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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA*

Wednesday

May 27, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Admit strangers.

I would like to rule on a point of order raised by the Member for Mount Scio under Standing Order 49 on May 21, 2026.

The Member stated during Question Period that the Minister of Energy and Mines referred to the Opposition House Leader as misleading the public. She further asserted that this House has found on numerous occasions that misleading is not parliamentary when it applies to a person.

I have reviewed *Hansard* and have confirmed that the minister said the following: "I'll go back again and say the Member for Windsor Lake sat on the LeBlanc inquiry. He knows how this works. There were three different models discussed there. He's misleading when he stands and says what he just said."

"The reality of it is that Gull Island, CF1 and CF2 are three entirely different things and the water management was. These guys tried to put it all in one brown paper bag and give it away again."

Standing Order 49 prohibits unparliamentary language. It's clearly stated in House of Commons Procedures and Practices, Fourth Edition, paragraph 1,335: "Personal attacks, insults, obscenities or allegations that a Member has lied or deliberately misled the House are not in order."

The word "misleading" is not categorically unparliamentary. It is not necessarily a violation of Standing Order 49 to say that a statement made by another Member is not factual, as a Member can inadvertently make an incorrect or even misleading statement. However, I once again remind Members that it is unparliamentary to imply a dishonest intent by suggesting that a

Member has deliberately stated something that is false or misleading.

Viewed in context and keeping in mind the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking, I find that the statement in question made is unparliamentary and I would ask the minister to withdraw his remarks.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**L. PARROTT:** Withdrawn, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Thank you.

### Government Business

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

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

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that notwithstanding Standing Order 63, this House shall not proceed with Private Members' Day on Wednesday, May 27, 2026, but shall instead meet at 2 p.m. on that day for Routine Proceedings and the conduct of Government Business.

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

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

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move that notwithstanding Standing Order 9, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 27, but shall continue to sit for the conduct of Government Business and, if not earlier

adjourned, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

**SPEAKER:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Order 6, Bill 13.

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

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands, that Bill 13, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act, now be read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Forestry Act." (Bill 13)

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

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

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

It's a pleasure to be up here this morning to bring in the bill to amend *Forestry Act*. It's a bill that needs to be done.

Speaker, this provincial government is committed to help ensure Newfoundlanders and Labradorians live safe in their communities. Since taking office, we have made great progress delivering on that goal. *Budget 2026* includes more than \$7 million for equipment, supplies, staffing, to provide volunteer firefighters with training and equipment to respond to floods, forest fires,

medical calls and other emergencies. This includes more than \$400,000 for five new emergency services' positions to strengthen public safety.

We are committing \$730,000 to hire 25 additional firefighters in 2026-27, with another additional 25 in '27-'28.

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

**P. FORSEY:** We are providing an increase of \$1.76 million in helicopter support to ensure continued timely wildfire response, wildfire management and resource enforcement efforts. With this support in place and forest fire season now in effect throughout the province, our teams of trained and dedicated firefighters are gearing up to protect our people, homes and entire communities when they are needed in this season.

For the first time in years, Speaker, we have support of the full fleet of water bombers to help them through that.

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

**P. FORSEY:** As we continue to provide those resources necessary to fight wildfires, our department is also focusing on wildfire prevention. Based on the recent response to our call for applications to the Community Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Program, communities are taking huge interest in doing all they can to prevent wildfires. More than 130 communities recently applied for funding to develop wildfire resiliency plans and projects. Following a thorough and unbiased review of applications, we provided funding to 58 communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador to help with that firefighting protection.

A second round of funding is coming soon to assist even more communities in our province. I would suggest that when we announce that, that communities take advantage of that program to help enhance their communities and that also includes fire

breaks so that communities can get involved in that.

Our provincial FireSmart staff are working with communities to raise awareness of simple steps residents can take to reduce risk of wildfires. All of these initiatives reaffirm our focus on building safer communities.

Today, we are digging deeper into legislative tools we use to protect people, our communities and forest resources from the threat of wildfire.

Following the historic wildfire season of 2025, we completed a full legislative regulatory review of the forest fire related provisions of the *Forestry Act* and Regulations. The *Forestry Act* has seen very little change in 35 years. We all know that modern legislation to protect people, communities and forest resources from wildfires is long overdue, that's why those changes are coming.

The legislative amendments we are proposing today are designed to modernize, clarify and strengthen the tools the department can use to regulate burning during forest fire season. They also expand the authority of forestry officials during emergencies to support fire control or suppression efforts and address public safety concerns. You'll find most of this is about our public safety concerns.

The proposed amendments to the *Forestry Act* include moving penalties now included under the *Forestry Act* to the *Forest Fire Offence and Penalties Regulations*. This will ensure the minister has flexibility to amend penalties, if required, during emergencies without requiring the House of Assembly to open. We won't have to bring it back to the House. It also keeps all forest fire related penalties in one place.

Expanding fire-related offences to include a person who recklessly or negligently starts a fire, in addition to the current offence related

to a person who deliberately starts a fire. This restructured legislation is intended to help defer unlawful and unsafe activity. Allowing the minister to include all areas of the province in a fire ban proclamation where necessary for the protection of the forest land by modernizing and clarifying language in the act related to offences including adding a definition of flammable vegetation, highway, industrial operations and roadway to ensure there is no room for misinterpretation.

Expanding areas of the province that the minister may declare as restricted travel areas to also include municipal parks, provincial parks and private campgrounds. To avoid confusion and ensure safety and consistency in restricting travel in an area due to forest fire conditions, parks and campgrounds will be included if restrictions on travel are required.

Expanding the areas of the province for which a permit to burn is required to light a fire during forest fire season. This will include all forest land; all land with 300 metres of the forest land; and all land that contains flammable vegetation.

Clarifying and expanding the authority of forestry official. For example, we propose giving forestry officials the authority to order individuals to leave an area if required to support firefighter control and suppression efforts. This includes creating an offence where a person does not comply with that order.

Creating offences that cover a variety of situations such as igniting a fire, causing a fire to be ignited or failing to extinguish a fire after the permit to burn has been cancelled or suspended. These may seem like small actions but absolute clarity is required when communicating those rules. We want to ensure there is no room for misinterpretation.

When our proposed amendments to the *Forestry Act* pass, we will release other

changes associated with the regulations including forest fire offence and penalty regulations, mill regulation and forest fire regulations. Regulatory changes will further strengthen our ability to modernize, clarify and strengthen provisions related to the forest fires including penalties for fire-related offences.

As I mentioned, our teams of wildland firefighters supported by local volunteer fire departments and resources are ready for action if necessary.

We know from experience that they do everything possible to protect our people, homes and entire community. Those firefighters and volunteer firefighters do a great job, professional job in protecting our communities. We need to help them with the provisions that they need including regulations and help them along the way to do their jobs.

I would like to thank all the officials, all the people in the volunteer fire departments, our own crews, pilots, officials and workers for their continued efforts and especially the years they've already punched. I would like to wish them all success again this year and thank them, especially, for their service.

We know from experience, they will do everything possible to protect our homes and entire communities but preventing wildfires from starting is the most important thing we can do to ensure all our communities are safe in Newfoundland and Labrador. Residents, volunteers, government officials, forest and commercial operators all have a role to play. The amendments we are proposing reflect a whole of society approach in preventing and mitigating wildfires.

We consulted with Indigenous groups and organizations and other stakeholders including sawmill operators and forestry companies for feedback on the proposed amendments. We will continue to work closely with all the stakeholders through the

implementation of these amendments. We believe these proposed changes address not only their concerns but the interests of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, as we work together to prevent wildfires.

That's the intent of this bill, Speaker. As I mentioned, the intent mostly is to protect our communities, protect our people, protect our individuals so that everyone is safe throughout forest fire season. We all have seen what can happen. We've seen the devastation that was caused last year in CBN. We saw what happened in 2022 in Central Newfoundland especially up around the Martin Lake fires. We saw what happened in Labrador, of course, the Churchill Falls area, what happened there, and how those monsters now are coming into our communities and destroying them.

We need to be able to have everything in place that we can to protect our communities and our workers while those scenes are happening because forest fire behaviour has changed. It's more rapid and more intense. Anyone can tell you forest fires have changed, especially with structure fires that can happen. A forest fire comes into communities, attacks the structures that are there, they're more flammable today. They got more chemicals. The materials that they are using, they burn faster, burn quicker and rapidly. So we need to be very protective of our communities, very protective of our forest.

Forestry is a big industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, always has been, and a big part of our heritage, a big part of our culture. We need to protect our forest as well as our people to have that forestry industry going for years to come.

With this act changing from legislation into the regulation it gives the opportunity to adhere to those regulations and to protect the people of our province. We need to do that. We need to ensure that we take all precautions. Safety is utmost and I think

those regulations and the proposed amendments will do just that.

So with that, Speaker, I'll take my seat and I'll let someone else have a chance to speak on this act.

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

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

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

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

Again, certainly a privilege to stand here today and talk about another important topic of interest to us as a province – not to us as a province, I guess, but as a country and as the world – is facing in terms of climate change and what climate change is doing to our weather patterns and the challenges that's bringing with it, Mr. Speaker.

What the minister is bringing here is certainly a good plan, I believe, to start with. It's important that we do not react but we do respond. That requires involvement of officials which are quite engaged because I certainly can appreciate the work that goes on in terms of those officials putting in a lot of work. Those officials, I had them when I was minister, I'd like to thank them this morning for all they do, because it's about protecting our communities and protecting this province. It's becoming more challenging and with that challenge comes a cost.

The minister talked about forestry and how important it is. Forestry, and I guess the forestry industry, has changed in terms of the paper industry and the need for it, but in this province, we know that Corner Brook Pulp and Paper is certainly an integral part of the forest industry, the newsprint industry. We know they employ 400-plus workers across its mill, power plants and its forest operations. Just for stats alone, in 2025, newsprint production totalled approximately

158,000, almost 159,000 tons. That was down from 2024. There is a trend there. We know that's a concern in terms of the mill operations, but I'm just stating this factual information to give light to the importance of the newsprint industry in this province.

Also, not just Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, they work in conjunction, I guess, in agreement – most times – with Newfoundland and Labrador's lumber industry. They include three large, integrated saw mills: Sexton Lumber Company Limited; Burton's Cove Logging & Lumber Ltd.; and Cottle's Island Lumber Company Limited. Together, they represent nearly 95 per cent of the province's lumber production.

So I just wanted to put that on record in terms of the role that they play in this province and how important it is from an employment perspective, but, also, I guess, for these operators, Mr. Speaker. I certainly visited all of them during my tenure, as minister, to see their operations and to see the challenges that they faced. The changes that are coming forward in this piece of legislation protects them, because they have wood materials, saw pellets and sawdust that can create fires. They know that they have to have their individual plans in terms of protecting their businesses, but it's also the concern for the government and the minister and working in conjunction with them to ensure that they have their fire mitigation plans as well.

The minister started out by saying we have made great progress. I agree, but as I said last night in some of my remarks, that progress didn't happen in seven or eight months. I think it's important to recognize that because this is too important, there's a lot of work that has been done over the years by officials and us, when we were in government, to listen to those officials, not only listen to those officials but visiting the saw mills, talking to the firefighters, talking to the volunteer firefighters in our rural

communities and asking them what do they need in order to do a better job.

The minister talked about 25 additional wildfire firefighters. That's indeed a good thing. It's not just about hiring additional workers but it's also equipping them with the resources that they need. The minister talked about we have a full fleet of water bombers. We do and that's a good thing. As I said before, in terms of fires, you can have 100 water bombers, and depending on the state of the fire, then they necessarily can't be put into the line of fire, so to speak, because of the state of the fire.

We need more aircraft assets other than water bombers to assist those pilots that are flying into, as I said before, the line of fire which can be very dangerous as well, but anybody who's been in those aircraft, talking to the pilots and how they are specialized in what they do in terms of retrieving water from a lake or wherever or a body of water and then taking that water to the fire areas and extinguishing, it's super amazing as far as I'm concerned. Those pilots are to be commended. I don't think they're talked about enough.

We talk about the water bombers a lot but the water bombers wouldn't get off the ground if it wasn't for those pilots and the people who assist and the people that maintain the aircraft. It's certainly a piece of it for sure.

The minister also talked about wildfire prevention plans; also a good move. He talked about a second round of funding, that's very important, but I think no matter who is governing, the time has come when we recognize that we have to do more, we have to invest more in terms of helping to avoid, I guess, not avoid but help with situations as last year's fires.

We saw again last year, which seems to be getting worse every year, in terms of the extent of the burning, we saw it in various parts of the province and it's very

concerning. I remember last year when I was in my office on the fifth floor looking out and seeing the fire that close to industrial gas stations and everything. It was a frightening moment to realize how close we are and if the wind changed direction, it could have been disastrous.

The enormity of what we're seeing in terms of fires is becoming a new reality and we have to be ready for sure. As I said, responding to it and not reacting. We are living in different times and we have to be ready and I think this is a good move towards being ready.

The other thing, as well, in terms of fighting fires is we do have a friendly agreement with other provinces to assist if we need their craft and we assist them if they need our aircraft which is a good plan. I know it's a costly venture, as well, but we can't put a price on lives and saving communities. That's a good plan and that will continue, I know. It's all towards helping us face the enormity of forest fires in the province.

I know the minister referenced some changes in the *Forestry Act*. We will have some questions in Committee for sure to seek clarification on things that are happening or what the minister is trying to do here and the officials are trying to do as well. Also, I thank the officials for taking time to brief us a couple of days ago and allowing us to ask some questions but we have more questions that we'll certainly ask to the minister.

The changes allow the minister to suspend a licence or suspend all or a part of a mill operations being carried out under licence in prescribed circumstances. There are two descriptions there that I would seek answers and clarification because I reference a mill that, at one point when I was minister, due to an electrical problem, was shut down – the whole operation. It should never have happened because the electrical part didn't interfere with the other

parts of the operation. I'll seek clarification when we get to the stage on that.

There are a lot of references in Bill 13 about creating an offence. I also will seek clarification on that from the minister and expanding the areas of the province. There are a lot of reference to expanding the areas of the province, but that's certainly in relation to forest travel and forest fires, all in an attempt to help with the fire mitigation plans from a provincial perspective. It also references no longer exclude provincial parks, municipal parks and private campgrounds from the application provisions of the act relating to forest travel. I believe that's important. That's from, I guess, a provincial responsibility and the assets we have in our provincial parks. That's certainly an important piece of it as well. There are other things, as I said, Mr. Speaker, that I'll seek clarification during Committee stage.

I also reference in a lot of the descriptions here, "allow a forest official to order a person to leave an area for the purposes of controlling or extinguishing a fire and create an offence where the person does not comply with the order." I have some concern about that, allowing a forest official to order a person – I guess the concern is around adding responsibility of duties for the forest officials. Are we overwhelming them with their responsibility? Are they properly trained? Is there additional training required? Making sure that they're equipped, from a training perspective response time, I think that's important just adding on extra duties to the forest official. I'm sure the department and the minister is looking at that and ensuring that they are equipped to do their job once they're out in the field.

Also, there's a lot of reference as well, I think I referred to it before, allow a forestry official – that's referenced three or four times. Also, "clarify that a person who cuts or removes trees from forest land or engages in an activity that is likely to cause

a fire during a period other than the forest fire season is required to obtain an operating permit where required by the regulations." I know in a rural district a lot of people sometimes say to me, why can't we just cut wood along the roads? We could do your brush cutting for you with those blowdowns, let us clean it up. But people don't realize the dangers of it, especially during conditions that are critical, warm and we know now with climate change that's happening, the weather patterns that we're having. This year we had a lot of snow, but we didn't have a lot of frost. So in the ground, there's not a lot of water based in the ground that people think that it innocent, oh, I'll just have a brush fire, cut some of the brush that's around my property or grass or whatever, innocently, but certainly proposes a danger.

I had it happen last year in Harbour Breton, innocently someone started to burn some grass and it was pretty close to being disastrous. Not to blame that person for what they did, but certainly for them to recognize that you have to be more cautious and self-aware of what's around you in terms of burning, whatever material.

I think the minister referenced last year's fires and challenges. It was very challenging. As an MHA representing a rural area where your only vein in and out, really, is – we have a ferry system, but that doesn't carry vehicles. The only vein in and out is the Bay d'Espoir highway, Route 360. When that closes down, the rage of the fire is a lot to contend with, but then you have more challenges with people getting to their cancer treatments, getting out for work. It can become a rage in itself, not just the fire alone.

Then there's the piece of people understanding what officials do, what firefighters do. Last year, it was a social media mess in terms of people using their own opinions to say, you know, forestry officials, I'm not sure they know what their talking about. It doesn't seem like there's a

fire there to that extent, but it is, trust the source. I used to always tell everybody, don't share anything on social media that is not sound from a reliable source. Share what I put there because it comes from officials, those that are on the ground, because social media last year became a fire in itself and there's no need of it. Absolutely, no need whatsoever.

That leads me into the educational piece. So we can bring in fines, we can bring in warnings from whomever, but the unfortunate part about it is some are going to do what they want to do no matter what. So I think it's the dangers of, the educational component of it, to alert people of what their actions will result in because last year, in terms of the Martin Lake fire, as the minister referenced, Mr. Speaker, I have a family – and I'll certainly speak to the minister about it – that lived in, not in a cabin, it was their home. They lost everything. She was pregnant at the time and very stressed for her own concern and the baby's concern. It was a very difficult time. I reached out to them yesterday to see if they had any resolve to their file. I don't think so. I'm not even sure the minister is aware of it but I'll certainly have a side conversation with him to bring about their concerns because they had proof that they were living in that and going to their employment close to Central Newfoundland. They lost everything they had there because it was a place of residence for them. That was unfair to them, but we understand.

There were a lot of people – when fires happen, they want to get to their cabins. They want to make sure that their cabin is not being destroyed. There was a tremendous effort last year from fire breaks to firefighters doing their best. We all had daily updates. We don't realize what goes into the efforts of trying to keep that blaze away from destroying properties. It can become very, very devastating for all of us because it connects all of us. We have friends that have cabins. I think about that

family that I just referred to. They've been devastated and, unfortunately, had to make some other arrangements in terms of living arrangements, but it's been difficult on them, but thank God that the mom and the baby are good and all is well there.

The educational piece, and also the consultation piece, I think that falls under the heading of educational piece, and the minister mentioned Indigenous groups. I know we each signed a forest management agreement with Miawpukek First Nations back a few years ago and we worked on it for years. We believe it was the right thing to do from having access to lumber that, not necessarily used but they could use it, and also their intent was to provide wood source, heat source for seniors in their community.

I asked during the briefing, does this affect their forest management agreement and are there any adjustments that need to be made to their forest management agreement to help them because they have access to that resource and that could be, I guess, dangerous as well. But knowing the council at MFN and their community group, I would say they are prepared. They have their own plans, but it's nice to work in conjunction with the provincial government, that we work with them because they live in the area, they hunt in the area and they cut wood in the area. For them, it's the same concern as protecting all of us, in terms of living down in that area.

In terms of the sawmill operators, the feedback from them, I believe it is a crucial piece as well to ensure that they have their input into how the plan should move forward. I know that's been done in terms of communicating with them because they're the front-line workers as such, in terms of what we should do, protect their properties, therefore, protecting all of us in the province that's in and around those operations.

I'm going to take my seat. I'll have questions, certainly, during Committee

stage seeking clarification on some issues. But this is definitely a good move forward in terms of preparing the people of the province, preparing communities and we can't highlight education enough, what we all need to do to have better planning and have our fire mitigation plans in place.

There's a lot more work to do, for sure, but this is a good step forward in many steps that I'm sure will come forward. We all know that there's a financial component to it and there's investment in this year's budget. There have been investments in previous budgets and that's all a good thing because it's an investment, it's not a cost; it's an investment into the future of communities, the future of this province.

I guess from a fire prevention perspective, too, in terms of the plans for Central Newfoundland, Gander, the facility that's proposed there as well, I encourage the government to move ahead with that because I believe the training component could be a lead for us, as a province, in terms of Atlantic Canada. I think that would better prepare us in terms of investment into the organizations and the entities that are involved in fire mitigation and helping to keep our province safe.

But we all know there is a big challenge ahead of us, we need to be prepared. I believe this is a good move in the right direction to be prepared. I look forward to others discussing on this and I'll have some questions for the minister in Committee stage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

**H. CORMIER:** Thank you, Speaker.

I rise to speak in support of the proposed amendments to the *Forestry Act*, Bill 13. These amendments are truly necessary and focused on very important goals: protecting the people, protecting communities and protecting our forest resources of Newfoundland and Labrador from the growing threat of wildfires.

Our province has always had a deep connection to the land. Forests are part of who we are. They support jobs, tourism, recreation, wildlife – and I was unsuccessful in the moose draw this year – traditional lifestyles and the natural beauty that defines Newfoundland and Labrador.

In recent years, we have all seen the increasing danger posed by wildfires, not only here at home but across Canada. Wildfires are becoming larger, more unpredictable and more destructive. Communities are being evacuated, families are losing homes and firefighters are being pushed to their limits. Governments everywhere are recognizing the modern challenges require modern legislations.

This is exactly why these amendments are so important. The *Forestry Act* has changed very little in more than 35 years. Think about it. The *Forestry Act* has changed very little in 35 years. Over those 3½ decades, technology has changed, emergency management has changed, forestry practices have changed and the risks associated with climate and wildfire activity have changed dramatically, yet much of the legislation governing wildfire prevention and response remain outdated.

These amendments represent a long overdue modernization of the act. They will clarify the rules, strengthen enforcement, improve public safety and give forestry officials the tools they need to respond quickly and effectively during emergencies. Perhaps, most importantly, these amendments place a stronger emphasis on prevention because wildfire resources are

essential. The best wildfire is the one that never starts.

Speaker, our government has already demonstrated a strong commitment to wildfire preparedness and emergency response. We have increased funding for emergency services and volunteer fire departments. We have returned the fifth water bomber to service. We have hired additional wildfire fighters and we continue to invest in prevention, mitigation and community readiness.

I know the fifth water bomber has been a bit contentious on the other side of this House but, at the end of the day, does it really matter, as long as that bird is flying this summer to protect the families.

Those investments matter, but legislation matters, too. Good legislation creates accountability, good legislation provides clarity and good legislation gives officials the authority to act quickly while public safety is at risk. That is what these amendments aim to accomplish.

Speaker, one of the most important changes involve strengthening the province's ability to regulate burning during forest fire season. As Members know, forest fire season is currently in effect from May 1 to September 30, on the Island, and May 15 to September 30 in Labrador, the Big Land. During this time, permits are required for many forms of outdoor burning. These rules exist for a reason. A single careless act can quickly become a devastating wildfire and we've seen that.

Unfortunately, many wildfires are caused by human activity. Sometimes, it's accidental; sometimes it's negligence; sometimes it's simply a failure to understand the risks, but regardless of the cause, consequences can be enormous. Homes can be lost, businesses can be threatened, forests can be destroyed and lives can be placed in danger. That is why the proposed revisions strengthen the province's authority

surrounding fire bans, enforcement and emergency response measures.

The amendments will also create responsibilities for forestry operators and industrial users operating in the forest areas. These sectors play a critical role in our economy. Many already operate responsibly and safely, but when conditions become dangerous, everyone must do their part to reduce risk.

Speaker, I can speak from a lived experience. Last summer, as an employee of Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, we shut down because of the wildfires. We had to, the forests were too dry for the equipment to operate in the woods and we ran out of wood, so we took downtime, took an opportunity inside the mill to do some maintenance, but it effected the livelihood of some people inside that mill, especially our junior employees who didn't have the vacation allotment like this old dog had. I could take the time off and not worry about it, but some of those younger kids couldn't with young families. So it does effect. These changes can help ensure stronger requirements, better compliance and clearer expectations.

Speaker, another key amendment introduces a significant new provision related to reckless starting of wildfire. Think about that – reckless. Why would someone want to do that? I think most people in this province would agree, if careless and reckless behaviour causes a wildfire that threatens communities and put lives at risk, there must be consequences.

The updated language around offences and penalties will strengthen accountability and make enforcement more effective. At the same time, moving penalties into regulations allows government to respond more quickly when updates are needed rather than waiting for lengthy legislative changes. That is practical, that is efficient and that is a responsible government.

Speaker, I also want to highlight the extensive consultation that took place throughout this review process. The department consulted with sawmill operators, forestry companies, industrial sectors and stakeholders across the province. That matters because effective legislation is built through collaboration. The first time I spoke in this House, I talked about collaboration. It's so important, regardless of the side, that we all work together to make this province better for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

As these amendments move forward, that collaboration will continue. Speaker, prevention must remain the centre of this conversation. Every year, forestry officials remind the public about the importance of safe burning practices, checking hazard ratings, properly extinguishing campfires and reducing fire risks around homes and properties. Simple actions can make a tremendous difference.

Cleaning brush around the homes, keeping wood piles away from buildings, ensuring ATVs and chainsaws have spark arresters and avoid open burning during high-risk periods, these are practical measures that protect families and communities. While legislation alone cannot prevent every wildfire, it can create stronger rules, clear authority and better public awareness.

Speaker, when we think about wildfires, we often think first about the firefighters, and rightfully so. Wildland firefighters, volunteer fire departments, emergency personnel, pilots, forestry officials and first responders perform extraordinary work under extremely difficult conditions. They work long hours; they face dangerous situations and they do so to protect complete strangers.

Speaker, in my District of St. George's - Humber, every fire department we have are volunteers: Pasadena Fire Rescue, Steady Brook, Little Rapids, Massey Drive, Gallants, Stephenville Crossing, St. George's, Flat Bay, Bay St. George out in

Codroy Valley, all volunteers who give up the time tirelessly to train and protect people.

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

**H. CORMIER:** These amendments support those front-line workers by ensuring we have stronger legislation behind them. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the volunteer fire departments across Newfoundland and Labrador. Every department, whether paid or volunteer, thank you for what you do.

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

**H. CORMIER:** In many communities, volunteers are the first people to answer the call. They leave their families; they leave their jobs and their homes to protect others. Whether in the Humber Valley, Bay St. George, the Northern Peninsula of Labrador or anywhere else in this province, these individuals deserve our gratitude and our support.

Speaker, we've all watched the devastation wildfires have caused in other provinces and territories; entire communities evacuated, homes reduced to ash and families displaced for months. We saw that here in our own province last year in Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde. Those events remind us that preparation matters, modern legislation matters, clear authority matters and strong prevention measures matter. No government can eliminate wildfire risk entirely, but governments do have a responsibility to prepare, modernize and respond. These amendments are part of fulfilling that responsibility.

This legislation is about protecting people. It's about protecting communities. It's about protecting the forests that are such an important part of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's about ensuring that our laws reflect today's realities, not realities of 35 years ago.

In my maiden speech, I spoke of my connection with the mill in Corner Brook. I'm a third-generation employee at the mill. If we didn't protect our forest, if there wasn't a forest out there, I probably wouldn't be here today. When the Cormiers landed in Codroy Valley back in the early 1600s, 1700s, some were farmers, some were fishermen but, my crowd, well, we were loggers.

The minister from Deer Lake drove across the Island with me and, in my car, I have a CD player – yes, my car is that old, I have a CD player.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**H. CORMIER:** There is only one CD in that car and that's an interview that my brother, Keith, had done Christmas Day 1975 with my Grandfather Cormier. He talked about his life history and the life story. The minister remembers it well. He talks about logging in Rattling Brook. We were coming through the Exploits area. We were driving through the area at the same time that the CD was talking about logging in that area. It was quite remarkable to bring us back to that time when they were just using bucksaws, not chainsaws.

These proposed amendments modernize the *Forestry Act*. They strengthen wildfire prevention. They improve enforcement, provide greater clarity and they help ensure Newfoundland and Labrador is better prepared for the future.

In closing, I encourage all Members in this House to support these amendments and support the continued work being done to keep Newfoundlanders and Labradorians safe.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

I'll start with picking up on what the hon. Members said. I remember there was a *Land & Sea* show on the loggers and I'll tell you, that it was one hard life that they led, no one can take that away from them. I remember the gentleman they interviewed, he had his life written on his face, it was as clear as that.

We will support the changes that are being put forth here. If nothing else, as the minister said, it's precautionary. It's about being committed to ensuring the people live safely in their communities, especially communities that are –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**J. DINN:** – tied closely to the land around them, that government is committed to doing everything to protect communities.

Many of these measures here are seen as prevention and mitigation. It's about making sure that we don't have to respond but that we can indeed prevent the need to respond.

The other aspect of this is that there were wide consultations and we may have a few questions on that as well later on, but, for the most part, it seems to be an expansion of the powers of government to be able to respond to fires, the ability to fine, the ability to suspend licences and to give forestry officials the power they need to carry out their jobs and to prevent what had happen to us last year.

There's been an acknowledgement from several people now that forest fire behaviour has changed and, yes, it has changed. As the minister said, they ignite and burn more rapidly. I would say that if you notice anything over the last few years, the winds have gotten a lot more intense, the gusts and so on and so forth,

summertime, wintertime, it doesn't make any difference now.

I'll talk a little bit about climate change in a minute, but the fact is fires are happening, not just here in Newfoundland and Labrador, but across the country and across the world.

Thirty-five years have indeed changed. I think last year we saw for the first time some of the lowest water levels in major bodies of water, Grand Lake, Humber River, you name it. Obviously, we're not only getting wind but we're getting dryer summers as well, much dryer and hotter.

I think in Montreal this week they're already into the 30-degree, 38-degree temperatures. This is May, I know we don't usually get a spring until much later maybe, but the fact is it's getting dryer and hotter. So we're now forced to change our behaviour. In response to that, as several Members talked about, in 35 years, conditions have changed and the act needs to keep up with it.

Certainly, I would say that was brought home this summer past. We had smoke from Conception Bay North and Paddy's Pond. We had the smoke from the wildfires in Western Canada but this smoke that came over the city, came over other parts of the province, represented severe destruction of communities, devastation. It impacted people's lives. It took away their homes, devastated their communities, placed people at risk, uprooted people and so on and so forth.

The Member for the district well knows how that impacted. I know that my wife and I went out to Carbonear to the school to help – and just so you know, Carbonear is where my family is from and we still have the land there and heavily wooded land, too, I might add. One thing struck me, Speaker, is one day that we were going out, we drove by just as the fire around Paddy's Pond was starting. The fire trucks were coming out of

there. I guess they realized, at this point, there is nothing they could do. At that point, it was just smoke coming up on the other side of the pond. By the time we came back in, it was a raging inferno. That's how quickly it took off.

I know years ago, in New Brunswick, when they had a fire ban, major dry summers and I remember driving behind a vehicle and they threw a cigarette butt out the window. Ordinarily, that wouldn't be a problem but, in a tinder-dry situation, something like that can ignite a major fire. We know we saw last year's restrictions on the use of chainsaws, ATVs and so on and so forth in multiple provinces in reaction to this. It's forced us to change.

Certainly, we've brought up the issue of climate change, and I heard that mentioned here a few times. The question usually is asked, do you believe in climate change? I think the better question to be asking is, do you know what it means? Do we know what it means?

Well, we got a taste of what it means last year in the cost to people's livelihoods, to their homes, to the destruction of communities, of our natural resources and so on and so forth. While it's good that we're looking for ways to respond to it and make sure that we can mitigate this and reduce the cost and the impact on people's lives and make sure communities are safe, I think, at some point, we've really got to look at, not just here in Newfoundland and Labrador, but finding ways to collaborate with other provinces to address the issue of climate change and try to at least mitigate that as well. That's what's underlying a lot of this.

I will say that the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune talked about the need for education, and I can't agree more. I do remember when I come back from the West Coast and I'm over that way fishing or whatever, there are a couple of signs, at least one that I remember on the way in that

is a big sign that has the relative speeds of a forest fire, a caribou and a person. There should be more along those lines because one thing, it draws your attention to just how fast a forest fire moves. There's no way you can outrun it, not as a person.

But I think that kind of messaging along the highway, even, as people go, is a constant reminder because the more education, the less need for regulation as well. Maybe people's attitudes haven't changed because when you think of Newfoundland and Labrador, what we see outside today is more or less what we've come to expect. I do remember, like, May 24 was a time when you might very well wake up with snow around your tent, or in June we've had snow. I do remember that.

I will say this, the one last thing I'll end on because I think the education piece is important. As a salmon angler, I walk into a few rivers, such as the Salmonier River, and you see the amount of garbage that's left on the way out. It's not directly related but, I think, in many ways, sometimes having reminders to people, not only in how we treat our natural environment, that taking those steps to treat it with respect is important. Not just in terms of garbage in the woods, but also in how we go about making sure that we don't burn it down and ourselves and other people with it.

I will end with this, because we've got the fifth water bomber back and forth – and I know that's something that my former colleague from Labrador West pushed heavily, and having that stationed in Labrador West as well. I will agree with the Member for – I got names down, but not necessarily where – St. George's - Humber, it doesn't matter where it came from, as long as we've got that out there.

A few weeks ago, I met with a firefighter pilot, and he actually does firefighting in Australia – he's a Newfoundlander – Greece and so on and so forth, but he was telling me about the Air Tractor AT-802 Fire Boss

aircraft equipped with float planes. I know he has written the government on this as well, and the government departments on this, but he talks about that this is the plane that he flies exclusively and that is used in these jurisdictions to fight forest fires.

Compared to a new Canadair 415, which will cost \$40 million to \$50 million, and a new Super Scooper 515, he estimates would be about \$60 million, a Fire Boss is roughly about \$4 million to \$5 million. Float plane equipped, it's a lot cheaper and probably would allow for greater coverage as well.

New Brunswick recently brought four of these planes into their fleet. So while we have a fifth water bomber, maybe there's an opportunity here to draw on the experience of this veteran pilot, whose had 15 years in this area, to look at how we expand our fleet with more reliable crafts, and just as effective, that would give ourselves greater coverage. If we've got to change and update this act, that's 35 years since it was last updated, then it's not only important to update the act and update the regulations, but also maybe to update the equipment that we use to make sure that we have the best coverage possible.

From the reading I've done on this since I met with pilot – and we had a good chat about this. He flies these planes. You can imagine then, if you had five or six of these planes flying in tandem, you could cover a lot more area in many ways and probably a lot more efficiently.

I think as we go forward, to the government, I believe this bill is certainly a genuine attempt here to address a very serious problem and make sure that we do not have a repeat of what we had last summer. I applaud the minister for that. This is a serious issue and we've got, what I could call, immediate action on it, but I think we might as well start planning for the future in that, when we're looking replacing equipment, we consider what else is out

there. In our budget, in a province with own financial issues, maybe there's a way of getting a better, bigger bang for the buck and also being able to respond more quickly and more efficiently to the fires that occur.

I do recommend that you at least investigate the AT802 Fire Boss aircraft float plane. It's being used in other jurisdictions. New Brunswick has them. Right now, they bought four new ones and maybe it's a path that we can go down, too, if not to replace the current fleet, but to supplement them as well.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

I'm stand today to speak Bill 13, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act. While this bill is presented is largely administrative and technical, the reality is that it also has a response to very real anxiety that we all experienced last year across the entire province during the devastating wildfire season of 2025.

As was said in here, climate change is real. We are seeing the change in patterns. Wildfires are not something that happen in other places anymore. People were devastated – people are still devastated. People are still displaced. People still need to receive compensation, which, to my understanding, they haven't, as of yet. Certainly it's a real discussion and, again, it's important to be ready.

Also, something that I'd like to see go further are relationships with other jurisdictions, as we've seen last year. We know aircrafts, for example, and teams from not just outside of Canada, but the United States were here to help us and things would have been far worse if we did not

have that support. I'll just take my memory back to what happened in Spaniard's Bay in a cemetery, how a fire was ignited by an ornament on a gravesite. That's how the fire started.

Again, this graveyard lays at the top of the community and things could have gone badly, but thankfully because of that aerial support that was literally just down the road, further down in Conception Bay North, attending to those blazes down there on the North Shore, they were able to get there quickly, but we could have had another devastated community and town dealing with what people on the North Shore are dealing with.

Those aerial supports were necessary. They made all the difference. So it's very important to develop those relationships with other jurisdictions and to ensure that they are there at the ready when we need them.

Another big challenge that we saw is that there were simultaneous blazes happening everywhere, across our province and Labrador, and across the country. We know that was happening. So much so that the our neighbours to the south, the Americans, were actually complaining about the smoke blowing up from Canada. They were actually complaining about that as if it was something that Canadians were intentionally doing or even wanted to contend with themselves.

But there are aspects of the bill that we support and modernizing the outdated language makes sense. Clarifying authority during wildfire emergencies makes sense. Improving coordination around burn permits, forest access, restrictions and emergency response tools certainly makes sense. Ensuring Forestry officials have clear authority during the high-risk fire situations is reasonable.

Also, the key question is will these amendments actually improve wildfire

preparedness and emergency response on the ground, or are we simply expanding the powers on paper without ensuring that the people, equipment, communication systems and front-line capacity exist to support them?

One of the biggest themes throughout this bill is the expanded authority. The minister can prohibit burning through proclamations. The Forestry officials can suspend permits. Officials can order people out of areas. Officials can requisition private equipment during a fire. Officials can seize evidence related to fire investigations.

On that note, too, about the private equipment, hats off to the people who are willing to step up and offer their equipment. We saw that last year. People were ready to help and willing to help by using their own personal equipment.

Officials can seize evidence related to fire investigations, and Forestry officials are now explicitly granted peace officer powers under the *Criminal Code* for enforcement purposes. These are significant powers, and with these significant powers comes the need for transparency, however, accountability and the proper training, as we know.

So what training will Forestry officials receive before exercising expanded evacuation authority or peace officer powers? These are, again, questions for Committee. How will enforcement decisions be reviewed? How will government ensure consistency across regions, particularly in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, and Labrador itself? Because, as we know, uneven enforcement during an emergency situation creates confusion and confusion during emergencies can put lives at risk.

I actually received that first-hand feedback about some volunteer firefighters who were on the scene and they were attending, particularly in CBN. Then, when officials came out, provincial officials, there was a bit

of confusion there about what orders were being given. Again, we can't also forget the value of local knowledge of the lands in the communities that our volunteers are serving and they have been for years and decades.

Another major concern is communication. The bill removes several requirements to publish notices in newspapers and, instead, allows the department to publish orders through department channels, including online platforms and social media. This certainly can be viewed as a way to modernize but many rural residents – and this is the reality – cabin owners, harvesters and seniors do not live online or, often, don't even have reliable access to Internet, let alone 24 hours a day.

Some areas still struggle, as we know, with reliable Internet and cell service. We do know that was also a promise on the campaign trail of the now Premier to invest much more to improve cellular service throughout the entire province. Again, we'd like to see that. That wasn't in the budget.

Some areas still struggle with reliable Internet and cellular service, and that's a fact. So government needs to answer the very basic question on how will people actually know when a fire proclamation is issued? How will they know when a burn permit is cancelled? How will they know when the travel restrictions are in place? If someone unknowingly violates an order they never received, that becomes both an issue of fairness and public safety.

The bill also broadens the scope of land subject to fire prevention rules. It now applies, not only to forest land itself, but also to land within 300 metres of forest land and land containing flammable vegetation.

Again, the intent may be understandable, but how will ordinary residents determine whether their property falls within those rules? I mean, it's something to be considered to even develop some sort of

special relationship with regard to media – radio, television, mainstream media.

So what exactly qualifies as flammable vegetation? Will government provide clear public guidance, or will residents and small operators be left trying to interpret vague rules during wildfire season while facing penalties that government has not yet even fully outlined?

The bill removes specific monetary penalties from the legislation itself and, instead, leaves them to regulation. Officials have said that it is because of government-needed flexibility during last year's wildfire season when fines had to be introduced quickly. I applaud that. I remember that we were all sitting by the TV and the radio and even keeping an eye online about the actions that were taken and literally the day-to-day or the hour-to-hour events that happened during the wildfire season.

I remember we, as a government, had to increase fines, and rightfully so because we rely on common sense and the common courtesy of respect. Let me tell you, and as my colleague mentioned, even so much as flicking a cigarette butt out the car window, we see it every day. I still see it. I'm sure everybody in here sees it throughout their communities. That's something that can very well start a fire, especially in the dry conditions that we saw last year. Again, people need to use common sense. Check the provincial sites; check the municipality sites.

I think, as well, it would be beneficial to develop consistent communication and planning with municipalities and give them the authority to impose their own bylaws, which they do have, to increase fines. That may be something that they want to explore, because it's everybody's responsibility to do their part.

Education, we can't emphasize that enough. Maybe it's something that we can also start seeing in our schools is education about

safety of burning and campfires and all of that stuff. Like I said, it's everybody's responsibility and it's never too early to start learning about fire safety because it's a reality that we do certainly contend with here now in our province, along with the rest of the country.

Flexibility cannot come at the expense of transparency. The public deserves to know what penalties are being considered, how severe will they be and how will government distinguish between accidental mistakes and reckless behaviour, because enforcement must be proportionate.

One section that deserves careful scrutiny is the authority to require private equipment and assistance during wildfire response efforts. In emergency situations, co-operation, as we know, is essential, but if government can compel the use of private equipment, then government also has an obligation to clearly outline compensation, liability protections and timelines for payment. If someone's equipment is damaged in helping during a wildfire response, what happens then? Those details will matter.

Finally, the bill repeatedly assumes the existence of sufficient capacity within a system. Do we have enough Forestry officials? That's a really good question. That's something that we need to know. Do we have enough wildfire suppression personnel, enough equipment, enough communication infrastructure, enough coordination capacity within municipalities, volunteer fire departments, Indigenous governments and emergency management agencies? Again, it goes back to having that consistent dialogue and to having those plans in place because expanding legal authority without expanding operational capacity risks creating legislation that looks strong on paper while front-line responders continue carrying impossible workloads.

We all want stronger wildfire prevention. We all want safer communities. Everybody

does. We all recognize that climate-driven fire risk is becoming more serious and more unpredictable. The government cannot legislate preparedness into existence. Preparedness requires investment; preparedness requires staffing; it requires communication systems that people can trust; and, perhaps, requires government to support the front-line responders and emergency personnel expected to carry out these expanded responsibilities. That is the standard that this legislation should ultimately be measured against.

So it certainly is good. It's a step in the right direction and, again, I can't emphasize enough that it's everybody's responsibility. We work with municipalities, we work with law enforcement even and expanding fines and holding to account the responsibilities is essential and perhaps who knows, maybe some of these fires could have been prevented. But going forward, the best legislation that we can have and to support the people on the ground, is the best thing that we can do as a provincial government. Also, let's bring in our federal government counterparts and our colleagues in on this conversation because, again, we're all stakeholders here in our province, in our country.

That said, I look forward to Committee. Again, I thank the minister for bringing it in. I know he's passionate about the topic. We're all here to work to create the best legislation moving forward.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you, Speaker.

It is my privilege to speak on behalf of the residents and the constituents of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. Of course, I'm very pleased to see the minister and his department bring forward this bill for amendment. We know that we live in a time

where we need to make these kind of adjustments and expanding the authority and emboldening the preventative and mitigation of fires in all our communities is crucial. I'm very happy to see the attention going to this.

Obviously, I, too, even though I'm a St. John's resident and representing people in the downtown core, I have had lots of people who have lost their homes in the CBN fire and we've experienced this tragedy in many other areas as well.

I'm going to speak from an urban vantage point. Obviously, we're talking about forestry, but when we talk about parks and other capacities it all intersects in terms of the amendments that are being put forward.

We've got a long history in the City of St. John's of unbelievable fires. We've got the Great Fire of 1846; the Great Fire of 1892; to the Knights of Columbus in 1942, so many people lost their lives, so many people homeless as a result of fires. Only in recent years, in 1992, of course, we saw the CLB fire in the city centre. Fires are a huge concern for everybody and even though we could talk about forestry and forest industries, we know that there are patches of woods and fires that certainly are in urban areas as well.

I lived just below the CLB and watching the flankers coming down of the burning building. Of course, the Big R went up as well, we had to evacuate from our home in anticipation of that. So, you know, there are many people who understand the fear of fires and how it can impact their lives. But I just wanted to give a little bit of a perspective from an urban vantage point.

I'm certainly very happy to see that, as part of the amendment process, the department held numerous consultations and conversations with industry and communities, and as my colleagues mentioned, we'll probably get into a little bit more about that otherwise.

The areas in particular that are of interest to me, the department spoke with Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador; Pippy Park; Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, especially with the elements that are applied to provincial parks and campgrounds. So I'm very happy to see that engagement and certainly we'll talk a little bit more about that in Committee.

I did want to just reference as well that I had the incredible opportunity and privilege to work side by side with a lot of the St. John's Regional firefighters in my former municipal role, as did my colleague here as well, MHA Korab. We see the hard work that happens with firefighters, whether or not it's urban or rural, and they need to be commended. They need to be supported. These are incredible workers in our community and so a big shout-out to those folks as well.

I want to just kind of focus in now on urban parks. One of the major concerns of mine, and I will certainly table this letter for the minister because it hasn't been brought to his attention. It's certainly starting to make the rounds here now. But one of the big concerns that I have brought forward is about Pippy Park.

In my former role as a board member for the Pippy Park Commission, in 2013, the Newfoundland and Labrador health authority basically imparted a no smoking ban on all the property and so be it, we're working towards healthier environments and such. Unfortunately, one of the side effects that happened about that – and that was the CEO, Vicki Kaminski, I believe, at the time, brought that ruling down. What ended up happening was those people who are smoking had nowhere to go. There were no little kiosks, no outdoor stations, nothing, so people basically ended up needing to go and have their smoke and, of course, they ended up on Long Pond trail.

I spoke with the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts and Recreation, as it does fall underneath her purview as well with the

parks and campgrounds. This has been an issue that I have been trying to address, both in my role as a former board member and as a city representative, and now as an MHA who is a critic of this particular area.

It's not just about healthy living and people walking on trails and going through smoke. We are now in a time where we know that there are huge risks involved to cigarette butts being disposed of in an inappropriate fashion.

Since 2013, there has been a lot of smokers who have been frequenting the Long Pond trail. I have numerous correspondence and have been vocal about this issue for a very long time; however, it is now becoming an issue of safety. It's no longer just about people who are trying to get out and enjoy themselves in health and wellness on the trails in an urban park that is supported under the Tourism, Culture and Arts and Recreation portfolio.

Of course, my colleague, the MHA for Mount Scio, has been apprised, as the MHA for the area as well. But I wrote a letter again trying to tackle this issue on January 21, to the members of the board, to try to problem solve, to try to find a solution here, because it's not just about healthy living any longer. This is about fire potential and safety risks in an urban park.

If one of those cigarette butts – and there are many of them. Anybody who chooses to go on Long Pond trail, which is a beautiful urban trail, a walk around Long Pond, just across the street from us folks here in the House of Assembly, just one cigarette butt, we know, can cause a huge forest fire. That's Pippy Park right there. This is an ongoing concern since 2013, and there needs to be some sort of resolution.

I do have a letter that I would like to table to the minister so he's aware as well. Because Forestry, obviously, there are lots of intersections here. I will provide that for the minister as well, but I think we need to start

thinking outside of the box. Fires happen everywhere. Forestry is everywhere in our beautiful province, and especially in the parklands. These are some of the major issues that are of concern to me.

The issue was about trying to tackle preventative methodology. Let's get out there and start educating people about not throwing their cigarette butts out the window, things like that. There are a number of initiatives that we can do. I'm really pleased to see, of course, many of the considerations that are brought forward in the amendment that are going to tighten those things up.

We know that we need to tighten up the regulations to address the unlawful and wilful fire starters that are out there, because there are. Most times, when we see fires set and proliferated in a number of areas, it's because of negligence, and that is with education.

I think there's an educational component to this as well, but I think that we need to start shifting our focus into a more serious framework where we know that these kind of things are huge threats to our lives. In the City of St. John's, I think this is something extremely important for us to look at. It's on our doorstep here for the hon. Members of the House of Assembly and I think it's something that we can easily problem solve. There have been many solutions brought forward, but I certainly will be bringing it to the minister's attention.

Again, I like to just thank the minister and his department for bringing this forward. I think that we're going in a really great direction. This is modernizing. We know we live in a different day and age when it comes to fire risks and safety. So we need to do everything that we can do, from every corner of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, to try to tackle it.

Thank you, Speaker. That's it for me.

**SPEAKER:** Seeing no further speakers, if the minister speaks now, he will close the debate.

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

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

I appreciate the comments of the Members. I think it's all agreed there that this bill is a good initiative to put in place. I think we have agreement from all the Members, so I appreciate the conversation, topics, stories and the initiatives and how they feel, and some of the things that they've seen throughout the forest fire season and that sort of stuff.

I think it's good to hear that. I did make a couple of notes as they were going along. The Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune mentioned climate change and the weather changes – and so did the Member for St. John's Centre – and we've seen it over the years, yes, drier climates, drier weather changes and how that affects, especially, the swiftness of the fires and how they can relate and how they are more active in the drier conditions. Sure, it does take those steps.

That's why we need to be putting on those steps of protection and more of the amendments to the act. We can update. As we said before, as I said earlier, forest fires changed, tools and equipment have changed, so our regulations and legislation have to change as things change.

Those are good points that they brought up there. It's good to see that he agrees with those measures. He talked about the industry and the stakeholders and how important the forest industry is throughout our province. So did the Member for St. George's - Humber mention his relationship with the forest sector.

It's good to see that. We did have consultations with those stakeholders to put

those measures in place. It's good to see that we did have those conversations, and I know that the Member knows of the act and how this changes things. Like he said, he has appreciation for it.

He does have some questions, I guess, in the committees, and that's good. I know there will be committees, but he mentioned education and awareness. I did hear that, probably from all of the Members, basically, education and awareness. I'd just like to point out that through the tools that we have, education and awareness, the awareness part will be through other means. There are all kinds of media, radio, Facebook posts now and that sort of stuff. The awareness, when the fire index is high and that sort of thing, we will be making posts and announcements on that stuff as we move along.

As far as the education piece – and I mentioned it previously – we put \$2.26 million into our Community Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Program. That was for education and awareness and what they can do to prevent fires and help prevent with fire breaks and whatnot.

So we just put \$2.26 million. We've been training firefighters. There's fire school training going on right now, actually down at the Burin Peninsula, as the Member from there mentioned yesterday that there was training going on there, and I did attend that over the weekend. It was great to see all the volunteer fire departments, volunteers coming in from different areas, taking part in that.

The more training and tools that we can provide those people with, the more they'll do their jobs more adequately and professionally. That's the kind of stuff we have been doing and we'll continue to work with those people.

Of course, the education piece that was done through the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Program. Again, we have another

round coming and I would encourage all the communities who didn't get one to put their applications in again with the criteria that's needed, and we'll be certainly looking at more applications. That's part of the education process and programs that we've done.

The Member for St. George's - Humber, of course, mentioned that the act hasn't changed in 35 years. He just mentioned the way changes have been and 35 years there has been no changes made to the legislation and the regulations so it's time that we did take that initiative. I know everybody agrees with it. It's good to see that we're taking that initiative and he agrees with it as well.

He agrees that the rules and regulations need to be put in there to protect the communities and the industry, of course, that he talked about. He mentioned checking the fire indexes all the time and practical measures. Practical measures come with the Wildfire Prevention program that we put it. All of that can go into prevention and awareness.

FireSmart has been going into schools for years and teaching some of the FireSmart. We all know Smokey the bear. He goes into all those places. They've been teaching wildfire prevention for years throughout our schools. It's good to see that, but the more we can do, the more education, the more awareness – and I do believe that everybody is starting to see that now. You'll see it on Facebook posts. I see it every day now. As soon as there's a spark, as soon as there's a fire, as soon as there's something happening, you'll see people sharing Facebook posts of what to do and how to do it. It shows their concern. It really does. It shows their concern and they are, of course, aware of what can happen. They don't want it to happen. I know that. You can see that. So the awareness comes as a holistic part. I think that's being done through all of our parts, even the general public.

He mentioned the volunteers, of course, the firefighters during the wildfires last year, all the volunteers that were out there. Not only the firefighters, there were other groups of volunteers as well. I can remember the Lions Clubs stepping up, that's one in particular that I know. I only say that because I'm a member of the Lions Club, so that comes to mind, but there were a number of volunteer groups and organizations that gave up their time during the forest fires last year and previous years. I'd also like to thank them for their efforts as well.

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

**P. FORSEY:** The Member for St. John's Centre, he does agree with the changes. He said the awareness and education, he agreed that we should be doing more with that. So I just indicated the awareness and how we're going to do that, the education that we provide. I think that's pretty explanatory.

He mentioned the smoke for the firefighters. Even the smoke for those firefighters with the chemicals and the different materials that they're using today, sure, it causes bigger health issues, it really does. It increases our demands on our hospitals and our health, the smoke, of course, we can see what can happen there.

St. Johns' East - Quidi Vidi agrees with the bill, I can see those changes coming. She made some good points with regard to the community stuff that can be done, so I appreciate those points.

Overall, I think everybody is in agreement with the bill so I'll just sit down now because we'll let this go to Committee. I'm sure there'll be some questions in Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Before I call the question, I did note that when the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi was speaking she referenced something that she wanted to table. I would ask her, at this time, if she could just let me know what that is and we'll see if we can get leave of the House.

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you, Speaker.

This is a letter that documents the issue that I was bringing forward and would love to bring to the attention of the minister.

**SPEAKER:** Okay.

Does the Member have leave to table the document?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Leave.

**SPEAKER:** Leave has been granted.

I will now call the question.

All those in favour of the motion?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

The motion has been carried.

**CLERK (Hawley George):** A bill, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act. (Bill 13)

**SPEAKER:** This bill has now been read a second time.

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

**L. PARROTT:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Forestry Act," read a second time, ordered

referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently. (Bill 13)

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

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands, that the House do resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 13.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave this Chair and that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 13.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Dwyer):** Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 13, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Forestry Act."  
(Bill 13)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Chair.

As I alluded to in my remarks in terms of consultation, which is a very important part of the process, I ask the minister: What consultation did your department take with Indigenous groups, municipalities, forest operators, cabin owners, outfitters, tourism operators and other regular users of forest land?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Again, those consultations did happen with the stakeholders and Indigenous groups. As I mentioned in my earlier comments there, those groups were engaged with commentary, especially the stakeholders in the forestry industry. They were in favour of it; municipalities were in favour of it. So all those groups and individuals were consulted with and in agreement with the bill.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you.

Just for clarification, Minister, in terms of those consultations, were they written submissions, were there meetings? What feedback did you get from those stakeholder groups to help you move forward with the changes that are before us today?

**P. FORSEY:** Verbal consultations were with municipalities –

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

You just got to wait to be acknowledged there, Minister.

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

**P. FORSEY:** There were consultations, especially, with industry stakeholders, verbal consultations were done with those

people and there was EngageNL and the other means of, basically, written submissions and that sort of stuff for the bill.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Yes, and the reason for clarification there because I think sometimes EngageNL doesn't do justice to getting the feedback that you require. In terms of future consultations, that can be certainly noted.

Minister, how will the department define and identify flammable vegetation in terms of a practical perspective?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Flammable vegetation – not only on the treeline, that would include flammable vegetation within properties, that sort of stuff, in the treeline area of dry brush, trees, vegetation that's dry. Not only just trees, but other means of drier vegetation.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Yes, in terms of even grass alone, raked up and burnt, because they want to get rid of it.

Minister, the comms piece in the consultation – I spoke about it in my remarks – I think it's probably the best tool that we can use to help achieve what you're trying to achieve. How will the department communicates forest travel orders and fire proclamations – we that newspapers is a day of past, I suppose, in terms of communication. It still exists, no doubt.

So what other means are being replaced, instead of the newspaper departmental publication?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Again, I did mention that in my ending there, sort of thing. There are various means of communication, like our website is there, of course. That will be on our website. That is probably the biggest one, the government's website.

We can also communicate through the TV, radio and that sort of thing, but those are the sort of ways we'd be getting it out there. The website, of course, is always open there and it will be on the website.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Okay, that was kind of my next question in terms of other ways of alerting people, and certainly we all know emergency alerts. We all use a cellphone, but in rural parts of the province where it's more challenging, it becomes challenging in communicating that to them.

What safeguards are in place to ensure rural residents, cabin owners, harvesters and people without reliable Internet access receive timely notice of restrictions?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Our fire index is up on the site. You can check the fire index and look at our fire index. That would come through those means like radio, TV and the website, of course. Those are some of the ways we'll get those measures out there.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Chair.

The bill, Minister, mentions restricting entry or travel on land where insecticides or herbicides have been used. How will the department coordinate those restrictions with public health and environmental protection officials?

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

**P. FORSEY:** We'll know where the herbicides and that are sprayed, and anything that needed to be communicated like that, it would be communicated from the department or in the areas through signage and that sort of stuff. We'll have awareness out on that.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Minister, under the new section, section 98, burn permits may be cancelled, and holders must extinguish fires. What process would be used to notify these permit holders that a permit has been cancelled?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Again, through the same medias, awareness and that sort of stuff. The communities will probably pick it up through their website. We'll probably work with the towns and communities so they can pick it up through their websites and have it on. We'll make that awareness out through the different media channels.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Minister, what circumstances do you intend to prescribe in regulation for suspending or reinstating operating permits?

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

**P. FORSEY:** The operating permits are for the industries out there that are within the extreme conditions of a forest fire, so they'll be reinstated when the index goes down and we're out of the fire hazard.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** I guess it's measuring the risk and determining when it – yes, okay.

The bill moves monetary penalties into regulation, so from act into regulation. What range of penalties are you considering and how will you ensure that they are proportionate?

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

**P. FORSEY:** All the penalties are in the regulations. The reason for that was so that the departments and us can have easier access to those regulations that need to be changed, if you can, rather than waiting to have them come into the House.

I think your government probably saw some of that in the last fire season, that you needed to be able to get at some of those regulations.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Yes, and I guess it's a fine line in terms of these penalties. I spoke of it before, in terms of, we can put a fine figure on anyone's behaviour, but it doesn't necessarily change the behaviour as such.

So, the communication piece, how do we do that? More communication and educational pieces are certainly required in order to change people's behaviours and encourage others to take a responsibility, because we all have a responsibility as individuals.

Minister, how will you distinguish between accidental non-compliance, reckless behaviour and deliberate conduct when enforcing the offences as outlined in these changes?

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

**P. FORSEY:** That will be done through the resource enforcement officer, whether it should be a ticket or a charge, depending on the seriousness, the way it was caused and that sort of stuff.

We do have some offences there for deliberate, and we have some offences there for negligent. That would be determined through the officers themselves. Like I said, they have training on how to deal with if it's a ticket or a charge. A ticket would be upfront, of course, and a charge would go through the courts.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Minister.

Also, we've heard the words "allow a Forestry official." It's definitely adding on, for good reasons, with the forestry officials, but do you think that this is adding, I guess in terms of overload of responsibility and workload for those officials?

You mentioned that they are trained. If it's new territory or new requirements of those officials within departments, will additional training be required? Is that a direction that you're moving in?

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

**P. FORSEY:** We do continuous training with the officers. They will be trained. They have done training. They continue to do the training. They're the first there on the scenes and make a prediction of how it was caused and that sort of stuff. So they'll have their training to be able to adhere to that.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Just one more quick question. I do have others, but I'll allow a time for others to ask questions of the minister.

In terms of those added responsibilities for these workers, are they asking or do you get feedback from them: You add additional responsibilities on us, then we're going to need to be compensated for it. Is that something that is a concern from the field workers: You expect me to do more, then I need to be compensated for it more. Are you hearing that from officials on the ground?

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

**P. FORSEY:** We have communications with our officers all the time, that sort of thing, what's rolled out there for them. They know their jobs. They do it professionally, of course, and they do a great job. So we're always talking to our officers on what they need and what they do. We always do that.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Yes, Chair.

I'll end there for now, as others do have questions, but I will be coming back with a few more questions for the minister.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre and Leader of the Third Party.

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

Would it be possible to have a summary of the responses that you received from the engagement, the input people gave, would it be possible to have a summary of those responses?

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

**P. FORSEY:** The best thing I can tell you is all positive. That's the best thing I can tell you.

**J. DINN:** (Inaudible.)

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

**P. FORSEY:** The best answer I can give for you on that, Member, is they were all positive.

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

**J. DINN:** Was there any concern or reservation raised from the forest industry about the proposed changes in the bill, and if so, what was the nature of those concerns?

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

**P. FORSEY:** I didn't get that question.

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

**J. DINN:** My apologies.

I was just wondering if there were any reservations or concerns received from the forest industry about the proposed changes that are in the bill, and if so, what was the nature of their concerns?

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

**P. FORSEY:** No. Again, all the consultations that were done through the construction people, forestry industry, they agreed with those amendments.

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

**J. DINN:** I just want to go back to communication and notifying people. I know

that this bill is 35 years waiting to be updated. We recognize that a lot of things have changed, certainly, in the environment and so on and so forth. Communication has also changed significantly, even from the point of view of websites and that.

So I understood from the minister, Chair, that the primary method is the website. I guess I'd be interested in, specifically, the measure – I'm assuming through social media as well. In relation to radio and television channels and the providers, whether that's Bell, Rogers or whatever else, considering the fact that people in a lot of cabins, they do have satellites and so on and so forth that they can access.

I'm just wondering are there any other contracts or do you engage with the various providers to put messages out? What did you do in the last fire season, certainly with Conception Bay North, and communicating with people? I'm just trying to get, specifically, what other measures other than the website would be used?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Other than the website, yes, it would be TV and radio. That's the best way we can get it out there.

With regard to being direct in the communities, we'll be certainly into those communities. If something happened that was directly in a community, we'll certainly be working with that community. We would be in that community and working with them.

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

**J. DINN:** As a salmon angler, usually you have to check the website to make sure rivers are open, what are the protocols, but they also post on rivers if the river is closed or if the river is open.

I'm just wondering, certainly at key access points, is there any attempt to put up notices, especially to check the website or whatever else, remind people to do that?

I only ask that because we're looking at the issues around here as pretty serious, like in a cabin area or in a community. I'm just wondering, is that approach being considered, similar to what DFO does with rivers and that?

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

**P. FORSEY:** We'll also put out emergency alerts on that as well, when the time comes, but keep checking the weather index of course. The same thing, when you mentioned salmon fishing, we all do that; we check to see if the advisories are there. It's the same thing with the weather index and channels.

Radios, of course, are a great way of knowing if there are bans and that sort of stuff. So all types of media are important.

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

How about through Municipalities NL? Would they be considered a conduit for information as well?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Well, I just mentioned, as far as communication with municipalities, we'll certainly be in contact with municipalities. We are always engaging with municipalities.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, currently, how many Forestry officials do we have? How many are there currently?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Right now, we have 90 resource enforcement officers; 27 offices throughout the province enforce forestry, inland fish and wildlife laws and protect the province's natural resources, including the *Forestry Act*, fire related regulations and off-road vehicles. Resource Enforcement Division vehicle inventory is 49 trucks, 48 ATVs and 54 boats.

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

**L. PARROTT:** Chair, I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

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

The hon. the Member for the District of Placentia West - Bellevue and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

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

Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and

have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

**L. PARROTT:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

**L. PARROTT:** Presently.

**SPEAKER:** Presently.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again presently.

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

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

I move, seconded by the Member for Labrador West, that this House do now recess.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

This House stands in recess until 2 p.m.

### **Recess**

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

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

Admit strangers.

Today, in the Speaker's gallery, I would like to recognize and welcome former MHA Betty Parsley and her daughter, Kimberley Parsley, who are visiting us today. Betty represented the electoral District of Harbour Main from 2015 to 2019. She was an awesome MHA, I must say.

Good to see you, Betty.

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

**SPEAKER:** I would also like to welcome to the Speaker's gallery today, Mr. Ian Kelly of the Royal Newfoundland Regimental Advisory Council. Mr. Kelly is attending today as part of a Ministerial Statement recognizing the establishment of a new commemorative display entitled, Newfoundlanders in the Gardens, in the City of Canterbury in the United Kingdom, honouring Newfoundlanders who served and sacrificed in World War II.

Welcome, Mr. Kelly.

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

**SPEAKER:** We have a full house in the public gallery today. I'd like to welcome, first of all, to the public gallery Rebecca Dutton, President and CEO of the Janeway Children's Hospital Foundation. The Janeway Telethon is the subject of a Member's statement today.

Welcome, Rebecca.

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

**SPEAKER:** I'd also like to welcome to our public gallery, Dave Innes, who was a crossing guard with the City of St. John's for Rennie's River Elementary and is also subject of a Member's statement today. He's accompanied by Mandy Edwards, City of St. John's Crossing Guard Program

coordinator and Jennifer Lee, the school Principal.

Welcome to our gallery.

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

**SPEAKER:** I'd also like to welcome, to our public gallery, a group of Nobles representing the St. John's Shrine Club, the Compass Shrine Club, Mount Pearl and the Trinity Conception Shrine Club. Mazol Shriners are the subject of a Member's statement today.

Welcome, gentlemen, and thank you for all you do in our communities.

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

**SPEAKER:** Also today, we have in the gallery, Mr. Grant Boland and his wife Tracie. Mr. Boland is the subject of a Member's statement today.

Welcome to you both.

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

**SPEAKER:** We also have Julia Bloomquist and Josh Smee from Food First NL, which is likewise the subject of a Member's statement today.

Welcome, Julia and Josh.

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

**SPEAKER:** Last but certainly not least, I'd like to welcome to our public gallery, President Linda Olford of the Newfoundland and Labrador 50+ Federation, which is the subject of another Member's statement today. She is joined by her volunteer board members, lovely people who I had the pleasure of meeting just a little earlier.

Welcome to our gallery.

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

### Statements by Members

**SPEAKER:** Today we'll hear Members' statements from the Members for the Districts of the St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, St. John's West, Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, Waterford Valley and Windsor Lake.

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you, Speaker.

It is my honour to rise today to acknowledge the City of St. John's Crossing Guard Program which provides an essential service at primary and elementary schools throughout the city. Through their daily presence at school crossings, crossing guards build strong community connections, enhance safety and encourage active mobility.

Specifically, crossing guards like Dave Innes at Rennie's River Elementary encourage families to walk or wheel to school safely, supporting physical activity. They are often the first friendly face that children and families encounter on their way to school.

Despite challenging weather, Dave shows up with a positive attitude, a fist-pump and a genuine commitment to the safety and well-being of the children and families whom he protects.

One Grade 6 student said, "he is a really nice guy and even if I had a bad day, I'd always be happy if I saw him. Even on hot days, he would give us treats like mini freezies. Every time a dog goes by, he has a treat ready – he takes care of people."

A parent sums it up beautifully by saying, "it's hard to find a kinder, more pleasant man than Dave to greet students, parents, family pets and pedestrians in general. We are so lucky to have Dave as our school crossing guard."

Let's us all, please, all the hon. Members, acknowledge the great work of Dave Innes and the Crossing Guard Program in the City of St. John's.

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

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

**K. WHITE:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize June 6 as Shriners International Awareness Day and to celebrate the outstanding contributions of the Mazol Shriners in St. John's, along with Shriners across Newfoundland and Labrador and around the world. This special day recognizes an organization built on fellowship, compassion, philanthropy and dedicated community service.

For many years, Shriners have proudly supported charitable initiatives throughout Newfoundland and Labrador while helping raise awareness and funds for the Shriners Children's network. Through their tireless volunteerism and generosity, they have helped provide life-changing medical care, specialized treatment and hope to countless children and families facing difficult challenges.

Beyond their important charitable work, Shriners are widely recognized for their active involvement in community events, parades, fundraisers and outreach activities that bring people together and strengthen the spirit of giving back. Their dedication to helping others reflects the very best values of kindness, generosity, leadership and service.

Shriners International Awareness Day gives us an opportunity to thank all Shriners and volunteers for the positive difference they make every day in communities both locally and globally. Their efforts continue to inspire hope, improve lives and strengthen communities.

I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating all Shriners throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

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

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the outstanding work of Our Table in the District of Virginia Waters - Pleasantville and the positive impact this welcoming community space continues to have in our community.

Through the important partnership between Stella's Circle and Food First NL, Our Table has become much more than a gathering place. Together, these organizations help address food security, create opportunities, foster inclusion and strengthen community connections throughout our province. The Hungry Heart Cafe, the award-winning social enterprise of Stella's Circle, is also located on site and provides nutritious meals while serving as a valuable community asset in Pleasantville.

Recently, I had the pleasure of attending Stella's Circle's skills development graduation ceremony at Our Table, where participants were recognized for their hard work, perseverance and achievement through skills development and workplace experience programs. It was inspiring to witness the pride and confidence shared by graduates, family, staff and volunteers.

I thank Julia from Stella's, Josh from Food First NL and all the staff and volunteers with Our Table, Stella's Circle and Food First NL, along with all the community volunteers and supporters, for their compassion, dignity and hope they bring for each and every Newfoundlander and Labradorian each and every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

**J. KORAB:** Speaker, I rise in honour of one of the district's most talented artists, Grant Boland, and I can't think of a more fitting person to recognize here in this House of Assembly.

Grant was born in Riverhead, St. Mary's Bay. He studied fine arts at Memorial University Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook. Grant is a multi-medium visual artist and has exhibits across Canada and parts of the United States.

He has collaborated with local artists and publishers to illustrate and paint a series of children's books, and his one-of-a-kind paintings hang in many homes and restaurants across our province. You can also view his portraits and his work within the Ottawa Senate and our very own House of Assembly here, having captured images of five of our most recent Speakers. He's also painted the Speaker of the Senate and two Lieutenant Governors.

Grant has received numerous awards for his paintings, including two Elizabeth Greenshields awards. Last year, he received the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council Emerging Artist of the year and I was very happy to present him with the 75th anniversary of Confederation Medal.

Grant has participated in numerous group exhibitions and solo exhibitions across the province.

I ask all Members to join me in recognizing Grant Boland.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Windsor Lake.

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

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the incredible impact of the Janeway Telethon, which is scheduled for June 6 and 7, with the annual Teddy Bear Convoy on June 7.

For generations, the Janeway Telethon has brought the people of Newfoundland and Labrador together in support of children and families facing some of life's most difficult moments. Through the generosity of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, millions of dollars have been raised to provide life-changing medical equipment, specialized programs and enhanced care for young patients at the Janeway Children's Health and Rehabilitation Centre.

What makes the Telethon so remarkable is not only the funds raised but the spirit of compassion it represents. Every donation, volunteer hour, phone call answered and story shared reflects the kindness and generosity that defines Newfoundland and Labrador.

I want to recognize the dedicated staff, health care professionals, volunteers, donors, sponsors and families who make this event possible each year, especially president and CEO, Rebecca Dutton, who is here with us today.

The Janeway Telethon is a powerful reminder that when Newfoundlanders and Labradorians come together, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Janeway Telethon and wishing them every success at this year's event.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Outside of our normal line up, I have a request here from the Member for the District of Gander to do a Member statement.

Does the Member have leave?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Leave.

**SPEAKER:** Leave has been granted.

The hon. the Member for Gander.

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

I rise to recognize the important work of the Newfoundland and Labrador 50+ Federation and the dedicated volunteer –

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

**B. FORD:** – board of directors led by President Linda Oldford, joined by Amy Farrell, Noreen Careen, Rose Atkinson, Kevin Thorne, Ray Babstock, Leo Bonnell, Carl Parsons, Lorna Warford, Albert Legge, Albert Careen, Jessie Clueitt and Angela Decker.

The 50-plus Federation is an umbrella organization representing 134 clubs and approximately 7,000 seniors. Incorporated in 1978, it's devoted to the welfare and best interests of seniors across Newfoundland and Labrador. Local clubs organize social and educational events and connect with individuals at risk. The federation distributes newsletters and holds an annual provincial convention to discuss issues important to seniors.

Approximately 25 per cent of our population is now 65 years of age or older. The federation, on behalf of all seniors, advocate to government on policies that impact this demographic. Resolutions from their recent convention related to standard home care supports, geriatric supports, senior friendly rental units, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, health care satellite clinics for specialists and costs related to eye care, hearing aids and diabetic supplies.

Seniors deserve our respect, our care and our unwavering attention and I thank the NL

50+ Federation and the 134 local club volunteers for their relentless dedication.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

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

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

Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize a deeply meaningful act of remembrance and to express the sincere appreciation of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to the City of Canterbury in the United Kingdom and to the Royal Newfoundland Regiment Regimental Advisory Council.

On May 24, 2026, the City of Canterbury reopened historic Dane John Park following an extensive restoration project. With the support and encouragement of Ian Kelly and other members of the Regimental Advisory Council, a new commemorative display entitled "Newfoundlanders in the Gardens" was unveiled as part of the reopening to honour the service and sacrifice of the soldiers of the 59th Newfoundland Heavy Regiment, Royal Artillery, during the Second World War.

This permanent tribute recognizes the important role Newfoundlanders played in the defence of Great Britain during one of history's darkest chapters. In 1940 and 1941, as Britain stood under threat of invasion, Newfoundlanders crossed the Atlantic to defend freedom and democracy.

At Dane John Gardens, members of the regiment installed and manned massive coastal defence guns to protect Canterbury and the surrounding region. Their courage, commitment and readiness formed part of

Britain's defence in its hour of greatest need.

Speaker, Mr. Kelly has joined us today in the gallery, and we thank him and the Advisory Council for their work. We will always remember those who served and sacrificed so future generations can live in peace and freedom, and I might add that Mr. Kelly's father actually served right there in Canterbury. This display ensures their legacy and the enduring bond between Newfoundland and Labrador and Canterbury will be remembered for generations to come.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, I rise today to join in recognizing this meaningful act of remembrance in Canterbury and to acknowledge the efforts to memorialize Newfoundland and Labrador's proud military history.

The unveiling of Newfoundlanders in the Garden is a meaningful tribute to the members of the 59th Newfoundland Heavy Regiment, Royal Artillery, whose service during the Second World War helped protect Britain during a critical time.

I also want to recognize Ian Kelly and the Royal Newfoundland Regiment Regimental Advisory Council for their dedication to preserving those stories of service and sacrifice. For Mr. Kelly, this tribute does carry a deeply personal connection as his father served as a warrant sergeant in the 59th Heavy Artillery Regiment. That connection makes this recognition especially meaningful and reminds us of the

lasting impact these sacrifices continue to have on families and communities today.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**J. DINN:** I thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement.

We also thank Mr. Kelly for his contribution to preserving the legacy of those who served in those dark days for humanity and the United Kingdom.

We also hope that this commemoration will serve to strengthen the historic bonds that unite our province and country with the United Kingdom and Europe, especially as we seek to navigate our way in a world racked with increased global conflict and instability. May these bonds form the basis of a new area of co-operation and mutual benefit.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

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

**L. EVANS:** Thank you.

Speaker, I rise to recognize June as Pride Month in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Pride is about acceptance and human dignity for our 2SLGBTQQIA+ community. It is also an opportunity for us all to stand together in support of diversity and to reaffirm that everybody deserves respect, belonging and equal opportunity regardless

of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Pride is about visibility. For many people, especially youth, seeing communities, workplaces, schools and governments openly support diversity can help to reduce isolation and encourage acceptance. It also sends a powerful message to all of us that people must be valued for who they are and that discrimination and hate have no place in our society. It's 2026, there should be no tolerance or acceptance for hate and prejudice towards others who don't fit into your idea of what is normal.

As we celebrate Pride, let us continue building communities rooted in respect, inclusion and acceptance, where everyone is empowered to live authentically and proudly.

As a proud out, queer Member of this Progressive Conservative government, I invite all Members of this House to join me at 10 a.m. on Monday, June 1, for the annual Pride flag-raising ceremony here at Confederation Building.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

I also stand to join in recognizing June as Pride Month here in Newfoundland and Labrador. In previous years, it was my privilege as minister to take part in the raising of the Pride flag to mark the beginning of this very important month. I know how meaningful that moment is for many across our province and I'm glad to see that continue.

Pride Month is an opportunity to celebrate diversity, inclusion and the contributions of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community here in our

province. It is also a reminder that everyone deserves to feel safe, respected and accepted for who they are.

I also want to recognize the advocates, organizations, volunteers and allies who continue working to create a more inclusive and welcoming Newfoundland and Labrador.

As Pride Month begins, I hope we continue working toward communities where everyone feels supported, respected and empowered to live openly and authentically.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

Pride is indeed about the visibility, and we support diversity. That's why it's imperative that we see hateful comments removed immediately from government social media posts.

Change begins at home. To demonstrate that people cannot use government social media platforms to spread hate, we ask government to develop a policy around how it deals with such posts while respecting freedom of expression.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Oral Questions.

Oh, I wasn't notified of that one. Sorry.

The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being for a Ministerial Statement.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for giving me the opportunity to stand to speak.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize National AccessAbility Week taking place from May 31 to June 6. This year's theme, Building a Strong, Accessible Canada, highlights the importance of inclusion, respect and belonging.

National AccessAbility Week is an opportunity to celebrate the contributions and leadership of persons with disabilities, while recognizing ongoing work to remove barriers and create opportunities for people to fully contribute to their communities and to their workplaces.

As Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I remain committed to advancing accessibility and inclusion throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Earlier this year, we took an important step forward with the *Disability Advocate Act*, which will establish an independent Office of the Disability Advocate for our province. We are also working alongside the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board as they develop recommendations to help improve accessibility. Together, these efforts will improve access to programs and services for persons with disabilities and their families.

Guided by the principle of "Nothing about us without us," we will collaborate with community partners, organizations and advocates to build a more inclusive Newfoundland and Labrador for all of us.

Mr. Speaker, I thank everyone who continues to support accessibility and inclusion throughout our beautiful province.

Thank you.

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

**S. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Speaker, I rise today to join in recognizing National AccessAbility Week and to acknowledge the important contributions of persons with disabilities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

This week is a time to recognize leadership and community involvement while also reflecting on the ongoing work needed to remove barriers and enhance accessibility throughout our province. Accessibility is about more than policies or legislation, but ensuring people can fully participate in their schools, workplaces, communities and everyday lives with dignity and independence.

I also want to recognize the many advocates, organizations and community leaders who continue pushing for meaningful change in gender inclusion. Their work has made a real difference for many individuals and families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

As we mark National AccessAbility Week, I hope all Members of this House remain committed to building a province that is more accessible and inclusive for everyone.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

We also take this time to celebrate the contributions to our communities by those living with disabilities; however, we must also take this opportunity to underscore the fact that 31 per cent of those living with disabilities also live in poverty, well below the provincial average.

If we want to take poverty eradication seriously, we can't do that without finding

more effective means to level the playing field for those living with disabilities.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government – the Official – the hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition – my goodness.

**J. HOGAN:** It's been a long couple of weeks, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** It has been. It has been.

**J. HOGAN:** No worries.

Speaker, as we all know seniors are so important to Newfoundland and Labrador and what they've done to develop and grow our province, and we owe to give back to them now that they're in their senior age.

When we were in government, we did things like make sure shingles vaccines were available for free for everybody over 50.

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

**J. HOGAN:** We created the ability to make sure seniors could age at home in this province. We had new, innovative solutions in the red book as well.

So I ask the Premier: What is his government doing that's new and not piggybacking on Liberal ideas for the seniors of our province?

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

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Mr. Speaker, no piggybacking. We didn't piggyback on any initiatives they had.

I raised, and many people on this side of the House last year, about increasing the Seniors' Benefit. I would think *Hansard* will show that, probably no less than six times, we've advocated to increase the Seniors' Benefit for seniors.

We have increased, by 20 per cent in this budget, for seniors. We've also looked at seniors who wish to remain in their own homes, mostly served in rural Newfoundland. We've doubled the amount of grants that would be available for people to get work done on their houses for low income. Home Modification, we've doubled that.

We care deeply about seniors –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** I agree with the Finance Minister, he's not piggybacking on Liberal ideas because we promised to double the Aging Well at Home Grant.

So I ask the Minister of Finance: Why won't he commit to using that Liberal idea to provide seniors the money they need to age well at home?

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

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition stood up and referred to: there are other levers we can use.

The goal that we would use to put levers and put money into people's pockets in rural Newfoundland can take many facets and we've had many uses of the word "levers."

How we put money into the seniors' pockets in Newfoundland and Labrador can come in a variety of ways. The one that I mentioned in response to my first question was one way of putting money into people's pockets.

We're on the first year of a four-year term. We've said, clearly, the Premier said, that we can't do everything in the first year.

We care deeply about seniors, Speaker, and we'll continue to look after the welfare of seniors.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** I think what people are hearing is that seniors weren't prioritized in this budget, if you're waiting for year three or year four.

Speaker, this government only budgeted \$3.5 million for physician recruitment in this budget. By comparison, when we were in government, annual investments in recruitment and retention incentives exceeded over \$10 million.

I ask: How does the Premier expect a significantly smaller investment to deliver better results for patients who are still waiting for access to primary care?

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, we are investing in recruitment and retention, but, more importantly, we are looking at, now, the problems, the deep-rooted problems of recruitment and retention and how it's done through the Office of Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services. We are working with the CEO cooperatively. We're engaging.

What we have to do is make sure that regardless of how much money is spent that, in actual fact, when a doctor or a physician or nurse practitioner or a nurse or an LPN calls the recruiting office or emails the recruiting officer or reaches out and wants to have a job in Newfoundland and Labrador, that someone's going to answer the phone and get back to them.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, beyond the unionized nurse locum expansion with the RNU, which is primarily aimed at reducing dependence on travel nurses, we've yet to hear of any other specific recruitment and retention initiatives of the government. We know that there's an issue. People want solutions.

I ask the Premier: What exactly is this government doing differently to recruit and retain health care professionals in our province?

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, to be quite honest, I have been bombarded with people reaching out to me who wants a job, wants to work here in the province as a nurse, as an LPN, as a nurse practitioner, as a doctor and they're not getting any replies back.

There have been deep-rooted issues with retention and recruitment with the work that was done under the former Liberal government – 10 years. But the front-line workers and people who are out there doing the work, who want to work with us, they want to do a good job, but a lot of times I've heard from Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services people that their hands were tied. Their hands were tied when it would come to developing, delivering services.

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

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** I appreciate what the Minister of Health is talking about what's happening in this time frame as we go forward, but if doctors and nurses are calling her and not getting response back, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians need to know why aren't they getting calls back?

If there are doctors and nurses willing to work in Newfoundland and Labrador and the minister is telling Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that those people aren't getting a call back, I can tell you, that's not a good retention plan, that's not a good recruitment plan.

So why are these people not getting calls back?

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, in October and November, lots of calls. In actual fact, we have now begun a task, in October and November, we have taken action to make sure that the phone will be answered.

Speaker, honestly, do you know what I inherited? I inherited a recruitment and retention office where, in actual fact, Speaker, there was actually a lot of barriers. Also, people actually called and complained about not getting the answer. If they called patient relations for the whole province, Speaker, patient relations had three active people answering complaints for the whole provinces and for management. That's the mess that I was left with, honestly, Speaker.

In actual fact, Speaker, there have been huge issues – huge issues – where money was not properly invested; recruitment wasn't actually properly done.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, we recognize that there was an issue with regard to recruitment and retention and making sure people got calls back. That's why, during the course of the campaign, we made a promise to streamline the process and consolidated NLHS and the Department of Health recruitment and retention efforts.

So all I've heard is that in the last seven months –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I only want to hear the Member.

**J. HOGAN:** – people continue to call, there continues to be a recognition of an issue and, actually, it sounds like there's continuing to be a problem that they're not getting calls back.

So what steps has the Minister of Health taken to fix this problem?

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, let's talk about some of the things we've actually done and are actually continuing to do.

I recently went to a nursing graduation in Corner Brook; 50 out of 52 nurses have accepted full-time (inaudible).

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** We're introducing paid work terms for nursing students all over Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** We're actually putting money in the budget to make sure that the nursing classrooms that are set up in Grand Falls and Gander and Labrador are actually filled with nursing students, which they haven't been in the past.

We've also turned around and invested money into making sure that technology is there, to make sure that the workers of Newfoundland and Labrador have the resources they need in our health care system.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, that's not what we heard at the RNU breakfast. The Premier must have been listening to different people at that breakfast because students are still saying that they're not hearing from recruiters and retainers.

Is the Premier committed to legislation which will mandate a safe nurse-to-patient

ratio, which we heard about it from the RNU this week, if so, when can the province and when can nurses expect this legislation to be tabled in the House?

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, myself and the Minister of Health have met with the Nurses' Union on several occasions. We are working with them to develop solutions in Newfoundland and Labrador because that's exactly what we've said since the beginning. If you want to fix something, go talk to the people that work in it. That's what we're actually doing. The minister is actually going out and talking to people that work in the system.

Let's talk about some of the things in the system they did: opening up buildings and not making announcements for teams and not funding them.

Speaking about not funding things, Speaker, let's think about the report that was issued yesterday. A shameful report from the Auditor General's department on a deal that they made and they turned around and left 30 beds in the so-called facility that was really needed, vacant.

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

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

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. DEMPSTER:** Last week, the Premier sent a letter to other Party leaders twisting serious concerns about decorum into complaining that he was asked questions about individuals like Dr. Whalen and Jerome Kennedy.

The Premier is missing the point. The questions are about the Premier's decision to pay political staff from MCP funds. Further, when he was an Opposition leader, the current Premier asked about political staff at least a dozen times in Question Period.

Why was it okay for him to ask about staff, but it isn't okay now?

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, let's talk about staffing. Let's talk about the staff in 106 Airport Road –

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** – the report that was released yesterday. Let's talk about that for a second. Let's talk about the fact that instead of turning around and accepting the recommendations of that report, the former minister of Housing and the current Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, actually took exception to the report, actually challenging the accounting knowledge of the Auditor General, Speaker. That's what's going on.

Acknowledge the fact that these recommendations were made and we need to move forward. They made a bad deal and it's time for them to acknowledge it.

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, there are many people the Premier could ask, but I would encourage him to start with the City of St. John's. When you're dealing with the vulnerable, it's more than an exercise in accounting.

In Estimates, it was confirmed that Dr. Whalen spends very little time in the Department of Health with the minister and her officials and that his involvement with the department hasn't been much more than an occasional walks over some times or talks on the phone.

How can the Premier stand by his comments that Dr. Whalen is only hired to provide health care advice?

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, let's talk about homelessness. Let's talk about the fact that 30 beds were left.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** They paid for them, but they were never funded.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I want to hear the Premier and that's the only person I want to hear right now.

The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Again, Speaker, 34 individuals who transitioned to independent and permanent housing between June '24 and December '25 resulting in an average total cost of approximately \$706,000 per person, that's what the Auditor General is talking about.

There was no plan. There was no plan, that's the whole problem, there was no planning done and it cost the people of Newfoundland and Labrador significant amounts of money because they did not have a plan on how to deal with homelessness.

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, the people of the province want to hear from the Premier, too. They want to hear answers to those important questions that they're bringing to us. If that is the case, we have another document that we received through an ATIPP request that shows Dr. Des Whalen is working on non-health care files.

Will the Premier finally confirm Dr. Whalen is being paid with MCP funds to do work that has nothing to do with health care?

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, again, while the Member opposite may not care about homelessness or don't think it's important, I certainly think it's important and the report that was issued yesterday, *Transitional Supportive Living Initiative*, from the Auditor General and the fact that the Members opposite are trying to dispute the Auditor General, an officer of this House of Assembly and to say that her accounting and – let me quote– the accounting methodology that was used is not the way I would have done it. That's directly from the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

I assume it's the same accounting they used when they put all the money for the tobacco settlement in the budget in one year.

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I have the minutes here from the last Education meeting, actually, early childhood, that Dr. Whalen attended.

Speaker, unfortunately, we keep learning more scandalous details about the Premier's decision. We knew the Premier inappropriately paid staff from MCP funds to get around salary limits but we just learned in budget Estimates that the Premier didn't even bother to adjust the Premier's office salary budget accordingly.

Why has he secretly padded his political staff by an extra \$275,000 from MCP and tried to get away with it?

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, why don't we talk about stuff that's really important to this House of Assembly? Why don't you talk about stuff that matters to the people of the province? Because it matters to me, because it's public money being spent here, a lot of public money and in my opinion –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

We are this close from speaking privileges being taken away – final warning.

The hon. the minister.

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

A lot of the public money had been spent, and I take that seriously. I've always said it's not our money; it's public money.

Speaker, another point, despite pointing out the urgent need for transitional housing, the former government did not use emergency or urgent exemption to procure the facility which would have allowed only a 12-month contract. Instead, they used the exemption for a particular space, which allowed them to sign a three-year contract without a competitive process.

Can they explain that to the people of the province?

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

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

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

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, if the minister wants to talk about public money, we can talk about the \$275,000 for a part-time political staffer in the Premier's office, the only person I know of who is getting a bonus this year.

It gets worse, Mr. Speaker. We discovered in budget Estimates that the Premier's former deputy chief of staff, Steven Outhouse – who is now the chief of staff for Pierre Poilievre in Ottawa; no connection of course to this party here, they try to deflect all the time – which is a partisan political position, was secretly being paid through – wait for it – Cabinet Secretariat as professional services to his consulting company.

Why does the Premier think it was appropriate to use this public funding when he has a budget in his own office for this type of job?

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

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, I ask the Member opposite for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, has he seen this report? Because we have. A lot of people in the province have. A lot more will hear about it and see about it.

This man stood on media outlets and he's criticizing the AG. I've been around this House a long time, it's unheard of to be publicly criticizing a statutory Officer of this House of Assembly. They cannot defend themselves. It's terrible. It's a bad show for democracy.

If they want to talk about all the other stuff, maybe they have to look in the mirror, Speaker, because what I'm hearing on the radio and what I'm hearing in the news from this Member opposite is shameful. He owes an apology to the AG and he owes an apology to this House of Assembly.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, I heard the Premier quote me from the radio interview that I did this morning, and he's right, I did say that, and I said at the very end of it: In my opinion.

It is my opinion, the 150 people who went through Horizons at 106 should have been counted in that formulation – the numbers.

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

**F. HUTTON:** Speaker, 40 people are now not chronically homeless because of it. They are trying to sensationalize it.

So back to the question that they're not answering, Mr. Outhouse's title was deputy chief of staff and continued after the Premier was sworn in. That's a political role and it was inappropriately paid for out of funds budgeted for non-partisan bureaucrats.

Why is the Premier once again skirting the political staff pay scales, this time paying a political operative through a corporation? And he's already doing it from MCP as well.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Your time has expired.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** I'll say it again, Speaker, this is what people are talking about. There is no one in my district or any district talking about the nonsense that we're hearing across the way. It's pure deflection. We will not let them deflect.

Maybe they can answer me something because I happen to attend Cabinet every now and then, too. November 29, the owner of the Airport Inn sent a lease proposal to the corporation. Now, that happens the day before. Less than 24 hours – I would say in about 16 hours – it ends up in the Cabinet room and recommended leasing the Airport Inn for three years which is against (inaudible) and should have only been 12 months. A memorandum of understanding was signed that afternoon.

Can anybody in this Legislature or anybody who is ever sitting in a Cabinet room tell me this makes sense? It doesn't make sense. It stinks. The Member opposite and the Opposition should apologize to the people of the province.

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

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, I will now make an apology for not putting a price on a person's mental health for addictions and the treatment they need.

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

**F. HUTTON:** I ask the Member opposite: What price do you put on a person's life?

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, I refer to that as a bit of a cheap shot. There's no price on a person's life. We have a responsibility in this Legislature – when you sit in this seat over in your government, you have a responsibility to manage an \$11-billion budget.

These people were homeless. They were in the tents. We didn't appreciate – no one liked that. No one liked to see it. Nobody did, especially the Opposition when they were government. They took an action. It wasn't about saving a life because they were other programs throughout the city where we could help them out. This is about transition.

At \$700,000-plus a year – \$700,000-plus a year – and they went and capped the number to 75 at a loss of \$1.5 million in keeping those rooms empty. Can anybody explain that to the people of the province?

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

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

The Auditor General's website says her office is independent of government and works in a non-partisan, fair and transparent manner. Yesterday, the Auditor General said to the media that she provided the report on 106 to the minister a month ago so she could get on the same page with government.

Why was the Minister of Housing working with the Auditor General for the last month to get on the same page?

**J. KORAB:** (Inaudible.)

**SPEAKER:** The Member for Waterford Valley, you need not speak any further today. You will not be recognized.

I forget who was even going to answer. I'm sorry.

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

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

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

If the Member opposite has that question, she should direct it to the Auditor General. I met with the Auditor General at 8 in the morning before she released her report. That's when I met with the Auditor General. The staff from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation were continually back and forth with the Auditor General and her team to ensure that this report was done correctly.

Had the former Liberal government followed the public procurement process and all the rules and regulations, we wouldn't be here today with an Auditor General's report.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

**P. PIKE:** Mr. Speaker, since the pandemic, chronic absenteeism among high school students has jumped from roughly one in four students to nearly one in three.

I ask the minister: What specific actions is this government taking to address this growing crisis?

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

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

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

Under this previous government, we saw chronic absenteeism in K to 6 peak at 11 per cent; for Grade 7 to 9, peak at 22 per cent; Grade 10 to 12, peak at just below 34 per cent.

In our seven months, those figures have dropped respectively to 10 per cent, 16 per cent and 28 per cent.

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

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

**P. PIKE:** Speaker, does the minister acknowledge that chronic absenteeism is directly impacting student achievements, graduation rates and classroom outcomes across Newfoundland and Labrador?

With one-third of our high school students now considered chronically absent, which is what we're going on, what benchmarks has the minister set to reduce absenteeism and when does he expect to see results?

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

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

**P. DINN:** I totally agree with the Member. It is serious. In seven months, we have seen results, and we are going to continue to see results. We are not going to sit on this for 10 years. We're not going to do that. We've seen it decreased; it's going to continue to decrease.

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

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

**S. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Speaker, homeless encampments have appeared on Signal Hill. What is the minister's plan to help these people, or did he agree with the Auditor General that it is too expensive?

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

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

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

I can certainly say had the former Liberal administration done the proper planning, we wouldn't be here today. We would not be here in the situation we are today.

Mr. Speaker, the Members opposite certainly have their opinion on the Auditor General's report, but I can certainly say that the Auditor General provided this report on facts. The facts stand in this report. We will adhere to the report and we will do the proper planning going forward. We'll also follow the *Public Procurement Act* to make sure that we follow the Minister of Finance's words of spending smarter and spending wiser.

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

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Speaker, after all the advocacy from community groups like Act Now, CUPE, Unifor, We're Here For You and our caucus, finally seeing intimate partner violence declared an epidemic is great recognition for survivors and families. We all say thank you.

Now we get down to work. Speaker, a CBC report today said the Justice Department does not have data on how many cases have been tossed due to trial delays.

Will government put supports in the Justice system so the trials dealing with allegations of sexual assault are not dropped?

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Speaker, we recognize the impact of Jordan cases on our justice system. Immediately upon becoming Minister of Justice, I took action to ensure that our public prosecutions, for example, would be supported. That's why, in *Budget 2026*, we see 14 new public prosecution resources, which includes six new Crown attorneys and eight support staff.

This investment also includes digital modernization, which will also assist in relieving the pressures within the courts and within prosecutions so that cases can be heard on their merits. So this is action we've taken, and we're very committed to it, to ensure public safety.

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

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

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

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

The Auditor General report on Housing and transitional supportive living initiative indicates serious problems with the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

I ask the minister: What measures has he taken to address and rectify these problems since taking office?

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

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

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

This is the second report from the Auditor General that our government has accepted from the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation. There's a pattern from this former Liberal administration.

Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is we are doing all that's recommended within the report and we have started that from the first report and we'll continue with this one. I can assure, not only the people of this House but the people of the province, that we will, under the leadership of this Premier, do what is right and we'll do it right as we go forward and not to be caught, because no one in the province wants to see another report like this one.

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

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

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

The Minister of Housing has promised that all residents of Horizons at 106 will be rehoused before it closes at the end of the year. Many residents have already given up hope and expect to be on the street.

I ask the Minister of Housing: Is the plan to place residents in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units?

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

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

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

We have a plan going forward. That's why in *Budget 2026* we included additional funds for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to ensure that we hire staff and to make sure to get our units under Housing Corporation repaired and back into the fold. We will use those units for the people of 106 Airport Road. We'll also use the Canada-

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Benefit to help support them as they transition into community.

Mr. Speaker, I have said many times to the media – and as early as just before I came to this House of Assembly – that we will leave no one behind from 106 Airport Road. These are people. These are people who are important to us and we will support them as we move forward.

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

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

**E. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, health care is the number one issue in the Corner Brook area. Patients in Corner Brook have been advised that the rheumatologists who have been travelling to Corner Brook since 2020 for follow-up appointments will cease these services. Residents will now have to travel to St. John's for these follow-ups.

I ask the Minister of Health: Will your department have this matter reviewed immediately and begin recruiting for rheumatologists for the West Coast to ensure that patients can receive the treatment on the West Coast and not travel to St. John's?

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands is correct; we heard the same thing. We've become aware that a rheumatologist has decided to stop providing clinic services.

Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services is recruiting right now for a rheumatologist for Western region. I will be following up with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to address the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands'

concerns about how new patient consultations are done, Speaker. That's one of the biggest problems I think his constituents are facing. So we'll be actually dealing with that, addressing that.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Minister, for that positive response.

Mr. Speaker, housing is a major issue in Newfoundland and Labrador and Corner Brook. I've had many meetings and discussions with the Minister of Housing on the residents living in the former Corner Brook hotel.

Can the minister please give us an update on the progress and the work already done to help solve this housing crisis and provide services and support for the residents who need them the most who are living in the Corner Brook hotel?

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

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

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

We are continuing to support the individuals in Corner Brook. I've had discussion with the hon. Member several times, with the Member for Corner Brook several times, as early as this morning, with respect to what we need to do in Corner Brook.

The services that are provided to the individuals at that hotel – the members of the FACT team are there, the Housing Corporation, social workers there on a regular basis providing supports. But going forward, Mr. Speaker, with *Budget 2026* and

what we have included in *Budget 2026* for housing, we are looking at all options for Corner Brook.

I have said to both Members that they will be included in those conversations as we move forward to better serve the people of the West Coast area. That is certainly a priority for us, and they will both be included in those conversations.

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

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

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

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

Today, my petition concern is the Green Brook bridge, Route 220. These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

WHEREAS the Green Brook bridge on Route 220 near Lawn has deteriorated substantially in the last two years, and the changes in the structure of the bridge are clearly evident; and

WHEREAS due to construction, heavy trucks travel over this bridge on a daily basis and they are concerned for their safety; and

WHEREAS residents are increasingly concerned with changes in the structure of the bridge and are noticing a huge difference while driving; and

WHEREAS if something catastrophic were to happen to the bridge and make it impassable, residents would be negatively impacted as this is the main route to their town; and

WHEREAS this is now a serious, serious safety factor for all motorists travelling on this section of highway; and

WHEREAS inspections have been carried out in the past but the deterioration is visibly evident and becoming worse each and every day, and residents are concerned as it impacts their safety and their quality of life;

THEREFORE, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately have Green Brook bridge inspected for safety reasons, make the report available to the residents of the area and change the timing of the repairs so they can be completed this year instead of 2027.

Mr. Speaker, people in this area are really concerned about the condition of this bridge. It's clearly – and I travel this bridge pretty much daily when I'm in my district – visible; the bend in that particular bridge is getting worse and has gotten worse, even in the last few months. Truck drivers who cross this bridge are becoming increasingly concerned as they notice an extreme difference as well.

This bridge is a necessary lifeline for the residents in this area. This bridge is supposed to be part of the 2027 capital works projects for this area. Mr. Speaker, could the minister –

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

**P. PIKE:** Could the minister at least go out there and have a look at this bridge or get his officials out there?

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

Are there any further petitions?

Seeing none, Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

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

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

Motion 4.

**SPEAKER:** Motion 4.

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that in accordance with Standing Order 8(8), the winter-spring 2026 sitting of the House of Assembly be extended beyond Thursday, May 28, 2026; and that this House shall sit until it adjourns to the call of the Chair; and that, notwithstanding Standing Order 8(3), the week of June 8, 2026, shall not be a constituency week.

**SPEAKER:** All those in favour of the motion?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, Motion 3.

**SPEAKER:** Motion 3.

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy House Leader, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Pharmaceutical Services Act, Bill 19, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that this bill be read a first time.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Pharmaceutical Services Act," carried. (Bill 19)

**CLERK (Hawley George):** A bill, An Act to Amend the Pharmaceutical Services Act. (Bill 19)

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

When shall the bill be read a second time?  
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**L. PARROTT:** Tomorrow.

**SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 19 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 13.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 13.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Dwyer):** Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 13, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Forestry Act." (Bill 13)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

Again, we are back now discussing Bill 13, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act, here in Committee of the Whole. To the minister, are there enough wildfire suppression personnel?

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

**P. FORSEY:** I mentioned this morning that we had 90 resource officers, 27 officers and we are hiring more forest fire fighters, wildfire fighters, another 25 this year, along with the resources we already have.

The more we can do to enhance our resources, the better our communities will

be safe. Yes, we are moving ahead with our resources.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you for that, Minister.

Is there enough communication infrastructure?

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

**P. FORSEY:** What was that question again?

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

**P. PARSONS:** I asked if there was enough communication infrastructure in place currently.

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

**P. FORSEY:** Yes, we have infrastructure in place to look after the communications, along with the 170 Forestry staff that we have employed right now. So, yes, we have those staff.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

Also, is there enough coordination capacity within municipalities, volunteer fire departments, Indigenous governments and emergency management agencies?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Again, there is communication all of the time within different groups, different municipalities; communication between the emergency and forest fires, especially municipalities.

Again, I'll go back and make reference that we just put out the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Program, communicating with 58 communities and \$2.26 million put forward to them. So it is all done through communication and education.

Yes, the communication between stakeholders and municipalities and fire departments are really intact.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

As we know, the Forestry officials, now, are granted peace officer powers under the *Criminal Code* for enforcement purposes. As we know, these are significant powers and, with the significant power, comes the need for transparency, obviously, accountability and the proper training.

What training, to date, has been given now to these officials to make them prepared for their new roles and the expanded powers?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Again, it's the same answer that was mentioned this morning. They already have that training. We'll continue that training and we'll provide the resources that they do need. That's always ongoing and they already have it.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Right, but again, with the expanded responsibility, especially where it's under the *Criminal Code* for enforcement purposes, what new training – I mean, the training is ongoing and it's important, but what specific new training will be offered?

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

**P. FORSEY:** They already have those powers for the officers, and it's not under the *Criminal Code*.

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

**P. PARSONS:** With the new enforcement decisions that they're going to be given and obviously granted, how will the enforcement decisions be reviewed?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Well, they're always the first ones on the scene. They're always there. They monitor the situation, monitor the scene. They determine the result of the fire, how it was caused, how bad the fire is and make that determination there, whether it's going to be ticketed. After that, it will go through the courts.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

How will government ensure that consistency remains across all regions, particularly in rural and in Labrador itself?

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

**P. FORSEY:** We have depots all across our province throughout, and we're always in communication with municipalities. So they'll be established throughout the depots that we do have.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

Obviously, now with changes in climate change, what we're seeing, which is ultimately the reason to expand the legislation, what new conversations with this

focus have been had with municipalities across the province?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Great communication. I mean, the emergency plans, we're even working on our emergency plans from the previous – we accepted the report from the Auditor General. We're already doing our emergency plans with the communities and our own plans.

As far as the climate change perspective on foliage and dry foliage and grass, again, we just put in \$2.26 million to communities; 58 communities got that for training and education – and that also includes firebreaks, by the way, that they can use. So we're working towards that.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

Yes, that's good; we certainly welcome those investments. It's important for organizations, as well, outside of municipalities, who may have received that funding or who have been named.

Are there any tangible plans with actual municipalities and particular members of council on maybe even how they can expand bylaws with regard to enforcement and whatnot? So anything tangible with municipalities, thus far, aside from the announcement of the funding?

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

**P. FORSEY:** With regard to bylaws, the towns already have their own bylaws of what they do in regard to fires in their communities. Of course, the regular regulations and legislation that the province has there, if they don't go by the town one, they'll abide by the provincial one.

Those bylaws, rules and regulations are in place, yes – and communication is always there for that.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

That's good, and we thank the municipalities for their independent level of government but has the department and officials within your department, have there been any tangible meetings, any conversations or actual plans that have happened with municipalities across the province?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Actually, the department met with MNL and are working on communication plans for that.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Okay, so there's a reach out to MNL but no actual plan or anything tangible in the way of municipalities.

Whenever that happens, will the minister notify the House or even to publicly communicate what the plans will be? Because I think a lot of MHAs, especially when you meet with your joint councils and different municipalities, they ask that question. They put it to their MHAs. Oftentimes, they hadn't had any direct contact with the department.

What I am want to know, will the professionals, who are the officials, within Fire and Emergency Services, even including the provincial fire commissioner, is that offer there where they can actually go have sessions with municipalities, to equip them with the knowledge and how they can go about creating new policy even by

working with their individual volunteer fire departments?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Yes, actually, we saw that through the AG's report, the emergency preparedness that was done with the communities. We've accepted all those recommendations. We're working with the communities. We started with MNL with the climate change committees and we're working with them on that. We've also put some FireSmart, and we're working with the CBN area.

So there are lots of communities but we know that there's lots of work to do, especially from the Auditor General's report, that wasn't done before that we need to get done. We're working towards that.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Okay, that's good.

So, obviously, we can expect officials to have hands on going forward, maybe something annually, that will be offered to municipalities; because, they are the front-line defence in every community, so we'll look forward to that.

Minister, can you elaborate on firebreaks and what areas that we can expect to see firebreaks or what supports are put in place for all municipalities across the province?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Firebreaks are important to protect from forest fires.

Communities can apply again – we'll be putting out another round of the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Program. So if any communities feel that they need some firebreaks, they can certainly put it in

through the program. We'll be reviewing all of those applications when we get them. There are provisions there for firebreaks, as well our own provincial ones, as we need them, through the fire chief.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Is there an actual program where they can go and apply, specifically, should they want a firebreak? Like, is that a go to right now? Is there a branch on the website, perhaps, or a contact or someone where municipalities can, today, if they're hearing this conversation now, actually take that initiative to get this under way?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Again, we will be opening up those applications fairly soon.

In the meantime, we have six FireSmart staff tasked with meeting with the municipalities and supporting those communities on that.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

Now just moving along to Wildland Coveralls, which is relevant to what we're discussing, will every volunteer firefighter throughout the province in every municipality and even non-incorporated receive their own Wildland Coveralls? Will every volunteer firefighter receive them?

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

**P. FORSEY:** It is relevant, but it's not part of the bill.

Yes, we are accepting applications for the coveralls and we'll be looking at those.

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

**P. PARSONS:** That will conclude my questions.

Thank you to all the staff in the department, and to the minister.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

Minister, the top of page 7 of the bill, section 9 of the bill, repealing section 81 and substituting it with this: "The minister, or a person or category of persons authorized by the minister, may cancel a licence, suspend a licence" et cetera, et cetera.

What would be a category or persons that the minister would authorize for this?

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

**P. FORSEY:** We're looking at section 9 –

**CHAIR:** Section 9 on page 8, it continues.

**P. FORSEY:** Section 9 – 81 – the minister may cancel a licence where the minister is of the opinion that the operation of the mill in respect of which the licence was issued is not in compliance with the terms and conditions of the licence; or not in compliance with a provision of this Part or the regulations.

This reflects the amendments made to the mill regulations to allow a person or category of persons authorized by the minister to suspend the mill licence or suspend all or a part of the operations carried out under the mill licence.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

I gave you the wrong reference. I had a different version of the bill. So just to go back – I'm not sure if you gave that answer or not, so I apologize because I was just trying to straighten out the right document.

My question is, what would be a category of persons authorized by the minister?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Are we still at section 9?

**J. HOGAN:** Yes, on page 8.

**P. FORSEY:** I'll have to get that answer for you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** I appreciate that. It's the minister getting authorization to essentially delegate authority to cancelling and suspending the licence. So I hope the minister would know who he would be able to delegate that authority to. I look forward to getting that answer.

Section 10: this is going to take you a little while to probably read because I read it a few times and I'm not sure if I'm missing something. If you look at (a.1), which is a new definition, you have to look at the act as well. It says: A person who operates a mill, while the mill licence is suspended, could be guilty of an offence. That makes sense to me.

But then it also says: who operates a mill, when all or part of the mill operations are being carried out. So I guess I'm confused. Why would you have someone guilty of an offence if they're operating the mill when part of the mill is being allowed to be

operated? That would be confusing to the mill operator.

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

**P. FORSEY:** Back to your first reference there on the other one. It's the resource officers, officers and Forestry officials.

Section 85 – that's a newly added one. It's section 85: "A person who operates (a.1) a mill while the mill licence is suspended or all or part of the mill operations being carried out under the licence are suspended ...." Or the minister may, subject to the *Environmental Protection Act*, use of – that's the amendment to create an offence where a person operates a mill while the mill licence is suspended or all or part of the mill licence operations is being carried out under the mill licence as it is under suspension.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** Yeah, that's what it says. My question is part of the mill licence is suspended, so I guess that means part of it is not suspended. When I read it, it sounds like you can have someone guilty of an offence for operating the mill when their licence allows them to partially operate the mill. That's confusing to me.

I might be missing something. The point of the question is to make sure it's not confusing for the people who are operating mills and end up with tickets or in jail.

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

**P. FORSEY:** It's to reflect the amendments made to *Mill Regulations* to allow the minister, or a person or category suspended and the mill licence suspended or all parts of the mill operations being carried out under a mill licence.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** Sorry, I apologize; I didn't hear the answer. I was talking to one of your colleagues who was trying to help.

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

**P. FORSEY:** It's also for separating the suspended parts when they are suspended.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** I'll leave it there but to me that's not clear. It seemed to me that someone who is operating under a suspended licence, partial suspension of a licence, can be subject to a fine for doing what they're allowed to do. That's the way I see it right now, so I'll move on.

Section 92 of that same page, Minister, talks about applying to land within the jurisdiction of the province and all land within 300 metres of forest land. I'm just wondering how the number of 300 metres came to be the number used for the legislation.

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

**P. FORSEY:** Back to the other answer: that could be where they're abusing the different types of lumbers, like for pressure-treated lumbers and that sort of stuff, different operations of the mill or harvesting different sections. It still would be part of the mill, for the first answer.

The 300, that's including all lands. That includes the 300 metres for any vegetation like dry foliage, dry lumber and that kind of stuff, not only from the trees but 300 metres away from dry foliage.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** I could be totally wrong but if people are carrying out something that they're allowed to under the licence, which you said they did, what this legislation says to me is a person who operates the mill, while all or part of the operations being carried out are suspended. So if they're operating the part that's not suspended, it still says they're subject to fine, which I think is confusing, and not what I think was the intent of it.

I'll leave it at that. That's why we're here to ask questions and if the minister is satisfied with the way it's worded, well, that's fine.

I'll move on to page 9, the offence provision, section 96. I think the old legislation talked about fines of about \$200. Now, it allows an offence to be liable on summary conviction to a penalty prescribed in the regulations. Is the minister able to comment about what the size of the fines would be, once the regulations are drafted and in force?

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

**P. FORSEY:** "A person who violates or fails to comply with a provision of this Division, a provision of an order or permit or a condition attached to that order or permit is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a penalty prescribed ...." That's amended to remove the monetary fines for offences related to forest travel and forest fires and authorize penalties for those offences in the prescribed legislation.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** Can the minister provide information to the public about what the size of those fines would be in the regulations?

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

**P. FORSEY:** That would range from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** Can the minister advise when those regulations will be, I guess, drafted, finalized and publicized?

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

**P. FORSEY:** We're hoping to draft that and have it ready by next week.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you.

Minister, when you look at the Explanatory Notes, it talks about one of the purposes of the bill is to "expand the areas of the province that the minister may declare to be a restricted travel area ...." Now, obviously, we had wildfires here last summer and it's an understatement to say it's an emergency situation.

Nova Scotia faced the same thing. Nova Scotia made a decision to ban Nova Scotians from going into the woods. Very recently, the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia said that decision by the Government of Nova Scotia was unconstitutional as it violated section 6 of the Charter, which are our mobility rights. I'm wondering if the department has done a Charter analysis to make sure that this bill is in line with the Constitution and the Charter.

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

**P. FORSEY:** Yeah, that's in regard to travel lands. Where there's an extreme fire at the time, the minister can provide a ban in that area, especially travelling in around the forested area, so that we could provide that. We consulted with Justice on that.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** Okay, so just to be clear, the consultation with Justice was specifically related to the potential Charter challenges? I'm not asking for your opinion, I was looking (inaudible). You make your decision based on the opinion but ...

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister for Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** I was blacked out there.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** Did you seek opinion from Justice, specifically on the Charter issue, with regard to mobility rights?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Yes, we considered the Nova Scotia case and consulted with Justice. That was considered and the case was, like I said, reflected. It was considered and we consulted with Justice, yes.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think back to the line of questioning around a mill while the mill licence is suspended. I visited a West Coast operation twice and, during one of their operations, the electrical panel of the operation was a concern, and an officer came in and shut down the whole operation, which was unfair, in my view.

That needed to change because the cutting of the wood, the harvesting of the wood was a separate operation that didn't require electricity. Why should the full operation shut down because an electrical panel needs to be – they came and put locks on the door. I was, like, you've got to be kidding me.

I think that's to clarify that piece, and it is a good move because a shutdown for him for those few days meant thousands and thousands of dollars, sending people home that needed the work, needed the employment.

So I just wanted to clarify that. I can understand someone reading it, and the suspended piece, but trying to appreciate the full operation around those saw mills, I think, gives an appreciation for what's going on here. It's not a question to you, Minister, just to seek that clarification.

Minister, in the Explanatory Notes, it's referenced five times, "create an offence." What's the process and what's involved in creating an offence?

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

**P. FORSEY:** It's creating an offence, I mean to say, in regard to starting a wildfire or any illegal activity or deemed illegal activity in regard to what an offence would be. That would be determined by the REOs or the courts.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Chair.

Also in the Explanatory Notes, Minister, it talks about authorizing penalties for offences. What type of penalties are we talking about? Just a few examples.

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

**P. FORSEY:** That is to put the penalty into the regulations so that we have easier access to the regulations and penalties.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Fortune Bay - Cape la Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the Notes and certainly in the bill, it references around doing what's necessary to put out a fire. That can include using private equipment owners, their equipment, to help with the putting out of the fire or the attempt to.

My question is, what protections are in place for those private equipment owners if the equipment is damaged while they're being used for the fire mitigation process?

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

**P. FORSEY:** That's already in the current act and we'll work with the contractors or whatever on that.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** So you're saying there are protections in place?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Compensation is specified, yes.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** I know you've probably been asked this before, but in terms of your briefing on this, Minister, do you feel that there are sufficient Forestry officials to carry out these changes and the work that's required under the changes under this act?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Yeah, they're performing the same duty that they've already done, really, and we're hiring more forest fire fighters to combat the forest fire season. We've got 90 – what was the number I had on that? I had 170 wildfire fighters, 90 officers and we're hiring 50 extra, so we have adequate staff.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you for that answer. I know officials will say we have adequate staffing so we'll see after another season, I guess, in terms of what goes on and the challenges facing them.

We referenced a few times a mill licence, operating permit or burn permit being suspended or cancelled. What's the appeal or review process for that, Minister?

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

**P. FORSEY:** They'll be repealed or cancelled in regard to the fire index and the conditions of the index that day, whether it's extreme. The index will cancel their permits at that time and dependent on the result of the index and the conditions at the time.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** That doesn't really speak to the appeal. What I was asking for is the appeal process. So if my permit is suspended or cancelled, where do I go? What do I do to appeal or review that suspension or cancellation?

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

**P. FORSEY:** There is no appeal.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Okay.

I was expecting that that protection would be there. Anyway, maybe it's something the minister can take back to their staff to see if it's worthwhile – part of the process should be there.

In terms of these amendments, Minister, small forestry operators, some operators and rural business during forest fire season, how do you expect these amendments will affect them overall?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Back to the other question, there is no appeal process but we can propose a plan.

With regard to the overall season, I guess that will depend on the season and, hopefully, we don't have a season like we had before. The thing here is for safety of all communities and people in the province and, hopefully, everything goes smooth.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Yes, we all hope for that but the reality of it is we all wish for a good season but we know that we need to be ready as we talked about before, for sure.

I had a few other questions there, but I think I'm satisfied at this point. We'll come back, I guess, after the season. We'll have an opportunity in the fall to ask the minister about the season and if these measures improved overall firefighting mitigation plans in this province. Hopefully, there will be no fires so you don't have to be stressed out and your hair get greyer or lose it.

Anyway, I appreciate the time, Minister, for the answers and stuff. Again, I thank the officials for giving us the opportunity to ask these questions and you providing the answers.

Thank you.

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

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

Just one last concluding question that prompted me as the leader asked the question. Has the minister done, especially since last year with the unprecedented wildfires and since you've assumed office, a jurisdictional scan across Atlantic Canada, and even the entire country, to compare legislation to what they have with regard to expansions now that we're making, a jurisdictional scan to see what other provinces are doing in the way of legislation as it pertains to these items?

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

**P. FORSEY:** Could you run that one by me again?

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

**P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, what I asked was, given the unprecedented season that we all saw, I mean, it was like no other. Since you've assumed your role as minister and working with the staff and the department officials, have you done a jurisdictional scan, ultimately across our country, or even in particular, with Atlantic Canada, what they're doing in ways of legislation based on the expansions that we're making now pertaining to these items in your legislation?

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

**P. FORSEY:** We're always looking at different ways of doing things with regard to legislation. I've talked to the federal minister. Actually, I'm headed for meetings with the Atlantic ministers shortly. We'll be meeting again with the federal ministers and we'll be looking at all those legislations and protections, what we can do. The department themselves, they're always in

contact with other jurisdictions to see what they are doing, the equipment they have.

So we'll continue to work those roles and anything we can do to protect our communities and to do it the best way we can, we certainly will.

**CHAIR:** Seeing no more questions, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

**CLERK:** Clauses 2 to 33 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall clauses 2 through 33 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 33 carried.

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

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act. (Bill 13)

**CHAIR:** Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

**L. PARROTT:** Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 13 without amendment.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 13 without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**SPEAKER (Lane):** The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue and Chair of Committee of the Whole.

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

The Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that the Committee recommends Bill 13, An Act to Amend the Forestry Act, without amendment.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and recommends Bill 13 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

**L. PARROTT:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

**L. PARROTT:** Tomorrow.

**SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

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

**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 Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

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

Here we are again, it's an opportunity to get up and speak to the main motion. As we know, it's the largest motion, ultimately, that we pass here in the Legislature on a yearly

basis. We are late into the season. It's budget time in the year. But it's always a privilege to stand, regardless of legislation, to represent your district. I represent Harbour Grace - Port de Grave and I sincerely thank my constituents for their confidence in me.

Now we're just going to get on and talk – again, it was raised here today in Question Period by my hon. colleague from the District of Conception Bay East - Bell Island and that was stated that it was something that was discovered during the Estimates process that the Premier's former deputy chief of staff, Steve Outhouse, a partisan political position, as we know, was secretly being paid through Cabinet Secretariat as professional services to his consulting company.

That's alarming. That's concerning. We didn't get an answer to that, but I just wanted to put it on record here again. It's just amazing to see the promises that were made, that were put on record by the now Premier.

Also, the MCP, I heard some chirping during Question Period saying no one in my district is asking these questions. I can tell you, Speaker, the people in my district are very disappointed to hear that there's a political staffer being paid through the MCP budget.

As we know, the MCP budget is in conjunction with the federal government. It's federal payments that are made from the Government of Canada to each and every province and territory here and, ultimately, to look after our health care to ensure that we have free health care. That's where our free health care comes in, which is another way that we differ from our neighbours to the south, the United States.

We have free health care here, and we're fortunate to have that. We do know that health care is a challenge here in our province – not just in our province, but across the country we're seeing this. To

take the \$275,000 for 28 hours a week, plus a \$13,000 bonus to give political advice, from the MCP budget, I don't think it's ever happened. I think it's unprecedented and it's scandalous.

As my colleague said earlier, it indeed is a scandal. People are not happy. Again, that money is used for when people go to their doctors or if someone needs a surgery. We do know that we have the highest rates of certain diseases that we're not proud of here in the country. Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we're leaders in those chronic diseases.

We know that many people reply on dialysis, whether it's a home dialysis or where it's dialysis where they have to go to their health care facility. You can go down any day of the week and people are lined off receiving this. Unfortunately, the people need this health care. That's where that money is coming from. It's MCP. I don't think anybody would agree that it's wise or it's a good thing to take from MCP to pay for political staff.

As we do know, there's a budget for political staffers. As we all know, and we see that in all governments across the country and even in other countries, there are designated pots of money for that but to take from MCP, I think it's unheard of, it's unprecedented and, quite frankly, it's disgusting. I hear that in my district. People are angry. People are not happy about that.

To see one song to be sang on the campaign trail –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I'm finding it difficult to hear the hon. Member.

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

**SPEAKER:** Thank you for your co-operation.

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

Again, it's not right. We do know the improvements that have to be made in health care alone, we do know that and to simply go and take from that pot, it's just mind blowing. It's sad.

There is lots of funding. There's a designated budget for political advice. So the question is, why is this Premier doing this, taking from MCP, taking from cancer treatments, taking from dialysis, taking from surgeries, taking from everything in health care. Everything that's covered by health care comes from MCP to support the people for their health care, so to take from that for political advice, for someone to sit up in the Premier's office and to consult for political events in the lobby or outside events, it just doesn't make sense. Pay it from the appropriate pots, I guess, allocations where this funding can come from. We do know that. It's simply not appropriate. No one thinks it's a good idea. It's not going away.

There were some questions again today in Question Period, but I will tell you, until it's reversed, it's not going away. It's not going away from constituents and the public and it's certainly not going to go away from this Chamber, from Members on this side of the House.

Speaker, \$275,000 for however many hours a week with a \$13,000 bonus. I know it's been tossed around here about bonuses. The only person, as my colleague has said, receiving a bonus or has received a bonus is the person, the political staffer that's been hired to do this job and we all know who that person is, a doctor.

Again, back to the Steve Outhouse stuff, it's partisan political positions. We do know it's secretly being paid through the Cabinet Secretariat. Again, the question begs, how is this appropriate? We do know that Mr.

Outhouse's title was deputy chief of staff and that continued after the Premier was sworn in. It's a political role. It was inappropriately paid for out of funds budgeted for non-partisan bureaucrats.

We can ask this question all day, we're not getting any answers. Question Period was very disappointing, there were questions asked about direct departments and direct real issues that are put before our province today, but, again, Members opposite stood and they held up props, booklets and made reference to that and they didn't want to talk about it. They didn't want to give answers.

It's okay, I mean, it can happen here in the House of Assembly. They can choose to answer how they want to answer to us, the Official Opposition and Members of the Third Party, but the people are seeing and the media can see and the public can see. So it's okay, they can conduct themselves accordingly but there is a larger audience that's watching. Ultimately, they're the ones that hold everybody to account here in our House.

Which brings me, again, to another big issue that's facing our province. We don't know what's happening with the MOU. It was also said here yesterday by our leader and put on record about the escalating clause, and for the Premier to get up now and act like it was a big surprise, like no one knew, when *Hansard* surely indicated and it's on record that the then Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, who is now the Minister of Jobs, actually asked the question.

He prided himself on his knowledge of finance, and we need that skill set here in this House, but he got up, on record, and asked specifically about what the Premier is trying to say was hidden. The leader asked the question: Did they just not know? What's the deal? To act like it's a big surprise. It's not. Nothing was a surprise. The experts were here. The international experts were here, JPMorganChase and Power Advisory. These are international

experts. Arguably, I would say, the most appropriate, qualified experts in the world to answers these sorts of questions and to negotiate these deals.

It's true, former political ministers and former political people were not qualified to negotiate deals to this magnitude. It impacts the present, the past and, of course, the future of our province. This will be the most important deal facing the people of the province and it's simply not appropriate for any one individual, whether they're the Premier, whether it's a minister, whether it's an entire caucus, to pull the curtain over and to, ultimately, shut out the House of Assembly and shut out the people of the province of what's happening with regard to the negotiations.

That's not what was done when our administration was in power. We did the exact opposite. It was full transparency that was practiced here in the House of Assembly, a special debate. The media were invited. The media were briefed. All Members could ask questions, unlimited, with no restrictions.

Now, you know, we heard a big talk – I guess that's where the old cliché comes from when people don't trust politicians. I've always taken exception to that, Speaker, because I don't conduct myself that way. The only promise I ever make is I'll do my absolute best. No one's in an actual position to promise certain concrete things because you really don't know what you're facing when you get in and when you take office.

We all learned that in 2016 when we assumed office after we were flushed with cash during the Muskrat fiasco. We knew what we were facing then. My gosh, we couldn't even make payroll. We were in danger of not making payroll because of what was inherited then by the previous PC, Danny Williams, administration.

Of course, we knew what we walked into and now we hear the other side complaining

about what they inherited. Well, we inherited – and arguably that inheritance is still there that they're dealing with. So it's all recycled in a circle. It's gone back. So they're ultimately dealing with their own debt.

Muskrat Falls, I mean, it's wonderful, yes. It's a green initiative and it's good that the province ultimately owns it, but we're still paying on it and it's going to be paid on for a long time. As a matter of fact, we could argue that the federal government got a stake in it because they're the ones providing the rate mitigation annually at \$500 million to help people with their power bills.

Again, it goes back to that. We're at a time now that, you know, unprecedented, where the cost of living is extremely difficult on everyone. Even people who are doing well, even with two people working in the household, they're finding the struggles with regards to the cost of living. Again, if we didn't have that rate mitigation from the federal government, we'd be dealing with something – it would be even that much harder.

So we go back to this, it's the largest deal, I personally think, and it's my personal opinion that I'll put here on record, I think the Premier's going to sign the deal, because how can he not. It's a good deal. We do know that the tables have changed. In the past, Premiers have gone to court to force Quebec to open this deal that was completely unfair, that was agreed upon back in 1969, but it couldn't happen. The courts ruled in favour of Quebec.

But now we know that we're in a different situation where Quebec needs the power. Quebec is probably going to go elsewhere. We do know that they're also facing an election. We do know that the party, who's also the Bloc Québécois, what they've said. They stated their opinion on record for what they feel about the deal with the MOU. They said it's not a good deal for Quebec and they would scrap that deal, if they assume

power following their provincial election. We know that the time is ticking on that.

We also heard the minister say – who is now the new Premier, Premier Fréchette for Quebec – that if there are going to be changes made for Newfoundland and Labrador, there are going to be changes made for Quebec.

We had the best negotiators, international experts with no bias, with no political ties, with no ties here with regard to the people in our province or who can stand to benefit. They were here, they offered their advice and it was open and transparent. So I call on the Premier to tell us who they're negotiating with and who they talked to and the experts.

Don't the people of the province want to know that, because the Premier ran on transparency. The Premier also promised a referendum. The question has been asked and asked: Is it going to happen? I don't know, Speaker, if you'll get to participate in a referendum, or if I will or our constituents will, but I guess time will tell.

But when you make a promise on record, that's on record, however you follow through after with what you do, but there is no one individual, there's no one leader who has the absolute right to shut the province out the details and to block transparency with regard to this very, very important deal facing our province.

Again, the billions that are stood to be gained, but what's important are the protections in place within this deal. We're not at a fixed rate, like we know with the '69 deal, but currently we're still living in the '69 era. We're still living from that deal that there's opportunity that could have been changed, but we know that's not the case.

I'll move on to some other priorities. Also very disappointed to see the \$66-million cut in the roads budget. I heard my colleague here just behind me here stood up on a

petition on behalf of his constituents about the dangerous conditions of the roads. They're from our constituents. It's not based on the personalities of the individuals occupying these seats, it's based on the thousands and thousands of people who got out and exercised their democratic right to vote, to put us all here and that's our duty to do that.

We do know there was a promise to open up the RCMP detachment in Grand Bank. We do know that's not going to happen and now we're told it can't happen because it's not within the jurisdiction of the province to make that promise, but it didn't stop the leader from making that promise when he was out campaigning, knocking on doors.

Again, there are a lot of things that we've seen there. Lots of things that we've seen and the promises that were made but, unfortunately, we're seeing a pattern that it's completely gone in the opposite direction of what was promised that would happen. I mean, it's not simply my opinion, it's the feedback that I get, not just in my own district but in other districts of this province, other constituents, not just here.

People don't forget, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, they like to engage in their politics. Look no further than the *Open Line* show or the opinion polls or whatnot, people like to engage. People like to have their say and to have their input. People appreciate transparency. I'm calling on the Premier to reconsider that, to come back, to tell this hon. House, to tell the members of the public who they're speaking with, with regard to the negotiations, and hold that panel to account.

The Premier of the province is the most powerful office in the province and I think it's not good enough that the panel simply sent a note and said, here's the report, you can read it out, we're not going to be there. It's a far cry, it's exact opposite of what we saw happen here by the international experts that were brought in from JPMorgan Chase

and Power and all those individuals that were here. They answered all questions without restrictions.

Again, it is disappointing to see the \$66-million cut in the roads budget and a significant number of districts that will not avail of any roadwork at all this construction season. Also hearing from MNL – I represent a district where the joint council of Conception Bay North, they meet regularly. I like to meet with them when I can, when possible, but that said, we're in touch every day and when necessary. It's concerning about the lack of consultation that was done with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador.

There's lots of room to do things better and it was the same thing when this administration was on that side. There's always room for improvement. I say, Speaker, when we work together, we get the best results.

I will take my seat now, Speaker. I thank you and I look forward to the debate continuing.

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

**K. WHITE:** Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to speak to *Budget 2026* in my capacity as Opposition critic for Government Services.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the many public servants, front-line workers, inspectors, occupational health and safety professionals, IT staff, labour advocates and WorkplaceNL employees who work every day to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The work they do often happens behind the scenes. It's not always visible to the public but it matters deeply. Whether it's a worker trying to navigate the compensation system after an injury, a family depending on reliable digital government services or a public servant

ensuring that government systems remain operational and secure, their efforts affect the daily lives of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

These responsibilities cover a wide range of issues that directly affect people across the province including workplace safety, workers' rights, government modernization, cybersecurity and access to public services. They all shape the confidence people have in the institutions that serve them.

There are areas within this budget where progress has been made. There are investments that deserve recognition. There are public servants doing difficult work under increasing pressure and there are initiatives that, if implemented properly, have the potential to improve services for people throughout this province.

It's also our responsibility on this side of the House to examine whether these investments are sufficient, whether they are properly targeted and whether government is actually delivering meaningful results for the people it serves because Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are looking for more than announcements. They're looking for outcomes.

People want to see real improvements in the services they rely on. They want workplaces that are safer, government systems that are more efficient and secure, fair treatment for injured workers, timely service for businesses and confidence that public dollars are being managed responsibly. Those are the standards government should continue to be measured against.

Government Services is one of the most operationally important departments in government. It oversees Consumer Affairs, Motor Registration, digital service delivery, inspections and a wide range of regulatory and administrative systems that affect both individuals and businesses across this province. When government services

functions well, people may not always notice, but when it fails, the impacts are immediate. People experience delays; businesses encounter red tape; consumers struggle to access services and the public confidence erodes.

This budget speaks frequently about modernization and modernization is important but it cannot simply mean digitizing old processes without improving the experiences for the people using them. For many people in this province, especially seniors, rural residents and individuals with limited digital access, government services can feel fragmented and difficult to navigate. Businesses continue to raise concerns about timelines. Residents continue to raise concerns about responsiveness and many people still feel they are being bounced between departments or systems without clear answers.

Government has a responsibility not only to modernize systems but to ensure those systems actually work for the people using them, that includes ensuring adequate staffing, it includes proper training, it includes strong customer service standards and it includes ensuring that digital modernization does not leave people behind.

Another important responsibility within Government Services is ensuring that public-facing systems are clear, accessible and responsive for both residents and businesses. Businesses across Newfoundland and Labrador regularly interact with government through licensing, inspections, registration, permits and regulatory requirements. When those systems are difficult to navigate or are unnecessarily slow, it creates frustration and uncertainty.

For small businesses, in particular, administrative delays and unclear processes can have real operational impacts. That is why service delivery matters. Government should always be

looking for ways to simplify processes, improve communication and reduce unnecessary barriers while still maintaining strong public standards and accountability.

I also want to speak about the Office of the Chief Information Officer because in today's world, digital infrastructure is essential. Government systems hold sensitive information and support essential services across this province including health care, education, public services and critical government operations.

At the same time, cybersecurity threats continue to grow globally. Every government and institution faces risks and residents rightfully expect that their personal information will be protected. That means investments in cybersecurity cannot be treated as optional. They are a core responsibility of government and essential to maintaining public trust, protecting services and ensuring the reliability of systems people depend on every day.

The people working within OCIO carry significant responsibility. Their work deserves recognition, but we also need transparency. Residents deserve confidence that government systems are secure. They deserve confidence that cybersecurity protocols are current and they deserve confidence that government is proactively preparing for evolving threats, because cybersecurity incidents are not theoretical, they have real world consequences.

Mr. Speaker, government continues to speak about digital transformation. Again, modernization can be positive but digital transformation must be accompanied by proper implementation. Too often governments announce new platforms or systems before ensuring users are adequately supported. We've all seen situations where digital systems create confusion rather than simplified processes. That is why implementation, training, public communication and accessibility matters.

A digital government strategy must account for the realities faced by residents throughout this province. Not everyone has reliable Internet access, not everyone is comfortable using online systems and not every rural community has the same level of connectivity. So while digital transformation can improve efficiency, government must ensure residents are not excluded from essential services.

This also raises broader questions about rural connectivity and digital equity. Access to reliable digital infrastructure is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity. People depend on Internet access for education, employment, business operations, communication and access to government services.

In many rural and remote parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, connectivity challenges continue to create barriers. Students struggle with online learning, businesses struggle with unreliable service, residents struggle to access digital platforms and workers struggle with opportunities that increasingly depend on reliable connectivity. Government cannot continue speaking about digital transformation without also ensuring digital access.

Another issue that must be discussed within Government Services is the growing concern around service capacity and public responsiveness. Over the last number of years, residents have increasingly expressed frustration about how difficult it can be to get straightforward answers from government systems. Sometimes that frustration is about delays or unclear communication and sometimes it is simply about people feeling the systems are designed around government structures rather than around the people expected to use them.

That matters because when people interact with government, they are often doing so at important points in their lives. They may be registering for a vehicle, applying for a

permit, seeking consumer protection assistance, navigating licensing requirements or trying to resolve an issue that directly affects their business or livelihood. Those interactions shape public confidence. A resident should not need extensive knowledge of government structures just to access basic services. That is why service design matters.

Mr. Speaker, many rural residents already face additional barriers when accessing services, travel distances are longer, Internet reliable can be inconsistent and, in some communities, access to in-person services has become increasingly limited. Government must recognize that modernization cannot become synonymous with centralization. Digital systems can absolutely improve service delivery, but they must complement accessible public services rather than replace them entirely.

The reality is that many residents still value the ability to speak with a real person when they need help navigating government services. That human component still matters. Government must also continue improving transparency around timelines and service standards. Residents and businesses alike should know what they can reasonably expect when interacting with government because predictability matters.

I'd also like to discuss the role that the Office of the Chief Information Officer plays in supporting broader government operations. Many people understandably associate OCIO primarily with cybersecurity and IT systems but the role of OCIO extends far beyond that.

The work being done within OCIO affects how departments communicate, how information is shared, how digital records are maintained and how efficiently services are delivered across government. In many respects, OCIO forms part of the operational backbone of modern government. That means that pressures on the department continue to increase,

technologies change rapidly, public expectations evolve rapidly and cybersecurity threats evolve rapidly. Keeping pace requires long-term investment and long-term planning.

One of the challenges governments face across Canada is recruiting and retaining skilled IT professionals. These are highly competitive fields. The private sector is aggressively recruiting talent, our provinces are recruiting talent and governments are increasingly competing for the same workforce. Newfoundland and Labrador cannot afford to fall behind in this area. If government systems are going to remain secure, modern and reliable, then government must ensure it has the people necessary to support those systems.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a moment about labour. Labour issues affect every worker in this province. Newfoundland and Labrador continues to face serious labour market pressures. Many industries are struggling with recruitment, many workers are facing burnout and many workplaces are dealing with staffing shortages.

We hear repeatedly about challenges in construction, challenges in transportation, challenges in skilled trades, challenges in health care and challenges in rural regions where labour shortages are particularly severe. These challenges cannot be addressed through announcements alone. They require long-term workforce planning. They require training opportunities. They require retention strategies and they require workplaces where people feel safe and respected. Workplace safety must also remain a priority. Every worker deserves to return home safely, yet workplace injuries continue to occur.

Workplace violence continues to occur and workers continue to face risks in industries across this province. We have heard significant concerns from workers and labour organizations regarding workplace violence. Those concerns deserve serious

attention because workplace violence is not an abstract policy issue, it has real consequences. These workers deserve more than acknowledgements; they deserve action.

Mental health in the workplace is another issue that deserves continued attention. For many workers, stress levels remain extremely high, burnout is increasing, workplace pressures are increasing and many employees feel stretched beyond their limits. This is particularly true in sectors already experiencing staffing shortages. When workplaces are understaffed, pressures increase on the workers who remain, that pressure contributes to burnout and burnout contributes to retention challenges. This creates a cycle that becomes increasingly difficult to break. Government must continue working with employers, unions, safety organizations and workers themselves to improve workplace conditions because healthier workplaces benefit everyone.

I'd like to take a moment and turn to WorkplaceNL if I may. WorkplaceNL exists to support workers who have been injured on the job. Workers who experience injuries are often navigating difficult and stressful circumstances. They may be dealing with pain. They may be dealing with financial uncertainty and they may be dealing with significant emotional strain. At those moments, they need a system that is fair, efficient, compassionate and transparent.

Staff within WorkplaceNL work extremely hard to support injured workers, but we also continue to hear concerns from workers about delays, communication issues and frustrations navigating the system. For someone already coping with an injury, delays can be devastating. Delayed decisions affect income, they can affect access to treatment and they can affect recovery. That is why timely service matters.

We've also heard ongoing discussions regarding benefits and compensation structures. These are important conversations. Workers deserve confidence that the system is treating them fairly, and employers deserve confidence that the system remains financially sustainable. Achieving that balance is important but balance cannot mean that injured workers feel ignored or left behind.

The issues with these portfolios are complex. No single department can address them alone, which is why collaboration with workers, employers, labour organizations, industry groups, public servants, safety advocates and community organizations is so important because the best policy outcomes occur when government listens.

Mr. Speaker, throughout this debate, government Members will point to investments and announcements, and in some areas those investments are welcome, but the real measure of a budget is not the number of announcements made. The real measure is whether people are seeing meaningful improvements in their daily lives.

On this side of the House, we believe government should work efficiently and responsibly. Public services should be accessible, workers should be protected and public institutions should operate with transparency and accountability. Modernization should make life easier for residents, not more complicated. Workplace safety systems should support prevention as well as recovery. Injured workers should be treated fairly and with dignity and public servants should have the tools and supports they need to deliver services effectively.

Many of the pressures facing these departments are not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador. Governments everywhere are dealing with cybersecurity threats, labour shortages, recruitment challenges and changing workplace environments, but acknowledging those

pressures does not remove this government's responsibility to respond effectively here at home. People still expect results, regardless of how widespread that challenges may be.

The role of the Opposition is to provide scrutiny and accountability. Our responsibility is to examine where progress is being made, where gaps remain and where improvements are still needed. This budget includes commitments but commitments alone are not enough. What matters is how those commitments are implemented and whether they lead to measurable improvements for the people relying on these services.

We will continue to push for transparency, stronger service delivery and better outcomes for workers, residents and businesses across Newfoundland and Labrador because people deserve a government that not only makes commitments but delivers on them.

Thank you.

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

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

I rise today to speak to this year's budget, one that, unfortunately, falls short of the moment we are in. This budget reads as a missed opportunity for all of us and does little to address the rising cost of everything.

At a time when people across this province are asking for relief, for vision and for leadership, what we have instead is a document that feels somewhat directionless. It reads as incremental, cautious and overly familiar. It is a budget of announcements without action, a plan to make plans, when what people really, truly need are results. Perhaps most concerning of all, it does little to address the rising cost

of living, the very issue that is shaping daily life for so many in Newfoundland and Labrador. The budget is quite simply, in my opinion, a missed opportunity.

So let's start with affordability. St. John's East - Quidi Vidi is one of the densest areas for shelters, supportive housing and food banks in our province. People in this province are struggling. They are working harder than ever, yet falling further behind. The cost of groceries, rent, transportation and home heating continues to rise, but wages and supports are just not keeping pace.

So the government certainly points to modest savings, as we've heard the \$330 per person annually. But let's be honest, that amount barely scratches the surface. For seniors on fixed incomes, for single parents, for workers earning low wages, this is not meaningful relief. There is no serious effort here to address income insecurity, no basic income pilot, no plan to ensure a livable wage, no structural change that would help people not just get by but actually get ahead. We are at a point where people are employed and still cannot afford the basics of life. That should concern every one of us in this House, yet this budget does not meet that reality with urgency.

Deputy Speaker, food insecurity in this province is at crisis levels; 24 per cent of Canadians are food insecure. Here at home, that number climbs even higher, between 25 per cent and 30 per cent. That means one in four people do not have reliable access to adequate food. Some 137,000, or just over 25 per cent of our people, are food insecure. Think about that. That's one-quarter of our households.

We know the reasons: rising grocery costs, high transportation expenses and the added burden of heating in a cold climate. Families are increasingly forced to choose cheaper, less nutritious food, if they can afford food at all.

We are grateful – deeply grateful – for the people and the organizations who run food banks and shelters. They are compassionate, dedicated and essential. But let's be clear, food banks are not a solution; they are a symptom. They are a band-aid over deeper issues: poverty, mental health challenges and addiction. Yet, this budget does not respond with the urgency required. There is no comprehensive strategy to reduce food insecurity, no meaningful investment in eating healthy initiatives, no bold plan to tackle poverty at its root. We are managing crisis, not solving it.

Deputy Speaker, I hear regularly from seniors in my St. John's East - Quidi Vidi District who are struggling to make ends meet and they have worked their entire lives, they've built our communities and now many are facing rising rents and increasingly daily costs with little support.

We hear the phrase "aging in place" often from this government but words are not enough. If we truly believe in aging in place, then we must provide the supports that make it possible: home care, household assistance, even snow clearing. Without these, aging in place is not a policy, it's an empty promise. As the baby boomers age, this is the fastest growing demographic in our province and our seniors deserve stability, dignity and real support.

Housing, as my hon. colleague has detailed numerous times, is another area where this government's budget falls short. We are in the midst of a housing crisis, rents have increased significantly, around 9 per cent over the past year, and thousands are struggling to keep up, yet no rent control. There are 2,600 people waiting for rental assistance and investment in non-market housing is minimal and spread over several years. Of course, I don't need to go into the recent Auditor General's report.

We also have to ask: Where is the workforce to build the houses we need?

Without a plan for labour, and I think that's something that we really need to look at, without scale, without agency, these measures simply do not meet the moment. Housing should be treated as a fundamental right, not a commodity. This was an opportunity to shift towards that vision and, in this budget, it was missed.

Deputy Speaker, health care is about more than buildings, it is about people. This budget invests in infrastructure, beds, facilities, expansions but without the health care workers to staff them, these investments cannot deliver results. Again, we heard loud and clear from the registered nurses of our province and across the country on this particular issue.

We are already seeing strains across the system. Home care workers who are essential to keeping people out of hospitals receive only marginal support and, once again, we see a missed opportunity on pharmacare. There was a chance to work with the federal government to expand access and reduce costs for people and where was that opportunity? It was floundered. We cannot build a stronger health care system without investing in the workforce that sustains it.

Deputy Speaker, if we are serious about the future of this province, we must be serious about education, but the reality is that Memorial University continues to receive less operational funding than it did in 2014; CNA woefully is not receiving adequate support with the ongoing inflation. This has led to job losses and reduced capacity in the fast-track nursing program. There are no commitments to paid work terms for students and, at the same time, early childhood educators who play a critical role in our society remain under supported, often working without adequate pay, benefits or basic working conditions, and we know many of them.

We talk about addressing labour shortages, we talk about supporting young people, but

those goals require investment and this budget does not deliver it.

There is also a concerning silence in this budget around the public sector workforce. With major union negotiations happening right now and over the next many months and growing issues of attrition, we should be seeing a clear strategy to recruit and retain workers. Instead, we see uncertainty.

How do we sustain essential systems and services without the people who deliver them? How do we build for the future without investing in the workforce? These are the questions that remain unanswered.

Deputy Speaker, when it comes to public safety, this budget focuses heavily on policing but overlooks the preventative component. We know that many of the root causes of crime lie in poverty, mental health challenges and addictions, yet these areas still remain underfunded – the wraparound supports that we continue to talk about here with the NDP.

Economically, this government remains heavily reliant on oil revenues, exposing itself to volatile global markets and leaving us vulnerable to price fluctuations and uncertainty. With illegal wars and a major shift in global economics, we still have little evidence of real economic diversification strategies. We cannot continue to rely on a boom-and-bust cycle and expect stability and sustainability.

We hear acknowledgment of climate concerns but investment decisions continue to tell a different story about little commitment to building a sustainable economy that can withstand the future. Climate change is not a distant issue, it is here, it is accelerating, yet this budget does not reflect a comprehensive climate action plan. The government is investing in emergency response without even looking at climate change.

We see continued investment in oil development contradicting environmental goals and delaying necessary energy transition that we know is happening worldwide. Key areas that are neglected are electrification, energy efficiency and the support for public transit. Around the world jurisdictions are moving forward with just transition strategies, creating jobs, strengthening economies and reducing emissions at the same time.

I had the pleasure of attending Dr. Angela Carter's talk on oil transition a few weeks back at the A.C. Hunter library at the Arts and Culture Centre here in St. John's with a great room full of folks, all interested in how we can move away from non-renewable energy, namely oil and gas, which causes 90 per cent of the carbon emissions that cause climate change, such as extreme weather changes like fires, floods, heavy snowfalls and, even more dangerous, loss of ice from melting in Labrador.

The low-carbon oil soundbite is a myth. We need to quickly ween ourselves, putting our workers first. In that work, steer us away from a boom-or-bust economy, something truly sustainable.

Dr. Carter spoke about her recent travels to Columbia for an unprecedented first transitional conference on transitioning away from fossil fuels. Just transitions are underway around the world delivering job gains and economic benefits in Scotland, Denmark, Poland, New Zealand, New York, Illinois and Colorado States, just to name a few.

Government needs to address climate change with a growing knowledge that there is no long-term future in oil. The oil companies know it and are themselves investing in renewable industries because we are timing out. With a global oil demand that is going to peak in a very few years, government must plan for an energy transition and this budget, sadly, does not offer one.

One facet of a just transition entails a deep and quick reduction of emissions while developing a just transition for workers to shift to sustainability. Labour-led, the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour are forging the need to support rigs to renewables. Workers are frustrated with the erratic boom-or-bust work cycle and want to live in healthy communities with energy security and where Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are the true beneficiaries, not multi-billion-dollar oil companies. But that requires planning, investment and political will and this budget, unfortunately, does not provide it.

We're also seeing a growing shift towards automation and artificial intelligence. These technologies have potential, but they also carry risks. Without proper frameworks, they can displace workers and deepen inequality. This budget does not address that imbalance. There is no plan to ensure that technological change benefits communities, protects workers and supports long-term employment. The government itself needs to immediately address its own slipshod use of AI within its own government systems.

Deputy Speaker, arts, culture and tourism, again, are another area where they are not luxuries. They are economic drivers and essential parts of our identity. I've spoken many times on the creative economy, yet there is no increase in arts funding. Young people cannot build a future, workers cannot be supported in that and communities cannot thrive as they should.

No meaningful new, strong supports for tourism. We hear from operators across the province that access remains a barrier, infrastructure is lacking and that cultural workers are undervalued. If we want to grow our population and our economy, we must invest in the sectors that make this province vibrant and liveable.

This budget reflects a government that is choosing caution over courage. It manages

the present but does not prepare for the future. It acknowledges challenges but does not meet them with the scale or the urgency required. People in this province, and certainly in my district, are asking for more. They're asking for affordable living, secure non-market housing, strong public services, a sustainable economy and a future that they can believe in.

That requires bold, equity-driven leadership. It requires us to move beyond incremental change and towards real solutions because, at the end of the day, a budget is not just numbers on a page. It is a statement of values and it impacts every single one of the people we serve in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have an opportunity, still, to build a province where no one goes hungry, seniors can age with dignity, young people can actually have a future, workers are supported, communities can thrive and a province that can work for everyone, not just those on the inside track.

I am a hopeful person and I am a glass-half-full kind of gal. I truly believe in the future of this province. I wouldn't be here, and probably neither of the rest of us would be as well, unless we thought meaningful change can happen. I certainly task the new government to do so.

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

I am so pleased to stand and speak to the budget. I've already had an opportunity to speak to some of the impacts of the budget on seniors, on young families, on tourism, on educational supports. I've also had the opportunity to speak about priorities and opportunities for the District of Gander

which, as I often refer to, is the area encompassing Appleton, Benton, Gambo, Gander and Glenwood. Those priorities and opportunities were primarily around the Atlantic Wildfire Centre and 9 Wing Gander, related to federal defence spending.

So, today, Speaker, I would like to frame up my remarks on some of the municipalities in my district and to talk and highlight some of their needs, knowing how much the budget and spending from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador impacts what municipalities are able to do and achieve and to work in partnership with government to achieve things for their district.

For the Towns of Appleton and Glenwood, while each is a very distinct and separate municipality, I would like to speak about them collectively just for a moment. These two communities located on the western end of my district are well-known to I'm sure all of us who have travelled along the Trans-Canada Highway. They're closely intertwined and serve as a terrific example of neighbouring municipalities working collaboratively and sharing services. Even when they don't have to, it's not because of a regionalization project, they work collaboratively and they share services for the benefits of their residents.

For example, Speaker, the Town of Appleton takes responsibility for the administration of water and sewer services, while the Town of Glenwood provides fire protection and fire services. Children from both communities of Appleton and Glenwood attend Lakewood Academy located in Glenwood and this shared approach extends beyond services into the social fabric of each of these communities.

Over the Christmas season I had the opportunity to attend a seniors' dinner hosted by the Town of Appleton and its recreation committee but it welcomed seniors from both communities, on both sides of the mighty Gander River. I also attended, since being elected, the Riverside

Pentecostal Church Easter community egg hunt. Again, bringing together families and children from Appleton and Glenwood alike. I should also add, adults from these communities were quite enthusiastic about this egg hunt. It was not just for the children; it was quite a community event.

Speaker, these are just a couple of examples of the shared experiences and strong community spirit that I've been able to witness since becoming an MHA, and the leadership shown by municipal councillors, under the leadership of Mayor Allison Laite in Glenwood and Mayor Garrett Watton of Appleton, and the work of local non-profit and volunteer organizations in these communities, Speaker, is truly remarkable and commendable. They serve as a model right across this province, demonstrating what can be achieved when the shared services are there, when they are willingly collaborating and a commitment to supporting residents together.

That said, Speaker, these communities also face important needs. Some are tied to shared services while others are unique to each municipality. So I'd like to turn my attention for a moment to the Town of Glenwood to highlight one pressing issue in particular for the Town of Glenwood, which is fire protection and wildlife mitigation – wildfire mitigation. I apologize, Speaker, fire protection and wildfire mitigation. Although, I'm also sure that the people of Glenwood are also concerned about wildlife.

When I first met with municipal leaders and the fire department, much of the discussion focused on fire protection needs. One issue stood out as especially urgent, an issue that, given the increasing threat of wildfires, is front of mind for the municipal leaders in Glenwood, as well as Fire Chief Dale McGrath and local residents.

So years ago when the sawmill in Glenwood closed, it left behind an enormous collection of sawdust. Now, when I picture a pile of sawdust, I picture when my father would

have a cord of wood dropped off in the driveway, and that's how I picture a pile of sawdust. But to help paint a more accurate picture, this is not a small pile. What exists today is a massive, compacted mound. You can picture in your mind's eye approximately the size of two football fields in diameter and around the height of a one-story building.

This sawdust pile is located near a residential neighbourhood and when we consider the realities of wildfire risk, particularly in the community like Glenwood, which is bordered on one side by the Gander River, but certainly on the other three by forests, this represents very serious concerns.

Speaker, I was pleased to share information with the municipality about the wildfire mitigation fund. Municipal staff put forward a strong and well-prepared application and, unfortunately, their proposal was not approved. I understand that available funding was limited, in fact, my understanding is that the funding made available may have been rolled forward from funding that was left over from last year and prior to the most recent budget.

Speaker, I'd also like to acknowledge and thank the Minister of Forestry and emergency preparedness for the conversations that he and I have had regarding this issue. I understand that there maybe another round of funding opening up and I appreciate the time that the minister gave to me to discuss this. So it's not just a local concern for the community of Glenwood, it's a matter of regional importance for Central Newfoundland.

Speaker, there is an urgent need to ensure that funding is made available for both the study and safe removal or mitigation of this highly combustible material. It's fuel for a wildfire. This is not about creating alarm, but rather about taking proactive, responsible measures to reduce risk.

We've seen first-hand the devastating impacts that wildfires can have including in Central Newfoundland in recent years. So it's critical that investments in wildfire mitigation are directed to the communities that need them most before a preventable situation becomes an emergency not just for the community of Appleton and Glenwood but for all of the forested area of Central Newfoundland.

Speaker, I'll turn my attention now to the municipality of Appleton and I'd like to speak specifically about their needs as it relates to the New Found Gold and Queensway mining development. Unlike many communities across Newfoundland and Labrador and indeed across Canada, where mines have existed for decades and communities developed around them to support workers and logistics, Appleton presents a very different situation. Appleton is a long-established, vibrant community. It's a beautiful place that embraces rural living while also offering strong local services and access to nearby amenities.

Speaker, I note with interest that this mining project is often referred to as the Gander mine in discussions across the province and country. While Gander may certainly experience some benefits, this project is fundamentally located in Appleton and its distinction matters. It's the residents of Appleton, as well as those in the neighbouring community of Glenwood, who are most directly and the ones navigating how to balance the realities of mineral exploration with the social, economic and environmental impacts on their communities.

Speaker, I'd like to extend my thanks and deep respect to the municipal leaders of the Town of Appleton. This is a significant and complex development within their community and they've demonstrated strong leadership in guiding their residents through it.

Currently, the town council is in negotiations with the company regarding the formation of a Good Neighbour Agreement. While in some respect this may resemble an arrangement such as a PILT, or payment in lieu of taxes, for example, that sometimes communities enter into with airport authorities, it goes much further than that. My understanding, based on research and discussions, is that a Good Neighbour Agreement can include commitments related to community support, social development and investment in local well-being. These agreements often address how companies will contribute financially and socially to the community while also recognizing and managing the economic impacts of their operations.

The Town of Appleton does have capacity for growth. There is space within their business park for investment, and they're actively working through considerations related to Crown land, infrastructure access, as well as long-term planning. The project is currently in the environmental assessment phase. I've had the opportunity to attend two public meetings hosted by the company and with the municipality where residents have expressed strong support and where valid concerns have been raised. A third public meeting is scheduled for the first week of June where residents will again have the opportunity to engage directly with the company, ask questions and seek clarity.

This is an exciting project with significant potential for the community, but it's also one that has to be carefully managed to ensure that the social, economic and environmental interests of Appleton, Glenwood and the surrounding area and the region are fully respected and supported.

Speaker, I'll speak now about the community of Benton and to recognize this beautiful town that you will find between Gambo and Gander as you turn off the TCH. I'd like to extend a sincere shout-out and congratulations to Local Service District

Chair Dion Wade, who has recently taken on a leadership role with a newly elected committee.

I had the opportunity to attend their public meeting where an election was held. I was really pleased to help facilitate that discussion and we are really pleased that support was provided by staff from the Department of Municipal Affairs and they were really helpful to that process.

I'd like to congratulate the individuals for taking on these important responsibilities. I'd also like to acknowledge and thank Terry and Donna Hynes, and the previous committee members, for their long-standing commitment and support that they've provided to the community, especially throughout this transition to new leadership.

Like many smaller communities, Benton faces real challenges. There are ongoing needs related to waste water, drinking water and ensuring consistent water pressure for homes. These are essential services that so many of us take for granted, but they require significant effort to deliver and maintain, particularly in smaller communities, like Benton, where it's volunteers who are often taking on the difficult task of managing these systems and the task of fee collection and local administration.

These responsibilities can be uncomfortable at times, but they're necessary to ensure communities can access the resources they need. I'd like to take this moment to commend the leadership in Benton for the difficult decisions they're making in the best interests of their residents.

On a positive note, the community is actively working to formalize a recreation committee. They are home to a beautiful fire hall and community hall that serves as an important meeting spot for the community.

Speaking of protection, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the efforts of Benton's

small but mighty volunteer fire department. Last summer, they responded to a vehicle fire that was dangerously close to a shed that was surrounded by forested area – dangerously close. Their quick and effective action very likely prevented what could have become a significant forest fire in Central Newfoundland.

Finally, for those of you who may not know, the provincial T'Railway runs through the community of Benton. We frequent that often on our Side By Side in our berry picking adventures in Central Newfoundland. I highly recommend stopping in the community to visit the Blossom Antique store. It's well worth the visit in the local service district in the community of Benton.

So then, lastly, the community that I'm going to choose to highlight today and some of their needs, the community of Gambo. I'd like to begin by thanking Mayor Peter Lush and the members of council for their continued leadership and dedication to their community. I'd also like to recognize Fire Chief Keith Peckford and the members of the fire department for the important work they do to keep residents safe.

Speaker, Gambo has experienced significant challenges in recent times, particularly relating to flooding. The community has seen infrastructure damage as a result of high water levels and storm surges, and council has been working diligently to ensure that the necessary funding is released to support critical repair work.

I understand the municipality has been approved for disaster financial assistance related to road rehabilitation, which is an important step in the recovery of that damage. At the same time, the town is looking ahead, Speaker. There is important work under way related to Crown Lands as the municipality advances plans for their existing current municipal park and visions of a boat launch – projects that will enhance

recreation, support tourism and improve quality of life for residents.

I was also so pleased, Speaker, to see that Gambo also received funding through the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Fund. This proactive investment will help strengthen community safety and reduce risk, as we continue to see increasing concerns related to wildfire activity and municipal leadership's involvement in helping with those situations. What stands out in Gambo is a community that not only responds to challenges, but one that is also planning for the future.

All of that being said, I would like to, again, by summary, say that as a former municipal leader myself, I have deep respect for municipal leaders across Newfoundland and Labrador. I think about those who receive no financial remuneration whatsoever, unlike some of the larger communities where there is a stipend or payment. There are municipalities and they might receive a turkey at Christmas. Maybe they get a trip into the Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador Conference, but I know they're not getting a lot of pats on the backs in the communities for which they do so much work. I believe very strongly that the direction a community wants to head in, that direction needs to be set by the community themselves.

While I'm so pleased and proud to be in the House of Assembly as an MHA at the provincial level of government, I maintain that municipal government is a government closest to the people it represents, and most in tune with the people that they represent.

As we consider the needs of municipalities, I encourage government to work very closely with the leaders from municipalities and Local Service Districts to help set, fund and resource their priorities for their community and those residents.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

The MHA for Gander is a very tough act to follow. I'm going to try my best to stay focused, but the good thing is that the governing party has given me three pillars that I'd like to talk about a little bit, as we go through this little story or journey, as one of my last opportunities to speak to the budget.

On the campaign – and I guess all the ministers' mandate letters don't exist as they did in the past, but they do exist through a blue book, which is what they've said they are going to follow. That makes it, I guess, easy for us to say that these are the three priorities: lower taxes, better health care and safer communities. I'm going to try to address all three of those in what I'm going to talk about today.

First of all, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who spoke so far; it's been pretty informative from a lot of different districts. Those who spoke, you get to learn a significant amount. I

I'd be remiss if I didn't talk directly, first and foremost, about something that I spoke a lot about already through the budget: the Future Fund. We're talking about a policy change that we've made. I will highlight some of the things that I think we've uncovered over the last number of days, weeks and month or so, that we've been discussing in the budget since it's come down.

We did know that the PC government that was elected campaigned on the fact that they were going to remove the Future Fund. They called it a slush fund. We've uncovered that that was not true, through the process. We did uncover that – and it's okay, too, because once you actually get into the seat of government, you actually

learn a few things that you probably didn't know when you weren't on that side of the House, which is completely understandable. When you get into new positions, you learn things that are different.

The Future Fund was a way of – and I think is one of the greatest investments you can make for the future of any province – not just ours, any province. I think we have uncovered that the Finance Minister does agree that that is a good thing to invest in, we just don't agree on the quantum and the time frame and when we should invest.

But it's not just me that's saying that we should invest in the Future Fund. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives have said that we should put all – all – non-renewable revenues into a Future Fund. I'm not saying I agree with that sentiment, I'm just saying that's one perspective because they believe that it's non-renewable and, therefore, by putting it in the Future Fund, it gives our future generations to avail of that money that is all people's resources that have come in this province in the past, present and future.

There is even more than that. It wasn't just the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that said that; Fraser Institute also said it. They didn't go as far as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives went. They said that we should continue to increase the amount of money from non-renewable resources placed into the Future Fund for future generations.

I think we've also uncovered that there is a significant amount of interest that was made on the money that we made an investment in. I think it was some \$68 million. I could be wrong a little bit, a million here or a million there, but I think it's around \$68 million that we made, over and above the investments we made, that was the growth on the fund, and I think that's important.

We did uncover that the cost of borrowing was about 3.7 per cent to borrow that

money that we put into a Future Fund that was getting better than an 8 per cent return. All that is positive. I did learn a few things about sinking funds, which is interesting. The rate of return for sinking funds is roughly a little higher than the Future Fund rate that we were getting, but still comparable and more than it was costing us to borrowing.

I will ask the Finance Minister, if I misspeak, please jump up and correct me at some point in the future.

I'm not going to take too much time to go through – I'll go a second longer anyway. I think some of the changes that were made with respect to the Future Fund give the impression – albeit we were told that it's not that way – the Future Fund could be taken at any point to be put on debt, which in and of itself is not a bad thing. The Member for Waterford Valley has said that on many occasions, that it's okay to pay down debt. There's nothing wrong with that.

But what we had put in place with the Future Fund was to ensure that that money would go for debt, 10 years after it had a chance to grow, and we were going to continue to put money into it. That's the big difference that we had.

Many of the lending agencies or the credit agencies that we deal with in this province viewed this as somewhat positive, somewhat neutral. It wasn't a negative, it wasn't really a positive, but they did view the Future Fund as a positive before it was changed. That's something that I think is not necessarily in the best interest of the future.

I was going to talk about Municipal Operating Grants and Municipal Capital Works money, but I would be raining on the parade of the MHA for Corner Brook who's done a very good job of asking questions on that to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. What I will say is that we can't have people saying that there's been changes made that have lowered the

amount of money and they added additional years on, and the only person who has been saying that it's more money or not less money is the person who is being asked the questions. Everybody else seems to believe that it's less money.

So the seven big municipalities that are around that get to keep getting this funding, albeit less funding, they can't all be wrong. Generally, when every one of those other groups are saying that there's a change and it's negatively impacting them, they can't all be wrong. It's not us that's saying it, although we have. It's not just us that's saying it, it's every municipality across the province.

I think the words that I harken back to, as the Finance Minister would like to say, is that MNL got it wrong. I don't believe that's the case. I believe they're advocating for the constituency they represent, which is all municipalities across this province. I'm glad that the Member for Corner Brook has brought and shed very good light onto those, as well as the MHA from Waterford Valley has brought it up on a couple of occasions as well.

I'd be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity to talk about ECEs. I didn't know the impact that ECEs were having, I'll plead ignorance initially, until I had kids of my own. I didn't realize the impact that those top-rate, well-educated people can make in the lives of little people. Those children that we put in their trust every day make significant advancements every day because of those individuals. I don't think anyone in this House of Assembly would disagree with that statement.

It's important for all of us to endeavour to try to do everything we possibly can. When we were on the other side of the House, we brought in \$10-a-day daycare, \$10-a-day early learning centres, faster than a lot of other places in the country with a partnership between the federal government. We know the federal

government has pared back some of that money and haven't expanded on it. We hope they will because we think it's a great investment, not just for our young people and the ECEs but it's a great investment for the economy.

I'm hopeful that we'll be able to do that, but what I think we really need to focus on is exactly what those ECEs, that are entrusted with the most valuable resource that we have in this province, are saying. They're telling us that there are three things that they've requested: an updated wage grid, pass the 2026 year that was done, we had a three-year wage grid that ends in 2026; they talked about pensions; and they talk about sick leave. Those are the three things that are priorities for them. There are a variety of other things.

I agree with the minister, there is a need for a committee. Absolutely. That committee can help look at all the other priorities that are in the system. We already know those three are the priorities, front and centre, for not only the sustainability of the system, but to ensure those people are treated as fairly as possible. We know that. I think everyone on the other side of the House knows that. Now we've just got to put the money into the system.

I would also like to highlight a little bit during the last little bit of my time about Memorial University. Memorial University – and I've said many, many times – stands as a memorial to those that paid the supreme sacrifice to give us the freedoms that we enjoy today. Anything that we can do to support that institution, we should do. We should also hold them accountable. Absolutely.

I'll be the first one to agree. Everyone on this side of the House, when we were on that side of the House, agreed with some of the calls from the Opposition of the day to bring the Auditor General in. We did it and some of those recommendations have been implemented while we were over on that

side of the House. I'm hopeful that they will still be focused on implementing some of those recommendations while they're on that side of the House.

It's incumbent upon all of us, because we hear from the students, we hear from the faculty and there are significant challenges that they face. These students that we're talking about at Memorial University, they're not our future; they're our now. We've got to stay focused on trying to ensure that we keep – the student enrolment seems to continue to go up. We want to make sure we continue to give them an opportunity to be here, maintaining as much of those funding envelopes that we can and try to find expansions, and demand the university do better as well.

We don't want those changes at the university to impact cuts in academic departments, like mathematics, because we understand fully what that means. We understand that cuts in mathematics affects engineering, science, business, education. All of those are quantitative skills that students will need, and will need to be successful in the economy that the Minister of Jobs has talked about. We know that's important.

We know that Memorial University is an economic engine in this province. It's a research hub. Successful research has been done at that facility and will continue to be done at that facility. I hope this government is looking to continue to invest in that.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Medical school.

**B. DAVIS:** We have a top-notch medical school that needs to be continued to be invested in. That's where we are going to get the next round of doctors in this province.

We know that investments we've made in the medical school to increase space are going to pay dividends. It didn't pay

dividends as much for when you're sitting on one side of the House and you're changed to another side, but it will pay dividends for this province. That's what the investments are about. They're about the long-term sustainability.

I don't have a lot of time left. I had two other topics that I wanted to try to talk about, and one was better health care. From where I sit and the people that call me and message me on a regular basis, they don't see it yet. We know health care is a big boat trying to change and it takes time. We also know that building new hospitals and infrastructure are important. I know my colleague from St. John's Centre loves St. Clare's, and in reality, I think we all love St. Clare's, but we all know that St. Clare's is aging. Parts of it are old, parts where they're not as old, but there's no doubt it's not functional for what we need as health care of the 21st century.

Building that hospital also builds opportunity. It builds opportunity for recruitment. It builds opportunity to build a state-of-the-art facility, not unlike was built by the former administration in Corner Brook. Everyone in that region will say that's a fantastic facility. We also know that any time we make investments like that, it helps with recruitment, so that's a plus.

But there are two other positives that we don't talk about, and we don't talk about enough, about building in the area where we wanted to build that hospital. It was about the expansion of the road transportation network. Anybody who has been in Paradise and lives in Paradise, it's a concern that they've had for a decade or more. It's challenging on Topsail Road to get out of their homes in Paradise. This would have opened up a new exit in the back of Paradise to allow traffic to move out of that area and onto to Outer Ring Road with better ease and would make lives better for those individuals in Paradise.

Because of the building of a water tower, it would also make significant advancements

in housing. I may get the numbers wrong, so I don't want to say that these are 100 per cent accurate, but I do think from talking to the mayors of the three towns in the past, it's somewhere around 5,000 households that could be built because of a water tower being built in that area. It's the corner of three municipalities coming together. That location is where over 275,000 people are within 10 minutes or 15 minutes of that hospital site.

So I think we've got to really look hard at the decisions made for that, and whether we should, as the MHA for Waterford Valley has said many times, be throwing good money at bad ideas. I think the Finance Minister said he wants to make solid investments. Well, I think this is one. I think the public will get on board and be very happy about the investment, if we were able to make that investment in a hospital such as a new replacement for St. Clare's.

I won't talk for much longer. All I'm going to say is that I'm excited that any opportunity and investment in Justice and Public Safety is a good thing. Any investment that we make in children is a good investment. Any investment we make in children in care is a good investment. We can stand on this side of the House and support those, quite easily. What we're saying is we'd like to see more in some of those areas.

We all see public safety as a priority in our community, and any investment that we make is a good investment. All we're saying is let's make sure that we're putting the resources where we need them to be, making sure we invest in the RNC and the RCMP.

In my area, it's the RNC that do fantastic work. Obviously, there are vacancies; we need more officers. I've had, in my former role in Justice for a while, many great conversations with both Chief Pats, in this case, that do fantastic work and there's a significant amount of co-operation. I think we need to do more of that. I think we need

to continue to focus on what's going to make the difference in our communities.

That's where I would like to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, just to say thank you to everyone who has had the pleasure or displeasure, I guess, of listening to me for a bit of time on this. I would hope that the government and through the Finance Minister, who is bringing forward this budget, looks at any advancements we can make in some of those areas that I've talked about. I think looking at the Future Fund, looking at St. Clare's, for sure, would be investments, not just for my region of the province where I live, but for the entire province.

St. Clare's is a hub for everyone in this province. Everyone in this province has used St. Clare's or have family members who have used St. Clare's. We need a replacement for that and I think it's going to be to the advantage of this government if they would see the light on that project and move forward on that.

I'm not saying it has to be on Kenmount Hill. If you don't like that location, fine, put it in Galway. I don't care where it goes, but we definitely need a hospital and we should definitely be starting to focus on it.

Thank you.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker.

I appreciate my last opportunity to talk about this budget. You know you spent a lot of time with your colleagues when the Member before you pretty much says everything you were going to say anyways. But he did a great job, I think, summarizing the issues that we have with the budget.

There are a lot of issues we have with the budget. We appreciate that it was this government's first budget, but I would think that would be one of the easier ones to do. They just came out of election campaign, with a blue book full of campaign promises, lots of opportunity and lots of sectors of this province, lots of social sectors and economic sectors to deliver on a lot of promises that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians heard about and voted for and expected to be delivered.

Our job is to ask questions about what has been delivered and ask questions about why it hasn't been delivered and if it is ever going to be delivered. We asked a lot of questions over the course of this session and we got very, very, very few answers.

As my colleague from Virginia Waters - Pleasantville went through some of the main points, I think I'll take some time, in my last opportunity to speak to the budget as well, just to let everybody know what our concerns are with the budget; let the government know what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have told us their concerns are with the budget; and give them an opportunity to contemplate why we've asked these questions, why we think it's important and how they can take this away and when they come back for their next budget, next year, to consider what was lacking and how they can make progress in the years to come for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

As I said during the course of the campaign, I was asked so many times, what are your priorities? My answer was always health care. Health care is always the most important component for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and I think for everybody across this country. We are so fortunate that we live in a country where we have access to publicly funded health care, which is the same for everybody, no matter what part of the province you live in, where you come from or how much money you make.

We see so much news from our American friends. We see stories about people who have to go bankrupt because they can't afford to get cancer surgery or heart surgery. That's not the way we live in Canada, but we have to make sure we continue to invest in our public health care system. If we let it slip in any way, shape or form, it's hard to get back. It's hard to get anything back once it starts to slip.

Are there issues with our health care system? There are. Of course, there are. We always acknowledged that when we were on the other side of this House. Premier Furey at the time, he left his medical practice, made sure the Health Accord was done to set a blueprint for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador health care.

We were very open, and I was very open during the course of the campaign and while I was minister of Health, that we weren't going to fix health care in a week, a month, a year. It's going to take a long, long time. It's important to follow that blueprint. Because it wasn't a Liberal blueprint; it was all stakeholders in this province that got together to come up with health care in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There was a focus on access to primary care. I don't know how many times I was asked, does every Newfoundlander and Labradorian have to have a family physician? The answer to that is no, every Newfoundlander and Labradorian has to have access to primary health care.

We were at the RNU breakfast meeting this week and at our table we spoke about that with the representatives and how important nurse practitioners and nurses can play in access to primary health care. We can develop our nurse practitioner program.

I'm very proud, during our time in government, that we took the step to include making nurse practitioner services free for medically necessary care in this province.

Now, it was a pilot project, but you have to start somewhere. We recognize that nurse practitioners can and will – in the future, very much will – play a role in making sure Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have access to the primary health care they need, but it's complicated.

We see the system and we hear from family physicians now who are struggling with the fee-for-service model. It's an old model. It's a dated model. It still very much works for some family physicians, but it doesn't work for a lot of family physicians and it doesn't work for a lot of new doctors who are coming into the system right now. That's why it wouldn't necessarily work for nurse practitioners, as well.

When we came up with our pilot, we made sure we consulted with nurse practitioners, the association and the Nurses' Union to deliver a pilot that we felt was a starting point to make sure nurse practitioners could deliver that primary care at no cost to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I encourage the minister and the Premier to continue with that pilot, but to make sure they listen. Because I'll be the first one to say that our pilot may not be perfect. Our pilot was a pilot for a reason. It's to make sure that it was flexible to develop and improve that pilot as we go forward. That's an important part of that announcement that was made.

Medical travel is certainly not lost on me. I know more about medical travel because of the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair. She talks about it in our caucus every single day. When I say every single day, I might mean every single hour of every single day because she lives it. Not only herself, but she lives it through her constituents who are in rural and remote parts of this province.

When I say she talks about it, Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe, there's a long list of people that the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair brings to our table who are struggling

with travel issues to their important health care appointments that they need to get to, and it was a struggle.

We made a lot of efforts to improve that MTAP system. We put it into the Department of Labrador Affairs. We did a voucher program rather than having people pay upfront. If you don't have \$5,000 to pay upfront, you're not going to get to your health care appointment. That's not the way public health care should work in this province.

But what we saw in the blue book and during the election campaign was to provide 100 per cent coverage for essential medical travel, and what did we get? Limiting the scope, limiting the timing and limiting the funding for that essential medical travel.

Again, Deputy Speaker, that was a promise that was made. I can tell you that was a promise the people in the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair's District heard about and are extremely disappointed and, more importantly, extremely worried about how they're going to access health care in this province going forward.

Government has done some good things in terms of investing in MRIs and other equipment, and we know that's a start. But it's not just equipment. The radiologists are already struggling to run the equipment they have to their full capacity because of lack of staff. The medical radiation technologists are as important as the machines.

The only mention of recruitment in the budget is for doctors and nurses. It's not about front-line staff, not just doctors and nurses – obviously, they're an incredibly important component of our health care system. They treat patients, they work together and they work collaboratively, but there is so much more to our health care system than doctors and nurses. I want to thank them for their work, but I want to thank everybody in the medical system for their work each and every day.

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

**J. HOGAN:** We had a Member here who had to run out just yesterday or the day before, ran to the emergency room. I'm sure he came back feeling a lot better about how his family member was treated and had access. I'm sure it wasn't just doctors and nurses. It was receptionists, it's the cleaning staff, it's the technologists – it's everybody in that hospital setting that leads to better health care and better outcomes for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We asked the question about recruitment and retention today; \$3.5 million for physician recruitment in this budget. We had \$10 million for recruitment and retention initiatives in our budget. Now, of course, the other side is going to criticize us and say we didn't do enough. Well, if we didn't do enough with \$10 million, how are you going to do more with \$3.5 million? That math just doesn't add up.

When we asked the question today – and the frustrating part of being on this side of the House right now is that the questions are not being asked as gotcha questions. The questions are being asked. If there are proper answers, give the answers to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and we'll stand up and cheer and say thanks, that's a great answer. We appreciate that you have a plan to recruit doctors. We appreciate that you have a plan to recruit nurses. But the answer we got today was, oh, nurses and doctors are still calling and no one is calling them back. I don't think I could have heard a worse answer, to be honest with you. That was very troubling to hear that.

My friend from Virginia Waters - Pleasantville talked about the St. Clare's hospital. That issue has been politicized, which is politicizing health care. We did make an announcement that we want to build a new health care facility, a new hospital in this province. The Health Sciences Centre is an old facility. It's a

tertiary centre for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That now is our modern facility. That's our modern facility going forward.

I've walked through that. It is tough for the doctors and nurses and staff to work in that hospital in that setting. When you see leaks, holes in the walls, bricks falling apart, broken elevators, that's not how we deliver good health care in Newfoundland and Labrador. We're better than that and we can do better than that, and we wanted to do better than that.

The answers we got on that is, well, it was going to cost too much money because you had an \$8-billion to \$12-billion plan to build that hospital. No, we didn't. We had an \$8-billion to \$12-billion assessment that if we built everything with all the bells and whistles, everything you could imagine if we could afford it – maybe if you had \$227 billion, we could – everything that we could have built if we wanted to, that's what it would look like.

The other part is we wouldn't have built it all at once. We could have built it in sections over time and it wouldn't have cost \$8 billion to \$12 billion. It wouldn't have cost \$8 billion to \$12 billion all at once, but we would have started that process. We would have been further down the road towards a new hospital if we had been elected.

I encourage the government, without doing an assessment on the cost of doing repairs at St. Clare's, you don't know if you're spending smarter because you don't know what the cost analysis is. You don't know what the cost benefit is. You've made a political decision to cancel a Liberal promise for the benefit of that side of the House, and that's not helping Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Affordability – tremendously important issue. This issue, the word came up after COVID: affordability. I don't think we used that phrase prior to COVID but, since

COVID, we've seen the cost go up. We've seen gas go up. We've seen groceries go up. We've seen airline tickets go up. We've seen housing go up, up and up and up – clothing. It just hasn't stopped. It seemed like it did level out a little bit and then it reared its ugly head again over the last number of months.

We talked about levers. Certainly, the Minister of Finance talked about levers and I talked about levers.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Joy sticks.

**J. HOGAN:** Joy sticks, sure. There's no joy in the levers that weren't pulled, I can tell you that.

The Liberal government pulled levers such as increasing the Home Heating Supplement, cutting the gas tax, reducing Motor Vehicle registration costs. Those were continued, but they were Liberal levers. None of the levers in the blue book were pulled, with the exception of the personal income tax exemption change, which is saving Newfoundlanders and Labradorians about \$28 a month.

As the Minister of Finance said – all the days blend together, I think it was today or yesterday – that won't help all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. He said that's okay because he's pulling other levers. Well, he hasn't. People are still struggling. People need more help.

Another issue that I think was politicized was our debate over the gas tax, which was a good debate. We had an amendment that was in order, and the right conversation to have was, what is the right amount of gas tax for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians so the government can still have that tax base to collect revenue to do things like improve the roads, versus what's important that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can have a gas tax that they can afford.

As we debated that, we lost the ability to debate it because closure was called. The first sitting of this government and they decided to shut down debate on an important issue for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I would say that that set the tone for the sitting of this House.

We also heard comments outside of the House of Assembly: Why would we debate that in the House of Assembly? My thought is, I don't know, because it's important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. But people on that side of the House think differently. People on that side think, trust us, don't worry about it, don't ask questions and everything is going to be fine.

We had a statement in here today about the Royal Newfoundland Heavy Artillery Regiment and words like "protecting democracy" were used. We should never think that something as simple as closure or mocking the House of Assembly cannot have a trickle-down effect on the effect of democracy in this province and in this country.

As I say that, I hear a big huff from the other side, unbelievable – unbelievable. That shows the respect that they have for this Opposition and this government. That shows the level of respect they have when we ask questions.

Safer communities and 24-hour snow clearing – we heard an announcement that promise made, promise delivered. I think it was one of the first times I heard that. But then not very long after, it was very clear that that promise wasn't kept and the Deputy Premier said it wasn't kept and blamed residents for expecting too much. So they made a promise they didn't keep and blamed it on the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador for thinking that they should have got what they were promised. Again, setting the tone for the course of this government.

A lot of questions about roadwork – and, by the way, when the Member for Burin - Grand Bank gets up to do his petitions on roadwork, which is his job, articulating what his constituents need, safe roads in his community, a very good job on doing that, day in and day out, there was a lot of huffing and puffing every time he gets up. Not again – not again. Well, how about you do the right thing and do what he asks? Send some officials down to his district to look at the conditions of the roads.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Safer communities, make sure that the courts are open – some courts in this province have closed. We see that they're reopening and we're glad about that. The issue that I had is it's never clear to me about why they've been closed. I have certainly heard comments about sheriff's officers, yet this budget has no investment in additional sheriff's officers.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**J. HOGAN:** We are glad to see additional RNC and RCMP officers, but it is disappointing to see there are no recruitment and retention initiatives for those officers.

We have seen that our recruitment and retention initiatives had been successful, as we saw 18 new officers who graduated and were sworn in in early April of this year. We are happy to see that the Liberal recruitment and retention initiatives in keeping the Special Constable pilot is being maintained, but we hope that the government will build on them to achieve a higher police-to-population ratio in this province.

I'll echo the comments of the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi today during Question Period when she said it was good news today to see the government finally take the stance that gender-based violence

in this province is an epidemic. That is a good announcement. That is a good and right thing to do.

I just want to say thank you to my friend, Georgina McGrath, who has been a champion of this issue. The work that she has done on the federal level with Senator Fabian Manning doesn't mean just positive steps forward for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but she's making a name for herself and doing good things on the national stage. That's something that we should all be very proud of.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Some other notable absences from the budget: child care. Again, the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville talked about child care. Of course, you know child care is important, but it's when you have your own kids in child care, you sort of sit back, and you pick them up every day, and you think those individuals are in charge of the safety and education of my little kids each and every day.

It doesn't get more important than that. You're putting your most prized possession in the trust of these individuals, and I thank them and I thank the ones who did all the hard work for my kids. I bet you, it was a lot of hard work with my kids, too.

The budget takes credit for the Liberal government's efforts to develop new child care spaces. We had zero 10-a-day child care spaces in 2021. In 2025, we had over 11,000 – 11,000 – children. In four years, parents were paying \$10 a day rather than \$50 or \$100 a day.

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

**J. HOGAN:** That is an unbelievable achievement, and one that this Liberal government will be very proud of for years to come.

That doesn't overshadow the fact that the budget completely neglects early childhood educators. I've heard the Minister of Education talk about taking the time to prioritize and two things worry me. He already has the priorities; the second thing is, if you're prioritizing things for the minister to pick from the top, it certainly sounds to me like he's not going to pick the things on the bottom.

If ECEs are putting them forward, whether it's three, five or 10 – three, five or 10 things are important to ECEs and they should all be considered, not just because they have to be prioritized at the request of the minister.

Investments in our K-to-12 system – the budget provided no meaningful action to address recruitment and retention of educators. It failed to reduce class-size caps and improve allocations to address increasingly complex class compositions. No increased allocations for supports for students with exceptionalities, mental health challenges, language barriers. No increased allocations for school counsellors, instructional resource teachers, school psychologists, speech language pathologists and other specialized supports.

Again, Speaker, we hear that children are the most valuable resource – no investment in children, and that's a shame.

The debt and the deficit – the Finance Minister has said, insatiable desire to save money, an insatiable desire to reduce debt and an insatiable desire to reduce the deficit. They also said they wouldn't do that on the backs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Well, if that's true, why didn't we see more affordability measures? If that's true, why didn't we see more help in the K-to-12 system? If that's true, why didn't we see more help for the ECEs? If that's true, why didn't we see more investment in sheriff's officers for our justice system?

They did make a choice. They chose not to invest in things that they promised that they would invest in. We all know that the financial situation in this province is a struggle, and do you know what? That's not a new story for Newfoundland and Labrador. It's always been a struggle.

They made a lot of election promises, and we will take a little bit of time to talk about Churchill Falls because it does have an opportunity of billions and billions of dollars. I will say it again, that this report, that has been provided, is extremely troubling for me and for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. All we had asked during the course of this House of Assembly is to tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who provided the information in the report.

It's not only to protect Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; it's to protect this government. They should want to know who provided this advice. We will continue to ask questions about that. We will continue to push for openness and transparency and we hope that some day in the near future, before the deal is signed, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians get the full story about what this government is getting itself into.

One of the most disappointing promises that wasn't kept was no topsides on the work for Bay du Nord. Now, I know that they've said they're going to build a dry dock that they don't know the cost of, with a \$200-million contribution from a company that makes billions and billions and billions of dollars every year. That dry dock will be built over five years.

We've talked to other corporate entities in this province who would have been prepared to build that dry dock themselves. Why wasn't that part of the deal and maybe the \$200 million could have been used for something else? That's the deal that they made with Equinor.

I did meet with Equinor. For some reason, it's been said in the House of Assembly that

I didn't meet with Equinor when I was premier. I met with them on June 5. I remember what they said to me because it was right around the time I had a meeting with Trades NL who, at that meeting, did an incredible job of advocating for Newfoundland and Labrador trades workers and did an incredible job of telling me why it was important to get topsides for this project. They said to me, do not sign any deal without all the topsides being done here in this province, or at least the vast majority of topsides being done here in this province.

During my meeting with Equinor, they said to me, Trades NL is not at the table; don't worry about it. That's essentially what they said to me. I remember thinking, during the course of the election, if we were successful, I had two huge decisions to make. One was what we were going to do and how we were going to proceed with the Churchill Falls deal, if we were fortunate enough to get to the definitive agreements. The second was how I was going to manage to move forward on the Bay du Nord Project when I had an advocate in Trades NL who was so sure and so set in their ways that topside was the only solution to move forward on that project.

That weighed on me for weeks and weeks and weeks. When the election was over and the announcement was made and the Minister of Energy stood in this House on numerous occasions and also said we could only proceed if we got the topsides, it made me question what was said at those meetings and if I was misremembering things. It made me question if I misremembered what the Minister of Energy stood here in the House of Assembly and talked about with regard to topsides.

I went back, I reviewed everything and no, that was the promise. That was the commitment that was made and you could cut it any way you want, you can spin it any way you want, that promise has not been delivered on. They can live with themselves

if they feel that that promise was delivered on, but it's pretty clear to me there are no topsides coming here to this province.

If a bidder is successful, that's great and I hope they are; but when you have Equinor, the proponent, saying that the companies in Asia are more likely to get the bids, we've given up all the leverage we would have had on that, Speaker.

Another troubling thing is the referendum has been committed to and the Premier, despite numerous questions, not by me but by media outside the House of Assembly, won't commit to what he said he would do. The blue book clearly says: "We will not proceed with any deal on the Churchill River unless it is approved by the voters via a referendum." I can't understand why the Premier can't stand by a promise that he made. I can't understand why the Premier won't commit to something that he made on day one of the election campaign.

He knows why he won't do it, but there is something he's not telling Newfoundlanders and Labradorians about why he won't maintain that position on the referendum. We keep asking that question; I doubt we will ever get an answer, but I want to remind Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that was a promise that they made to them and they should be delivering on their promises, because that's what they were elected to do.

Speaker, I think I'll end on this – because I know the Finance Minister likes when I talk about *Ted Lasso* so much so that I think he talks about it more than I do. But I will end on this because I'm going to give him another quote. That is that taking on a challenge is a lot like riding a horse. If you're comfortable, you're probably doing it wrong. This government is too comfortable. They don't answer questions. They laugh at the questions that we ask.

We asked a lot of questions today, and do you know what? It was really odd. The

Minister of Education answered a question, and they cheered. They cheered for him for doing his job. Thirty minutes and they got one cheer because they answered one question. They're too comfortable. They need to take this seriously.

They need to recognize that we're not asking questions to embarrass them or to have gotcha moments, but if there are answers to the questions, good for you, provide them. If there are not answers to the questions, something is wrong. If they're unable to talk about the current state of the province and continue on our bingo card to talk about the Liberal Party, something is seriously wrong.

I understand it is a new government, but it has been months now. The lack of acknowledgement and lack of responsibility that the ministers and this government are taking for their portfolios is troubling. We have three years and five months left, and I will be here every day this House is open. I will ask questions. You can say I'm low for asking questions. In fact, there was a social media post yesterday that said exactly that. I'm curious about where that came from now.

But I will ask those questions and so will the rest of my caucus, and we will do what we feel is right for Newfoundland and Labrador. As the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville said, credit doesn't matter to us. What matters to us is Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Again, as I sit down now, it's not lost on me that the second there's a criticism, the chirping starts. You've got to get thicker skin. You've got to own the job. You've got to stand up for what is right and you've got to deliver for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you.

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, I am going to take some time this evening to talk to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and to talk about where we, as a government, are moving where the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have asked us to go and what we were elected to do. But, at first, I want to start off and say I'm proud to close out the debate on *Budget 2026*, the first budget of our new government.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** I want to begin by saying thank you. Thank you to all of my Cabinet colleagues who have worked hard across every department to bring forward a budget that reflects the priorities of the people we serve. I want to thank our caucus who went out in all their communities, worked hard and spoke to the people in their communities from Labrador to rural Newfoundland to the Northeast Avalon to every region of the province, to identify those things that mattered most to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I also want to thank, of course, Minister Pardy, the Minister of Finance, for his leadership, discipline and hard work on this budget. I can stand here today and proudly say that I have never seen a more experienced Minister of Finance and a better Minister of Finance in the last 10 years.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** I want to thank all the officials in your department, Minister, and of Treasury Board, Executive Council and every other department across the government who put in the long hours, the work that was necessary in order for this budget to be able to be presented to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. As

we know, budgets simply do not happen. They're not the work of any one person. They're the work of a lot of people across government departments and everywhere.

I also want to thank the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who came out in record numbers to offer their opinions on what they felt should be included in this budget. The number of submissions that we received this year, I think the minister alluded to it earlier, was like three times in one year of what would be three years in a row, we actually exceeded it. That would mean they came and they spoke about what they truly wanted to see in the budget.

They wanted to see us deal with the cost of living and lower taxes. They wanted to see us deliver on health care and they wanted us to deliver on safer communities. Speaker, that is exactly what we have done.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, we talk about the budget, we've talked about the slogan, "for all of us," and that's exactly what this budget is. It's a budget for the working people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's a budget for seniors. It's a budget for families trying to make ends meet. It's a budget for small businesses, nurses, trade workers, teachers, fish harvesters, students, first responders and communities that deserve a government that listens and acts.

We said we would lower taxes; we've done so. We said we would focus on health care; we have. We said we would make communities safer; we're doing that. We said we would build a stronger future without pretending that challenges do not exist. This budget keeps those promises.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, we have included a significant number of items.

As we start down our journey, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador elected us to represent them in this House of Assembly, we are the people's government, that's what we do. We put forward a blue book, we campaigned on the blue book and, over the course of our term in office, you will see us deliver on those commitments. We started this year with the budget that we just announced.

So we can talk about the fact that we did make the gas tax permanent. That reduction is now permanent, so we will always have the lowest gas tax in all of Canada. That is a commitment we made, that is a commitment we will intend to keep. We are increasing the basic personal exemption as noted, so nobody in Newfoundland and Labrador – the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador, I think the minister alluded to 285,000 people – 285,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will actually get a benefit from this move. That is a major investment for every single taxpayer in this province.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** We reduced the small business tax and we've implemented a program to keep reducing it. That's the Minister of Finance that has committed to doing that and we've actually put it in the fiscal forecast. So it's actually reflected that it will be done, just like we said it will be done, Speaker, and because we know small businesses are the backbone of Newfoundland and Labrador. They hire local people. They support all our communities. They support non-profit organizations. They support community organizations. They support sports teams and other activities. I want everybody that owns a small business in Newfoundland and Labrador to know that we are on your side and we will make it better.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, earlier today we talked about the seniors and what we're doing for seniors. The minister talked about the fact that the Seniors' Benefit is now being increased by 20 per cent – 20 per cent. That matters, Speaker. It matters to seniors all over the province. They deserve that. They deserve our respect, they deserve our dignity and they deserve the support, and we are doing that.

We also talked about the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit; 3,000 more children in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador will see a benefit so more families can get the help when they need it most.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, let's talk about health care because, obviously, when we ask about health care, we inherited a health care system that, despite the significant amount of money that is being spent on health care, our health outcomes in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador were ranked the worst in the entire country – the very worst in the entire country.

So do we have work to do? You bet we do. We have a lot of work to do, but we've started down that journey. We've started to make those improvements, working with a Minister of Health who brings more passion to that portfolio than you would ever want to see in an individual, who stands up every single day and talks about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and making improvements to their lives. That's what we have on this side.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, let's talk about that. More than \$31 million over the next five years so patients can see nurse practitioners for medically necessary services without paying out of pocket. That investment is a long time coming. We spoke for two years in Opposition and asked for

that to happen. Well, it's going to happen and we're going to make it happen because nobody in Newfoundland and Labrador should ever have to pay to see a primary care provider.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** I heard the Leader of the Official Opposition talk about medical transportation. Medical transportation – we have committed, it's long overdue. Something, again, that we've been talking about for years that we are now going to make sure that when people in Newfoundland and Labrador have to travel outside their region for medical reasons, to see a specialist or for medical appointments, they will be funded 100 per cent – 100 per cent.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Not only is that a measure for health care, that puts money back in people's pockets, that helps with the cost of living. That's the type of investment. So it's not just direct tax cuts. It's actually investing in people.

When you don't have to pay to see a nurse practitioner, that \$60 that you might have to pay for that visit stays in your pocket. When you don't have to spend 50 per cent of your money for travel because you need a medical appointment, that money stays in your pocket. Those are the types of things we are doing, as the minister likes to refer to levers. Those are all levers that put more money back in people's pockets so they can deal with the cost of living.

Speaker, we are adding acute-care beds. We are investing in long-term care beds in Stephenville, Bay St. George; Labrador; Clarenville; and Corner Brook. We're moving forward with health infrastructure in communities like Corner Brook, Grand Falls-Windsor, Conception Bay South, Happy Valley-Goose Bay and St. John's. We are investing in MRIs, CTs, echo

machines, hyperbaric oxygen therapy and practical improvements that will help patients get diagnosed and treated sooner.

Speaker, these are all investments in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, an investment in our health care system. In addition to that, we're investing in people who work in the system, more nursing seats, paid work terms, more doctor recruitment, a provincial nurse travel team instead of paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to travel nurses that come from other provinces, we're going to invest in our own. We're going to invest locally, we're working with the union and we're going to make sure that this program is available.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** More support for internationally trained doctors, more medication under the Prescription Drug Program, expanded RSV vaccine coverage for infants and adults 75 years and older. Speaker, these are all things that we're doing.

We're continuing to work on health care. We continue to do that, real action and I'm proud of it. I'm very proud to say that we will continue to do more because there is definitely more that needs to be done. That is the goal we have set for ourselves. That is the challenge that my Minister of Health has been given and that is the challenge all of us are prepared to deliver for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, when it comes to safer communities, our minister stood up in the House and talked about the hirings of 21 new RNC officers, 25 new RCMP officers, more Crown attorneys and support staff, expanding the number of provincial judges, supporting a unified bail court, investing in mobile health crisis teams, violence prevention, trauma-informed services and supports for people at risk of gender-based violence.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, that's what you call getting it done.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Community safety is not one thing, Speaker, it's not just policing, it's justice, it's mental health; it's prevention. It is supporting vulnerable people before crisis becomes crime and it is also emergency preparedness. We all saw the impacts of the wildfires, Speaker. We saw communities stand up for each other. We saw our volunteer firefighters and other people, first responders, municipal leaders, ordinary citizens do extraordinary things. That's why, Speaker, we've made a serious investment in all of those. That's what we will continue to do, Speaker. There are so many other things that I can go on and on and on about.

When they stand up and say our budget doesn't deliver for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I would say to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have delivered and we will continue to deliver on your behalf, because we made a commitment to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador when we ran. We said we would make access to health care – improvement it. We said we would turn around and lower costs and lower taxes. We turned and said we would have safer communities. We have started down that path, Speaker. We have started down that path in year one, in our first budget and we will continue to do that for the next three years because the people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve it.

Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador has a proud future, a very proud future and we need to make sure that, as a government, we never forget who put us here and why we're here. We will continue down that path.

Speaker, I may have more years behind me than I do ahead of me, but I will guarantee

you that I will stand up here every single day and stand up for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who elected us. I will stand up here and make sure we deliver the best deals possible, the best health care system, lower costs and safer communities for all of us.

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

**SPEAKER (Lane):** Are we ready for the question?

We're now voting on the main budget motion.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Nay.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Division.

**SPEAKER:** Division has been called.

### Division

**SPEAKER:** Are the House Leaders ready for the question?

All those in favour, please rise.

**TABLE OFFICER (GUSHUE):** Tony Wakeham, Lloyd Parrott, Joedy Wall, Lela Evans, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Paul Dinn, Craig Pardy, Barry Petten, Jeff Dwyer, Loyola O'Driscoll, Andrea Barbour, Chris Tibbs, Lin Paddock, Pleaman Forsey, Mike Goosney, Keith Russell, Riley Balsom, Hal Cormier, Mark Butt, Jim McKenna, Joseph Power, Eddie Joyce.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, please rise.

**CLERK:** John Hogan, Lisa Dempster, Bernard Davis, Sarah Stoodley, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Pam Parsons, Keith White, Paul Pike, Elvis Loveless, Fred Hutton,

Jamie Korab, Jim Parsons, Bettina Ford, Michael King, James Dinn, Sheilagh O'Leary.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 22; the nays: 16.

**SPEAKER:** The motion has been carried.

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

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

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

I move that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to debate the Estimates of the Legislature.

**SPEAKER:** The motion is that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply to debate the Estimates of the Legislature and that I do now leave the Chair.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

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

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Dwyer):** Order, please!

We are now debating the Estimates of the Legislature. I will now ask the Clerk to call the subheads.

**CLERK:** For the Estimates of the Legislature, 1.1.01 to 9.1.01 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall 1.1.01 to 9.1.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 9.1.01 carried.

**CLERK:** The total.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, the Legislature, total heads, carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the Estimates of the Legislature carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Legislature carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

**L. PARROTT:** Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report the Estimates of the Legislature carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise and report the Estimates of the Legislature.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

**SPEAKER (Lane):** The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue and Chair of Committee of the Whole.

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

Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters referred to them and have asked me to report the Estimates for the Legislature carried without amendment.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole on Supply reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report that they have passed the Estimates of the Legislature without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

**L. PARROTT:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, I wish to inform the House that I have received a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

**SPEAKER:** All rise.

As Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I transmit Estimates of the sums required for the Public Service of the province for the year ending 31 March 2027, by way of further Supply, and in accordance with the provisions of sections 54 and 90 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, I recommend these Estimates to the House of Assembly.

Sgd.: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lieutenant Governor

You may be seated.

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, that the message together with a related bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole on Supply.

**SPEAKER:** The motion is that the message together with a related bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole on Supply and that I do now leave the Chair.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBER:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

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

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Dwyer):** Order, please!

We are now considering the resolution and related Bill 14, An Act for Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for other Purposes Relating to the Public Service.

### Resolution

*"Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:*

*"That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to His Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2027, the sum of \$7,280,979,800."*

**CHAIR:** Shall the resolution carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, resolution carried.

A bill, "An Act for Granting to His Majesty Certain sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service." (Bill 14)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

**CLERK:** Clauses 2 to 4 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall clauses 2 through 4 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 4 carried.

**CLERK:** The Schedule.

**CHAIR:** Shall the Schedule carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Schedule carried.

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

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

**CLERK:** MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY:

WHEREAS it appears that the sums mentioned are required to defray certain expenses of the Public Service of

Newfoundland and Labrador for the financial year ending March 31, 2027 and for other purposes relating to the public service.

**CHAIR:** Shall the preamble carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, preamble carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act for Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service. (Bill 14)

**CHAIR:** Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the resolution and a bill consequent thereto, carried.

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

**L. PARROTT:** Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report the resolution and Bill 14 carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise and report the resolution and Bill 14 carried without amendment.

Is this the pleasure of the Committee to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

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

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

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

Speaker, the Committee of the Whole on Supply have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that Bill 14 be introduced to give effect to the same.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole on Supply reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report that the Committee has adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

When shall the report be received?

**L. PARROTT:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, that the resolution be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that the resolution be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against.

Motion carried.

**CLERK:** "*Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:*

"That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to His Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2027 the sum of \$7,280,979,800."

On motion, resolution read a first time.

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Government Services and Labour, that the resolution be now read a second time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the resolution be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against.

Motion carried.

**CLERK:** *"Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:*

"That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to His Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2027 the sum of \$7,280,979,800."

On motion, resolution read a second time.

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, for leave to introduce the main Supply bill, Bill 14, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that the hon. Minister of Finance shall have leave to introduce Bill 14, the main Supply bill, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against.

The motion is carried.

Motion, that the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to

introduce a bill, "An Act for Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service," carried. (Bill 14)

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act for Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service. (Bill 14)

On motion, Bill 14 read a first time.

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Jobs, Growth and Rural Development, that the main Supply bill, Bill 14, be now read a second time.

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

Is the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act for Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service. (Bill 14)

On motion, Bill 14 read a second time.

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

**C. PARDY:** Speaker, it is with pride that I move, seconded by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Premier and the MHA for Stephenville - Port au Port, that the main Supply bill, Bill 14, be now read a third time.

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

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

Is the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act for Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service. (Bill 14)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act for Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2027 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 14)

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

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

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**SPEAKER:** All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

This House do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, May 28, 2026, at 1:30 p.m.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, at 1:30 p.m.