on their watch, and it needs attention. So let's start and pick that up.

Family Care Teams: The budget said there are 19 Family Care Teams at various stages of implementation throughout the province. It says it's adding resources for four more teams this year, as it aims to get to 35. These numbers remind us of the housing numbers when the government was counting numbers before things were actually in place. How many of those 19 teams are currently operational and fully staffed, and in what year does the government plan to have all 35 teams operational so people who need access to primary care can actually get it?

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** In the regions without Family Care Teams, what are people supposed to do in the meantime to access primary care if they don't have a doctor and can't afford nurse practitioners? Again, this Liberal government would rather downplay these facts than meet the need. They have challenged the NLMA on their numbers, showing a quarter of our people do not have access to a family physician. By the government's whitewashed count, how many people in this province currently do not have a primary care provider? That is the question.

The incoming president of the province's Medical Association, Dr. Stephen Major, says he doesn't see anything in the provincial budget that will address the urgent problems facing Newfoundland and Labrador's health care system. He said: We've come to the point that we accept what is really unacceptable, and I don't see anything that's in this budget that really addresses that.

Why is the head of the Medical Association saying to this Liberal government you're ignoring a crisis?

He went on to say: I just think people need to be more like the fisherpersons at the protest last week and say, this is not good enough.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** This is not good enough for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. If the people of the province were to show up at Confederation Building to protest poor access to health care, would the Premier call out the riot squad as he did with fish harvesters, or would he listen?

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** The head of the Nurses' Union said she was disappointed that none of the recommendations it made were in this

year's budget, calling it – quote – a big, missed opportunity.

After the travel nurse contract fiasco, will the government be changing its tact and listening to nurses about the changes in approach that are needed to retain hard-working nurses we currently have?

We've heard the stories of new nursing graduates having trouble finding full-time work in a province that's seriously lacking nurses. Why can't this Liberal government make nursing students full-time job offers at the start of their programs of study?

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** So that they can make advance plans to stay here instead of leaving here.

The budget says: With ambulance integration, the system will evolve beyond transporting patients to hospitals. Once fully implemented, our new system will deliver emergency interventions to the patient, where, and when, they are needed.

With ERs closed and doctors working by video, is the new plan to deny some rural patients' transportation to hospital so they have to make do with whatever care the ambulance professionals can provide from their vehicles in these people's driveways?

One big question is whether ambulances will have a place to bring patients – quote – to. Does the government have a better plan to keep emergency rooms open and staffed so residents and tourists alike have confidence that emergency care is actually available nearby and is there when it is needed?

When will this government, which easily found so many tens of millions of dollars for travel nurses, finally stop nickel-and-diming the nurses and other health professionals we already have so we can retain the people we need to keep facilities open

without crushing them with excessive overtime demands that burn them out?

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** When will the province's new ambulance system be up and running? Will it be thoroughly tested and have a backup plan when it is rolled out in case there are bugs in the system that jeopardize the care of patients in urgent need? The budget says the new system will be technology driven, enabling quicker access to life-saving interventions. But we all know quick access depends on people more than technology.

Health care is about people helping people; we don't have enough of that right now in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have seen how bad policies have tied up good people by delayed access. Is the government investing enough resources in people and doing enough consulting with front-line emergency professionals to ensure the new system is actually better and not worse than what we have in many regions right now?

Again, our approach will be proactive. We will guarantee that every patient, who so chooses, will have access to a primary care provider.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** We will retain health care professionals by compensating them fairly, respecting them as professionals and listening to their concerns and acting accordingly.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** We will ensure that the Medical Transportation Assistance Program is reformed so people needing care outside their areas will get it regardless of means.

So, as I clue up today, I ask this simple question, I ask the people of Newfoundland and Labrador: Are people better off after

nine years of Liberal governance? No, they are not. The evidence is overwhelming.

People's standard and quality of living has deteriorated; affordability is front of mind for thousands of people; from children to seniors, people are going hungry – imagine that – here in Newfoundland and Labrador, people are going hungry. The government's response has been to raise taxes, double down on fees and let the spending power of the Seniors' Benefit and income support programs shrink with inflation. Seniors cannot even afford their prescribed medicine; people cannot get access to a primary care provider. They have to pay to see a nurse practitioner. They cannot get medevac flights and the care they need. People have lost their lives waiting. The government has chased away the doctors, nurses and teachers we need and then spent a fortune trying to replace them, with a lot less would have retained them.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Schools are more violent. Teachers and students are afraid. Teachers are unsupported, burnt out and ready to leave. Opportunities for growth are being lost. Students cannot afford to study here. The government would have no population growth to boast of but for a rapid dictator attacking Ukraine. We welcome those people, but war is not a growth strategy.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** The government has whitewashed its records so badly that no one trusts anything they say. Hundreds of new housing starts turned out to be a 11; homeless people were shuffled away from Confederation Building to avoid shaming the Premier; labour relations and our fisheries are in ruins. The Premier has pulled police away from dealing with rising crime to protect from protestors. Police feel unsupported as crime rises; addictions care is all but absent; and additional resources are being withheld when they are needed.

Women are still fighting to be paid equitably for doing equal work. They are fighting with the government opposite which is resisting equality.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Indigenous communities feel ignored and sidelined. The government is taking people to court to seize the land their homes have been built on for generations.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** But there's plenty of money going everywhere. Government is spending untold millions on sole-source contracts that benefit their friends at taxpayers' expense.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Meanwhile, key roads are not fit to drive on and thousands of people have to boil the water they drink. They can't drink soda because there's now a Liberal tax on that, just as there's a Liberal tax on carbon, supported and endorsed and rammed through this House by the Premier opposite and his Liberals –

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** – against the protest of all of our caucus and the people of the province. Because all Liberals are cut from the same cloth, no matter how whitewashed the signs may be and how small the world Liberal might be, people can't take much more of this. If they vote Liberal in by-elections, it's because they're scared of reprisal.

Do we have confidence enough to vote for this budget? The government has picked some of the things we've called for, I'll give them credit, but taking the budget as a whole, they've missed the mark; missed the mark for seniors; missed the mark for students, teachers and children; missed the mark on health care; missed the mark for

persons with disabilities; missed the mark for Labradorians; missed the mark on the fisheries; missed the mark for businesses wrapped in red tape; and missed the mark for everyone struggling to make ends meet while paying their higher taxes.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** This is not a budget worth supporting. It's a fiscal house of cards, as the financial analyst has pointed out. It's a wasted opportunity. For every good thing, there are dozens of missed opportunities.

Speaker, with that, I'll take my seat.

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

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

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

It's going to be awfully hard to follow that lengthy, passionate speech from our leader who cares and has given us the direction that we need. I think that he will make an amazing premier for this province.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Speaker, the first thing I want to say is, it's Volunteer Appreciation Week. I just want to take a second here and thank every volunteer across this province who makes life so much easier on everybody and saves this province so much money. Whether you're a firefighter, you're with the Special Olympics or you're just picking up trash around your hometown on a Saturday afternoon, thank you very much to all those volunteers out there. You are so valued, and we are lucky to have you.

Speaker, one issue that is an issue of contention within this province, but it's felt everywhere of course, is the cost of living. I'm so very proud to be representing the people of Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans

now for almost five years. I see it and I see it in real time.

Every MHA got a different approach. Everybody got their different ways of doing things. For me, I try to read as much as I can, but I like to be out in my community. I like to talk to people. I'll go to the grocery store just to talk to people and see where their heads are and see what they are struggling with.

I think that is just as, if not more, important than having your nose in a book reading the data, which is as well important, don't get me wrong. But unless we talk to the people who are being affected by the decisions that are being made and the decisions of tomorrow, we don't get a real sense of exactly what's happening on the ground and that's where I've been most comfortable is on the ground.

We talk about groceries and the cost of living when it comes to buying groceries for a family of four, which is a pretty big family nowadays, especially when it comes to the cost of things. But trying to buy groceries at the grocery store and you'll see people walking around and putting stuff back because they can't afford this and they can't afford that.

I've said it before and I've said it for many years, to watch a senior put back a jug of orange juice or something like that because they can't afford it, it's heartbreaking to see. I know that everybody here in this House of Assembly has seen it at one time or another, but it's absolutely heartbreaking to see and I feel so bad for them; or the people who may not be as advantaged of some others, it's just sad to see when they cannot get the groceries that they need for their children.

We talk about the inflation rates, we talk about stuff like that and we talk about the environment that people are trying to work and live in; but when we talk about trying to make this province better, whether it be with

a sugar tax or anything else, or education, we have to understand we need to get a handle on the cost of living first. Because, for the average family now, the average family going out to get groceries, they're not spending all their time in the produce section. They can't. They can't afford to.

When you go to the grocery store now and you see a bag of apples for 12 bucks or a bag of oranges for \$11 or some greens and stuff like that, it's extremely expensive – it's extremely expensive. Anybody who says that the carbon tax has nothing to do with groceries, I'll call you out on it right now. I know lots of farmers out West that I can tell you exactly how to chain goes and everybody should know it by now.

But when you go to the grocery store, for the average family now, they're not within the meats. They can't afford to buy red meat and chicken. Do you know what they're buying? They're buying hamburgers. They're buying hot dogs. They're buying Kraft dinner. They're buying pasta, whatever pasta sauces they can get. They are not eating what they should be eating.

Unfortunately, that's definitely taking its toll on our environment and the people who live in Newfoundland and Labrador. As our leader just said, we have the lowest life expectancy in just about every range and that's unacceptable. But that's exactly where we sit.

Vehicle maintenance right now – how many vehicles are on our roadways right now that probably shouldn't be, or that may have a maintenance issue that needs to be addressed before it gets any worse and then it becomes a hazard on the road? The fact of the matter is people can't afford to fix their vehicles right now. People cannot afford to fix their vehicles, and everybody knows right now that there are vehicles on the road – it's not a family member or parent or an adult looking to be criminal by no means; they just can't afford to get it fixed. Even though they know they should, people

cannot afford to get their vehicles fixed right now and it's causing havoc all over the province.

When we talk about the fuel, oil, we see parents or whatever trying to fill up their vehicles and trying to make it to their payday, as most people are living paycheque to paycheque. It takes its toll on a family. It truly does. It's deterring people from having children here in Newfoundland and Labrador. People are not having children in Newfoundland and Labrador because they feel as though they can't afford it, and that's going to definitely wreak havoc on our population growth for years to come.

Pressures on parents: There are so many pressures on parents right now it's not even funny. When you talk about a cellphone, for instance. Right now, every person needs a cellphone – they do. Even the kids, teenage kids, every person, for school, for everything else. Those societal pressures that are put on parents are so much more extreme than they were 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago, it's not even funny. Whether it be the recreation for kids that we all want to put our children in but some cannot afford – and that's a sin, too. But all these pressures on parents right now, it's crazy. Whether it be on seniors, on our most vulnerable, same way. We've seen our seniors and most vulnerable struggle for many, many years and it continues on and continues on.

But I'd like to talk about one group that we've often referred to in the past as the middle class, if you will. That sort of doesn't exist anymore. Once these goalposts move past a certain amount – which they are moving more and more each and every day – the middle class in our communities, they aren't middle class anymore. They are middle to lower class and, unfortunately, that's what we have to put up with right now. Those goalpost changes and the middle class get worse and worse. This middle class, once again, these are moms and dads working 40, 50, 60 hours a week. No

person in this province should have to work 60 hours a week and stay up late at night and worry about how they're going to pay their bills.

Unfortunately, again, that's where we see it. We can talk about what that looks like in real time. I'd like to talk to a group of people out there now – hopefully, they're listening and if not, we'll get them to listen to it. But if you, as a parent, ever went to the refrigerator and grabbed your jug of milk and realized there was one glass left and you have a wife and some children and stuff like that, you leave it. You leave it right where it is, because you know you probably can't afford another gallon of milk for the next couple of days. You as a mom or dad will not drink that milk that's in the fridge. You'll save it for one of your children. I'm talking to you.

If you ever pulled up to the gas station and put – embarrassingly sometimes, it shouldn't be, but it is in this society – \$8 worth of gas in your car because that's all you got, and parents are doing it. Those parents that are putting \$8 in your car, I'm talking to you as well.

Again, we talked about the vehicles that need upgrades, that might need some sort of maintenance. There are people out there with houses that have done well up until the past couple of years now. They need to pay attention to their houses, but they can't afford to do it. Unfortunately, this is once again what we're left with. If you're a parent that ever drove home at the end of the day and parked your car and sat in that parked car for five, 10, 15, 20 minutes and just sat there with your own thoughts and thinking about how you're going to make it through tomorrow, I'm talking to you as well.

The parent guilt out there is real. It truly is. I've felt it in the past. I know so many parents out there are feeling it now. But that parent guilt of not being able to afford to put your kid in hockey, not being able to afford another gallon of milk so you leave it for

your kids that will get up in an hour's time or whatever, that's real and that exists within this province. Until we can all get together and work together and find a solution, it's going to keep getting worse and worse. Unfortunately, that's what we see today.

Specifically, in the Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans District, we've had some issues out there and we still have them. The Buchans Highway – I think it's Route 370 going up through Buchans there – they see a lot of heavy traffic on that road and unfortunately the road continues to get worse, worse and worse, and I will be talking to the minister about this. I haven't talked about it yet this sitting, but I'm going to talk about it now.

Up in Buchans and Millertown area, we have, of course, Marathon Gold. A lot of heavy equipment moving in and out of that area and if you want to see the shoulders of the roads up there, there are some actual pits alongside the road that are sunk down three and four feet and the concrete and the blacktop is just waiting to go as well. That's unacceptable.

Whether it be the logging trucks that go back and forth, they are tearing up the roads and the citizens that use the Buchans Highway or down through Millertown, they deserve better. They use these roads daily. They drive with their kids, there are school buses, there are ambulances and we need to ensure that these roads stay intact.

I've said this before and I'll say it again – and maybe one day we'll see a budget with this sort of legislation in it – how is it when we have huge projects like this, a certain percentage of the money that project takes in to the province, on behalf of a megaproject like Marathon Gold or Valentine Lake – sorry, Calibre now – a certain percentage can't go back to the roads; it can't go back to ensure that the citizens that use those very roads can keep with the uptake.

To take the monies, for instance from Calibre, and put it into other roadwork across the province, well, that doesn't seem fair enough. The people up in Buchans, Millertown and Buchans Junction, they deserve better and I really hope that we can find a way to get some of the repairs up on that road, because if those roads fall apart, that's the other thing, we can't get logging trucks up there and that stalls the economy as we move forward.

Hopefully, we can talk to the minister – it's not in the Roads Plan, but hopefully we can get something in there to ensure the people up in Buchans are taken care of and feel safe as they drive their children around.

Health care, of course, in Grand Falls-Windsor, we are the backstop. We are the contingency plan for all the other outlying districts and communities. For instance, we had three diversions again this past week with Buchans and I think down the Connaigre Peninsula and whatnot, and a lot of people then would have to go into Grand Falls-Windsor into the emergency room or to the hospital there and it's just so overrun.

Again, it's not a reflection on the health care workers that work there. I know most of them. I have many family members and friends. I just want the best for them. I want them to go to work with the confidence that they are supported by the government with whatever they need when it comes to personnel or whatnot.

I'll tell you one thing, though, that could definitely take some of the pressure off the Grand Falls-Windsor hospital and that would be the Botwood hospital – as my colleague from Exploits has said many times before – their emergency room, it was promised twice that it would be opened and, of course, it's not.

What would that do? First of all, it would give people who have a chance or who need a chance to get medical care, quickly, down the Botwood Highway or in the



surrounding areas, that much better of a chance to get the health care that they need. It would also take the pressure off the hospital in Grand Falls-Windsor. That's something that we need, that the workers up there need as well.

I've got a quick personal story. The walk-in clinic in Grand Falls-Windsor, the Killick Clinic. They have great staff working there, absolutely amazing staff. They are constantly overrun by phone calls and what not and I get it. I called for an appointment and, as a matter of fact, I was talking to them today when they called me back for my appointment. What I was told was – this is a walk-in clinic – they are not taking any more patients, that's it. The walk-in clinic in Grand Falls-Windsor, if you haven't been there in the past year, you cannot go there now. They are not taking any more patients.

So, now, no family doctor, the wait times at the emergency room are astronomical and now the walk-in clinic is pretty much gone, if you haven't visited there in the past year. It's absolutely unreal.

What do people have to do now? People now, if they have an ailment or something that they may have had addressed in the past with a visit to their family doctor within a week or so, now they're saying: Well, I have no doctor to go to. I can't go to the Killick Clinic in Grand Falls-Windsor. I'm not waiting the 16 to 18 hours down at the emergency, which it can be that amount sometimes, I'm going to ignore it, maybe it will go away. I'm going to ignore it. Something that could have been caught with early detection is being ignored. It's being undiagnosed.

Again, not a reflection on our health care workers, but how many patients – and if you ever sit in an emergency room – and I sat with a person for about 12 hours about four or five months ago – in that 12 hours, I bet you we saw eight or nine people get up and walk out because they could not wait or did not want to wait any longer. So those

people are going undiagnosed and it's not good enough.

Also, in Grand Falls-Windsor when it comes to our health care, we are very pleased, two weeks ago, we took the first patient into our Lionel Kelland Hospice. The first community hospice in Newfoundland and Labrador welcomed its first patient two weeks ago –

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

**C. TIBBS:** – and their family, of course. For anybody who doesn't know, this is a community hospice. It is a 10-bed hospice. It is absolutely beautiful. But when we talk about the volunteers – I want to talk about the volunteers that made this happen. The past and present board members that made this happen, but, as well, the volunteer fundraising committee that raised all of the funds – that raised all of the funds – to get this hospice open.

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

**C. TIBBS:** It was a vision on behalf of Dr. John Campbell, Dr. Jeff Cole and Mr. Ken Dicks in Grand Falls-Windsor a decade ago, and they welcomed their first patient. I know that for future patients it will be somewhere where their families and them can truly have a death with dignity, the way that it's supposed to be and the way it should be, any time that can be accommodated.

So we are very happy to have the Lionel Kelland Hospice in Grand Falls-Windsor. We are very happy that it was a go and it will be successful. Once all the bugs are ironed out, we see where we are, it's going to be a very successful project. We're very happy to have the first one in Grand Falls-Windsor.

We talk about homelessness. Homelessness is not just a capital city thing. We have people in tents in Grand Falls-Windsor. We've had people in tents the past couple years now. We try to get them out of the tents but, of course, the backlog on the

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is huge as well. We have well over 100 people just in Grand Falls-Windsor waiting on that one list.

But when we talk about the people behind the scenes that are trying to do everything they can – I think I've mentioned him before in the past, but Mr. Wayne Follett of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, a fine fellow, one of the greatest people I have ever met in my entire life. But that man lives and breathes trying to get people the help that they need. He truly cares about it.

So, Wayne Follett, if you're listening my friend, thank you very much for everything you do.

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

**AN HON. MEMBER:** A good guy.

**C. TIBBS:** A very good guy.

A while ago, back about three years ago, I guess, I had an issue in Grand Falls-Windsor that has not been addressed yet and I've sent it along to the former Minister of TI and nothing was done. We have a divided highway in Grand Falls-Windsor that three years ago there was a horrific accident – a horrific accident – where somebody lost their life. The issue that we have – and it happened again two weeks ago, just two weeks ago it happened again – we have vehicles that are probably unfamiliar with the area going west, crossing over before they get to the divided highway at the median and going westbound in the eastbound lane.

Of course, three years ago, my friend, his dad lost his life and we do not want this to happen again. My son drives this highway, my wife, myself, my constituents and the worst part about this is, you could be the greatest driver in the world, but on that highway that's 90 kilometres an hour, going through Grand Falls-Windsor with a very, very hairpin turn coming around by the

hospital, you can't see what's coming. So if you're going 90, they're going 90, nobody has a chance.

I have consulted with the current TI Minister today and hopefully we can get something figured out for this, because I can tell you, on a professional note, I will do whatever it takes. I've given him some suggestions. I'll do whatever it takes to get this fixed, so it never happens again, but on a personal note, this better never happen again because my constituents deserve better.

It's not just my constituents, anybody driving on the Trans-Canada this can happen to. You could be doing 90 kilometres an hour, paying attention and it's absolutely terrible. But if somebody is coming that wrong way, you don't have a chance and that's not good enough. I've been asking for this for three years now and nothing has been done. It might be just as simple, like I suggested before, as moving a sign. That might take it.

So I'm going to work with this TI Minister. I believe that we're going to come up with a solution, but it's just unfortunate that it had to come to this. It's been three years and we haven't seen anything yet. Again, it's definitely not good enough.

People in Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, I couldn't be more proud to represent you. We have done so much in the past five years. We have worked very hard to ensure that our services remain where they are, even though they've tried to be taken. They've tried to deteriorate it. We have stood our ground in Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans and we will continue to stand our ground, to make sure that my constituents, my family, my friends, the people I care about are protected in the future, whether it be their jobs or their health care or whatnot. We want to ensure that happens as well.

I'm going to take the last minute here and talk about something personal. We're given a platform. We're given an opportunity to talk about certain things and I want to talk

about something right now, I only got a minute, but I'll be quick.

My son, I've talked about him many times, Declan, in the House of Assembly here. He came out to us when he was 16, a couple of years ago. I see it lots of times on Facebook and whatnot, you'll see people pull down the pride flag and all this kind of stuff. I'm going to address something right now. Somebody said to me a while ago: Why are you proud of your son because he's homosexual? I'm not proud of my son because he's heterosexual. True story, this was what somebody said to me.

I said: I'm not proud of him whether he was heterosexual or homosexual; I am proud of him because he had the absolute courage in the face of adversity to come out at 16 years old and be proud of who he is. It's not about their sexuality; it's about being proud of somebody in the face of adversity, coming out, standing up, doing the right thing, being unapologetically who they are.

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

**C. TIBBS:** That's more important than anything. For you dads and moms out there, keep that door open, keep the communication open and love your kids.

Thank you.

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

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

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

It's great to have an opportunity to speak, my first time to the budget, and hopefully I'll get a couple of more, for sure. There are so many things I could talk about in the budget. I will say I did listen intently to the Minister of Finance when she gave the Budget Speech. I did so online because, of course, out of respect for the people who were

outside fighting for what they felt, fighting for their rights –

**J. ABBOTT:** This is where you were supposed to be.

**P. LANE:** Excuse me?

**J. ABBOTT:** This is where you were supposed to be.

**P. LANE:** Oh, I –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**P. LANE:** I say to the Minister of Transportation, I'm not going to take lectures from you, and I don't go talking about the Premier when he's never here.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you.

But anyway, I did listen to the speech intently. I could listen to it – I didn't have to be here to listen to you fellows pounding on the desk and everything. I could do that from the comfort of my home, which I did.

Anyway, I want to talk about – because there are so many things – health care. Health care, obviously, is an important one, Mr. Speaker, to everybody in this House of Assembly. At least it certainly should be and I'm sure it is. I want to say, and I've said this many times, I don't envy our Minister of Health – I don't. I really do believe, in my heart, he is trying. I believe he's trying. But I believe he inherited a mess, I really do.

Now, how we got there, how we got in that mess, we can debate that. We know, of course, that we had a pandemic. We know

of a lot of global issues happening. But we also know that prior to the pandemic and so on, we were standing up in the House of Assembly on this side to the former minister and talking about the concerns we were hearing about lack of health care, about lack of family physicians, about lack of nurses, about overrun emergency departments and so on. We brought it up over and over and over again. We talked about recruitment and retention.

I can remember – and it was supposed to have been worked on, but then, lo and behold, as I've said in this House of Assembly before, I am hearing from a constituent of mine from Southlands who's contacting me from Halifax, telling me he graduated from MUN medical school and, in his final year of MUN medical school, he got offers from Quebec, from Prince Edward Island, from Nova Scotia, from New Brunswick and not one person reached out from Eastern Health, Western Health, Labrador-Grenfell Health and Central Health – not one. Nobody from the Department of Health. Nobody reached out.

He took it upon himself, because he wanted to stay here, to contact Eastern Health and say I'm graduating; I'm interested in work. He couldn't get a return phone call. He tried a second time; he couldn't get a return phone call. His colleague – a good friend of his, a lady, a doctor as well – did the same thing; couldn't get a return phone call. He was letting me know this from Nova Scotia. Because once he couldn't get anywhere with it, he made one call to the recruiter, within 48 hours, he was on a plane to Nova Scotia, put up in a hotel while they were getting him a house. Now, that's a fact. That is a fact.

I know that we are in a mess. Again, I can't necessarily blame it all on this minister, but I also know that we were raising these issues for a long period of time and, obviously, they weren't being taken seriously and obviously recruitment and retention wasn't taking place. The minister had to put in a new

person to do recruitment and retention. Set up a division and a person to do it, because obviously it wasn't being done, and here we find ourselves.

Now, I'm sure we can all tell stories about different things, but I'm going to share a couple that people wanted me to share. I got one here – the person just messaged me, actually, about an hour ago, less than that, just to vent frustrations.

He says: Paul, there's probably nothing you can do about this; I just have to say that the state of our health care system is completely disgraceful. A friend of mine has a grandfather that I believe lives in your constituency, 82-year-old man who needs back surgery; can't walk; can no longer sit up or even go to the bathroom by himself. Spent the last two days in the hallway of the Health Sciences. Apparently, he qualifies for surgery, but it's a four-month wait time and they won't admit him until then.

I will admit I haven't yet looked through the budget, but is there anything different coming through the pipe for health care? It's honestly terrifying, the wait times, the lack of space.

Anyway, I just figured I would add this to the rolodex of complaints from citizens you are probably getting on a regular basis. I know you're likely as frustrated as the rest of us – and I would say to this gentleman, absolutely, 100 per cent, I'm frustrated just like the rest of us for sure.

I have another person, a constituent, who reached out a couple of weeks ago. This lady was having numbness in her face. She was having blurred vision. She was having headaches and she needed an MRI. They told her she was going to have to wait months for an MRI. She kept calling them on the daily – day after day after day.

She said: Can I go on a wait-list or a cancellation list? We don't do cancellation lists, she was told. Anyway, by luck, I guess

the girl that was working down there looking after it felt bad for her. One day a couple of weeks ago, she said, I'm really not allowed to do this, but can you come out here now? She went out there and she had her MRI.

She gets her MRI back and they say you have a brain tumour. That's why you're having all these symptoms. Now, we have assessed it and it's probably not malignant – it could be but likelihood, hopefully, it's not but you do have to go see a specialist.

Now you need to go get a specialist appointment to see a neurologist. Okay, who do I call to make an appointment? They went and they called the number. Can't get an appointment. What do you mean I can't get an appointment? I have a brain tumour. I'm told it's possible it could be cancer, but I just want to get an appointment. No, you can't get an appointment. We'll put you on a list. Put me on a list for what? To put you on the appointment list.

What do you mean? What's an appointment list? Well, basically, you have to go on a list and, at some point in time, people on the list will get an appointment. So hold on a second, I've got to go on a list to go on a list, basically. Yes, basically, you've got to go on a list and eventually you'll go on the appointment list. So when I go on the appointment list, how long will I have to wait? I can't tell you. You're not even on the list yet, but it could be a couple of weeks. It could be six months. It could be longer.

I've heard from people who have issues and they've told me that they've got to wait to see specialists for two years; people are waiting for MRIs for months and months and months. I mean, crisis is not the word for it – crisis is not the word for it.

So I say to this gentleman about what's coming down the pipe in this budget: I don't know. I never heard anything that's necessarily – I will say, I did hear the minister say, I do believe, that in terms of MRIs, they're going to get a new machine or

they're looking at getting a new machine, and I appreciate that.

I hope we're going to have the staff to go along with that machine because we can have all the machines we want, if we don't have someone to read it and so on. Even if we read it, based on the story I just told about this lady in my district, what is the point of getting an MRI, if you get one and you find out that you have, in this case, a brain tumour – it could be anything – but you can't see a doctor. We are even wasting our time. It's a waste of time really to get an MRI, if we're going to get diagnosed and then we're going to have to wait for months on end just to see a doctor or to see a specialist. These are the kind of situations that are going on.

I have another one. I have another gentleman who reached out there the other day and he was with his father, I believe. He was in a waiting room at that point in time, I think, two days on a stretcher and so on. Same type of scenario, people waiting in the hallways.

I had one lady; she was a cancer patient and she was feeling ill. She didn't know what was wrong with her. She has a serious form of cancer and she was feeling ill. She waited 16 hours, sat there in the emergency department and, basically, eventually she just had to go home. She was in racks of pain. Sorry, nothing we can do for you.

These are the types of things that are happening that I'm hearing from people, certainly in my district. These things are just not acceptable, I'd say, Mr. Speaker. They're not acceptable.

I don't know what the answer is. I can't say I do. I mean, we all know it's going to be about recruitment and retention, but I was disappointed to hear that the number of nurses – we've got, apparently, 35 nurses, unless I heard wrong – 35 nurses.

I'd like to know what happened to all the nurses we were supposed to be getting from India. We went on a mission to India and I thought we were going to get hundreds of nurses there. Maybe I misunderstood that one, but we went to India; we went to Dubai. I wasn't really expecting to get much out of Dubai, to be honest with you. I guess it was a nice trip for someone. Went to Ireland and Alberta and, basically, we got 35 nurses out of it. We did get a doctor. We got a doctor in Ireland, but other than that, I don't know. It's mind boggling – it's mind boggling to me.

I'm also hearing from people with concerns around long-term care. I guess another question I would have for the minister, maybe I missed the announcement, it's possible, but we were doing a study into long-term care, did that study get completed? I don't know. I know there was a study being done into long-term care. I can remember standing up here doing petitions –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** That's in that stack.

**P. LANE:** Maybe it's in the stack of reports, yeah.

But I can remember standing here in the House of Assembly presenting petitions for Lillian's Law because of all the concerns that people had in long-term care, and it was – could it be a year ago? I'm not trying to be funny here, but is it a year ago that the minister or the government said that they were doing this report into long-term care? I haven't heard anything, so I'd love to have an update as to where that report is into long-term care.

Another one that I've had someone reach out to me about and that is separation of partners in long-term care. Again, I'm pretty sure, time slips by, but it feels like a year ago or whatever that I thought the government made an announcement that we were solving that because Halifax has solved that issue, that they no longer

separate couples. I'm sure that the government came out around a year ago and said: We're on board the same as Halifax, we're solving that issue and we won't be separating couples. I got a couple that have been separated for months. I'm after forwarding it to the department two or three times and unless they got reunited within the last week or two, they're still separated.

So that's another big issue. I'm not trying to be negative for the sake of being negative, but you have to point these things out because they're happening in real time.

I'll give you another one, a person reached out to me last week. This lady, she has a very significant form of cancer – a very significant form of cancer. Her husband reached out to me. So it was only a year or two ago, a couple of years ago, where with COVID-19, we all had to be in our bubbles, remember that? Everyone had to be in a bubble and you had to wear masks and all that kind of stuff. People couldn't go to funerals. There were people that had family members in palliative care, they had to go one at a time and all this kind of stuff.

Now, I had somebody reach out to me just the other day about his wife, who has a significant form of cancer in a room in the Health Sciences with four beds, just separated by a curtain, all cancer patients, and one of them had COVID. When he contacted me the second time, two had had COVID, at that point in time. He's saying: Well, my wife has had all these treatments, she's immunocompromised. These are the people at risk. Now we're going to say: Well, we've got nowhere else to put you, so we're putting COVID patients and cancer patients all together in the same room and hopefully the curtain does the job.

Of course, they weren't going to have that as a family. So she spent the night in the day room, as a cancer patient, in one of those old vinyl chairs. She sat up in the chair with the IV in. That's where she spent

the entire night. That was her bed that night, in a day room, in a chair. She couldn't sleep because we got COVID patients now and cancer patients, they're all together in the same room.

This is the kind of stuff that's happening. I'm not making any of this up. This is all real stories that people have. I'm sure other Members can probably share similar stories.

I know it's going to be a challenge to recruit and retain, I get all that, but we have to do better. I figured it was important just to raise this. I usually don't harp on about health care a lot, although it does impact everybody. It impacts a lot of my constituents. I usually don't get into the stories, but some of these stories are very, very serious. They're still happening. When we try to paint a picture about the great job we're doing in recruitment and retention and so on – again, I know the minister is trying. I'm telling you, it isn't working. We're not seeing the results yet, just by these stories alone.

That's not counting all the calls we get about no family doctors. That's not counting all the calls we get about people who, like I say, are at the emergency departments, they're just lined up there waiting, people that are waiting for diagnostic tests, people that are trying to see specialists and so on. It is a mess – it is a mess. As I say, I do not envy the minister for what he has to deal with, but it has to be dealt with.

I'm going to conclude – I just want to sort of go to what my colleague for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans was talking about, the cost of living and so on. That, too, is a real issue. And it is a combination of a whole lot of things. I know the federal government are getting beat up on big time over the carbon tax, as they should, but I will point out that at least with the federal carbon tax, we're getting something back.

When the provincial government over here imposed their carbon tax, they were keeping

all the money. They were keeping it all. It is interesting and some people might say somewhat hypocritical that the Premier is now going to lead the charge, going to be the hero now on the carbon tax, when he collected the money and they kept it all. At least now, under the federal system, people are getting some of it back. But it is a combination of a carbon tax, the sugar tax, interest rates, inflation, gouging, corporate greed; it's all coming together in one big storm and she's all in a mess.

But I would say to you, people are not happy – people are not happy. I'm hearing people all the time; all I hear is: Trudeau got to go – Trudeau got to go. People are fed up with that administration and they're getting fed up with this one, too, because you can try what you like, you're wearing it. You got no one to blame but yourself.

When everyone was cuddling up to Trudeau – I can remember a couple of years ago, I saw a picture when the b'ys were up in Ottawa and one of them was here like this, trying to get the head in to get in the picture and there was someone stood behind and they were up on their tippytoes. Everyone wanted to make sure they got their picture with Trudeau. Now they're going to pretend they don't know him. We don't know him. And our signs are going to be white instead of red.

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

**P. LANE:** I pities poor old Joanne Thompson there. She's on the social media doing all she can trying to stay positive and the b'ys are going to throw her under the bus.

Anyway, that's all I have to say for now, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now adjourn.

**SPEAKER:** Before I call a vote there, I just want to remind Members of the Social Services Committee that we will be meeting at 6 p.m. here in the Chamber to discuss the Estimates of the Justice and Public Safety.

All those in favour of the motion to adjourn?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 1:30 o'clock tomorrow.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, at 1:30 p.m.