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Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I would like to welcome to the Speaker's gallery today, former St. John's mayor, former MHA, Shannie Duff, and might I just add, an individual who I have had the utmost respect for.

She will be the subject of a Member's statement today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Accompanying Ms. Duff is Debbie Hudson.

Welcome.

Also in the Speaker's gallery is someone who certainly does not need an introduction. Welcome to the pride of Newfoundland and Labrador, Brad Gushue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Brad is the subject of a Ministerial Statement today.

Accompanying Brad are his wife, Krista, his parents, Ray and Maureen Gushue, his sister, Natasha, and he is also accompanied by a number of other family members including Parker Tipple, Spencer Tipple, Marie Tibbo, Harvey Tibbo, Ray Hanlon, Margo Hanlon, Judy Power, Brian Power, Donna Power as well as Team Gushue's third, Olympic gold medallist and tremendous athlete in his own right, Mark Nichols.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Today, in our public gallery, I would like to welcome Colin Barry, who is the subject of a Member's statement. He is accompanied by his Grade 5 class from École St. Matthews.

Welcome everyone.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome individuals from the McSheffrey Resource Centre, which will also be the subject of a Member's statement today.

Welcome to Justin Taylor, the program lead; Kathy Dicks Peyton, co-chair of the board of directors; and Jim Crockwell, executive director.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Finally, today, we have individuals in our public gallery from the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture, which is the subject of a Ministerial Statement.

Welcome to Mr. Rick Carey, the general manager, and Ms. Chelsea Foley, Agriculture in the Classroom coordinator.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome a new Page to the Chamber today, Ella Niblock, who is from Conception Bay South.

She's currently enrolled in her third year of social work studies at Memorial University. Ella's long-term goal is to be a lawyer, and she is scheduled to write her LSAT this July.

Best of luck on your exam, Ella, and welcome to our House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, St. John's West,

Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, Waterford Valley and Windsor Lake.

The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and – my heart.

I have known Shannie Duff for over four decades, and her outstanding contribution at the municipal level has been complemented by significant contributions at the national level. One of the most significant figures in Newfoundland's municipal history, she linked urban development and housing issues, seeing it in both an economic and a social perspective.

I was delighted to attend the Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador Conference in November of 2025 for the inaugural Shannie Duff Inspiration Award. This award was recently introduced by the Women and Gender Equity Committee of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, a committee I was privileged to be a part of. This award honours the former St. John's mayor's legacy of leadership, mentorship and community building by recognizing individuals who empower others and drive positive change in their communities.

Shannie was also a Member of this House of Assembly, representing the constituents of St. John's East from 1989 to 1990.

So the first honourees of the Shannie Duff Inspiration Awards were Mayor Linda Chaisson, Mayor Kelly Power, Councillor Leann Goodyear and Mayor Tammy Fifield.

This award recognizes Shannie's enduring impact on municipal politics and heritage conservation in Newfoundland and Labrador. I am so honoured to have received a share in her mentorship.

Thank you, and I ask all to congratulate this incredible woman, from this Chamber.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and celebrate Mr. Colin Barry, the 2025 recipient of the Teacher of the Year Award from Canadian Parents for French.

Mr. Barry is a Grade 5 teacher at École St. Matthew's. His dedication to French education, passion for cultural enrichment and the community involvement make him a model educator and an inspiration for us all. Mr. Barry creates an immersive learning environment that encourages students, not only to learn French, but to also live it. He integrates Francophone culture, history, music and literature into his lessons, making French meaningful and enjoyable.

Beyond the classroom, he organizes French language activities, celebrations and exchange programs that connect students to Francophone communities both locally and globally. Mr. Barry is highly active in his school community. He coordinates Tigers Got Talent, an annual talent show; he organizes and mentors the Silly Squad, fostering school spirit and inclusion; and he attends many student extracurricular events.

Mr. Barry is a remarkable educator who has gone beyond simply delivering lessons. He has inspired, motivated and truly impacted students' lives.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating Mr. Colin Barry.

Merci, Monsieur Barry. Félicitations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize an extraordinary woman from my district, Ms. Jaida Lee.

At just 19 years old, Jaida has built a legacy in the sport of baseball. This January, she was selected 14th overall in the league's inaugural draft by New York to begin her professional career. She currently plays for the men's UBC Thunderbirds and Team Canada. Jaida has also been inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame for being the first female to play in a male baseball competition at the Canada Games, an honour and testament to her exceptional talent, dedication and work ethic.

This is an incredible accomplishment, not only for Jaida and her family, but for the entire community. Her success reflects years of perseverance and commitment, and it serves as an inspiration to young people across Newfoundland and Labrador who dream of pursuing excellence in sports and beyond. Jaida represents our province with pride. She is a powerful role model for young athletes, especially young women, and breaking barriers and showing that anything is possible with determination and support.

On behalf of this House, I congratulate Jaida Lee on her outstanding achievements and wish her every success as she continues to make history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Speaker, in the spirit of International Women's Day, I rise today to recognize an accomplished leader from my district, Karen Sherriffs.

Karen has dedicated much of her career to strengthening sport and recreation in our province. Karen most recently served as CEO of the 2025 Canada Games, an

incredible undertaking that brought athletes, volunteers and communities together in celebration of sport and community spirit. Her leadership helped ensure the Games were a tremendous success and left a lasting legacy on athletes.

Building on that success, Karen was recently appointed Chef de Mission for the Team Newfoundland and Labrador for the 2027 Canada Games in Quebec City. Karen's involvement in the Canada Games dates back decades. She worked with the host society for the 1999 Canada Winter Games in Corner Brook and, since 1999, Speaker, she has been involved in every Canada Games including multiple times as Assistant Chef de Mission.

Her dedication to sport community leadership was also recognized for the King Charles III Coronation Medal. For 21 years, Karen has worked with the City of St. John's recreation division promoting healthy and active living.

Speaker, Karen Sherriffs continues to inspire through her leadership and commitment to sport, and I welcome all Members to rise to recognize this amazing person from my district of this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the outstanding work of McSheffrey Resource Centre.

McSheffrey Resource Centre is a vital pillar of support within the District of Windsor Lake, providing essential services and programs that help residents gain access to information, support and opportunities in a welcoming space where individuals and

families can connect with resources that strengthen well-being and inclusion.

Through partnerships with local organizations and the dedication of staff and volunteers, McSheffrey ensures residents have access to programs that support learning, social connection and growth. Whether hosting gatherings, offering outreach services or providing space for local initiatives, the centre plays a vital role in bringing people together. Spaces like McSheffrey help build stronger neighborhoods by encouraging collaboration, compassion and mutual support in programs that improve quality of life for residents in the District of Windsor Lake.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in recognizing McSheffrey Resource Centre, and thanking its dedicated team including Jim Crockwell, Justin Taylor, Liz Shallow, Benjamin Williams, Chantal Barron, Annie Warner, Pennie Spurvey, Sophia Rouah and Desiree Mackey, whose work helps strengthen our community and ensures that every resident of Windsor Lake has the support and opportunities that they deserve.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, we want to grow more of what we eat and eat more of what we grow, right here at home. This month, we celebrate the people who are making that goal a reality.

We lit the Confederation Building green on Saturday to mark Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month. Our friends at Agriculture in the Classroom are out and about in the province's schools this month; through stories, music, art contests and other fun activities, they're talking about the role agriculture plays in our daily lives.

One of the highlights is their new storybook, *Hay! Have You Herd?* The story follows Abby as she learns how veterinary care helps ensure the food we eat is safe and nutritious. Thank you to Agriculture in the Classroom NL for inspiring a future generation of farmers here at home.

March 15 to 21 also marks Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. Farming can be dangerous work; our farmers follow strict measures to ensure safe workplaces for all. We also offer funding to help them keep their farms safe and strong.

Speaker, join me in celebrating our province's agriculture professionals for their important work.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Speaker, agriculture is extremely important in our province and, in particular, this month of March. It's encouraging to see many initiatives highlighting the work of farmers, educators and industry partners.

Agriculture in the Classroom NL continues to do exceptional work, and their new storybook – *Hay! Have you Herd?* – is a creative way to help young people understand how veterinary care and food safety go hand in hand.

Speaker, as we mark Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month and Canadian Agricultural

Safety Week, it's also a moment to reflect on the broader picture. Farmers across Newfoundland and Labrador are deeply committed to growing more of what we eat, and they are eager to see continued progress toward that goal. Many are navigating rising costs, land availability challenges and the ongoing demands of maintaining safe operations. They appreciate the supports that exist and they also express a desire for programs that are easier to access and more responsive to the realities they face every day.

Speaker, we honour the people who feed us and we remain committed to working collaboratively to ensure agriculture in this province continues to grow.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, I want to thank all farmers who work tirelessly across our province to keep us healthy and well fed. We must return the favour with better supports, especially when times turn bad and crops fail due to the effects of climate change as we saw last summer.

We look forward to the government fulfilling its commitment to make more Crown land available to farmers and to the development of a 10-year agricultural strategy.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, Brad Gushue's retirement marks the end of an extraordinary chapter in Canadian sports history, a journey that solidly establishes him as the greatest of all time in curling.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Brad started curling at the age of 13 in 1993, and first represented Newfoundland and Labrador as a junior champion in 1995, at the age of 15 years old. Over the past three decades, he has built a remarkable record as two-time Olympic medallist, a world champion, a six-time Brier winner and 15-time Grand Slam winner.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: His success has made him a true ambassador for our province, as his achievements represent years of dedication, hard work and outstanding sportsmanship. He has changed the way curling is viewed in our province and our country and inspired countless fans.

His final Brier in St. John's was a heartfelt celebration filled with emotion as fans gave a standing ovation to honour their hometown hero. This moment captured, not just a farewell, but an acknowledgement of how his journey has raised local pride and encouraged young curlers to pursue their dreams.

Brad Gushue is a symbol of perseverance, and his impact, both on and off the ice, is significant. He has trained and motivated generations of curlers, proving that success can come from anywhere, especially in our beloved province. As he steps away from competitive play, his legacy will continue to shine as a source of inspiration for future athletes.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this hon. House rise and join me in congratulating Brad Gushue on an incredible career that has brought immense pride to Newfoundland and Labrador. His achievements and commitment to curling deserves our heartfelt recognition and gratitude.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

It's truly an honour to rise here today to join in the recognition from an extraordinary career of Brad Gushue. It's great to see so many of his family and friends, and teammate, Mark.

For many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Brad has been more than just a champion curler. He's been a source of pride in our province; whether its the early days representing Newfoundland and Labrador at the juniors, winning multiple Briers, Grand Slam titles – I still have one of those cheques home in my garage, literally – become world champion curlers and, of course, becoming the first men's team to win the gold medal at the Olympics, he's constantly demonstrated his dedication, his resilience and team work, and what it can achieve.

Speaker, I have the privilege of not only being a Member here, of the House of Assembly, but as a former member of Team Gushue, playing alongside Brad in that 2006 Olympics.

Brad's success was never accidental; they were the result of unwavering dedication, unmatched, hard work ethic and a deep love for sport, qualities I got to experience

first hand. His influence reaches far beyond the curling sheets. He has inspired countless young athletes across Newfoundland and Labrador to get involved in sport and to believe that world-class success can happen right here at home.

Just as importantly, Brad has always represented our province with humanity and sportsmanship, making him not only a champion on the ice, but ambassador for Newfoundland and Labrador. As he steps away now from competitive curling, his legacy will continue through the athletes he has inspired and the pride he has brought to the communities across our province.

Speaker, I'd say he'll go down as the GOAT – for Bernie, that means Greatest Of All Time, just in case you were wondering – but, on behalf of the Official Opposition, I want to thank Brad for what he's given to the sport here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I look forward to continuing to see him at the Curling Club as we watch our daughters compete in the sport we both love.

Thanks, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement.

On behalf of the NDP caucus, I want to congratulate Brad Gushue on his long and storied career in curling and note with pride how his achievements have been reflected on our people and our province.

I cannot help but wonder which young people in our schools might become the next Brad Gushue. That is why we repeat our call from yesterday for this government to make sports more affordable and accessible for everyone in this province,

especially those living in more remote areas where travel can be particularly expensive.

Again, I express huge gratitude to Brad Gushue on his incredible athleticism and community inspiration.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

On February 17, the Premier advised the public through the media that the staffer that's being paid in his office with health care funds was – quote – not part of his transition team.

Yesterday, the Premier gave a different version and said that the staffer was indeed part of the transition team; both can't be true.

So I ask the Premier: Which version is true?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, while the Members opposite continue to focus on an individual, we are focused on the issues that our current health care system has that have been left over from 10 years of neglect.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Let me speak briefly about one of those.

Recently, I went to Labrador West and met with over 100 seniors and, while we just

didn't talk about cost-of-living and affordable housing issues, we also talked about health care, one of the things they brought up to me about health care was the fact that a significant number of them have to travel every month to St. John's to have eye injections.

They asked me the question: Why is it not possible to have the specialist come to them instead of all of them having to travel out? Great suggestion; something we're going to act on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I do agree with the Premier, we're focusing on one individual. The individual that we're focusing on is the leader of this province, and it's the Premier.

So I ask again, and I'll give him an opportunity, tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians which version is true, because both can't be true, Premier. You spoke two different facts, only one can be true.

When were you telling the truth, was it on February 17 or was it yesterday? It can only be one or the other.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me talk about some facts – the Member opposite wanted to talk about facts, let me talk about facts.

Under the Liberals, from 2016 to 2025, health care spending rose at a percentage of total spending from about 36 to about 40 per cent; total health care spending rose

from about \$3 billion a year to about \$4.45 billion a year; Newfoundland and Labrador had one of the highest levels of per capita health care spending in the country, which sounds like a good thing, but it wasn't.

Under the Liberals, after a decade in office, we had one of the worst health care outcomes in the entire country. That's exactly the legacy that we're talking about, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: It's zero for two on the answers, Speaker.

It's very clear questions and yes or noes, and we're not getting the answers and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians aren't getting the answers.

The Premier has claimed, Speaker, that paying a political staffer from MCP funds is allowable because it comes from a pot of money for administrative purposes. Health care administration and political support are not the same thing, Speaker.

So can the Premier point to the exact language, either in the MCP legislation, the regulations or the NLMA MOU, that allows partisan, political advice in the Premier's office from health care funds?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Once again, Speaker, let me talk about it. More and more spending; poorer and poorer outcomes. Obviously, something was wrong at the governance level, and that's why our government was elected by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: The only way we're going to do that is by consulting with the real experts, the people on the ground, the people who are delivering those systems, handling those issues on a day-to-day basis, and that's exactly what we are doing. I make zero excuses for spending money to get the best health care service that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I continue to look at the Premier's words, zero excuses and zero answers. He's zero for three, Speaker. Let's try a fourth time. The political staff contract that this staffer had signed specifically says the political support staff pay plan on file with the Clerk of the Executive Council shall apply to political support staff. Let's be clear: It does not say to pay from MCP funds; it says they are paid pursuant to the political support staff rules.

So why is the Premier not following the terms of this contract?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, yesterday the Leader of the Official Opposition talked about a letter they had received and referred to yesterday. We believe it is related to another staff member entirely. I would ask the Opposition if they would table that in the House, because quite frankly we believe that they brought misinformation on this particular individual that is quoted in that. Facts are clear and we'll certainly be focusing on it.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

We'll happily table the letter that was written from a private email from the deputy chief of staff as we all know, who should be using government emails when they're communicating, so we'll happily table that. We'll look forward to the information from the Premier about the individual that they did refuse to follow the public service rules on.

So we're happy to put that information out here, but we look forward to the answer, because it's not just from us if we're going to ask those questions. If you want the information, I expect Newfoundlanders and Labradorians want answers as well.

Let's try for a fifth time, because the Premier is zero for four. The pot of money that the Premier is shockingly comfortable paying political staff from out of MCP dollars is \$129 million.

So I ask: Does the Premier think he can spend up to \$129 million on political staff as long as they're doctors?

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

L. EVANS: Speaker, one of the things we're trying to do is we're to clarify the misinformation, and the misinformation coming from the Opposition is that the dollars that this doctor, that they are questioning, is being paid for is under MCP money that goes to actually provide health services to patients.

Speaker, that's not correct. It's very important that people know that the money is coming out of administration dollars, and that at the end of the day, after 10 years, we look at the huge deficits that have been created by excessive spending with lack of actual service being provided.

We just got to look at the Family Care Teams, Speaker, \$20 million for this year, over budget. Nurse practitioners –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

We kind of got an answer there. I guess that's why they call this Question Period and not question and answer period; but anyway, I digress.

Speaker, the Minister of TI keeps referencing Dr. Browne, a public servant that the minister claims to have learned about when he arrived in the department.

Did the minister not read the public service notification that went out announcing Dr. Browne's bureaucratic role?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

That's a moot point. I went in the department, there was someone that was down occupying a space. They never communicated with anyone in the department. When I asked who they were, they were a special advisor to the Premier. When I ask who was paying for him, they said the NLHS is paying for them.

That was my main concern and the Premier made the right move in January. We removed that person from that position because they were not providing any meaningful service to the people of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: I guess when a minister takes a role over the department, everyone, should come up and say hello, introduce themselves and give their job description.

But anyway, Speaker, the fact that Dr. Browne continued to work after the change of government means that he was not political staff.

Why would the minister try to make false comparisons when he knows the difference, or does he also not understand the difference between bureaucrats who are not allowed to give political advice and political staff who are paid to give it?

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, I'd guess to say, we're only 130-odd days in, I would think there are lots and lots and lots of people poked away in this government and in these buildings that this crowd over here, when they were on this side, got them poked.

We haven't found them all yet. We will get there eventually. They've done a great job of hiding them, but I assure you, when we do, we'll take the corrective action.

We got elected on lower taxes, better health care and safer communities, and we will follow through on every one of those promises that (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Speaker, the president of NAPE, Jerry Earle, has said that they are – quote –

outraged by the use of health care funds for political purposes. The union says that they've offered access to front-line members to provide consultation to the government at no cost, which makes this appointment even more insulting.

Why is the Premier insulting front-line workers?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I must say, regarding NAPE and the president, when we met with the president and NAPE for the first time, we were welcomed, we were engaged and what we were told is that it was so refreshing to meet with government officials, Health officials, that were actually engaged in solutions –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: – engaged with working not only with the union, but looking after workers and respecting the workers that provide so much service to the people of this province who rely on access to good health care.

Speaker, I've never heard that it's the staff that's the problem. It's always basically the investments and the lack of the investments in proper resources to meet the needs of patients in our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm glad the Minister of Transportation brought up tax cuts because as everybody sees, the price of gas has absolutely

skyrocketed over the past week due to the conflict in Iran – spikes which we haven't seen since 1983.

When the price of gas rose due to the conflict in the Ukraine, our Liberal government cut the gas tax by 50 per cent. Given the increasing rising prices of oil that will continue into the future, will they not only keep our tax cut but lower it further?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, all of us in this House of Assembly are aware of what's happening in the Middle East and the conflict, and all our prayers are with all of the people in that particular region.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: There are many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who find themselves over there in that region because of work or travel. So our prayers are for their safety as well.

But to the Member opposite's point, absolutely, the Liberal government did cut the tax on gasoline by 50 per cent, but it was due to expire on March 31. That's why last week the Minister of Finance introduced legislation to make that cut permanent, just as the Member has asked.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: That does not provide further tax relief to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians when costs are going up.

In a video posted to Facebook in 2022, the current Premier said, a premier – and I quote – controls the amount of taxation that he charges on a litre of gasoline.

If the Premier still believes his words, will he further cut the gas tax for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, it was those of us and some of my colleagues on the opposite side of the House who stood in this hon. House and voted against the carbon tax which the Liberal government introduced, voted against the sugar tax which the Liberal government introduced, and yes, we fought to make sure that the gasoline tax in Newfoundland and Labrador was cut in half and we're now going to make it permanent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, at some point in time, they're going to have to get over the past and recognize that they are the government and they control the levers. Focusing on Liberals – and we all know that the Minister of Energy is a big fan of Prime Minister Carney – but they need to deliver for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on the promises that they made.

So I'll put the words of the Premier to him. He said that government does have levers that it can pull to help the people of our province.

Premier, you are running the government. Will you help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: I'll repeat it again.

Last week, this government, our government, has introduced legislation to make a commitment, a permanent reduction – not a reduction that was scheduled to expire March 31, but a permanent reduction to gas tax for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

That's why we're committed to making sure that people no longer have to pay for medical transportation. That impacts cost of living too, when they have to take out of their pockets to pay for medical transportation. That's why we're also going to make sure that no Newfoundlander and Labradorian has to pay to see a nurse practitioner, which they've had to do under this former Liberal government for years. That's going to be taken care of, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to increase the Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I have to go off script for a minute. I've heard from public servants who need help and are afraid for me to advocate on their behalf to this government, that they will be fired. I just heard the Minister of TI in this Question Period say, in response to public servants, that we haven't found them all yet.

So I ask the Premier: Are you governing through fear and are you –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Shame!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: I'm flabbergasted that you would say such a thing, Minister.

Should the public servants be afraid here, Speaker?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

AN HON. MEMBER: Shame.

SPEAKER: I said order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I say to the Member opposite and I say to anyone in this public service, if you're hired on and you're doing your job, you have no worries; unlike the previous administration. There was a parade of people being led out by security every day. That will not happen under this administration.

But I will tell you, if you've got your political appointees put in different areas, that are just there as a political appointee, well maybe we need to have a deeper look, because we've got to try to wrestle down a \$1-billion budget deficit you left us, and we'll do everything in our power to do what's right.

If they don't belong there, they will go. If they belong there and they've got a meaningful employment, they will stay where they're to. It's a pretty simple answer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, last week the Minister of Health called on 'someone' to increase mental health care beds. She seems to continue to not acknowledge her responsibilities.

Minister, who are you calling on?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I'd just like the Member to repeat her question, because either I didn't hear it correctly or it didn't seem to....

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I said, last week, the Minister of Health called on someone to increase mental health care beds. The minister seems to continue to not acknowledge her responsibilities.

Who are you calling on?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I'll have to go back through *Hansard* to actually understand what she said; because, in actual fact, I, as the Minister of Health and as the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Speaker, we will be working to actually increase access to mental health, and not just through virtual, not just through phone, not just through a revolving door of walk-ins, Speaker. We want to make sure that we actually meet the needs of people who need services for mental health supports.

That is actually a diverse spectrum of services. What we're going to do now is we're actually going to increase the access to adequate and proper mental health services, Speaker, that people have been calling for the last 10 years, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, in the media, the Minister of Health called for extra beds for mental health, but across the country and here in Newfoundland and Labrador, there has been a call to provide supports in the community.

Minister, what is your plan?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, there has been an increase. I recognize there has been an increase in mental health beds. There's been actually six in Labrador-Grenfell Health region and there has been five in Eastern-Urban region as well; but, Speaker, that's not enough and that's what I was talking about, I guess, last week in the House.

The number of beds that are available has not been addressed. We have not looked at the needs, Speaker, and we need to increase the number of beds, but we also have to increase the engagement. When people go in trying to access mental health supports, we need to make sure they have proper engagement because, a lot of times, Speaker, calling or going virtual is not a solution for (inaudible) service.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Speaker, I ask the Minister of Tourism, what is her plan to ensure that the rising cost of fuel will not negatively impact our tourism industry?

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

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, our new government, the Progressive Conservative government, are focused on making tourism and Newfoundland and Labrador the capital of Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: The economy will fluctuate, and that is a normal thing. It happens on a regular basis and we will assess as we need.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

Given the rising cost of fuel and plans for year-long European flights, will the Minister of Tourism be providing subsidies to airlines?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, as I continue working with the proponents, I work with the airlines and the airports, I will continue to have these meetings and assess things as we go so that we can rise Newfoundland and Labrador as the capital of tourism in Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Speaking of rising, Mr. Speaker, rising oil prices driven by the war in the Middle East are already increasing transportation and shipping costs, and that will impact flights, freight and groceries in our province.

What is the minister's plan to mitigate the impact of rising fuel prices on groceries and keep them from skyrocketing?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, I thank the Member for the question.

We know that the gas pricing is very volatile. We know that we see peaks and we see valleys that would occur. We're not sure as to where this one is going to be.

The minister says, about the affordability measures – and I think they all read our platform several times because I know by the questions, they cite it quite often. They would know that we've got many affordability items that would be there. The Premier just addressed the gas tax permanent reduction. That is an investment from the taxpayers to make permanent – \$80 million to make it permanent that, in 21 days, gas tax does not rise.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Speaker, many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are concerned about the rising cost of home heating oil.

Will the government commit to continuing the Liberal government's home heating supplement and potentially expand it, given the rising costs and expanded revenue that the province may gain?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Again, Speaker, I'd like to refer the hon. Member to our platform book as well, with the myriad of affordability issues that would be there. We know that if we raise the Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent, we know that that is going to help out the affordability of the seniors in our province. If we add more than 3,000 children in the Child Benefit, we know that's going to help families out with affordability.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: We know that if we raise the basic personal exemption, we know that there are 285,000 tax filers out there (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I'm unsure how many more affordability measures that the Member would suggest that we would have in there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: That is a significant number that we do have in our platform.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, early childhood educators are raising alarms that they haven't been provided time to give feedback on the new policies before their contracts end on March 31. They're worried rates may have to increase to \$50 to \$100 per day if this is not addressed.

Will the minister allow additional time for consultation?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question.

As I said, children, most valuable resource. Consultations have occurred on this program. Feedback has been received. The documents that have been sent out are based on the feedback, so there's no determined, concrete contract yet. In fact, we've actually extended the feedback period. Going forward, we will have this ready to roll out March 31, and everyone will be happy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, we're hearing that the new policies don't include sick leave provisions.

Can the Minister of Education advise when early childhood educators will be getting the pensions and sick leave they were promised during the Conservative campaign?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

The consultations we've had and what's gone out to the stakeholders is what they brought to the table. So everything that's included in that is what they brought to the table.

Part of our plan, which I believe they've read quite closely, looks at pensions and the like for early childhood educators. That's a four-year plan. We will be looking at that. We know that early childhood educators are very, very important to our education

process and to ensuring that our children are educated at an early age.

So, as we go forward, we will continue to have consultations with the stakeholders. We will honour any commitments we make to them and, hopefully, we'll have a better system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, transparency cannot be just rhetoric; it needs action.

So I ask the Premier: When will he release the report of the All-Party Committee on Basic Income to the public?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand to answer that question as a Member of that Committee. I would see no problem why we wouldn't release that report, and just an anecdote or a comment on that report is that the first recommendation in the report is that we would lobby the federal government in order to help out with a guaranteed basic income, and that was our request.

We're going to make that request, knowing that Prince Edward Island, two years ago, made the same request to the federal government and were denied.

So we know that we may not have a lot of optimism for the first recommendation to be achieved, but we will certainly look at releasing that report in short course.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, it has been six months since that report was signed off on – six months – and it sounds like the PCs are following the example of the predecessors and shelving the report to gather dust.

So I will ask this: Will the minister, will the Premier, commit to releasing the report this month, March?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

I can tell the Member opposite that our government is committed to making lives more affordable for the people of our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: We will be releasing that report, Mr. Speaker. I cannot give the Member opposite a time frame but, as my colleague, the Minister of Finance, just said, that report will be released soon. This government has been nothing but transparent and we will continue that when it comes to the basic income report.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, in light of a former premier being appointed as vice-chair of the National Bank of Canada, his second board position since leaving politics, will the Premier commit to extending the cooling-off period and include board appointments to align the province with the federal standards?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

It's something that we'll certainly take under advisement from the Member opposite. I don't disagree with him in his recommendation. There are a number of things that we need to clean up around former MHAs, former premiers and stuff, including the provision of office space which we intend to make sure we clean that up as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, right now Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province in Canada that does not make their MHA conflict of interest disclosures publicly available online.

In the spirit of transparency, I ask the Premier when will he make these public and bring us up to the national standard?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Again, Speaker, that's something that we'll absolutely look at and see the reasons why we're not similar to what other jurisdictions are and certainly take that into consideration.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, a quick question.

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, the Premier told the media yesterday that Dr. Whalen was part of the transition team, even though he said the opposite back in February.

If Dr. Whalen had been advising the Premier on health care since the transition, why did it take 100 days to write the federal government advocating for pharmacare?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services for a quick answer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, one of my first responsibilities as Minister of Health was actually engaging in a meeting with the federal minister. Then I actually went to Ottawa and had a meeting with the federal minister, along with the Premier, and then I had another meeting, Speaker.

The thing is every time I met with the federal minister, I brought up the fact that Newfoundland and Labrador is excluded from that pharmacare pilot project that they started. We want to be engaged; we want to actually sign on, Speaker.

In actual fact, it's misinformation to think that we're not interested. We are. It was the past government, Speaker, that allowed the door to close, basically putting us on the other side of the door and not having the option to actually join in on it, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has now expired.

Orders of the Day – oh, sorry, never mind.

I'm ahead of myself. I'm anxious to get to all this great legislation I'm sure we're going to be....

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: I got excited that time.

AN HON. MEMBER: You've got to do more homework.

SPEAKER: Yes, I've got to do more homework.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

It is my pleasure to table a cost estimate of the cancelled Kenmount Crossing hospital and the infrastructure technical briefing that went along with that announcement.

It's my pleasure to table those documents here in the House today for all to see.

Thank you much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is calling for more supports for police officers.

WHEREAS our province has experienced significant retention challenges that place a substantial strain on existing police resources, including longer response times to urgent calls for service across the province; gaps in patrol coverage, particularly during peak hours; reports the RNC police force is 80 officers short of an ideal complement;

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to increase police staffing to meet the current and projected needs of our communities, recruit more RNC and RCMP officers, improve retention of the hard-working RNC and RCMP officers in our province and engage with the RNC and RCMP on strategies to decrease burnout and improve work-life balance.

Speaker, as we know, just yesterday, it was a lead story actually on NTV news that the RNC are calling that we are significantly below the national ratio on where we should be with regard to our RNC officers. So certainly, we're calling on government to fulfill their promises. The promise was made, they were going to go above and beyond to hire more police officers, but now they're walking that back, as we know, to simply focusing on filling vacancies. Well, that's not what was said, of course, in their election platform. So we're calling on them to step up and fulfill that promise, one of the many, many promises that was certainly made on the campaign trail.

Also, we're calling on them to continue the work of the Liberal government, the previous administration, to take actions such as what we did: five new RCMP positions were funded by the Liberal administration for deployment in Happy Valley-Goose Bay as recommended in the Public Safety Review complemented by the Police Transformation Working Group, which I know my hon. colleague is very proud of, and \$10 million was allocated for the creation of a Joint-Task Force Unit comprising of both the RCMP and RNC officers.

This unit targets weapons, drugs, contraband enforcement and critical incident response activities, aiming to bolster coordinated enforcement efforts province-wide, Speaker. We provided over \$180 million annually for policing services in Newfoundland and Labrador, in both the RCMP and RNC, and, in the last five years, we invested nearly \$40 million in additional funding to support RCMP and RNC policing; supports for ongoing police training, equipment, fleet and operational requirements. It was our Liberal government that launched the Police Transformation Working Group in 2023 and its extensive engagement with community partners which continues to help enhance public safety.

I also met recently with the Joint Council of Conception Bay North. They are certainly working on building on these resources. They're calling for more. We certainly need more policing in this region.

SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very pleased to stand here to address this issue of crime; of the issues that we have with respect to escalating crime in our towns and communities throughout the province.

I can assure residents of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that our government is working closely with our partners, with communities and with police agencies to ensure that public safety is a priority.

I can also say, in regard to that, I've met regularly with many organizations. I've met with MHAs. I met with the opposite Member who has raised this petition. I've met with the town council as well in Conception Bay North. I was at that very meeting that the Member for Harbour Grace - Port du Grave was in attendance. I've met with the RNC leadership, and I've met with the RCMP as well. I've met with the RNC Association.

I want to assure the people that we support the law enforcement in our province who are working very hard, and we are addressing the national trend that we see that police have been leaving policing, but we are encouraged in our province by the number of recruits and those training specifically in the RNC.

We will acknowledge it's demanding work and we recognize that people's priorities change as well, as their home-work life does as well, but that's not unique to policing. So we are committed to ensuring that there are investments in law enforcement in our province.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, I respectfully stand to table the petition removing the provincial

portion of the HST on children's products. These are the reasons for this petition:

Parents of young children already face tough economic pressure. The government should not be taxing parents for items that are of necessity.

The current cost-of-living crisis has made a challenging situation dire for low-income families and single parents.

The Provinces of Ontario, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island provide a point-of-sale rebate on children's goods such as children's car seats, children's clothing, children's diapers and children's footwear.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to remove the provincial portion of the HST from children's car seats, children's clothing, children's diapers and children's footwear.

Speaker, raising kids is expensive, and the cost-of-living crisis is making it harder than ever. Families shouldn't be nickel and dimed on the essentials that their children need. Children grow fast and so do the cost, and parents are already stretched so thin. They shouldn't be punished every time their child needs a new pair of shoes or outgrows a jacket.

No parent should have to choose between paying the bills and buying their children what they need to grow, learn and thrive. The government shouldn't be profiting off kids essentials, taxing diapers, car seats and school clothes is unfair to families. Affordability is about dignity, and families are the backbone of our communities. Supporting them with real relief, like removing HST on children's goods, is how we build a stronger Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons and background of this petition:

WHEREAS the current bus stop on Route 23-167-1, run 23-167-1B, at the corner of Walsh's Lane and Bay Bulls Road requires young students to cross a very busy street at peak rush hour to board their bus; and

WHEREAS several older students living on Walsh's Lane and Bawnmoor Street are picked up and dropped off on Walsh's Lane; and

WHEREAS there is a growing level of concern for student' safety;

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to investigate this matter further, explore all options and make any necessary changes to the route to ensure student safety.

Speaker, I've talked to multiple parents that live in this area. One of the biggest concerns here is that Walsh's Lane is used as a shortcut. So it's not just local residential traffic; they're shortcutting, and shortcutting at higher speeds. The residents have brought forth solutions, suggestions – very plausible, very simple solutions – to staff, and they're not really getting anywhere with it; hence why I'm bringing it forward here now, Speaker.

I'd just like the department to look at this. I believe the minister when he says he cares about our children and wants to make improvements. I would just hope that if a resident puts forward a reasonable solution that staff look at it reasonably and not just say, no, for the sake of saying no or fear of setting some precedent that they made a

mistake. It's not about making mistakes; it's about the safety of children.

I'll table this here now and ask the department to look at it.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, for a response.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I just wanted to respond to the Member's petition. I made it clear in this House, I've been there for a lot of years, and I've always said child safety is paramount to me. I've never shied away from that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Nor would I shy away from this one, but this is the second petition now in the last week on school bus stops and, respectfully, I think in fairness to everyone, this should be submitted to my department. These gentlemen know that.

Put it over to the department officials, let them review it and I'll give them my word that, when they review it, they all come through me. I requested that no bus letters go out to anyone without coming to me, because sometimes they go out and people come back and they're upset that they got denied.

I want to make sure that if it's at all possible, it's your best interest to let it come through me. Submit it to the department, go the proper stage, let them do a review, because we're not the experts. Let them do a review and then, when we discuss it, we'll do everything in our power for the safety of children.

I don't think the House of Assembly needs to be the spot. We have department officials

over dealing with those things. If I deny it or we deny it and you've got a bigger issue, bring it to the House of Assembly by all means. Give them a chance to review it first.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Orders of the Day.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 5, second reading of Bill 5.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Thank you, Speaker.

I stand today to talk about this tax bill to amend the *Revenue Administration Act No. 2*.

Speaker, many people across our province, the rising cost of living continues to be the biggest challenge they face. One of the biggest things that we can control is the cost on fuel.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

H. CORMIER: Thank you.

This bill will make the gas tax permanently at 7.5 cents, and that's so important. That makes it the second lowest in diesel and the lowest in gas.

My district, Speaker, is probably one of the largest geographically, somewhere in the vicinity of 260 to 270 kilometres long. Many of my residents, people that supported me and people who didn't, have to travel 20, 30, 40, sometimes 60 kilometres just to get gas, groceries, attend appointments; we use our vehicles.

In Canada, in most places, using a vehicle is a choice, but in rural Newfoundland it's not. People rely on their vehicles to get around.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Any time that government, this House, can make a decision to make life more affordable for the people of this province, we have to do it.

Speaker, we look at the cost of goods coming into our Island, gas affects it and, fortunately right now – I know someone spoke on the other side about fuel prices and reducing – but oil is starting to come down. It fluctuates. It's a commodity. It fluctuates up and down. It's down somewhere around 10 per cent right now, today; it could be up 20 per cent by 5 o'clock, but it could be down another 20 per cent come 5 o'clock. So it's important that we put something stable in place, that the residents know that we have their backs. We, as a House, got their backs.

Speaker, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board talked last week about collaboration; we in the House working together to make life more affordable, more pleasant for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This side of the House is doing just that. The gas tax, again – I give full credit where credit is due – on the other side of the House, when they were in government, they reduced it. Well done, but we're taking it to the finish line, Speaker. We're making it permanent. We're taking it to the finish line for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: I guess this is the second thing, much like Bay du Nord, it was started but we got it across to the finish line and we got it signed up.

Speaker, we'll go back to collaboration in this House. I came from a background of working together with people, finding the best incomes. It's how I was brought up. I was always brought up with being kind, being kind to whoever. They might not be kind to me, but I'll be kind to them. Working together, working collaboratively, we can do that. We can make life more affordable for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and this gas tax is going to do it. It's going to put more money back in their pockets.

I remember the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands spoke yesterday about the ministers he had meetings with over on this side of the House. He had more meetings in the last five months than he had in three years – three years. The last three years is not collaboration; this is collaboration. This is working together for the betterment of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Speaker, it's important. I know it's my first time up talking to a bill, and I appreciate it, but anybody who knows me knows I like to take a lighter side to life, and I'd like to talk about the Member for St. John's Centre. He spoke last week about the fish he caught, the salmon, and the cost of catching that salmon and only sharing the fin with his brother.

So with this gas tax, hopefully his next fish he catches will be lower cost; however, I'm beginning to think that catching of the fish is more about productivity and ability versus the cost, and I'll do this: I love the rivers. I love fishing. I'll extend an invitation to the Member for St. John's Centre, if he's out on the West Coast in late June, early July, I'll

bring him to the rivers. I'll put him on his fish, but if he promises he has to take it home and share it with his brother, we're all good.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Speaker, I'll finish up this way.

When we collaborate, not just in this House, but we listen to the people. The Members opposite have to listen to their constituents. We have to listen to our constituents. We have to bring it together for the betterment of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This gas tax can do this. We'll make it happen. We listen to the people. We're listening to the other side. I said it in my maiden speech that a good idea can come from any side of this House. We have to be prepared to listen, and we do listen. Both sides of this House listen.

With that, Speaker, I'll finish up, but I will be supporting this bill. I think it's a great idea and it's the right move for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Dwyer): The Chair recognizes the MHA for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the Member for his sentiments about co-operation. I also want to say, I guess as a new Member of this House, that there has to be a place for criticism and challenging government. That is our role on this side of the House. So if we advocate for new ideas and you to do more, that is our role, Mr. Speaker.

The people of this province face extraordinary cost-of-living challenges. Some of these costs affect everyone, rich or poor, but some are particularly difficult for

low-income families and seniors with fixed incomes. Groceries, home heating, child care, gas, they're things that affect everyone, everywhere. Keeping the gas tax low is something I welcome. Freezing gas tax is one way in which we can help people with the cost of living, but it's only one of many other levers.

Home heating fuel, for example, as mentioned during Question Period, the previous government introduced a home heating supplement to help people who rely on oil to heat their homes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. PARSONS: One way that the new government can provide immediate relief to people is by extending this program and possibly even expanding it, especially given the volatile price of oil that we're seeing now all over the world.

Another measure we can take is child care. Affordable, accessible child care is essential to supporting families and strengthening our workforce and enabling parents to participate fully in the economy. The \$10-a-day program that was introduced was a great success, but there is more to do. There is a shortage of affordable daycare, Mr. Speaker, in my area. I'll give you one example.

At the City of Corner Brook when I was there, they built a beautiful, new community recreation centre that includes daycare. Unfortunately that daycare has yet to get funding, the \$10-a-day funding for the YMCA's daycare at the Marina Redmond Centre. So this is something, again, that our new government could do. I hear hints of it coming in the budget. I really hope that we see that through.

Electricity costs – this is something that's been a topic of great discussion in the campaign. I know that our party proposed removing the PST on electricity. Something I know that my colleagues in the Third Party

also would support. That is something that affects, as I mentioned, transportation, groceries, everything. So let's look at energy costs.

But the issue of the moment, of course, is the gas tax freeze. I'd like to congratulate, first of all, the previous government for lowering the gas tax to the lowest levels in Canada –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. PARSONS: – previously, in 2022. And, of course, we know gas affects more than just your drive. There are expenses that we pay weekly or daily, and gas is one of them; every time we go to fill up, we notice how much it costs.

Lower gas taxes provide immediate relief to families, there is no doubt. But as the Member before mentioned, it is also really important in rural areas – places where we have no choice but to drive to get where we're going. There is no mass transportation; there is no other way to get. Everyone is spread out. Our services are spread out. Our health care is spread out. People have to travel for work.

Again, taxes and the price of gas affect rural residents more than anyone. And, of course, our small businesses, Mr. Speaker. Gas affects our contractors, our fish harvesters, our tourism operators, delivery companies – you name it. Again, a lower gas tax is always beneficial to them.

Mr. Speaker, in order to stabilize the cost-of-living pressures on our families in this province, I think it is important that the government take measures to keep the gas tax low and look at other ways in which we can make sure the price of gas remains stable for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Thank you, Speaker.

When I was elected, the people in my District of Lewisporte - Twillingate, not only did they believe in me, but they believed in the pillars of this government: better health care, safer communities and lower taxes. With this introduction of the permanent reduction of the gas tax, it resonates not only throughout my district, but throughout this province.

First when I was asked to speak on this bill about reduced gas tax, a good friend of mine, a resident of Lewisporte came to mind. I won't say his last name, but Paul. Every morning when I get a chance to stop at the local Tim Horton's in Lewisporte, there's usually a group of gentlemen sitting around having their morning coffee. I call them the unofficial Tim Horton's caucus.

The one gentleman I mentioned, Paul, was concerned about the price of gas. Like the rest of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, he's hardworking, and recently, the last couple of years, he purchased a boat – not for fishing, but for pleasure. Nothing better than going out the bay when the water is flat and calm.

Now, for Hansard, back in my hometown, Twillingate, we call it flat 'cam.'

AN HON. MEMBER: Like the oil.

M. BUTT: Like the oil.

With the increase of fuel, you know, it's harder and harder to justify going out for the day. With this reduction of fuel tax, it eases that pain because now he can take that simple joy after working, and on the weekend when the water is flat 'cam,' he can go for a ride. There's nothing better than going out the bay in a boat on a beautiful day.

This introduction is a permanent reduction of the gas tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Permanent. Not just a pause that everybody has to wait on bated breath on March 31 to see if it's going to continue or not. This ensures better affordability for all.

As the Member opposite mentioned last week about the increase in tax revenue, you know, the more tax, the more revenue for our coffers. Well, after the last 10 years of reckless spending – let's just say what it is – we need more money, but as the Premier has mentioned before, we won't balance the budget on the backs of Newfoundlanders. We'll put more money in their pockets.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: With the introduction of this permanent reduction, it would help many industries. Fishery for example. I'll just take a few. The lobster fishery, for example, because you have inshore boats and there's fuel for boats. Nobody hauls lobster pots by arm anymore; we use pot haulers or lobster haulers. Everything runs by gas, gas for the trucks, gas for transportation.

I have a friend of mine who doesn't live in the district, Cory. I was talking to him this past weekend. He does participate in the lobster fishery. Has no children, but he had a concern. He said, with the price of gas, he doesn't know how the ordinary person in rural Newfoundland can do it. He said it's a struggle.

I also thought of a good buddy of mine in Twillingate, Craig. Born on the water, forever; participates in the offshore fishery, but also does the inshore. He goes at codfish and the squid, and it's the same thing. Everything cost money. It is money out of his pocket to go out and make a living for him and his family.

Forestry is another example. For Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who burn wood, it's a cheaper option than burning oil. Growing up with wood heat, there's nothing like it. A beautiful heat.

A. BARBOUR: Loves it.

M. BUTT: Loves it; but there's a cost because you still got fuel, trucks and chainsaws and transportation costs.

Tourism is another big proponent of this fuel tax reduction. You have tour boats; especially in my hometown of Twillingate, this past summer with the multitude of icebergs that were around, tour boats were in constant motion all running on fuel. This increase of tax, if it came back on the 31st of March, it would have to be passed along to the customer. I know that being on family trips of four, everything is budgeted. Now, when you have to budget for fuel, you have to limit on your activities that you can take. A lot of families just choose not to go.

Transportation – everything that we use day to day from dry goods to food, is transported, usually by a truck, by diesel fuel. If the tax increases, well this extra cost is passed on to the consumer.

The Leader of the Third Party mentioned last week about the price of a bag of groceries. Nobody has to be reminded about the price of groceries. It's getting to the point now, Speaker, that going to the store now you've almost got to ask if there's a payment plan for two litres of milk. This reduction of fuel tax – permanent reduction of fuel tax – will affect everyone in our province, from Nain, located in the wonderful Big Land, to Lamaline on the Burin Peninsula.

My colleague here mentioned, with rural residents, they are more impacted by this tax than anybody else because of the distance they have to travel for work, for appointments and the lack of public transportation. So with this, rather than

living in a big town like this, a big city where there's busing, you can walk to work, we don't have that luxury in rural Newfoundland. Also, like my colleague mentioned, with this introduction of the permanent reduction of the gas tax, we will have the lowest gas tax in Canada and the second lowest in diesel in Canada.

In conclusion, Speaker, I'd like to quote from my colleague from the wonderful Torngat Mountains: Speaker, this is what action looks like.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's also my pleasure to stand and talk to this bill, Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administrative Act No. 2, but I'd be remiss if I didn't comment on the previous speaker's comments.

Perhaps he could reach out to the former Member for Twillingate to school him and to remind him about – you know, he talks about reckless spending – about the Muskrat Falls and the rate mitigation which this province heavily relies on. A lot of people don't know and forget that we receive a half-billion dollars from Ottawa each and every year to offset our power bills, and that is because of a PC, Conservative, government Muskrat Falls, which we are still digging out of debt for which I might add.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: So when the speaker talks about reckless spending, I ask him to reflect his memory back to the Conservative government prior, which we're still in debt for. So just some food for thought there to

the previous speaker, new Member, and congratulations on his election.

That said, Speaker, we know that families and businesses and communities across Newfoundland and Labrador are still feeling the squeeze from the high costs, especially at the pumps. We know what's happening in the Middle East – also, I would like to extend our thoughts and prayers as well to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are currently in the Middle East, one who is actually a friend of mine.

A local person from Bay Roberts is currently living over there in the Middle East. He's actually been in the news to give updates. It's Mr. Darren Butt and his family. Our thoughts and our prayers are with them, of course, that they will return home safely and continue to live safely, those Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are currently in the Middle East.

But we're also hoping that the government is not going to stop there. We do know that this is not new legislation. This has been done for multiple budgets now to support cost-of-living measures, which we've done for years and years. As well, we didn't stop there, we also cut the registration price in half for when people want to register their vehicles. That's another measure that we did.

L. PARROTT: (Inaudible.)

P. PARSONS: Speaker, the Member for Terra Nova is chirping and it's hard to stay focused now. So, again, this is my time to speak. I'm sure he'll be getting up and speaking, because he likes to speak as well here in this hon. House. He's my friend but I'll ask him to keep his chirping at a minimal while I'm talking.

We talk about seniors; this would not only support the overall cost of living, but the other initiatives, you know, we want them to go further. Again, this is not in the new legislation. This is something that we've

done for quite some time and there were reasons, perhaps, why it wasn't done permanently by a previous administration; because, as we know, we often work in conjunction with other levels of government, in particular the federal government, and there's continuous mention of a federal carbon tax with a backstop, and there were reasons preventing our administration from doing such things.

Again, we're happy to see them continue the work that we've started for the past decade because, as we know, a lot of times, much of the legislation and much of the cost and the funding and the budgets that are carried over takes time. They've been in office over 100 days, or 130 days I think, whatever that number is, so they are getting to, I guess, come in and continue the work and actually announce the work that this previous administration has done.

So we'll certainly support this bill, as we do everything and we can do everything to support the cost of living, to support Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but again, we're calling on them to go further with their other cost-saving measures; again, the registration of vehicles. We do know that there was a promise made, of course, in our platform to double the Seniors' Benefit from \$400, which we brought in, and we were going to double that to \$800.

We haven't seen that happen just yet, but we're hoping that there are going to be initiatives like this come down in their budget, because as we know a lot of people are suffering right now and, again, we see the cost of everything is going up, whether it be fuel, whether it be groceries, insurance payments, you name it, all the payments and obligations that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have on a monthly basis, it is getting tougher but, unfortunately, salaries and pensions are not going up; those are not changing.

So I hear from my constituents, of course, and these are people who have good jobs and two people working in the household. Again, it certainly is a challenge. We applaud to see them going in the right direction, you know, that they're continuing the good work that we did start, but we ask them to take it further; because, as we know, the bill repeals and replaces section 51 of the *Revenue Administration Act* to set out a clear, itemized list of per-litre tax rates on different grades of gasoline.

Section 51 of the *Revenue Administration Act* is repealed and the following substituted: "(a) on propane fuel grade of gasoline, a tax of \$0.07 per litre;" and "(e) on all other grades of gasoline, a tax of \$0.075 per litre."

But again, this is good to see this go in the right direction, but we certainly will be looking for more initiatives to support Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on cost-of-living measures here in our province. So it is good. Again, I applaud them for continuing the work that we started, and we will be certainly supporting this bill.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour and a privilege again to stand at any time in this House, and I'd like to speak to the gas tax here right now. It's been an interesting 10 years, Mr. Speaker. Here we are inheriting this province now and taking government on the billion-dollar hole almost to dig our way out of. Yes, we do have a war going on in the Middle East and we're seeing a sharp rise in gas prices and all that stuff, but it is this volatility, Mr.

Speaker, that makes us put this move into this legislation here in the House.

The freezing of this number in the gas tax helps us to combat that volatility over in the Middle East, and it allows us to say right now no more, no further; we're not going to put this on the backs of the people anymore; we're going to hold steady. That's what we're going to do in this government here, Mr. Speaker, is hold steady.

Of course, I appreciate the commentary from the Members across the way, and they're saying go further, go further. But I mean, isn't that just the Liberal way, though, isn't it? Nobody worries about hundreds of millions going astray, but then they'll focus on the salary of one staffer – a little bit much, Mr. Speaker, if you ask me.

Talk about a gas tax now, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it's at 7.5 per cent; it was at 14.5 per cent. Yes, I give the Liberals credit; they brought it down in hard times, sure, but we're taking it a step further and we're moving it over the finish line. What we're doing is we're going to freeze that right where it is because we know that global events can affect us right here at home in Newfoundland and Labrador.

That's a fact, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to make sure that we address that. So you will never be able to control volatility in other parts of the world, but we can certainly do what we've got to do here at home in order to protect Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and that's what our government is all about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, I guess there's about 42 cents a litre that affects us from all levels of taxation, most of that being federal of course. This government will continue to work with the federal government to do all we can to take any type of tax burden off the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Of course, in taking government, what do we have to do? We have to look at all of the tax structures within our government and evaluate them all, and this is just one more piece of that. And again, what is that? It's a Blue Book promise kept, another one of those. Everybody is loving our Blue Book, especially the Members across the way. We can see in Question Period, they're all over that Blue Book, up one side of her and down the other, Mr. Speaker.

We're very proud of that Blue Book and we're going to deliver on the promises set out herein. With that, I'm going to put a Labrador spin on today's debate if I may. Born and raised in the Big Land, there's a Labrador way of life. When I had Minister Ottenheimer and Minister Evans and I had everybody up in the district and Minister Wall, we were blessed with a bright, sunny day, which we call a large Labrador day. That means you can't see from end of her to the other. It's so beautiful you got to have your shades on. It's so bright in Labrador on a large Labrador day, Mr. Speaker.

In saying that, we have a Labrador way of life and when you're up in the Big Land, we've got a big cabin culture. We don't call them cottages or nothing fancy like that. We've got a place now to put our nets so that when we get down there, we can put them in the water, Mr. Speaker. That's what it's about in Labrador, but when you're travelling all over the Big Land, geographically it's called Big Land for a reason.

When you're going to your cabin, or when you're going up north or you're going south, you're going into the other great districts of Torngat Mountains and south, I would say as well, and over the course of Labrador West, we travel all around, but those distances are so vast that fuel and its price is very important to Labradorians, I'll tell you that. Whether out fishing – and we've seen what the last 10 years has done to every single household in this province. You can't go out and afford anything, Mr. Speaker.

There's no way – you can't get Campbell's soup no more; you have to go with the no name – too darn expensive now.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, we have to be vigilant as a government and I ask all MHAs from all sides be vigilant in your districts, talk with your people, a good idea is a good idea. We always say that on this side of the House. What I mean by that is if you've got any good ideas to help this government reduce the cost of living and to do whatever we can for people, we'll listen. We're not going to say that we know all and we're the be all and end all here, what we're saying is we're open to any suggestion that improves the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I'll go back to that Labrador way of life. When you head out of Lake Melville and you head out and it depends where you're going, you can go down towards North West River and go towards Dry Island and (inaudible) and all those places, or you can go straight up, come down and past Mud Lake and then go out across out into Kenemich and Kenamu river is there and then out around Adam's Point, of course, then you're in my world in Gitters Bite, Mr. Speaker.

That is truly, truly one of my favourite places to be and I'll say this, because it is such a long distance. It is a three-hour round trip on snowmobile with ideal conditions, from Goose Bay to Gitters Bite where we go fishing and where I grew up and my family grew up along with a lot of other people on our street as well. I just say that it's a beautiful experience. It's just what we do.

Somebody mentioned here earlier in the House about going out wooding and it's so darn expensive for fuel, oil. It's so darn expensive for everything. If you have the ability and you've got the family members to help and especially if you have some young

kids that you can put to work in your family, it's great to go out. It's just a healthy exercise.

It's part of our way of life here in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's just about wooding; you call it whatever. You go out and you get that wood, and it saves on the family's expenses. Like I said, it's also offsetting the cost that could be contributed to the high cost of food or any of the other bills that you have to have in the household, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly not going to sit here on this side of the House and say that we're not proud of this. We're going to be proud of every single cost-saving measure we put out to the families of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Premier himself said it, that we're not going to balance the books of this province and this gigantic hole we've been left by the former government on the backs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that had nothing to do with that. We're going to put as many measures in place as we can to make life easier to people, and like I said, write your MHA. Send emails in. Get on Facebook; tell people what your ideas are because these times are definitely hard.

We've watched the regression in my district, in Lake Melville, over this last 10 years. It's absolutely shameful, Mr. Speaker, and it's a host of things. It's the former government; it's federal decisions that are made; it's realities; things happen across the world. That's just the way it is, Mr. Speaker.

We have to have fiscal responsibility here on this side of the House. We have to, especially when we're starting in the red, and there's a hell of a lot of red – no pun intended – but in terms of that, when we're in the red, we have to be vigilant, and I use that word over and over again. It's about fiscal responsibility.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh

SPEAKER: Order, please!

If I can't hear the speaker, I will call order.

Thank you.

K. RUSSELL: Thank you for your protection, Mr. Speaker, definitely needed, definitely appreciated. I can't hear anything over here right now, but I'll rise above, like we always will on this side of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: So in saying that about fiscal responsibility, at some time – okay, we're out in the boat now. My cabin, great time to talk about that. So we pull up the boat because it's a little rough down there, and we take the little boat out. We go out and check our nets. When we're checking our nets, you know what I mean, if we see that it's leaking, you've got to patch that up.

Well, I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker, we have a pretty leaky little boat on our hands right now. A lot of patching has to be done on this side of the House, but we're good to go, and the people know that because that's why they put us here because we're going to be fiscally responsible, we're going to do what's right by the people, and we're not going to be afraid to explore and be creative when it comes to the solutions that we need in order to address the challenging times that everybody is facing right now.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we've heard on this side of the House. We hear it at Question Period. We hear it from every constituent we all have: the cost of living, the cost of living, the cost of living. I just want to talk a few minutes since we're talking about reducing this, keeping this tax reduced permanently, we're talking about what it takes to run a family, run a household in Newfoundland and Labrador right now.

I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we came onboard; sugar tax, out the door, no sweat. We're reviewing all the other ones as well. We have to make sure that when we talk about the way that trends are

continuing, and we're seeing that right now – we're seeing fuel, we're seeing food – and everybody's worried. They have a right to be worried in their household about what follows this conflict in the Middle East and the rising of everything, because obviously the food has to be transported. I mean, it's got to get to your local grocer and all of those things take trucks, boats, planes and all that stuff – planes, trains and automobiles as they say, Mr. Speaker.

But in saying that, I want to talk about something this could really – we have some mention about fishermen, of course, and one of my favourite shows has always been *Deadliest Catch*. That is a dangerous job, but then again, it doesn't have to be crab though, does it? If you're at the shrimp or you're at the halibut, whatever you're at, it's a dangerous job. So the very least we can do is try and offset the monumental costs associated with running those enterprises. It's near and dear to us because fishing, of course, is a way of life.

So in saying that, Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about farmers; because, on this side of the House, we know we've got our work cut out for us, especially on the Labrador side, because we have a very short growing season and food security, from a provincial standpoint, has to be paramount in terms of producing as much as we can right here at home by our own people. That means supporting the fishermen, farmers, right down from the egg farmers right through to the people that are doing our turnips and our cabbage for our Jiggs' dinner on Sundays. What I'm saying is we've got to be aware of all of the trials and tribulations that people in these industries, so farming and the fishery and all that, everything they face.

What you're going to see on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is always going to be continued pressure on the federal government and continued work from within this House and within our own caucus to make sure that we offset the crazy costs

that are coming up and being sprung on families seemingly out of nowhere.

I just want to say a little bit about the dangerous work as well. As a lover of seafood, I just want to say, to people that engage in these activities, like farming – that’s dangerous as well. There is a lot of heavy equipment, and I believe it was mentioned here, the amount of fuel it costs to run a farm, to run a vessel. You’re not just talking about gasoline and all that, you’re talking about other associated products as well, so everything from the oils and the greases to have to make it all happen.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be vigilant – I keep using the word over and over again – but we have to make sure that whether it’s talking about a sugar tax or whether we’re talking about a gasoline tax or whether we’re talking about even new projects such as Bay du Nord or whatever like that, we have to make sure that we put the interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador before politics. We have to make sure that families are successful in our province. As families fall, communities fall. When communities fall, provinces fall. I mean, we’re never going to fall because we’re so resilient and strong, but I say it as a cautionary tale just to say that we have to do everything we can.

Every move that’s made on this side of the House will have that lens put on it from our Minister of Finance. We want to talk about making sure that we respect, during this process, those people in the offshore and everybody in the oil and gas industry, Mr. Speaker, because those are the people that are putting their lives – just like those fishermen for that bit of crab, and just like those farmers driving those big combines and all that stuff – the people offshore and the oil workers, these are the people that are delivering this stuff to shore; these are the people that are keeping this industry going, and we want to make sure that

they’re respected in every way, shape or form.

I will tell you this, just at the hotel, we ran into a bunch of offshore workers and we ran into a couple of people we met from – I can’t remember the district right now.

AN HON. MEMBER: Twillingate.

K. RUSSELL: Twillingate?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes.

K. RUSSELL: Twillingate was the district?

We met a couple of people from Twillingate who, only days after the announcement, got the call from the engineers, from their people, and they came back and they’re so excited. Just the amount of energy into that – do you know what we did? They were like: We got calls. Kind of like coming out of hibernation, we’re back in the game.

One gentleman told me, he said, well, I’m going to retire offshore in the oil and gas and, he said, my son is ready to go to work and start his first years in there too, and this project is right on the horizon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: They’re all so happy to have that, Mr. Speaker. Thousands and thousands of people are going to be in that same spot with the Bay du Nord announcement as well.

In saying that, it’s about families, it’s always been and you hear that over and over again on this side of the House. It’s about doing whatever we can as legislators, and that’s not just us on government as well. We know that we got hard-working MHAs from all flavours, Mr. Speaker, in this House that are here for the right reasons too. They love their districts. They love the people in their districts. You’re here to serve them and you’re here to do whatever you can. So hopefully that means supporting our

legislation in this House when it comes to doing this stuff and making sure that we all work collectively in the best interests of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I will thank the Minister of Finance, again. You know, we get a little chuckling, a little barbs, a little chirping across the way, that's all find and dandy, but when you make a move like saying, okay, the first \$15,000 of anybody's income is going to be tax-free, that's huge. When you put that out exponentially to every member of the province, and then you talk about, okay, sugar tax and revamping other taxes, you talk about then freezing this tax, these are progressive moves, Speaker, that will ensure the success of the family in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The family means more than anything in the world, as we all know. We all come from these big families. Newfoundland and Labrador is not so big that you don't know anyone from every single district, and we truly do. That's the way it is.

I'd like to thank the minister for time to speak on this. I'd like to thank the Members across the way for their commentary. I look forward to seeing them support us wholeheartedly and making sure that we do the very best in freezing this gas tax for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Just before I acknowledge the next speaker, I just want people to understand that this bill is not a money bill, so I would expect there be some relevance to the tax.

I'm giving some leeway because we have new Members that would like to talk about their district, but in the meantime, it's not a money bill; it is a tax bill.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to have a few words on this permanent gas legislation, to take off the tax permanently, because it has been ongoing for a number of years, as we know. It's a great time to say, okay, let's make it permanent so we don't have to come back every year and go through it again. I applaud the government for doing it.

I'd be remiss if I didn't bring it up, Mr. Speaker, about the Muskrat Falls. There may be one person over there, and myself, that were there in Muskrats Falls – period.

So look at the other 21 Members – and I don't even think that person was in Cabinet to make the decision at the time, if I remember correctly – and take the other 21 Members and throw it as if those people, men and women, did something wrong with Muskrat Falls, and keep throwing it back at people who had no knowledge of it, who weren't involved with it?

I was involved. I was here for five days with it, but I don't say 21 of the Members that are over there that had any involvement with it. They might have heard it on the radio and heard when we were in the House of Assembly for five days. So this idea, keep throwing out Muskrat Falls – look what you did – one person, that was it, wasn't even in Cabinet at the time. It's time to put that to bed because it's easy to go back in the past and we all can do that. But it's time to take it and move it forward.

Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to speak on history again. I can tell you, I've been there on many occasions, no matter what government is in, there are going to be tough decisions that have to be made. I don't care what government is in. I'm going back with Clyde Wells in his day. I'm going back to 1988, first when I declared that I was going to be a candidate. You come

right on through, even with the PC government when they won in 2003, is that they had to make tough decisions. The Liberals had to make tough decisions. This government here is going to have to make tough decisions. There's absolutely no doubt about it.

I'm just going to give a bit of history about this, Mr. Speaker. In 2015, when we won the government, in 2016 we brought down a budget. It was a terrible budget. I was one of the ones who said it's going to be tough to sell. But we had to make the decision because we were left with such a huge deficit. I was the one who went out publicly and said give us a chance to work at it. Give us a chance. Let us see what we can do over the next four or five years to get this done because it was a big deficit and we didn't realize how big the deficit was and I was the one saying give us a chance.

So, Mr. Speaker, my point on that, this government inherited a huge deficit. I'm saying to people here, there are going to be tough decisions, and the Members opposite, the Liberal Party and the NDP has to hold the government accountable. I understand that, and I'm a part of that also. But for me to stand here today and just criticize with a billion-dollar deficit, and I was in the same boat in 2016, and say give us an opportunity, give us a year, give us two years to see what we can do with it.

Then that's what I'm saying to this government here, is that you deserve that opportunity. You deserve it, because I went through it. I went through that hard time of making tough decisions. Maybe we went a bit too tough. That's up for debate. But we had to make the decisions that we had. Then I know some Members of the government brought up some of the fees and that. We had to do it at the time. It was tough. It was tough; we had to do it.

So when I look at the Members opposite now, you're in the exact same boat as 2016, didn't realize the deficit was going to be so

big. Everybody expects, with a new government, things are going to change overnight. It is not. I'm telling you right now that decisions that you're going to make, when you're in Cabinet, there's going to be very frank discussions of what should be done in Cabinet to bring to the public. That's part of being in Cabinet, that's part of the decision-making and that's part of being in government. That is the whole part.

I've been through it. I always use this statement and I think it's one of the best lines that I could ever get from a teacher, from anybody. It was Clyde Wells. It was 1989 when we ran and he had to make tough decisions. Back in 1992, they were going through a budget and there was a big fight with the teachers and teachers were out saying we're going to get rid of the government and everybody was trying to speak to Clyde Wells, saying we can't make those changes because they're going to be out against us and everybody was trying to convince the premier at the time.

I remember they came to me and they said, well, you got his ear; he listens to you; talk to him. I remember we were driving out to McIvers and I was speaking to the premier and I said, Premier, you know we got an election coming up; you know a lot of people are nervous about the election in 1993 and about decisions that you're making. I remember Clyde Wells looking at me, he said, Eddie, I rather lose with honesty than win with dishonesty. In 2003, we won more seats than we did in 1989, because Clyde Wells spoke to the people and he always said don't underestimate the intelligence of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to know what position we're in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: My advice to the government is be honest with the people. I know it's going to be tough. It's just got to be, because everybody, human nature, wants their road paved. Everybody wants cheaper gas.

Everybody wants cheaper food. Everybody wants health care. It's tough. No matter what, it's tough; but if you're honest with the people and very concerned about the people and you put it out in such a way and then whatever you say you're going to follow up on, I can assure you that people will respect it. Some may not like it but they will respect it, and I've been there. On two or three different occasions, I have been there.

I can tell you when you go back with the previous government and when you talk about the sugar tax – and I'll just give you a little history on the sugar tax, because a lot of people weren't even here then.

This was stalled in the House and they're going to keep going. I went outside here and I said, I'm going to work out a deal here, and I did. Part of the deal was any money came in – at the time, if you go back and check the sugar tax, the amount that the government was going to collect was \$3 million. It went up to \$11 million, \$17 million – went way beyond that; it was \$3 million. The deal was not to use the money for general revenues, to put it in, say, heart and stroke, diabetes, so it would be an education program across the province. So it's not a money grab. Find some way to do that.

That was what we agreed to out there. I brokered the deal, and we came in the House and next thing you know, we all voted for it, no problem, pass it on through, get it done. They changed it. Once you change that, and then you've got people over here who agreed to that change at the time, it was the PC Opposition over here at the time, changed it, and then that's where that's become such a big issue.

Then when it goes from \$3 million revenue, up to \$11 million, up to \$17 million – I think the last I heard was \$21 million, \$22 million. My point on that is if you're going to do something, follow through on it. If you don't, your credibility won't start. Then I look at the

carbon tax. Again, I know, I was the minister actually that first brought in the carbon tax. But the part of the carbon tax was that we're going to spend the money here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So that's why I agreed with the carbon tax. That's why I agreed. What happened is the rules changed. That we could put up backstops for Newfoundland and Labrador, that we could spend the money here – anything we collected here we could spend it here, with the environment. Which is a lot of good reasons, we could keep it in Newfoundland and Labrador. Then it changed. When it changed, and then we didn't have the ability to create a Newfoundland-and-Labrador product here, how to spend the money, how we're going to collect and spend the money, that's when it changed. That's when things went off the rails on that.

So this idea, that the Liberal government at the time took the carbon tax and they supported it all, it's not true. You could make your own made-in-Newfoundland product on how to spend that money. It changed, and that's where the Liberals got caught in a bind. Right up until 2018, I was a part of it. They changed it after 2018 when the federal government changed it. They said here's what you've got to do. If you don't do it, we're going to take it and we're going to direct the money, and that's what happened.

So I'm defending both sides here because I have the history of both sides. But the sugar tax one was one that was supposed to be used for education, but the carbon tax, that was a federal government that forced the provincial Liberals at the time to make sure that they follow their rules from Ottawa, not the rules that was first initially – because I stood up and answered questions on it.

I stood up and answered questions that we're going to make it stay in Newfoundland and Labrador. We'll develop a plan to keep the money in Newfoundland and Labrador

to spend it the way we want to spend it. That's the true history on it.

So I'm just going to say to the Premier and to the Minister of Finance, one of the biggest concerns that you hear, besides health care and a few other things, is what are you going to do with the deficit? In my opinion, you have to show the leadership, that for some way that you're going to help people out, but you're going to say we can't keep spending and increase the deficit. It's a balancing act and it's tough. I look at the Minister of Finance; I don't envy you. I don't envy you one bit.

I'll just say that when it comes out, I'm sure the people are going to look at their health care and they're going to look at other things that's going to affect them personally, the cost of food, the cost of gas, the cost of prescriptions, that's the kind of stuff that hits people personally. But many people in Newfoundland and Labrador are educated enough to know that we cannot just keep spending and spending and spending.

So I say to the Minister of Finance, there is room there to help people out personally, but it's going to be a tough decision by the Cabinet in this government. It's going to be tough. I can assure you that it's going to be tough. But I said before, and I used it from Clyde Wells's day, is that be honest with the people and explain why you got to do what you got to do and you'll be surprised how many people will understand it. I've been in that situation also.

Then we're talking about the MOU for Upper Churchill. I'll get into that story later about the MOU for the Upper Churchill. I'll get into that story, and I can tell you, there is a story there. I'll tell you why I'm going to get into it later. I'm not going to get into it right now, Mr. Speaker, because I don't want to get off too far about – it's not a money bill. I was the one with the NDP and the Speaker at the time who said, look, they're going to pass this. The Liberals got enough that will pass that. Let's find some safeguards.

That's when we came up with restrictions on the Oversight Committee. He said, let's set it up, parameters of the Oversight Committee. I'm going to get into that story later on and I'm going to have documentation. The reason why I'm going to bring it up, once that debate starts on the MOU, because the minister at the time, when it was over, when there were changes, he wasn't even in government.

So when I put my name to sign it, to establish an Oversight Committee and then behind my back the Terms of Reference of what we agreed to in this House of Assembly was changed, I can tell you, it's not right. I have the letters, I have the documentation and I can tell you that what we agreed to here that day, what we voted on in this House, about the oversight Committee, it was changed.

I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker, and that's just a bit of history because I've been through it and I'm going to say the government is going to have tough times here. It's going to be tough. But hang in there for the people of the province. I say to the Opposition and the NDP, and I'll be part of it also, hold the government accountable, that's your role. If you don't hold the government accountable, what happens then is the whole credibility of the electoral process stops. If there are issues, bring it up. That's what we do.

But let's bring it up for the betterment of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. When you look at the permanent gas tax, especially what is happening over in the Middle East right now – and God bless them all. It's sad to see so much, not just over in the Middle East, all around the world. It's just sad. When you bring in something like this here, the gas tax, which is permanent that people don't have to worry about every year, asking us questions, are we going to get relief – now it's going to be permanent relief. This is a positive. It might be a small step, but it's positive.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: It is positive.

If you find that there's going to be a lot of small, positive steps that's going to help people, you're going to find that people on both sides of the House have to agree to it. Because that's what we're here, to make the betterment of Newfoundland and Labrador for every individual that we can in this province.

I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker. Again, when I hear the Muskrat Falls, trying to blame it on 21 of the people who weren't even in this House of Assembly, it just shows that the argument is getting a bit thin. There's no doubt that there was a major flaw in the Muskrat Falls, but I can tell you that 21 of those people over there were never in this House of Assembly. They weren't here.

So let's put things forward that this government is doing now, because the Liberal government – and give them credit. I was part of it. Even up until this government formed, they handled the Muskrat Falls issue. It was tough. But they did handle what they had to put in to keep the rates down. Give them credit. It was done – it was done. Now it's the government to handle that.

But for us, as a group over here, to continue throwing that up to 21 people that it was your fault, it wasn't your fault; you weren't here. But you have to deal with. The Liberals dealt with it at the time. When we took over in 2016, we had to deal with it until 2025. The mantel is passed over now.

So I've been in that boat. I'll say it once more, I've been in that boat in 2016, and then we asked people to give us a chance. I know the PC Party is going to say give us a chance because we're new. There are a lot of issues there. I can tell you, be honest, be upfront, and I'm sure you're going to make the right decisions.

When you're in Cabinet – and I've been there – and there are some really contested

issues coming up, just remember one thing, that you're doing it for the betterment of people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Stick to your values, stick to your guns because when you don't have a robust argument, a robust discussion about how we're going to make this go forward, what happens is it's going to slide on through.

I say God bless you all for being in that position of government because I know we were over here too and there had to be tough decisions made by the Liberal government. But I think that if we all come together, the Opposition, the NDP and myself, to keep government accountable, to bring up issues, I think we're going to have a better Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So that's why with the putting the tax in, the gas tax permanent, I will be supporting that because it's going to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a great honour to rise to my feet here today in representing the people of the District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde. Speaker, it's a pleasure to get up in support of this bill here today. It's something that I heard a lot of when I was campaigning here this past year, people struggling with affordability, the cost of living.

Something that came up a lot, as well, was that people were wondering if this was going to be something that was continued. It's something that I've heard over the last couple of years, especially around this time of year, is the gas tax reduction going to be

permanent, or are we going to face another 7.5-cent increase at the pumps at the end of this month?

I'm pleased to see that this piece of legislation is something now that we're putting forward to make sure that this is going to be a permanent reduction for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: I can echo some comments from Members earlier that families, workers and businesses all across our province, they rely on their vehicles every day. Whether it's going to work, transporting their children to school, or transporting goods. So it's going to have a larger impact to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and we made a clear commitment to the people of this province that we would permanently lower the gas tax, thus delivering on part of our campaign platform to deliver lower taxes for all of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Not only that, it delivers clear direction to the people of the province. Again, I mentioned early about people wondering, is this going to go up? Are the taxes going to go up on gas again? But no, it's not. It's going to be permanently reduced, so this gives the people clear direction – exactly what they're looking for. It's predictable, ongoing relief rather than short-term measures, and residents wondering if the cut will be permanent.

It's especially important for rural districts like mine. For rural districts in Newfoundland and Labrador, where you have no choice but to use your vehicle. Speaker, for me, myself, I know it's approximately two hours to travel from one end of my district to the other, going the long way – going right around the perimeter of the district. I look back on when this tax cut was first introduced in 2022, and I worked in St. John's, and I drove a little car, and every

two days I had to put \$100 worth of gas in my car to come to work.

It came to the point where, not only for myself, but for other people who had to do the same thing, it got to the point where you had to look at it and say, can I afford to go to work? Can I afford to put gas in my car to go to work? That's a question a lot of people ask themselves during that time. So I'll give credit where credit is due – good job to the Members opposite for introducing the tax cut. Thank you.

And now, instead of having it come up yearly, we're going to permanently reduce the taxes. Our focus remains clear: making life more affordable and supporting our economy and building a stronger future for Newfoundland and Labrador, and permanently reducing the gas tax is a step in the right direction.

So with that, Speaker, I don't think I can add much more to that. A lot of my colleagues have already said what I've been echoing, so with that I'll take my seat.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly always a pleasure to stand up in this House and rise to represent the good people of Burgeo - La Poile, one of the best districts in the province, if I do say so myself, but I'm sure my colleagues here would have to say otherwise.

Today, obviously we're talking about Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No 2. Just to provide some more context, obviously to the listeners at home who are watching, this bill would amend the *Revenue Administration Act* to maintain the reduction of tax on

certain grades of gasoline by seven cents per litre.

Mr. Speaker, I just have to make a couple comments, obviously listening to the debate in the House and as one of the first-time Members, I've been watching – or as a new Member, I should say, I've been watching the House of Assembly for a number of years, though, in my previous life and it's so interesting to hear how obsessed the government is with us on this side.

I reflect back to the campaign when we heard over and over and over the government was focused on the future of Newfoundland and Labrador but, Mr. Speaker, I would say they're spending an awful lot of time living in the past.

Speaker, let's be real about the permanent change here. This change in taxation on gasoline has not changed since the introduction in 2022. The repeated reduction has stayed in place since 2022. So while we certainly support this bill, it is good to remind the listeners and the people of this House that there has been no increase in this gasoline price on the tax side of things since 2022. That means that when this bill receives Royal Assent and comes into effect, there actually will be no current change unless obviously fluctuations in gas prices that happen over time; but, from the taxation side, there's not going to be any changes. So it will be interesting to see what the government does going forward on that matter.

Speaker, I want to speak also from my district point of view, obviously, from a rural perspective. I represent a number of communities, as I've mentioned before, that travel long distances to access a lot of services, most of the services that are provided in our more urban centres, so I just want to reflect on some of the communities that I represent.

Obviously, in my hometown of Burnt Islands, a community on Route 470, there

are also a number of communities along that stretch of road that connect to Port aux Basques. There is no store in those areas. There's one store in Burnt Islands that has a gas station, so people have to travel long distances every day to access medical appointments, groceries, other services. They certainly feel the pinch that we see and hear from as mentioned by other colleagues in this House on affordability and the cost of living.

I also think about the residents in Ramea and Grey River who use the ferry and those in Burgeo who travel on Route 480. You know, they take a lot of time to go to Corner Brook or other parts of the province. Route 480 is a significant portion of a highway that they need to travel on, so that obviously adds to the cost that they face as well.

Seeing this tax reduction to be in place is certainly good news, and that's why we've all mentioned over here on this side of the House that we will be supporting the bill.

Speaker, it's also interesting to hear about balancing the books – talking about what this government looks forward to on the multiple campaign slogans that we hear over and over and over on the other side about balancing the books won't be on the backs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Well, I argue if anybody listened here today from the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, balancing the books could come from cuts to the public service. We're certainly going to have a lot more questions on the comments from the Member opposite because those comments warrant a serious concern from a lot of Members. Is the government going to be cutting the people that work so diligently, so hard for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? We have a lot of questions on that end as well.

Mr. Speaker, we also hear them talk about, as I mentioned earlier, living in the past. They like to talk about the past 10 years, but this Liberal government – when they were in

the Liberal government, I should say, Speaker, did make significant strides in different areas like health care, for example. So as though they choose some of the facts that they want to choose – let's say personal care attendant vacancies, they declined from a peak of 380 in April of 2021 to 38 in July of 2025. Diversion hours decreased from 1,432 hours per month in 2022 to 34 hours per month in 2025. So those are significant –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

M. KING: Sorry, Speaker, lost my train of thought there. I'm thinking of relevance on the other side when I heard the Member for Lake Melville talking about salmon, so I'm kind of confused. I must be getting hungry hearing what he talked about.

Those are changes that we made to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that have made significant changes to people, not just fact and figures that we hear a lot on the papers here in the House of Assembly, but those are significant changes that are helping change people's lives in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

M. KING: So, Speaker, to stay on topic –

SPEAKER: Quiet, please.

Thank you.

M. KING: It's very interesting to hear from the Members opposite. So if they want to talk about lower taxes all the time, well, how about we talk about the petitions that I've been putting in this House of Assembly to remove the provincial sales tax off electricity bills, where we're seeing the doubling of costs to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? That will lower taxes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Why don't we talk about the court closures that I've mentioned in petitions and the court

of Port aux Basques? Accessing justice is causing significant issues to the people of my district who have to travel long distances. That's a cost to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the people of my district. Why don't they open the court back up so people can access those services?

We talk about the roads in my district, Mr. Speaker, and across this province. Why don't they start addressing the issues on the Trans-Canada Highway that I hear from multiple people who are damaging their vehicles –

SPEAKER: I remind Members that –

M. KING: – because of potholes on the roads in our district. That's lowering costs for people.

So the changes they're making today, we're seeing no changes on the tax side for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's maintaining what the people on this side of the House did, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: So I'm glad to see the Members support what we decided to do and to maintain those changes, but that's all it's going to do. If they want to talk about lower taxes, all the listening, they said, about solutions on this side, why don't they take some of my solutions and enact them?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker, thank you very much.

It's an honour for me to stand here as the Member for the District of Harbour Main. For many years, Speaker, I stood in this House advocating for my constituents, especially with respect to the cost-of-living crisis that they were experiencing. I can say that I'm so proud today to be a part of the new government that ran on an important pillar, which was affordability, making life more affordable for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and that's exactly what this bill does here today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I want to say thank you to the Minister of Finance for his initial comments when introducing this bill.

He talked about the important principles of balancing revenue and balancing expenditures, that we need to acknowledge is so critical today, because we are a government that is also based on fiscal responsibility. Fiscal responsibility is key as well and, as the Minister of Finance indicated, we need to spend smarter. That's exactly what this Progressive Conservative Government is going to do, Speaker.

I can say that, when listening to the speakers on this important bill, we've heard on this side of the House the concern to ease the burden of the people of Newfoundland, and we campaigned on the permanent reduction of this gas tax. Now I'm so happy and proud to say that we have honoured that commitment; we have honoured that commitment by introducing this bill which is permanent reduction of the gas tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Why is that important? I'm just going to mention a couple comments that were made just recently by the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde. He talked about one of the things that I think is really important to

acknowledge, and that is the importance of predictability.

Now this reduction in the gas tax means that the people have certainty; they can predict. They don't need to be worrying now about the effects of this gas tax and whether it's going to be not permanent or whether it's going to be reintroduced. This government has given assurances to the people of this province that you can rest sure and confident that this gas tax is permanent and it will continue to be permanent from now on.

I think that's a really important point, and why is that important, Speaker? I think that's important because we have to recognize the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the affordability crisis. What is the impact that this has on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

When I think about my constituents in the District of Harbour Main, I know the incredible severe financial stress that they have been under for years and years. This stress that they've endured, because of the financial crisis, impacts mental health. It impacts physical health. It impacts quality of life, and I can say that this government, this Progressive Conservative government, is an example of a government that is in action. It is a government of a progressive action, and that is this Progressive Conservative government here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I, unfortunately, I have to remind the opposite Member that we advocated strongly when we were in Opposition. We pressed government consistently on reducing the gas tax, and I think that this is the fruit of our labours when we were in Opposition, Speaker.

I think it's important to acknowledge that; I think it's important to recognize. Our focus has been on reducing taxes. We know that

the people of this province have been taxed to death for years by the opposite, former administration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: We ensured that that sugar tax was gone, and that's the leadership of our Premier.

When we have made decisions so far, in the very short 135 days, I think it is, the Premier has asked us, as Members in Cabinet and in this government, and as Members of the House of Assembly as well in terms of our Members, to ensure that every decision that we make – is it going to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

I can say, Speaker, this is a perfect example of how we are helping the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, the affordability crisis is real. When the Minister of Finance introduced this bill and when he talked about it, he talked about how we are committed as a government in easing the burden that is on the people that we represent, and we know that burden is real.

Over the last number of years in Opposition – 6½ years – I mean, its heartbreaking when we see the cost-of-living crisis that people have to endure; how expensive it is for people to afford housing; how expensive it is to rent. The cost of rent has increased so much over the last number of years. So those are real issues that people are facing in our province.

We're looking at, of course, the rise in the gases and how expensive that is for people. So this will provide immediate relief for the people of the province so they can be assured that there's not going to be continued increase in gas taxes. This is permanent; that is a big thing. We

campaigned on it and now we've honoured it.

Another thing I think is important, when we look at what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, what we've seen when we were in opposition. We saw child care affordability; how young families are struggling with child care affordability and how difficult and an incredible financial burden that is as well. So this gas tax will, as well – the permanent reduction of this gas tax – provide reassurance and comfort to many of the people that are experiencing child care issues.

The Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, he talked specifically about the cost of groceries at the supermarket, and I know we all understand that. I know when I go to the supermarket and I see the cost, and I see my constituents and the stress that is on them when they even have to go to the supermarket, the soaring prices of food, it just seems to be getting more expensive day after day. This, of course, increases food insecurity across our province, and it's hitting everyone. It's hitting everyone.

Of course we know, the Minister of Finance when he opened up this bill, he talked about the direct impact this is having, the rising demand for food banks, and why is that? Because as food prices climb, we know more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are turning to food banks for help. We are cognizant of that, we are aware of that and we are going to, as a government, ensure that we can do everything we can to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: So, Speaker, when I heard the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands speak earlier, it was refreshing to see, because he indicated that we need to be given an opportunity. This government needs to be given an opportunity, and we deserve that opportunity. Why do we deserve that

opportunity? Because the people of Newfoundland and Labrador elected us and they wanted to give us a chance.

They wanted to give us that opportunity to deliver on the promises that we made. I can assure you, under the leadership of our Premier and this new government, that's exactly what we're going to do, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: But, Speaker, make no mistake about it – and the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands was so true on this – that part of the decision-making – and I'm learning as a new Cabinet minister in this government – that we are going to have to make tough decisions. There's no question about it. We are going to have to make tough decisions that are in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

But, of course, we will do that. We will make sure that every decision that we make is with the lens of, is this ultimately going to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? That is the direction we've been given by our Premier and that is the direction that we're going to take, Speaker.

I can also say, with respect to what the Member opposite, Member for Humber - Bay of Islands had indicated – and I believe this to be true as well – in our government, it is very important that the Opposition play the role that they have and that is to hold government to account. That is so important and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: – we will not shy away from that. That is part of this democracy and it is one that we take seriously, as the government, representing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We believe and our Premier believes – and it's an important priority for him – that we are open and transparent.

That is a commitment that we have made and continue to adhere to going forward. We will be accountable to the people but, as the Member opposite said, from Humber - Bay of Islands, that accountability that they're holding us to, I think the people of Newfoundland and Labrador expect them to hold us accountable for our policies and for things that they may not agree with and that's obviously important in our democracy. We're not going to agree. We should respect each other when we disagree. I think that is very important and necessary in our democracy.

But as far as holding the government to account, I would ask that they give us this opportunity. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador, when they elected us, that is what they wanted to do. They wanted to give us a chance. So I think 135 days we're only in and the progress that we've made so far is, in my submission, very positive. We're just getting started, Speaker. We are just getting started.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: In conclusion, I just want to say it is great to hear that the Members so far who have stood in support of this bill – and this is why collaboration is so important, working together. When you see a bill that is good – and there are going to be many opportunities going forward for the opposite Members to support the work that we're doing because it is in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and we will all, if we're working together, really be able to help the people of our province.

On that note, Speaker, I just want to say that I'm glad to see that there is support for this bill. It's a great bill. It's going to make the lives of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador better and it will help them and I'm really happy to see that.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party and the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, we will support the bill. It will certainly reduce costs, I would say, for drivers and so on and so forth. But I think anything that's going to reduce the overall cost of living or help with it is important. However, the one thing I will say is this, if we're looking at the gas tax, one thing we know about oil is it's extremely volatile and we will never solve the affordability of the cost-of-living crisis just by removing taxes.

I'm thinking OPEC in 1974. Like I said out there, I'm that old, I guess, that I remember it because there was an oil embargo by OPEC against the US and other countries who supported Israel in the Yom Kippur War. It's almost like déjà vu all over again, in many ways.

They cut supplies, they banned exports to the US, prices quadrupled. It led to, I think in many ways, a real push towards smaller, compact, more fuel-efficient cars. It had that effect on North American society.

The oil in our pumps today that we're paying 60 cents or a lot more than what we were paying out a few weeks ago has been in the pumps, I guess, for weeks, and it was produced months ago. If I'm listening to the information, we're not getting oil from the areas that are affected as such, yet we're paying increased prices for it at the pump.

So in many ways, to talk about, I guess, addressing affordability, it's going to require more than just the permanent removal of a gas tax. We've talked a little bit about this already in terms of the need for income and social supports. Again I will reference Hugh Segal on this: People with more money tend to be less poor.

Now, no doubt this gas tax will help every time I go to put gas in my vehicle. It'll probably help the person who was putting \$5 in their tank last week, by putting a little bit more into it, but it may not have the overall effect we hope for. We've had the carbon tax removed, we've had the gas tax removed, yet if you look at the – even read the report, the Canada's Food Price Report – food prices have still climbed, even with that. Food prices have still climbed.

It notes here, too, that while food inflation is quick to jump in response to higher energy costs or tighten availability –

SPEAKER: Excuse me, I have to interrupt the speaker because you've already spoken to this bill first. There will be other opportunities in Committee –

J. DINN: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize –

SPEAKER: – so we'll move on to the next speaker.

Thank you.

J. DINN: There, I got my three minutes in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to get up in this House of Assembly again and represent my district, and I thank the kind constituents in my district for putting me back here again for the third time. It's a great pleasure to be able to stand here in the House of Assembly.

It's certainly a pleasure here, again, to be able to stand on the gas tax bill as well. I listened to everybody speak here over the last couple of days and listened very

attentively to a lot of points that people are making, and I made some notes as they were going along, how it affects people in the districts.

First, I heard somebody else mention here boat tour operators. They have a gas tax that they're going to eliminate, the permanent gas tax on the fuel, and how it affects those people in that industry as well. We stood in here, in the House of Assembly, I don't know, probably three or four years ago, and we fought very hard in getting this gas tax removed. Starting off, it was 8 cents, and we stayed here for many days and many nights, as the Opposition at the time, and we did not give up. They reduced the gas tax. They put a hold on it and didn't charge the 8 cents to the gas tax. We stood here for many days, alternating speakers, and it was something that we forced this government to be able to put a pause on this tax.

Now we're going to do it as our side; we're going to permanently stop it. So that's something that we fought long and hard over the years. I'm going to say three or four years ago, but we certainly fought very hard to make that 8 cents, and we didn't leave here – that was one of the negotiations we had during our debates – we weren't leaving here until they did something, and they stopped it with the 8 cents.

Today, we're making it permanent when this is finished, so that's something we should be very proud of.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Again, as the Minister of Justice and Public Safety had said too, it affects our quality of life.

There are a lot of people that drive back and forth. Again, I live in a district that's 2½ hours from one end to the other when I'm going to drive it. People leave – and I'll use Trepassy, as an example, Cappahayden, St. Shott's, Renew's and that area – 1½ to

two hours to drive to town. Eight cents on fuel is something that's very important to them, that they're not going to have to spend.

I mean, we look at the volatility that's in the oil industry today and when that, you know, the gas went up 22 cents or fuel goes up on housing, and fuel in some of these restaurants in propane. So when the propane goes up and they're in restaurants and they're cooking meals, well who do you think is going to pay the fiddler when it comes to that? The people that are going into those restaurants that are buying those meals.

Well, the people that own those restaurants are going to have to raise prices in order to cover off the prices of fuel. That's something that's pretty volatile, but that's how it works and it affects everybody's quality of life. So for us to come in, as a government, and to be able to stop this gas tax, I think that's very important, and to be able to put a permanent stop on it, I think is a great idea.

I mean, we stood in here over the – well, I've been here now, it will be coming on seven years, and we've listened to some of the ideas that the government came in – as examples that they brought in would be a sugar tax, all right? We fought long and hard. We didn't get that removed, but it's something as a government we'll probably be looking at and something that we'll be certainly coming out on is the sugar tax.

That's something that we've done, and it's gone. Something that has gone, the sugar tax, and they've proven it. Over the years they were saying how much money they took in. Every year the number went up. The tax that they brought in proved nothing. All it did was the cost and the taxes that they took increased. It didn't deter people from buying sugary drinks. So it's something as a government they thought was a great idea, and then we squashed it. We got in here, we got rid of it and that's something that's helping the taxpayers.

When we look at our pillars, we look at better health care, lower taxes. So the second pillar, lower taxes, we've done something about that already. We've started and initiated that. We started with the sugar tax, now we're starting with the permanent gas tax.

So it's something that our government – we're in here 125 or 130 days. We've got a four-year platform. All the questions you're asking, you want it all done in four or five months. We've got four years. All the questions you're asking us, like everything should be done in 130 days, it's incredible. We listened to this for a period of time and come in here with the questions – it's just unbelievable. Being here 130 days and the amount of questions that they're asking us with a four-year term, and they've all got to be implemented within five or six months. That's incredible. It's hard to believe.

Took them 10 years to fool it up, and it takes us six months to fix it; incredible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: I think about all the tourism opportunities that are in my district that are tied to taxes, tied to fuel tax, and everybody that visits my district – and I can go up and down. I wrote down notes here on all the events and stuff that happen. I started with boat tours in Bay Bulls. There are boat tours in Tors Cove. There are other tours along the way. You look at the Colony of Avalon in Ferryland; Lighthouse Picnics, who just received a big award; look at the UNESCO site up in Portugal Cove South, all those are big tourist attractions, people coming in here.

If the price of gas keeps going up or if we don't permanently put a fixture on that, then there'll be less tourism, but over last year, I know that, in my hometown where the boat tours are – and I know both of them specifically – tourism is up 30 or 40 per cent last year in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in their industry. There are a

lot of people just constantly, bus tours coming in and stopping. It was just unbelievable the amount of tourism that was in my district, anyway, that I can see from last year. You drive it every day, and you see it every day, just the amount of tourism, and I'm sure that that's going to increase again this year, because this is the place to go. No doubt about it, it's the place to go. So if we can permanently get rid of this tax, that will be very good for all those industries.

I just look at – again, we debated it over the years – the carbon tax, what the Liberal government had voted on. It's something that we were against as well. Again, talking about fishery – and, of course, the new stand-alone Fisheries and Aquaculture Minister that the Premier had said he would do in his Blue Book. He done it. You know, talking about the fishery and permanent gas tax, I mean, these fishermen fueling up their boats, getting out on the water, being out there a long time, the safety issues, everything that ties into the fishery is incredible – the amount of fuel that these fishermen use.

Again, I'll talk about the farmers. I know a couple of them personally in the area, and I just think about, okay, the price of fuel has gone up 22 cents. So he's up there, he's a dairy farmer there in the Goulds and up in my area, the price of fuel goes up 22 cents. Just think about that in an industry that he's providing milk for our province. It's just unbelievable. How is he going to handle that? How is that going to portray out through the rest of the province, 22 cents on a litre of fuel, on gas, or 23 cents, and the price of diesel has gone up. You think about the hoppers and you think about the tractors that they're using to move the hay. There are so many aspects of how this affects the whole province.

Again, for us, as a government, to be able to come in and put a permanent fix on this gas tax, I think that's a great initiative and it's something that our government, moving

forward, will be looking at – you know, a lot of stuff over the next four years that we got to mandate. We'll be looking at other stuff.

When we came in here in 2019 – well, I came in here in 2019, along with many other Members as well. There are a couple that were here before us but when we came in here, in 2016 they put in 300 new taxes in the budget in 2016 – 300. Now I think we're going to have a review of them and see if a lot of them are going to be legit. Again, if we can reduce some taxes on what they installed in 2016, if we can go back and review them and make it better for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, then that's something we'll go back and review and have a look at. I'm sure that the Minister of Finance is going to be looking at that stuff.

Again, Speaker, it's certainly a pleasure to get up and be able to speak on this bill. I look forward to when it comes through the House to be a final vote.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Member for Gander.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I get into my comments that I had written, I actually wanted to give thanks to the Member for Lake Melville for the reminder he gave all of us about how deeply the Liberal Party cares for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Thank you for that at the beginning of your statement, really appreciate that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Mr. Speaker, I know I'm new to the House of Assembly. It's just so fascinating to me to hear the Minister of

Justice stand up and say that this bill is providing immediate relief to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is not providing immediate relief to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is phrasing something that already exists. This is not putting money back in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: So I'm very surprised to hear that.

But, Mr. Speaker, in my remarks, what I did want to say, as the Member for the District of Gander which, of course, includes Appleton, Benton, Gambo, Gander and Glenwood, I rise to speak on the bill. Of course, I live in a community that plays a very unique role in Central Newfoundland and Labrador. It's not just a town; it also functions as a service hub for a wide region of rural communities.

So residents from surrounding areas travel to Gander daily for essential services. As Members opposite, Mr. Speaker, who live in Central Newfoundland know, Gander is the service hub for Central Newfoundland, serving not only the people of Gander, but the approximately 80,000 who travel to the district regularly.

Speaking of travel, Mr. Speaker, as well, I was very surprised when I heard the Minister of Fisheries speak so eloquently just now about tourism and about its impact on Newfoundland and Labrador. Of course, the district is no stranger to that. Earlier today, I did ask the Minister of Tourism for her plan to deal with the rising cost of fuel.

I had been hoping to hear that the Minister of Tourism had engaged in conversations with Marine Atlantic, or perhaps had engaged with meetings with major airlines, with airport authorities, with rental car companies, with Uber providers to start formulating that plan. So I can only gather from the response that this government

does not have a plan and has not started a plan to deal with how the rising cost of fuel is going to increase tourism across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, also through a rural lens in Newfoundland and Labrador, there is no public transportation system connecting most towns and communities. So residents rely on their vehicles for things like getting to work, accessing medical appointments, grocery shopping, attending school, even extracurricular activities and opportunities for youth in well-being and recreation. In the District of Gander and in the outlying communities, we have families who travel into our community so their children can avail of things such as swimming lessons, sporting opportunities for them.

As well, Mr. Speaker, when I think about Gander and us being the hub of recreational competitions and provincial, Atlantic Canadian and national competitions in Gander, I think about all the families across Newfoundland and Labrador, the moms and dads and nans and pops and coaches who get in their vehicles to drive long distances across this province to bring their children to recreational opportunities. Ask any hockey parent, ask any parent of a swimmer or of a child in gymnastics or in other extracurricular activities about the cost associated with transportation in getting their children to those. So the cost of gas definitely has an impact on them and their families.

Speaker, Gander serves as a regional centre for Central Newfoundland, as I said, serving approximately 80,000 people. Residents from many surrounding communities regularly travel to Gander for services that simply aren't available in smaller towns. So that could be health care services, access to government offices, retail stores, big grocery, recreation infrastructure, employment opportunities, as well as the airport and transportation links. People often drive long distances just to access those services.

So Gander being the service hub, I support the measure that will help reduce and keep the cost of gas low. Longer commuting distances, of course, mean higher fuel consumption and many rural households already face additional costs related to living in outside larger centres and living in smaller communities in more rural areas.

When fuel costs increase, rural residents have fewer alternatives than those living in urban areas, especially with the lack of public transportation and increased distance needed to travel to reach essential services. Speaker, I also know in my District of Gander that fuel costs do affect local businesses and workers and I know that it has to affect them in other districts across Newfoundland and Labrador, the many workers who travel significant distances daily for work, sometimes across multiple communities.

So stabilizing fuel costs helps support rural workers and small businesses. In the District of Gander, I have a constituent who runs a very large shipping company, so, of course, transportation companies are impacted greatly by the rising cost of fuel and then the services and the goods that they transport, they too get affected. As the convention capital of Newfoundland and Labrador, outside of the Avalon, Gander with our services, we are a service sector and the increasing prices of fuel, that increases the cost of food, for example. In the service sector, the food costs and food services impact those who plan conventions and tourism as well.

The rural perspective, when we think about it, policies that affect fuel costs must always be considered through a rural lens in Newfoundland and Labrador, and we have so many communities across our province. We're just geographically spread out as a province. So access to services, employment and health care often requires significant travel.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to reference my previous work, in working with the tourism sector across Newfoundland and Labrador for 22 years. We often talk, in Newfoundland and Labrador, about volunteerism and the need to increase the rate of volunteerism. One of the reasons people cite as why they don't volunteer or why they don't volunteer more is the cost of volunteering. One of the costs of volunteering is gas. I know that almost Member, if not every Member, Mr. Speaker, in this hon. House has volunteered in their community.

So when you reflect on the cost of gas for coming and going to meetings, attending conventions, running errands, even things like purchasing food that volunteers prepare and donate and that the rising costs of fuel are going to put the prices of that food up, all of this has a really big impact on volunteers across our province. So being able to contain the price of gas, for the government to be able to lower the cost of gas, it's actually a service that they're providing to volunteers across Newfoundland and Labrador to help control an issue that can be an impediment for many people when it comes to volunteering.

Mr. Speaker, just in closing, for the people I represent in Gander and the surrounding region, transportation is essential. Gasoline is not simply a convenience; it's a necessity that connects rural residents to jobs, to services and to opportunities. Measures that provide stability and predictability around fuel costs are therefore extremely important to rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Might I say what a wonderful job you're doing in your new role. It's much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about today, our end goal for this government is poverty reduction in Newfoundland and Labrador. Thanks to the Minister of Finance, we're going to get one step closer to that and that's what we're looking at.

Now, I will remind the Members opposite, and the one that just spoke, actually, from Gander, it was this party that had the greatest poverty reduction plan in Canada. It was revered from all over this nation, and we're going to strive to get right back on that. With this Finance Minister, I can guarantee you, we're going to get back on track with poverty reduction here in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's extremely important.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to talk about, of course, the gas reduction and who it really applies to; who it effects most.

I can honestly say, after working a lifetime in oil and gas, after having family members in mining and fishing, it's the industries. It's going to help industries here in Newfoundland and Labrador go on with their projects and whatever they have, which is going to create employment. It's going to create jobs, spinoff jobs, and I'm so happy that the industries right here in Newfoundland and Labrador are going to be able to take full advantage of this gas reduction as well, because it's extremely important. The more money they save, the more work they can do and the more jobs they're going to pass on.

This government, in its first 135 days, has shown time and time again – just in 135

days – just how strong our support is for these industries; for Bay du Nord and oil and gas, for the mining that we're going to get moving in this province, for the aquaculture –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: – for the fishing, for the forestry. We have so many industries in Newfoundland and Labrador, we should be the Dubai of Canada with just 540,000 people. Mr. Speaker, like I say, we've shown our support for these industries. It's just so disheartening that we don't see the same support from the Members across the way, and I'll give you a "for instance."

The Member for Burgeo - La Poile, who stood up just a moment ago and gave us a history lesson about the past five, six, seven, 10 years, this is the Member who pushed so hard for the national marine conservation area on the South Coast. Did he forget about the aquaculture, the fishing, the mining? Was he in support of it, because we didn't see it. He certainly came out hard in favour of the NMCA.

It's extremely important, conservation for this province, but it will not be to the detriment of the jobs and the families that support in these industries in Newfoundland and Labrador, and unfortunately we didn't see that. It was terrible. We support all of these industries. The Member across the way, once again he stood up and tried to give us a history lesson, it didn't work.

I'm going to give him a today lesson on how these industries can benefit from the gas reduction tax that we're going to be imposing today permanently – permanently. These are the industries that rely on them, the families that rely on these paycheques to sit down and eat every evening. I just wish the Member across the way could have had them in mind when he was making his pits to drive this marine conservation area.

Did he even speak to the members down there? Did he speak to the aquaculture?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I need to hear the Speaker.

C. TIBBS: Thank you for your protection, Mr. Speaker, much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, when we made that decision, we had those families in mind, the aquaculture, the fishing, the mining. Mr. Speaker, right on the front page, there will be no mining in NMCA's, in national marine conservation areas – zero mining.

The scallopers – there would be no scalloping. What do we tell those fishermen? How many people rely on these industries that are going to benefit from this gas tax reduction? So many. I want all those families on the South Coast to know, we have your best interest at heart and we'll continue to fight for the industries that support the families of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

As the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, I'm very privileged and honoured to be able to stand and speak on this.

Of course, our rural communities certainly have longer distances to travel. In my particular district, the folks, they do a lot of shorter commutes, but we all know that that uses up a lot of gas as well. As my Leader has referenced, of course we will be supporting this because we are looking for cost-effective measures; however, it is really

important to note that we're basically holding the fort here. We're treading water. I mean this is no more savings than we had already on the books.

In regard to looking for new and innovative ways to try to encourage cost savings, because we know that certainly the minister is going to be looking at ways to cut and to do that, but at the same time, it has to be a balancing act. As the hon. Member for Humber - Bay of Islands behind mentioned, we all have a responsibility in this House together, to work together and create this balance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. O'LEARY: One of the things that I think is so crucial is that we invest in the people, and the NDP have been very strong on this.

During our campaign, we had a fully-costed platform going forward. It was all about how we could continue to invest in the people and, of course, we didn't see those things from our colleagues here in the House as well, so we have to wait and see.

We are looking forward to the future discussions and the budget about how we can make life more affordable. I mean, the minister had talked about child poverty. Well, child poverty, of course, continues to escalate and successive governments have gotten us to this point – 21.4 per cent overall child poverty rate in 2022. It's frightening. Many of us here are parents or we have children in our lives. This is our future and it's completely intolerable that we can all just put up with that. That can't continue, so there are a number of measures that have to happen.

Again, as my leader had mentioned, we're going to support this, obviously. This is one very small piece of a very large pie. We would like to see, certainly going forward, action.

One of the things that we know is costly is a lack of climate action. That is very costly to our people. When we have fires in communities, when we have coastal floods, when we have hurricanes, that is costly to our people, not only in terms of their lives and their livelihood, but also the bottom dollar. It's going to cost us so much if we do not have a climate action plan. So, again, I'm very interested in how, and hearing about how that climate action plan is going to be enacted because we know that is a necessity. It's not a want; it's a necessity in this day and age. We need to look at more sustainability, how we can actually live, and it'll be more cost effective and better for our children and generations to come.

I'll refer back to some of the things that I just mentioned about, again another small piece of the pie, but cutting HST from children's essentials. That's a piece of the pie that people will really feel in their pockets. The families with children, the cost is just surmounted. It just keeps on growing and growing and growing, and, of course, we know and we've had multiple conversations about food banks and the increasing dependency upon food banks.

Again, another thing that is completely unacceptable in the 21st century in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, where we are just abundant with resource, we're strategically located and we have phenomenal people in our province. Yes, we do need to invest in the workers and we do need to make sure that everybody has a buyable employment in this province, but we also want to make sure that we don't destroy it while we're doing it. So this is all about sustainability.

There are a number of things that we can continue to do when we have poverty staring us in the face, when we have mental health and addictions – and, again, in my district we have some of the wealthiest people in the province and we have some of the most downtrodden. It is a really diverse

district that has very complicated needs, but we have to serve them all.

Yes, every single Member of this House of Assembly has the responsibility. Whether or not we're new, like myself, or other people who are newly elected or people who've been here for a while banding around and making decisions on behalf their constituents, we have to work together. It is absolutely our job to hold government accountable, to make sure that government is transparent, to make sure that we are asking the questions for decisions that are going to come forward in a budget that will impact people for generations to come.

I won't speak much longer on this, but I really think that the Climate Change Action Plan, the poverty reduction, all of these things are things that we can really, really work on while we're looking at these smaller pieces of the pie. While we continue to tread water, while we're holding the fort on some of these cost savings, I think it's time for us to really, truly look at innovative ways that we can make life more affordable for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Jobs and Growth; Rural Development; and Immigration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Thank you, Speaker.

In starting here I'd like to, I guess, return almost to a year ago when we were debating a very similar bill, but it was only for a one-year period. I asked my colleagues in caucus at that time, why isn't this being done on a permanent basis, because I was new into my role.

We lobbied over successive speakers to have that made permanent, it went to vote

and it did not happen. It is so good to see now, I think, unanimity, that the Opposition, all their speakers getting up highlighting the impact of this tax in their own districts and maybe if some of them had been here last year, they would have seen and joined with us in making this permanent.

The other thing is we view a lot of this as being administrative. Reducing this tax, of course, is going to have significant impact on every Newfoundlander and Labradorian and it's also chewing up time in not being able to bring other important bills to the House.

Mr. Speaker, that will not be the issue next year. This will now be permanent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes to highlight some of the issues from oil and gas both strategically, nationally and in here at the provincial level, at a tactical level. First of all, at a strategic level, is the impact on the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait of Hormuz, 20 per cent of world oil flows through it. The last major time that we were in crisis in the Strait of Hormuz was 35 years ago, the Gulf War. March 3, that just passed, was the 35th anniversary of the closing of the Gulf War. We had significant Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that served during the Gulf War.

The Gulf War highlighted, as the current crisis does, the need for security of supply, not just for Canada as a whole, but for Newfoundland and Labrador. For those in the House that are not aware, Canada imports oil from Saudi Arabia. It goes into Montreal. So that is why it is so important to continue to expand and grow our oil capabilities, and particularly the most ethical and the most environmentally sound oil that's out there, and that's our oil off our coast. That's something that we can offer to both Canada and to the world.

That is why, I think, one of the proudest moments that I've had as a Member of this caucus was last Tuesday when the Premier and the Minister of Mines and Energy joined with Equinor and Bay du Nord in announcing Bay du Nord but, more importantly, the Premier reiterated that we are back in the oil business –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: – and the further note that we have no intention of leaving the oil business.

This is about, in developing our offshore, safety and security of supply for Canada, for our province and also for the world. We're seeing that play out now at a global stage in the geopolitical politics that's playing out through the Strait of Hormuz.

Some countries right now are tapping into their strategic reserves to ensure that they have sufficient supply. Nationally – so there's a national impact here as well. Our caucus lobbied vehemently against the carbon tax and there are other restrictions that's employed by the Government of Canada, the industrial carbon tax, emissions cap. We have to ensure that, as a country, we set the conditions so oil-producing provinces, like ours, can expand and grow so that we can supply what the world needs.

You know, the international energy administration has highlighted that the world will continue to need oil. More importantly, world demand is going to continue to grow, in their estimates, for at least the next couple of decades. So why not have that be oil from Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: So here at home in the province, we've seen from what the Minister of Mines and Energy has highlighted the number of events, not just that Newfoundland and Labrador is back in the

oil business but we are setting the conditions to grow our oil industry.

I'll give you case in point. This morning when the Minister of Mines and Energy opened the Digital Offshore '26 Conference, it was 50 per cent larger than last year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: The interest in growing our offshore, new participants has returned. That's going to have a significant impact on our entire economy in this province. That's going to set the conditions for more money for health care, for roads – yes, maybe even a few roads down in Burgeo - La Poile.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Exactly. But it will have a broad-stroke impact on everything that we do as a province.

So you might ask, with regard to oil and gas and this gas tax, the importance of doing it now and making it permanent. I want to highlight two issues that have an impact on that, and that's certainty and consistency, which is important any time that you are doing budget planning; not just budget planning for government, it also comes back to businesses, particularly small businesses, and individuals when they do their own budgets as well.

Certainty for the government, in what that tax is going to be at a multi-year level, so to be able to plan and do plans for multiple years. Consistency – that's really important with regard to small businesses, particularly small operators of gas stations, for them to know what the tax rate is going to be so that they can figure out their margins. Margins are very important for them because the greater the quantity of oil that they sell, there are a few more shekels for them.

Then that comes back to certainty and consistency with our individual residents across Newfoundland and Labrador and the

impact on them. As many of you here now, even on the Opposition side, have highlighted, the impact right across your districts at an individual level, that's why it is so good to see. I believe that we have unanimous support in doing that.

This is about doing what is right for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We are a geographically dispersed province, gas is needed and then we still have significant, as was highlighted, traditional industries, fishing, mining, forestry, agriculture and even tourism, where there is a significant demand on both gas and diesel. Reducing this tax allows a number of those companies to improve their productivity. It will improve their productivity but also improve their capacity to have a better bottom line and then, potentially, to turn that around with further investments in their companies and to hire more people.

We've seen stories right across, the impact on fishing, mining, forestry, even at a recreational level, at a tourism level and then, as I highlight, I note the impact on the cost of living, an issue that our government takes very seriously.

We have 15,400 people a month using food banks and this is one of the initiatives that we are taking. A promise that we made and a promise that we are keeping is to ensure that we are providing tax relief across this province, tax relief that will help the most vulnerable in our province.

So, Mr. Speaker, it was an honour to be able to speak on this. I believe we have a consensus on this; let's not waste this any longer. This is so important, a bill for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, let's bring this to Committee now.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Lane): The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll say to the Member for Bay de Verde, it's not a waste of time. If I get an opportunity to stand on my feet and speak on behalf of the people of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, then it's not a waste of time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: I will say to him as well, he said gas is needed, 100 per cent, but what is also needed for the people in my district is for gas to be at an affordable price so they can live and operate their vehicles at an affordable price. I just want to make note of that.

The 51st General Assembly, certainly an honour to represent, once again, the people of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. I've always said whenever I get an opportunity to stand on my feet, I'm going to thank my constituency assistant because I wouldn't be able to do what I do without her. I'm telling you, I heard it at the doors. Of every 10 doors that I went to, nine complimented her and praised her up.

That goes for all CAs. I know everybody says the same thing, absolutely. We'll never commend them enough and they'll never be remunerated enough, as far as I'm concerned, for what they do. So that's important.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: I say, you know, relevance in terms, but I thank my family, because I believe it's very relevant. We all feel the same way, we wouldn't be able to be here without support of family.

In terms of the taxation, making it permanent is a good thing, it sure is, but it's something that's not going to give an immediate relief today. If there's anybody listening to this right now, it's not an immediate relief.

Making it permanent is a good thing, I make no bones about it, and from my district's perspective, from the Trans-Canada Highway down, you're 150 kilometres plus, so it's a long distance and you need, as the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay said, gas in order to travel to medical appointments, because we have a hospital in Harbour Breton, we have clinics in St. Albans, but the people have to go to the bigger centres for those important medical appointments and affording it is a challenge. It's a challenge right now. It is.

I see the Premier there is nodding his head, that's a good thing.

Medical transportation, well we look forward to what they're going to bring forward to support, especially people in districts like mine, in rural parts of the province.

Shopping in Central – they've got to go to Central to shop and in Eastern parts of the province – and fishermen. There are a lot of fishermen in my district and, any increase in gas, as we see it happening right now, they find it difficult because they're making their budgets at home, writing down – okay, this is going to cost more, then it's going to cost us more, what do I need to make adjustments to my enterprise?

Companies in the aquaculture industry, they have to make adjustments when the cost is there. So more that we can do to help them, the better it is.

I know the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay talked about margins for gas station owners – absolutely. The higher that the price goes, they feel the pinch and pain that they've got to put this on the customers, which are locals in their community.

You have truckers, you have tourism operators and people's way of life. I take, for instance, recreational scallop dragging. It's a way of life down where we live and any higher increase in prices on gas, they have

to reflect – can we do this any longer – and that's a challenge for sure.

I think the sentiment in this House of Assembly is all are feeling the stress and the pain of the cost of living. I listen to all sides, and the MHA for St. George's - Humber talked about making this stable, permanent. That's a good thing, but I ask the question: What is your government going to do further? It's the question on minds of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and, as I said, making it permanent is a good thing.

Members opposite also talked about listening to our constituents. Well, I can tell you one thing, that's something that I was born on, in terms of listening to your constituents. You'd knock on the doors and people say: Do you know what? Sometimes you can't deliver, you don't deliver, we understand, but you've certainly got a sincere way of listening, and that's important, and the hon. Member for Corner Brook, I give credit to him, he certainly said a place of responsibility to ask government questions.

It is a responsibility. I heard so many times on the other side, six years I sat over there, when they talked about – especially the Member for CBS, and I know he's listening very attentively to me right now. In terms of asking the questions, we were elected to do a job over here, and we're going to do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: He leaned over his seat many of the time so we're going to do the same thing. The questions are important, but the answers are more important for people in my district and for the whole of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The MHA for Lewisporte - Twillingate, he made references to reckless spending in the last 10 years. Well, I'd like to ask him if the financial support for Lewisporte in terms of the wharf infrastructure, if that was reckless

spending, because we sat many of times with the Town of Lewisporte, and he knows it, that we put –

AN HON. MEMBER: \$10 million.

E. LOVELESS: Yes. As the Member said here, millions of dollars on the table to support them because it was the right thing to do. That was not reckless spending, I say to the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate District.

And haven't done anything in the last 10 years but, today, really, it's something, well, Members are praising that we already did. We did things. I think it's disingenuous to get on your feet and say nothing has been done in the last 10 years when you have Members that are praising things that happened last year.

Well, we were governing last year. Good things were happening in the province, so that's – you shouldn't be saying it, put it that way. That's the other way, whoever's looking online, they shouldn't be saying it. That's what people will say to me as well.

The MHA for Lab West talked about a \$1-billion deficit. That's a lot of money. I say to the Minister of Finance, it's a big deficit, no doubt about it. That was close to \$1 billion. In 2016, it was over \$2 billion, so double the challenges. So don't be remiss in saying that that wasn't a challenge at the time, because somebody referenced in terms of a tough budget, it was a tough budget and you're going to have tough decisions.

We see it in Nova Scotia with Tim Houston. There are people out protesting on the streets right now because he had to make tough decisions. Absolutely, we get it 100 per cent, but any government who's governing, I don't care how long you are governing, you're doing good things for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The people of the province know that. So when you stand on your feet and say you never done anything for the last 10 years, they

know the difference in that, but I get it in terms of what goes back and forth here in this House.

Someone referenced farmers, and we recognized the industry today in a Ministerial Statement, and being a former minister who visited a lot of farms, dug some potatoes with the farmers, they feel the pinch, and we all know that, in terms of gas prices. I guess for us it's supporting them – what will we do for them? So I say to the minister, that's on your shoulders of what you can do to help.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands referenced, in terms of the carbon tax, and his story was certainly true because I was not an elected Member but I was in the Premier's office at the time when Made in Newfoundland was the process, and we had the choice to do it, because what we had was a plan to help Newfoundland and Labrador, but then the feds stepped in, changed it and that's what happened. He used the word "forced." They did force us to change it and that change did not benefit Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The MHA for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde also talked about the importance for rural districts like mine. He referenced: Can they afford to go to work? It's a good question. It's a good question and I say to the Minister of Finance, who I know listens – absolutely 100 per cent listens – again, the question is what will you do to address his question of can I afford to do it? Can I afford to drive anymore because the prices are so high? So that's a question for the Minister of Finance.

MHA for Burgeo - La Poile, don't worry about it, because the Member for Baie Verte said you're going to get roadwork.

L. PADDOCK: Baie Verte - Green Bay.

E. LOVELESS: Baie Verte - Green Bay, there you go – you're going to get roadwork.

The MHA for Harbour Main, she stressed the challenges of cost of living. I'm glad she did, and she sincerely put on the table all the challenges that are out there. So I challenge you now, being at the Cabinet table. It's going to be challenging for sure, but what you listed today, I'm sure you'll take that into consideration when you're making your decisions, because there are a lot of challenges and this reduction in taxes, again, is not something new. It's just being made permanent today and now.

The MHA for Ferryland – the financial pressures of gas – I say to him as well, responsible for processors, harvesters, fish plant workers, it's on your shoulders because they're going to be feeling the pinch. What will you do as Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture? What will you do for them? That's what you need to be considering when you're at that Cabinet seat around that table for sure.

I think I'm getting close to my time but I do have more stuff to say, I guess, Mr. Speaker.

I know in Question Period there were talks around tourism, and the Member for Gander certainly does it so well in terms of speaking about things that are happening in the tourism industry. We all know on both sides when you say nothing was done in the last 10 years, we know there have been good things happening in tourism. From cruise ships coming in Corner Brook, St. John's, wherever the case may be, there are good things happening in the tourism industry – absolutely – but the challenge now is for the current Minister of Tourism to make sure that increases.

I saw her make the point that we're going to go to the top, wherever that is. I hope we will go to the top, but we're still waiting for that plan of how she's going to get to the top. It's going to be challenging, no doubt about it, absolutely 100 per cent, because tourism is very important.

I went to Yarmouth on the past weekend to watch my son play hockey, and I'm going to tell you, Newfoundland and Labrador – very proud. I spoke to the two commentators that call the game, right? So I took them up some Newfoundland flags, and he said, we're going to wave them. I said you better wave them.

You want to be proud of Newfoundland and Labrador? Go to Yarmouth and watch the hockey game. They draft a lot of Newfoundlanders, and they're very proud of them. I'll have more to say on that later on this week but I think, in terms of our identity as Newfoundland and Labrador, we've already done a lot of work. Just our identity alone distinguishes us in the tourism industry, but we know that there's the strain of the gas and everything else in terms of flights. We want to see more flights. We want to see people come to Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Member for Gander talked about Gander being the service hub. B'y, I can certainly appreciate that from my district because people travel to Gander to do a lot of things, but she talked about sports and recreation, the pressure of gas taxes. Rural communities are facing challenges. I know there's a hockey rink in my district that's facing challenges. So I'm saying to the Minister of Recreation, heed that, in terms of sit down with those communities, because they are facing challenges. You lose a hockey rink in a rural district, or you lose it anywhere, you're losing a lot. You're losing your identity in the communities as far as I'm concerned.

These are the challenges for rural communities, and I would suggest, in your budget talks, in your plan, consider it. Because there are people in the province that are asking for it, for sure. The same as for municipalities. So the minister that is responsible for municipalities, they're going to be asking for more support too.

There are going to be a lot of challenges in terms of – and I like what the MHA for Gander, and I think, all of us, whoever is governing, always, any policy that you're going to develop, use rural lens, because it's important – very, very important. I believe she mentioned the volunteers, as well, who play a big role certainly in the existence of communities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

But I'll end by saying that the man that governs the United States – I might challenge the Minister of Finance, maybe you should call him or go meet with him to say your reckless decision has cost us dearly. So we're going to send you the bill. If you do call him, please read it on the floor of this House of Assembly. We'll look forward to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly an honour again to get up and speak on this bill with regard to the gas tax bill. As the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune just mentioned, everybody likes to get up and talk about their own district, and I'm no different. During the election, I did hear from my district and I listened to my district, and I heard about the cost of living and the taxes. I heard about it.

Today, to see this tax go, to permanently remove the gas tax off the gas – that would have been in at the end of the month anyway – there is immediate relief and my constituents in my district will be glad to hear that that tax won't be going back on, which would have happened under the former regime. So I'm glad to say that we're here to do that.

I also listened to the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, and he brought up the roads in Burgeo - La Poile. I'm very disappointed to hear after 10 years of his own government that the Member's roads down in Burgeo - La Poile are not done. But I can understand it, because in Exploits after 10 years of the Liberal government, our roads are not fit either.

It's good to know that the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune says that –

E. LOVELESS: Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

P. FORSEY: Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune – I'll get it right the once.

But anyway, it's good to see that he's interested in what we're doing because he said it's a good thing that we're making it permanent, which is a good thing. So that's only a few months since we're there. I'm sure he's interested and he already said he's interested in what we're going to do, and I guess he is. But I'll take a phrase from himself: Stay tuned – stay tuned; give us time.

E. LOVELESS: No problem.

P. FORSEY: There you go.

Anyway, as far as the gas tax goes, keeping the reduction, we know that industry is starting up. Then we all talked about the industries. We really did. We know how important industry is to our province. We know earlier this spring, soon the fishery will be starting up, the farming will be starting up, all the industries will be back, construction season opens and that will put everyone back in business again.

So it's good that that gas tax will be relieved because the industry needs it. Imagine after the end of this month that was going to be put back on them again. It adds to the cost of the industry; it adds to the cost of doing business. We look at food security. I mean,

we see it every day. We've heard it; we've seen it. We look at the shelves; we buy groceries. We've heard again from our constituents. We know the food on the shelves is expensive, but look how that's helping us when they're going to buy those groceries because if that was put on again, that's another extra tax, the gas tax and everything, that's coming in from outside the province that it adds to an increase in our food supply.

This is a good thing that we're doing this and keeping that reduction. Not only that, the farmers in my area, in Central Newfoundland, probably one of the hubs for farming, because Central Newfoundland is a hub for a lot of industry in that area and for a lot of people – so farming is a hub in that area, and I talked to the farmers. Everything they buy, the fuels that they buy, they got to pass it on to our kitchen tables. The parts that they buy, have those flown in or come in by transport to fix their machines, adds to our tables. The price we pay is on our tables, the feeding our children, the feeding our people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So we need to make initiatives, like the Premier just did to bring in that gas tax. He said we were going to make it easier on the taxes, and that is one initiative. That helps with everybody at the end cost of putting food on our tables. We need initiatives like that.

Food services, again, we rely on the fishery. It was mentioned here soon the gas, the fuels that will be burned through the fishery, enormous amounts of dollars goes through it. I mean, say, if you talk to any fishermen, they will tell you the cost of fishing is not cheap. The price of fishing is not cheap and that goes with the danger that goes with it. The price of that is not cheap either.

To bring that into our plans to get it processed all costs – so as fuels increase, everything increases, parts for their boats, parts for their engines, all that plays a part

in the industry, which brings our food cheaper when we get it to our tables. We need to be looking at more initiatives like that to help the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. We listened to them during the election, we really did, and they listened to us. I think they listened to us because we're over here now because of the things that we said.

We will do what we said in our Blue Book: lower taxes, safer communities, better health care for all of us because that's what the people want. That's what they voted us in for and that's what they'll get.

We'll look forward to proceeding with our Blue Book and different initiatives. Food security, again, we'll be doing a 10-year plan to increase food security. That 10-year plan will be part of reduction in gas taxes in order to get it cheaper to our tables, that we can grow more here. I did a Member's statement there today. We want to grow more of what we eat and eat more of what we grow. It's pretty simple.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: In our 10-year plan, that's what we'll do. We'll look towards growing more of what we eat and eating more of what we grow, and we'll get to that.

So that is some of the initiatives that people want us to get to those plateaus, and we're interested in getting to those plateaus. With the Blue Book, with one piece at a time, we'll get there. We did listen to the people of the province and they did listen to us, so I'd like to thank them for that.

As we continue, Speaker, we will do more initiatives for the cost of living and to help people along the way in their daily lives. That's what we plan to do.

With that, Speaker, I'm not going to take up a lot more time. I just wanted to get up and make those few points because I did hear some comments from across the way that

probably needed to be talked about and really interested that they're interested in what we're going to do. With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat, and we'll speak for another day.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Harbour Main, that debate be now adjourned.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the debate do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Torngat Mountains, that the House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

This House is now adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, March 11, at 10 a.m.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, March 11, at 10 a.m.