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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.

Before we begin normal proceedings, I'm now prepared to rule on a point of order raised by the Member for the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair during debate on the private Member's resolution on April 1, 2026.

The Government House Leader, in responding to that point of order, stated that a point of order must clearly indicate what the point of order is and suggested that it is not a point of order to ask that the Speaker go back and review an entire debate or speech to find an offensive comment.

The Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair has indeed clearly indicated that her point of order is raised under Standing Order 49, which prohibits the use of offensive language, that she has specifically referenced a certain phrase "choke on it" used by the Member for the District of Lake Melville in debate.

In addition to considering the remarks brought to my attention by a Member, it is also within my role as Speaker to intervene where I feel questionable language has been used during debate. I have reviewed *Hansard*. The Member for Lake Melville did, on two occasions, use the phrases "choke on it," as referenced by the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair in her point of order. On one occasion, the Member for Lake Melville stated: "You just can't come in and impose your will on a district as the minister and say here it is, choke on it."

On another occasion, the Member for Lake Melville stated: "They said: Here's your mega-shelter, choke on it." In the same part of his speech, the Member for Lake Melville also stated: "They tried to ram it down Lake Melville's mouth. They tried to ram it down and they said, no."

Standing Order 49 reflects a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all Members and for this hon. House. The use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. As noted in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Fourth Edition, 2025* paragraph 13.37: "In dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker takes into account the tone, manner and intention of the member speaking, the person to whom the words at issue were directed, the degree of provocation and, most important, whether or not the remarks created disorder in the chamber."

There is no set list of words or phrases that are unparliamentary. It is the context which must be examined. While I appreciate all Members have the right to speak, criticize and debate passionately, we must be guided by the Rules of Order and Decorum. It is the duty of all hon. Members to uphold the dignity of this institution of Parliament.

With these considerations in mind, I do rule that the above statements made by the Member for Lake Melville are unparliamentary and would ask that he withdraw them.

Finally, the Member for Lake Melville did use another phrase during debate which he prefaced by saying, I hope this is not unparliamentary – I am sure the Member knows the phrase to which I am referring. I will not repeat it.

I rule that the use of the phrase in question is, as the Member has suspected himself, unparliamentary and I ask that he withdraw it, as well.

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

K. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise in the House. I'm a passionate guy and I will say that I withdraw the remarks based on how upset I was at the utter devastation left by the former government in Lake Melville.

SPEAKER: The Speaker would ask that the Member withdraw the remarks unequivocally.

K. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the remarks unequivocally.

SPEAKER: Okay.

Today, I would like to welcome to the public gallery, Her Worship Carol Molloy, from the Town of Come By Chance who is the subject of a Member's statement. She is accompanied by her family.

Welcome, Your Worship.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: As well, I would also like to welcome to the public gallery, Nicholas Abrard and Rania Amirouche who are part of a group of young Francophones who will be recognized in a Member's statement and I understand they are accompanied by members of their family.

Welcome to our public gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Mount Scio, Placentia - St. Mary's, Placentia West - Bellevue, St. George's - Humber and St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: Monsieur le Président,

Aujourd'hui, je prends la parole pour souligner un groupe remarquable de jeunes francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador qui ont récemment participé au Parlement jeunesse pancanadien à Ottawa, du 7 au 11 janvier. Cette expérience a réuni 72 jeunes

de partout au pays, leur offrant l'occasion d'endosser le rôle de parlementaires, de débattre d'idées et de mieux comprendre nos institutions démocratiques.

Parmi les participants figuraient Nicholas Abrard, Rania Amirouche et Maya Marmouche de Saint-Jean, ainsi que Meaghan Lee de Labrador City. Ces élèves incarnent le talent, la curiosité et l'engagement civique présents dans la communauté francophone de notre province.

Grâce à cette expérience, ils ont développé des compétences en prise de parole, en pensée critique, en collaboration et en leadership. Ils ont également tissé des liens avec d'autres jeunes francophones d'un océan à l'autre, renforçant ainsi la vitalité du français au Canada.

Des initiatives comme le Parlement jeunesse pancanadien jouent un rôle essentiel pour encourager l'engagement des jeunes dans la vie publique et pour renforcer notre démocratie.

Merci et félicitations!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, 19 years ago, a young soldier from our province answered the call to serve his country. Today his image looks out, with quiet strength and dignity, over all who visit the Private Kevin Kennedy Memorial Garden in St. Vincent's.

This garden stands not only as a tribute to Private Kennedy, but as a sacred place of reflection, remembrance and peace. It honours those with ties to the communities of St. Vincent's, St. Stephen's and Peter's River who served in uniform.

Established through the dedication and vision of the Fisherman's Museum Committee, the Memorial Garden is home to a plaque bearing the names of 38 soldiers, and memorial benches dedicated to loved ones.

Private Kennedy was just 20 years old when he was killed by a roadside bomb on Easter Sunday, 2007, in Afghanistan, alongside five fellow soldiers. He made the ultimate sacrifice in the pursuit of peace and in the hope of building a better world for others.

His legacy lives on in the hearts of his family, his community and this province.

I encourage all who visit St. Vincent's to take the opportunity to walk through the Pte. Kevin Kennedy Memorial Garden to reflect and to remember.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

In this historic year and the final day marking the 100th anniversary of women achieving the right to vote and hold public office in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is especially fitting to recognize the remarkable achievements of Her Worship Carol Molloy.

In November of 2025, Ms. Molloy was notified by *Atlantic Business Magazine* that she had been nominated for its Most Powerful Women in Business recognition. From 249 nominations, she was selected as one of the top 25 Most Powerful Women in Business.

On March 25, 2026, she travelled to Halifax to attend the gala where she proudly accepted this distinguished honor for devoting more than 20 years to health,

safety, environment and quality through her own company.

On this historic anniversary, Ms. Molloy is serving her second term as mayor of Come By Chance located in the beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue and is an active member with the local fire department. Her leadership and dedication continues to inspire and pave the way for future generations of women leaders.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Mayor Carol Molloy on being named one of the Top 25 Most Powerful Women in Business and for showing true leadership in uncertain times.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

H. CORMIER: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the dedicated members of the St. George's Fire Department. In a close-knit community, like St. George's, our volunteer firefighters are more than just first responders, they are neighbours, friends and family members who step forward when others need help most.

Whether responding to structure fires, motor vehicle accidents, medical emergencies or assisting neighbouring communities, they serve with courage, professionalism and heart. They give countless hours to training, fundraising and community events, all while balancing full-time jobs and family responsibilities. Their pager may go off at any hour; without hesitation, they answer the call. Because of their dedication, residents in St. George's and surrounding areas rest a little easier.

On behalf of the people of St. George's - Humber, I offer sincere thanks to every

member of the department for their service, sacrifice and unwavering commitment to keeping our community safe.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Maggie Helwig, author of *Encampment*, said that we are sent into this world to plant life in the wasteland. Stephen Lewis planted life in the wasteland. He advocated tirelessly and passionately for social justice, inspiring millions worldwide. Hearing him speak made you want to join him in building a better world.

Stephen served as a New Democrat MPP in Ontario, as provincial NDP Leader and Official Opposition Leader. He championed the struggles of working people that led to rent control and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. Lewis served at the UN as Canada's ambassador and as Special Advisor on Africa. He worked with Nelson Mandela to end apartheid in South Africa. As deputy executive director of UNICEF, he raised awareness of the effects of war on children. As UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS, he convinced world leaders to respond to the devastating epidemic in Africa. In 2006, he and his daughter founded the Stephen Lewis Foundation to help people living with HIV/AIDS and save lives.

Most of all, Stephen was a loving son, husband, father and grandfather, who will be deeply missed by his family, his NDP family and all Canadians who believe in fairness and a just society.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, correctional officers play a crucial role in our justice system, working with some of the province's most vulnerable individuals.

This summer, the Correctional Officer Recruitment Training Program will be offered in Labrador, with successful graduates offered employment as correctional officers in Labrador. We anticipate even more officers in the coming months as 38 students are enrolled in the training program in St. John's and Mount Pearl. In May, they will join the dedicated correctional officers that work tirelessly at facilities across the province.

Through this training, recruits learn about the various issues faced by our diverse inmate population, particularly related to mental health and cultural sensitivities, as well as operational courses, including use of force and emergency situations. The program's hands-on instruction helps recruits learn from our amazing correctional officers so they can see the life-changing influence that they can have on inmates, promoting rehabilitation to help break the cycle of crime and keep our communities safe.

Earlier this year, I visited the Labrador Correctional Centre to meet with the staff and see the centre first-hand and the planned renovations that will support staff and inmates.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking those who bring their compassion and empathy to the role of correctional officer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

We here in the Official Opposition recognize the important work of correctional officers across Newfoundland and Labrador. Expanding training opportunities within the province is a positive step and, in fact, increasing access to in-province training is something that we have long supported, particularly to remove barriers for those entering public safety careers.

But, Speaker, training alone is not enough. Officers continue to raise concerns about burnout, staffing shortages and safety on the job, especially as they respond to increasingly complex needs including mental health and addictions.

While these training initiatives are, certainly, welcome, we call on government to work on a broader plan that will keep not only new recruits but all correctional officers working in our justice system. We agree that improving access to training matters, but without a real plan to retain staff, we are only addressing part of the problem.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

We all know that our corrections system is in desperate need of more staff. Through their work, inmates learn new skills through programming and prepare for reintegration into society. They are key to lowering crime rates and improving safety.

We, therefore, ask that this government do all it can to ensure that, once hired, these officers are treated with the respect they deserve and the working conditions they need so that they can stay and thrive in the system.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Firefighting resources are more than equipment and aircraft – they represent safety, resilience and hope for all of us. When last year's wildfires swept through our region, residents endured heartbreaking loss and disruption. Families were forced to evacuate, homes and cherished possessions were damaged or destroyed, and entire communities were left grappling with the emotional and physical aftermath. Those experiences remain deeply felt and serve as a powerful reminder of what is at stake when wildfire strikes.

In moments like these, the strength of our firefighting capabilities truly matters. Ground crews and aerial resources work together to slow fires and protect infrastructure, with the aim of helping residents return home. Water bombers, in particular, are a visible symbol of reassurance, arriving when conditions are most dangerous and time is critical.

Speaker, that is why the progress being made on the fifth water bomber is so important. Structural repairs are advancing extremely well, with most of the work already completed. The project remains firmly on schedule, and the aircraft is expected to return to service on May 1 for

this year's firefighting season. Its return will enhance our readiness and ensure we are better prepared to protect communities and help strengthen emergency response, as we face the wildfire season ahead.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

We are pleased to hear that the repairs to the fifth water bomber are on track and will be completed on time. These aircrafts are a critical part of our province's wildfire response, helping protect communities and residents during challenging fire seasons.

As we saw last year, water bombers proved invaluable in containing fires and supporting ground crews when it mattered most. We also recognize the professionalism and dedication of the pilots who operate these aircrafts. Their skill and commitment ensures they are safely and effectively used. At this time, having aircraft ready is only part of the equation. The ability of qualified pilots has been identified as an ongoing challenge.

We encourage the government to continue its efforts to recruit and retain the personnel needed to keep this fleet operational. Ensuring both equipment readiness and effective capacity of staffing is essential to the safeguarding of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

We commend the government in getting the water bomber back in service after so many years. However, we would be remiss if we didn't also commend former Labrador West MHA Jordan Brown for his work in keeping this issue in the public eye until it was resolved.

As the next fire season approaches, we ask government to hire the seasonal wildfire prevention staff permanently so they can train and repair equipment in the off-season, so we aren't scrambling every spring to fill these positions.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

As families gather this weekend for Easter, travelling by road and planes and boats across our province, they're facing costs far higher than they expected just weeks ago. The food on their tables is more expensive than ever. Yet, the Premier refuses to take action. The Finance Minister has said there are multiple levers that can be pulled, but none are being used.

Why won't the Premier allow the Finance Minister to pull a lever and provide relief to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, today?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, as I have said previously in the House, we are fully aware of what's happening in the Middle East and the significant cost. It has happened, and that's why we make the steps to make sure that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have the lowest gas tax in all of Canada.

Let me point out some of those numbers: British Columbia right now, provincial gas tax, 14.5 cents; Alberta, 13 cents; Saskatchewan, 15 cents; Manitoba, 14 cents; Ontario, nine cents; Quebec, 19 cents; New Brunswick, 10.9 cents; Nova Scotia, 15.5 cents; Prince Edward Island, 8.5; Newfoundland and Labrador, 7.5. I will guarantee –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: I will guarantee that the people of –

SPEAKER: The Premier's time has expired.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

While it's great that we have a low gas tax here, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians aren't concerned with gas taxes across the country. They're concerned with what the Premier can do here which, so far, has been absolutely nothing.

We've heard media reports, even last night, that oil prices have soared 13 per cent after Trump's speech and stock markets continue to plummet.

Will the Premier finally admit it's time to use the additional oil revenue and if not to lower the gas tax, to do something for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, we will do something. That's number one. The Leader of the Official Opposition asked when we would do something. One thing that the viewers that are watching home today will see a distinct difference between government today and government of yesteryear.

The Leader of the Official Opposition used words earlier this week to put your money where your mouth is and put the money in the budget, he spoke affirmatively. The Deputy Opposition Leader said, only half a million dollars.

We want to plan efficiently to make sure that we hit our target audience.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm not sure what the answer to the question was, but, anyway, we'll try again. We'll give him another lever. He might like this one because, as grocery prices continue to rise, it continues to put pressure on families. In Manitoba, the government has removed sales taxes on all groceries and organizations here, like the Single Parents Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, have said a similar measure can provide meaningful relief to families in our province.

So if they won't pull the lever on gas tax, will they pull a lever and reduce the cost of groceries?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I can tell that the Third Party thinks that's a very good question as an NDP government. But one thing I'll remind the Leader of the Official Opposition is that, in Manitoba, they administer their own provincial sales tax. They control it.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, we go through CRA, the federal government, which we found out that if we want to put out the Disability Benefit, it's going to cost us \$3 million and \$700,000 annually in order to launch it.

The government of previous years would have jumped at that. We want to make sure we do it to save the dollars in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I'm not sure the Minister of Finance is hearing the questions because the answers have absolutely nothing to do with what I'm asking. We are simply asking this government to reduce the cost of living for all kinds of issues in this province. We are giving them levers, we are giving them options, and they are just saying no. They're deferring, talking about what other provinces are doing. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians care about what you're doing, Minister.

Now yesterday, the Minister of Finance complained about the deficit. Well, we had a huge lever to deal with that deficit. It was called \$225 billion from the Churchill Falls agreement.

So I ask: Would the Finance Minister like to have a billion dollars for this year's budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I'd just like to address the preamble, if I may.

AN HON. MEMBER: Of course.

C. PARDY: Of course.

I stated that in order to deal with CRA, with the federal government, it comes at an astronomical cost. Three million dollars to deal with CRA to reduce the sales tax on groceries, the provincial tax portion, which mostly is exempt except for prepared foods, then would cost somewhere around \$3 million.

We'd prefer to think that that \$3 million is better served to support the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Liberal way was to sign up and put it out with an astronomical cost.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I'll just say to the minister that talking in circles and throwing out numbers is not going to make groceries cheaper for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. These are very simple questions, Minister.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: We are asking why you won't do things to make the cost of living easier for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. So I'll try another question because we're not getting an answer on this. Maybe it's because you refuse to do things and you will in the budget.

So can the minister tell this House whether his government plans to introduce any

spending cuts in the budget, and if so, which areas will be affected?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I know I have 45 seconds, but I want to address the preamble in a second.

For the third time, to deal and to reduce the tax on prepared foods for the groceries would cost us about \$3 million in dealing with the CRA. That's three times I've said \$3 million that we think is better spent to service those that would need it most, not to pay the CRA.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: The question would be: Would there be any cuts in the upcoming budget? The answer would be: I'm not aware of any, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: So we have a Finance Minister who's not aware of the budget; we have a Finance Minister who won't spend money on Newfoundlanders' and Labradorians' needs; we have a Deputy Premier who said we're not going to tell you about the cuts until the budget, so stay tuned. So it certainly sounds like cuts are on the table and they're sort of working around the edges here and not coming forward.

Now, I would ask the Finance Minister, you have an opportunity to tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians why you're not delivering for them and why you sound like you're

going to make things worse when the budget is put down next month.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me be perfectly clear to all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, what we campaigned on and what we are going to see in our upcoming budget. I said, and I stay committed to and so does every Member on this side, our government, that we will not balance the books of the province on the backs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: We are going to help them balance their budgets and then we'll focus on balancing the budget for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, a murder trial was halted today due to a lack of court staff, and the judge directly asked the Minister of Justice to take this matter at hand and ensure there are enough officers to handle this specific trial. The minister has been working on this for several months and we worry that things might be getting worse and not better.

So is there a realistic timeline the minister can provide regarding solutions to this very important issue?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

As the Leader of the Opposition understands, I cannot comment on any specific case or trial that's before the court, but I do want to assure the public that Justice and Public Safety departmental officials have been in contact with the Office of the High Sheriff and we have been assured that there will be sufficient officers in Corner Brook for that trial.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I respect the answer on a specific trial; that is the right answer. I'm not asking her to comment on the specific trial, but I will ask the minister if there is an increased risk in this province that criminal trials will be dismissed due to adverse Jordan rulings?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I can say that I met with the working group, the Provincial Court Working Group, with respect to their findings, I met with them last week, on the systemic issues and the systemic pressures that the court system has been facing, specifically with respect to the Jordan timelines. I can say that I'm very optimistic and very encouraged by the Working Group and the findings that they have made.

I can say that there have been a number of initiatives that have been already started with respect to virtual bail court, as well as other initiatives that will really –

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

A CBC report today outlines that inmates are having to sleep in the gym in between drops of water and mice at the century-old penitentiary.

Can the minister confirm that he isn't going to cancel the badly needed HMP replacement, the same way that he cancelled the badly needed new provincial hospital?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, I'll address the second part of that question first. I will never make apologies for cancelling the tower of power on Kenmount Crossing that was upwards to \$14 billion to construct. It was the smartest decision we ever made as a government and I stand by that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: As for part two, we have to live with what this previous administration agreed to. It was a sole-source contract that's costing us north of \$700 million. It's long out, it's done, I've committed that it's going to be built.

Would we have done the same thing? No, but it's going to be built. There will be a penitentiary in place. So to her question, yes, we are proceeding.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

In their election platform, the Conservatives promised to make more families and individuals eligible for the Physical Activity Tax Credit by letting them claim fitness gear like sneakers and bikes.

Will the minister responsible for Sport confirm that she is ensuring this tax credit will broaden in the budget?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: One thing I do commend the other side is that they've read our platform very well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I mean that sincerely. You've read it well and you understand it well. I think you're really going to enjoy the budget when it's delivered. You all have a great seat, and I would think that will come out very shortly as to what would be in our budget – very shortly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

This question is for the minister responsible for Sport: What criteria has the Minister of Sport suggested to make sure that the expanded Physical Activity Tax Credit applies to more people in the province?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: In being the minister of levers – I mean Finance –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: – the only thing I would say is anything that provides the relief to children occupying sport, and children in particular, we take very seriously. I think that will be reflected in our budget.

I can't really, today, stand to tell what's in the budget, but I do look forward to delivering it when the date is established, and I sincerely do. I think it's a good budget to help out those that are active in Newfoundland and Labrador, and those that are vulnerable.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

I didn't ask the Minister of Finance to reveal what was in the budget. I asked the Minister of Sport on what suggestions she made to you, as the minister, to help ensure that tax credit is expanded.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. FORD: So my question is, Speaker: The Tourism Minister has advocated for more travel within our province as a way to boost tourism, does the minister agree that the increase cost of gas will affect people's decision to travel?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: The Member for Gander wasn't here last year when the previous government was in place, but there were a lot of things that, confidentiality, couldn't be disclosed.

Myself and the minister and the whole team have had numerous conversations about what is important for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: If you're asking have we spoken? Speaker, 100 per cent that I can say we have.

Again, I know you're not asking what's in budget. The only thing I can say to you is that the budget will reflect all those conversations we've had in order to help the affordability of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

The blue book promised to provide paid work terms for students training in hard-to-fill areas like health, social and educational services of the provincial government. This includes all students who are studying to be nurses, teachers, social workers and more.

Will this be in the budget? These students deserve the truth, Minister.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Again, related to the budget and to the finance of the province, we've had lots of

consultation on the topic that you mentioned – lots of consultation. At the point of being redundant, I would say it's something that you can look into the budget to see, when it's delivered, as to what we've achieved.

I fully expect that when the budget is delivered in the House, you're going to have lots of questions about – you may stand to your feet and say we really celebrate what you've got in the budget because you're going to help the children, the four children that are sleeping with the mother in a rat-infested or rodent-infested house –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SPEAKER: The Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hope I have the ability to clap. I haven't had the ability to clap in six months on anything you've done.

So the blue book promised to provide the money and put money in the pockets of graduates who are willing to stay, work, live and raise a family here in this province with their tuition back.

Will this be in the budget, Minister?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I must commend that those are very good questions, no doubt about that.

One thing that I stated in the House – and I do believe I did state it in the House – was that we did some pre-budget consultations. This year, the response back from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador was more than the last three years in total.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: So the only thing that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

C. PARDY: We will see as to where the budget measures up to what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador want. We told you that the three pillars – and I'm sure you're reading the platform, you know what they are – the budget will address them.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

The Conservative blue book promised Labrador will receive a new MRI machine and the additional technicians needed to operate this machine.

Is the Minister of Health still committed to this? Has she decided where it's going and will she deliver it in the upcoming budget?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, yes, that commitment is in the blue book. We are bringing in those MRI machines.

In actual fact, when we deliver the MRI machine, not only is that going to help the patients access MRI services in health care, but also, Speaker, I see it expanding and actually playing a greater role in terms of recruitment and retention for Labrador.

I spoke highly of the Premier's commitment to make Labrador its own regional health

council so that Labrador's concerns can be addressed and that Labrador health care could be focused on Labradorians and that we would have access to timely and adequate health care in Labrador.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm happy to hear the minister say the MRI will be announced in the budget, and hopefully it'll be installed shortly thereafter.

Yesterday, in response to my question about medical travel, the Minister of Health said – and I quote directly – “in actual fact, we're going to look at affordable travel, not just for patients, but for every passenger that wants to travel in Labrador.”

So is the minister going to make medical travel 100 per cent free for everyone, everywhere, as they promised, or is it just going to be affordable? I'm just seeking clarity because 100 per cent coverage and affordable are not both the same.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, first I'd like to address the preamble about the MRI.

It's actually going to be a PC government that delivers an MRI to Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: It's going to be a PC government that delivers Labrador's health council to Labrador, and not having to share it with other parts of the province that are not even attached to Labrador. We're going to have Labrador focused health care and, in actual fact, it's going to be the PC government that delivers timely and adequate health care to the people of Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

Since the minister started six months ago, the walk-in clinic on Blackmarsh closed on March 18; on November 3, 2025, a family physician left her clinic at Pearlgate Medical centre in Mount Pearl; and on March 20, a nurse practitioner left Exploits Family Care Team.

What is the plan for the patients and should Newfoundlanders and Labradorians be concerned?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, actually, I thank the Member opposite for the question, because his question draws attention to the state of health care that we inherited from 10 years of Liberal government.

In actual fact, we are working with physicians, we are working with health care providers and, also, we're working with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to make sure that these patients are addressed and that we're going to be looking at ways we can provide services for these patients. We're not going to turn a blind eye.

Also, we're going to make sure that we can deliver timely and accessible health care in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, the Family Care Team in Corner Brook was expected to open in February, but residents are left in limbo waiting for some answers.

Can the Minister of Health confirm when it will open to provide the primary care they promised?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, in actual fact, I again have to thank the Opposition for their timely question, because it draws attention to the things that I've been raising.

We've had so many Family Care Teams quickly announced but not rolled out, Speaker. One of the things that I'm doing is making sure the Family Care Teams that have been established are properly staffed, through good recruitment and retention, and I'm dealing, as Minister of Health, and working with the CEO of Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to address the problems with recruitment and retention.

It is actually quite upsetting for me because I had the expectations that this would be really a good system, and we are going to make improvements to recruitment and retention –

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, this was announced with this government as well, and we want to hear why. I've heard this from staff at NLHS, that this was coming. There are currently staff in NLHS with a signature on their email and no facility open, as rumored, at the old hospital.

Again, when is it going to open?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Yes, Speaker, I think, it's three years.

One of the things that I keep talking about is we really need to have focused recruitment and retention, but also, Speaker, I want to address some fear mongering that has been going on in terms of Family Care Teams.

I want to assure people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that have a Family Care Team in their region that what we will be doing is we will be going back and clean up the Liberal mess that was created. We are –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: – going to support the Family Care Teams, unlike the Liberals who rolled out things just for the good announcements and not addressing the Family Care Teams that need (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Speaker, the blue book committed to expand school meals for K-to-12 students. Our students can't learn when they're hungry, yet nearly 40 per cent of children in our province live in food-insecure households.

Will this expansion be in the budget? Will it be continued?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you.

Thank you for the question. It's a very serious one. As we know, children going to school hungry are not set up to learn, and it's something we're going to continue. There's the food lunch program that's there, where it's been rolled out to a number of schools. We're going to continue to roll it out to additional schools this year. The expectation is to ensure that all children who can avail of it are able to go to school not hungry. One thing they can cross off their list, and they can concentrate on their education and learning. So we are going to continue to roll out that program.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, if there's no roadwork planned for the District of Placentia - St. Mary's, what is your plan to deal with brush cutting and ditching?

SPEAKER: The minister for a quick response, if you can.

B. PETTEN: My plan with brush cutting and clearing is no different than roadwork. We'll do it as needed and where people express the need. That's being studied. I'm not involved at that level, but everywhere that

needs brush cutting done, we'll do our best to get it done. It's very important, the safety of our roads, including moose fencing, which we are going to increase that budget.

We've announced in our blue book that we're all about safe communities, and brush cutting is a big part of our safer communities initiative.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

During the election, the Premier promised to expand skilled trades courses in high schools across the province to help fix the skilled trades shortage. The NLTA says there's a growing shortage of teachers, particularly specialty teachers, especially in rural areas.

So I ask the Premier: Where is he getting the teachers to expand the skilled trades courses to fix the skilled trades shortage?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

We know that skilled trades are extremely important in this province. Moreso in terms of advancing apprentices, and we know the projects that are coming up on our horizon are going to require skilled trades.

We are working with the NLTA to work through what we can do in the classrooms to encourage children to advance and take up skilled trades. In fact, it's just next week, we're meeting again with the NLTA. We will continue to work with the NLTA to address any concerns within the schools and the classrooms.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

This is a serious recruitment and retention problem, not a skilled trades problem. The number of substitute teachers has declined greatly and the number of retired teachers working as substitute teachers has grown from 61 in 2015 to over 630 in 2026.

So I ask the Minister of Education: What steps are his department taking to reverse this trend and attract more, new people into the teaching profession?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thanks for the question.

It's interesting how the number of retired teachers has increased from 61 to almost 600; not on our time, on the previous government's time. So you're right. You are so right that we have to work now to try and reverse that trend.

We are working with the NLTA, and we're going to work with them on the retention and recruitment team that we have together. We're going to work to try and reverse that trend because it should never have happened in the first place. If anyone had a plan in place, we would never be where we are today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: We need our teachers and we need them in the classroom, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, overcrowding at the penitentiary, as we've heard, has reached a crisis point, with inmates forced to sleep on cots in a gym just to avoid raindrops and mice. These are unacceptable conditions. They are a violation of basic human rights and no one should be subjected to this, including those who are incarcerated.

So I ask the minister: What is the immediate plan to address this – a plan the Liberals did not enact? It is clear we cannot wait for the new facility while people continue to live in these conditions today.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I can say that the safety and well-being of inmates and correctional staff in the province's facility at HMP is a priority for the Department of Justice and Public Safety, and for this government.

I can advise you that I also have had discussions with the president of NAPE and the correctional officers' shop steward, who indicated and talked about the issues with respect to overcrowding and some of the potential solutions that we can put in place to address this issue at HMP.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, we know that real public safety comes from rehabilitation, not just incarceration. Restorative justice and addressing the social determinants of health are key to helping people successfully reintegrate into society.

I ask the minister: How much funding can we expect to see in the upcoming budget for restorative justice initiatives and programs that address mental health, addictions, housing and other supports for inmates to ensure successful reintegration?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I can say that the rehabilitation of offenders in our prison system is a priority for us as well. Ensuring programming in our new prison, and in the prison that we have, that it will address some of the problems that we have with recidivism and prolific offenders that are out in our community, we are committed to ensuring that there is proper rehabilitation, proper programming in our correctional facilities, not only at HMP but throughout the province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will move, pursuant to Standing Order 11(1), that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 21.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act and the Family Law Act, Bill 12.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, I rise because there has been a lot of questions over our fairness and how we do our roadwork in the province and, again, I think it's very important for the people of the province to hear this.

Previously, in the last five years – and these are Liberal or former Liberal districts. I'm just going to list off amounts so people can get a context of this: \$61 million, \$39 million, \$37 million, \$35 million, \$52 million and Labrador received \$120 million.

I think they've all done quite well. We will continue to do as we've stated in this House, we'll be fair to the people of the province and we will create safer

communities, we will lower taxes and we'll have better health care.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Petitions.

Petitions

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

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

Access to justice is a fundamental right of all Canadians. The closure of the Provincial Court in Port aux Basques has created a significant barrier to justice for residents of the Southwest Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Community members involved in civil and criminal matters are now required to travel long distances to attend proceedings, creating hardships for individuals, families, witnesses and legal professionals.

The courthouse also served as a local point of access for a range of justice-related and government-supported services, including matters involving family law, fines administration, peace bonds, legal aid interactions and other processes that rely on an in-person attendance. Its closure has reduced the availability of these services in the region, resulting in delays, increased costs and disproportionate impacts on vulnerable residents.

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 reopen the Provincial Court in Port aux Basques to restore accessible, timely and locally delivered justice services for

residents of the Southwest Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, I would note that I have signatures here from Isle aux Morts communities, Port aux Basques, Rose Blanche and Burnt Islands. As we've seen today that the working group – 10 minutes before the House of Assembly opened, the minister spoke to the media on the working group report. While I certainly appreciate the work of the working group and all that they have done, we have a report that has been delayed. It took four months. All of the articles that we've seen since November of staffing shortages as the problem, and the minister gets the working group report and says there are staffing shortages. It took four months of that to acknowledge something that we already knew.

The people of my district want to see the court in Port aux Basques open back up –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: – to access services that are important to them.

Now that the minister has the working group report, I will take the time for the minister to update this House on when the court in Port aux Basques will be reopened.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Further petitions.

The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I have a petition on the Labrador South Health Centre. These are the reasons for and background for this petition:

WHEREAS the Labrador South Health Centre is the only health centre serving the entire district; and

WHEREAS the health centre currently has no doctor on site and no X-ray or lab technician;

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to prioritize returning those services to the Labrador Health Centre.

Speaker, I've been on my feet a number of times on the health centre. Apart from this, we just have community clinics down through the district. This is a very, very important facility in the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

I have a lot of petitions from L'Anse-au-Loup, Forteau and L'Anse au Clair on this particular one, and there are multiple reasons why folks are concerned about the health centre there right now. We currently have no doctor on site. We have a doctor that comes in periodically. He was just recently, I believe, in for a week. People are reaching out to me as recent as this morning saying they didn't even know he was in the area, so that's a problem. If there is no doctor on site and he's living in Ontario, that's a problem in communication. People don't know when he's there.

The other thing, Speaker, we did have a doctor that was very interesting in coming there. He came, actually, and toured the facilities in December and nothing had been resolved with the NLHS. I did speak to the minister. The minister met with myself and some leadership from the area, and we raised those concerns, but we haven't heard anything back. That's been some time, and I would really encourage the minister to urge NLHS, if there is a doctor that wants to come – we know they're scarce all over the province; we hear about it, we have a guy who wants to come there. We encourage her to, you know, come in to try to resolve this.

What we got there right now, as somebody said on the call, if you go in with a bad knee, you can work with Teladoc, and that works. If you go in with a bleed on the brain and your doctor is in Toronto, that doesn't work. So it is a very big concern as we have no other doctor down across the area.

We lost a lab and X-ray tech; this is causing huge issues. Just since the House started, 1:30 today, I had an email saying: My wife has to go to Goose Bay or St. Anthony for an X-ray. That's incredibly crazy. Are they getting on the ferry and spending two days to get an X-ray? Are they going to drive 800 or 900 kilometres for an X-ray? So I really have to keep prioritizing this. This only happened this winter; 2026 was when we lost a lab and X-ray tech. There are some that move in and out periodically but, again, people don't know when they're there. That's a big concern.

The INR machine, I was told on the 31st of January, was ready to go back. They were doing training. To date, it's still not there.

Speaker, the hostels are another issue. I reached out now, this is umpteen times. Hostels in St. Anthony were supposed to be opened in early December, and they're still not open.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, and I thank the Member for her petition.

Being somebody from Labrador and from a region that struggles to access timely health care, I fully support returning the services to Southern Labrador. I met with the MHA and leadership from those communities, and

we've committed to working with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to actually restore the services.

Speaker, we are looking outside the box because some of the barriers, we understand, we have to overcome. We have to make sure that Southern Labrador has access to timely and adequate health care. As the minister, I'm committed to doing that.

Also, I'm very, very disappointed with the issue she raised about people not knowing the doctor was in the region. I can see how that could be so frustrating to her, and also to the patients in there that want to access health care and be able to see the doctor. So I will be reaching out directly to Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to make sure that when a doctor is coming into the area, that the patients know about it so they can access these services.

We are looking at ways, now, to restore lab and X-ray access and also to be able to provide primary health care. We are committed to that. We will be working closely with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services and the leadership in the area.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further petitions.

Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, Order 2.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Exploits, that this House

do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 8.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair and that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 8.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Power): Order, please!

We are debating Bill 8, An Act to Amend the Wild Life Act.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Wild Life Act."
(Bill 8)

CLERK (Hawley George): Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just looking at some clarification on section 13 and the changes in it. When I look at the old section, Minister, it talks about, "A wild life officer may at reasonable times enter upon a premises or place or enter or stop and enter upon a vehicle, aircraft, vessel, boat or raft and (a) require the production of a licence or permit; and (b) search the premises" –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: I know, I can start over. It's your crowd –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: Or is it ours? Okay.

Anyway what is says is: It can require the production of a licence or to search a premises. It seems to me that the word "search" has been removed from that section, so am I reading that accurately?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Yes, that is what's in the bill.

J. HOGAN: Say it again?

P. FORSEY: That's what's in the bill, right there.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Minister.

So why is the ability for a wildlife officer to search a premises or place removed?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: They may need to do their job at the site, if they had a warrant to go in and do that. Then they can obtain the telewarrant right there on the site and then they go in and search.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: I'm not advocating that they should be or shouldn't.

It has been removed. I believe that there was ability to get warrants beforehand, so was there an issue that we now think wildlife officers shouldn't have the authority to search a premises or allow them to search and to find a licence or a permit?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Well if the wildlife officer has reasonable doubt that there's something illegal in that premises, they can acquire a telewarrant and go in and search that area.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: Yeah, I guess I'll ask that again.

In the old legislation, they had the ability to search, and now they do not have that ability to search, so why was that? I'm sure there's valid reason but I'd just like the answer about why it was taken away.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: By getting the telewarrant. If they've got reasonable doubt that they can go in to get a telewarrant to go in and search. That's what a telewarrant is all about. They'll go in and search that area.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: So my understanding from reading the old section then, if they had the ability in the legislation, that would give them the immediate authority to search. Now they have to take the time to go get a telewarrant.

So I don't know of a situation, but that, with the time lapse, could change circumstances that might miss an opportunity to find something with that search. I'm still not clear why that ability to search the premises has been taken away from a wildlife officer.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Well they can with the telewarrant. You know, they get a warrant right where they are. They can call for a warrant and the warrant gives the ability to search that premises.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: Okay.

Is there any concern that there's a risk in the time that lapses between when the wildlife officer makes a decision to get a telewarrant from when he or she gets it – that there might be a risk that that time lapse might affect the search?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Again, you know, that's discretion of the officer. If he feels there's some illegal activity there, he can get that telewarrant and then go search. That would be their discretion.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Minister.

I understand how the telewarrant works. If you want to get an answer from the officials, that's fine, but I'm not getting a sufficient answer that there may be a delay in the officer making his or her decision to seek the telewarrant; whereas, beforehand, in the old legislation, they had the ability to search written right in section 13(1). That has been taken away, for maybe good reason, and that's why we're here to ask the questions and just make sure we know the reason why it was done and that it should proceed in that fashion.

So I'll just leave it at that for now but, just for the record, I haven't got a satisfactory answer to that question.

I'll move on to, "Subsection 13(4) of the Act is amended by (a) deleting the words 'place, vehicle, aircraft, vessel, boat or raft' and substituting the words 'place or vehicle.'" Essentially, we're leaving place and vehicle there and removing aircraft, vessel, boat or raft.

Can the minister tell this House why we're deleting aircraft, vessel, boat and raft?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Could you repeat that question again? I am having trouble hearing.

J. HOGAN: I'm just trying to find the right reference for you, Minister. It is on page 5 of the bill.

AN HON. MEMBER: He got a new earpiece, just give him a second.

J. HOGAN: Yes.

On page 5, Minister, at the bottom there, subsection (4), in bold it says, "Subsection 13(4) of the act is amended...", and we're essentially deleting the words "aircraft, vessel, boat or raft" and we're leaving – I say we, I guess, as a house – "place and vehicle" in there. Why are we removing those other words?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: By deleting those words they're just using wherever they are, they can certainly search.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: So just for the record, I guess, I'll read out the old section 13(4) to give

clarity. It says, "The owner or person in charge of the premises, place, vehicle, aircraft, vessel, boat or raft referred to in this section and persons found there shall give a wild life officer reasonable help to enable the wild life officer to carry out the wild life officer's duties and functions under this section...."

So we are now not including vehicle, aircraft, vessel, boat or raft in there, only premises or place, so why are we narrowing what this section applies to?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: I'll take that one back and get you an answer for that one.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you.

Just a couple of questions for the minister. In clause 9, section 18, it talks about resisting a wildlife officer. If a person, I guess, legitimately – and it can happen – forgets to bring the licence along, does the wildlife officer have the flexibility to allow the hunter to obtain the licence within a reasonable amount of time, and what time are we talking about?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Yes, that is the discretion of the officer and there is a reasonable amount of time, probably within 24 or 48 hours, that they can get that licence and bring it to the officer or the detachment.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Would a person convicted be also restricted from holding an inland salmon fishing licence, which is also licensed by the provincial Wildlife Department?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: It was there. I thought I read that out yesterday. Give me time to look at it, but I did think that they would be revoked from all licences. Let me see what we did with that yesterday.

I do believe they are revoked from holding those licences.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Sure, the minister can take that back and find out for sure to confirm.

I'm thinking it is, yes, but I just need you to confirm on record if it is restricted – okay, the minister got an answer.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: The answer to that last question: yes, based on that officer's discretion.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Just for clarification there, is it within the provincial wildlife licensing division or is what you're saying is that it's at the discretion of the wildlife officer?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: That would be based on the discretion of the officer and how deep the offence is. They may be able to revoke a licence on other parts of that act as well.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Minister, in terms of the increased roles and responsibilities of these officers, we know that can be challenging, because it's around ticketing and other responsibilities that will fall within the Department of Justice.

Are you concerned, or even the Minister of Justice, that this will increase department supports which can really be a concern for that department? Are you concerned about that?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: The officers, you know, put in the act of where they did wrong and the rest of it is done through the courts.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Yes, I get that, but my question really was – it's no difference when we brought in the cameras. That's significant work for ticketing officials, which is under the Department of Justice, which was a concern. That's why it was delayed in terms of bringing it out to make sure that the Department of Justice officials are equipped and there's enough of them to deal with it in terms of putting stress and strain on them.

So that's all I was asking, because the increase in fines and stuff, if there are increases in tickets, it's going to put more responsibility, not on your officials, but through the ticketing process, which is going to go to the Department of Justice.

So my question was: Do the two departments correspond in terms of if that's a concern or not?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Yes, but with regard to the tickets and the fines, just because the fines are going up, it's not going to increase the tickets. It will depend on the act of the individuals, really, but, yes, they'll be worked out with the courts.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Yeah, that didn't answer the question, but we'll park it right there.

Minister, in terms of – I said this during my comments and how important this is, and I know you recognize this as well – the not-for-profit licences, I'm not sure what amounts are divvied out across the province, but are you planning on increasing those licences for not-for-profit, say moose licences?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: To your previous answer, it's not a concern. I did say, yes, in the meantime, that we were working with the courts.

That depends on, with regard to the moose licences that are out there, non-profits and individuals, I mean to say, there are ranks and that for the non-profits. That is done through the moose management allocation. So it depends on the moose management allocations and the reviews that we've done in the area. We'll decide how many licences each year and who goes where.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Yeah, I understand what the minister is saying. It goes back to the moose management planning and, in terms of numbers of animals, trying to balance, as I said in my opening remarks, but putting on the record, and I think the minister can appreciate that, the licences for not-for-

profits are beyond important to, like, Lions Clubs in the province and stuff.

So I guess I'm lobbying and pleading on behalf of them to not decrease them because, at the end of the day, it is your decision. Staff can come to you with recommendations, then I would make a recommendation to – and I don't think it would happen. I don't think under your watch that you would allow that to decrease, but I would propose to increase it if there's a need there in the not-for-profit. I know there is a need because I've certainly talked to them, but we'll park it at that.

Minister, the educational aspect of it as well, in terms of the act, are you anticipating or planning any new educational programs around the *Wild Life Act* and educating people in the province in the significance and the importance of it?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: I do believe that education is important in every department and every division that we do. So the more education we can provide with regard to wildlife and the fines and the responsibilities that we have in our own selves, I think it's crucial.

Yes, we will be doing some education parts on that, with regard to different ways that we can educate, especially our youth as they move forward.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: I do have a few more questions, but I think a colleague behind me has a question. I'll let him do that before I finish off with my final questions.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

I was just wondering if the minister could explain the rationale of why coyotes were added to the definition of fur-bearing animals?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Yeah, good.

In other jurisdictions in Canada, coyotes have been classified as fur-bearing animals, primarily trapping and marking it for its pelts. That's why it's classified now as fur-bearing. Trappers are responsible for over 90 per cent of the coyotes harvested in the province and the key to managing species.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

The reason I was asking was because, of course, clause 11, section 21, refers to the penalties for allowing flesh or fur to be spoiled or wasted, specifically with fur-bearing animals.

With coyotes, of course, recently we've been trying to manage that species through bounties and such, and we still allow them to be harvested on big game licences. So I'm wondering are we worried about any repercussions there and will that section apply to coyotes as well?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Again, it is under this act and it's a fur-bearing animal. We do offer a collection fee of \$65, and some people use it for their furs and the others would be left for research with regard to the biology research in our labs and that stuff. That's why it's considered a fur-bearing animal and it's considered under this act.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Chair, just to confirm, again, I guess, if coyotes are harvested, either way are they subject to fines? Are people subject to fines under that section for simply harvesting but not tanning furs of coyotes?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: It depends on the illegal act. All the laws are under the discretion of the conservation officer. If the conservation officer finds that it's a fine or there has been an illegal act or activity activated, well then it's up to their discretion and he can issue that fine.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: I know this will come out, Chair, in subsequent guides and things, but just to clarify for people who may see a coyote and take a coyote, say this moose hunting season, under a big game licence, the minimum fine I believe is \$500 up to \$25,000 for destroying furs.

I know what you're saying about discretion, but we don't want, of course, to make criminals out of people who are trying to do the right thing to kill a coyote. So I just want to clarify, I guess, what's the purpose or anticipated action that the department would take in such a case where, say, a big game hunter takes a coyote but does not use the meat or the fur?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: I don't think anybody is trying to promote poaching, but there are licences that they need for coyote as well. I wouldn't want anybody to take it illegally.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Sorry, again looking at the Hunting Guide for this year, it says: Holders

of valid big game licences may harvest coyotes during the open season for those species. They use bigger caliber bullets to do that, so it's not illegal for hunting is what I'm talking about. It's legal purposes, and like I said before, there was a bounty on coyotes.

So now is the intention to get rid of that bounty and just treat them as pure fur-bearing animals, that you have to tan the furs?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: If they can turn them in for science use, then that's good.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The next is not a question, it's more of a statement I guess, and it goes to moose-vehicle accidents and to talking about the balance and the management plans throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

I, certainly, commend my colleague from Mount Pearl North who had a very passionate speech on the personal strain and stress after a moose-vehicle accident that has left her life with many challenges and that of her daughter.

I guess, in terms of that management piece, we know our roadways – the brush cutting has been referred to today as a very important mechanism. Also, last year, we brought into the department, and I fought for it for a couple of years, I think it's classified as a vegetation suppression program, and that's really spraying of brush once it's cut, so it can last for 10 to 12 years, and we know the fencing piece too.

So I'm just encouraging the minister, and certainly the Minister of TI and the Minister of Environment as well, that it's part of his –

I know he's listening. This is important for the management piece of moose animals. That's more of a statement than a question.

Minister, in terms of wildlife officers, enforcement officers under their classification, if they're responding to or if there's a call for response for roadkill or any situation around an animal, do you believe that one officer should respond to that or more than one officer? Should there be two to support each other?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Usually they work in pairs. Usually that's how it's done.

I don't know of an occasion where one has been out. I do think they always go in pairs, especially on roadworks.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Well, you and I need to have a conversation, because it's happening, certainly down in my district. I know it's something that you would appreciate, because it has happened. Only during constituency week I had a conversation with one of them, that they leave the office, they go by themselves and anything can certainly happen.

No officer should be out on the roadways by themselves, because who knows what can happen. So I call for those supports; for you to look at that, and we'll certainly have a side chat about that.

The other piece, Minister, it's relevant to the act, is around veterans that are outside of the province, but veterans that are from the province, in terms of obtaining licences. They're treated as just ordinary individuals. They're not under a classification of veterans, we'll say. That veteran always comes home, and he asks me: Will we get special treatment in terms of a licence?

Whether it's a salmon licence or a moose licence or caribou licence, is that something that you're willing to entertain?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Of course we have resident licences and non-resident licences, it depends on where the resident lives.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Yes, I understand that, but my question was around veterans.

I think you probably got my point in terms of should we look at it; because it was asked when I was there as well, and I was certainly entertaining for sure. I know you do have to take into consideration of everyone else. It could be police officers as well, right, but something more as a lobbying to the minister to take a look at that, because it's been asked by several that have certainly posed it to me. Hopefully we can come to a decision on that, or your government can.

The other piece was on Mr. Barry Fordham around the food banks. We certainly allow them for donated moose meat, I think more at the time. At this point, in terms of what wildlife can be donated to food banks, because I know Mr. Fordham has been asking for more, can you update us on what you are considering more of, in terms of being able to donate to food banks?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: I did have a meeting with Mr. Fordham. We discussed a few things, but those discussions are still ongoing.

Right now, the regular things that are being donated to the food banks are still there. Yes, we know there's a demand in food banks and the more we can do in those

situations, so those conversations are still continuing.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Well, to use your Finance Minister's words: spending smarter; this doesn't require any spending.

It's a good thing to do, and I lobby you to look at Barry Fordham's ask. We all know the need of food banks in the province, and I know the Minister of Finance is listening and I know he agrees with me in terms of how important food banks are.

The Minister of Labrador Affairs, she spoke about invasive species. Again, it's not, I guess, a question, but it is something that I think, in terms of a balance of those invasive species, we need to look at. I think the cormorant was what she was referring to, how dangerous they are, and there are others that are out there that are impeding on a lot of things in and around the wildlife. I guess, again, it's not a question but encouraging the minister, as your colleague did, in terms of the invasive species.

I know she, certainly, talked about the enforcement improvements. That's important in terms of the enforcement improvements to deter the activity of the caribou operations in Labrador, I call it illegal operations, there was a chopper she referenced, hotels and all that, because that goes to the balance piece and in terms of the management piece of animals and the availability of animals for residents and non-residents.

So I don't have any further questions, just to say thank you, Minister, for the time. I'll end it there. I'm not sure if anyone else has questions.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I just want to pick up on the issue of invasive species.

If you walk now, I think, by Mundy Pond, there is a sign there that talks about putting turtles, releasing pets, an invasive species. We've got a number of examples of that.

I remember in 2006, Chair, it was in the *SPAWNER*, about the gentleman who hooked – I think it was a good several pounds black piranha that was caught in Gambo Pond. It wasn't so much hooked as he wouldn't let go of the lure. Obviously, someone released him, and whether he would overwinter was another matter; however, with climate change, we have plenty of invasive species.

On that one, with regard to the importation of exotic species, whether it's snakes, turtles and so on and so forth that come in through pet stores which are, essentially, invasive species, especially if people let them go, and that could have an impact on wildlife. I'm just wondering what measures would the department be taking then here, to deal with those issues; animals that come in legitimately through pet stores and that but people no longer want to take care of them?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Well, we have our rules around that and the law and regulations for bringing in pets from outside the province and that sort of stuff.

We, certainly, don't encourage anyone to release invasive species anywhere. I would encourage anyone who sees that kind of activity to report it to the officials. It could be our department and it could be the RCMP.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: So would enforcement officers have jurisdiction there, as well, in that capacity, to investigate?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: If the law is broken, then that would come under the law. The law, of course, would be the RCMP or the RNC.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: So in the interest of protecting wildlife, is there any plan – and if there isn't – to create a registry of when an animal is purchased, the owner and maybe a buy-back program or a program to return these to a designated site for proper care or relocation, rather than just putting them into the wilderness?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Again, those rules and regulations are there for those species if someone finds themselves, that they can't take a pet. I mean to say, yes, they can go back and try to get someone to take it, that sort of stuff, but it is illegal just to put it out somewhere. We wouldn't encourage that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: I know these weren't brought in but if you go – I know over to the West Coast there are a number of, I think, they are American toads. They're everywhere now. They are prolific if nothing else. I don't know what damage they're doing but, obviously, they're probably squeezing out the indigenous species of frogs and so on and so forth, out competing them. That's where my concern comes, is that an invasive species comes in with no known predators and then proceeds to disrupt the ecosystem and impact the indigenous species that we have here.

With clause 5, and I'll just move onto this, I think you talk about cleaning up obsolete clauses. The government has instituted a no bag limit hunting season for double-crested cormorants from September to March, yet that migratory species is not present on the Island from November to the spring but many similar looking protected species are present in that window, such as the great cormorants and wintering loons.

So I guess the question we have for the minister is: Explain the rationale behind the decision to open a permit for double-crested cormorants when they are mostly not present?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Did you say clause 5?

J. DINN: Clause 5, yes.

P. FORSEY: The wildlife can issue permits for the double-crested cormorants, not the great cormorants. You can't shoot those of course, but they can put in permits sometimes on invasive birds and that sort of stuff, nuisance areas, but with the uptake of the fisheries and different source areas and migratory areas, they put in that window there to allow shooting of those double-crested.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: No argument with that. I understand the rationale, but why issue, then, a hunting season or a bag limit or permits for the double-crested cormorants at a time of the year when they're mostly not present?

That's the first. It's one thing to institute a no bag limit, a hunting season for double-crested cormorants from September to March, but they're mostly not wintering here in Newfoundland and Labrador at that time. There is a possibility then, the second part,

that people could easily mistake other species that are protected for these.

I'm just wondering what the rationale is for that time frame?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Hunters have the responsibility of knowing what they are shooting.

I mean to say there are birds around in that time of year as well, so hunters have to distinctively know what they are shooting.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Would it be better then maybe to have a separate hunting season or maybe a different time frame for double-crested cormorants, when they are actually on the Island?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: You know, we've got the time limits for those birds to be harvested. It's the same thing as any other hunting permits that we have for different sorts of birds, wildlife and that sort of stuff. So they would come under those same rules.

J. DINN: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Order, please!

I didn't recognize you.

J. DINN: My apologies.

CHAIR: No problem.

J. DINN: I realized that my mic wasn't on.

CHAIR: I recognize the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Now I've got to do it all over again, which is fine. I'll get it said even better this time.

Shore birds, like the Hudsonian whimbrel, are at risk due to hunting activities targeting licenced species, like the Wilson's snipe. A strong hunter education program campaign or a ban on snipe hunting is required to protect the Hudsonian whimbrel and other at risk species of shore birds from accidental killing.

So will the minister commit to addressing this issue, either through an education program or through a ban on snipe hunting, so that we can protect the protected species? That's what I'm asking.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: With the seasons the way they are right now, we do see birds staying longer at different times of the year, staying longer in the seasons and that sort of stuff.

With regard to education, I did say to the other Member, yes, education is wonderful. I think education should be out there. We'll find ways to educate people on what they are but, again, before harvesting any animal, any bird, people need to be aware and know what they're shooting.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Coyotes, Chair, I know they've been added to the list of fur-bearing animals, but most of the hunting, I guess, would be out in the woods or in the habitat where you'd find them. Coyotes have also adapted to life in the city.

I know my colleague has dealt with it when she was on the St. John's City Council. I also remember at one time people up in Bowring Park looking for their little dog because they had seen coyotes in the area and it probably was a meal by that time.

So I'm trying to think about how does this relate to – and I would assume part of this is to control the coyote population. I'm just trying to think in terms of that interface, especially where coyotes adapt quite well to human presence, in city areas, in urban areas, what is the plan then, I guess, to control them there in terms of trapping or whatever else that comes along with it?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: We know that coyotes come into towns. We've seen that; we've heard that, but any time there are animals that are around like that, we encourage anyone to call the wildlife officers. They'll deal with that situation with regard to coyotes within town limits.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: A quick question with regard to – are there wolves back on the Island now, have they re-established? I've heard that they have actually re-established themselves on the Island.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: We know there are hybrids and coyotes on the Island, but the exact number of wolves and that kind of stuff, I can get that number for you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: So we have, I guess, wolves in coyote clothing, but that's where I'm going with this.

In the hunting of coyotes, I guess – I'm just looking at the mistakes there because we haven't seen wolves for very long. It's only recently that they've been introduced. I'm looking at it in the terms of the identification of the species, especially if they're going to

harvest them. I also understand you have coywolves. People didn't think that they interbred, but obviously they do, but the coywolves tend to be a little bit larger than coyotes and also less fear of human beings, as well.

So I'm just curious in terms of this process, the distinguishing between wolves and coyotes and then whether it's when you had this particular species of coywolves, do the regulations anticipate or cover this or is that an area that's left out?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: We do have wolves and we do have coyotes on the Island. Again, it's up to the hunters to know what they're shooting. They need to identify their targets, know what they're shooting. So a hunter has the responsibility to know what they are shooting.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: I would agree with that in terms of if I've got a moose licence, I'm not going to shoot a caribou. It's very clear the difference in the antlers, the appearance, everything else.

I might even argue that there's probably going to be a difference between a male moose and a female moose or a black bear or whatever else, but I'm asking here, in the sense that these are not species that are – well, coyotes probably more so, but they are relatively new species. There's no long-term experience in identifying them.

Maybe I'm wrong in this, but I'm assuming that there will be some leeway there and some acceptance if a person brings in a wolf – Oh, this is a wolf, not a coyote. That's what I'm asking.

The other thing is, as an angler, I'm supposed to be able to identify the

difference between a salmon and a trout, but I can tell you that it's going to be very difficult at times to distinguish between a salmon just fresh in from the ocean and a sea-run brown. They are very close, but still I appreciate the fact that I would have to know the difference. Again, these are familiar species.

So I guess in this area, I'm just asking here would there be leniency, a little bit, at least in terms of when it comes to the ability to hunt coyotes and mistaking them with a wolf or coywolf?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Wolves are already fur-bearing animals; they're already listed as that. There are coyotes and wolves.

So, again, they've got to know the same thing as what you said with regard to the trout, the fish, identification of what they are. The hunter, as well as the fisherman, has to know the distinction between what they are shooting.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

While we're on the topic, I thank the minister for his informative information about this. I would like to take his attention now to black bears.

As we know, black bears are common in Central and other parts of the province, but they are making their way toward communities on the Avalon. Just last year, actually, we were in here and, on my way out of a meeting – it was late spring into the summer – I got a call where my neighbour, just in Bay Roberts, actually had a black bear in the backyard. Of course, I made a call to Wildlife. I have to applaud them, they were very quick to get out there and to get a trap. Unfortunately, they didn't manage to

trap the animal. They followed the animal, but that animal made some quick time between Shearstown and Bay Roberts and it hung around.

With that said, though, residents in the community, including myself – I'm a dog owner as well – pet owners, there was an alarm. Of course, people were very concerned that these black bears were coming so close. The feedback Wildlife officials gave me is that because of the closures of the dumps in certain areas in the province, they are making their way this way in search of food sources.

So is there a plan or has there been discussion about, you know, preparation for should we see more black bears coming onto the Avalon and to this side of the province?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: As far as waste management, you'd have to take that up with another department, but with regard to black bears, you can certainly – yes, I know they're in chase of food. That's what they do. I realize that, but we do encourage anyone who spots, again, coyotes, bears or any animal within the community limits, please call the Wildlife Division. They'll come out, as they did in your case, and have it investigated and hopefully have that animal removed and back in the wilderness as quick as possible.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

Certainly, obviously, that is on the radar of staff, that these black bears are certainly moving toward areas that they normally didn't frequent.

With that said, I did want to comment on what my colleague from St. John's Centre

said about toads. We are seeing these species of toads. I mean, growing up, a frog or a toad was not something that was common, certainly in my communities on the Avalon and Harbour Grace - Port de Grave District, but now they are frequent. I mean, it's nothing to go take a drive, particularly in the summertime and the springtime, and they're out on the road. It reminds me of the video game, Frogger, because they're everywhere and people are intentionally going and they're running over the toads.

With that said, though, toads are known to have a toxic substance that they could be dangerous to domestic pets and whatnot, but is the department aware of this problem about the toads and is there an actual plan for toad control, if you will?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: We realize that there are a number of frogs and toads around, but our biologist will be looking at those and bringing back any observation that they see.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you.

In conclusion now, I'll move onto another species, the beavers. Obviously, we know beavers frequent ponds and lakes in the community, in particular in Spaniard's Bay. I get calls usually every year about beavers who are building dams, in particular in the New Harbour Road area. Where the beavers are there, they're building their dams and, of course, it's causing flooding and mischief to property owners.

Again, I will applaud the officials for making quick work. They'd come and they'd trap the beavers – of course, safely – but then they'd relocate them to the nearby District of Placentia - St. Mary's, up into Whitbourne.

Then, of course, that problem is then transferred on to there.

We know beavers are there, of course, and they're hard working, making their dams, which ultimately causes flooding to property damage and whatnot. So is there anything different that they're doing, or anything extra I guess, in preparation for the beavers?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Again, you know, we've seen this all over the province. I've had it in my area, actually, but trappers are called. They're given licences to go in and get those beavers.

Trappers can do it; other than that it's to call the wildlife officer and remove them to another area. We know that beavers are in the areas but any damaged areas or where ponds are overloading, especially along the highway – if it's along the highway, I'd rather for you to call the department than TI – but, yes, they are removed and trappers do take the beaver.

P. PARSONS: Thank you.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 16 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 to 16 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 16 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Clause carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Wild Life Act. (Bill 8)

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 8 without amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 8 without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Labrador West and Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that the Committee recommends Bill 8 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and recommends Bill 8 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands, that Bill 8 now be read a third time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Wild Life Act. (Bill 8)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Wild Life Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 8)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: I call from the Order Paper, Bill 4.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

We're here –

SPEAKER: I remind the minister that you have to move and second the motion.

C. PARDY: Oh.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that we bring Bill 4 to the floor of the House for second reading.

SPEAKER: It's been moved and seconded that Bill 4, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act." (Bill 4)

SPEAKER: Go ahead, Minister.

C. PARDY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

This is An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act. For all those who may be watching at home, that may not mean a whole lot to them, but what I would say, if we call it the sugar-sweetened beverage tax, that will mean a lot to those viewers at home.

To give a little background on it, the previous government brought this sugar tax into the province back in 2021, somewhere within that fiscal year. They brought it in so that people – and the effect was that there would be 20 cents per litre charged on any beverage that contained sugar. It became an affordability issue for rural Newfoundland.

A saying comes to mind that there is nothing sweet about the sugar tax, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Nothing sweet about the sugar tax. It is an affordability measure.

When we were in the Opposition, we spoke about it numerous times. We were against a taxation, adding another tax. Keep in mind, we were on an Opposition against the government that sits across from us, at the time, that brought in over 300 taxes and fines in the start of their government in 2016. We didn't think that this one was founded.

Just give me an opportunity to explain why we think this one wasn't founded. We talked about discussing things in the House of Assembly to find out what the merits are, merits for and merits against, and we do a good job in our debate of legislation. Well this was a tax that was brought to the floor of the House. We were opposed to it; it did go in.

Often in legislation we'll find – and the Minister of Justice and Public Safety will soon say maybe something coming to the House. We're the final province that's bringing it in. In legislation, all governments, often we are at the tail end of other provinces in Canada in bringing in legislation. It's just the way it happens; we're usually on the tail end.

Well, this sugar tax did not exist anywhere else. There was no other province that had a tax on their sugar-sweetened beverages in their province. Now I would say, for clarity, for those watching at home, we need to be conscious and cognizant of the amount of sugar that we consume. All 40 of us in the House of Assembly would agree that we need to be very cognizant of the amount of sugar that we take in. So that we don't agree with, anything to say that we're not really invested in the amount of consumption. That's wrong.

Any study that we searched when we presented in opposition of this, there was only one that we could find. That one study was produced for the Northwest Territories.

They had a third party do a study. Northwest Territories did the study, and the study indicated that taxation was not the way to do it. Taxation to create effective change wasn't the preferred option. Everyone in the country was aware of the study. Northwest Territories solicited a third party to do a study and the study results were that taxation wasn't the way to do it.

I asked Andrea Hyde at the Legislative Library – Andrea does wonderful work, and I give her a round of applause.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I had asked her, in anticipation of this bill coming to the floor: Can you send me all the instances when we were in Opposition – anybody in the Opposition – who was speaking out and speaking regarding the sugar tax?

She highlighted the different speaking sections, Mr. Speaker, and, basically, it was around seven pages of citations of Opposition speaking against the sugar tax. I frame that for the viewers at home that are watching, we were opposed to the tax. We were not opposed to initiatives to reduce the sugar consumption.

We, as government, ought to be challenged to say, what are you going to do differently, and if it is something that we think that ought to be, as far as, rolled out to the public, how are we going to achieve it if we're not going to tax it? That is on us to do that.

We said in Opposition that we think education is the way to do it. That's what I had stated several times in the House in my Opposition. That was the way to do it. Prior to the tax coming in, we had an information sharing from the Beverage Association. They met with us in our caucus room, and they gave over and said: Here's the history of the carbonated drinks that we sell in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Do you know what they said, Mr. Speaker? They said that the percentage of consumption of carbonated pop, Pepsi, Coke, was decreasing in Newfoundland and Labrador. This was prior to the tax. It was decreasing, good. That was good. What was increasing were the diet drinks, the percentage, which I think most of us probably would concur with, but that was a reality. Prior to the tax, the pop consumption was decreasing.

So through the intense efforts to lobby, through the myriad of day after day with questions to challenge the government on it, they would have citations and sometimes the government that sits across from us now, at that time, stated that it may be working because the consumption is decreasing. We knew that before the tax came in that the amount of consumption was decreasing.

We were the only province. Were we right in an Opposition to challenge the sugar tax? Were we right? I would say we were.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Some would say, if we're going to run a government on evidence base, why do you know that you're right?

Here is what we would think, Mr. Speaker. We would think that if the tax came in in 2021, and we were the first one to bring it in, if it had merit and it was meritorious, you would think that, probably in 2022, there might be an uptake of another province, maybe one more who would jump on, but in 2022, it didn't happen, nor did it happen in 2023, nor in 2024. In 2025, from relentless challenge on the merits of taxation, the previous government shut the tax down. They eliminated it; they brought it down to zero. They did it and that was the right move.

Nobody followed, we knew the consumptions were decreasing, but all 40 Members would know that we need to

lower, collectively as a province, our sugar consumption; nobody debated that. Our challenge as a government now is to continue the decline, enhance the education to know that excessive sugar consumption is not good for you and that will be the challenge on the government that we would plan efficiently to make sure that we create even more exponential change than what the decrease was, even before the tax rolled out.

That's where we were. Any kind of taxation, bills, fines, fall under an affordability issue. It is an affordability issue. I know at the time, in 2021, when the tax came in, I can report for the District of Bonavista, a lot of people that were paying the tax couldn't afford to spare an extra dime. That was where we came from. I would think, in a lot of cases, the percentage of the population that may have been affected are the ones that could least afford it. That was the taxation.

So we're pleased that we are here today and we're looking at eliminating totally from legislation any reference to the sugar tax. Not only with zero, but we're going to eliminate it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Anyway, the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands had a little smile that time because we're eliminating it. What the reason would be for that is that's what we promised, that when we get in the House, all remanence of that tax, we're just going to wipe out from the legislation, and that was it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: So it doesn't achieve anything. It's eliminated. The only thing that all the remanence of it in this bill, we were asking that it be removed. When we talk about an affordability measure, there might be a question saying, well, really, how big was the impact? That might be a good question coming in Committee: How big was the

impact really? Was it really a hit on affordability?

Well, when you take out \$12.5 million in taxation on this from the public of Newfoundland and Labrador, that is significant money – that is significant money – \$12.5 million or thereabout, because it fluctuated from one year, but generally in the middle years where we had the full fiscal, I think it might have been \$12.5 million or \$12.4 million, in that range. But that was generally it.

The Members across will say, if they speak to it, we used that money to put in some really attractive initiatives: the school food program, which is meritorious. Nobody has any complaints or questions the value of the programs that were stated that the money would go to. Insulin pumps as well – nobody. But I'm sure the funding for the insulin pumps continue. As the Member would say, if we can expand it more, a great initiative.

The school lunch program, Kids Eat Smart, all those are valuable components and we would like to extend that as well. That ought not to have been anchored to the sugar tax, which was very unpopular, which nobody in Canada wished to follow. We were number one, roll it out, but there was not ever a number two. Nobody followed, which is indicative that it doesn't belong.

So the intent of the tax was to improve health outcomes, and that can't give data. I'm not sure if when a Member across would stand up and say, well, we've got data to know that the health outcomes improved. You may have people from organizations speak or reference to say we believe that there was an improvement. But, keep in mind, the improvement had started before the tax came in. The sugar content drinks were decreasing, and that's where it was.

Anyway, we're bringing this in today as an affordability measure to maintain it at zero.

But, really, to eliminate all the remanence of it in legislation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat with this and I look forward to some commentary on it, and if anybody can know that they want to challenge some of the comments made, I think that's great and that's what we're here for. Challenge is good.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm happy to speak to this bill today. I just want to note, I guess for anyone watching, the sugar tax has been removed since July 1, 2025.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: I think that's an important point to make. So the government put out a press release on May 30, 2025, announcing getting rid of the sugar tax, Speaker. It says: "The elimination of the sugar sweetened beverage tax is made through amendments to the Revenue Administration Regulations. Additional amendments to the Revenue Administration Act will also be introduced in the House of Assembly to repeal the tax."

As per our previous government's press release on May 30, 2025, the government is now introducing changes to permanently repeal this tax. So I thank the government for doing that. I do want to mention that, you know, we're changing a tax from zero to zero, as the minister mentioned. Earlier this week and last week and the week before, we chatted about changing the gas tax from 7.5 cents to 7.5 cents.

So this is another tax that the government, who campaigned on lower taxes, are not changing at all. They're repealing the tax that we already removed as of July. I thank the government for that. I do want to say that I do think Newfoundlanders and Labradorians would rather us be here debating lower personal income tax, as the government promised in their mandate letters, and I do think they would rather us be debating lower small business tax, which they also promised.

We fully support this motion, this bill, as was put out in our government press release on May 30, 2025, and I congratulate the government for changing the tax from 7.5 cents to 7.5 cents and the sugar-sweetened beverage tax from zero cents to zero cents for all of us.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: If the minister speaks, he will close the debate.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to be able to get up here this afternoon –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PADDOCK: – and speak on the finality with regard to this sugar tax because this is about elimination, not reducing it to zero, but completely wiping it out via legislation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: I want to highlight a number of things with the sugar tax because it was a tax on our culture, our way of life. So let me highlight that to a certain degree.

We're here into Easter weekend – a very important weekend in our Christian faith – and when I looked at the words above the Speaker, the Latin: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God” – if you translate it – Easter weekend, I think so many of us across this great province, we grew up in our families and it was about fish and chips, as I learned here in town, or around the bay, salt fish, cod; but with all of those meals it was, particularly if you visit Nan, having a little drop of Pepsi with it as well. Ther sugar tax was, in fact, a tax on Easter. I am so glad that, with this legislation, we are reversing that now completely.

Further to our culture, I go back to growing up at Christmastime and having the capability of visiting aunts and uncles and enjoying a glass of Purity syrup. So many businesses had significant challenges at how much tax should be applied to that quantity of syrup. So you see, the sugar tax was a tax on a Newfoundland business, Purity, but also a tax on Christmas in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are righting a wrong.

The other thing I want to highlight with the sugar tax is, in the summer – we have, as the Minister of Finance highlighted, the only province that was employing a sugar tax – and we get so many visitors to our province, tourists, looking at their bills and going, what is really going on here in Newfoundland and Labrador? Their sugar tax was a tax on tourism in Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, we are righting all of those wrongs by the complete elimination of the sugar tax. As you can see, we simply can't sugarcoat what was done beforehand.

I also want to highlight, I talked to so many businesses across my district. Some of them very small mom-and-pop stores. A number of them had challenges with the administration and in understanding how the tax had to be applied to certain beverages and sweeteners. It also created a challenge on the Minister of Finance's Department because they were swamped with queries

as to what the sugar tax applied to, what rates does it charge to for certain items.

It was, in fact, a logistical nightmare. It was an ill-conceived tax; it was an ill-conceived rollout and it was a challenge for both small businesses and government itself.

Tax and the importance of tax is about certainty and consistency. The sugar tax, certainly, did neither of them. As the Minister of Finance highlighted, and particularly across my district in Baie Verte - Green Bay, in talking to a lot of residents in small towns, it was the increase in pop, that they enjoyed, that had really had an additional impact on cost of living. That, as now, will be eliminated, and that is certainly something we are giving all residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As the Minister of Finance highlighted, the big thing with the use of sugar is an understanding early in life, having education on it. As had been highlighted here today by the Minister of Finance, that is where we need to focus, drawing awareness on healthy sugar consumption. Start that early in our school systems, not taxing people as they are trying to enjoy a little bit of comfort in life.

So as you can see, this tax and the complete elimination of it is a win for Newfoundland and Labrador owned businesses, like Purity. It is a win for our culture, Easter, Christmas and it is a win for encouraging more tourists to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Dwyer): The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

This is a really interesting issue. I wasn't a part of government at the time, but I did

follow it quite closely. As we said, and as we all know, we are one of the most unhealthy provinces in the Confederation. We suffer from a high rate of diabetes. We also suffer from high obesity rates and high cancer rates. These are all things that are directly impacted by sugar.

Now, when this was considered, I can understand why it was considered. It may have been the first province but there are over 100 jurisdictions around the world that do have some sort of sugar-sweetened beverage tax. It has been noted to be fairly effective as well. It's not something that's popular, of course, and it's not something that's easily implemented, for certain.

I don't know if you've read a book called *Nudge* by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein. It was around 2008-ish, for sure. It's about nudge theory. This is a theory that Richard Thaler later won a Nobel Prize for, his work on this behavioural economics and how to nudge people to make the right decisions about their health, about their finances and things like that.

Nudge theory is employed across many jurisdictions. The UK has nudge units where they develop policy, they change how forms work, the default options for pensions and things like that, as well as looking at making choices about the food you eat. The important thing about nudge theory is that it does allow people to make the wrong decisions as well, but it nudges them to make the right ones. It is important that we don't trick people into making decisions a certain way, but it's also important that we have transparency and people understand that they are still making a decision.

There are many arguments for and against sugar-sweetened beverage taxes. I've mentioned how, of course, there is evidence that it does reduce the amount of sugar-sweetened beverages that are consumed, and that was the case as well here.

Now I know the minister mentioned he heard from the beverage companies and they said it was already reducing. I would caution on taking advice on this issue from the very manufacturers of the product at issue, it's a bit of a chicken in the henhouse kind of thing.

The other thing I want to mention is, and we talked about this as well, that the revenue generated from such measures should definitely be directed to targeted measures to correspond with the type of behaviour you're trying to stop. In this case, I understand it was school lunch programs, diabetic insulin pumps, and of course, these correspond directly with the sugary beverages that we're trying to eliminate and the consumption of sugar in our society. That makes sense, of course, but there are also arguments against.

I know it's been seen as a regressive tax for low-income earners, but the studies have shown, pretty conclusively, that those low-income earners that are affected benefit the most from the reduction in consumption of sugar-based beverages.

Regardless, I think it's an idea that clearly was not popular, not ready for in this province. There are challenges to getting it implemented in a way that everyone can understand and see. I would suspect, and I will wager that we will see similar initiatives, maybe not this government, but in future governments around our country because we are understanding more about how sugar negatively affects our health.

So that is something we'll see. But, again, I like to think that our recommendations that come from our public service and from others will come based on science, empiricism and not just necessarily what's currently popular at the time. (Inaudible) is definitely difficult.

I'm not going to argue either for or against the sugar tax, but I would like to say – and again, I'll quote the Finance Minister when

he said it eliminates nothing, what we're doing here today – it eliminates nothing. So this seems to be a theme of what's going on here. Again, as someone who's only spent a few weeks in the House, okay, so we're going from a zero-to-zero sugar tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. PARSONS: Right? So we went earlier this week from a 7.5-cent gas tax to a 7.5-cent gas tax. Earlier this week, we talked about housing, and we had a great debate on a motion to support the government in its efforts to attack the problem of housing. Then it was like déjà vu all over again. We came back and did the exact same thing, only with a little more of an edgier tone. So I

L. PARROTT: Speaker?

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

L. PARROTT: Relevance, talking about housing and the sugar tax.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you.

Again, I respect the now government. You are the government, not Opposition. Your stance to make unnecessary changes that don't affect anyone's lives, that is your prerogative. Of course, we have no desire, only to further some of the matters, like reducing further the gas tax.

Again, I would look forward to your analysis on future taxes or sin taxes that we have to implement. We welcome the research and evidence on that. But I really would like to debate something that actually affects the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. As a new MHA, it's something I'm astounded by, how unproductive, I guess, these types of issues are.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. PARSONS: Again, what I've seen so far, I've seen some really important things, some technical bills done that have to be done. I've seen some things done here. Again, the Disability Advocate, excellent progress on a very important social issue, absolutely. But I've also seen about the same amount of bills that aren't actually affecting people's lives, and this is a bill that doesn't affect people's lives.

So that's all I really would like to say about that. I would encourage government to move forward with an agenda that actually changes things so we can debate it meaningfully. I would be happy to do that, and I look forward to your opinions and your ideas for how we can improve the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, thank you.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that this debate do now be adjourned.

SPEAKER: It's moved and seconded that the debate now be adjourned.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, that this 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 do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, April 21, at 1:30 p.m.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at 1:30 p.m.