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Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

SPEAKER: Motion 1.

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

K. WHITE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm honoured to have the opportunity to speak to *Budget 2026* and, more importantly, stand in this House as a voice for the people of St. John's West. Representing the residents of this district is a responsibility I take very seriously. Every conversation at the doorstep, every email and every concern shared by residents matters when we debate a document such as this because a budget is about far more than dollars and cents. It's more than tables, estimates and announcements. A budget is a statement of priorities. It tells people of the province what government values, what concerns it has listened to and what challenges it is prepared to confront. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, it also tells us what issues are still being overlooked.

For the people of St. John's West, the concerns are clear. Families are worried about affordability. Seniors are worried about keeping up with the cost of living. Young people are wondering if they will ever be able to afford a home in the communities they grew up in. Residents want to feel safe in their neighbourhoods, supported in their schools and confident that the government is paying attention to the realities they face every single day.

That is why it is important that we approach this budget, not simply as a financial exercise, but as an opportunity to ask whether the plan is truly meeting people where they are. This budget will be measured by a few simple questions. Does it make life better for the people who live in our communities? Does it make life more affordable for families who are stretched thin or seniors who are trying to remain independent? Does it support people on income support who are already living with very little or help renters who are facing rising costs and uncertainty? Is this budget going to make our streets, neighbourhoods, schools and public spaces safer and support our communities? Does it respond to the concerns residents are actually raising with us? Those are the questions that matter to the people I represent.

St. John's West is a district of hard-working families, proud neighbourhoods and people who care deeply about one another. It's a district with seniors who have built this province, workers who keep our economy moving, parents doing everything they can for their children, teachers and school staff giving more than ever and volunteers who hold communities together.

It is also a district where people are feeling real pressure in their day-to-day lives. Residents are struggling with the rising cost of living and growing housing insecurity. Communities are increasingly concerned about crime and public safety, and many are seeing the impacts of addictions, mental health challenges and poverty become more visible in neighbourhoods across this district.

When we look at this budget, we must look at it honestly. There are measures in this budget that will help some people, and I'll acknowledge those, but there are also serious gaps and, as an Opposition, it is our job to identify those gaps and push government to do better.

Mr. Speaker, affordability remains one of the biggest issues facing residents in St. John's West. Everywhere I go people are talking about the cost of living: groceries cost more, rent costs more, insurance costs more, power bills keep going up, transportation costs are a worry, parents are trying to keep kids in activities while also paying for food, rent, school supplies and gas. Seniors on fixed incomes are trying to make the same amount of money stretch farther every month. For many people, there is no breathing room left. I hear from people who are working full-time and still falling behind. There are young adults who want to build a life here but cannot afford rent and seniors who are proud and independent but who are quietly struggling.

This budget does include some affordability measures to help these people. The increase to the basic personal amount is welcome. The increase to the Seniors' Benefit is also welcome. The expansion of the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit is welcome as well. Those measures matter, but we also have to be honest about their limits.

A tax measure may help someone who is earning enough taxable income, but it does not do enough for those who are already living in deep poverty or the concerns of people on income support. It does not fully answer the concerns of renters facing large increases or even the concerns of families whose grocery bills have risen by hundreds of dollars a month. Affordability is not just about one tax change; it is about whether people can actually afford to live with dignity in this province, and for far too many people in St. John's West, the answer right now is no.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot talk seriously about affordability without talking about those who are living off the least. Income support recipients are some of the most vulnerable people in our province. Many are dealing with disabilities, illness, trauma, mental health challenges, family breakdown,

unemployment, housing instability or other barriers that make daily life difficult. These residents are not living comfortably; they are trying to survive.

In St. John's West, we see the impact when income support rates do not keep pace with the actual cost of living. We see it in food bank demands. We see it in housing insecurity. We see it in people relying on community groups for basic needs. We see it in people falling behind on rent, utilities, transportation and medication.

If government is serious about affordability, then income support has to be part of that conversation. We cannot say we are helping people with the cost of living while leaving the lowest income residents without enough to meet basic needs. Community organizations are doing extraordinary work to fill the gaps, but they should not be expected to carry the full weight of poverty in this province. Food banks, outreach workers, volunteers and non-profits are stepping up every day, but they are stretched. They are seeing more need, more desperation and more complexity.

This budget needed to show a stronger commitment to income security, poverty reduction and basic dignity for people who are living in the most difficult circumstances, because poverty is not isolated from every other issue we face. Poverty connects to housing. It connects to health, mental health and addictions and even public safety. If we want stronger communities, we have to address the conditions that are making people vulnerable in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about crime and safety, if I can, this is one of the issues I hear about most often from residents in St. John's West. People are worried. Residents are concerned about violence, break-ins, drug activity and repeat offenders in their communities. Many are uneasy about increasingly aggressive behaviour in public spaces and about what their children are being exposed to. More and more people

are questioning whether their neighbourhoods feel as safe as they once did.

Recently, there was a deeply disturbing report of a young man being violently attacked in St. John's West and we cannot ignore the fear and anger that residents feel when they hear about a serious assault involving multiple individuals and weapons in the community.

People are asking: How did we get here? How are incidents like this happening in our neighbourhoods? What is being done to prevent violent crime before someone is seriously harmed? What is government's plan beyond reacting after something terrible has already happened? Those are fair questions.

The budget includes funding to increase the number of RNC and RCMP officers. That is important. I support additional policing resources. The RNC does difficult work under difficult circumstances. Officers are responding to complex situations involving violence, addictions, mental health, homelessness and repeat calls for service. They need support and the public needs to know that the police have capacity to respond when people call for help.

But more officers alone cannot be the entire public safety strategy. If we only respond after a crime has occurred, we are already too late. Safer communities require enforcement, absolutely, but they also require prevention, intervention, treatment, youth support, housing stability and coordination between departments. Residents in St. John's West are not asking for slogans, they want to know what is actually going to change.

Residents want to know whether emergency calls will be answered more quickly; whether violent incidents and repeat problem properties will be dealt with effectively; and whether meaningful

intervention will happen in neighbourhoods struggling with ongoing drug activity.

People also want to see earlier support for youth at risk of becoming involved in crime, better access to addictions for families in crisis and safer public spaces where residents feel comfortable walking home, waiting for a bus or letting their children play outside. Those are the outcomes people care about most.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear, when residents raise concerns about things like drug houses, they are not doing so lightly. They are talking about homes or properties where they see frequent traffic, intimidation, noise, suspected criminal activity, discarded items, threats, violence and repeat police presence. They're talking about situations that make neighbourhoods feel unsafe in their own homes.

No family should feel afraid to open the door. No senior should feel afraid to sit on their step. No parent should have to worry about their child being exposed to dangerous activity just outside their home. Government needs a stronger, coordinated response to these problem properties. That response cannot fall only on police. It requires Housing officials, mental health and addiction supports, municipal partners, Justice officials, community organizations and public safety officials working together.

When a property becomes a repeated source of danger, residents need to know there is a system that can intervene. Right now, too many people feel like they complain, call, report and wait, and nothing changes. That erodes trust. When people lose trust that government can keep communities safe, fear grows.

This budget talks about safer communities, and the investment in police officers is a start, but residents need more than officer numbers. They need a full public safety plan that addresses the root causes and the immediate risks.

That means investing in stronger addictions treatment and improving access to mental health services. It means providing supports for families before situations reach a crisis point and ensuring earlier intervention for youth who may be at risk. It also means taking meaningful action to address repeat offenders and ongoing violent behaviour, improving coordination across government departments and agencies and strengthening community-based prevention efforts that help address issues before they escalate, because safer communities are not built by one department alone.

Schools are another major issue for the people of St. John's West, Mr. Speaker. Schools are at the heart of our communities. They are where children learn, grow, make friends and build confidence. They are also places where many of society's pressures show up first.

Teachers and school staff are seeing more complex needs than ever before. They are supporting students facing hunger, anxiety, instability at home and growing mental health challenges. They are working with students who require additional learning and behavioural supports, often needing far more time and attention than current resources allow staff to provide.

This budget includes funding for additional teachers and teaching learning assistants. That's a positive step. I welcome any investment that puts more support into the classrooms, but we have to recognize that schools are being asked to do more than teach. Schools and educators are increasingly being asked to respond to poverty, trauma, mental health needs, behavioural challenges and families facing difficult circumstances. That is an enormous responsibility to place on the education system. If government is serious about helping students succeed, then schools must have the resources and supports necessary to meet the realities they are facing.

That includes adequate staffing, safe and healthy learning environments, stronger mental health and guidance supports and meaning supports for inclusive education. Most importantly, it means ensuring that no student is falling through the cracks. For a district like St. John's West, this matters deeply.

When young people are supported, engaged, included and connected, they are less likely to fall into dangerous paths. When they have recreation, mentors, mental health support and stable home lives, communities become stronger.

Public safety does not begin only when police are called. It begins in homes, schools, recreation programs and community centres. That is why investment in schools and youth are investments in safer communities.

St. John's West is filled with people who care. There are volunteers coaching sports, organizing events, helping seniors, supporting youth, collecting food, running community programs and showing up for their neighbours. There are local groups that make an enormous difference with very limited resources. There are churches, non-profits, school communities, sports organizations and informal networks of residents who quietly help one another every day. These groups are often the first to see when people are struggling. They know when families need food. They know when seniors are isolated. They know when youth need somewhere to go. They know when people are falling through the cracks.

Government needs to treat community organizations as essential partners, not afterthoughts. If we want better outcomes in affordability, public safety, health, youth engagement and seniors supports, we need strong community infrastructure. That means predictable funding. It means support for recreation. It means support for youth programs. It means support for seniors' programming. It means supporting

places where people can gather safely and build relationships. Because, when communities are connected, they are more resilient. Isolation makes problems worse; community connection helps prevent them.

Mr. Speaker, housing and residential tenancies are also major concerns in St. John's West. Housing affordability has become one of the defining issues of our time. Renters are under enormous pressure. Young people are struggling to find apartments. Families are competing for limited units. Seniors are worried about whether they can remain in their homes. People on income support are being priced out of the market almost entirely.

The budget includes investments in social housing and repairs. That is important. We need more social housing. We need vacant units repaired and brought back into use. We need more affordable options for seniors, families and individuals, but the scale of the housing crisis requires urgency. People cannot wait years for housing solutions while they are struggling today.

Many renters feel afraid to speak up about issues in their housing because they worry about losing their home. Constituents have raised concerns about poor living conditions, delayed repairs, unaffordable rent increases and the difficulty of navigating the residential tenancy system. For many people, the process feels overwhelming and inaccessible. Residential tenancies may not always receive the same attention as large housing announcements, but it matters enormously to people's daily lives.

A rental unit is someone's home. It is where they sleep, raise children, cook meals, recover from illness and build stability. When that housing is insecure, everything else becomes insecure as well. Government must ensure the residential tenancy system is fair, accessible, timely and balanced. Tenants need protections. Landlords need clarity. Disputes need to be resolved

efficiently. People need to feel that the system works. In a housing crisis, fairness in the rental market becomes even more important.

Mr. Speaker, housing also connects directly to public safety. When people are homeless or precariously housed, they are more vulnerable. When people are living in unsafe conditions, communities feel the strain. When troubled properties are not addressed, neighbours lose confidence. When mental health and addictions are left unsupported, housing problems become public safety problems. That is why government cannot treat housing, justice, health and income support as separate silos.

The issues residence are facing do not fit neatly into departmental boxes. A resident dealing with a violent incident near their home does not care which department is responsible. A parent worried about drug activity nearby does not care whether it is Justice, Health, Housing or municipal enforcement; they just want actions. Government needs to work across departments in a way that reflects the realities residents are living.

Mr. Speaker, I want to return to public safety once again because this is such a serious issue in my district. When residents say they do not feel safe, we need to listen. We should not dismiss them or reduce their concerns to statistics alone. Statistics matter, but lived experiences matter as well.

If someone sees open drug activity near their home, they feel less safe. If someone hears about a violent assault in their neighbourhood, they feel less safe. If parents are worried about their children walking home, they feel less safe. If seniors feel intimidated in their own building or on their own street, they too feel less safe.

Government has a responsibility to respond to that. The increase in RNC officers is a step, but residents also want to know how

the resources will actually be deployed and whether they will lead to visible improvements in their communities.

People want to see stronger community policing, faster response times and meaningful action in neighbourhoods dealing with ongoing issues. There are also important questions about whether officers will have better access to mental health and addiction supports when responding to complex social situations. Because adding more boots on the ground only makes a difference if there's a clear plan to improve public safety outcomes.

When it comes to public safety funding more broadly, the conversation cannot just be about how much money is being spent. The real question is whether those investments are meeting the needs we are seeing in our communities. Are we seeing enough to prevent crime before it starts? Are there sufficient supports for youth, addictions treatment, mental health care and families facing crisis? Are we addressing the root cause that contribute to repeat violent behaviour and ongoing instability in our neighbourhoods? Because if those gaps remain, then the work is not finished and the budget is incomplete.

Mr. Speaker, the role of the Official Opposition is an important one. We're not here simply to criticize for the sake of criticism. We're here to ensure that the voices and concerns of residents are brought into the House. We're here to ask difficult questions, push for accountability and advocate for stronger outcomes for the people we represent. We are here to say when something is positive, but also to say when something is not enough.

That is the approach I take to this budget. There are positive measures. Additional police officers are welcome. Affordability measures will help some residents. More support in schools is welcome. Housing investments are also welcome. But the

budget does not fully meet the urgency people are feeling.

This budget did not fully reflect the depth of poverty many people are experiencing, or the growing concerns residents have around crime and community safety. It does not go far enough in responding to the pressures facing renters or in supporting the community organizations that are carrying so much of the burden. It still falls short of fully addressing the connection between addictions, mental health, housing instability and public safety issues that cannot be treated in isolation if we want to see meaningful change.

Mr. Speaker, residents of St. John's West deserve a government that sees the full picture. Residents deserve affordability measures that generally reach the people who need them most, along with income support that reflects the real cost of living in this province. They deserve safe neighbourhoods, meaningful action on violent crime and a serious response to drug houses and repeat problem properties. People also deserve schools that are properly supported, housing that is affordable and stable and a residential tenancy system that is accessible and effective. Communities need strong local organizations and supports that are equipped to help people before situations reach a crisis point.

I want the residents of St. John's West to know that I will continue bringing their concerns forward in this House whether the issue is affordability, income support, public safety, education, housing or residential tenancies, I'll continue advocating for the people I represent.

Concerns around drug activity, repeat problem properties and neighbourhood safety deserve to be addressed responsibly, clearly and firmly and I'll continue raising those issues. That is my responsibility as the Member of this House and is one I take seriously. I'll approach that work in a way

that is constructive but also direct because residents are not interested in political gains. They want action, accountability and real results.

People want to know that their concerns are being heard, that the realities facing their neighbourhoods are understood and this House remains focused on the issues affecting their everyday life. This budget contains measures that will help, I'll acknowledge that, but it also leaves significant work to be done.

For the people of St. John's West, the test of this budget will not be how many announcements government made. It will be whether life becomes more affordable, whether housing becomes more stable and whether communities become more safe.

The people of St. John's West are strong but they need more than words. They need practical support, real investment and a government that is willing to confront difficult issues honestly.

As Opposition, we will support measures that help people but we will also continue to ask hard questions, identify gaps and demand better where this budget falls short because the people of this province deserve nothing less, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very excited to be able to stand on my feet to chat about Motion 1, the budget. I'm always excited that the Finance Minister has his pen in his hand and willing to listen to what we have to say and, hopefully, make the changes that we bring forward on this side of the House that's meant with a heart and a half, as they say.

We're always excited about – I'm always excited about budget debate, equally on this side as much as I was on the other side, to be quite honest with you, because I think it's an opportunity for the people of the province to get a look into the view that the government has on what the priorities are. I think my hon. colleague from St. John's West did a great job on highlighting some of the issues and some of the successes in the budget.

I'm going to take the opportunity, because you do get an opportunity in the budget to talk about your district, which is an opportunity, as the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis said, it's got a wide berth here, to talk about a lot of the variety of things. So I'm going to take the opportunity to highlight some of the successes in the district, go through some of the things that we're doing in the district. Throughout my two other opportunities that I get to speak throughout the budget, I'll highlight some of the things that I think we can improve on in the budget. I'll do some of that today.

I think this time I'm going to spend a little bit of time on my district. I'm very proud of the district I represent and the people who live within its borders, like I am for all the districts that I get the opportunity to stand on my feet listening to all the other 39 Members, except the Speaker now these days, to hear their viewpoints on their district and get the opportunity to learn about the things that are happening in everyone's district and excited about that.

I represent the beautiful District of Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, a historic district I like to say, just to distinguish myself from the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis who says he has a beautiful district as well, which I know. Some of the coastline that I have is the same coastline that he has. I'm excited about that.

It is actually funny, just before coming up I was in our caucus room and the district profile and the district boundaries came up

and I looked at my little piece of the province in the Avalon region. It's not as big as some of the other districts that we represent in our province, like Humber Gros Morne or places like that, that are very, very large and very diverse. I have a very diverse district both from an immigration standpoint and cultural standpoint but also from a social and economic standpoint.

I have some of the richest neighbourhoods in this province and I have some of the most struggling ones. Many of them have similar problems with respect to things that are highlighted by many of us that get up and speak today.

My district starts at the top of the district from the Outer Ring Road and extends down Torbay Road, right down into the Quidi Vidi Gut village and then right up East White Hills Road, border by the mountain where the mountain bikes take hold on East White Hills. It's a very interesting district. I always said to the former Member for Signal Hill - Quidi Vidi that I cheer only for the stakes one, two and three in the Regatta and she, at the time as well, could cheer for four, five and six because we split the lake.

I told the former premier one time who used to row, I said, if you're in stakes four, five and six, buddy, I'm not cheering for you.

But, no, it's pretty historic to represent such a great district like that. The longest continued sporting event in North America happens right on our doorstep. We share it. It's pretty exciting to see some 30,000 to 40,000 people on the banks at a garden party where races are happening.

I always found it fun when I used to be a minister, we'd go to FTPs and, when I happened to be the Tourism minister, I'd go and talk about the great things that we do in our province and the other ministers were shocked that we had an event that was contingent upon not weather as much as wind. It could be a beautiful day, sun splitting the rocks, 30 degrees, but we

cancel the Regatta because it's too windy. It's the only one in the history of the province, and the history of the country I think, that operates like that.

They're very excited when you tell them those and that's what I encourage ministers on the other side to do as well. When you get the opportunity to be with your colleagues, tell them about the little nuances of our province and the little nuances of where you represent because it brings that piece of home – our home – to their doorstep.

I don't normally get the opportunity to talk about some of the beautiful trail systems on the Grand Concourse or the East Coast Trail, but I have both of those in my district. The East Coast Trail, I have the very beautiful Sugarloaf Path trail, about 8.8 kilometres. I know the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi has walked it many times, I'm sure.

S. O'LEARY: Yes.

B. DAVIS: It's one of their favourites. It's a beautiful trail. It extends right along the side of my district. It's beautiful.

We invest in those things as a government because it's what brings people here, but it's what also keeps people here, and for recruitment of physicians or nurses or hard-to-recruit health care professionals, those are things that want to keep people in communities. In every part of our province, we have little things that we want to make sure people know exist, because that will help them want to stay in those communities.

I also have four schools in my district that I really care deeply about, three that actually are in my boundaries and one that I've adopted that happens to be in the St. John's East - Quidi Vidi District. I've adopted it because I don't think any students actually go to that school, MQP, from your district, or very few, most of them come from both

myself and Windsor Lake. It's just the nature of how the school boundaries were broke up. I've adopted it because of that reason, and they're interested. They give a great opportunity for you to go visit.

Virginia Park Elementary School is a new school that was built. Not too many people in this House of Assembly can say that a fuselage of a plane was found when they were building a school in your district, but it was in mine. It was an interesting build that happened just as I was getting elected in 2015.

It's a beautiful, state-of-the-art school, students are great, fantastic staff and they do so many things with some 30 different cultures and countries that are represented in the school community. It's excellent to go a multicultural event there. You get to experience so many different countries and aspects there that are on full display for all of us to see.

You've got Vanier Elementary just on Ennis Avenue, which is fantastic; a small neighbourhood school that does excellent work and fantastic staff as well. They've got a community garden that is to die for. Sometimes when you're walking up Ennis Avenue, you can see 10-, 12- and 14-foot sunflowers on their property. It's absolutely gorgeous. So I encourage you, if you're ever out and about, to take that walk in late June, early July when they start to come out.

Then we have a junior high in St. Paul's. It's a school that most of these feed into. They've got an excellent staff. They have a state-of-the-art track right around the back of their school that the whole community uses. That was an investment by the province and the federal government to do that.

It's not Canada Games size because they couldn't fit it in the boundaries. They would have, had they done that, but that was a project that was led by school community. I

happened to be a part of the project, played a small role in it, but the province and the federal government came through for the school community and the neighbourhood to put that there.

Then you've got Mary Queen of Peace, which I talked about before, which is the biggest school just outside of my district, with almost 600 students. It's where my kids go. It's a fantastic school, with great teachers. There are some things that we can always improve in those areas but, for the most part, I have to say that when you bring concerns forward, they get fixed.

We've got some over in MQP with a parking lot that is in disrepair, but I understand that those things generally won't happen during the school year. They generally happen after, so I'll work with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure on that very topic, when we get there.

One of the good things about being on this side of the House is that you get to do some Member's statements. I know the ministers on that side are going to say, that's correct, because they miss that. I'm sure they miss that. Sometimes you can get leave when that happens, if all of us are feeling really good over on this side but, for the most part, everyone over here is going to give you leave because we want to hear too. We want to hear those good stories about what's happening with the people in your district. We want to see those things. That's true.

I want to hear them because I think it's really, really important. It's always important to highlight successes because it will drive other people in the district to let you know about those successes. The very small few that we bring forward in this House of Assembly is only a small snapshot, a snippet of what's actually happening in each of our districts.

There are hundreds of people we could profile each and every day, and it's too bad

we don't get more time to do that. I would be a very strong advocate in bringing forward more of those if we could. But we obviously don't want to dominate all the time with that, but I think it's really important to highlight some of those successes. I would be remiss if I didn't highlight some of those even today.

I don't know if anyone knows, but I'm going to tell you a big secret here today. I'm a huge Montreal Canadiens fan. Like, it's huge, and I can see the Speaker shaking his head because he is a closet Montreal Canadiens fan I'm sure – I'm sure.

What I can say is I'm actually not a Toronto Maple Leafs hater. I truly am not. I actually want them to do well too. When they're not in, I cheer for Montreal, of course, and I couldn't be any prouder of a member of my district – there are actually two I'm going to highlight right now, but I couldn't be any prouder of Alex Newhook who lives in Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: I'm almost as proud of him as Shawn and Paula are. I almost am, I'm sure, because I was so excited when he got traded to Montreal – when they picked him up, sorry. I was really excited to see him do so well, considering the fact that he had a major injury early in the year. He was off to a banner-year start.

I had the opportunity to go over and see him and Abby at their house during Christmas just to wish him well with his recovery. He was doing well and he had said at that point – and Paula said as well – that he was going to be back early, and he was.

He worked really hard. I'm glad to see he's getting into the full season form right now at the right time for us. Seven goals, two assists through 14 games played is pretty impressive for him and pretty impressive for anybody, for that matter. Even more important than that is the game-winning

goals that he's been able to get in game sevens is pretty impressive.

But one thing that I read was that is the first time in Montreal Canadiens history – the first time in Montreal Canadiens history – they've ever won a game seven, on the road, in overtime – first time. Over all the years Montreal has been in existence, first team in the league, all those years it's the first time the Montreal Canadiens have ever won a road game in game seven in overtime.

I'm glad the minister and MHA for Ferryland is agreeing with me – a very big hockey fan. Not a bad hockey player himself, but I'm really excited about what's coming on Thursday and I wish him the best in his success. I couldn't mention Alex without mentioning Abby because Alex would be the first one to say that Abby's a better hockey player than he is. He'd be the first one to say it.

She's done fantastic for herself. She had a great college career, playing for Boston Fleet now in the Women's Professional Hockey League. We're always excited to see success stories like that because my two little girls can look up to Abby and say that I can do this because she can do it. She just lives over the road from us. That's impressive.

I can't talk about impressive young women without talking about Jaida Lee –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. DAVIS: – just over the road from me as well, starting her professional women's baseball career. That's new. Never happened before because it never existed before. She drafted 14th overall. This impressive young lady has broken every glass ceiling that existed in sports for her in her sport of choice, which is baseball; played for Team Newfoundland and

Labrador at the men's Canada Games baseball in Niagara and did fantastic. I can't wait, hopefully, to travel to New York to see her play a professional baseball game and, hopefully, she'll do what I expect her to do – strike out many of the players she's going to be facing. She's quite an impressive pitcher.

Then we've got Seth Hyde. Many people won't know who Seth Hyde is, but some will. If you're a hockey fan, you will know who Seth Hyde is. I knew him well before he was ever the shining star he is today. He was always a pretty big star in Vanier – always a pretty big star there. He was always a great student. He was a great friend and one of those people that did fantastic for all of the people that were in his class, always a top-notch individual.

As someone would say, from my district, top-shelf individual. We've seen him, now, progress at a very young age to being the lead broadcaster for the Regiment – impressive in and of itself. But I'm more impressed with his community outreach. That's what I'm impressed with.

Seth Hyde Sport Side – he created a charity where he can help people. It's an amazing charity that does work to not only highlight pretty cool things, but try to raise some money for some pretty cool causes. I'm proud of that young person. I've known him a long, long time, and I'm excited to see what the future is going to bring for Seth when he comes forward with this.

I've also had the pleasure of sitting in this House for a few years. Not as long as some people. There are some people here much longer than me, but I have seen three Sergeant-at-Arms, only three, during my tenure. All three Sergeant-at-Arms live in Virginia Waters - Pleasantville – all three. Only three that I've served with, all live in my district. There must be something in the water, Mr. Speaker.

Wayne Harnum was the Sergeant-at-Arms when I first got here. He lives in my district.

A fantastic guy, retired RNC officer, worked in forensics for a number of years. He is just a very good person to work with in the Sergeant-at-Arms role. I always felt safe in his presence. I always felt he was going to do what he could for us.

Fast-forward a few years later, we picked up Bob Escott who also was a retired RNC officer, had another career in the provincial government outside that, an exceptional individual. I think he went to Brother Rice as well. The MHA for St. John's Centre can probably confirm that.

Then we go to our current Sergeant-at-Arms who lives just up the road from him too. Alex Brennan, he's had a storied career as an RNC officer, but also in the military, and done some tours. I think he was CO of the Regiment. I think he was CO when it went to the 90th anniversary of Beaumont Hamel and went over with the full contingent, which was one of the first times they'd been back to Beaumont Hamel in a long time.

Impressive individuals, in and of themselves, and Bob would always tell me that I shouldn't mention him without mentioning Helen because Helen is an award-winning author in my district as well. Happens to live in the same house as Bob, but she's an impressive author of crime stories but also a funny person and has written numerous books. Many of the people in my district take great enjoyment from the work that she's done.

I could go on and on about highlighting some people. I may do that the next time I get to speak as well. I know the Finance Minister didn't have the opportunity to write down much of that because it was related to my district and the budget in a macro sense maybe, but I'll get a little bit more micro in my next opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

I will say that there are some things, as my colleague from St. John's West said, in the budget that I am very happy about. Some things that the minister or the MHA for Cape

St. Francis has been working on that transcends from the former minister of CSSD, the MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's was working on, some that I was working on and I'm very happy about seeing those things progress.

What I think governments, when they do turn, it's all about standing on the shoulders of the people that came before and making advancements on what they've done, doing what's right and doing things that are going to be better for all of us.

I do appreciate the opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I will take my seat because my time has expired and I will get the opportunity to speak again.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

M. KING: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's indeed a pleasure again to rise in the House and represent the good folks of Burgeo - La Poile and speak to the amendment here of the budget. Of course, as all of us participated in constituency week last week, I always enjoy those weeks and any time that I can get home to the district and talk to the constituents face to face and see them in our community and had some productive meetings with town councils.

I went to Rose Blanche. I had a great meeting down there with the Rose Blanche-Harbour le Cou council, talking about some issues and concerns that they have. I look forward to having those conversations with ministers directly to see what we can do to address.

It's certainly an exciting time of year as well for many of us here in Newfoundland and Labrador, but as high school students

prepare for their graduations and proms across the province, I know there are many happening in the District of Burgeo - La Poile and I want to say congratulations to those students and everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador as they prepare for the next step in their future.

I think this is a lot of what we're talking about here with this budget is preparing for the future and creating opportunities for a very bright future in this province and creating opportunities for our young kids to get a job here, to grow a family, to stay in the communities they want to stay. Burgeo - La Poile is, as I've stated many times, very far from the capital region and can be forgotten a lot of times. I've seen that over the years from governments past and especially from policy perspectives.

My job here is to make sure that those people are not forgotten. I can say to the people at home and I can say to the people here that I won't stop and will make sure that does not happen, that they are remembered and that it is an important part of this province.

I would elaborate on that a bit with the recent news of the food fishery. I know that it's certainly top of mind for many people in this province and especially in my district and the South Coast and Southwest Coast of this province. We saw the announcement recently by the Fisheries Minister, and while it certainly is great to see some of those changes come into effect for people in our province, it was very disappointing for many people in my district, Speaker. A lot of frustration and a lot of anger in that area.

Those NAFO divisions that are included, it says that three days a week is only available for those to participate in that area, while there was many changes for seven days a week in other parts of the province.

I think the ultimate question, and we heard some of the folks – I got to commend some

of those as we talked during the PMR in the House here that was introduced by my colleague across the way about the fishery and those that were speaking up about this important issue in the Food Fishery Fighters group – and I'm sorry if I got that wrong, to those folks. But I know they did important work and they are to be commended for speaking up. They're still speaking up and supporting the people of my district, I do know that, because it's very important to them.

We want to see a fair and safe food fishery for everyone in this province. We want to make sure that everyone can participate equally, and everybody can be safe on the water. The weather in my district specifically is very challenging a lot of times. The wind, especially in the summertime, can be very unpredictable. Having those limited days does not provide a safe opportunity for the residents in my district to participate. We totally understand the critical zone that the cod stocks are in. We totally understand that. But to what degree do we compromise safety as well, Speaker?

No one is asking to go every day and get boatloads of fish. No one is asking that. What they're asking for is to be treated fairly and to be given the opportunity to participate in a safe food fishery. As many people in my district would know, I have written the federal minister and I'm looking forward to having a conversation with her in the near future to hopefully get that fair opportunity to bring the voice of the people that I represent to the minister to tell her how disappointed they are in their decision, and that there is a path forward.

We do truly believe there is a path forward for everybody in this province to participate in a safe and fair food fishery. I would hope that the Minister of Fisheries and the Premier as well would acknowledge that. We did acknowledge that there were positive changes in this province, but the government needs to be a part of this conversation as well.

I certainly will be there to represent my constituents, but I think it would be fair for the government that represents my constituents as well, to speak up on this matter, to reach out to the federal minister to make sure she is hearing their concerns as well.

The more people that speak up, the better it is for all of us, and that is the key point for all of us. My residents are part of this province, my residents matter and I would hope it matters to the Premier and to the Minister of Fisheries. I encourage them, if they have not, to get a part of this discussion and speak up with the federal minister to let her know that the folks in my area are not completely satisfied with this change and want to see a fair and safe food fishery for everyone.

Building on that little bit, I want to talk about tourism in my district. I've mentioned it a number of times and it's such an important industry in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and a key part of the success that we see in small communities across our province. Many, many small communities now – I know the Rose Blanche Lighthouse, for example, is starting to gear up for the year ahead. Our parks are open again.

I look at Cheeseman park and Sandbanks park in Burgeo and seeing visitors come to those areas to start camping is exciting for a lot of people in our province and a lot of people in my district – the storeowners, especially, hoping they see visitors. Our small businesses are creeping up again. Our visitors' centres are opening. It's a very exciting time of year, Speaker. Everyone is looking forward to the warm weather and everybody is looking forward to visiting our province and see what we have to offer. We want to see those supports there as well.

I'll talk a little bit about summer students that has been mentioned here in the House of Assembly. It's been some challenges faced from a federal side in the Canada summer jobs. I've talked to a number of

communities this week and last week about some of the challenges that they're facing in not getting those summer students in place.

Those summer students are key to the success of a lot of our rural areas during the summer. I just mentioned the Rose Blanche Lighthouse. I mean, they're seeing a decrease in the summer students available. That is a very big issue for them and a very big concern to see the success of that site. They get a lot of visitors – a lot of visitors. It's very well marketed and that's something I'm hoping to work on with the government as well.

Our coast on Route 470 was labelled the Granite Coast years ago and we're looking to get some signage and stuff up to kind of advertise that as the Granite Coast to get visitors to not only visit the Rose Blanche Lighthouse – which is a very big attraction to many people that visit the province. Port aux Basques, as I've mentioned, is the gateway to this province. Argenta is used in the summertime, too, of course. They travel by Marine Atlantic, but Port aux Basques is usually the first place that people visit here in this province.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

M. KING: I say to my hon. Member, yes, of course, I want to mention her district as well as an important part of that service, but Port aux Basques is usually the place that people come to first when they get here. I'm having a lot of conversations with the communities in my area to try to get that support there. How do we get visitors to go to the Rose Blanche Lighthouse but to spend more time in that area itself, to visit the other communities along the Route 470 that offer a lot to visitors?

Isle aux Morts is a very historic community as well. They have the Harvey Trail there – a very historic story, as many people would know, with a fishing disaster there and a rescue. It's very historical and people go there to read about this information, to see

those stories. They see about it in brochures and pamphlets. We want to make sure they're coming and staying.

Burnt Islands is another community. It's the only store along that coast, outside of Port aux Basques, so people tend to stop there and visit and take in the sights. They have the island portion there. The community is right on the water. I always see campers and trailers driving through the community and stopping to take pictures of the ocean and the island portion, especially of Burnt Islands. They are probably taking a picture of my house because that's where I live, Speaker.

Besides that, it's a beautiful spot for people to stop and see. We want to get them coming into those communities. We want to see them spend more time and to spend their money, of course, to support the local economy, to keep those businesses going strong and to make sure those supports are there in the community.

We want to see those investments from our government into the tourism industry. We want to be able to see new investment. We want to make sure that the focus is there. For me, rural communities, especially, I know tourism is a very important part to the province as a whole, but the rural side of things is very important for me to make sure that we're getting the supports for those summer students. If we have to increase those positions to make sure we get those supports to the businesses and organizations, let's do that. Let's make sure those communities have the supports they need.

It goes a long way and sometimes it's not very much that they ask for, to be frank. A lot of times, the bigger areas, the urban areas, there are big pots of money that they're looking for because it makes sense with what the challenges they are faced with – their bigger population. In a lot of our rural communities, a small, little bit goes a very long way. Making sure that we can provide

those supports to those people is very important.

It goes outside of tourism as well. We've had conversations – I know we're past the winter season but 24-hour snow clearing. As I've mentioned, Port aux Basques is the gateway to this province. A lot of commercial traffic, a lot of passenger traffic travel through that area. We want to make sure – and it's all hours of the evening. It's not at certain times of the day. Yes, it picks up at certain times of the day when the ferry gets in but commercial traffic, especially, is travelling all the time through our area.

We hear stories about it and I'm sure people have seen on their social media the Wreckhouse area that's just outside of my district. It is a very windy area. A lot of challenges with transport trucks tipping upside down or blown over because of the wind. Increasing that signage, increasing that awareness of our area and what happens, but those people are travelling all hours of the night and especially in the wintertime that can be very challenging with our weather as I mentioned earlier.

Making sure that 24-hour snow clearing is actually helping all areas of the province. We know those busy routes, those 14 routes that have been acknowledged, that's certainly something that's been in place before as we've mentioned. We want to see those increases to help not only just commercial traffic, but people who live outside of the Port aux Basques area. Many travel to that area to work, to access services and that could also be all hours of the night. Many people have to travel the highway. I think of the Burgeo area of my district, Route 480. Many people have to travel over that 150-kilometre stretch of road to access services in Corner Brook or Stephenville for health care appointments.

In the wintertime, it can be very, very, very challenging. So making sure our operators, making sure our TI crews at the depots have what they need to do their job. Making

sure we're addressing the concerns this time of year – I've mentioned here before in petitions, we're having a lot of challenges with road conditions along Route 480. I'm pleased to see some of those issues being addressed, but we need to make sure all of those things also go back to the tourism side.

We want to make sure our roads are safe for our visitors. If our visitors come here and have a lot of challenges on some of these roads they may say, well, I'm not going to go back there or this is a very difficult place to get to.

We don't want that. We want to make sure all of the areas of our province where people are going to visit, and our residents are accessing services, have reliable roads, safe roads to travel on. So we need to see those investments as well, and I hope that we can see some changes next year, of course, because the winter season is behind us.

Another issue in my district is that health care gets brought up a lot. We know that health care is a very big issue for a lot of residents in our province. We hear a number of stories in the media or on social media or in the House as well when different Members are bringing up stories that they are hearing from residents and the challenges that they're facing accessing health care, to get their needs addressed. Some serious concerns, some serious challenges out there, especially in my district. A lot of residents would be travelling to the bigger centres like Corner Brook and St. John's for medical appointments, to see specialists that are not available in our area.

There are a lot of issues with medical transportation via air services. A lot of cardiac issues, looking to access the beds here in St. John's and waiting long periods of time. I'm working with some constituents now on those matters to make sure that we're getting those issues addressed because it's very big, concerning issues,

very severe health issues that people are looking to get dealt with and can't be waiting long months. They can't be waiting months and months and months to get an appointment or get transferred to St. John's to access services. So we need to see improvements in those areas, we need to see investment dollars.

I've had some positive conversations with the minister before on a CT scanner for Port aux Basques that's been promised in a previous budget. We're hoping to see that come to fruition as well, Speaker.

We've heard conversations about the MRI machines and attracting medical professionals to rural areas. That is another key part of attracting health care professionals to Port aux Basques and surrounding areas because those centres, and the Calder Health Centre in Burgeo or the Dr. Charles LeGrow Health Centre in Port aux Basques, are the hub for a lot of different regions. They go to those places every day of the week, if they have to go to the emergency room. So we want to see those investments continue in our rural areas to help bring health care professionals to our area, to see families move to our communities and to make sure that health care is being addressed.

Something that gets brought up very much to me now and something that I hopefully will see more improvement on is the self-managed home care workers. You know, especially in a rural community, we know that our population is aging probably faster than a lot of folks. We want to help seniors to remain at home for as long as they can. It's so important to them. It's where they're comfortable, it's where they grew up normally, it's where they feel most comfortable. Going to a long-term care home or a person care home, it can be challenging for a lot of folks.

When you leave a small, rural community that you've lived your entire life in and having to go to a bigger centre, having to go

somewhere you're not familiar with, it can be very challenging. Especially when it comes to issues like Alzheimer's, for example, that creates bigger challenges as well. I know that from a personal perspective, Mr. Speaker, dealing with one of my family members and the challenges that comes with it. All they say is they want to go home. So how do we support the people who need to work with those seniors in our homes?

It's been brought up here many years, of course, and I know that they definitely appreciated to see that \$2 raise that was mentioned in the budget by the Minister of Finance. It's certainly something they appreciate, but it still puts them at an unequal footing from those who work in agencies. You know, the agencies are still \$2 or \$2 and a bit more than those agency workers. So if they were to get a raise at some point, they're still behind. They're still behind. So we want to see equal pay.

The question of pay equity, I would challenge the government – and this is a quote, Speaker – "... under this spirit of pay equity, why in the world wouldn't those employees being paid directly by the Department of Health and Community Services doing the same job receive the same pay as those in the agencies?" That's a very good question, I think, to the Minister of Finance. That question is actually from himself. That is what he said in the House on May 21, 2025.

So I would say to the minister, while the raise is certainly appreciated, and I know that he's probably heard that as well, we need to see that equal pay. We need to see that increase for those folks who do the same job, and a very, very important job. I want to thank so many of them in Burgeo - La Poile and across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador for the incredible work that they do, working with our seniors in their homes, making sure they the proper care that they need.

Those things, again, are small things that we can do – very big for a lot of people, of course, but small things that we can do to support our rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It's very, very important to a lot of rural communities in our province. Like I say, it's not that it's not important to our urban centres as well, but I know it has a bigger focus in our rural communities because of the challenges we have accessing services.

Even making sure that the pay is equitable so we can see more people come into that field where, obviously, in the smaller communities, you have so many folks that can work in home care. We want to make sure that we can bring more people into that environment to make sure that we're addressing the gaps that are there. So I think that equal pay for equal work in that sector is certainly important.

With the little bit of time that I have left here on our amendment, I want to talk about Justice as well. I mentioned this yesterday in the petition. Losing some services is also a big highlight. The courthouse in Port aux Basques closing, it's not just a courthouse to access justice services. It acts as a hub for other government services, drivers' examinations, getting your licence renewed or a picture taken. There are many other services that take place in that building outside of our justice system.

When it closes for the court, though, it has a ripple effect a little bit, and people in the community start to think: Is this an erosion of services? Are we seeing other services taken away because it's easier to have in a hub? It's easier to have those services in Corner Brook for a government. When a government is making those decisions, it is probably easier to have a lot of services in Corner Brook, to have a lot of services in the bigger centres around our province, but I would say that it's a challenge to the folks that live in those areas to access those services.

Not everyone can drive. Corner Brook is 2½ hours away. Deer Lake is three hours away. St. John's is 10 hours away. A lot of challenges for folks, they can't just get in their car and drive to these places. There are a lot of seniors who need help that rely on somewhere to stay, especially when they go to some of these places. They can't just drive the one day.

So we don't want to see an erosion of services. We want to see our services being improved and making sure that residents who have challenges going to the bigger centres can access those same services that many people in our province access, because our rural communities are the fabric of this province. Tourism is a big part of this, as I just mentioned, and they're a big part of who we are in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So speaking for my district again, we want to see investments in our area as a gateway community, as a gateway district to this province. We want to make sure that those communities have the supports that they need to thrive, to build on opportunities that we can have and to make sure our organizations and groups are supported.

Speaker, in the little time I have left, I look forward to speaking again on the budget, on why we want to see more for the people of Burgeo - La Poile.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

Always a pleasure, as it is I'm sure for the rest of the Members of this hon. House, to stand and speak on behalf of the residents that I represent in Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

I would, first of all, like to just mention a thank you on the record to my colleague from St. John's West for his tribute to a family member yesterday.

J. KORAB: Waterford Valley.

F. HUTTON: Waterford Valley, sorry.

John Hutton who passed away last week, he was a family member, a cousin. It made me think about his contribution to the music industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. But it made me think about all the other people from every district across Newfoundland and Labrador, similar to John, who contributed quietly or sometimes a little more in public, to the province that they live in and the province that they call home, the province we love.

I want to talk a little bit about my district and my connection to it. My parents had owned a home. Where I live in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, believe it or not, 60 years ago when they built their house, there was mostly summer houses out there, little cabins, which is what they had. They started with a shack that was, I think 12 by 12, and then when four kids came along, they decided to build something a bit bigger.

In a month from now or so, I'll turn 60 years old, and I can remember when I was 11 years old, the year that the road that I live on now was paved. We used to actually – I think there's a statute of limitations on this and my dad is passed, so he's not going to get in trouble – when we'd turn onto Old Broad Cove Road, we'd fight over who could sit on his lap to steer the car down the road until we got to the house.

It was over a dirt road, which runs right along Windsor Lake. In the summer months, even though that was our drinking supply, they would pour oil and water on the road to keep the dust down. Now there's a sign that says, if you throw a chip bag out the window, you're going to get a \$1,500 fine. So times have changed. But in many ways,

the stories are the same and the issues facing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are the same.

I can remember that I was living away briefly when I studied in British Columbia, coming back – and when I was going through this tour of the interior of British Columbia at radio stations, TV stations and newspapers, the guy who was our prof was taking us around to see if we could maybe land a job or a work term at one of these places and he asked me why I was not putting out résumés like the other students in class. I said: Well, because I plan to move back to Newfoundland as soon as I'm finished here in two years. I don't have any intention of not living at home.

I can remember going down over – there's a part of Old Broad Cove Road where you crest the hill just past Tolt Road and you can see right out over Conception Bay and it's where the sun meets the sea. That's the sign on the entry to Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, and the sunsets down there are remarkable. The area that I represent is a beautiful area, right next to the ocean. Even the part of Paradise, where you drive across St. Thomas Line, people do that drive in the evenings just so that they can see the sun setting.

The folks on Bell Island, who I represent, have the added benefit of seeing the sun – even from my side, when it dips below Bell Island, they get the extra 15 or five minutes or however many minutes it is. It is a beautiful area, and it's one of the things that draws so many people to Newfoundland and Labrador.

The quality of the air – yes, we have issues, but it is, by comparison, if you see what's on television, a safer place to live than many others. We do have challenges. I'm not trying to say that we don't. We obviously do. Societal issues that are contributing to that, but it is a beautiful place.

In the Tourism Estimates last night, with the Tourism Minister, I referenced the need for a really reliable ferry service to go back and forth to Bell Island. This year will mark the 60th anniversary of the closure of the Bell Island mines, the iron ore mine. The history that is associated with that part of our province – the only part of the world, outside of Europe, that saw actual action with the U-boats off Bell Island because of the contributions of the iron ore to the Allied Forces.

That mine has turned into an economic gold mine, if you will, for that part of the province as, a couple of years ago, they reached almost 20,000 visitors to Bell Island to go see the mine and to look at the history and to actually get to go down into it. But without a reliable ferry service, that part of our tourism aspect is challenged and is threatened. I'm learning more about that, as it's been a little over two years since I became the Member.

I was delighted to hear in the Speech from the Throne that there would be ferries built. I'm still waiting to see when and where the actual plans will come through. I know there's an RFP out for a swing vessel, but I hear about it on a daily basis, how important that aspect of travel is. And not just for tourism, but for the hundreds of people who travel back and forth on the Bell Island ferry every day, in both ways, to get to work on the mainland side, over in St. John's or Mount Pearl, wherever they work; and, equally, the folks who are teachers or nurses and the doctors who go to the other side, to Bell Island, to work on a daily basis and how it's not always just the weather, which can be very unpredictable and out of everybody else's hands.

I spoke, similarly, about the situation with Fogo and the need for a reliable ferry service for that area. There are others, but the need for people who rely on tourism and the businesses to get back and forth in a reliable service and the need for that.

I mentioned John, off the top, as a person. When I entered politics back in 2024, I think one of the first questions, after I got elected, a reporter asked, what's the difference between being a reporter and an MHA? I said, at that point in time, that there is no real difference because people do not pick up the phone to call you when everything is going right in their life. If you're their MHA or if they are at their wit's end, they call a reporter and say I need some help. People do that on a constant basis. I'm sure not just on this side, on every side and the independent and the NDP Members, they get calls when people feel they're at the end of the rope and they need help from their Member, or if they want to go public with it and go on either *Open Line* or one of the TV stations or radio stations to have their story told.

I can tell you that after over 30 years in the media, when I left, people would ask me, what's your favourite story you covered? I don't know if there's a favourite story, but I can always remember that I got the most out of talking to people, just average people, after interviewing all the premiers who were in power, all the finance Ministers, prime ministers of Canada – I interviewed them.

Somebody that I worked with at NTV, Jim Furlong, who was recently given a doctorate from Memorial University, told me that being in news is like having a front row to the parade of life, that you're right there. I thought about that and I thought about the 30 or 31 budgets that I covered while I was in media. I thought about the 30 regattas that I covered as well, with various hosts, including Dee Murphy and Brian O'Connell; 30 July 1 ceremonies at the War Memorial; 30 or 31 November 11 ceremonies – those solemn ceremonies that take place.

I thought about the cod moratorium and being in that room when John Crosbie actually announced that our fishery was going to close. I mean, who would have ever believed that our fishery would close, the cod fishery? Now we're seeing some

resurgence and a partial reopening of the recreational cod fishery for parts of the Island.

Our name changed in 2001 from Newfoundland to Newfoundland and Labrador. That was a big deal to see the name of the province change officially. It's a very long name, but it's good because it recognizes both parts of the province.

I think about 9/11 and the impact 9/11 had on Newfoundland and Labrador, globally, but the impact that it had here, I can remember going to the airport that day and seeing the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people getting off planes after many hours. I can literally remember where I was standing when somebody phoned me from a NORAD station in Northern Ontario to tell me that planes were crashing into the World Trade Centre. At that point in time, standing in the bedroom, walking into the bathroom – it was early in the morning – thinking, how is this going to impact us? Of course, hours later, we knew how it was going to impact us.

Thousands and thousands of people were here, and we stepped up. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador stepped up. This is about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The budgets that we talk about in here impact people, their daily lives.

I thought about that story and 9/11. I also thought about one of the coolest stories I guess, if you will, that I can ever remember and somebody who I met, who wasn't from Newfoundland and Labrador, but his name was Dr. Lanier Phillips, Order of Newfoundland and Labrador recipient, and the outpouring – how that changed his life, the reception that he got here in Newfoundland and Labrador from people who had never seen a black person and the country that he came from where he was shunned, he was accepted here and how that made him feel and how it changed his life. How many other lives did that change?

How many other people did he go and tell? Thousands, tens of thousands of people, about how the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are good people.

We are good people. We have challenges here, but we have to go back to the fact that we have so many good things going for us. We have to continue to look at it as half full, not half empty. We have challenges. The Finance Minister has to come up with \$3 million every day to pay the interest on our debt – every day. I get that. But the average person is not walking around thinking about that. They're thinking about their own lives.

I think about Cougar Flight 491 and the tragedy that impacted thousands of people. If you think about your own friend group and your own family, if something happened to you today, how many people would feel sad because of that, or impacted? All the people that we've touched over our lives, not just your immediate family but your friends, your schoolmates from years ago, people you bump into, the people who you touch and impact on a daily basis. The people you've met or perhaps haven't seen in 10 or 15 years but still remember the interaction they've had with you.

I think about Snowmageddon. That was another huge story that I got to cover right before I left reporting and came to politics. Of course, it almost coincided with the start of COVID.

I can remember – this is a personal story – my son, we had to go to the United States because of a medical issue that he had. Fortunately, it turned out to be good. We got on a plane on a Monday and a couple of people were wearing masks at the airport in St. John's. We'd been talking a little bit about Coronavirus, but nobody knew what it was. We came back on a Friday – sent there by medical professionals here to a specialist – and half the people on the plane were wearing masks.

I can remember then we slide into COVID and everybody wanted to reach out to their neighbours. Everybody was making sure that everyone was okay. We were washing groceries. The challenges that we went through, the businesses that failed because of COVID, the help that was tried to provide to people so that they can continue on and how there seemed to be this outpouring of compassion and love for each other to try to stay together – we're in this together.

Then I remember seeing a video online not long after, the baseball stadiums opened up somewhere. It happened to be in the United States where three people were fighting over a seat, like literally a fist fight. I thought, how did we go from everybody wanting to care about each other to being right back – okay, I guess we've forgotten that aspect of how we are all in this together.

But we are all still in this together, and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who make impacts and inspire us – I'm going to regret this, I know – but I can remember this guy here winning a gold medal.

J. KORAB: Who?

F. HUTTON: You.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

F. HUTTON: Unfortunately, they didn't –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

F. HUTTON: Yes.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's not true.

F. HUTTON: He did.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

F. HUTTON: I know he hasn't told you that this morning, but groups like this. We were talking about Alex Newhook, at 25, who already has won a Stanley Cup, and

Michael Ryder. I was standing on the roof of the building when I saw the leg of that table give out and the Stanley Cup hit the roof of the building down there. I think it was the King George V. They landed a helicopter and they were flying all over.

J. KORAB: Raymonds.

F. HUTTON: On top of Raymonds Restaurant, yeah.

Michael Ryder and Danny Cleary, all these stories, these people who inspire you and who, because of the job that I had, I got to meet and talk to and interview up close.

I thought about folks like Alex Faulkner, he played in the Stanley Cup before I was born.

J. KORAB: For the Red Wings. Go Red Wings.

F. HUTTON: Go Red Wings.

All of these people who have had this huge impact on Newfoundland and Labrador and people who inspire us to want to be better. What we do in here does impact people. It's great that we've got Alex Newhook out there now who is inspiring us to stay up really late. Although, I did fall asleep during the overtime period, despite the Member for Burgeo - La Poile trying to text me to keep me awake. It's important that we remember to focus on these positive things.

I know that in recent weeks, as we find our footing on this side and as the government Members find their footing, we oftentimes go back and forth. But I think we need to remember that, now more than ever, given what's going on globally and what we see going on south of the border in the United States with outrageous behaviour, if you will, by somebody who has so much control and influence over what happens to your pension, to any investments anybody might have, to businesses.

We need to be the leaders of our districts and to behave in a way that we're not trying to tear each other down all the time. We're trying to build everybody up and provide a better place for Newfoundland and Labrador.

If you struggle to figure out why you come here every day – and I hear everybody else say it – it's so that you can leave this place a little better than you found it. Now if that means helping one person in your district or 10 people or implementing some policy that will, I don't know, bring in \$10-a-day daycare to allow people to go back to work or increasing the threshold for income tax so that people will get it.

Now, there are good aspects of the budget. I would have liked to have seen more tax breaks that would be more immediate to people so that they could feel the effects immediately. There are some good aspects to it, as my colleague from St. John's West did mention earlier today. There are good aspects, but it is our job to ask questions about it, the same as it was for the government Members who did for many years. I was only there for a little less than two years as a government Member but worked behind the scenes.

It is important, though, that we remember the reason we're here is for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the residents who put us there, the residents who text me and message me. Not all of them are complimentary by the way – unsolicited because you take a stand on a certain thing they have a different political ideology and they don't want you to say the things you're saying. The government Members have a role. The Opposition Members have a role, as well, and our role is to look at this budget or whatever policies come before us, whatever laws or whatever we're discussing or debating in the Legislature, and debate them.

Yes, tempers might get a little bit hot from time to time but we need to try to keep it on

a more civil level so that the people – and I'm not saying that we could inspire people but at least show the leadership that is required at this point in time. While others are faltering from that role, we need to be able to maintain that level of civility so that when we do say, this is what we're going to do, or when the government says it, then people will say, okay, well, somebody is in charge here, who's doing the right thing for us, hopefully.

It all goes back to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We look to the sports folks like Alex Newhook to inspire us, to make us feel good, and we need that. We also need to feel good about what's done in here and the example we set, I think, is very important for all people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always an honour to rise in this House and represent the residents of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde and it's an honour to stand here today to speak on *Budget 2026* and what it means for the people of my district and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as a whole.

They say you should save the best for last, but I must first highlight a critical investment in this budget that speaks directly to the resilience of our region.

This year, more than \$25 million has been allocated to support wildfire recovery efforts in the Conception Bay North area.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Furthermore, the commitment to rebuild Cabot Academy is also one I welcome, as such a facility will play a vital role in the recovery of the North Shore. After a devastating summer, in which families were displaced and property was lost, many residents are still dealing with the emotional and financial aftermath.

Through it all, we seen first responders on the front lines every day, whether it was during the wildfires at the forefront of the blaze or in the aftermath when they advocated for better protection for their communities. That's why we are doubling the volunteer firefighter and search and rescue tax credits to \$6,000, as well as allocating over \$7 million in new funding to assist volunteer firefighters.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Simply put, Speaker, they deserve it.

Over the last year, I've had many conversations with firefighters from across the district, and they have all told me the exact same thing. They want to do whatever they can to prevent and be prepared for any wildfires that may occur. They have put in the work, advocated for supports and have taken additional training in wildfire firefighting. I can say, with the utmost confidence, that they will be ready whenever they get the call. The rest falls on us.

It is our job to make sure that those who protect us have the equipment, training and supports they need to do their job safely. This commitment is an important step forward, as it represents more than just funding. It represents a promise kept that those affected would not walk this road alone.

This budget reflects stability, responsibility and a clear commitment to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This budget recognizes the challenges people are

facing, while continuing to make the right investments necessary to strengthen our province.

In my maiden speech I referenced the issues I heard while going door to door, and I said that these issues were not simply abstract policy debates but, instead, they were real concerns raised by real people. Speaker, this budget is not based on abstract policy either. It will deliver real, tangible measures to help all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, like the increase to the personal tax exemption which will put money into the pockets of every single hard-working person in this province.

My district is one that is very familiar with lackluster cell service. From the moment you leave Salmon Cove right to Bay de Verde and back down the other side to Winterton and beyond, you'll be hard-pressed to get a phone call to go through, and our government recognizes that reliable connectivity is essential. It is essential for seniors who may need emergency services, for workers and business who rely on communications to operate and for families who are simply just trying to stay connected.

That is why *Budget 2026* continues to support investments in rural connectivity, as we work with partners to expand and improve cell coverage in under-served areas.

Speaker, the backbone to our local economy is our small businesses. They buy local, sell local and hire local, keeping that economic wealth within their communities. This year, our government has taken action to reduce the small business tax, providing meaningful relief to entrepreneurs across Newfoundland and Labrador. This is a practical step that helps local businesses reinvest in their operations, as they support their employees and continue to grow in their communities.

These are the business that know their customers. It's the kind of place where the owner makes sure there's enough flour on the shelf because they know someone's nan will be baking bread that day. That level of care and connection cannot be replicated.

Just last week, Speaker, I had the opportunity to stop in at a local business in my district, Rock & Rise Sourdough, where I had lunch – and may I add, probably had one of the best sandwiches of my life. It is exactly the kind of business this measure is designed to support: locally owned, community-driven and built through hard work and passion.

A reduction in the small business tax may seem like a line in the budget, but for businesses like Rock & Rise Sourdough, it means more breathing room. It means the ability to invest in equipment, hire staff or simply keep the doors open during challenging times. Speaker, our small businesses are at the heart of our communities and a driving force behind our local economy. This tax reduction is about supporting them, not just to survive, but to succeed.

I want to take a moment to recognize a generation that built the very communities we are proud to represent today. These are the people who laid the foundations for what exist today. They worked in the fishery, the trades, in small businesses and in our public services. They raised families and created a community that we now call our own. After a lifetime of contribution, they should never be left behind.

They should not have to worry about whether they can afford their groceries, heat their homes or to live with the dignity they deserve. Supporting our seniors is about more than policy; it is about respect, fairness and recognition for those who helped our beautiful province get to where it is today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: This budget takes meaningful steps in that direction and it reflects that a simple principle that those who built our communities should be able to continue living in them with security and peace of mind.

Speaker, while we must take care of our seniors, we must also ensure we provide opportunities for our youth. The continued tuition freeze at Memorial University is an important step in ensuring post-secondary education remains accessible and affordable for students and families in Newfoundland and Labrador. At a time when costs are rising, this provides stability and certainty for our students to confidently pursue their education.

Speaker, we are going even further. This budget allocates \$40 million towards a new Graduate Tuition Refund Program set to begin in the next fiscal year. This program will support graduate students who choose to stay, work and live right here in our province by providing a refund on their tuition.

This is about more than affordability. It is about opportunity and our responsibility to provide that. It's about giving our youth a reason to build their futures here at home. It's about strengthening our workforce, supporting our economy and ensuring that the talent we educate stays right here in the place they have always called home.

For districts like Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, this matters deeply. We want our young people to know they do not have to leave to succeed and that there is a future for them right here. By investing in education and creating incentives to stay, this budget is helping build a stronger, more sustainable future for Newfoundland and Labrador; one where those who call this beautiful province home may stay here and confidently grow their skill set with the confidence they are wanted; a place where

they can thrive and build meaningful fulfilling lives without looking for opportunities elsewhere because we will provide them right here at home.

Speaker, housing is one of the largest issues facing not only Newfoundland and Labrador, but Canada as a whole, and I am proud to see this budget take meaningful action in this area. This year, our government is investing more than \$125 million to support housing while also maintaining and improving existing homes across our province.

I'm glad to see changes to Provincial Home Repair Program, Home Energy Savings Program and the Home Modification Program. After speaking to many constituents, it was easy to see the amounts, limits and eligibility were all outdated and did not accurately reflect the cost of these projects today.

These programs do more than just replace siding or shingles. They allow people to reduce heating costs by adding insulation, fixing windows or replacing doors. They keep people in their homes by helping modify bathrooms, install ramps or make other accessibility modifications. These investments are about increasing supply, supporting communities and ensuring people have access to safe and affordable housing. Whether you are a first-time homebuyer, a young family or a senior looking to remain in your home, these investments will benefit you.

By supporting both new construction and existing housing, we are taking a balanced approach – one that meets immediate needs by planning for long-term growth. This is about giving people a place to call home, as well as the tools to keep that home safe and accessible, while also ensuring our communities remain vibrant and sustainable for years to come.

One of the largest parts of this budget is a significant investment being made in the

health care. People knowing that they can access quality health care close to home is incredibly important. This budget invests a total of \$5.4 billion into health care, including new measures to improve access, strengthen front-line services and support patients throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

I am particularly proud of the investments being made into nurse practitioner coverage. We will invest more than \$31 million over the next five years to ensure people can access medically necessary care through nurse practitioners without paying out of pocket.

This kind of investment provides reliable care to those who need it, along with reducing traffic in emergency rooms, as we know many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians currently use them as replacement for a family doctor. It's a two-fold approach that will increase care for those who need a practitioner, along with reducing the load on emergency rooms across the province.

We are also investing in two new MRI machines for Grand Falls-Windsor and Happy Valley-Goose Bay to help improve diagnostic capacity and reducing wait times for patients, not only in these communities, but across the province.

We are also continuing to invest in long-term care with almost \$50 million allocated for additional long-term care beds, dementia beds and acute-care beds throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. These investments are critically important as our population ages. Seniors deserve access to quality care and dignity close to their families and communities. Expanding long-term care capacity helps ensure that people receive the support they need as they continue to move later into life.

At the end of the day, health care is not about the numbers in a budget; it's about the people who need quality care wherever

they live. Whether it's a new parent anxiously awaiting a diagnosis of their child or a senior who needs just a little extra help living in their home, everyone deserves access to quality and timely health care no matter where they live or what stage of life they are in.

Public safety is a key piece to strong, healthy communities, and this budget makes it clear that our government is committed to protecting the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This budget includes the hiring of 46 additional police officers over the next two years. That is a significant investment in front-line policing. This will ensure a greater presence in our communities, faster response times and stronger supports for our law enforcement as they carry out the important work of keeping people safe.

But, Speaker, I've heard first-hand how even our officers are frustrated with the system, as they can arrest someone one day, only to see them walking around the next. That is why we'll also be funding an additional 14 new positions within the public prosecution to help ensure that cases move efficiently through the courts. This will reduce delays and strengthen the overall effectiveness of our justice system. Together, these investments reflect a balanced and responsible approach as we support both enforcement and prosecution to deliver a system that works for the people instead of failing them.

We also have to be honest about a growing concern we are hearing across our communities: the impact of prolific offenders. In many cases, there are a small number of individuals responsible for our large amount of repeated crimes. This not only places strain on our justice system, but it also affects the sense of safety in our towns and communities. Addressing this issue requires more than law enforcement alone. We must recognize that many of these situations are closely tied to underlying challenges, such as mental

health and addictions. If we are serious about reducing crime in a lasting way, we must address the root causes.

Speaker, for issues like this, where so many factors are in play, there is no silver bullet. No one solution that can fix it all at once. That is why, along with increased law enforcement and court supports, we are also making investments in the mental health and addiction services. By expanding access to treatment, recovery and support services, we are helping individuals break the cycle. A strong public safety approach is one that is both firm and compassionate; one that ensures accountability, supports law enforcement and invests in prevention.

Speaker, let me be clear, even with all these investments, this budget does not raise taxes and it introduces no new fees. At a time when people are already feeling the pressure, our government has made a deliberate choice. We are not going to make life more expensive. As our Premier and Finance Minister have said many times, we will not balance the books of this province on the backs of its people. In fact, we are doing the opposite.

Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest provincial gas tax in all of Canada. This matters to people, especially in my district, where you can commute from Bay de Verde to Carbonear and drive for nearly an hour just to get to work. That is why we have ensured the gas tax is permanently reduced to 7.5 cents. We will also be increasing the basic personal exemption to \$15,000, meaning people can earn more before they pay a cent in provincial income tax.

Speaker, that is real relief. That is money staying in the pockets of hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. No new taxes, no new fees, more money in people's pockets – that is the kind of balance people expect and that is exactly what this budget delivers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Speaker, for too long in this province the story has been the same. We have asked more of our systems than they were built to handle. More patients than our health care system could serve. More calls than our officers could respond to. More families than our housing supply could support. We have been living with a gap between what people need and what has been available to them.

Speaker, people have felt that gap. They have felt in waiting rooms, when the wait for urgent treatment is just too long. They have felt it in their communities, as they watch houses deteriorate without proper funding to keep them going. They have felt it at their kitchen tables, as \$100 worth of groceries just doesn't get you as much as it used to.

This budget is about closing that gap. It's about building capacity in health care, so people can get care when they need it. It's about strengthening the public service, so people feel secure in their communities. It is about investing in housing, so people have a place to call home.

At its core, Speaker, it's about people. It's about seniors who built our communities and deserve to live in them with dignity. It's about the young people who are deciding whether to stay and deserve a reason to build their future here. It's about the families working hard every single day and deserve a government that is working just as hard for them.

This is a budget that recognizes where we have been but, more importantly, it sets a clear direction for where we are going: a province where opportunity is not limited by geography; a province where hard work is matched with real support; a province where people can see a future and choose to build it right here at home. That is the Newfoundland and Labrador we are building, and I am proud to support our *Budget 2026*.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to take this opportunity to stand here today on behalf of the constituents of the Burin - Grand Bank District. It's been a pleasure to represent these individuals for the last five years. I know what a proud people, what a hard-working group of individuals and so on that I represent, and a group that has a lot of pride where they live and where they're from.

Like the rest of my colleagues in the House today, I had the opportunity last week to visit my district, to spend a whole week there meeting with councils, meeting with individuals, meeting with groups and just being around people that you know. It makes a big difference to you, by the way. It's almost like it's a break when you go into your district. I know we all work very hard in our districts, but it's great to get out there. It's wonderful. It's wonderful to be around the people that you grew up with and that you've worked with most of your lifetime.

I know both sides are the same there. We all feel the same. Last week, as I talked to colleagues on both sides of the House – can't wait to get home; can't wait to get to the district; can't wait to see family; can't wait for the long weekend. It's wonderful. We all come back refreshed.

During that particular week I had home, it was time to listen to my constituents, listen to what they had to say, and to get a firm grip on what we could do to help and what our government needs to do to address their concerns. I think what I heard, my colleagues on this side of the House, and what you heard, is pretty much the same. I think so.

I guess I should start with the cost of living. Living in rural Newfoundland, like I do, the

cost of living is having an impact. The cost of gasoline, the cost of groceries is certainly having an impact on our residents. We hear stories of parents going without so their children can have food. Like, those are amazing things. People going to the grocery stores and not being able to afford the things that they normally could.

The pics of Newfoundland farmed chicken that I saw on social media the other day at \$23 and \$24 for one chicken, these are the kinds of things that we're seeing. It's not only in Newfoundland and Labrador. There's no blaming here or anything. It's not only in Newfoundland and Labrador; it's everywhere. It's right across our great country, the costs; but if you live in rural Newfoundland, yes, you're going to have additional costs, because of transportation costs to get there. That's impacted by the cost of gasoline.

Also, electricity bills – and somebody mentioned today about going oil to electric. That's a great program, by the way. A lot of people are taking advantage of it, but a lot of people can't take advantage of it. Because if the cost is greater than the amount of money they can get from a grant, then it's no good to them because they can't afford the \$5,000 or \$6,000 it takes – the overrun. They can't afford that. So that's a program that we may have to look at in some point in time. We may have to look at a program that helps these people get over the high cost of installation and so on.

I heard a lot, as well, from the constituents about the food fishery. As a matter of fact, a lot of them complimented my hon. friend and colleague, the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, who brought that forward in the House last week. You know, it was one of those times when we all said yes, this is a great bill. This is a great thing that we're doing here. Let's get the food fishery back. Let's get it back to everyone in the province. I was elated when we passed that in the House, and I thank the hon. Member for bringing it forward – great job.

The only thing is that in my district it doesn't apply. Speaker, 3Ps is not included. So we don't have that out there. What I'm getting now from people that I talk to is, why can't we have it here in St. Lawrence? Why can't we have it here in Grand Bank? Why can't we have it on the Burin Peninsula, as well? My answer to that is I agree, and not only do I agree, we all agree in this House that the food fishery should be open.

I was out for a walk on Monday in St. Lawrence, and I talked to this old guy. He said: Now, again this year, I have to go out, probably on bad days, to get a few fish. He said: One time, here, when the fishery closed down and you'd go out and jig a few fish, there were three of us going. Three fellows – three boats in St. Lawrence used to go. Now, he said, there are 50 going. He said: If they'd left it alone, there'd still be only three of us.

Anyway, I said to him, look, we're going to work on this. The dialogue will continue, and we certainly will be writing the minister. I think we should all do it on behalf of our districts. Like the hon. Member here, we should all do it on behalf of our districts, especially us that don't have the time increased. We should all do it.

While I'm talking about the food fishery, I should say that this week, in St. Lawrence, there's an unveiling of a monument for those fishers who were lost at sea, who lost their lives fishing, lost their lives making a living for their families. I guess it was six or seven years ago, when I was mayor of the Town of St. Lawrence, we had one of the biggest fishing disasters ever. We lost four people: a father, a son, a cousin and a friend – four people. I think there was probably seven or eight kids involved in that. I remember being the mayor there and I remember it being a trying time for me.

One of the ladies that lost her husband said to me, when I was home on the weekend, Paul, can you go to the service because we really want you a part of it? You were so

much involved in it. I was, because I was kind of acting as the spokesperson for the town, and the media was out there, of course, for the entire week and the search was on.

So we were all hopeful and the town, it was almost like everybody was hugging into each other and saying we've got to get through this – we've got to get through this. Come on, they're going to find them – they're going to find them.

We got word that they called off the search on day three or four. They called off the search. I remember making calls to as many people as I knew, even people that owned their own vessels, to go out. I was sitting in the council building making those calls and as I was driving home, I got a call from – I would imagine it was probably the Coast Guard; I'm not quite sure. They were saying the search is going to go on. We're going to go out.

Now, I was 28 years on council, about 10 as mayor then, and I pulled my car over in the busiest section of the town, which in rural Newfoundland, it's not downtown Toronto, and I sat back in my car and for the first time in years, I cried. I cried because I said we've got a chance of getting them home. That's true. I told that lady that story at the local supermarket the other day and she says, yes, we all did; didn't we? That's how rural Newfoundland is.

This food fishery is not about a few fish in the water; it's about safety. It's about safety and people doing what their fathers did years ago. As a matter of fact, my great-grandfather, Sam Pike, drowned on his way back from fishing, him and six or seven others, and it changed the trajectory of our family for years. It made a difference. But he lost his dad coming in around the cape in St. Lawrence.

The other thing that I heard – and I'm trying not to be negative; I'm just telling you what I heard – is the whole idea around the health

care in our area. Health care is a problem in all of our areas, not just mine, it's everywhere. In St. Lawrence now, we don't have a doctor. We do get some locums, but we haven't had a doctor now in three years – not just in the last eight months, like someone might say, why did you do before that? But we haven't had a doctor in a few years. That's not to say that we shouldn't be out recruiting.

For rural Newfoundland, what we need is a program of visiting specialists. We need to get our specialists out of St. John's, out into the rural areas. I remember when my father was sick, a trip to St. John's would have killed him. It would have killed him. That's why we couldn't bring him in. It's something that should be looked at for us in rural Newfoundland.

We should be able to get a doctor, access to a doctor and access to a specialist. Bring them out to all these cottage hospitals and the health care clinics and so on. Bring the specialists out. It would make a big difference. We have extraordinary people – extraordinary people – that work in health care. It takes a lot to work in health care, as you know. We have to thank those people, but we have to support them as well.

I sent the Minister of Health a couple of emails today. The email was from a young doctor who graduated last year and he graduated with the hopes of staying in Newfoundland and Labrador and getting a placement because he wants to be a surgeon. He's been trying to get a placement here in Newfoundland and Labrador, trying to get a placement here at the Health Sciences Centre. It doesn't matter where. He's also looking for a placement, not only as a surgeon, but he said, well, maybe ENT as well. He is a bright guy, and can't get one. He can't get a placement here in Newfoundland and can't get anybody to take him in and work at his specialty.

Do you know what he's going to do? He's going to leave Newfoundland and Labrador before long and he's not returning. This is a homegrown young fellow. I know him. I remember him from elementary school. He's a homegrown Newfoundlander, went to med school, did well and cannot get a placement in Newfoundland and Labrador. He has to go away. Can't get a placement in a province that's crying for doctors. We have to look at things like that. We can't let that stuff happen, and I hope the minister responds to him.

I have four centres in my district. I have the St. Lawrence U.S. Memorial. I have the Burin Peninsula Health Care Centre. I have the Dr. S. Beckley Health Centre, and I have the Placentia West Medical Clinic. They're all wonderful, wonderful places, and wonderfully staffed but not enough staff.

I just want to talk – quickly, too – about the St. Lawrence hospital. The St. Lawrence cottage hospital, it's called U.S. Memorial hospital, and U.S. Memorial hospital was built by the Americans. I think I may have said this in the House before, but on February 18, 1942, three American ships went aground off the coast of St. Lawrence. One of those managed to get free. The other two grounded.

We lost over 289 sailors, but 186 were saved. They were saved because the people of St. Lawrence and Lawn lowered themselves down over cliffs and hauled these men to safety – just an amazing thing, in 1942. My father used to tell me about it. He was 12 years old at the time. He said that the parade of bodies going through the town, it was just amazing. It was the largest U.S. naval disaster in U.S. naval history.

The people of St. Lawrence and Lawn got together; they went out, and they saved these many men. As a gift to the community, Roosevelt presented them and built a cottage hospital. It's not standing today, but in its place stands a new health care centre, but the feeling that our people

got this hospital in St. Lawrence because of what they did, that's why we're so protective over that. Just to let you know, and a little bit of history as well.

Mr. Speaker, I have to talk about student employment. I can't sit unless I talk about that. I have a list of communities that received no students this year – none. St. Lawrence, for example, where I live, what is it known for? Soccer – the best soccer program in the province, the soccer capital of Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: Not one student. Not even one – not one.

The St. Lawrence town council, who operates a swimming pool, none. Pool closed, impacting the whole community and surrounding communities – gone. The CYNs that are in the area, two CYNs on the Burin Peninsula, no student. What are we going to do with that? What's going to happen to CYN programming for the summer?

AN HON. MEMBER: Historical societies.

P. PIKE: The historical societies, zero.

Like, that's a little ridiculous – that's a little ridiculous. I'm still waiting, and I asked the minister yesterday if could get a list. No, I couldn't get a list.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're not out.

P. PIKE: It's not out? Okay. All right.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. PIKE: Let's hope, but these are the calls that I'm getting now. If they are coming out, good on you, but I was told yesterday by the minister, I got what I got.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. PIKE: All right. He knows. He's there.

It's important to us that we have these. Our kids in rural Newfoundland and Labrador have to come St. John's to go to school. We don't have the luxury of having our kids at home. I have three children, and most people here have children. We have to send them to school in here if they want to do anything now, because CNA, by the way, is pretty much non-existent in most regions, or the programming is not suitable to them.

So our kids have to come in here, go to school, but they can't get summer jobs to help them along. I mean, come on. I know those people who live in Labrador, your kids either go to New Brunswick or they come in here and so on. It's sad. It's really sad and I'm just hoping that things will change. I've got, I'd say – I'm not exaggerating – at least 12 or 13 emails this morning about students.

In my last few seconds, I'd just like to say that the Burin Peninsula has always been strong. We've weathered storms, economic storms, political storms and all sorts. But we've built strong communities and we've supported one another and we'll continue to do so. We'll never give up.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well done there, the Member for Burin - Grand Brank, absolutely, in terms of recognizing the challenges. The thing about it, in terms of a rural district, when an MHA, no matter what side or where you stand in terms of talking about rural challenges, we all get it. We certainly do and appreciate it.

I always begin with thanking the people of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune for affording

me this opportunity. It is an honourable opportunity to stand here and to talk, some on the budget, some on your district, but it's all relative, Mr. Speaker. Like colleagues have said, last week, we had an opportunity again to visit our districts. I did as well. I visited the hospital in Harbour Breton, chatted with some patients. That day it was a good day in that hospital in terms of patients being seen in a good amount of time.

But I talked to some staff that were very disappointed again that there was no mention in the budget of the 10-bed expansion of the Connaigre Peninsula health care facility in Harbour Breton. But I'm not going to give up on that. It was not just about the long-term care beds; it was about acute-care beds as well and a family care clinic. Again, the staff were disappointed.

I know a lot of people have been talking about the Montreal Canadiens. Well, I'm going to have a little shoutout to them as well. I think in the Bell Centre, if the announcer had been wise the other night, he would have said: Are there any Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the building tonight? I'm sure there would have been a lot of hands, for sure, because I know a lot of people that were there.

I saw on a social media picture this morning, or last night, two men fishing, one with a Leafs jersey and one with a Habs jersey. I'm sure everybody probably seen it. Why am I not catching anything? You need a 'Newhook.' So there we go.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: I know we're all proud. We've certainly had lots of talent, Mr. Speaker, from this province and many have been mentioned. We now have Newhook housing a Habs jersey and couldn't be prouder, for sure, of him, and this province.

That leads me into the importance of recreation and recreational development in this province because we do lack. I know there are a lot in this Chamber here that know this person, Jack Lee. I've known Jack Lee for a long, long time. My son has been in his hockey program. Jack has always been keen on developing more recreation real estate in this province and I support him 100 per cent. The feds, not long ago, certainly mentioned about recreational development and funds for that. I'm hoping that the provincial government is going to take note of that.

We visited many times, whether it was New Brunswick in Moncton or in Halifax, four ice surfaces, and we don't have it here. We should've had it here years ago, but I think we need to look at that as an investment because there's a great return on that. Will it cost? It will cost in order to build it, but I don't think it's a cost. It's an investment into the youth of the province, an investment into the province and it's an investment into, I guess, futures like those of Alex Newhook, who has gone to the professional fields now. They're in the NHL.

We need more investment into recreation from a provincial perspective because it does attract outside interest, outside investment coming in for hockey tournaments. It's not just about ice surfaces. Whether it's basketball, volleyball or other sports as well. We need to expand in recreation, because it is an important part – I know for me, growing up, your academics were supported by recreation. It went hand in hand, for sure, for me and certainly following on for my family as well.

Moving from recreation to the fishery, I'd like to just reference a few important stats in terms of the aquaculture industry that's in my district, but it's not just in my district, it's in the whole of the province and how important it is.

Aquaculture in Newfoundland and Labrador – employment – there are approximately

2,500 people, that's big employment workforce; \$185 million annual production value and that can go higher and it will go higher; \$785 million in economic activity generated, not just in the rural parts of the province but this is the province as a whole. That's upwards of close to a billion dollars and it will get there.

Speaker, \$290 million in GDP, and did you know that 100 per cent of mussels grown in Newfoundland are certified organic, that goes to the quality of a product on the world markets; 120 million meals to Canadians and the world from aquaculture; 19,900 tons of seafood farmed each year; 28 businesses in primary production and not just salmon, trout, there are also oysters and I referenced mussels.

It's a big industry and aquaculture is agriculture. Seafood is the largest agrifoods sector in Newfoundland – a province which imports 90 per cent of its food. Aquaculture is a 14 per cent share of the Canadian aquaculture sector.

I spoke a few times about the importance in my district because there are three fish plants. One in Harbour Breton, one in Hermitage which is salmon and trout, but the one in St. Alban's that has opened recently, is just trout alone. The market is very strong right now for trout because we all know in terms of a product, it depends on the markets. Right now, it's certainly servicing my district well and I know there are investments going on in those plants, further investments and those investments again are into the people that it employs and the communities. They pay taxes. They buy vehicles. That's important to the survival of rural Newfoundland and Labrador communities. I stress the importance of that.

My colleague from Burgeo - La Poile, as well, talked about the food fishery and certainly my colleague from Burin - Grand Bank talked about the food fishery. I think in my district 3Ps, they didn't follow through on

the seven days a week, which was disappointing to them, because it's been alluded to that weather is a big challenge in terms of allowing them to go on the water. But certainly in my district, the food fishery is not what it used to be in terms of the quota, the numbers. It's not there anymore.

I did hear a gentleman on the Southwest Coast talk about we're just asking for fairness. Whether that is the federal minister will look at the bag limits, even a tag system for them, they only want their fair share, and that's not too much to ask for. But I do have concerns as well that I think the limit per boat was lifted.

To me, the first thing that comes to my mind is safety, then how can we police that there won't be more than should be on a vessel, and that's a safety concern. I hope people don't take advantage of that to get more fish, but it needs to be monitored. It needs to be taken into consideration from an enforcement perspective. Because we want people to go on the water, to be fair, because the food fishery is a recreational activity and it benefits our tourism industry as well in this province.

We all know there's a high cost now in terms of fuel to go out and get fish. I hope that this will be a successful season, but on behalf of the people in my district as well, they feel that it's unfair and it is unfair and I think it should have been across the board. So, hopefully, the minister will reconsider that.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in my district, in terms of the fishery we have, lobster is big; halibut and crab not so much. In terms of the crab fishery, from a provincial perspective, talking to other harvesters, they're having an okay year so far. Some are being challenged in areas in terms of catch rates and stuff like that. We hope that it will be a good year for sure, and everyone have a good year and be safe on their vessels and return to their families.

Just moving to Estimates, I did hear the Member for Exploits, the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands, talk yesterday. He admitted when he was on this side, he asked for more; he wanted more. I'm glad he admitted that, because you do. I guess, for all of us, we'll never have enough for our districts. There's a balance and that is the challenge, I guess, for any Finance minister or any government, for sure.

In Estimates, we asked some questions around agriculture, and the minister did tell us that there's a 10-year agricultural plan coming forward, not costed though. As the Minister of Finance likes to talk about, that it was forecasted and everything else, the cost here was not forecasted, but a 10-year agricultural plan, it is needed. I look forward to seeing what that plan is, for sure.

The minister talked yesterday about fires, and he said we have to be ready. We do have to be ready, and we've seen forest fires, I think, increase, and the enormity of these fires is growing unfortunately. We hope there's none this year, but I would say that firefighters will be challenged again this year, for sure, with our weather patterns and everything.

The minister talked about fire mitigation plans, funding for that. My district did receive some funds, and I thank him for that because it's important. I know he recognizes the challenge in rural parts. Also, I asked the question in Estimates about if the region, as a whole, wanted to put in a plan, would they be able to do that, and the answer was yes. I think that's a good thing as well because if there's a regional plan, the communities within that regional plan can help the provincial plan to work more effectively.

The minister talked about the waterbomber. He did say it flip-flopped and all that stuff, but the thing about the waterbomber, even at damaged state, it was valued very highly. I don't make any apologies in terms of

taking direction from the staff within to say hold on to that asset.

I think it was damaged in 2018, but when I was there in 2021, maybe, in TI I think it was, then we had a lot of discussions around should we sell it to get a lot of money. When you have a valuable asset such as that, I make no apologies that we did hold on to it.

Now, during that time, fires were not at the level that they are at now. So we became more challenged with fires. So now we have an asset; we probably need to repair it to have it in our system.

Again, every year and every minister will ask the staff the same thing, are we ready to fight fires this season? Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. When staff tell you that, you take trust in that in terms of making your decisions moving forward, and I always received that from the staff. If staff had said to me that you need to go a different direction with regard to that waterbomber, then I certainly would have, and would have presented to government to do the same. But the cost of that water bomber and repairs was forecasted and budgeted last year, and the RFP went out last year, early in the year, when we were in government.

At the end of the day, listen, in terms of credit, we now have another asset on the ground and it will be in the air to help fight fires in this province to keep communities safe. I've said it before, fighting fires, you can have a lot of water bombers, but the state of the fire determines if the water bomber leaves the ground or not, and that's determined by officials that monitor it.

In terms of resources for fighting fires, Mr. Speaker, a Bird Dog certainly is another asset that can be used. We had discussions around that. The government will see wisdom in that, and the training centre in Gander, I believe, can become, not just a training centre in Newfoundland and Labrador, but an Atlantic training centre that

can provide training for other Atlantic provinces.

I know when we were in discussions, other Atlantic provinces were very interested in the idea that we had around the Atlantic training centre. It's in Central Newfoundland and Labrador, so centrally located to benefit many. I know people down in my district would welcome it in terms of being adjacent to the central piece, to have that training for them.

As I said, in terms of the firefighting plan, the minister said yesterday, we will be fair. I believe you will, and we will monitor that, but I take trust in those words in terms of being fair. He did list my district as getting over \$2 million.

In rural districts, as well, in terms of firefighting, there is a greater need because fire departments don't have the fundraising capacity or capabilities of bigger centres. I think a lot of those funds certainly go to those rural districts because of that. That is a good plan. We need to do more and I know there is more investment coming in terms of firefighting in this province.

Again, on the fisheries and the Atlantic Fisheries Fund, I know it's cost shared between feds and provincial, but we didn't see anything in the budget for that. I'm a little bit worried about where that will go. I guess it remains to be seen, but a decision will be made. In terms of even the cod plan, we don't know what that's going to be, but we will wait to see, I guess.

Someone said, you know, there are good things in this budget. There are always good things in budgets for sure. I reference home care repairs, increasing funding for that. It is very important because that keeps seniors in their homes and home care workers. That's a good thing for sure, recognizing what they do, because their work is not easy but they provide very valuable work to the seniors of the province.

Mr. Speaker, I can't support the budget because the no investment into the 10-bed extension in Harbour Breton really, really disappointed the people in my district, but I live in hope. We always live in hope that the Finance Minister is taking notes right now and said we will do this. I look forward to getting that response from him and his government.

AN HON. MEMBER: He got no ink left in the pen.

E. LOVELESS: I know he has a lot of ink in his pen.

Just the last minute or so, Mr. Speaker, in terms of resource development, I will have more to say on resource development. In this province, we are blessed with resources from mining to oil. We were never out of the oil business, and I'll speak to that because it has been referenced by the government that we're back in the business; we've never been out of the business. Oil and gas, crude oil production Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore totalled 87.6 million barrels in 2025 – an increase of 14.6 per cent compared with 2024. The corresponding value of production remained on par with '24 levels at 8.4 billion.

F. HUTTON: That's 240,000 barrels a day.

E. LOVELESS: Speaker, 240,000 barrels a day. So I don't think we've been out of the business and to say that is misleading.

In terms of resource development, my time is running short, but I will have more to say on resource development and where we should go and some other comments on other things affecting my district and giving the Minister of Finance some good ideas that he didn't think about in his budget that will probably – it would up his stock, not down it.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I thank you very much for your time.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Seeing the time, I move, seconded by the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, that debate now be adjourned.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, that this House do now recess.

SPEAKER: This House is now in recess until 2 p.m.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I'm prepared to rule on points of order raised by the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair on May 7, 2026.

The Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair raised a point of order under Standing Order 49 in relation to statements made by the Government House Leader during Oral Questions on May 6. The Member advised

that the Government House Leader stated in reference to the Leader of the Official Opposition: "So if he wants to talk about people telling lies, he should have a look in the mirror."

The Member asserts that this statement implies that the Leader of the Official Opposition is telling lies in this hon. House. I have reviewed *Hansard* and have confirmed that the Government House Leader did make the statement leading to the point of order.

Standing Order 49 prohibits unparliamentary language. Allegations of lying, misleading and not telling the truth, as well as other similar language, have been considered on numerous occasions in this House and in other parliamentary institutions. Members will often disagree about facts and argue that certain assertions made by other Members are false.

It is not necessarily unparliamentary to say that a statement made by another Member is not factual. It has been consistently held, however, that it is unparliamentary to suggest that a Member has deliberately stated something that is false or misleading, as this implies a dishonest intent.

After considering the context, tone, manner and intention of the Member, I find that the statement made is unparliamentary. I would ask that the Government House Leader withdraw his remarks.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I withdraw my remarks.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I'm now going to rule on points of privilege and order raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition on May 5, 2026.

The process for raising a point of privilege is set out in Appendix E of the *Members' Parliamentary Guide*. The issue raised must relate to the Member's parliamentary role and an allegation of obstruction must show that a Member was obstructed in parliamentary work, not simply while performing representative duties such as caucus work.

A point of privilege must be raised at the earliest opportunity – if the matter occurs outside the daily sitting of the House or, when the House is adjourned, the Speaker must be given notice. Written notice must be given at least one hour before the sitting time for the House on the day the matter is being raised. The Member raising the possible breach of privilege must concisely lay out the facts constituting the alleged breach.

In this case, while I am satisfied that the point of privilege was raised at the earliest opportunity, the required notice was not provided in advance of the Leader of the Official Opposition raising it. The Leader of the Official Opposition referred to my email of May 4, 2026 – in which I noted that there had been violations of the protocols on photography and videography within the parliamentary precinct – but stated that he is unaware of which Members are being referred to or what consent may have been given.

The facts, as presented, are somewhat speculative in that respect – there is no allegation of specific conduct by a specific individual, as is generally required in raising a point of privilege.

I do, however, wish to comment on the substance of the Leader of the Official Opposition's points. The *Parliamentary Precinct Order* made under the authority of the *House of Assembly Act* defines the parliamentary precinct. The precinct comprises all those areas delineated in paragraphs 2(a) to (i) of the order. For present purposes, paragraph 2(a) includes

“the East Block, North Wing, second and third floors of the Confederation Building, including the House Chamber, Speaker and Clerk Offices, Caucus rooms and all corridors and offices within that area.”

Subsection 19.2(4) of the *House of Assembly Act* provides the Speaker with the authority to control and manage the parliamentary precinct. Subsection 19.2(5) states that the Speaker may, subject to an order of the House of Assembly, take any action the Speaker considers necessary for the control and management of the precinct.

Under this authority, Speakers past and present have determined that the designated area in the Chamber foyer, known as the scrum area, is available for use by all Members for the purpose of conducting scrums or interviews. However, any photography or videography in other areas of the parliamentary precinct requires the prior approval of the Speaker.

Taking photos and videos for partisan and political purposes within the precinct is not allowable. This was communicated in my email to Members on December 15, 2025, and reiterated in a second email on May 4, 2026.

With the increased use of social media by both Members and caucus staff, it is increasingly difficult to monitor and enforce this rule. As noted in my email on May 4, there have been compliance issues on both sides of the House.

If there has been some misunderstanding as to the specifics of the rules on photography and videography in the precinct, or as to the nature of consent given by the Speaker, I must take Members at their word on that. I am not prepared to find that there have been any particular breach of privilege in this respect. I do not find that any Member has been obstructed in the performance of their parliamentary duties.

The Leader of the Official Opposition also asserted there has been contempt, as unnamed parties have failed to comply with the established rules or requests to remove photos or videos that have been posted online. As noted above, there have been issues on both sides and there may have been some misunderstanding as to the rule and the nature of the permission given. I do not find contempt in relation to any actions to date.

The Leader of the Official Opposition has stated that if the rule – or my ruling – is not enforced, some Members are being treated differently than others and cannot do their jobs to the same extent as others. I do not find that there has been any inequitable treatment here. Again there have been issues on both sides.

There has been no previous ruling on this issue. The emails sent to date were attempts to clarify the protocol with respect to Members' use of the precinct. By this ruling, however, I am clearly setting out expectations and all Members should comply in the future. There should be no room for misunderstandings going forward.

Finally, the Leader of the Official Opposition raised a point of order under Standing Order 7, which provides that the Speaker is responsible for order and decorum. There is no point of order; this is not a matter of parliamentary procedure in this Chamber.

I appreciate that there has been some confusion in the early days of this General Assembly due to the prolific use of social media both for parliamentary and for political and partisan purposes. The rules with respect to photography and videography within the parliamentary precinct will be forwarded again to all Members with additional details. These rules are the same as those which govern the media in accordance with the Press Gallery Association constitution and the House of Assembly press gallery guidelines.

Caucuses and Members have designated, private spaces within the precinct, for example, Members' offices and caucus rooms, but common spaces such as like the Chamber and surrounding corridors must be a safe and neutral space for all. These spaces should not be used as a backdrop or tool for partisan political purposes.

It is not the role of the Speaker of the House of Assembly service staff to monitor Members' social media. I expect that all Members and staff for which they are responsible will adhere to these rules. Failure to do so could be considered a matter of contempt in the future.

All hon. Members should continue to act honourably and respect the parliamentary precinct. If there are any questions regarding this particular issue or the use of parliamentary precinct in general, I encourage all Members to contact my office for further information.

Thank you.

Today, I would like to welcome to the public gallery Julie Humber, Brian Dunn and Wayne Peddle. They are members of the organizing committee for the Canadian Open 5 Pin Bowling Championships, which is the subject of a Member's statement today.

Welcome to our gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I would also like to welcome to our public gallery Bonnie Morgan and Alana Walsh-Giovannini, who are the co-chairs of Belles with Balls, which is also the subject of a Member's statement today.

Welcome, Bonnie and Alana, as well as a number of other belles and friends, and might I add, thank you for your great work. Very appreciated.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of Gander, Burgeo - La Poile, Burin - Grand Bank, Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde and Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise to recognize Brenda Quinlan-Anderson for her leadership and compassion through the Meals to Give program in Gander.

Since taking it on in 2021 during the pandemic, Brenda has built a network of approximately 3,000 members. Many of those are helpers and sponsors, while more than 400 individuals from over 150 households rely on the program to supplement meals.

Those supported include seniors, low-income individuals, single parents, people facing medical procedures or personal crises, and those without stable housing. Assisted by approximately 30 volunteer drivers, meals are delivered directly to recipients – most of whom have no transportation.

Through donations ranging from one plate of home-cooked leftovers to large catered meals, or excess food ordered for special events, the program thrives. Without any solicitation, business, organizations and individuals want to give to the Meals to Give program.

Brenda manages every aspect of the program from coordinating members and volunteers, record keeping, working with restaurants on best prices, accepting and storing donations, plus organizing all of the deliveries and donations.

When someone once told her, "You saved me," I've heard her reply, "Doing this saved me too."

Mr. Speaker, Brenda's work and the work of her volunteers and supporters, it reflects the very best of community and I'd invite all hon. Members to help me recognize her and their good work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

M. KING: Speaker, Burgeo - La Poile has so many incredible places and communities that make it a destination that every Newfoundlander and Labradorian should visit as we head into the summer tourism season.

Our district is home to the historic Rose Blanche Lighthouse, a landmark that continues to draw visitors to our coast. In the gateway community of Port aux Basques, Scott's Cove Park offers a vibrant waterfront with music, local artists and the welcoming spirit our region is known for.

Travellers can take a scenic boat ride into Grey River and La Poile, two communities surrounded by dramatic cliffs and untouched wilderness. In Ramea, growing ecotourism opportunities invite visitors to explore island trails, seabird habitats and the beauty of life on the coast.

Hikers can walk Harvey's Trail in Isle aux Morts, while the Cape Ray Lighthouse and museum offer a look into our maritime history. The scenic community of Burnt Islands continues to impress with its coastal views.

Families can experience a camping trip of a lifetime at Burgeo Sandbanks Provincial Park and adventure seekers can try shark fishing with Margaree Outfitters.

Speaker, Burgeo - La Poile is a place of beauty, heritage and adventure. I encourage everyone to make it a part of their summer plans.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a group that inspires the communities and people they interact with. Started in 2008 by Ada Hollett and instructors Emily Papail and Mary Bungay, the Decade Dancers from the communities of Grand Bank and Fortune are keeping the traditional forms of dancing, including the lancers, alive.

The group shares their talents at many functions, including seniors' clubs, long-term care facilities and community gatherings. Their enthusiasm and friendly smiles warm the hearts of those who experience their performance. The dancers have also developed lasting bonds and have become friends as well as performers. During COVID, they received a grant and delivered food packages to people isolating, including our seniors.

These individuals are true volunteers and are constantly learning traditional Newfoundland and Labrador dances to entertain others. Just recently, they worked with Memorial University as part of a research project looking at the art of traditional dancing in our province. They exemplify lifelong learning and that we can all continue to grow and make positive contributions to our communities.

I ask everyone to join me in recognizing the Decade Dancers and all they do to keep our traditions alive and our communities better places to live.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a true piece of history and culture in our province, the Bay de Verde Heritage Premises and its main attraction, the historic Blundon Heritage House.

Build in 1896 by John Blundon, a local merchant, this beautiful property is the perfect example of Newfoundland and Labrador's rich fishing and merchant history. From its grand family quarters to the fishermen's rooms, all the way to the room of a modest servant, every corner of this house reflects the lifestyle and traditions of our culture.

Thanks to the generosity of Ms. Dorothy Blundon and her family, the house was donated to the Town of Bay de Verde in 1996 and was then turned into a heritage structure in 1999. In the time since they've opened, the Heritage Committee has earned both the Southcott Award and the Manning Award for outstanding achievement in heritage restoration.

Speaker, one of my favourite parts about the Heritage House is you are always welcome to stop in for a cup of tea and a raisin bun. Both of which I will enjoy at some point over the summer.

I ask all Members to join me in recognizing this local treasure, the Blundon House of Bay de Verde.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: I rise today to recognize a group of very determined women, most of whom reside in Conception Bay East - Bell Island and, as you noted earlier today, are here with us in the gallery. They are part of a fantastic group known as Belles with Balls.

The mission of Belles with Balls is to raise money for ovarian cancer research and education while promoting overall women's health in Newfoundland and Labrador. They have done just that, Speaker, surpassing the one-million-dollar mark this year –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: Speaker, I am proud to say that all that money stays right here in Newfoundland and Labrador to fund ovarian cancer research.

Belles with Balls was co-founded in 2018 by Portugal Cove-St. Philip's residents Bonnie Morgan and Alana Walsh-Giovannini. Bonnie has been dealing with a recurring form of ovarian cancer and I'm so delighted to see her feeling a little bit better today and here with us. As well, Alana lost her mother to the ovarian cancer.

Facing these challenges, together they decided it was time to help battle this insidious disease. They work tirelessly with provincial fundraisers and community events to fund treatment and perhaps, someday, help find a cure.

Bonnie Morgan and Alana Walsh-Giovannini are the co-chairs of Belles with Balls but they have lots of help. The other members are Kaitlyn Jarvis, Barbi King, Janice Ryan, Victoria Ryan, Karen Stapleton and Hayley Wilson. 9

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members of this hon. House to join me in applauding the ongoing efforts of Belles with Balls.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Good job.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to celebrate a significant milestone of an organization dedicated to learning and literacy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council has helped thousands of people improve their basic skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy.

On May 22, the council will celebrate its 40th anniversary.

Speaker, when you teach reading and writing skills, you are also helping people build their confidence, strengthen their self-esteem and accomplish everyday tasks that many of us take for granted.

The council's commitment to literacy is reflected in its initiatives for people of all ages.

Its programs help adult learners increase their literacy and essential skills, help provide additional reading, writing and numeracy activities to students from kindergarten to Grade 12, and help people with technology and financial literacy for the modern world.

Speaker, many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are better off today because of the Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council.

Congratulations to the tutors, founders, volunteers and learners whose lives have been changed by the council.

I invite all hon. Members to join me in celebrating the Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council and wish them the best of luck in the next 40 years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: I thank the hon. minister for a copy of his statement.

Speaker, the Official Opposition joins in recognizing the Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council on the occasion of their 40th anniversary. There is no doubt that the thousands of people they help improve their basic skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy. These people are now better able to meet the challenges faced in life because of the work of the Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council.

The Laubach Literacy Council provides the fundamental building blocks of education, which subsequently enables people to engage in complex tasks, pursue gainful employment and personal independence, and become active, civic participants.

We also acknowledge the efforts of the tutors and the founders of the foundation, and continue to encourage and support those individuals who avail of the support provided –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

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

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

We, too, applaud the work that the Laubach Literacy Council has put into improving literacy skills. In the province with the lowest adult literacy score, we should be doing more to support such groups and improve access to resources.

This government must take the problem seriously, and that begins with increased investment in our public libraries' network. Please work with the PILRB to enact its future state plans so that it can offer all the services of a modern library system.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate an incredible showing by Newfoundland and Labrador talent at the 38th East Coast Music Awards in Sydney, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

This prestigious event, which runs from May 20 to May 24, brings together artists, industry professionals and fans, featuring live performances and awards that celebrate the sound of Atlantic Canada.

Speaker, we have 36 nominees from Newfoundland and Labrador across a wide range of music and industry categories.

Artists from this province are excelling locally, nationally and globally, and we are committed to creating an environment where they continue to succeed and thrive.

Our government is strengthening the cultural, arts and heritage sectors, supporting economic development, community vitality and professional growth across the province – for all of us.

But most importantly, Speaker, we celebrate Newfoundland and Labrador's cultural sector and its many social and economic contributions.

To the nominees from this province – we'll be cheering you on at home as you showcase the incredible talent, dedication and creativity thriving in our arts and cultural community.

Good luck to all of you.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

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

Speaker, we're pleased to join government in celebrating the remarkable success of Newfoundland and Labrador artists at this year's East Coast Music Awards. Thirty-six nominees from our province is something we can all take pride in, and it reflects the strength and creativity of our cultural community.

Speaking of music, Speaker, I also want to acknowledge this morning's exciting news that St. John's will host the 2027 Canadian Country Music Awards.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: This is a major opportunity for our tourism and cultural sectors and a chance to showcase our province on a national stage.

While we celebrate these achievements, we also look forward to hearing more about how government plans to support long-term growth in the arts and culture industries which contributes so much to our economy and to the identity of Newfoundland and Labrador.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I extend congratulations to all nominees –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Member's time has expired.

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 want to wish all the nominees from our province the best of luck. We'll be rooting for you.

In the meantime, we want to make sure that more artists are able to afford to dedicate their time to their craft, and that means paying them for the work that we all enjoy. This is why we call on government to increase funding levels for music artists as creative and cultural drivers so they can have financial security and stability.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

J. HOGAN: You timed it well, Speaker.

Speaker, it is important that the public hear from the Churchill Falls panel. What is also important is that we're able to see their work. Who did they talk to? Who provided evidence? What did they say? The public needs to know how the conclusions were reached in order to have confidence in the recommendations that are in the report.

So will the Premier, the leader of this province, insist that the information be provided to the public?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, the real issue here is not the panel. It's the MOU that the former Liberal government signed and defended that looked exactly like and contained like the 1969 agreement. That's the problem. An MOU that we now realize needed more power, more transmission and more value.

Let me quote from the IRC report that says that it concludes – and I'll read it – the IRC concludes that despite the benefits, the MOU in its current form is not in the public interest. I was glad to hear that the Leader of the Opposition agrees with that recommendation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, with all due respect, this government has moved on from the MOU so it is about the report; it is about what the panel has said. If that's what they're going to rely on to get the negotiations going with Hydro-Québec, it is so important that everybody knows what was in that report.

Speaker, kids in elementary school learn you have to show your work or you don't get full marks. So why won't the Premier make sure that this panel shows their work to the public?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Once again, Speaker, let me talk about the MOU that the Members opposite voted for when they were in government that saddled the future generations that he just spoke about with amazing debt.

Let me quote the independent review again: The government required terms that were leading to unpaid debt and equity balances at the end of the PPA – creating risk for the shareholders and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Page 27, Speaker, and we all know the shareholders are Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Why don't he tell the people of the province why they voted for the MOU?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: The Premier may not realize he's making my point for me. He's reading out information that we have no idea where it came from. Who provided that information? Who spoke to the panelists? How did they get that information? What were the discussions?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: We don't know any of this. All we know is we have a document from three people who won't speak to the public because the Premier won't let them. We have information that we don't know where it came from.

So if the Premier wants to rely on the report, on this panel, why –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: – won't he insist, as Premier of this province, that the information he's quoting be disclosed to the public?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, the information I'm quoting is in the MOU. That's the point.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: We're talking about an MOU that they all voted for. Let's talk about that for a second, Speaker. Let's talk about the 2 per cent escalator clause and the \$30-billion debt after the amortization period.

They turned around, did not listen to their own negotiators, did not listen to their own financial advisors, yet voted for an MOU that contained that very information. I ask the Member opposite again, go take a look at page 27.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I wish the Premier was this concerned about the MOU when we debated it in the House of Assembly. He's talked more in the last three minutes than he ever did in the last year and a half about the MOU.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Transparency and accountability are crucial when dealing with matters of such long-term significance to our province. Guess what? Those aren't my words; those are the words of the Premier when he was on the other side of the House. We held an unprecedented debate

in this House with our negotiators and experts on this deal.

On what date will the Premier live up to his words, open the House and let Newfoundlanders and Labradorians hear what the panel has heard, so everyone knows where this government stands on this deal?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Once again, Speaker, I would ask that the Members opposite, maybe if they had to take a closer look at the MOU themselves, they wouldn't have signed it. He now says, no, it's not good enough. It's great to hear the Leader of the Opposition say it's not good enough. I appreciate that, but they shouldn't have signed it in the first place.

At the end of the PPA, due to both the 2 per cent revenue escalation and misaligned 65-year amortization, there will be a debt in dividends and equity obligations of over \$30 billion, repeating the failures of the 1969 contracts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: That's exactly what this bunch over there were about to do. So do they even know what they voted for when they voted for MOU?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Yes, Speaker, when we voted and we did our job as MHAs, we knew exactly what we were doing.

As the Premier moves forward with the new deal –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm going to start naming people again.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: As the Premier moves forward toward a new deal with Hydro-Québec, if he gets that deal, will this new deal be reviewed by an independent panel which will be accountable to the public?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me address some of the preamble. Let me tell you what the former government did.

They interfered during negotiations. They went over the head of their own negotiators. They didn't follow the advice of their own advisors. They interfered to the detriment of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They forced terms for political gain, which resulted in – not my words, Mr. Speaker, but the words of the report – a riskier and more expensive deal.

Did the Members opposite even know what they were voting for?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, at some point in time, the Premier is going to have to take

responsibility for the future of this province and the deal with Hydro-Québec.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: Speaker, a new deal will be different from what this panel reviewed.

Given the Premier's stance on reviews and how important they are, how can the public be assured that any deal he signs, if it's not reviewed, is in the best interest of the province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, we have done exactly what we said we were going to do. We hired an independent review committee –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – they presented a report. They clearly have outlined where this –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm not asking for order again. I'm serious. Members are going to be named and, speaking privileges are going to be taken away. I've had enough.

The Premier.

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, we have clearly identified how we're going to move forward. We're going to move forward and look for more power, more transmission and more value for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Because they are the people that deserve this and they are the people

who we are working for in this institution, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, if we're going to look for more power, more transmission and more money, I ask – because Hydro-Québec said this yesterday, no agreement will be reached on terms that are less favourable than in the MOU.

Given that the Premier has said what he will be looking for, what is he prepared to give up in a deal with Quebec?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, unlike the Members opposite, we're not going to sign a deal like 1969. We're going to sign a deal that actually does what I just said we were going to do. We will get more power, we will get more value and we will get transmission. Maybe, like the last MOU, we will not be forced to simply sell our power to Quebec for the next 50 years like they agreed to in the MOU.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, if they get more power and more transmission rights than I ask what will Hydro-Québec ask for? Are we going to give up the risk of the cost overruns and make sure that Muskrat Falls will happen again and we will take responsibility for the overruns? Are we going to give up more money that we were getting when the electricity crosses the border from Labrador into Quebec?

If we get more, we have to give something up, so tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Premier, what you are prepared to give up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll tell you what we're not going to do. We're not going to negotiate in public. We're not going to sign away the future of Newfoundland and Labrador. We're not going to forget about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians like these guys did.

A 2 per cent escalator clause is going to cost the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador \$30 billion at the end of the agreement, and they sold it. They oversold and underdelivered. They tried to convince the public that this was something that it wasn't. Now they're ashamed and embarrassed that they signed it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, if the report is a roadmap to a future deal, can the Premier confirm that everything recommended in this report will find a way into a deal, if he gets one?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: The roadmap to the deal that this Premier is going to sign started in 1969 when they failed to deliver for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, when they started off on a gravel road with the bumps

and never put a culvert in. The roadmap that this Premier is going to sign, when we get the deal, is one that's going to look after Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and our future. It's going to secure electricity so we can develop our resources and be the primary beneficiaries.

They didn't even look at the economic outcomes. Don't take my word. Look at the report. It's clearly written in there. They didn't look at the economic outcomes. They put in an escalation clause that would cost us money. Now they don't want the report to be out there public. They failed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: This is an important question, Speaker, so I'll ask it again.

Rather than deflecting away, will everything that's recommended in the report make its way into a deal, if the Premier gets one?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: I would say anyone that's watching the House this afternoon is wondering why they failed. I can tell you why they failed, because if you listen to the questions that he's asking, he wants a government to publicly negotiate a deal and tell people what they're going to do, show their hand upfront and then go ask for – it's not how it works.

We are going to negotiate the best deal possible and I can tell you what, it doesn't even have to be very –

SPEAKER: I ask the Member for Gander for your cooperation.

L. PARROTT: – good to be better than what they did, but it's going to be a hell of a lot better.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: So if they're not going to rely on the report that they said they were going to rely on, that was the most important part of their election campaign, a report that they've made public, what was the point of it if it's not going to be the roadmap to a new deal?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I don't know if the Members opposite heard me yesterday when I talked about how we would take this report and we would use it as the emphasis, as the roadmap for actually getting a new deal and a better deal for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Maybe he missed that.

Maybe he missed the fact that we've already appointed a new negotiating team that's already in place. It's already doing the work. Maybe he missed the fact that we've turned around and started to already do an analysis on the financial and economic benefits for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, so when we start our negotiations, we will be ready to deliver for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

As the province waited for this report, we lost seven months of negotiating time. Can the Premier guarantee that any new deal

will include retroactive payments back to January 2025?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Almost 60 years the people of Newfoundland and Labrador lost because of the last deal they signed. So, seven months, we're not too concerned about that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk about the path forward with this deal, we have done exactly what we said we were going to do. We have done an analysis, instead of hiding stuff away, secret votes, saying they didn't do it, misleading the public with false claims, how they're going to deliver – false claims right from the very first day that they presented this MOU. One day it's a deal; one day it's not; the next day it's a framework. They don't know what they even signed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll remind the minister opposite that I was three, apparently, when I signed the deal in 1969. But I can tell you, I spent most of my life waiting for the moment to get an MOU, as every other premier did, to try to get it changed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: We brought it to this point.

I ask the Premier, Quebec media are reporting that Hydro-Québec is now looking at options to meet growing power demand without Newfoundland and Labrador.

What options are the Premier looking at in case we lose this opportunity? Are they considering taking all the risk, as they did with Muskrat Falls? Is that why he has hired Danny Williams's people to surround him and advise him, including one who said Muskrat Falls would pay for itself?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, again, I don't know if the hon. Member heard the news yesterday from the Premier of Quebec, who talked about the fact that we've already had discussions; who talked about the opportunities that are there for both Newfoundland and Quebec; who talked about the fact that we will get together again and talk about how we move forward into a new agreement. Maybe they missed all that, Speaker, but the people of Newfoundland and Labrador haven't missed it. They recognize that the MOU that the former Liberal government signed did not provide the value that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve.

We're going to fix that. We're going to get a better deal. We are negotiating. We are prepared to negotiate with the Province of Quebec and they're certainly prepared to negotiate with us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

I did hear the Premier of Quebec, and I heard the Premier of Quebec a few months ago, when she first met with the Premier when he was first elected, say that if we want to change the deal, then they'll be changing their side of it too. So as our

leader asked, what will they have to give up in order to get more?

The Quebec government has also said they're already making alternative plans. How will the Premier explain to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who need more money now for health care, roads and public safety as they promised, when he squanders this money?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: What the Premier is doing is called leading. They should probably take a page out of his book because they certainly didn't when they were over here.

Mr. Speaker, the Member across stands here and he talks about transparency and a path forward. We have planned every step of the way. This has been ongoing since we came into power. We didn't give away 106 Airport Road, we didn't give away Kenmount Road, any of Snow's Lane, any of the things that this former Member admittedly did all on his own and he's standing up talking about integrity. We will get the best deal based on something that they could not do.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Small businesses across our province apply for jobs under the provincial summer students' program. Now after applying, they were told they're not eligible.

Why did the minister waste everyone's time asking them to apply when he had no intention of awarding them any funding for jobs?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Mr. Speaker, our government is very proud to support summer students right across every bay and community in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Summer Employment Program is open. Those applicants that submitted applications and were unsuccessful, they're now going into a queue as funding becomes available.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Definitely not for all of us; definitely not for some small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, as an example, for the first time in years, Labrador Straits Historical Development Corporation, called the gateway to the North, were not awarded funding for summer students.

What does the minister have to say to groups like this across our province who has relied on this funding for decades?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to the summer employment program – like I said, the program is opened and still ongoing – there's also a Newfoundland Wage Subsidy program

that's opened to commercial entities. We will continue to review opportunities to support all businesses across Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think that was not-for-profits, not small businesses. The first question was small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, in Estimates, we learned the minister's department hasn't begun drafting the 2026-2031 Population Growth Strategy, as promised by the blue book.

How can the minister claim population growth is a priority when he is already behind on his own deadline?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Mr. Speaker, our government is not behind on anything. We are leading. We are developing a plan and that's what we are doing with Population Growth, as we are doing with Rural Economic Development. You plan and then you execute. That's something that I wish the other side had learned when they were in power.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I'm asking all Members once again for your co-operation.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the protection.

Speaking of leading, in Estimates, the Minister of Jobs claimed labour issues for massive projects like the Bay du Nord and the floating dry dock are not his responsibility. His department is literally called Jobs, Growth and Rural Development.

If it's not his responsibility in this province for the biggest employment opportunities, who is?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Mr. Speaker, as we saw in both the Throne Speech and in the budget, our government is focused on our traditional industries and creating new industries for Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Right across our province, those will come with labour needs and those labour needs are across government, and we will look to execute on all of it, for all of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

We're told that Celebrate NL is being dissolved and folded into the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, however the \$5-million budget it has traditionally been allocated did not follow into the department.

How will the minister secure private-sector sponsorship of major events without the flexibility of this Crown corporation?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, before I start to answer the question, I just want to say that the CCM Awards are going to be here in Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's, in September of 2027. I'm super excited about that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: And our government is supporting that through what was Celebrate NL. We are giving \$1.3 million –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: – and in the absorption of Celebrate NL into TCAR, there will not be any changes in the grants.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the courts are still closed in regions of this province and, therefore, small claims matters cannot get started.

Does the minister have a plan to help or compensate individuals who missed a limitation period because there was no access to the courts to file a claim?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I can say, first of all, that we are very encouraged by all of the efforts that have been made with respect to the court working group. We know that through investments

that we have made in our budget – which it's interesting that the Member opposite neglects to acknowledge any of those investments, especially with respect to the courts, that we are going to be able to see improvements throughout the entire justice system including the courts in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We're very excited about these investments. We're looking forward to seeing the courts roll out in terms of the operations of the courts and we look forward to that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Speaker, the minister can say all she wants that the courts are still not open, those are the facts and if she was listening to her working group, Speaker, she would have supported sheriff's officers in the budget, but I digress.

Does the minister plan to compensate people who aren't able to recover money that they are owed for long periods of time because they can't get a trial or a judgment while the courts are closed?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I can say with respect to the court issue, and I think another important point has been overlooked, I think we need to acknowledge the masters of deflection that the Member opposite and the former administration engage in. This total lack of any responsibility for the actions that they, while they were in government, for 10 years has to be acknowledged in order to be genuine.

I also would like to address the preamble when it comes to the sheriff's officers. I have been meeting with NAPE and with officials there with respect to improving the situation on recruitment of sheriff's officers and we're looking forward to progress on that as well.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, shamefully, we continue to see heritage buildings torn down, not just in my District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, but in communities across the province. Once these buildings are gone, they are lost forever. Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador, alongside community members, historians and folklorists continue fighting to preserve stories, culture and identity that these places represent.

So I ask the minister: Will government ensure meaningful financial incentives under the *Historic Resources Act* so that communities can actually afford to keep up these historic buildings?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, that was a great question. Our historic properties and our heritage homes are very, very important to our culture and our heritage here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We do have two separate pots that we can work with here. We have the heritage homes and we have the Historic Sites.

Heritage homes can be applied for by people, residents of personal property. Private property owners can apply for this to get grants to get their homes recognized

and then these grants can be used for maintenance and restoration.

We also have Historic Sites and we have historic buildings. These Historic Sites, they go from Mistaken Point –

SPEAKER: The minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, during Estimates, the Minister of Mines and Energy said that if the Churchill Falls MOU doesn't proceed government is considering all kinds of opportunities to send power to Labrador such as the expansion of Bay d'Espoir, wind opportunities, Gull Island, expansion of Churchill Falls I and II, thermal generation and, best of all, rediverting power from Muskrat Falls. All these require construction of a transmission line – something actually contemplated in the MOU.

So will the Premier admit that other than a list of this brainstorming exercise, his government has no plan to get power to Labrador for economic expansion?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While this Premier had the foresight to understand that the MOU was flawed and that it didn't present proper economic opportunities; that it would cost Newfoundlanders and Labradorians an immense amount of money at the end. That was really no different than what Joey's Liberals and the current-day Joey Liberals want to decide from 1969 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: He had an Independent Review Panel come out with the solutions as to how we make this better while that Member voted in support of it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party – quick question.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's true, we voted. We did vote.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: We did our job.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

J. DINN: A simple question: In light of the fact –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DINN: In light of the fact that people received their power bills yesterday – and thank god for rate mitigation – what measures will the Premier take to make sure that rate mitigation continues beyond 2030?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for a quick reply.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I'd inform my hon. colleague that we do take and realize the affordability in Newfoundland and Labrador, that is one option when we're looking at relief within the hydroelectricity and what residents pay. There are many levers that we can use as well. We're cognizant and we are discussing

as far as future affordability measures within the government – good governance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: The health care system is critically strained and it is imperative to continue to improve the level of health care throughout our province. The Western region is facing many challenges and any disruption or changes in our patient care delivery can have an impact.

It is my understanding that in the coming weeks, there will be a disruption of kidney related referrals at Western Memorial Regional Hospital, where patients are being referred to St. John's for initial assessment, with follow ups and treatments being held at Western Memorial. Any changes like this will result in patients from the West Coast having to wait for longer assessments and having to incur expenses.

I ask the minister: Are you aware of these changes in procedure, and what is being done regarding recruitment efforts at Western Memorial for additional doctors for Western Newfoundland?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I'd like to thank the MHA for Humber - Bay of Islands for his question; it's a very good question. In actual fact, two parts to it.

First off, I wasn't aware of any referrals to St. John's, but that's an important issue and that will be looked into. Also, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services do have a recruitment right now for a nephrologist for the Western Zone to make sure that they can meet the needs. Right now, they're not

aware of any patients being turned away, Speaker.

I will look into what the Member asked me about patients being referred to St. John's. We will actually take action to try to get this taken care of.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: I thank the minister for that answer and looking into it.

Mr. Speaker, the MSC has awarded the contract for the demolition and removal of the *Baltic III* in Lark Harbour. Starting July 1, I've been advised that 500 trucks filled with steel will be travelling along Route 450 to Stephenville. There is some work being carried out on Route 450 by the department this summer, which is the paving and ditching.

I ask the minister: Will your department contact and work with the contractors to coordinate the slated work by your department this summer and ensure that any damage to Route 450 due to the salvage operations will be repaired by the insurance company or your department?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for a quick response. We're running out of time on the clock here.

B. PETTEN: Okay, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: I thank the Member for the question.

It's kind of news to me, but anywhere where there's insurance companies trucking out material and it's going to do damage to our roads, that causes me concern so I will ask officials to check with that insurance company.

I don't think us, as a province, should have to pay for it, but I do believe the insurance companies trucking over our roads causing damage, it should be their responsibility and I'll have officials look into it for you.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has now expired.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: Today, being Private Member's Day, I call upon the Member for Windsor Lake to begin the debate on the private Member's motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

This is the first PMR that I've initiated so it's a real honour to talk about this important issue today for Newfoundland and Labrador kids living here in our province. This is about social media.

SPEAKER: I would ask that you move and second it.

J. HOGAN: Sorry. See, I said it was my first time.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, the following motion – I have to read the whole thing?

SPEAKER: We need it for the record.

J. HOGAN: WHEREAS social media continues to play a significant role in the lives of children and youth, often exposing them to cyberbullying and harmful content and online exploitation; and

WHEREAS parents, guardians, educators, mental health professionals and child advocates continue to raise concerns about the effects social media can have on the development, mental health and well-being of young people; and

WHEREAS the Government of Manitoba has announced plans to introduce legislation to ban social media and AI chatbot access for youth under the age of 16, while other jurisdictions around the world like Australia, France and Norway have also moved toward stronger protections for children online; and

WHEREAS in 2025 the Liberal government recognized the harm excessive cellphone use can have on students by implementing restrictions on personal electronic devices in schools, measures which educators have reported are having positive impacts.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to consult with parents, guardians, educators, youth, mental health experts and technology professionals to develop measures that prioritize child safety, privacy and healthy development.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to examine legislative and regulatory changes to restrict or prohibit access to social media for children under the age of 16; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House call upon the Government of Canada to work with provinces and territories to establish national standards to better protect children online.

I guess, note to self, Speaker, make my PMR a little bit shorter next time. I just cost myself two minutes, but you live and learn.

As I was saying before I procedurally made a mistake, this is about protecting children under the age of 16 in our province. We've heard comments in the House about children being the most valuable resource we have and I couldn't agree more. We have a responsibility as legislators, Members of the government and Members of the Opposition, as well, to look after future generations. What's more important than when we know an issue is facing our children, we know there's an issue that's damaging our children and hurting our children, I think we have a responsibility to act on that.

If you look at the PMR, it initially talks about social media playing a significant role in the lives of children and youth. I don't think that's really up for debate.

I remember when I got my first cellphone, I was 25 years old. Certainly, I think texting was exciting at that point in time. I remember actually someone telling me they had a phone and they texted and I said, why would you text someone when you can just pick up the phone and call them? Now, if you're phone rings you say, why is that person calling me, they should be texting me. So we've come a long way in the last couple of decades.

Then, of course, texting got more prevalent, the Internet got more prevalent, Facebook, Twitter, social media and now we're in a whole new world that my kids are seeing that I'm not involved in. There are a lot of upsides to social media. There are a lot of good things that can come of it. It brings communities together. It gives people an opportunity to meet people where they want to talk about certain things, that maybe they don't feel confident or comfortable talking about with other people that are close to them. You can reach out to people all around the world, stay in touch with family

and friends and meet new people all around the world.

That stuff is great, but there is a huge downside that has come with the proliferation of the Internet and social media across the country and certainly here in Newfoundland and Labrador. So it's not lost on anyone that it is having an effect on our children. As it says in the beginning of the preamble, it exposes our kids to cyberbullying, harmful content and online exploitation.

Speaker, while I think we all know that to be true, I think it's important to backup anything you're saying with facts. I just have some facts I want to read out here. For example, from the Government of Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada, which has found that problematic social media use among adolescents is associated with poor psychological well-being, emotional problems, lower life satisfaction, cyberbullying and school and social functioning difficulties. The developmental and social concerns identified in Canadian research shows that there are reduced attention spans, disruptive sleep patterns, increased loneliness, social isolation, body image issues, exposure to harmful or exploitative content, cyberbullying, decreased physical activity, academic difficulties and delayed emotional and social development.

Canadian Pediatrics Society has warned of growing evidence linking social media use with adverse mental health impacts on youth, heightened risks since the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns surrounding cyberbullying, harmful content exposure, body image pressures and addictive platform design.

The CPS, the Canadian Paediatric Society, said this and this is a quote from them: We are in the midst of a youth mental health crisis. Excessive screen and social media use can negatively affect sleep, emotional

regulation, attention, self-esteem and healthy social development.

Any parent reading all of this I'm sure already knows that this exists but seeing it from the Paediatric Society and the Public Health of Canada, I think it really might send some shivers up and down parents' spines. When the word crisis is used, I think it's incumbent on us, not only in Newfoundland and Labrador, but across the country, to not wait and to take steps now.

Why are we allowing our children to continue to be exposed to all these things, all these ills that are having these negative effects on our children? They're not able to learn. They're not able to socialize. They're having body-image issues. They're meeting people online that they certainly shouldn't be talking to. The risks are just really, Speaker, out of control.

As I said, if the legislators, people elected in Newfoundland and Labrador to do things, to protect our children, aren't going to do something about this, well who is?

I have two little kids. They're nine years old and four years old. I guess I would admit that they do have their own tablets and they do spend quite a bit of time on their tablets. We're careful about it. We make sure that the content that they watch and what they use their tablets for is limited. It gets away from you sometimes. Just as a little example, my little four-year-old, he might watch these short little videos. He hears some things maybe he shouldn't hear on it. He sees kids acting a certain way and his behaviour changes within minutes. He kind of starts acting like them. It's not really appropriate. So we have to make sure we take it away from him. But you see a four-year-old change their personality in a matter of minutes, it's pretty scary.

I went home last night and told Maggie, my daughter, I said, Daddy presented a petition in the House of Assembly to take away your Internet and your social media, your tablet. I

can tell you, she said, Daddy, no. She freaked out at me, but I don't think she knows that I don't quite have the authority I used to eight or nine months ago to do that. I did scare her a little bit and she got a little bit worried. I did explain to her why we were doing it and why we needed to talk about it. She knows, as well, that there can be some dangers out there with social media.

You see kids, kind of, work in groups and maybe they leave people out and they bully people on the other side. It's just not how we want our kids to be in this world.

The good news about my little four-year-old is he was playing a little game with his tablet with himself. This was only two days ago and he had it on the counter and he was pulling it out, the iPad, to see how far it would go before it fell down. It fell down and it smashed to pieces. So he doesn't have his iPad anymore. But do you know what? He was so good about it. He realized it was gone and he realizes it was his fault. When I came home, yesterday, he didn't have it there and do you know what he said? Daddy, will you play with me? How great is that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: He would rather have the iPad, but kids are resilient and they find other things to do. If we're going to stick an iPad in front of them, if we're going to stick computers in front of them, that's what they're going to do. That's what they're going to use. That's where the danger is. That's where the traps are. That's where the things are that we can't control as parents all the time. Certainly, when they're in school, we can't control it, and with their friends, we can't control it.

So we need to take those steps to look at how we can, as a province, do things to limit the exposure that our children are suffering from this. It's not going to be an easy thing to do. When I looked at it and what other countries are doing, no other province has

taken this step. I know that the Government of Manitoba is looking at it. But I think we need the help of all our provinces and the Government of Canada to look at how we deal with this as a society and as a country.

But why can't Newfoundland and Labrador be a leader in this? Why can't we take some first steps? Why can't we consult and say: What are the options to restrict this use for children in our province? As I said, if we're not protecting our children, as government, as Members of the Opposition, as 40 people elected to look after children in this province, who is going to do it?

So I think this is a very important PMR. I come at it a little bit from a selfish standpoint, seeing my kids grow up with the tablets that I never had. We think back nostalgically about our lives and my parents sort of kicked me out the door and I would just be in the park all day. As long as I was home by supertime, it was okay. Kids don't really do that anymore. But we need to encourage them to do that.

Like, with Jack, my son, if he breaks his iPad, he finds other ways to entertain himself. He'll find other ways to play. If we've got to help parents and help kids by taking away their social media so they can find those other ways, they'll find it and they'll be okay. Not only will they be okay; they'll be much better for it.

So I look forward to hearing from Members in the next couple of hours about this. I'd be surprised if people didn't all agree with this. I'm not sure what the answers are, but I think part of this is starting the discussion so we can at least look at what the potential answers are. When we find them, Newfoundland and Labrador should lead the way in implementing those answers for our kids here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

There's certainly nothing selfish about safety of our children. That should be paramount. This PMR is about children, but it's also about our teachers, our classrooms, our parents, our families, our communities. This affects everyone and it's not a partisan piece. This affects every district, every family, everyone that we need to address.

I always say it's people helping people. That's what it's about. Our most valuable resource – I know you're sick of hearing me say it, but it's true – our children and our youth are our most valuable resource.

I can say in the many, many years I've been coaching youth – in fact, this is the first year in 31 years I'm not coaching soccer, simply because I wanted to make sure I had time, so here we are over here. But one of our mottos was field time over screen time and getting more and more children out doing activities in the fresh air and staying away from the computers and laptops and that.

I'm confident all Members in this House of Assembly will agree that the health and safety of our children is paramount to this. We all work to ensure that our children are safe, teachers have safe classrooms, staff are safe, our schools and our communities and at home, that children aren't being exposed to things on social media that, back in the day when I was growing up, you wouldn't even think of.

This is a great PMR as far as I'm concerned. Again, this is why governments, past and present, are working on things like the *Safe and Caring Schools Policy*. That's something we're working to update. It hasn't been updated since 2013, but we're going to work towards that. Times change, things

advance, especially when you're talking about technology. That moves at a lot faster pace than we think here.

So some of the things we're going to do when we're updating this policy are include up-to-date, evidence-based best practices. We are going to recognize the realities of the school system in 2026. We want to be informed by national comparison, stakeholder consultations and data analysis. The review of this policy will help reduce and prevent bullying problems among school children; improve the relations of students in each other and at school; ensure that educators in pre-kindergarten and K-to-12 receive the necessary training and is updated in policy we're looking at; build social and emotional understanding; reduce aggression and improve pro-social behaviour; and that list goes on.

As the Member opposite said, this is something we want to be a leader in. We know it's not an easy fix. There are things we can do step by step. We have to start doing it immediately. All of these things that we put together combined will lead to a better environment, a better community, better education and early learning.

At the end of the day, we're working to keeping our schools safe, keeping our children safe, and that goes more than just physical altercations. That's serious enough on itself, but some of that is driven by what's seen on social media.

We live in a modern world. I mean, when we were growing up, there was always threats of getting hurt and falling down, and that's followed along, it's just become more complicated in some of the areas, especially when we're dealing with social media. We know there are many social media apps that could potentially lead to harm. This could come from the form of attacks from unknown sources. It could be from anonymous sources, neighbours, friends, family. When you go on some of these sites, you don't know where it's coming from.

Like other forms of technology, social media is imbedded in societal norms that will continue to exist. But we can offer a positive experience – we have to work on it – if it's used properly. Social media has been proven to be a source of timely information, connection information, sharing news and networking. But there is a growing pressure worldwide to restrict access to certain social media sites and chatbots for youth under the age of 16.

As was mentioned, we have other places like Australia and Manitoba who are looking at legislation in those respects. I'll give an example. When I came into this portfolio, early in the New Year, we had the Tumbler Ridge travesty that happened in BC. We had a meeting amongst my counterparts, a Zoom meeting. It was chaired by my colleague in BC, and that was driven by a ChatGPT site that a young man was looking for a way to go in and do what he did. We need to look at stuff like that. We need to ensure that that's monitored and that those of age don't have access to it.

A part that came out of that discussion we had, it's educational. It sends up a red flag for parents and teachers and guardians whose children are on laptops and computers and all that, and we need to monitor that. The responsibility also falls on those providers.

One thing that came out of that was a very quick, little motto: Report don't repost. That says a lot because that's what happens. Most of us see stuff on the Internet and on social media and we don't report it. Most of the times, we repost it. So that's something we can consider as we move forward.

Again, this is a non-partisan issue. It's something we should all be working towards. In my limited two minutes, I'm going to offer an amendment. I move, seconded by the Member for the wonderful District of Lewisporte - Twillingate, that the private Member's resolution be amended as follows:

That the fourth WHEREAS clause be amended by deleting the word “Liberal” and substituting the word “provincial”;

That the first THEREFORE clause be amended by deleting the word “develop” and substituting the words “identify potential”;

That the first BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED clause be amended by deleting the word “examine” and substituting the words “gather information on the experiences of other jurisdictions who have implemented such measures to better understand their outcomes and use this and other research to fully assess the benefits and risks of potential”; and

J. HOGAN: Extremely petty.

P. DINN: I hear the Leader of the Opposition, all this is being very petty. This is non-partisan.

SPEAKER (Dwyer): Order, please!

With the amendment brought forward, we’ll have to take a recess so we can see if the amendment is in order.

P. DINN: I’m not finished the amendment.

SPEAKER: Okay, you can finish the amendment.

P. DINN: I was interrupted, unfortunately.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. DINN: Student safety, there is nothing petty about student safety – nothing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: And the last, that in the second BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED by deleting the word “establish” and adding the words, “explore the potential for.”

That is the amendment.

SPEAKER: With the amendment brought forward, we will now recess to assess the amendment, if it’s in order.

Recess

SPEAKER: Are the House Leaders ready?

Order, please!

Upon deliberation of the amendment, I find that the amendment is not in order.

The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Advanced Education and Skills.

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

That’s unfortunate, but it doesn’t change the role of the PMR. As I said when I started, this is a provincial issue. It’s an issue that all 40 Members of the House should be concerned about.

If people take offence to the amendment, which is now not in order, that’s fine. That’s their prerogative but I think from all of us here, in this House, we really, truly have to work together to ensure that issues around social media in the hands of our children that are being used in other manners is done in a proper way that keeps them safe, keeps our communities safe and keeps our classrooms safe.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Thank you for the ruling on that matter for sure. I’ll pick up on a word, I think, that was said by one of my colleagues before me. I can’t remember if it was the Leader of the

Opposition or the Minister of Education. I don't want to give credit where credit is not due, but I will say both spoke very well about where we need to go.

Let's be leaders here today. We had the opportunity in the House to be leaders when it came to presumptive cancer coverage for volunteer and career firefighters. We were leaders in the country; 19 presumptive cancers were covered. We were leaders in the country.

The Finance Minister spoke a couple of weeks ago and said we are going to lead the country in GDP growth this year. So let's be leaders. We are doing it. In a couple of those files I just spoke of now, we are doing it.

I, like the Leader of the Opposition, have young children, and this coming forward is a personal thing for me. My two daughters are five and six. I haven't got to the conversations that the Leader of the Opposition and some of the other Members on the opposite side of the House have got to with their teenagers getting into social media. Those challenging conversations are coming for me for sure.

This is going to make it easier for the parent group that I see. I attended a pre-K information session a couple of weeks ago to talk about social media and screen time, and how it affects young minds while they're developing with dopamine and things like that. I won't go into this. This was a doctor that presented to us, and it was a pretty interesting presentation.

I learned an awful lot about that, and kudos to the Education Department for putting this together for parents for the past number of years. It has been great, and I think people tend to learn a significant amount about this.

What we're here to talk about today, as a former Education minister, I think it's a huge opportunity for us, and I think we have alignment across the House. Whether we

agree on a word here or there, I think the tenor of what we're trying to accomplish is important. I want to thank those parents and educators and experts who have raised these concerns with us over the period of time, and I understand.

I'm going to try to be as quick as I can and as succinct as I can because I know there's a significant number of people who want to speak on both sides. I'm going to try to shorten my remarks so that more people will get the opportunity to speak.

We've seen how quick technology has changed, and I think the Leader of the Opposition highlighted some of those things. I never had the bag phone, like some of my colleagues in this House. But I did have a brick cellphone, not a flip phone. I think it's incumbent upon all of us to understand the world is changing fast and, as legislators, we have to change fast with it, especially for these things.

Hearing stories about other jurisdictions, other parts of the world that are leading the charge on this, it's important. We don't need to reinvent the wheel here. We just need to start to look and start to roll the car. Moving this the right way, for us, is important.

UNICEF Canada has said and warned that social media can be used for sexual exploitation of children, promotes self-harm, incites violence and exposes hate. We've all seen it. We've all seen that happen, not just for young people, but for others. We want to encourage social media to be more positive, and I think that's going to happen over time, I hope, as people become more educated and understand that most of what you read or a lot of what you read is not necessarily true.

Speaker, Statistics Canada, some of the data they're putting out is alarming. One-quarter of teens are experiencing cyberbullying, cybervictimization and it increases during adolescence and stays

high right up until your early 20s, not much older than the Member for –

P. PIKE: Burin - Grand Bank.

B. DAVIS: Burin - Grand Bank, yes, that's right. Not much older than Burin - Grand Bank. Not the one I was looking for, but thank you for your help.

There's also a clear link between the use of devices and the risk associated with Internet use and smartphones before bed and waking up with smartphones. Rather than go through all those things – I think it's really important but it's important for us, as legislators, to try to be aligned with the tenor of what we're trying to accomplish, and I think we can get there.

From a Canadian context, I know the Leader of the Opposition mentioned about the Manitoba experiment or that Manitoba has announced that they're moving forward with plans to ban social media and AI chatbots for youth under the age of 16. The Manitoba premier has been pretty clear the platforms that are internationally designed to maximize engagement and expose kids to content that they're not ready for, in many cases.

So they're even considering a commissioner, or a regulator, to enforce the ban with fines for tech companies, not for the families, because we're all trying as families to limit that. I know that we've already seen the success of the ban in schools and the Minister of Education can attest to that, I'm sure. We've seen it, it's working very well. It's helping our teachers. It's helping classroom. I haven't been a teacher; I worked very closely with many teachers in my district and it has seen a significant improvement.

This PMR is thoughtful, responsible and I think it's asking the government to consult widely, which is what they would do, I hope, anyway. We're asking the government to examine the legislative and regulatory

options that lie before us and bring them forward to this House, because I can tell you there's one individual on this side, I can't speak for everyone else on this side, but I think most of us will be favour of those regulations and legislation options. Also, to call on the federal government to work and do more, which is important because we, as an individual part of the federation, are not the only ones in the federation, but we have the opportunity to lead this federation called Canada in this area. I think we should and it is incumbent upon us to do that. I think the federal government will want to do that. Prime Minister Carney has also signalled that he's interested in doing some of this.

The last point, because I know I want to yield some of time to my colleagues on both sides of the House, as a parent, I want my daughters to grow up with confidence. I want them to grow up with knowledge. I want them to grow up with the options to see the world and get the benefits that come from the very small world we've created now because of the Internet and social media, I want them to grow up with that, but I also want them to be protected. I think it's incumbent upon all of us and I call on the government to be proactive and engage with families and engage with legislators across the country to work for that.

For these reasons, Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to support this and to second this PMR. I think it's really important and, from the Minister of Education's standpoint, he was positive towards this, I think, and I'm hoping that all my colleagues on both sides of the House are going to be supportive and will vote for this.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to address an issue that's becoming increasingly present in our lives, families, students and communities across Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada, the impact of social media on young people and the proposal to restrict or prohibit social media for youth under the age of 16.

We all care deeply about the safety, well-being and the future of our young people. The challenge before us is determining the best way to protect them in a digital world that sometimes is evolving faster than our laws, our schools and sometimes even our understanding.

Over the last decade, social media has fundamentally changed. Young people today are growing up in a world where as much of their social interaction, entertainment, information and identity formulation happens online. While technology has created opportunities for connection and learning, it has also introduced very real risk.

One of the greatest emerging concerns is the increasing use of artificial intelligence on social media platforms. AI-generated content is becoming more common every day, images, videos, even voices now can be manipulated to entirely fabricate ways that are difficult to detect. Young people may be exposed to content that looks real but is completely false. This can distort reality, spread misinformation, contribute to anxiety and insecurity and make it harder for youth to distinguish fact from fiction.

We are entering an era where seeing is no longer believing. Technology companies cannot simply profit from these tools, while avoiding responsibility for their consequences. Platforms must be held accountable for the content distributed on their services. We should be examining whether stronger regulations are needed for AI-generated content including restrictions,

clear labelling requirements or outright bans on certain forms of deceptive AI media.

At the same time, AI is becoming unavoidable in daily life. Even a simple Google search produces an AI-generated overview before any human-created source appears. Computers and phones increasingly come with built-in AI assistance. Young people are growing up surrounded by these technologies whether they like it or not. This creates another concern, which is the role of AI in education.

Speaker, like many educators are now seeing students choose tools like ChatGPT to write essays, complete assignments or solve math problems without actually learning the material themselves. There is a concern that overreliance on AI may weaken critical thinking, problem-solving skills, creativity and independent learning.

At the same time, banning the technology outright may not be the most effective long-term solution. Artificial intelligence will likely become an integral part of the modern workforce. Our responsibility is to ensure young people understand how to use these tools appropriately and ethically while preserving the importance of critical thinking and genuine learning.

The broader discussion around social media requires that same careful balance as there are very real dangers associated with unrestricted social media among the youth. Parents may not know who their child is speaking to online. The anonymity of the Internet can expose young people to predators, scams, exploitation and harmful influences. Many youth experience cyberbullying, harassment and exposure to dangerous content related to eating disorders, self harm, depression and sexual exploitation. Social media algorithms are designed to maximize engagement, which can contribute to addictive behaviour and endless scrolling.

There are also growing concerns about privacy and security. Young people frequently share personal information without fully understanding the long-term consequences; data breaches, tracking and online manipulation are serious issues. Speaker, these concerns are real, they are serious and they deserve action.

Across the world, supporters of this movement argue that reducing social media could lead to significant benefits. We may see improved concentration in classrooms; better sleep habits; more time spent outdoors and being physically active; more face-to-face interactions with family and friends; more engagement in hobbies, like reading, music, crafts, sports and community activities. Those are positive outcomes worth striving for.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, we have already taken steps in this direction and through the K-to-12 Personal Electronic Device Policy. Phones are not permitted in kindergarten to Grade 6 and use is limited to lunch and recess for students from Grade 7 to Grade 12. These measures recognize that constant digital distraction can interfere with learning and social development.

Technology is not always accurate. There are also concerns about storing sensitive information and personal information. Realistically, young people are technology savvy. A determined teenager could likely find ways around restrictions. They could download an app or a virtual private network, a VPN, which will allow them to access restricted content. So we must ask ourselves: Would a ban truly eliminate access or would it simply drive usage underground and make monitoring more difficult? We must also consider the social impact.

Social media is not only used exclusively for entertainment. Many youth sports teams, clubs, schools and organizations rely on social media for announcements, even coordination, fundraising and

communication. If youth are excluded from these platforms, much of the responsibility may shift to parents and guardians.

Social media can also play an important role in maintaining relationships. Some young people use these platforms to stay connected with family members who live far away or with friends who they may not otherwise see regularly.

There's an important distinction between younger children and teenagers. Children who have not yet entered social media may experience fewer direct effects from the ban. However, teenagers who have already spent years using these platforms may struggle significantly if access is suddenly removed altogether.

In some cases, abruptly taking social media away from teens could create additional stress, social isolation or emotional challenges. This is why many experts argue that education, supervision and accountability may ultimately be more effective than prohibiting it alone.

We should be teaching our young people how to use social media safely and responsibly. That means educating youth about protecting personal information, recognizing harmful and/or misleading content, setting accounts to private, understanding digital footprints and being mindful of who they communicate with.

It also means encouraging parents and guardians to actively monitor social media use, reviewing followers, understanding what platforms are being used, discussing online behaviour openly and helping the youth develop healthy digital habits. Most phones and apps already include parental controls, screen time limits, content filters, restricted modes and app blocking features. These tools can help families create a healthy boundary without requiring a complete prohibition.

It's also worth discussing whether children need personal devices at such a young age. Many parents are opting to wait before introducing smartphones and tablets while allowing limited and supervised computer use for school-related activities.

Speaker, ultimately, there is no single policy that will solve every issue overnight. We need to ensure that measures we establish are fully informed. We must do our homework. That means having mindful consultations with parents, educators, youth, mental health professionals, child development experts, technical aid specialists and young people, themselves, should have a voice in these discussions because they are the ones living this reality every day.

We also must examine the role of federal and provincial governments. National standards may be possible, ensuring consistency across the country. Stronger regulations may be needed, such as fines for non-compliance, stricter age verification standards, transparency requirements for algorithms and protections related to AI-generated content. While it need to be fully assessed, the benefits and risks take first.

Above all, we must ensure that every decision we make keeps the well-being of children and youth at the centre of our conversation.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

We will be supporting this resolution.

In the business part of it, it talks about consulting with parents, guardians, educators, youth, mental health experts and

technology professionals. It talks about developing measures that prioritizes child safety, privacy and health development. It talks about examining legislation and regulatory changes to restrict or prohibit the access to social media for children under 16. It calls up on the Government of Canada to work with the province to establish national standards to better protect children.

When you look the verbs, there is a lot of active direction to take some action here. The only thing I would add to make it perfect would be in the third WHEREAS to add the word the "NDP" Government of Manitoba. Just to make sure we get that in there – the NDP.

However, this is an issue – if we think it's only happening now, the horse has long left the barn. Any of my teacher colleagues in here would know that long before now – I can still remember, at Holy Heart, when cellphones were just coming in and the access to social media that came with it. That was back in the early 2000s.

I have three grandchildren – nine, seven and two – and I will tell you they're better equipped around social media than I am with the dexterity, with their fingers and access to it and how to get around it. It's remarkable. Now, they have a mother, my daughter, who's a teacher so they're monitored as to what they watch.

I'm going to speak as a teacher and when I was president of the Teachers' Association, I had plenty of opportunities to speak to school counsellors. You could see over the time, certainly in the classroom, the levels of anxiety that would increase, even among young children. The phone was always on.

It was a battle in the classroom to get students to turn in their phones and often what they learned – any self-respecting teenager is going to find a way around anything. They would turn in the phone and what you started to realize is they actually had two phones. So one that didn't work

that they passed in to the teacher, in to the office and one that did. They learned pretty quickly the ways.

I have talked to the current president of the NLTA and I did ask him about the cellphone ban. Right now, in the classroom, it does seem to be working and there seems to be buy-in. I guess the key part of this resolution is the buy-in piece and the consultation that goes with it.

I won't date all of us, but there are many here of my generation that grew up in that time, they write to forget. I would say if there were cellphones around when we were kids, there's a good chance we would not be in the current positions that we're in right now. It's as simple as that. But we had that ability that our youthful days, I guess, are forgotten and it's no one else's business.

But we found that certainly with the young students, the sharing of anything, the most private and intimate details would be shared on social media. We used to say to our teachers, Speaker, do not post anything on Facebook that you would not post on the bulletin board of your local supermarket. It's not private and once it's there, it's for anyone to use really.

We know that the blue light emitted from screens can disrupt sleep patterns. But I guess one of the most disturbing things I learned when I was president and talking to counsellors is when they would talk about the number of students at the elementary grades who would have issues with suicidal ideation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DINN: So even at the elementary grade – it wasn't a high school issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's a little loud in here. I can't hear the speaker.

Thank you.

J. DINN: I'm almost hurt by that, that you can't hear me. I'm using my best teacher voice.

SPEAKER: I can't hear you well.

J. DINN: But I think it was the suicidal ideation that school counsellors were reporting amongst elementary school students – not high school, but elementary grade.

I think, at this point, it's we just can't simply say we can't deal with it, but we do have to find ways to make sure that children aren't exposed to the harms of social media. But also realizing that it does offer some benefit. I would also argue that in the time social media has been with us, Speaker, that it has become increasingly more sophisticated.

So I will say this, from a teaching background, education is very much the key. We talk about bringing financial literacy into the school system – well, it's about media literacy as well. I will say this, even if you ban social media, you're going to find movies and television shows where, guess what, young people are using social media. It's always going to be ever present and they will age out of the ban. At some point, there has got to be a good piece of education.

One of the tools that I used when I was a high school teacher, and that was very prominent, was the Media Awareness Network, now it's MediaSmarts. It offers a wide range of activities and education pieces to actually engage young people and people in issues around media, social media and so on and so forth.

We'll support this, but with that comes, I think, the heavy emphasis on if you're going

to find ways to restrict it – I like the fact that this motion is doing the consultation piece, but with it must come the education piece. That means providing the resources to schools and so on and so forth and, also, maybe the tools for parents as well.

It shouldn't fall just on parents. It shouldn't fall on schools either. As the old saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child. Well, I think we're all responsible for it in that way.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I would like to thank our leader for bringing in this PMR here today, this private Member's resolution. It's probably long overdue. I think many would agree on all sides of the House that it's something that we should have considered.

I'd like not just to see it limited to children but even adults. I think as politicians of the day, we've all experienced social media. Social media is great and there are a lot of positives about social media: of course, getting your communication, getting your word out there. But that said, it's also a tool for anonymous people to come and criticize and perhaps tell lies and just put things out there that are meant to cause harm and hurt.

I applaud this PMR. It's good to see it has the support as well of the Third Party. I would imagine that everybody would be supportive of this resolution because, again, this is just one of those good times where we can stand and do some good things here in the House of Assembly in collaboration. It also reminds me of some good legislation that we brought in as a government that was supported unanimously here in the House of

Assembly. It reminds me of the *Intimate Images Protection Act* or what we know as revenge porn.

We brought that legislation into this House; it was brought in by the minister of Justice and Public Safety of the day. Of course, it was supported unanimously. What that does is protect women – or anyone – who don't give their consent for intimate images and someone goes and posts that. Or even sends it around on their social media or on their cellphones or whatnot. It actually has made that illegal to do. I mean there are major consequences, by law, if someone should do that. There is some protection there. I wanted to bring that up and put that on the record.

I'm just going to share a story. I remember back in the early '90s when we first got our computer. You know one of those old-fashioned computers in the house. You can probably remember those times as well, Speaker. I remember it was placed in our living room; it was a new novelty item for us. I was sitting at the computer. I can't remember the particular program – again, early '90s. The computer we had, there was a little microphone and you could talk and interact, obviously, with someone out there in cyberspace, someone on the Internet. I'm a child; I was young at that age in the '90s. I remember getting on this program and a voice coming on and asking a very age-inappropriate question. Of course, you couldn't see anybody there, there was no webcam there, but I remember the reaction that my parents had.

Needless to say, that program was removed from the computer; we probably didn't even know it was there. But my point is, it can certainly be a very dangerous place for children, for youth – and for everybody, but especially for youth – where they rely on their parents, guardians, supporters and caregivers to make the best decisions for them. As we know, it's a place where predators play. We see that and we see that too often.

Unfortunately, we've seen stories, recent stories of families and people that are impacted here in our very own Newfoundland and Labrador, where youth have taken their lives because of the bullying that they're experiencing on there. I mean, we can all go back to our school days and remember the school bus can be an intimidating place for kids; it's a place where kids can be bullied as well as the school. But now, with social media, that doesn't go away when they get off that bus or when they leave school to go home for the weekend. They are faced with that pressure, that stress 24-7.

Even some apps like Snapchat. I personally don't know how to use Snapchat, but kids are a whiz at Snapchat. That's how they communicate. I know a lot of my friends who have children, that's how they watch their kids or communicate with their children, even.

Again, it's good to see some measures to be put in place here to protect our youth. We have to do what we can to teach them the best guidance, the best principles, the best values. Again, a message that everyone should remember: once you put something out there on social media, it's permanent. You may delete it from your platform, you may delete it from your Twitter or your Facebook or whatever, your Instagram, but it's still there. Ultimately, who's to say who can get access to it. We don't know. I try to live by my own policy. I wouldn't put anything in writing or on Facebook or on social media that I wouldn't stand up and stand by publicly, should I ever be question on that in public.

I do applaud this. I think it's a great PMR. It's good to see the consent here with everyone. I'll just go over my notes to make sure I'm not missing anything. It reminds me of the *Intimate Images Protection Act*. That's a good piece of legislation that was brought in.

That said, though, our thoughts and prayers and heartfelt condolences for families who have lost people because of cyberbullying because, again, it happens to children, as our leader said. Just to see little Jack's reaction change based on what he was watching. They're out there and just like anywhere, there are predators there and they're out there to capture our youth, to influence our youth.

Lord knows, as a former minister for Women and Gender Equality, it's also a tool used for trafficking that's used for women. We know that happens. It's not something that just happens far out there in another province or another country; it happens right here in our own backyard here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

That said, I will take my seat because I do know there are some Members who want to talk and want to add to this legislation. It's positive. I commend our leader again for bringing this in and I look forward to the collaboration of the entire House on this one.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to speak to the impact of social media on the mental health and well-being of children and youth, particularly the effect that access to social media and other related applications of online devices have on children under the age of 16.

I want to acknowledge that this is an evolving issue and one that is receiving increasing attention from parents, educators, health professionals, governments and researchers around the

world. There's a growing body of evidence suggesting that excessive or inappropriate social media exposure can have negative impacts on the mental health and well-being of children and youth. Concerns have been raised around anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, cyberbullying, self-esteem, social pressures and exposures to harmful or inappropriate content.

We've also seen disturbing occurrences within our own province involving predatory behaviour, targeting youth in our province using social media applications. Social media presents a complex and dynamic environment. The reality is that to access social media it's not an experience to be taken without thoughtful consideration of how it impacts our psychology, what we may encounter and the impacts of algorithms utilized by these complex applications.

It can be quite daunting to even open the discussion with a young person who has friends, teammates and family members all around them accessing these applications. Whether it's Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, or TikTok – and the list goes on – usage can result in an impact that forever changes the lives of young people in our lives.

When we learn to drive a car, we are not simply tossed a set of keys, wished the best of luck and sent on our way to figure it out on our own. We complete a test that gives us the opportunity to learn how, with a responsible adult that is licensed to operate the vehicle. This is accompanied by driving school where we would receive training from a licensed service provider to practice and hone our skills to promote safety.

We would complete a driving test to officially get the licence to operate on our own. Even then, we have a probationary period with restrictions to ensure we can follow the guidance and safety practices we have learned and practised. Operating a vehicle in an unsafe manner can change our life. It

could change the lives of others. It could end a life.

The fact of the matter is social media has this same power. Social media has the same potential to bring significant danger to our communities and specifically the young people in our province. Social media has and continues to change our lives every day shaping our behaviours and thoughts.

At the same time, we must recognize that social media and digital technology are deeply integrated into modern life. These platforms can provide opportunities for learning, communication, creativity, community connection and access to support networks.

That is why this issue requires our thoughtful consideration, careful research and a balanced approach. As our understanding continues to evolve, governments must continue reviewing and assessing how best to respond. We must be prepared to adapt our approaches, as new evidence emerges and as technology itself changes.

Speaker, there are important lessons to be learned from other jurisdictions. On a global scale, countries such as Australia and France have taken steps to strengthen protections for children online and to examine age-related restrictions and platform accountability measures.

However, early experience from Australia also demonstrate that these issues are far more complex than simply introducing a ban or restriction alone. Public reporting and commentary from Australia suggests that significant challenges remain with compliance and enforcement. A substantial portion of youth under the age of 16 reportedly continue to retain or create social media accounts and are still able to bypass age-assurance systems implemented by platforms. That raises important questions about whether restrictions alone materially

change outcomes or whether they may simply displace activity elsewhere online.

Speaker, critics and experts have also raised broader concerns regarding privacy and accessibility. Some have warned that intrusive age-verification requirements may create new privacy risks for users, while there's caution that restricting access to more mainstream or moderated platforms could unintentionally push young people towards platforms with fewer safeguards or less oversight. Importantly, Australia's experience has also reinforced the need for a broader and more comprehensive approach.

Nationally, Speaker, we're also seeing significant discussions emerge across Canada. Most notably, Manitoba has announced plans to introduce what is being discussed as one of the strictest youth social media regimes in the country. This proposal would restrict or ban the access to social media for youth aged 16 and under and would reportedly also apply to AI chat tools – an approach broader than what we have seen in many other jurisdictions. If implemented, this would represent the first in Canada legislation of its kind.

The Manitoba government has indicated that responsibility for enforcement would fall primarily on technology companies, rather than on parents or children themselves. There have also been indications that significant penalties could apply to platforms that fail to comply, although many details have not yet been finalized.

Speaker, the proposal appears to go beyond simply restricting accounts. At this stage, however, key elements remain unclear. That includes the timeline for implementation, the enforcement model and how age verification or access restrictions would actually function.

The Manitoba government has framed a proposal around concerns related to youth mental health, addictive platform design,

exposure to harmful content and the collection and use of children's data by technology companies. These are serious concerns that deserve careful attention. Before making decisions that could affect children, families, schools and service providers, we need to do the necessary work. That means consulting broadly.

We need to hear from teachers and school administrators who see the impacts in classrooms every day. We need to hear from students and young people themselves about how social media affects their lives. We need to hear from parents and caregivers who are navigating these challenges at home, and we need the expertise of mental health professionals, researchers, pediatric specialists and community organizations who understand both the risks and the reality facing young people today.

While some measures may improve safety and well-being, there may also be implications related to accessibility, communication, digital literacy, social connection, privacy, enforcement and equity. These are complex issues and responsible governments must take the time to fully examine them. That includes conducting proper research, jurisdictional scans, evidence reviews and stakeholder engagement before determining the best path forward.

I would note, Speaker, that not every solution is necessarily legislative. We owe it to young people and families to approach this carefully, thoughtfully and responsibly. We need to take the time to do our homework and get this right for all of us.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Like many parents here today, we're welcoming discussion on this issue because it is very important and it does clearly affect our youth. There's no doubt. My kids are a little older than some of my colleagues. They're 11 and 13. They spend a lot of time – too much time – in front of a screen. There's no doubt about it. But, for the most part, we've been able to avoid social media, which is good, but it's coming. It's coming for sure.

I want to start with there's an op-ed that was in *The New York Times* in 2024 by the then surgeon general, Vivek Murthy. He said: "One of the most important lessons I learned in medical school was that in an emergency, you don't have the luxury to wait for perfect information. You assess the available facts, you use your best judgment, and you act quickly. The mental health crisis among young people is an emergency – and social media has emerged as an important contributor."

Now Vivek Murthy served as surgeon general under Biden and under Obama – don't worry, not Trump. So he is actually qualified. I will also say very proudly that he was my classmate in college.

During his time, he dealt with things such as COVID, the opioid crisis, but he also did a lot of work on mental health and social issues. He did a lot about the crisis of loneliness. To my colleague in my book club, I will recommend another book. His book is a fantastic book – he has done a couple, but one is called *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*. It is about the epidemic of loneliness, as he calls it.

Dr. Murthy has also done a lot of work about social media. As he said in his op-ed, a year before that, he did a piece on social media and youth and did a very big, in-depth advisory on this. In his opinion piece, he went on to say that social media should carry a label, just like cigarettes do. That's how serious he considered the threat.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. PARSONS: It is.

I just want to tell you a few things that were in that advisory that he issued. These advisories don't go out lightly. They go out for serious illnesses, epidemics, things like that. The findings in the report included – and some of these things have been mentioned already – universal use of social media among teenagers – there's no doubt, like 95 per cent, something like that. Young people age 10 to 19 are in the peak risk-taking period of their lives, and that's usually when mental health challenges appear. I think the Education minister mentioned some of the things like self-harm that can happen, but it's because they're at that period in their life where they are affected by things.

There's evidence that social media use or prolonged social media use can cause changes to the brain, the amygdala, the prefrontal cortex – things that cause you to have empathy, the ability to understand people; things that allow you to control your impulses, regulate your emotions. They also see changes to the parts of the brain that increase sensitivity toward social rewards and punishments.

It's clearly a very sensitive time. So what has the studies shown thus far? I guess they are not all negative. There are some positives shown for social media. It's important to recognize that as well. So sometimes people who have trouble finding a community or a connection with others, find community in online environments that they don't find offline. That's true, but most of the results show a negative correlation.

One study, a vast longitudinal study, showed in 12 to 15 year olds a doubling of risk of poor mental health outcomes, including depression and anxiety, if they spent three or more hours on social media a day. Another study – this was a study of 14 year-olds exclusively – over 10,000 in the

study showed that greater social media use predicted poor sleep, online harassment, poor body image, low self-esteem and higher depressive symptom scores with a larger association for girls than boys.

A lot of times, these young people are exposed to extreme inappropriate and harmful content. They are exposed to this because of the nature of social media, the algorithmic design of the social media. They promote, often, body dissatisfaction and encourage young people to not like the way they look.

Dr. Murphy did acknowledge there's not a lot of good data. There's a lot of correlation with negative mental health incomes because of – outcomes, sorry. I keep saying incomes, I don't know why – outcomes. I'm looking at the Finance Minister and can't help but think about incomes. Dr. Murphy said that more work has to be done on the data to figure out the exact relationship.

As he stated in this *New York Times* piece, you cannot wait. We cannot wait for a definitive outcome here. We have to take action now before it's too late. I think he felt the evidence was strong enough to make that correlation, to label social media that way, so it's important to act now.

I will say to everyone here in the House – I don't know if they saw – there was an Angus Reid report, a poll done earlier this year. Seventy-five per cent of Canadians would agree to a ban for people 16 and under – 75 per cent. Seventy-five per cent of Canadians don't agree on anything and 70 per cent of parents with kids also agree to this. This is something that we're ready for, I think, as a country and as a province for sure.

As I said, I'm a parent of young kids. We try to keep them off the screens. We went to our cabin last weekend; they have no Wi-Fi there. What did they do? They knit. They birdwatched. They went trout fishing, of course, the opening weekend. They're out in the

outdoors playing catch, playing soccer out in the yard. It is very healthy for them to get offline.

So we can't do it without some kind of help here because of FOMO. You can't just say as parents, keep them out, stay away from it, because their friends are doing it. So we need to do it wholesale.

I'll get to the end here now so that my colleagues can keep moving. Thank you very much for your time. I look forward to this bill passing unanimously.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As always, it's an honour and privilege to rise in this House and speak to any piece of legislation or any resolution, but a specific pleasure to speak to this one today. I thank the Members across for bringing it into the House today. This resolution is concerning the protection of children and youth from the harmful effects of social media.

This is an important conversation, Mr. Speaker, and a timely one. I'll say this: I think people all over the province, whether you're a teacher, a health professional, an advocate and young people themselves, they're having this conversation right now. They're having this conversation over the dinner table, in schools at recess, in the classroom and via text, probably in class unfortunately, for some of the teachers I'd say.

I can say I enjoy hearing the dialogue from everybody about their kids and their experience with this as well. I guess I can say I'm a little lucky, my kids being a little older. Little Keith and Alicia are 27 and 29 respectively, so we still had a little of this

when they were growing up, but the apps weren't there.

I'll say to my Member across the way from Corner Brook, the algorithms weren't there, these different apps, all of this craziness. It was new – it was brand-new, so we didn't see as much of the bullying and the negative effects at that time; it was all new and hot. Everybody was only on Facebook looking up your old high school buddy who went into the army and you never seen him for 20 years. That's what it came down to.

But what we're seeing, Mr. Speaker, is that social media is no longer on the fringe. It's no longer on the margins of these kids and their lives. What they're doing is they're ordering their lunch, they're talking to their friends, they're celebrating issues and celebrating celebrities and being fans and doing all those things. But there's also those opportunities where they can be exposed to the negative as well: the bullying, the harassment, the misinformation, and I would say that addictive design to these apps that the time just flows. We're all guilty, every single one of us. So imagine that in the hands of the kids. You've got, as the Member across the way had referred to, the algorithm. This is the math that these developers are using to keep people glued to these functions and keep that there. It's that addictive design.

We've heard other Members talk about this too. We've talked about the adult content, pressures that we didn't have as Members of this House growing up, things about body image and body shaming and all of that stuff. Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I believe every single one – and I've said it here time and time again about rising above partisan politics, transcending that. Obviously, this is another instance of that. I believe that every single Member, regardless of your district, truly cares about the children in Newfoundland and Labrador and we're all going to march forward together. We'll pull oars on this one, I tell

the people of the province right now, because it's the right thing to do.

In that, we all have the same objective here, to see our kids safe. Anything that comes through this House that furthers that and allows us to participate in that and bring in that collective knowledge, the collective experience from the districts all across our great province, is something that is useful and time well spent, I'll say, Mr. Speaker, here in the House.

The challenge is how we get the response to this right. We've heard about other examples: Manitoba, other jurisdictions across the world where this is coming into force. This could be new and very groundbreaking for us, cutting-edge stuff if you will, but it has to be done right. It's not to say that social media is all bad or all good; it's much more complex than that, Mr. Speaker. I think we can all agree with that.

For some young people these online platforms create real harm. Real damage is being done. It can deepen their anxiety. They can become isolated from overexposure to this stuff. I tell you what, if you're on a group chat, let's just say that and you're a young fellow or a young lady and they've all marginalized you, now imagine how that feels when you've got a collective effort against you in terms of isolating you from the group. Imagine the damage that can do to a young mind, Mr. Speaker, I'll say.

We've all heard the stories that break our heart. We've all had family, friends, we've heard everything about children being targeted, private images being shared, young people being pushed towards harmful content and stories of students just – I mean you're unable to escape the bullying when you carry the device home in our pocket. That's unfortunate. So 24-7 access to what's bringing you down, imagine that, Mr. Speaker.

I guess this is the crazy world now that parents have the delicate task to try and manage because it's not an easy one. We dearly love our kids; we want to see them succeed. We can imagine how the parents feel when they can't even understand what's happening to their kids. It's social media, what's being done. They're not aware of the trail, Mr. Speaker. There are no paper trails, it's digital. Unless they're getting into all these devices and the kids are going to share this – and there's embarrassment with that too and social pressure to do that. Who wants mom and dad looking at your phone really? You're going to get in trouble that way too.

I'm just saying I'd like to acknowledge that. It's a very difficult new world. Times are changing. It's different.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say, with the changing times, we didn't have all this pressure growing up; but there's a role for us now, as government. We are legislators now, so we've got to effect this. There's a role for families. There's a role for communities, the federal government, as well. Technology companies – and I heard this said from a Member across the way, and perhaps one on our side too, let's work collectively together at all levels of government to hold these platforms and these developers and these people that are making a fortune off this, let's take them to task and make them make sure that their apps are safe before they can be put in production.

We have to do something that allows us to go down the road, perhaps, maybe if these apps and their developers step out of line and are indeed creating harm, that there's something we can do in terms of reaching them back, if you know what I mean.

As legislators, we have to be thoughtful about this. We have to look at what works. We must listen to those people who are closest to this; so that's the parents, that's the guardians, the educators, the mental

health professionals, the child protection experts, privacy experts and the youth, themselves. Let's not forget them during this whole conversation because these are the people here that we're talking about when we're talking about trying to create a level of safety for them over and above what exists today.

This resolution before the House recognizes that there are serious concerns around cyberbullying, harmful content, the online exploitation of some children, and it also points to concerns raised by parents, educators, child advocates, mental health professionals. I've talked about some of the things, like other jurisdictions – Manitoba, Australia, France, Norway – and we also recognize Newfoundland and Labrador schools have taken some steps to address the excessive cellphone use, as the Minister of Education had already said, in these schools.

I just want to talk really quickly before I close, Mr. Speaker, about my own district. Of course, we are always in touch with our own schools in our district and our own educators, our own professionals, and I just want to talk about a disturbing trend that is attached to cyberbullying as well, and that would be the suicide ideation.

I mean, back in the day, you might challenge your buddy to eat a caterpillar or do something silly like that, but now we have organized, I can say, concerted efforts, kids challenging kids to complete suicide, complete with how to do that. It's a sickening thought.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's at their fingertips.

K. RUSSELL: It really is, but it's right there. So you can imagine that scene where multiple kids could be engaged in that activity or challenging or bullying somebody towards suicide.

I'll just say that, because this is part and parcel with that, Mr. Speaker. It's what

these same guidance counsellors and teachers are telling me, that what they're seeing is that times are changing and the kids are developing faster so we're seeing mental health issues and these type of crisis and these complex cases at an earlier age. We're talking about upper elementary school. Now we're seeing the same type of issues we used to see in high school.

I'm saying again – my favourite word: vigilant – we have to be vigilant. We have to do what it takes in order to reverse this trend, Mr. Speaker. I believe it's a big part of what we're doing here today is supporting this private Member's resolution that's been brought from the Members across the way. I just want to say, when it comes to suicide and suicide ideation and challenging other kids, if you're a part of that and you're out there and you know your kids are a part of that, you have to stop that right now.

When it comes to places like Labrador and, I'll say, the more rural places in our province, when you talk about Indigenous communities, suicide has a major, major effect on these communities. They're so close, so tight knit that sometimes we see a dangerous cascade in suicides occurring over and over.

With that, I'm saying I'm glad to be part of this. I'm proud to support this private Member's resolution. If I could close on one note, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say to the community of Nain and the Ikkusek and Winters families, they've been affected by suicide in the most recent days and I just want to say that our hearts and our thoughts and our prayers are with you. William Ikkusek, you are my friend.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very happy to speak to this PMR today. I thank our leader and my colleagues for bringing this forward. I certainly support it.

There are a few things I want to chat about today. First is, in the District of Mount Scio, we have many schools. I have a junior high and a high school and I try to stay in regular contact with the teachers and administrators of those schools.

Notably, I was surprised first when I started. A few years ago, I asked one of the principals of one of the schools, what is the hardest challenge that you have running this school? I was very surprised to hear that online bullying and bullying that happens in online gaming – the principal was telling me that that was the top challenge in the school.

All the kids going home at the end of the day, they're playing video games and then chatting while they're playing video games, having that kind of social connection and most of it is not being monitored by parents. Then the bullying and associated chat – what happens when they're playing online games – that comes into school.

He said if the kids were not playing these games and doing this bullying, they wouldn't come to school. Now, that's not to say that everything would be perfect, but the school administrator did say that that was their number one problem in running the school and ensuring maximal educational outcomes for the children of that school was the fact that they play these video games at home and then chat and engage in the video games in the evening. I just think that's a very interesting – and that was maybe five or six years ago.

I do have experience now as a parent of a five-year-old. We try not to have very much screen time at all in my house. We do watch TV when my little guy is sick. You know, I watched TV growing up, and we tried to have some screen time, but it doesn't really agree with my little guy.

We started with, there's an iPad – and you think YouTube Kids is safe. Sure, let's give my kid YouTube Kids. My child started tickling and singing these strange tickling videos. I was like, what's going on? He watched it – we were always in the room, but I didn't notice. Then I was looking at these tickling videos on YouTube Kids. I was trying to block them, because he didn't understand that you can't just go up to anyone at the store, a stranger at the store. That's what these videos were doing, tickling strangers.

So I start going in one night to block all of these tickling videos, and I was there for an hour. I was like wait a minute, and then there were thousands and thousands and thousands of these tickling videos from Mr. Tickle with different accounts. I tried blocking the accounts; there were thousands of these tickling accounts and videos. I was like, what is going on here?

It was the same video over and over again. That was just tickling. This is not a safe instrument. I assumed, wrongfully, that YouTube Kids was generally safe, and I could give my child an iPad with YouTube Kids, but that is not the case. I won't talk about some of the other very bizarre videos that I've seen.

Now, I'm not to say that all content on, for example, YouTube Kids is bad, because there is some educational content. I do think that the lenses that have been applied are not necessarily appropriate. Maybe I was naive, but I do think that you can't just assume as parents or guardians of children that things, just because kids is in the name and it's from one of the major social media companies, are safe because that's certainly not the case.

We do allow screen time when my child is sick or when I'm cutting his fingernails and toenails, because he really doesn't like when I cut his fingernails or toenails. So he is allowed one YouTube video. This week, when I was cutting his fingernails, he

wanted to watch how to make a LED lightbulb. I found a video; it was a 15-minute video about how to make an LED lightbulb, and he watched that while I cut his fingernails and toenails. That was our video content of the week, just for some humour there.

It is a very complicated, complex, nuanced discussion. I do think the provincial government should and can play a role, but I also would implore the federal government to take a stronger role in regulating social media, particularly around children.

I believe it was in 2019 that I introduced a private Member's resolution encouraging the federal government to increase their regulation of AI, particularly from a privacy perspective, which they have not yet done. There was a draft, there was legislation in place but it never passed. I understand the current federal minister for Artificial Intelligence, as well as other ministers they have, they say that stronger regulation is coming. We have not yet seen that. I do welcome and implore the federal government to strengthen the regulations.

I did want to circle back, I guess. Last night, we were at my dinner table talking about our – we talk about our day and I told him, today at work we're going to be talking about not allowing children to use social media. He said, why Mommy? Why is social media so bad? Why are videos bad for me to watch all the time? He seems to understand when I explained it to him. I tell him it makes his brain (inaudible) because his brain – my child, I'm not saying everyone is like that, but my child, his brain does go (inaudible) whatever the – I don't know how Hansard is going to record that. His brain does that –

SPEAKER: Can you spell that for Hansard?

S. STOODLEY: – when he watches videos.

We did start with videos earlier on, watching some TV, some screen time but it was too challenging to parent and trying to figure out

the emotional regulation for it and how do you successfully parent this child. We have found, in our house, that the only way to have a reasonable child is to not have any screen time and not to have any social media at all, except for when he's sick and we're cutting his fingernails. Those are the exceptions in my house and that allows us to get through every day.

I always tell him our job is to get him to turn into an outstanding adult, which, hopefully, we'll be successful in, but you never know. I know every parent has that ambition for their child, Speaker. We are trying our best. I do think governments can certainly help families and parents with some of that regulation whether it's further regulating things like YouTube Kids or social media channels.

I can't imagine how the discussions will change over the next 10 years when there's Facebook and all those things. Hopefully, the regulation of these tools will help so that less of a burden is on families that may or may not even understand what is going on here.

I fully support this amendment. Thank you everyone for your feedback and I look forward to also hearing from other people in the House.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: First of all, I'd like to thank the former minister of Digital Government and Service NL for your work that you've done in cellphones in schools. I've heard from teachers that it's had a good impact so I just want to say thank you for that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Thank you.

Before I start, this is a very extremely important PMR so I'm asking all Members, if you hear me here now, please put your phones away if you want to take this PMR serious. Hear me out for what I'm about to say.

How do we get our youth not to do as we do? Let me say it again. How do we, as adults, get our youth not to do as we do? In 1901, Signal Hill, Marconi's first signal brought right here. That's where it started. That's where the evolution got us to this PMR today. That's a fact. Something we can be proud of, but something we also have to keep a close eye on.

It's the addiction that we all need to talk more about, social media and the red dot notification. It's an addiction, folks. It's like the slot machine. It's like a drug and we're all affected. I don't like to say guilty because it's a tool that we must use every day.

Who leaves their office or leaves their home and the first thing you do, if you're a smoker, you check for your lighter. If you're not, what's the first thing you do? You look for your phone and if you don't have it, anxiousness kicks in. Panic kicks in. It's a scary world and we're here to talk about what we can do for our youth and what we must do.

Screen time: I just wrote a couple of little notes to myself to see how much time I actually spend staring at a screen. I'm sure all 40 Members here have no choice but, daily, if you're here to serve your constituents, that's connection.

Here's a simple stat and I don't need the Finance Minister's help with this one nor the critic of Finance. Five hours a day screen time: I would challenge everybody to check your phone and I bet you it's above that; 365 days a year, that's 1,825 hours staring at a screen. That works out to 45, 40-hour working weeks per annual.

When I was in Lab City on council, when I first started, we had binders as such. Our agendas were dropping off on Friday. The Member for Lab West would know, he was the fire chief that sat across the table from me. It was contemplated: Do we bring in iPads? Do we modernize? Do we digitalize? It saves money in the long run. It's a lot more efficient, a lot more effective, speedy. That's where we are.

I remember one of the members opposite, Councillor John Penney, got really upset to the point where I took out my Snickers bar and put it on my table. I can still remember this quote that came out. I said: Illiteracy of the 21st century will no longer be those who cannot read nor write but those who cannot learn to unlearn to relearn. That's called the scroll era and, by gosh, here we are. By the way, I had to give him that Snickers bar. To this date, he adapted, as council adapted, as we all adapted and that's where we are.

Psychological effects of screen time, whether it's partisan attacks or whoever's doing whatever, whoever chooses to share a story. I think someone said – I heard it somewhere, I think it was the Member opposite here, Sir: If you're going to share something you write on a board, you want to make sure what you're sharing is critical, that it's factual because the mental health – back to my Member opposite – it's happening in each of our districts, it's getting into each school, each household and if you want to compare the continuity of suicide and social media, it's on an exponential rise.

I do believe this is a start. There is a balance. I could speak on notes that were written for me, but I do take this job seriously. There are social media minimum-age compliance updates for other countries, other jurisdictions. I do believe if we're willing to put in the time and the effort, there are ways to improve it.

Then there's the flip side. How far do you want to go because I also know youth, when

you take one device, they will find another way to get to where they're not supposed to be. That's something in the balance that you'll see.

I've read this report from Australia which I have here which anyone is more than welcome to. I've watched national conventions of all three major parties, and it appears that all are in favour, as is this Legislature, to identify where we are and that we have to do something about it. If we don't, our future won't be as bright as we all try to talk about it to be.

I've consulted for years and years and years with psychologists, teachers, doctors, principals and parents and it was only until the last couple of years that I forgot to consult with those most important, and that's the youth. I think a lot of Members would be surprised to know that not all youth are averse to what we're trying to do and what we can do if we work towards something in the structure of this PMR.

The most vulnerable in our society are our youth identified and our seniors and it comes into a balance of how we protect each and every one. We are lawmakers. Sometimes when we all wake up and we realize that, to know that we have the authority to make those changes and make laws here, although not always accepted in a great way when you're asking to take something from someone that they have already got, I think now more than ever is a time to act.

In closing, I just would like to say we hear a lot about what we should do but we must do it ourselves. The Member opposite for Conception Bay East - Bell Island once was a reporter, I do believe he'd remember reaching out to me because I did a hiatus on social media when I was the deputy mayor. I'd say 75 per cent of my community asked me did I move back to Labrador because they didn't see me on social media. Do you know what? Probably, in the

last 20 years, when it all came to light, my best 6 months of my life.

We didn't get to do the interview, just saying, but just the fact that media had reached out and seen the importance of it. I think media has a role here, as well, to watch the proceedings in this House, to keep this conversation going so we can, not only protect our youth, but ourselves and our seniors, and we can do it for all of us together.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

I'll just remind you that, on PMR day, we have a hard stop at 16:50, so you have six minutes.

B. FORD: Six minutes. Thank you, Speaker.

I wanted to start off just to tell a quick story. I have a 15-year-old and an 18-year-old. My story is when I realized just how impressionable children are.

When my youngest was about six months old, somehow, I always ended up nursing him when *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* was on TV. So Ellen DeGeneres was on, I'd sit back, I'd watch Elleen DeGeneres and I'd nurse my youngest. My 3½ year old, at the time, would be playing with blocks or balls or whatever in the room that I was in and it was a little bit of downtime. So *The Elleen DeGeneres Show*, for anyone not familiar, she did some product placement and backed some products.

So I had my two children with me in Walmart one day in Gander and the 3½ year old was in the cart. We're in the cosmetic aisle. This is a true story. When we're in the cosmetic aisle, we were in a makeup section and my 3½ year old said

this: Easy, Breezy, Beautiful, CoverGirl. I could not believe it. I mean, 3½ years old, he couldn't read and we're stood next to mascara and makeup in the CoverGirl aisle of Walmart and my 3½ year old knew the tagline because Ellen DeGeneers did ads for East, Breezy, Beautiful, CoverGirl with Sofia Vergara, if I pronounced her name correctly. These were the commercials that were appearing on TV throughout the show.

So fast forward to them and social media, so now 15 and 18, this conversation, I have been living it for the past decade.

I do want to say I think there's a really big difference between screen time and social media. There's a use for screens. The job market that they're going into, how they learn, what's provided in school. I mean, the technology, it has to be embraced, but the social media, it's not just about children. We've all seen, as adults, the overwhelming and emotional impact that social media can have on adults. When we think about those young, immature brains in their development trying to navigate that. I think it's really been this big, social experiment that's been happening for the past dozen years about social media and how it affects or will affect young people.

I know that teachers in my district have told me, the ban on cellphones in schools has made a significant positive impact on their ability to teach.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: I know I've monitored my children's screen time, and when that ban came in, his screen time at the end of the day is way less because of that ban. I know when I removed screens, as a form of punishment, for lack of a better word, when it's removed, boredom happens and then creativity follows. That's not a bad thing.

I'll also say that since we've been in this room discussing this, I kid you not, I've had texts from parents in my district. Someone

in Gander is watching the House of Assembly channel and screenshot what we're talking about and I've had a text from a parent in Gander, who shared in the parent group: Oh my gosh, our politicians are talking about banning social media for children.

I think parents would really welcome this because it's just like government, we do things to help people and to legislate where, you know, sometimes common sense might not prevail, like seat belt use or helmets on a quad, for example, but it could also be opportunities when parents need help. I know I find it helpful with my children when I can say this is the law, so I'm helping you follow the law. I think there are families who definitely would appreciate this. So when it comes to leadership and parents, I think they would – I know because I'm receiving these texts since we've been debating this right now.

The thing that I really reflect on as we've been talking about this – and I'm just going to read these out now to get them in *Hansard*: YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, Twitter, X, Reddit, discord. I want to put that in *Hansard* because I have a feeling 20, 30, 40 or 100 years from now, future Legislatures, researchers, someone is going to be looking at *Hansard* and there is going to be a world-wide discussion about the COVID generation and how it impacted them and how social media impacted a couple of generations of young people right across this planet.

I think when future people read this and they think about those social media sites and they research them and figure out what happened, they're all going to say: Were they all mad? How did they let this happen? How did this happen? We know it takes over.

This is a great opportunity now to try and turn this around. You know, this is a good time machine. This is when the time

machine that often gets talked about in the House of Assembly – let's turn back the time on this.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: If the hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition speaks now, he'll close debate on the PMR.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I have a long list of people to thank for speaking today: the Minister of Education, the Members for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, Lewisporte - Twillingate, St. John's Centre, Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, Corner Brook, Lake Melville, Mount Scio, the Minister of Government Services and the Member for Gander. I apologize if I missed anybody but that's a long list. I think a little bit longer than usual. I think people who weren't watching and if they read *Hansard*, they won't necessarily see the co-operation between the House Leaders to make sure that as many people got up to speak, today, as they could. I think most people took less than their 10-minute allotted time to allow for more time for people to speak. I think that just shows that this is an important issue that everybody wants to speak about and I think everybody agrees on.

I was going to go through and sort of summarize what everybody said but we'd probably be here until midnight because a lot of people spoke, as I said. One thing that struck me was the Member from Corner Brook when he talked about medical professionals and their suggestions and recommendations and analysis. One thing he said is that we can't wait. I think that's the important thing I'd like for all of us to take away today is that we can't wait and why would we wait.

We know there's a crisis. We know there's an issue. We know that social media is prevalent throughout society and it's damaging our children. It's affecting their studies at school. It's affecting their behaviour at home. It's affecting their mental health and if we allow them to go through their youth, into 16 and into their teenage years and out in the real world with that damage, with that harm, with that risk, we're really not doing what we should be doing as legislators and as parents in this province.

I think it is incumbent on us right now to take steps to deal with a situation, to ensure that our children are healthy, to ensure that our children are thriving, to ensure that our children are getting the best education that they can and that nothing is standing in their way.

While the debate was going on, I was out speaking to the media about a couple of issues and they asked about the PMR. They said: What are the things that you can do to ban social media right now? What steps can you take, right now, to make sure that this is going to happen? What steps can you do to get rid of these things that you're saying we need to be getting rid of for children? I was honest and I said, I don't have the answers.

So I think the other thing I'd like everyone to take away from this today is that I'm not here, and I don't think all of the Members are here, certainly, from this side of the House, suggesting that they have the answers, but we have to start somewhere. We have to start the conversation to talk about what answers are possible. We can explore other jurisdictions. We can talk to educators. We can talk to our children. We can talk to parents. We can look for solutions.

It's incumbent on us to find those solutions sooner rather than later. Let's not wait for other jurisdictions to figure it out. Let's take a responsibility here in our province. Let's be bold. Let's be leaders in this part of the

world to figure out how we can help our children now. Why wait? Why wait to see what works and doesn't work in other situations?

As the Member for Corner Brook said, you can't wait for that time in the future when you know exactly how we're going to fix it, you know exactly what the problem is. We know there's a problem now. We know we have an obligation. So let's do something about it sooner rather than later.

The last thing that struck me when we talked about this is the PMR is obviously directed at kids in this province, kids under the age of 16. It wasn't lost on me that a lot of people stood up and didn't limit their conversation to kids under 16. They talked about themselves. They talked about other adults. They talked about social media and the Internet, in general, in society. So it's not lost on me that, of course, it doesn't just affect kids between, you know, one and 16 years old. It affects big kids like all of us too, right?

I think the Minister of Government Services said, too, how far do we go with this. There are certainly good things about social media. There are good things about the Internet, but there are bad things, too, and it affects all of us whether they're kids or adults.

I took all the social media off my phone a number of years ago, that freed up the screen time that he was talking about for me. I have to make that conscious effort now, if I want to look at social media, to go to my laptop, which I still do, but I don't do it as much as when my phone is in my hand 24-7. That's just one little, small thing I did to avoid looking at it.

Do you know what? I remember when I deleted some of those apps from my phone and thinking I'm going to miss something. What if I don't see a message on Twitter or what if I don't see a post on Facebook? Do you know what? It doesn't matter. You'll be

okay if you miss a joke or a meme. You'll get the message that's important to you. Someone will find you if they need to talk to you. You don't need to use those social media apps to make sure you're in tune with society, to make sure you're in tune with the news, to make sure you're in touch with you family, your friends or your colleagues. It's all going to be okay.

That's just something that I did to make my life a little easier, to work on my own mental health, to make sure that that stuff doesn't stress me out or I waste time on it, because we all have better things to do with our time. A lot of people in this room have very important portfolios and ministerial jobs that they need to devote a lot of time into, and I think spending time maybe scrolling and looking at jokes, while it can be all fun and stuff like that, it's really not that serious and really not that important in the grand scheme of things.

So while I think it's important that we talk about our children, it's important that we look at ourselves as well. I'm not so sure if the province would appreciate us passing laws and regulations to say they can't use cell phones anymore, that's why we limited it to kids 16 and under but, at the same time, it's okay to look at ourselves in these situations as well.

Speaker, I know as well, we've had a lot of points of order and points of privilege in the House in the last number of weeks and a lot has been related to social media. So I just think it's pretty clear, it does have an effect on everybody's lives day in and day out, but I do want to focus on children. A lot of people stood up today and talked about their own children and how it affects them, different parenting styles, what works and what doesn't work for them. I think, as the Member for Gander said, it's not about screen time specifically, it's about how those screens are being used.

Let's help parents. Let's help kids. Let's do what we can to make sure that we limit what

they see. Being a parent is busy these days. It's probably busier than it ever used to be. You have a lot of kids in events and sports and dance and school. Seeing their kids is a lot of driving around, back and forth, and parents don't have a lot of time themselves. So adding that extra layer of having to worry about social media that generations in the past didn't have to worry about, it's an extra burden that parents are faced with these days.

Look, we try to help people every day when we're in government, when we're in the House of Assembly, regardless of what it is. If it's income support. If it's housing. If it's education. If it's health care. If it's justice. So why are we limiting ourselves to not helping parents deal with the issue of social media that affects their kids each and every day.

With that, Speaker, I guess everyone got about seven minutes. I won't use my full 10 minutes either, but I do want to thank everybody in the House of Assembly that spoke to this today. I think it was a really good discussion. As I said, I think and I know it can be a really good starting point for us, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, to take a very important and serious and leader-like step towards helping the youth in our province and maybe setting the path forward for the rest of Canadians as well.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Lane): Are Members ready for the question?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Leader of the Official Opposition, that we do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: Before I call adjournment, Members are reminded that the Government Services Committee will meet in the Chamber this evening at 5:30 to consider the Estimates of the Executive Council and tomorrow morning at 9 a.m. to consider the Estimates of the Department of Government Services.

This House do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, at 1:30 p.m.