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Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

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The House met at 2:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Today before we start our proceedings, I want to welcome some special guests to our galleries. We have today joining us the new Mayor for the Town of Wabush, Colin Vardy.

Welcome, Sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Congratulations on your election.

We also are joined by Mayor Rex Matthews and Councillor Stan Burt from the Town of Grand Bank.

Welcome, gentlemen, to our galleries.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Congratulations to both of you on your recent election.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today, we have members' statements from the Member for the District of Terra Nova; the Member for the District of Port au Port; the Member for the District of Bonavista North; the Member for the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair; the Member for the District of Kilbride; and the Member for the District of Torngat Mountains.

The hon. the Member for the District of Terra Nova.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: Thank you.

I rise today to pay tribute to two wonderful people, Mr. Speaker. Pastors Benjamin and Rita Elliott, along with daughter Elizabeth, left the comfort of their home in Botwood in 1948 to

establish the first Pentecostal church in Glovertown.

With only \$20 and a strong conviction they did just that. The first structure was an old woodshed that Pastor Elliott converted into a makeshift church. After their six-year term, the Elliotts had built a new church as well as a new pastor's residence.

The Elliotts then moved from Glovertown to Bonavista, where they again started from nothing, and built yet another church. They stayed in Bonavista for ten years amassing a large congregation. Pastor Elliott would also travel around the Province on the boat *Gospel Pioneer*, where he and other fellow pastors started new churches all along the Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In 2003, Pastor Benjamin Elliott passed away but is survived by his wife, Pastor Rita, who is now ninety-five years old. Just three weeks ago Pastor Mrs. Elliott was a guest speaker at a service held in Glovertown.

I ask all members to join me in thanking this couple for the contributions that they have made to so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Port au Port.

MR. CORNETT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Town of Cape St. George and its residents on being awarded two environmental awards this year.

Mr. Speaker, on June 7 of this year, the Town of Cape St. George received an award for environmental excellence from the Department of Environment and Conservation for the community's commitment to protect rare plants growing in the area and it was recognized for its waste management and recycling initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, the Town of Cape St. George received the Torngat Award for Environmental Sustainability from Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador at their recently held convention in St. John's on November 7 to November 10.

The 2013 Torngat Award recognizes the Town of Cape St. George for their many programs implemented to divert the amount of waste being shipped to the regional landfill site. This is certainly recognition of the municipality's continued efforts in protecting the environment.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join with me in applauding the Town of Cape St. George on receiving these two environmental awards.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Bonavista North.

MR. CROSS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

They came from near, they came from far, they came by plane, they came by car. It sounds like a Dr. Seuss book, Mr. Speaker, but I am proud to say it refers to the Town of Centreville-Wareham-Trinity Come Home Year held from August 9 to August 18, 2013.

Most of the Newfoundland and Labrador population has very proud connections to our rural roots. It is a very significant occasion when we are offered to spend quality time in the communities of our childhood, our formative years or the towns where we first found employment. Many were given this privilege in August, Mr. Speaker, as CWT welcomed them home or welcomed them back.

A celebration, as complex as a Come Home Year, requires many volunteers and community leaders. Centreville-Wareham-Trinity and the islands in the bay expanded its population immensely in August. From the kitchen to the parlour to the shed to the wharf you could catch

a story. Tall tale or truth, you would have to be the judge.

I request that we unanimously salute the collective efforts of Mayor Rogers and the CHY planning community and the townsfolk of CWT, because this summer it could aptly be termed the happiness capital of our Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

"Leadership is not about titles, positions, or flow charts. It is about one life influencing another."

I rise today to recognize Regan Burden, a Grade 12 student from Port Hope Simpson who is doing just that. At age seventeen, Regan has already represented youth at the regional, provincial, and national levels by being involved with projects like Students on Ice, when she travelled to the Arctic in 2011.

Regan joined Junior Canadian Rangers at the age of twelve, and is now a master corporal. At fifteen, she participated in Shave for the Brave. In 2013, Regan travelled to Norway, where one-third of the world's cod stocks reproduce, to protest oil drilling in the Lofoten Islands.

This fall, Regan participated in Miss Teen Achievement NL pageant and finished second runner-up. Her speech on climate change and her Norway experience was very inspiring.

Having the attributes of a natural leader and a great public speaker, Regan is called on many times in her community to be a master of ceremonies and serve on many school and community committees.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in wishing Regan Burden every success in her future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Kilbride.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in this hon. House today to recognize three constituents of the Kilbride District, Sarah Winsor of Bishops College High School in St. John's, William Newhook of Booth Memorial High School, and Connor Whalen of O'Donel High School, who have been awarded the provincial government Electoral District Scholarships, valued at \$1,000 each.

These scholarships are awarded to the three high school graduates in the district who have achieved the highest Department of Education scholarship scores. It is wonderful to see these students developing their potential, and I wish them every success in all their future endeavours as they continue to pursue their post-secondary education.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members of this House to join me in congratulating these students on their hard work and accomplishments.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Ms Caitlyn Baikie of Nain.

Since the age of fourteen, Caitlyn has been actively involved in research and promotion of climate change issues affecting residents of Nunatsiavut. She has conducted research in the Torngat Mountains National Park, and given keynote presentations at conferences, including

a national climate change conference in Winnipeg.

Caitlyn has also be recognized for work her work by many organizations, including the International Institute for Sustainability, where she represented Canada and Labrador at the International Polar Year, From Knowledge to Action, as a Circumpolar youth leader.

Mr. Speaker, many of you will remember Caitlyn last year as the first female page in this House of Assembly from Nunatsiavut. She is also very active in promoting Inuit culture at Memorial University.

Just this past weekend, Caitlyn was invited to be a panelist on the climate change panel that included Dr. David Suzuki.

This Christmas, Caitlyn will represent Memorial University and Canada on an expedition to Antarctica with Students on Ice – quite an accomplishment for a twenty-one-year old.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in recognizing Ms Caitlyn Baikie from Nain.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Mr. Speaker, our government remains committed to ensuring that residents on the Labrador Coast have continued access to nutritious, perishable foods at a reasonable cost.

Our Air Foodlift Subsidy, while available year-round, certainly becomes increasingly more important as marine service to coastal Labrador comes to a close for the year. Under this

program, a subsidy is paid to eligible retailers to offset the high cost of flying perishable foods into remote communities and retailers are then required to pass these savings on to their customers.

Our continued investment in the Air Foodlift Subsidy helps ensure Labradorians in isolated communities have continued access to nutritious, perishable foods such as milk, eggs, juice, yogurt, cheese, fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, fish, bread and grain products, as well as infant formula.

Mr. Speaker, we are very proud to be the only Province in Canada to continue to provide a food subsidy, over and above the federal government's Nutrition North Canada program.

Eligible retailers in Labrador are encouraged to register for both the federal and provincial subsidy programs. Retailers can receive an air freight subsidy of 100 per cent for milk and 80 per cent for all other food items, after the Nutrition North Canada subsidy is applied.

Retailers registered in the communities of Black Tickle, Rigolet, Postville, Makkovik, Hopedale, Nain, and Natuashish can avail of subsidies year-round and retailers on the South Coast and on the Labrador Straits can avail of the program if and when marine service is interrupted for more than five consecutive days.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to supporting healthy lifestyles among all residents of the Province. We are very pleased to continue to offer the Air Foodlift Subsidy program to ensure that healthy foods are accessible and affordable, supporting people in their efforts to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, the air subsidy program

is a good concept. I think it would be a tremendous program if the residents were actually getting benefits from the program.

Retailers in Northern Labrador, Mr. Speaker, are not passing the subsidy on to the consumer who still pays the highest prices for perishable food in the Province. In fact, one retailer in Nain did not take part in the food air subsidy program and his prices were still the best in town and better quality.

Mr. Speaker, the minister noted in his statement that retailers are receiving 100 per cent air freight subsidy on milk products, but you just try to buy a litre of milk in Northern Labrador for the same price you would in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Not a chance, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there has to be more done in monitoring the program to ensure that residents of Northern Labrador are receiving benefits from the air food subsidy.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I too thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I am also glad the Air Foodlift Subsidy remains in place, though we also hear from Labradorians that the subsidy to retailers is not benefiting the consumers. That is who should really be benefiting.

I am sure the minister is aware of the progress report of the Expert Panel on the State of Knowledge of Food Security in Northern Canada which is looking at factors affecting food security in the North and the health implications for Aboriginal people. The panel is examining factors such as environmental contaminants, climate change, and industrial development which affect food security in the North, including Labrador.

The final report is due in early 2014. I look forward to the minister taking time to review the report and give us a ministerial report on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Member for The Straits – White Bay North have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I too thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Food prices can be extremely high in northerly communities and we must have a food security plan to ensure that we have better access to nutritional foods. I personally would like to see the reinstatement of the Northern tax deduction for all communities north of 50-30.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to provide an update on the implementation of the Accountability Framework for Regulatory Reform established by this government in October, 2012. The first of its kind in Canada, the framework requires departments to provide regular plans and reports to ensure regulations are necessary, easy to understand, and accessible by the average citizen.

The Accountability Framework builds on our commitment as a government to continue to achieve zero net growth in the number of regulatory requirements. Since 2006, approximately 80,000 regulatory requirements have been eliminated and this commitment remains a pillar of the Regulatory Reform Initiative. Our primary goal remains reducing

red tape and improving the accessibility of services to businesses and the general public.

Mr. Speaker, departments submitted their first three-year Regulatory Improvement Plans last spring which, collectively, contain many activities to simplify the regulatory processes for businesses and individuals of this Province. These plans include actions which will enhance the accessibility of services, simplify legislation and further reduce the regulatory burden placed on the public so that their time can be better spent on carrying out business and contributing to our economy.

This spring, upon one full year of the implementation of our Accountability Framework, we will report to the public on our progress on regulatory reform. I am proud of our success to date, which recently included the implementation of online ordering for birth, marriage and death certificates, and the expansion of BizPaL, an online business permit and licence service which now reaches 72 per cent of the population. I am equally pleased about the impact our new Regularity Improvement Plans will have, and I believe it is important we communicate our efforts and progress to the public.

Mr. Speaker, this initiative is a permanent function of the provincial government and clearly demonstrates our continued dedication to reducing red tape. With the implementation of the Accountability Framework, we are seeing a cultural shift that supports the development of sound regulations and policies and enhances the customer service experience with government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Speaker, reducing red tape is a good initiative, and we encourage government to keep

reducing red tape wherever possible. Mr. Speaker, in this statement there is nothing new. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, it is pretty much a carbon copy of the release they had last October when they announced the same initiative; 80,000 regulatory requirements. That is what the minister says has been eliminated. This has not changed in over a year.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the minister's announcement next spring when, hopefully, he will have something new to say.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. It makes sense to reduce red tape when it makes sense to reduce red tape. We must be careful that it does not become a means to an end, cutting for the sake of cutting, and removing safeguards. Many regulations, in fact, serve us well.

When the minister says the goal is zero net growth, it sounds great, but really what does that mean? Government's role is to regulate, to protect citizens, and facilitate safe and responsible economic development and the operation of society.

One last note, the release says government wants to enhance the customer experience. I would like to reiterate, Mr. Speaker, people are not customers. They are citizens, and government's role is to serve them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Member for St. John's North have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

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

MR. KIRBY: Thanks to the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

If the government is really interested in reducing red tape, one thing you can do is consider paperless electronic paystubs for all government employees. Increasingly, across the country in the public service, people are able to electronically record their attendance and vacation, and there are a variety of other options for electronic applications, everything from the Home Heating Rebate to the seniors' recreation grants and so on, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador boasts a colourful history and culture that has helped shape our identity, and the Provincial Historic Commemorations Program is an important means of acknowledging the people, places, and practices that are worthy of official recognition. Since the program was established in 2010, it has recognized more than twenty nominations in every category and from every corner of our Province.

This year, five new designates of the Provincial Historic Commemorations Programs were recently announced during a ceremony held in Black Duck Brook. In the Events of Provincial Significance category, the designates were the establishment of formal schooling in Newfoundland and Labrador in Bonavista in 1727; the introduction of moose to the Island of Newfoundland; and the resettlement of Bar Haven. Root cellar construction was recognized as a Distinctive Cultural Tradition and Practice, while Emile Benoit was recognized as a Person of Provincial Significance.

The Provincial Historic Commemorations Program is a citizen-driven program administered by a six-member board, and I commend the work of the board and all those who submitted nominations in recognition of our truly unique Province and people. Mr. Speaker, the program offers everyone in our Province a chance to contribute to a list of what they deem to be our cultural and historical treasures, and we continue to welcome nominations in all of the categories.

One of the overarching goals of our government's cultural strategy, Creative Newfoundland and Labrador, is to protect and commemorate our important cultural heritage resources. Mr. Speaker, our commemorations program achieves this goal. It not only recognizes persons, places, and events of provincial historical significance, but also our intangible cultural heritage – our customs, our cultural practices, our traditional skills, and our knowledge – all of which help define our Province and its people.

Mr. Speaker, the vibrant and diverse culture we share in Newfoundland and Labrador is known worldwide, and there are so many significant contributions throughout our history that have influenced this culture. The commemorations program is an opportunity to continue to recognize the many contributors, and I encourage everyone to submit nominations to highlight the aspects of our history and traditional cultural practices that we should proudly celebrate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy. We, too, on this side would like to recognize the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador and the experiences. We see here Emile Benoit was recognized as a Person of Provincial

Significance. Anyone who ever met him and heard him would remember him and realize how much of a role he played in our culture and our heritage over the years and in the rest of the events.

I would also like to thank the board for their selection and their work for recognizing our heritage, and sometimes I am sure it is a difficult decision for the board.

Mr. Speaker, as you go down through here, one of the overarching goals of the government's strategy is to protect our cultural heritage sites, yet we see the cuts in the last Budget. Then you see all these big press releases and Ministerial Statements during polling period – then we look at we are going to be seen all around the world. I know \$4 million is going to cut out a lot of those places where Newfoundland and Labrador is going to be seen, Mr. Speaker.

We do celebrate our culture, we do celebrate our history and we must recognize it; but we also must recognize that in order to keep our sites, we need the staff to do it, we need to ensure that they are funded properly to ensure that when people come to Newfoundland and Labrador, they come here and see a top-rated site.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. Congratulations to the Provincial Historic Commemorations Program for encouraging people to celebrate our cultural and historic treasures, both tangible and intangible. Kudos are important.

Speaking of tangible, Mr. Speaker, it is also vital that government provide more actual tangible support to our cultural heritage. In the past year we have seen cuts to grants to community museums. At The Rooms we have seen three

archivists cut and we are now the only provincial museum without a conservator on staff, thanks to cuts from this government. Their roles are crucial in preserving and commemorating. Government cannot proudly celebrate these cuts.

As Emile Benoit would say: *Vive la Rose*.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, I asked the minister about government's ferry strategy. First, he said we have a strategy in place to replace all of the ferries in the Province right now. Then he went on to say that we have a strategy in place for replacement of some of the marine vessels in our system.

I ask the minister: What is it? Are you planning to replace all or some of our ferries?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess the difference in all and some is that we have already replaced some, so it is not in our strategy to replace the new ones.

Mr. Speaker, we have a strategy for a full replacement to the marine ferry fleet. I would just like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that we spent, since 2004, over \$650 million on our marine fleet here in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: So I think our strategy is working, and we will continue to work along that strategy.

As I announced a little while ago, we just announced an eighty metre ferry for Fogo Island. We announced that we are in negotiations for a second eighty metre ferry for the Bell Island run. That is nearing completion now. We made a \$10 million announcement for the –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was repeating the minister's comments from yesterday. He was the one who used the words all and some.

The minister's statements are obviously conflicting. Yesterday, right after claiming to have a ferry strategy in place, he stood and said we are in the process right now of hoping to replace or having a strategy put together to replace the ferry system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask the minister: How can you have a strategy in place while at the same time hoping to put one together?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would just like to pick up where I left off on the last question because I did not get to finish that.

We made the \$10 million announcement on the infrastructure repairs in Bell Island and Portugal

Cove. We do have a strategy in place for the rest of our ferry system. Before Christmas, as I committed to, we will have the RFP out for the Labrador ferries. That will be out before Christmas. In the new year, we will announce the RFPs for the rest of our strategy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Well, it is finally getting clear, Mr. Speaker. It was starting to sound like the government's \$5 billion infrastructure strategy. If you remember, that is the one the Auditor General said that did not exist, or the Poverty Reduction Strategy where the minister claimed yesterday we do not need a plan.

I ask the Premier: Why are your ministers so inconsistent in their comments? Do you really have written strategies or not?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one thing that this government has been since 2003 is strategic. It was necessary for us to be strategic because we took over a bankrupt Province.

Mr. Speaker, people will recall that we on a monthly basis were having schools close because of mould, air quality. You could not take vehicles up the Great Northern Peninsula because they might never get down.

We have ferry problems, we have wait time problems, and we still have significant problems in health care, Mr. Speaker. People had to leave regions of the Province to come to St. John's or Corner Brook for medical treatment. That is no longer true, Mr. Speaker, and that is because of strategy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: I would like to remind the Premier that yes, today people are having lots of problems with ferries, and they are having lots of problems in the emergency rooms. If you read the paper this week actually it is getting a bit worse.

Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the 2011 election, the Premier presided over a ribbon cutting and a grand announcement of the reopening of the fluorspar mine in St. Lawrence. A \$17 million repayable loan was made by the provincial government at the time to the owners of the fluorspar mine.

I ask the Premier: It has been two years since the announcement, will you tell the people of the Province how much of the \$17 million has been spent to date, and why is the mine still not open?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we were certainly very delighted to engage with the private sector in terms of the fluorspar mine and what it would mean to the Burin Peninsula. There was some along the way in terms of cost. There was a re-evaluation done of the cost because of escalating – in terms of the infrastructure that is put in to date, I will get the exact number. My understanding there is about \$300,000 related to engineering and design. There have been further discussions with IBRD and with the owner operators of the facility.

We are looking forward to this year, all intentions getting started on the project. We are looking forward to what it is going to mean to the Burin Peninsula. I am quite happy to be a partner in the project, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister was right, this year they went through re-scoping the project because of the cost overruns. The construction phase was scheduled to start this past summer with employment of over 370 workers at the site of the mine in St. Lawrence.

I ask the Premier: Has the government received an update on the new plans of the mine? When can residents of the Burin Peninsula expect to see jobs from this project?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the member for raising that subject here today. That is one of the investments that this government has made in rural Newfoundland and Labrador that we have been criticized for across the way on a number of occasions.

I say to the member opposite, we have received regular updates from the company. I met with the company as late as five or six days ago and they are on track. They are moving forward. They did have some delays, as my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries, just mentioned.

With respect to the \$17 million loan commitment, it is my understanding that no money from that \$17 million has been drawn down. There has been some funding from other sources that has been used in that project, but the \$17 million, I think, was directed specifically to the wharf project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we have heard one minister talk about \$300,000; we have heard a second minister say nothing.

Can we just get some clarification on if it is \$300,000 or no money at all that has been advanced from the \$17 million?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it is a pleasure to rise and talk about the mine in St. Lawrence because it is something this government is very proud to support. As we do with other projects, we stand in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and we invest because we believe in the people and the future of rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

I would also say if you check Hansard I think I was very clear. I said zero of the \$17 million has been drawn down because it is targeted toward the wharf project. There are other sources of funding from Natural Resources and other departments where the company has availed of to move the project forward. The \$17 million was targeted specifically to that particular project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, Eastern Health is missing the national wait-time targets for ER patients at the Health Sciences and St. Clare's 75 per cent of the time.

I ask the minister: Almost two years since launching a strategy on ER wait times, how do you explain this poor performance?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am really happy to get a question with regard to wait times because we as a government are always concerned about ensuring the people of the Province get quality care, the best care, and the most efficient care we provide in our 171 facilities through our 20,000 employees. We have made significant progress. We now know we are leading the country in five wait-time areas, and that is because we have identified those pressures and we put time, money, and energy into it.

In terms of our ERs, Mr. Speaker, we have recognized pressures in our ERs and we have started a process there through our emergency department strategy to ensure that we are going to make the same kind of differences there that we made in making us leaders in the country in radiation treatment, cancer treatment, cardiac care, cataract care, hip and knee –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, the stats do not lie: 75 per cent of the time.

I ask the minister: If you are trying to make improvements, why last year did you eliminate the director of wait time positions in the Budget?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, he is exactly right, stats do not lie, so let me give him some of the stats we are talking about. The number of visits to our ER departments have increased by 16 per cent at St. Clare's and at the Health Sciences; however, the

time to initial physician assessment has decreased by 17 per cent. The total length of stay has decreased by 11 per cent, and the number of patients who have left without being seen by a physician has decreased by 35 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to put in place initiatives to address the pressures that we are being presented with. Because we have a growing population in this Province, there are more and more people presenting to ER departments –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that not wearing a helmet while biking is strongly associated with death from a head injury. The number of children in our Province hospitalized after a biking injury is nearly double the national rate. Speaking of ER wait times, a new study by the University of Alberta found that bicycle helmet legislation reduces the rate of ER visits by children by 30 per cent.

So I ask the minister: Will your government commit to introducing bicycle helmet legislation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, the safety of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is utmost on our minds every single day, every waking hour, and especially our children. Many municipalities have brought in legislation and bylaws to incorporate safe practices when it comes to bicycle helmets.

That is right now where it lays, Mr. Speaker. There is no plan to move forward on that, but we

are certainly looking at opportunities for the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: I am glad to see that the minister acknowledges the importance of this topic, because our own government's research indicates we have the highest rate of bicycle-related hospitalizations of children in Canada, yet we are the only Province in Atlantic Canada that does not have it, and one of only three in the country.

So I ask the minister: When will stop pawning it off on the towns and bring forward the necessary legislation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, our government works very closely with municipalities right across this Province. They are doing a good job with regard to bicycle safety, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to work with municipalities on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: We are doing so good, Mr. Speaker, that we have the highest rate of bicycle-related hospitalizations of children in the Province, yet the minister wants to put it all off on the municipalities that do not have the means to police it.

We are one of only three provinces in Canada. When will the minister look out to the children

and make sure that this legislation is brought forward? Why is this not important to this government?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, we have enforcement officers right throughout this Province – RCMP, RNC, municipal officers. They are doing a very good job in enforcing the statutes of municipalities, as well as provincial statutes, Mr. Speaker.

At this point in time we are not looking at that, but we certainly are looking at opportunities again in the future. Mr. Speaker, it is a municipality that takes the lead on that. We work with municipalities on a regular basis and we will continue to do so, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week when I asked about the rental allowance rate provided by Income Support, the minister responded by saying that government was aware of the issue regarding affordable housing.

I ask the minister responsible for poverty reduction: If you are aware of the issue, why have you not addressed the fact that Income Support only provides a maximum family rental allowance of \$522 per month when you know it clearly is not enough to pay rent of \$800 to \$1,000 a month?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, we have increased the rental supplement out of

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. As a matter of fact, we have doubled it from \$4 million to \$8 million; as a matter of fact, the first government in twenty-five years to do so.

We understand we have created an economy that has given us certain challenges in regard to affordable housing. We work with all the groups, including Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, to address that issue and we will continue to do so.

As a matter of fact, we have a lot of programs within the Poverty Reduction Strategy as well, the Action Plan of Newfoundland and Labrador, which was announced in 2006. We will continue to implement that plan. It has been hailed right across the country in regard to being one of the best plans that was ever tabled, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: There is no new money in this year's budget for rental supplements, Mr. Speaker. Families are sending their children to school hungry because the rent allowance is only half of what is required to pay rent. There are more people turning to soup kitchens. The food bank usage in this Province is the highest in the country.

I ask the minister responsible for poverty reduction: Is this a part of your Poverty Reduction Strategy?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, we have invested \$149 million annually to combat poverty reduction in this Province. It has been hailed by the BC poverty coalition as an approach that their province should be taking as well. The Citizens for Public Justice have ranked Newfoundland and Labrador as first in its 2013 national poverty trend scoreboard, Mr. Speaker, and in 2013 a report by the University of

Toronto rated Newfoundland and Labrador as the first to access affordable and safe nutritious food.

We will continue to invest in the vulnerable people of this Province, Mr. Speaker, and we have done so since 2003.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: I can tell the minister that the people who are taking money from their food budget to pay their rent are not very excited about his statistics.

Mr. Speaker, today's private member's motion is on seniors, the tax benefit being distributed to 42,000 low income seniors in this Province. There are a total of 90,000 seniors in the Province.

I ask the minister responsible for poverty reduction: What does this say about your Poverty Reduction Strategy when almost half of our seniors in this Province are living in poverty?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, no government in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador has invested in seniors like this government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: We have put more money into the pockets of seniors than any other government in our past history. We have eliminated things like the tax on auto insurance that puts money directly into their pockets. We have had the heat supplement, and we have had various other programs. We have increased the Seniors' Benefits program. We have increased the number of prescription drugs that is covered

under the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program, Mr. Speaker.

Seniors are dear to everyone's heart in this House of Assembly and we will continue to invest in our seniors, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: None of what the minister just said, Mr. Speaker, helps people pay their rent when they are only getting half the amount required to pay their rent on Income Support. None of what the minister just said, Mr. Speaker, helps seniors put food in their fridge when most of them are walking the malls in the winter to stay warm. Mr. Speaker, the Low Income Seniors' Benefit is indexed each year based on the Consumer Price Index.

I ask the minister responsible for poverty reduction: Why are you indexing Seniors' Benefits within the cost of living but not Income Support rates?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I nearly asked the hon. member to take this plan of reducing poverty, an excellent plan for Newfoundland and Labrador, which was tabled and developed in 2006, and have a read. Because this is a plan, an action plan that we have committed to and will continue to implement, Mr. Speaker.

I will table it and ask the hon. member to have a read. Because when I mentioned the BC poverty coalition and all the groups across Canada as hailing this as one of the best plans every developed, it is true, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to invest in our seniors. We will continue to invest in our vulnerable people like no other government this Province has ever known.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Does he really think he is putting a smile on the faces of the families who cannot afford to pay their rent because Income Support is only giving them half of what they require to pay their rent?

When are you going to increase the rental rates for people on Income Support, when it is only \$522 and their rent is \$1,000?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that he voted for the Budget. That is a fact.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. O'BRIEN: You cannot come into this House and talk out of two sides of your mouth, Mr. Speaker.

He recognized the value of the last Budget. He recognized the challenges of the last Budget. He recognized before that we were investing in our seniors. He recognized that we were investing in our most vulnerable, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. O'BRIEN: Tell the hon. member to stop talking out of two sides of his mouth.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, John Noseworthy said the Department of Advanced Education and Skills is not doing a good job transitioning Income Support clients to the labour market. He recommended a case management model for working with Income Support clients.

I ask the minister: Is your department implementing a case management model for Income Support clients; and, if so, what is the status of the model implementation?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the protection, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has not been long in this House, but some of the other members were there, I can guarantee you that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. O'BRIEN: As a matter of fact, they criticized us in regard to that report and now they are asking us when we are going to implement it, Mr. Speaker.

I can inform this House that we take that report very, very seriously and we have implemented certain things over in my department up to this date and will continue to take that strategy, or that plan, or that report seriously, and certainly

we will be taking a lot of advice from it, Mr. Speaker.

You cannot talk out of two sides of your mouth.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Noseworthy indicated that 70 per cent of Income Support clients are not being referred to employment assessment and counselling.

I ask the minister: What percentage of Income Support clients are not being referred to the employment and assessment counselling today?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. member for her question. I would like to quote – and I can actually table this as well, when they are in the mood for tabling documents – the number of attendees in regard to sector skills: in Prince Philip Drive, we had sixteen; in Carbonear, we had twenty; in Gander, we had fifteen; in Grand Falls-Windsor, we had twenty-two; in Corner Brook, we had twelve; and on and on, Mr. Speaker.

The success rate in regard to the number of work placements after that – you take Gander, eleven had jobs, Mr. Speaker. It is working.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, on December 21, 2012 government entered into a deal with OCI that allowed them to ship out 75 per cent of the yellowtail quota; the remaining 25 per cent will be processed in Fortune. That was

supposed to create 110 jobs. To date, Fortune is still closed.

I ask the minister: When is he going to make OCI live up to their commitment and hire those 110 people?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, we were certainly for building the industry on the Burin Peninsula. That is why we moved forward with this partnership. The requirements of the OCI are moving forward. We expect very soon for the operation in Fortune to begin production. There is significant investment to be made, as it was one of the requirements of the agreement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. HUTCHINGS: In addition, there was a requirement for a vessel to be purchased. The indication was that there would be best efforts for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to be on that vessel. Right now I understand 90 per cent of folks on that vessel are Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

It was a good partnership. We are looking forward to the plant reopening in Fortune. We believe in the Burin Peninsula, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Our so-called golden age of economic growth is not trickling down to the 25,000 households on Income Support. People in poverty need a basic decent income to be able to afford housing, food, and other necessities before they can even take advantage of worker training opportunities.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Why did the Poverty Reduction Strategy drop the annual indexing of Income Support to the Consumer Price Index?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DUNDERDALE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when we came to government in 2003, this Province had the highest rate of poverty in the country. In the ensuing years since, and because of the investments this government has made in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador – all of the people in Newfoundland and Labrador – not only in the \$149 million that we talk about annually in the Poverty Reduction Strategy, but also in things like the gender and diversity agreements that go with every development we do in this Province, opening up opportunity for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians so they are not shut out from the economic engines that run this place, we have moved now to one of the third lowest rates of poverty in the country. There is more to be done, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, and the more to be done to bring back the indexing to the Consumer Price Index, that is what should be done. It should not have been taken away.

When the Poverty Reduction Strategy was first announced in 2006, Goal 5 promised greater access to ABE, but this year government cut ABE from the public college campuses across the Province and now hundreds can no longer enrol.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills: Why has this goal disappeared from the Poverty Reduction Strategy?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I would invite the hon. member to have a good read of our *Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006*, because she probably has not read it. As a matter of fact, she is wrong in regard to the ABE program. Each and every student requiring ABE in this Province has access to that. As a matter of fact, I commend the private sector, the institutions that are out there providing that program. They are out there in every place that was offered before and they continue to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Goal 5 of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which I have read and I am glad the minister finally read it himself last night, also promised greater access to literacy, but the promised adult literacy strategy has never surfaced –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: – and there are people who cannot get access to literacy upgrading to train for a trade.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Why does the Poverty Reduction Strategy still not include an adult literacy strategy?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, as I said in this House over the last couple of weeks, we have less people on Income Support and more people working in Newfoundland and Labrador than ever in our history.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Under the Sector Skills program, Mr. Speaker, as I just read out the numbers, we are moving people from Income Support into meaningful jobs, something they can latch onto, something they can believe in, and something they can be proud of. That is what this government is doing, that is what we will continue to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, government is going to praise itself for increasing the Seniors' Benefit this year by \$25 a year. That works out roughly to six cents a day, the same amount the dole was in the Dominion of Newfoundland in the 1930s. We have the highest percentage of seniors needing the GIS in the country, and food banks say this year more seniors are coming for help.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Is six cents a day the best he can do for the 40,000 seniors living in poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, let me talk about some of the investments. We have made investments right across government departments in regard to our seniors, in regard to people of low income, and in regard to people who are most vulnerable in our Province. We have taken that on since 2003.

We invest \$149 million annually. We are always seeking ways within the budget confines to reinvest and invest again in our seniors, Mr. Speaker. We have increased the Income Support health benefits. We are providing funding for the Earned Income Supplement project for single parents on Income Support. We have increased the Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement. We have increased the subsidy rate for children. That is not the seniors but that is to the most vulnerable people of this Province –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. O'BRIEN: - but we will continue to invest, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, this government wants us to spend this afternoon praising it for increasing the benefit by six cents a day. Mr. Speaker, because the rent supplement is not portable, it does not allow seniors to choose what area to live in so they are close to family and services.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Is he prepared to change the Rent Supplement Program to make it portable to fix this problem?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to outline for the member opposite some of the initiatives this

government has undertaken in an effort to ensure that the lives of seniors in our Province, those who we hold closest to us, absolutely are respected in this Province. Mr. Speaker, the Low Income Seniors' Benefit at \$38.5 million is one such example.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program, we invested \$29 million in the seniors program alone so that no senior in this Province, under the NLPDP program, pays more than \$6 per prescription. I hear from seniors' everyday on how that makes an incredible difference in their lives, and that is something we are proud of, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of other initiatives as well but I think my time is up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the majority of people on the wait-list for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing need one or two bedroom apartments.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: How many of those on that wait-list are seniors?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills for a quick response.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, we have invested heavily through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in our most vulnerable people, which include our seniors. We have created 244 new affordable housing units throughout the Province. We have invested, and actually we have a total of 1,117 new units provincial-wide now in our housing stock.

We have invested through the Social Housing Renovations Program. We have invested \$10 million to renovate approximately 640 social housing units throughout the Province. We have the Provincial Home Repair Program, which we

have about \$10.4 million into it. We have the Rental Supplement Program, which is an addition of \$1 million; along with we doubled that –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for Question Period has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

During Question Period, the minister responsible for poverty reduction said that I voted in favour of the Budget. That is a misleading statement. Mr. Speaker, I did not vote in favour of this year's Budget. I voted against this year's Budget, and I would like for him to clarify it.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker will check the records of Hansard to verify the facts and report back at a later date.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, again, going back to Question Period. If the Minister of Health and the Minister of Advanced Education would be kind enough to table the documents –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask members of the gallery, we are very pleased you are able to join us but as you leave, could you leave quietly, please.

MR. A. PARSONS: If the Minister of Health and the Minister of Advanced Education would be kind enough to table the documents they quoted from during today's Question Period, it would be much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Member for St. Barbe, during Question Period, indicated he had wrote the former Minister of Fisheries on January 29, 2013 specifically on how the industry figures in the CETA negotiations, and he indicated at that point that the minister did not respond. I would like to table in the House, January 29, 2013 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. HUTCHINGS: – the letter to the then Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture. I will also table February 27, 2013, the response to that letter from the then Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture. So indeed, the letter was received, it certainly was responded to. The statement was incorrect, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would like to table the Citizens' Representative Annual Digest for the period of April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting Adoptions. (Bill 27)

MR. SPEAKER: Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS play-based, full-day kindergarten has been proven to give children a stronger start in school and in life; and

WHEREAS a full day of learning early in life can help improve children's reading, writing, and math skills and provide them with a strong foundation for future learning; and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS full-day kindergarten provides opportunities for children to socialize with others and develop academic and social skills necessary for future success; and

WHEREAS children in full-day kindergarten programs are able to remain in familiar surroundings with staff and friends all day rather than moving between different locations; and

WHEREAS full-day kindergarten makes the transition to Grade 1 easier for both parents and children; and

WHEREAS provinces that invest in full-day kindergarten are seeing a return on investment in terms of better school achievement and fewer students at risk of falling through the cracks;

We, the undersigned, petition the House of Assembly to urge government to introduce a full-day kindergarten program for children and families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a new issue for us to have presented or to discuss here in the Legislature. In recent times a number of individuals have said to me: Well, how is it that we are going to be able to afford this? We do not have enough space, we do not have money, and we do not have enough teachers.

No one is talking about doing this – or at least I am not talking about doing this all at once. This is a program that can be phased in over the course of three or four years starting next September. There are a variety of scenarios. We do not need any back-of-the-napkin financing or funding scenarios for this. We know what the numbers are. The Minister of Education had his staff last year do a detailed analysis of how this can be done.

We can have pilot projects starting next September in Labrador, in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, and on the Northeast Avalon. If the Minister of Education wants a school or schools to have pilot projects for full-day kindergarten for next September, there are two in St. John's North I can recommend to him pretty quickly that can accommodate pilot projects.

This is something that will benefit not just our kids, Mr. Speaker, but the Province. It will benefit us economically, it will benefit our society greatly, and it is a good investment. Investments in early learning and care pay off to the tune of \$2.54 for every \$1 invested. If we could find an RRSP that had that rate of return, there would be lineup around the block.

Orders of the DayPrivate Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

This being now 3:00 o'clock, Private Members' Day, I will call on the Member for Exploits to introduce the motion in his name.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Cape St. Francis, the following private member's motion.

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House supports the government's decision to provide the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit, a refundable tax credit for low-income seniors which, this year, is providing some 42,000 seniors in our Province with payments of up to \$971, the highest amount ever.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that all members in this hon. House will be pleased to hear that 42,000 seniors in our Province have recently received a payment of up to \$971 as a result of the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit, a refundable tax credit for low-income seniors. Our government is proud to have significantly increased the benefits under this program three times in recent years.

Our government is proud to continue our commitment to assisting seniors once again by providing the Seniors' Benefit. As a result of the benefit being indexed on an annual basis, this year's maximum payment to seniors is the highest ever at \$971.

Mr. Speaker, the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit is a refundable tax credit for low-income seniors. A refundable tax credit is an amount paid to an individual even if they have no tax payable. In order to qualify for this benefit, the person must be sixty-five years of age by December 31 of the taxation year. The benefit is paid in October of each year and is

included in the same cheque as the GST-HST credit.

Mr. Speaker, this benefit is paid automatically without need to apply and is based on family net income from previous years. Mr. Speaker, in 2007, the Province adjusted the qualifying threshold in respect to senior couples so that the full benefit was received for incomes up to \$25,000, and a partial benefit was received for incomes up to \$31,587.

This change corrected an anomaly in the Seniors' Benefit program whereby senior couples had not been able to avail of the full value of the benefit because their income under federal programs, such as Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement, moved them towards the upper end of the income phase-out range.

Mr. Speaker, there was some mention of the Seniors' Benefit today and talking about the increase. In 1999, it was a \$200 and a \$400 maximum benefit amount. The qualifying income threshold was \$12,000 and \$20,000, with an estimated number of recipients at 34,000. The total value of the program was \$4.4 million.

In 2003, Mr. Speaker, under this government, the maximum benefit was increased from \$350 and \$700, with a qualifying income threshold of \$14,000 and \$20,000, with 30,300 seniors receiving the benefit, with a total value of \$7.5 million, Mr. Speaker. So in the matter of a couple of years, it almost doubled.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008, to recognize the cost of operating a household is not significantly different for a single senior than a married senior couple, the benefit amount was changed so that the single senior with net income of up to \$25,275 was eligible to receive the full benefit amount. As a result of this change, the Seniors' Benefit payment and qualifying income threshold is the same for a single senior as a senior couple.

What we are saying there is if you own your own home and you are a single senior or if you

are a couple, the cost is basically the same to operate the house, your lights, your heating, your repairs, just about everything other than, I guess, some food, Mr. Speaker. So it was agreed that the single senior or couples would receive the same amount.

As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, in 2008 the maximum benefit at that time rose to \$776. The qualifying threshold for single was \$25,275, and for family \$31,930, with a payout of over \$27 million in 2008 under this government. However, it did not stop there, because we knew the need was there for seniors. This money of course was of great importance to them, especially around this time of year.

In 2013, Mr. Speaker, the maximum benefit was raised to \$971. The threshold for a single senior was \$28,231 and for a family it was \$36,559. The estimated number of recipients is around 42,000, Mr. Speaker. From \$4.4 million in 1999 to this government today, the total value of the program is almost \$37 million paid out to seniors in this tax credit.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. FORSEY: Almost \$37 million.

Mr. Speaker, the tax benefit is received generally in October. I know in my district, in the District of Exploits, I have had –

AN HON. MEMBER: What a district.

MR. FORSEY: It is a great district, I say to the Member for Mount Pearl North, and South. Sometimes I think they are a tag team, Mr. Speaker. I think we can call them twins.

Mr. Speaker, in October is when they receive this benefit. I have had a lot of seniors in my district say it is certainly a good time of the year to receive the benefit. When you can receive almost \$1,000 in the fall of the year, Mr. Speaker, if people are burning oil, they have to fill up their oil tank. It is a great time to invest in your heating program for the winter. They are only two months away from Christmas, so it gives them an opportunity to catch up on all of

that. I have been told by a number – I am sure most members in this House, I would say, Mr. Speaker, have been told this is a great time of the year to receive the Seniors' Benefit.

There were several questions today pertaining to seniors, Mr. Speaker, the benefits, and the initiatives taken by different governments. This government has made substantial investment in programs for seniors since 2003.

Just to name a couple, of course I just mentioned the Seniors' Benefit, a refundable tax credit, with close to \$37 million program; the NLPDP, which is a tongue twister, the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program, over \$73 million in 2013-2014; the Home Heating Rebate, a \$15 million program. We have invested in many others, like the Age-Friendly Provincial Grants to support seniors' organizations, Wellness Grants for healthy aging and support seniors' community recreation, investments by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and the list goes on.

I must say the investments by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, Mr. Speaker, has been one of importance and essential. There was a need and we are filling that need. In the Affordable Housing Program, Mr. Speaker, just in Exploits alone, and I am sure throughout the Province because I have seen many of the announcements, we have had I think close to forty units of affordable housing built in the District of Exploits, in Bishop's Falls and Botwood.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: That is just in the District of Exploits, Mr. Speaker, but this is happening right across the Province.

For the people who are not sure or do not understand what affordable housing means, it is a fairly new program. There are new houses or new apartments being built. The rent actually is lower than the market rental rates that most people would pay for a monthly rent, which means when seniors move into these apartments – and, by the way, they are done by good

proponents, good contractors. They are well built. They are new. They have all the facilities they need in them.

They are accessible. So if you have a disability, you can avail of that. By the way, that is another standard or piece of criteria that is put into the building of these affordable housing units. When the applications come in and you apply for affordable housing, it is compulsory that there would be a certain number dedicated to accessibility for people with disabilities, Mr. Speaker.

That is just one of many programs through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, about the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing investments in their other housing units, in the home repair programs and so on, but I am sure my colleague from Cape St. Francis is planning on speaking on this today, and some other members, especially on this side. They can pick up some of the things I have missed, and I am probably going to miss quite a few because there is certainly not enough time – what I have today – to state the investments that this government is doing across the Province, especially for seniors, Mr. Speaker.

I mentioned the Home Heating Rebate earlier, Mr. Speaker, and it is available to residents of the Province who directly incur costs in their home, and whose adjusted family income for 2012 is \$40,000 or less. Regardless of the energy source used to heat your home, eligible households will receive a maximum rebate of \$250, where adjusted family income for 2012 is \$35,000 or less. Five hundred dollars for residents of Coastal Labrador, Mr. Speaker. A partial rebate is available for households where adjusted family income for 2012 is more than \$35,000, but \$40,000 or less, with a minimum rebate of \$100. That is how that one works, Mr. Speaker.

May I add, again, because I had mentioned the investment in the Seniors' Benefit rebate in 2001, compared to today and where our government took over in 2003. In 2001-2002 the maximum rebate was \$100. There were

approximately 15,500 people who received it. The cost at that time was \$1.5 million. Well, in 2012-2013, the maximum rebate is \$250 and \$500. It is \$250 on the Island and \$500 in Labrador.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

I remind the hon. member that his speaking time has expired.

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will just stand for a few minutes to have a few words on this motion. The member read the motion into the record. There is no need for me to read it into the record. I just find it kind of odd; private members' motions usually discuss something and we have a debate. This was already approved in the Budget, from my understanding.

So once again, during a polling period, here we see the government bringing in a private member's motion which was already approved in the Budget. The seniors' funds were already approved in the Budget, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Yes, I agree, and I will be voting for this. I have no problem with that, but once again we see the government coming in, in a polling period, instead of discussing significant issues, it is something that was already passed in the Budget. Here they are during a polling period and wants to pat themselves on the back.

My question is: How do you think seniors feel hearing members up talking about how seniors are in poverty and we are doing this for them and we are doing that for them? It is a great initiative, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, we hear members opposite, the minute you mention polling period, you mention things that are already passed in the Budget, they just want to pat themselves on the back and say everything is great. I can tell you everything is not great.

I agree with this initiative for seniors, absolutely. There is no doubt in my mind. I agree with it. I wish we could do more, and I am sure every member in this House wishes they could do more. Absolutely, there is no discussion about that, Mr. Speaker.

The member mentioned housing; housing is not great for seniors in this Province. I am not sure if it is because you represent a rural district and it is different from some urban. I can assure you, the rates for seniors trying to find affordable housing is becoming almost a crisis in this Province.

I do not know if it is just the Bay of Islands that I get the calls and from around the Corner Brook area, but the number of calls that I get from people who are trying to look for affordable housing for seniors is on the increase. We hear about all of the money being spent in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. How many seniors' units are there lately, with affordable housing, where seniors can afford it? As my hon. colleague mentioned before about the discrepancy in the supplement for certain areas where you just cannot afford it.

On one hand, I agree that we need to help out the most vulnerable. Sometimes it is seniors; sometimes it is not. On the other hand, we just cannot stand up here because it is a polling period and someone is given a member a private member's motion, go read it, and then all of a sudden you have to go up and pat yourself and the government on the back that everything is rosy. Everything is not rosy.

I agree with speaking the way it is, good, bad, or indifferent. There have been great initiatives by the government; I will be the first to admit it. I voted for a lot of it, I respect a lot of it, and I supported a lot of it. We just cannot stand up here and say everything is absolutely rosy.

I know this program was brought in 1999. I was a part of it. I can see the difference from the amounts, Mr. Speaker, that were increased over time. I agree, as government could afford it, government increased it. You will not get any rejection, you will not get any contradiction from me as a Member for the Bay of Islands when you are helping seniors out, absolutely none. The more we can do for seniors, the more we can do for the most vulnerable people in this Province, Mr. Speaker, I am all for it. I do acknowledge the increase over time in this program and that is good.

Mr. Speaker, in Corner Brook and the Bay of Islands area when you talk about the seniors and you talk about housing; housing is a major factor, absolutely. If anybody in this House thinks \$1,000 a year is going to fix the housing shortage for the seniors in Corner Brook and the Bay of Islands – the calls that I get – they should go out and speak to some of them.

A lot of people are living in their homes now and they are older. Their homes are much older, the repairs are a lot more, electricity bills are increasing, and food costs are increasing a lot. In some cases if there is only one person living in the home, where now they only have one income – if someone's spouse passed away, they only have one income – the burden on that person is much greater than if there were two incomes in the household.

As this here is a great initiative, we cannot stand in this House and say that everything is fine when it is not, Mr. Speaker. Rent subsidies for seniors – that is something we should look at, to increase the rent subsidies for seniors and the people most vulnerable. That is a big issue in this Province. I am sure you are getting calls in your own district about seniors trying to find affordable housing. This is not unique. I hope it is not just unique to Corner Brook and the Bay of Islands area. I am sure we are all getting these types of calls.

We need some kind of a strategy around seniors. It is all right to stand up and beat your chest, pat yourself on the back, look what we are doing; it is just not working. There have been some

significant gains; I will be the first to admit it. I will be the first to admit yes, there are improvements, but we need to look at the strategy itself to see how we can improve it.

I always said this, Mr. Speaker. There is no one in this House of Assembly who would not wish seniors affordable housing in this Province, absolutely no one. I do not think anybody would want it on any senior and I would never, ever think that. I know the difference, but what we need to do is come up with a strategy where we as a group, we, as parliamentarians, come up with some strategy together, every year make it a bit better, find different ways – it is all right to just pour money at it, but I can assure you affordable housing takes up most of the income for seniors in this Province now on low income. That is something that we need to look at, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to speak on one little thing when you are talking about \$900. You take a PET scanner in Corner Brook, or the radiation unit in Corner Brook, just think of a senior, one trip across this Province there is your \$900 – one trip. By the time they pay for gas, by the time they pay for one or two hotel nights here, and if you are in here for five or six weeks and you are not lucky enough to get into the Daffodil House, there is your \$900 gone the first three or four days.

That is the kind of things that we can do just for people all across this Province, Mr. Speaker. We always hear this government – and this is something that irritates me when you hear the government stand up and say we are leading the country. We are doing the best in the country. Well, let's do it in radiation units. Let's do it in PET scanners. If we could do it in all of the other areas, why can't we do that for Corner Brook and Western Newfoundland? Why can't we make it easy on the seniors?

Why do seniors sixty-five and seventy years old have to drive across the Province, Mr. Speaker? We are getting \$900 and it gone in the first three of four days because oh, we cannot do it, yet we can lead the country in every other way. There has not been a debate on this here, with the

information put on the table, with people being listened to, people being taken seriously in some of their major concerns, yet we just dismiss it.

I look at it, Mr. Speaker, that when you look at this \$900, I look at some of the seniors who call me. No doubt, there is a travel subsidy. I admit there is a travel subsidy, but when you have to drive across the Province, when you have to find a place here in St. John's to live up to two weeks, three weeks, sometimes six weeks for radiation, or if you have to come in here after 2015, if it is built by then, for a PET scanner when you could have it in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker, the \$900 is gone.

Mr. Speaker, when I hear this government stand up and say they are leading the country and all these great initiatives, we are leaders, we are great pioneers; yet, because of the cost, because of the cutbacks of the new hospital in Corner Brook, we cannot be leaders. We have to take a back step because we have to find some other excuse why it cannot be done.

We have to see seniors driving across this Province, Mr. Speaker, on a regular basis for radiation treatment, and in 2015 for PET scanners when there has not been an open, honest discussion or debate on why it cannot be done in Corner Brook. So excuse me if I do not jump with joy for \$900 when I get a call, just yesterday at my office, looking to travel to St. John's for this type of treatment. Excuse me if I do not get it because I am still getting calls at my office, Mr. Speaker, on this.

It is a very important issue to me. It is a very important issue to a lot of people in Western Newfoundland. It is a very important issue to the seniors in Western Newfoundland. That is why at every opportunity I get, I will raise that issue.

Mr. Speaker, look at Muskrat Falls, let's look at Muskrat Falls. If the government is correct in their own information, which I do not think they are because I think it is going to be much higher. You take in 2017, the increase in their electricity rates. A lot of the seniors cannot cut firewood. They cannot cut firewood. A lot of them are

through electricity years ago. Electricity rates are going to go up, what double, 50 per cent, 75 per cent? Where is this \$900 going to go when Muskrat Falls comes in?

These are the things where it is easy to stand up – and I think it is great that we give seniors this rebate. I honestly do, but we have to look at the bigger picture, Mr. Speaker. We just cannot stand up here during a polling period and put in a private member's motion and pat everybody on the back on how good government is and expect – I know for me, in my case, to stand up and say yes, everything is great when it is not.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, if you want to know the number of calls I get from seniors who are looking for affordable housing, I do not know what other members – and I am sure other members probably will not say or cannot say how many calls they get from seniors looking for affordable housing. I do not know why they will not. I do not know if they are allowed to, but I can tell you at my office I get a lot of calls from seniors on affordable housing. That is one thing in this Province, Mr. Speaker, that I feel we have to work on more is affordable housing for seniors.

I heard the minister talk about Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. There are great private initiatives and partnerships with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you a lot of the apartments that are being built in Corner Brook are out of range for a lot of seniors, especially if there is only one. If a spouse happened to pass on you have one income.

I can assure you a lot of the apartments that I am getting calls on, they cannot afford it. When you put on the increase in the electricity rates, you put on the increase in food, and medication – again, I applaud the government. They did bring in a lot of new funds for medication and drugs for the seniors. I applaud that, I think it is great. Still, there is a certain level that the seniors still have to put in and it is climbing, and it is climbing, and it is climbing.

Even though I will vote for this today, I have no problem whatsoever, anything we can do for our seniors. I will vote for it, absolutely. I think it is a great initiative. I applaud the government for building on this initiative that started in 1999. I applaud the government, but there are major issues for seniors in this Province.

I can assure you of one thing, Mr. Speaker, when I brought it up about the hospital in Corner Brook, we heard the minister saying no one has called me on it. I will just let people in Corner Brook realize, and they will be told, the reason why this is not a big issue is because no one has called the minister on it. Let me tell you, by the time I send the information out to the people – who I was saying I am going to work with government; I am going to be working with government to try to see if I can bring them around to reasoning of why it should be done in Corner Brook. Obviously, that is not working.

I will say to the people who I have been dealing with, Mr. Speaker, who just went through this treatment, who had to come in here for six, eight weeks, I will be saying what you need to do is contact the minister. Let the minister know your concerns. Minister, trust me, you will be getting calls from people who will be directly affected. You will know directly from their concerns.

Mr. Speaker, even if you speak to people like Israel Hann, a senior and advocate, the same one who was barred from the meeting by the municipal police in Corner Brook. You ask Israel Hann if he is going to let this drop. You go ask Gerald Parsons is he going to let this drop; the same person, Mr. Speaker. You go ask those few if they are going to let this drop.

These are the types of things we can look at in a rational way, Mr. Speaker. Let's have an informed discussion. Let's have an informed debate. Just do not say no, we cannot do it; no, we cannot. Turn around, and we are going to lead the country in all these other ways. If we can do it in one area, we can do it in a PET scanner and radiation unit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to try to get this back on track. I am not going to stand up and talk just about my district because that is not what this private member's motion is about. It is about seniors right throughout this Province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands on a point of order.

MR. JOYCE: Just to inform the minister, the Western Regional Hospital is for all the Western region and Labrador, not just the Bay of Islands. I know she wants to try to make it personal, but it is not personal to me.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, anyone who was listening would know that I did not say that nor did I imply that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to get back to the motion of the day. I am really pleased to speak to this particular motion, the private member's motion, regarding the approximately 4,500 older adults in this Province who will receive the Seniors'

Benefit. Recognizing the contributions of seniors in this Province is something that is important to all of us. There is no doubt.

Mr. Speaker, I know in my area of the Province, whenever I have opportunity to be in my district and meet with our seniors' group it is some of the best days that I have. Some of the best opportunities I have and some of the best learning I have happen is when I am with seniors in my district. There are so many programs that are operating out there because of our seniors, the incredible work they are doing, and the contributions they are making.

I look at the breakfast program out my way. I look at many of the community groups who are functioning. I look at all of the volunteer boards we have, Mr. Speaker, particularly this time of year through church groups and school groups. The contributions of seniors to this Province are absolutely amazing, and we need to acknowledge those.

Mr. Speaker, I want to try to parcel out my time as best I can here. There was some fear mongering done by the speaker just before me and I want to have a minute to look at that because we are really concerned about seniors who have the horrible diagnosis of cancer, what happens to them, and the treatments they are receiving. We acknowledge how difficult those treatments are; without question, we acknowledge that.

We work our hardest. The people we have in our health care system are working as hard as they possibly can to ensure that our seniors, particularly, but everybody who is undergoing a cancer treatment, a radiation treatment, in this Province is getting the best care we can. That is why we have an A+ rating in terms of radiation treatment in this Province, Mr. Speaker. We have worked long and hard and we need to acknowledge that we have an A+ rating.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: We have the best rating in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I know that the member opposite does not like to hear me talk about that. He talks about the fact that seniors in particular have to travel for that treatment. I acknowledge that, Mr. Speaker. We are a Province of 500,000, Mr. Speaker, but we are so large geographically, and that travel I understand is difficult and I wish it could be different.

Best practice teaches us that radiation therapy has to happen where the cancer programs are being delivered, Mr. Speaker. That is how we have been able to ensure that we are giving the best treatment, because we are offering the radiation program in a co-located site with the cancer program. That happens to be in our tertiary care centre, the same as it would be indicated for any area in the country.

Mr. Speaker, we have to make sure that we have radiation oncologists in place, we have to make sure that we have radiation therapists in place, and a whole host of other people who are required to deliver that program. Without a volume of patients to treat, then they cannot really function, because they are losing their skills.

On the West Coast of the Province we have, in last year's stats, 171, Mr. Speaker. You would need a caseload, just to operate the linac machine for radiation, of 500 to 600 patients. That is what is required. Mr. Speaker, fortunately, we do not have that population of people who need radiation treatment on the West Coast, so we bring them here. We have in place here, as well, a Medical Transportation Assistance Program to help with that travel, to help with those accommodations, to help also with the meals and the per diems and so on.

Is it ideal? Would I like to be able to put radiation treatment in every facility that we have in this Province? Of course, we would, Mr. Speaker, but we cannot do that because it is not possible to do it.

We talk about the PET scanner – and he has raised concerns about the PET scanner and again done some fear mongering among not just the seniors, but everybody in this Province around

the PET scanner. Mr. Speaker, I raise it simply in response to what I have heard over there across the way this afternoon in this very bill.

Mr. Speaker, again, if we could put a PET scanner in every single hospital, we would do that too. It is \$40 million to do that. We are finally getting one here in this Province, and we are proud of that. It is a \$40 million investment that is going to serve everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador. The reason that we cannot put a PET scanner in other places is not simply the cost; it has to do with the cyclotron and it has to do with the isotopes.

Now, I have some stats here that I think the people of the West Coast and all of our seniors would find very, very interesting. All isotopes that are used for PET scanners have a very short lifespan. In fact, they can lose their effectiveness in minutes – in absolute minutes. The most common isotope that is used for PET scanners will lose 50 per cent of its usefulness in less than two hours – in 109 minutes actually.

Mr. Speaker, the opportunity to transport from here to Corner Brook, an isotope, really means that what we have to do is produce five times as much as we need in order to be able to have that amount, to be able to deliver the treatment. Again, realizing that we need all of the specialists to be able to do that, too.

Mr. Speaker, we have done a great job on recruitment of specialists in Newfoundland and Labrador and we have a complement that we are going to be able to use here in St. John's. Mr. Speaker, for 171 patients a year, I seriously doubt, and all of the statistics would tell us that it is almost virtually impossible to attract people who have studied for sixteen years or more to come to an area and practice where the workload is 170 patients.

Now again, I point out to the people of the West Coast or Central Newfoundland, or Labrador or the northern part of this Province, this is not a decision we have made lightly. This is a decision that we have made based on the best evidence, the best scientific evidence we can find.

The World Health Organization has written extensively on this, Mr. Speaker. I invite the Member for the Bay of Islands to look to that information and to try to understand that what he is asking for, while we would love to be able to provide that in every part of this Province, is something that is just not realistic, something that we just cannot do.

We do have initiatives in place that will help the people of the West Coast and of Central Newfoundland and of Labrador who have to come to St. John's for those treatments. They can be comforted by the fact that they are getting the best treatment possible and we are able to prove that by having an A+ rating in terms of our wait times for radiation. No one waits more than one day, Mr. Speaker. That is an incredible statistic.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to this particular topic that we are discussing today in terms of seniors and the work that is being done, and I will address it from the Department of Health and Community Services perspective of course. Fifty-nine million dollars we spent annually on seniors-related programs within the department, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we value our seniors so much that these investments are investments that we are happy to make.

That number increases to \$700 million when you look at our long-term care and our community support services that are offered. As well, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the drug program that we have in place for seniors, I made reference to that this afternoon – during Question Period, I was asked a question.

Through our NLPDP, Mr. Speaker, there is one particular program for seniors, it is called the 65Plus program. For seniors who qualify, they can have the assurance that they are never going to pay more than \$6 per prescription. That is what we have committed to, and we have invested \$29 million in making that assurance to the seniors of the Province that their drug bill is

going to be \$6 for medication covered under NLPDP.

We look at other affordable initiatives including the Home Heating Rebate. Mr. Speaker, when I am home I have opportunity oftentimes to talk to people who actually work in that office because it is located in Grand Falls-Windsor, the Home Heating Rebate office, and they tell me about the stories of people who call them and thank them for that particular rebate, who tell them what a difference it makes in their lives. I heard some really heart-wrenching and heart-touching stories from people who have been very happy to receive this.

The Provincial Home Repair Program is another one and, of course, the significant tax deductions that happen for seniors in our Province that directly affect their quality of life.

Since last year, Mr. Speaker, when we launched our ten-year long-term care strategy, we have been really focusing on helping people who require long-term care and community supports, and we placed a special interest on various programs that can make a difference.

Just a little while ago, Mr. Speaker, we launched a new pilot program that was called Enhanced Care in Personal Care Homes. That particular program is aimed at helping people who perhaps do not really qualify for long-term care, in that they are a Level 3 or a Level 4 patient, but who can receive additional care within a personal care home setting.

We are piloting that program right now in three of our personal care homes in the Province, and I am hearing some very good results from that. I am hoping that the pilot program is going to prove to be exactly what we think it is, which will be a project that we are going to be able to move forward into a full-time initiative for our seniors in the Province. It will certainly allow individuals to stay in a more home-like setting for long periods of time.

Our Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Transportation Pilot Project is another of our long-term care initiatives, Mr. Speaker, that I

believe is making a difference in the lives of people in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is increasing access for older adults, as well as any individuals with mobility issues or challenges. They are able to find more affordable and reliable transportation, which allows them to lead fuller lives and means again that they can stay in their own homes. So we are operating now in Clarenville and in St. John's and the surrounding area, in Springdale, in Bay St. George, and this pilot will possibly expand to include other areas based on the success of the pilot. Again, it is another pilot that I think will bear great fruit and we are going to see opportunities to expand out even further.

Some of the comments that I have had – and I had a couple of e-mails actually from some of the clients who are availing of this particular service, the transportation program, and they are telling me that it has made a huge difference in their lives, when they can get out to do simple tasks that ordinarily would be difficult for them, when they can get out and go get groceries or go to a doctor's appointment without having to call on family. They can use this new pilot project. They can make the call and they can get out to do these kinds of things. Mr. Speaker, again, it is an innovative idea that we have been trying and we are seeing some good results.

The Community Rapid Response pilot project that we are hoping to have off the ground in the very near future is another example of things that we are doing. We had some conversation here in the House today around wait time strategy, particularly around emergency rooms and wait times in there. The Rapid Response program is going to make a huge difference particularly for seniors, Mr. Speaker. What this will do, this particular one, we will have four teams – and I can tell you where they are going to be located. They will be in Grand Falls-Windsor, the Health Sciences, at St. Clare's, and at Western Memorial.

These teams will help keep seniors in their homes as opposed to being admitted to hospital, Mr. Speaker. Quite often a senior will present at an emergency department, the condition may not be particularly serious but if there is no one to

go home with them, to help them convalesce over the two- or three-week period, then they may have some issues. Therefore, oftentimes, admission to hospital happens.

With the Community Rapid Response, we will be able to send a team home with them to ensure that they get the care that they need, that they can convalesce in the comfort of their own homes, Mr. Speaker. I truly believe that this will be another pilot project from which we will see great success. Recruitment is ongoing as we speak around this, and we hope to have the training started within the next couple of weeks around the Rapid Response. Then, very early in the new year, we hope to be able to set up those particular teams, Mr. Speaker. Again, I have no doubt that seniors are going to benefit from those new initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, we could talk about age-friendly communities. I know that Grand Falls-Windsor is one of those because I have been working with the group out there. It has been spearheaded by the council in Grand Falls-Windsor around an age-friendly community that is making a difference. We have over thirty of them now. Many seniors' organizations throughout the Province are implementing some of the strategies that have been identified there.

Mr. Speaker, I see that my time is running out. I just want to make quick reference to our Provincial Advisory Council on Aging and Seniors who are doing tremendous work in advising us in the department of the needs of seniors in this Province. They were here in the House of Assembly yesterday for Question Period. I am delighted to have them working with our teams in the Department of Health, providing their insight and their experience to us. They really make a difference.

I see that my time is done. I will take my seat for now, but hopefully there will be more time in this session to talk about seniors in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I was quite shocked actually when I saw this private member's motion come to the House. We are asked today to stand and to debate a motion that is simply an announcement of an already existing program. This is already budgeted for. This has been on the books for a number of years, and to ask to stand and debate this because there is an increase of six cents a day.

The increase in this motion is celebrating the fact that this government wants us to stand for a few hours in this House to pat it on the back for increasing income to the seniors of a maximum of six cents a day over a period of a year. Mr. Speaker, this is nothing short of pathetic – absolutely pathetic – particularly when we see how many seniors are in our Province.

The other thing, for the government member to stand up and say how wonderful it is that 42,000 seniors will be receiving this benefit, the reason that these 42,000 seniors have to receive this benefit is because they are living in poverty. What is the wonderful event about this? That because 42,000 seniors are either living in poverty or on the brink of poverty this government is going to give them six cents a day extra. If I was a senior in this Province, Mr. Speaker, I would be insulted; I would be absolutely outraged.

We are in a time of the most prosperity ever in the history of our Province. We have so many seniors who are living either in poverty or on the verge of poverty. This prosperity has been built on the backs, on the hard labour of the seniors who today should be celebrating because this government said they are going to give them six cents a day extra.

Mr. Speaker, it is nothing short of shameful. This is bizarre; I cannot believe it. I cannot believe that this government did not choose to stand to talk about programs that would truly

help seniors, programs like helping seniors around the issue of housing.

We know that so many of our seniors, and I would hazard to guess, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of our seniors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, are precariously housed, meaning that they are living in fear of not having adequate housing. Some of are inadequately housed now, but many are living in fear of the future because there is not adequate affordable and accessible housing available to them, and they know that. There have been some gains made by this government, but nothing compared to the need that is out there.

Instead of talking about issues that will substantially address the very real issues of the seniors in our lives, they have us up talking about six cents a day. Mr. Speaker, this is shameful – it is absolutely shameful. I cannot believe it. I am astounded. I am shocked. In this House today we should be debating innovative programs that will actually make a difference in the lives of seniors.

Mr. Speaker, before we get onto that, I would like to talk about what has been taken away this year from seniors, what this government has actually taken away, services and programs that would have helped seniors. For instance, the Residential Energy Efficiency Program, through housing, was cut in half this year. That means only half as many people can apply for it. That program was closed, oversubscribed, within months of it being announced, so only half as many people. There has always been a waiting list. It has always been oversubscribed.

So if the program was successful and oversubscribed, you think what this government would have done is increased it, but no. What did they do? They cut it in half. How many seniors are living in older homes, who need this program, who need programs that will help make their houses more energy efficient? We know the high cost of heating; we all know the high cost of heating. So six cents a day this government is proposing today, yet they have taken away half of the money for the Residential Energy Efficiency Program.

What else did they take away in this Budget, this Budget where they are going to praise themselves today for giving six cents a day extra? The other thing they took away is they cut back the Adult Dental Program to \$700 per person per year for dentures and \$150 per year for dental work. Mr. Speaker, I have seniors, and I know that all of us in this House today, we have seniors who are calling our offices who need dental work done, who are in pain and they cannot because the Adult Dental Program was cut back so severely in this budget. I do not think, Mr. Speaker –

MS SULLIVAN: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services, on a point of order.

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you.

The Adult Dental Program was \$6.7 million. It still is \$6.7 million, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the amount that was taken back from the Adult Dental Program, there is no way that six cents a day is going to be able to address the shortfall of the promise that was made by this government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services, on a point of order.

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there was absolutely no money taken out of the Adult Dental Program; not a penny taken out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, we know for sure that the cutbacks in the dental program –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

If members would like to have private conversations I would like for you to take it outside the Chamber.

For now the Member for St. John's Centre to continue with her speaking time.

MS ROGERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We know for individuals they are now eligible for \$700 for dentures and \$150 a year for dental care. An increase of six cents a day is not going to address the needs that were identified before the increase in the dental program was taken out.

Mr. Speaker, as well, the Provincial Home Repair Program, which was predominately used by seniors, particularly seniors in rural areas of the Province, there has been a new policy change in that program where seniors are only allowed now to apply for that twice in their lifetime. That is a problem, Mr. Speaker, particularly when you have seniors who have been living in the same house for decades and they need repairs done to their home.

We know that 42,000 of our seniors are living near the brink of poverty, under the poverty line or on the brink of poverty, because that is why they are going to get that extra six cents a day from this government that they are announcing

here today. That program, they no longer are eligible to apply more than twice in their lifetime, even though they may be living in that house for a very, very long time, which brings me to the whole issue of housing, Mr. Speaker.

We know the research that has been done in Newfoundland and Labrador, seniors have identified housing as one of their biggest concerns and it is a concern that is real. So many seniors live in fear around the issue of their housing needs. Their fear is whether or not they can continue to live in their own home if their home is more than one story, if their home is not accessible. If that is the case, where do they go?

We know the cost of rent has increased dramatically in most places. Mr. Speaker, not just in St. John's, but in Clarenville, in Gander, in different places and cities in Labrador, whether it is Lab West or whether it is Happy Valley-Goose Bay. We know rents have increased substantially, yet seniors' income has not increased substantially. We also know seniors are concerned if they sell their own house and they want to downsize that basically what is being built in most parts of the Province are expensive condominiums, that start at \$300,000 for a condominium.

Mr. Speaker, housing is one of the most pressing issues for seniors, and then the ability to stay in their house, to be able to access home care that permits them to stay in their house. We do not have a publicly funded, publicly administered, fully administered as part of our health care system, a home care system that is similar to ones in Manitoba, where when people need home care they do not have a means test. They do not have to open up their chequebook; they do not have to open up their wallets.

Home care is their right, just as is access to any health care service. These are services that should be a right and expected of seniors because in the long run it saves us money. It saves us money because it allows seniors to stay in their homes.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out some of the very effective programs that are happening in other places in the country, particularly in BC. BC has a number of supportive housing initiatives for seniors. They have a program called SAFER where they help seniors. Their rental subsidies are portable.

Their rental subsidies do not go to landlords. In fact, they go to seniors so that seniors can choose where they are going to live, they can choose whether or not they are going to live close to their services, to their churches, to their friends, to their families, which makes it a more supportive environment for them. Here in Newfoundland and Labrador what is happening is that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing gives the rent subsidy to particular landlords and therefore that is not portable.

The other thing that is happening, Mr. Speaker, we are all hearing it, all of us, every MHA in this House is hearing from seniors in their district. Seniors who are afraid; seniors who have lost a partner and so their income is cut almost in half and they know they can no longer maintain their home on the income that they have, or they can no longer maintain the rent, if they are in a rental unit. Then they say, well where will I go?

We know this government did not increase the number of rent subs this year. In fact, that is a bit of a cutback because we know rents have increased. We know the number of seniors is increasing in our Province. We know we are among the fastest growing proportion of population that are seniors in the whole country, we know that. Yet, services that seniors' need in order for them to be able to be housed in a safe and adequate way, the programs that should help them that is not what is happening.

We are hearing from seniors. We are hearing from seniors who do not know what they are going to do because the response of this government and the planning around these issues has not been adequate. We all know that. We all know that, Mr. Speaker.

There are best practices in other parts of the country. For instance, in BC, through BC Housing, British Columbia Housing, they have financial assistance for seniors where the money is given directly to the senior. So that the senior has some independence, some autonomy and can choose. They can choose where they can go to live, and the senior will not pay more than 30 per cent of their income on rent. Therefore, they are given a supplement that they can manage and they can be a little more creative with. That means it is not dependent. It is not determined by a landlord and it is not determined by the province where they can live.

There is also a fully functioning assisted living program where there is housing that is provided by all three levels of government with supports, where there are meal supports and where there are housekeeping supports, so that people can live in their own homes for longer periods of time.

Mr. Speaker, rather than talking about a motion that is talking about an increase of six cents a day for our seniors who are on the verge of poverty, let us talk about something specific. Let us talk about something concrete that actually affects the day-to-day living of the seniors in our Province with respect and with dignity. This is ridiculous that they want us to spend this time to pat them on the back for an increase for seniors in our Province of six cents a day.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed a privilege to get up here today to talk about this motion because this motion to me means what I am all about, why I am an MHA, and why I want to represent my district and the people in my district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I hate to choose one sector over another, but I can honestly tell you today that I am here because I want to represent the seniors in my district because of what they have done for me in my life and getting us here as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I feel that the Member for St. John's Centre gets up and she is like the only one in the world who cares about seniors. I am going to tell her today that I care about every senior in my district. When a senior calls me I will do anything I can for that senior.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: This government is not about giving six cents a day. That is the day years gone by when they were on the dole and that was all that was given to them. Let me tell you right now, \$971 is a lot more than six cents a day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the hon. member to direct his comments to the Chair.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: No problem, Mr. Speaker, but I mean day after day we sit here and we listen to the hon. member get up and do her thing. I am not an actor so I do not know how to do all these things, but I can tell you one thing, that I care as much as she does and so does every member on this side of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, our seniors are the backbone of our society. Every opportunity that I get to go to a seniors function, it could be a Christmas party for seniors or whatever, I go. Do you know why? They are the people I represent in my district and I want to show them I feel that they deserve us showing them how we feel about them every single day we get a chance. This motion today is all about what we do for our seniors and what we can do for our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I would love to have a magic wand. I would love to be able to be on the show we used to watch every evening, *Bewitched*, and be able to wiggle my nose back and forth. I could do everything I could do for every senior in this Province. We have come a long way in this Province. I am going to give you a lot of examples today of where we have come from. That is what this motion is about; it is what we are doing for our seniors.

She talks about six cents a day. Let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker. In 1999 the average person was getting \$200 – that is what a single was getting; a family was getting \$400. Today, they are getting \$971. That is more than six cents a day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, the program back in 1999 was \$4.4 million. Today it is \$36 million. That is an increase of 900 per cent, not six cents a day.

Mr. Speaker, we all here want to represent our area. I know that the hon. member wants to represent her area just like I do. When it comes to our seniors I do not think anybody in this House does not want to do what they can for seniors.

I am going to talk just a little bit today about what we do. Like I said, in 1999 there were 34,000 people; today there are 42,000. I am glad that we are helping 42,000 people, Mr. Speaker. I am very glad that anyone out there who needs our help we are helping them. Just as an example, just in the last couple of years, in

2010 it was \$80. Now it is up to \$971. We are increasing it year after year after year.

The other thing that my hon. Member for Exploits mentioned is the timing. Let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker. A senior who is heating his house on oil and gets a cheque for \$971 in the month of October really appreciates it. Guess what it can do for him? It can fill that tank of oil so there is heat in their houses and that is important to him.

It is also the time of year our seniors are the most giving people in this Province. It is the reason why Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are known for their kindness and their generosity. It is because what we were taught when we were growing up. My parents, and I am sure every parent in this House, were taught to care about other people. That is why Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are like we are. We care more than anybody else. I do not care where they are from, all over the country or all over the world, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – and that is because of the people who reared us, the crowd who took care of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, another thing that she talks about, the different things we are doing, is the Home Heating Rebate. We are putting money in every household to help them with their energy costs.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk a little bit now about the Member for Bay of Islands. He mentioned about Muskrat Falls and the fear that he put in the people about Muskrat Falls. I support Muskrat Falls for one reason, mainly. My main reason is the stability of rates. To a senior it is very important that they know that their rates are not going to jump up and down all over the place.

What Muskrat Falls is going to do for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, seniors, myself, and everybody, is it is going to stabilize our rates, so our rates will not be up and down and all over the place. That is so important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it is

so important to the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, I am telling you, listen here, it is so important that we do that. We cannot depend on oil out to Holyrood. Stable power and stable rates are great for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it is great for our seniors.

The Member for Bay of Islands, all he is doing is putting fear into seniors that are listening to this every day. There is no fear. I can assure the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador when Muskrat Falls is done, you will be assured that your rate will be stabilized.

Mr. Speaker, we talked a little bit today about Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and I want to give you a couple of examples, because in Newfoundland and Labrador it is the Home Repair Program. I had the opportunity the other night to go down to a friend of mine's house, a gentleman. He called me up. He actually called me up on my birthday and he said: Come on down, Kev, drop down. So I dropped down. He is a very nice man.

The man is going through a hard time. His wife is sick and stuff like that, but do you know what, Mr. Speaker, we talked about? We talked about the four new windows that were put in his basement. We talked about the new window that was put in his bathroom, and a new door that was put in his house, part of the Home Repair Program that he was able to avail of.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: That gentleman has enough to worry about, Mr. Speaker, with his wife being sick and stuff like that, and here was something that we could help him with. Do you know what? I felt very proud to be part of this government knowing that we are helping people like that.

Mr. Speaker, I went to another home and talked to a lady. She has problems with a leaky roof. I got her the application, applied for the thing, and her roof got fixed. This is what these programs are for. They are for our seniors. They are helping people out.

I would like to tell everybody out there today, if there is anybody out there who knows anybody who can apply for these programs, let us know. We will drop off and get the applications to you. It is a great program. I am sure every member on this side, and I am sure every member on that side, if there is someone out there who said, oh, I did not know about the program that could help me get windows, siding, or whatever it is for home repair to your house, let us know. We will do it. We will get out there and help you.

Mr. Speaker, last year the total number of people who applied for it, 86 per cent of them were seniors; 2,650 seniors in our Province last year availed of this program. That is huge. That is a lot of help. That is a lot of windows. That is a lot of doors. That is a lot of moms and dads and that is a lot of grandparents that we helped out here last year, Mr. Speaker.

There were modifications done to homes, Mr. Speaker; 358 seniors last year had their home modified so they could put a ramp or whatever it was to make it more accessible for their homes.

Mr. Speaker, can we do it for everyone? Would we like to fix every senior's house in this Province? I would, and I am sure everybody on this side would like to see every senior live in a home for as long as they can and for there to be windows and for it to be not cold and everything else. That is what we are here for; we are here to help our seniors. Mr. Speaker, we are doing our best and it is improving year after year after year.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned REEP, and she mentioned REEP getting cut in half or whatever. That is another very important part of our – how it works is the first number of people can apply for it and then they can apply for it the next year, so it continuously goes on.

I had a lady who came to me, she heard about it, and we went and sent an inspector down to her house. She lived in an older house and her basement had little small windows; there was a draft going in through. She got REEP to come down and they said you need insulation in your basement and you need to close down those two

windows. She went and did that – this was last year – and this year she is seeing a big difference right now in her oil bill already. Mr. Speaker, she thanked me for it because that is what that program is for.

That is what we are doing for seniors, but again like I said, if there are seniors out there and you hear about these programs, call us and we will make sure that you avail of any of these programs that are there.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Health was up earlier today and she spoke about the great programs that we have in the health and wellness program. That is what I want to touch on is the health and wellness program.

I have four seniors' groups in my district. I have one in Pouch Cove called Silver Threads, the one in Flatrock is the 50 Plus crowd, the crowd in Torbay are called the 50 Plus, and then there is the Golden Rod over in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove. We are very fortunate this year and the last couple of years to get grants for these groups. The group from Torbay took advantage of one of the grants and they went out to Brigus. The show they saw out there was shag rock or something like that I think it was called.

Mr. Speaker, I went down to a dinner after they were out there, and they were just so happy to get out and avail of a \$1,000 grant to be able to go do a run out there. It is called active living, making our seniors more active. Mr. Speaker, when I walked in that night, I felt proud of this government that we were able to provide something like that.

Our seniors and these different groups that I just talked about can avail of these small grants, but the more we make our seniors active, get the out and exercise – there is a wellness program down to the Jack Byrne Arena that they can use. They go around, they walk every week, and it is making them more active. It is like any of us, I suppose; we get a little bit more exercise and probably the healthier we will be in our lives.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that we do these investments. I would just like to point out that I was down to visit seniors in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove just a couple of weeks ago. I walked in and they were playing forty-fives and playing crib, and another crowd over there playing. Those are the groups that we support in our wellness programs. That is a great thing to do because these people really appreciate it. Anything we can do for our seniors, I know they appreciate it.

Mr. Speaker, we will talk a little bit about what we are doing in health care, too. As we all know, our society is getting older. There is no doubt about it. We are getting older. If you look at what this government is doing when it comes to health care in this Province, we are spending 39 per cent of our total Budget on health care. I went through it; everybody goes through it with their moms and dads. As you get older, it is obvious that you require a lot more care in this here, and we are investing in it.

Never before in our history have we had more doctors and more nurses in our system. Mr. Speaker, that is a sign of where our priorities are; our priorities are with the seniors in this Province and we are here for them. That is our job. That is what we are doing for them.

Mr. Speaker, our infrastructure spending in health care; I look at the long-term health care facility that is down in Pleasantville. I talk to people at the Hoyles-Escasoni now, and actually I have some people who are in there. I know a lot of people who work down there. That is a huge investment.

Now, would we like to have five or six of those investments of \$120 million or \$100 million, whatever it is called? Sure we would, but if you look at what we are spending in our Budget on health care, we are spending \$39 per cent of our Budget. So we only can do what we can afford.

The Member for St. John's Centre gets up every day – every day – she is up in this House and she talks about this and talks about that. Never once does she give us a cost of what she is talking about, nothing – nothing. If they have a

money tree over there that we do not know about, they should tell us, Mr. Speaker. The investments we are making, some of the investments we are after making in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, in our health care, and in our facilities around this Province, are second to none.

I heard the Member for Bay of Islands there speak earlier, my old buddy over there, look, giving me a look. Right on. We talked about seven new diagnostic machines in this Province, Mr. Speaker. We are doing our best when it comes to giving the seniors who are in rural Newfoundland what they need for health care. Some of it we can afford to do, and those are the investments we are making.

MS SULLIVAN: One hundred and seventy facilities.

MR. K. PARSONS: How much was it again?

MS SULLIVAN: One hundred and seventy facilities.

MR. K. PARSONS: One hundred and seventy facilities, Mr. Speaker. We are doing whatever we can to make sure seniors – because it is a worry. We understand that seniors do not want to travel. We understand nobody wants to travel. It is important to us that we do our best for our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Bay of Islands got up twice today and he talked about a polling period. I am going to assure the Member for Bay of Islands when it comes to the seniors in our Province it does not make any difference what period it is, this government cares about them. That is what we care about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you I am very proud of the investments this government is making. I am glad there are 42,000 people in this Province who will avail of the \$971. I applaud our government for what we are doing for seniors, and I hope in the future we

can even do more. We will do more in the future.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): The hon. the Member for St. John's South.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, speaking to the private member's motion today, I would say that I do not think there is a member in this House who would not support providing benefits to seniors. For sure I support – and I would say every member on this side of the House, every member in the House would support – providing benefits to seniors.

We need to really sit down and crunch what is happening here and have a look at what is happening. Let's talk about the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy which affects seniors in this Province. Government continuously delays its promise to deliver on the poverty reduction action plan and the poverty reduction progress report, Mr. Speaker, a commitment government made to release a report every two years. They have not provided one since 2009; that is over four years ago.

You have to wonder if government are so proud of their Poverty Reduction Strategy, why they have not released the status update on that in four years, Mr. Speaker. We need to know the numbers. The people of the Province need to know the numbers to be able to judge how effective the Poverty Reduction Strategy is.

I will admit there are good things in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. I have spoken about the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. OSBORNE: There are good things in the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Mr. Speaker, but there are people falling through the cracks.

I spoke in Question Period today, and I spoke in Question Period yesterday and last week as well, about the fact that the maximum family rate through Income Support for a rental allowance is \$522. Mr. Speaker, that \$522 is not enough to pay rent in many areas of the Province; not only St. John's but there are other areas as well, other areas where the economy is doing relatively well, and no doubt, Mr. Speaker, because of oil production and because of revenues generated from oil production and the mining industry. You look at places like Lab West, you look at places like St. John's, even in Clarendville, where the \$522 that is received through Income Support as a rent allowance, that is certainly – and that is for a family. That is the maximum family allowance for rent.

A two bedroom apartment in the City of St. John's right now is renting on average for \$800 a month; unless you are living in squalor, unless you are living in a rental property that is certainly not adequate to be living in. The average rental on a two bedroom apartment is \$800.

Most families receiving the maximum family allowance on Income Support have more people than two in the household. Some of them are comprised of a single parent and two or three children. Some are two parents and one or two, or three children. They certainly need more than a two bedroom apartment which rents for \$800 a month.

The family allowance for rental of \$522 does not cover the \$800 a month for a two bedroom apartment. What about a three bedroom apartment, Mr. Speaker? It certainly comes nowhere near covering that. What you have is people taking some of their food allowance to pay for rent. When you take the food allowance to pay for rent, what is happening there? You have children going to school hungry. We all know when children go to school hungry, Mr. Speaker, they are not learning. They are not learning the way they should be learning.

Now you are creating a snowball effect, because now you have children who are coming from a family who are below the poverty line, not

receiving enough Income Support to pay for their rent and adequate food and adequate heat and light. As a result, Mr. Speaker, these individuals, these families are sending their children to school hungry.

Now some schools have a breakfast program, and that is great. Where you have a breakfast program, the kids go to school and they manage to get a breakfast; a breakfast where they did not have an adequate breakfast at home. Some of them have a School Lunch Program, and that is excellent as well.

Should these families rely on sending their children to school to take advantage of the School Lunch Program? That is what it is there for, no doubt, but not every school has a breakfast program, Mr. Speaker, which means those children are going to school, and they are going to school hungry. They are not learning because they are hungry. That is a problem.

I have asked repeatedly in this House for the minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Mr. Speaker, to look at increasing the maximum rental allowance from \$522 to something that at least would allow those children to go to school with a breakfast in their bellies, and allow them to learn. That is a concern.

The fact that government has not released an update in four years on the Poverty Reduction Strategy is a concern, Mr. Speaker. There is a strategy, no doubt, but we were supposed to have a progress report in December, 2011, and it did not happen. Now they have missed the second deadline on that. They were supposed to launch another action plan in 2011-2012 and that did not happen, Mr. Speaker.

The Director of Poverty Reduction position has been vacant for a while, at least a year, and that has not been filled. Now you look at what we call a measurement of poverty, and the measurement of poverty is the low-income measurement. Poverty is considered as earning half of the median income. Just to explain that to people who are listening, if you look at half of the median income, the median income in 2011,

which is the latest statistic I have been able to get for the Province, was \$67,000. If you look at half of the median income, that is \$33,500. Any family earning less than that is considered to be living in poverty.

Now we look at the purpose of this private member's resolution that is on the floor today. The private member's resolution for Seniors' Benefits states that there are 42,000 seniors who will benefit from this. Mr. Speaker, that is 47 per cent of the seniors living in this Province, which means that almost half of the seniors living in this Province are living in poverty.

Most people in this House today are going to vote for this private member's resolution, Mr. Speaker. I will be first to admit that doing anything to put extra money in the pockets of seniors in this Province is a good thing, but do we celebrate the fact that almost half of the seniors in this Province are living in poverty? Is that something this private member's resolution is putting forward and we are going to say we are celebrating it? Really? This is a good thing that almost half of the people in the Province, half the seniors in the Province are living in poverty?

Mr. Speaker, 47 per cent of seniors in the Province are earning less than \$36,599 a year. That raises a concern for me. The Conference Board of Canada report shows that roughly 12 per cent of seniors lived in poverty in 2009. Based on this private member's resolution and based on the number of people, the seniors who are receiving this benefit; it is over 40 per cent, almost half of the seniors in the Province.

Now, keeping in mind that we now know that almost half of the seniors in the Province are living in poverty, let me read you something on a national statistic, Mr. Speaker. The average poverty rate for a group in Canada of seniors was 7.2 per cent during the study period, on a study that was done on seniors living in poverty; 7.2 per cent. We know, based on this private member's resolution, that more than 40 per cent of the seniors in this Province are receiving the benefit. That is a stark difference than the 7.2

per cent of seniors in the country who are living in poverty, a very big difference.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about some of the issues that I have raised in this House before. Let's talk about food bank usage. We know that food bank usage in Newfoundland and Labrador is the highest in Canada. Mr. Speaker, even more shocking than that, the usage of food banks in Newfoundland and Labrador is approximately double the national average. We know that many of the people who take advantage of food banks in this Province are seniors. We know that.

The number of people in this Province using food banks has continuously risen since this Poverty Reduction Strategy has come in. While I say, and I will admit, there are good aspects to the Poverty Reduction Strategy in this Province, we do know for certain, it is statistically shown that the number of people in Newfoundland and Labrador using food banks has increased since the Poverty Reduction Strategy has come in. Is that why the Province has not released an update on the Poverty Reduction Strategy?

Mr. Speaker, we know that people are relying on soup kitchens. I have gone and helped at one of the soup kitchens here in the Province. I can tell you, the first time I walked in through the doors to provide volunteer assistance at that soup kitchen; they had an average, on a Friday morning for brunch at that soup kitchen, of less than sixty people. I also know that this year they are up to over 200 people.

Now, why is that? Well, it is in part because the maximum family allowance for rent in this Province from Income Support is \$522, and the average rent for that family is somewhere between \$800 and \$1,000 in the St. John's region. I can tell you that is one of the reasons. I can also tell you, Mr. Speaker, that one of the reasons is because not all seniors in this Province are living comfortably. We know that from this private member's resolution where almost half of them are taking advantage of this tax rebate.

Mr. Speaker, some people refer to them as mall walkers. I think that is probably almost an insulting name. I will tell you who it is I am talking about. If you go into the Avalon Mall, as an example, in June, July, or August, it is not uncommon to go in and not see a ton of seniors hanging around the mall. If you go into the Avalon Mall in January, February, and March there are a number of seniors who go into the mall and spend their day at the Avalon Mall.

No doubt there is some value in the fact that they go in and socialize, but they do not go in and socialize in July or August, Mr. Speaker. They are in there in January, February, and March. Do you know why? I have spoken to some of those seniors; I know why they go in there. I have spoken to some of them. They go in there because they are forced to decide whether or not they are going to put food in the fridge or keep the heat on. So they go into the Avalon Mall and spend their day in there because at least they can go in there and be warm. They go into the Avalon Mall to stay warm so they can afford to put food in the fridge.

Now, we are talking about a Poverty Reduction Strategy. Not everybody is benefiting from that Poverty Reduction Strategy. While there are good aspects to that Poverty Reduction Strategy, not everybody is benefiting from that Poverty Reduction Strategy. The seniors who go to the Avalon Mall to stay warm during the winter are probably not benefiting the way government would have us believe they are. The people on Income Support who are receiving \$522 as a maximum rate for rent, but paying \$1,000 are certainly not benefiting from the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Mr. Speaker. Those are the cold, hard facts.

Mr. Speaker, you look at the Guaranteed Income Supplement that seniors receive. Some of those seniors on the Guaranteed Income Supplement – well, anybody who is receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement gets a drug card. Some of these 42,000 seniors who are receiving this tax benefit that we are applauding government today for these seniors receiving the tax benefit, some of those seniors do not receive the Guaranteed

Income Supplement. Their income is too high to receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement, but they are below the poverty line and they are getting this tax rebate.

Well, guess what? Those seniors are not getting a drug card. Is the Poverty Reduction Strategy helping those seniors, Mr. Speaker? They are not getting a drug card – they are not getting the drug card. Now, there is no doubt there are other programs to assist with drugs, there is no doubt about that, but I can tell you that the drug card under the Guaranteed Income Supplement, Mr. Speaker, covers everything except for the dispensing fee. The other programs do not. Are those seniors benefiting from the Poverty Reduction Strategy? Not like government would have you think, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I know I have fourteen seconds left to speak. While we are going to vote on this today, I will say that anybody in this House would applaud senior citizens receiving additional benefits from government, but this Poverty Reduction Strategy by this government, there are people falling through the cracks. On this side of the House, this party is going to fight for those people each and every time we stand on our feet.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Your time has expired, hon. member.

The hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For those of you at home watching I am just going to just talk about the motion that is on the floor here today.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT this Honourable House supports the Government's decision to provide the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit, a refundable tax credit for low-income seniors which, this year, is providing

some 42,000 seniors in our Province with payments of up to \$971, the highest amount ever.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly will be supporting this private member's motion. The Member for St. John's South asked who is benefiting from this program. I suggest there are 42,000 seniors in this Province who are benefiting from this program. Besides that, there is a whole suite of programs that our government offers that we have invested in seniors in this Province. There is a whole suite of programs that helps people who are definitely on the borderline with regard to their income and helps them through times of trouble. There is a vast array of programs and services that this government offers.

Mr. Speaker, I talk to seniors all the time. My father is eighty-three years old and he is still alive. I spend as much time as I can with him and I talk to some of his friends. They tell me the stories of the old days, what it was like even twenty years ago, thirty years ago, and forty years ago for seniors in this Province. Times have changed and seniors today are better off than they have ever been in our history for sure, and I hear that over and over again. Yes, we will find instances where seniors are facing challenges, and that is what government is here to do, to help them face some challenges.

We hear stories from years ago. I talk to seniors about: What was it like when you were growing up and what is it like today? You can sit and listen to them for hours and hours on end about what they face in growing up in families of ten, twelve, and fifteen children, one income coming in through the door, sharing everything in the household, facing those challenges in life; and then trying to care for their parents and their grandparents, and how times have changed.

Is it perfect? No, it is not, Mr. Speaker, but we are getting to a good place. We are getting to a solid place. We are taking care of our people. There is not one person in this House of Assembly who does not want to do more for the seniors in this Province. There is not one person here in this House of Assembly who does not want to move forward, and we will move

forward. Things will get better as time goes on and we will be bringing more programs and more services to the people of this Province, as we have done over the last ten years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to focus on one area as Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador that is close to my heart. Again, my father who is eighty-three years old lives by himself in a seniors' complex. He is a man of modest means. He was a taxi driver, he was a car salesman, and he was an insurance salesman. He lives a very modest lifestyle and he does not ask for a lot.

One of the things he does do in life, he loves to fish. He loves to hunt. Mr. Speaker, he is eighty-three. I take my son, who is seventeen, in the woods with him wherever I can. Wherever I go in the woods, I bring my father with me. That is what he used to do with me as a boy and that is what I do with him. I am giving back to him wherever I can. We plan many trips and many journeys across this Province, even across certainly Newfoundland and Labrador and into Labrador. My father certainly enjoys his time in the woods.

We have some fee reductions that we brought into place and Service NL did on May 1, 2012. We invested \$3.7 million in reducing fees for seniors. It is another way to put money in seniors' pockets so they can spend it on the essentials of life. I know my father was pleased to find out that his salmon licence has been reduced by 35 per cent. Adults above the age of sixty-five can avail of a 35 per cent reduction on drivers' licences and vehicle registration fees, and benefit from reduction of fees for activities such as fishing, hunting, camping, and woodcutting.

Now, my father is not much into camping any more; we are more or less going to the cabins these days, so he is not under a tent. We have a few cabins that we go to on a regular basis, which he certainly enjoys. He is not cutting a lot of wood these days either, although he is not bad at starting a fire and I will give him credit for

that. Certainly he does take advantage of the fishing and hunting, and he still participates in moose hunting, salmon fishing, trout fishing, and all of these activities that are near and dear to his heart.

One of the things I would like to digress to, Mr. Speaker, is this: my father is eighty-three years old. Three years ago, he had a double knee replacement. He could not go into the woods. He could not go fishing. He could not go hunting. He could not do any of these things. Because he was fit enough at that age, they recommended him to do both knees at once. I took a few weeks off work, I went with him to the hospital, and he came out of the operation with flying colours. The care in that hospital was impeccable; the care was absolutely fabulous.

After a week in the hospital, he went to a respite home in Gander. He was supposed to be there for two weeks. After a week, he said: I am good to go. He got up and he went before I had a chance to say: Hold on now, skipper; hold on a second. At the respite home, he got fabulous care; the meals were unbelievable. He enjoyed every moment that he was there, but he was also anxious to get back to his apartment.

Mr. Speaker, my mother passed away a few years ago. She ended up spending four or five years in the Lakeside senior citizens home in Gander. She was ambulatory at the time, she had dementia, but my father would go there every single day to take care of my mother, to go visit her and he got to know every single person on that ward in the hospital, every single nurse and every single practitioner.

He was Wally to them. He brought them cooked goods and suppers because they took care of my mother in such a way that he could not do himself, and he felt so appreciative about what they were doing. The care that my mother got in the time that she was there, it just changed his life. It made him more comfortable when he went home at night and when he took a weekend off to go in the woods fishing with me and my son. He was happy that she was getting the best care possible, Mr. Speaker.

I cannot talk enough about the care that my mother got. I cannot talk enough about the care that my father got. Certainly, in today's society, we see what is going on around us and we know that there are challenges out there. We know that there are people who maybe do not see the benefits of what we are doing, but the whole suite of programs that we have, that we offer seniors, are fabulous programs. Even though they may not see the money directly in their pockets, there are things that are we doing to make their lives easier, to make their lives more comfortable. We certainly have to work forward to make lives better for the people who basically put us on their shoulders.

We talked about affordable housing. Through the affordable housing program, administered by the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, 438 housing units have been constructed or renovated specifically for seniors since 2006.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we are doing a great job compared to what the rest of the country is going with regard to our housing. There are very few provinces that have the type of housing program that we have here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have been recognized throughout the country, throughout social organizations, throughout Canada and, in fact, in North America of the fine job that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is doing for our seniors and for the people of this Province.

Mr. Speaker, I just referred to partner-managed housing. Since 2009-2010, \$11.6 million has been allocated to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing for partner-managed housing. The upgraded housing projects serve more than 1,400 households of which 80 per cent are for seniors.

There are so many things that we are doing to make lives better for the people who deserve it. They are the ones who built Newfoundland and Labrador up to where we are today and it is the reason why we are experiencing prosperity that we are experiencing.

My children today have the opportunities that they have never had before. They have the opportunity that I never had when I was their age. I have two twenty-year-old daughters; the opportunities that exist for them today never existed when I was twenty years old. We know why that is. It is because of what our parents did; it is because of what we are doing now as parents ourselves who are creating this vibrant economy. We need to give back to the people who built this for us. We will continue to do that.

Our government is absolutely committed, Mr. Speaker, to doing what is right for the seniors of this Province. Every opportunity we see that we can within our means to do to make lives better for seniors, we will do that.

There are so many more other things that are happening that we are doing to make lives better for our seniors: Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Transportation Pilot Project, \$1.3 million. This is a pilot project that will increase access for older adults as well as individuals with mobility challenges to affordable and reliable transportation. Mr. Speaker, this is a pilot project. If we see this project working out well we know that we will invest more money into this area.

Right now the results on this project are looking very favourable. As we move forward and the money becomes available, we will be investing in things like this and we will continue to invest in things like this.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. John's South talked about the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Poverty Reduction Strategy has been called out by numerous Canadian and North American organizations as to being the lead in all of Canada. We have a strategy that is comprehensive; we have a strategy that crosses multi-departmental. We have a strategy that we know is working.

We have fewer people on Income Support in our history. We have more people working than any time in our history. We know there are good things happening within our economy, and

within our programs and services that we are providing. We know that we need to do more and we will do more, that is for sure.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at \$38.5 million invested into the Low Income Seniors' Benefit, that is not chump change; that is a significant investment. As we move forward, I can certainly see us putting more resources into this area as well.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program, my father has the benefit that he is well enough off – even though he is not that well off – that he does not need a drug card. I do know that people who avail of this plan, 65Plus, pay no more than \$6 a prescription for medication covered under the program. Mr. Speaker, this is a valuable program to our seniors. It puts money in their pockets and there are benefits for them to spend and put that money into places where they need to put money.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take my seat there now. I have offered up ten minutes for the mover of the motion. My ten minutes has passed and I believe he is ready to go. Mr. Speaker, I am certainly going to support this motion. I really think this government is on the right track in the direction that we are going. I hear it from more seniors every single day –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

MR. CRUMMELL: – that they like what this government is doing. We can all hear the few horror stories every now and again, Mr. Speaker, the few stories out there that we know where people are facing challenges, but the majority of seniors today are thankful and are moving forward and are happy. They are the golden years for a lot of these people in this Province, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to concluding this here today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the members in the House today for their comments: the Member for Bay of Islands, the Minister of Health and Community Services; the Member for Cape St. Francis who, may I add, spoke very passionate about seniors, as am I and as most members in this House are passionate about our seniors.

I would like to thank the Member for St. John's South as well. He did admit, Mr. Speaker, that we do have a poverty strategy that is working, with some wonderful initiatives; and, no doubt, we can always make improvements.

I would like to respond to a couple of the comments today, especially from the Member for St. John's South. What he is saying in order to receive the Seniors' Benefit, you have to live below the poverty level. That is basically what he is saying. He is saying that 50 per cent of the seniors in our Province or pretty close to 50 per cent of our seniors in the Province are receiving the Seniors' Benefit, and that is great news.

According to – and I only have recent years. In 2009, Mr. Speaker, and this was the federal low-income cut-off for one person: \$18,421. This, of course, is also considered as the poverty line.

Mr. Speaker, the qualifying income threshold to receive the Seniors' Benefit for single is \$28,231. That is for a single senior. That is a far cry from \$18,421. I think, basically, he is misleading the people out there that they are all living below the poverty level. That is not true.

From 2008 to 2013, this Province had a decrease of 3.1 per cent in the use of food banks, Mr. Speaker. The incidence of low income in Newfoundland and Labrador has gone from 12.2 per cent in 2003 to 5.3 per cent in 2011. Mr. Speaker, is there more that we need to do? Of course there is. There is always going to be more. That is why this government has brought in the incentives that we brought in for low-income people, and especially our seniors.

I would also like to respond to a comment that was made by the Member for Bay of Islands. He did applaud this government's initiatives for the seniors, Mr. Speaker, and I thank him for that. We know we need to continue the Seniors' Benefit and continue to explore ways to improve in other areas.

However, in regard to the Member for St. John's Centre, I think it is despicable, I think it is fear mongering because the Seniors' Benefit, which she did not try to get across to the general public out there and to the seniors, is \$971 a year. They are getting the \$971 a year. Hopefully they are going to get it and continue to get it.

It is a far cry from six cents a day; \$971 is what they receive in the Seniors' Benefit. That has gone from about \$200 in 2001 to \$971 today. Let's make sure that the seniors know. As I said, the Member for Cape St. Francis spoke very passionately about seniors and seniors in the Province, as did just about everybody here.

I have to comment on the Member for St. John's Centre, to try to fear monger and put fear in the seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador I think is totally, totally ridiculous and unacceptable. It is \$971, Mr. Speaker, along with other initiatives.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. FORSEY: Mr. Speaker, I was planning on and trying to get into a couple more of this government's initiatives for seniors. We have brought in so many over the years that if you do not make notes of them, you will never remember them all, not in one afternoon I am sure.

I did speak about the home rebate that is available to the residents in the Province, Mr. Speaker. This, of course, is in addition to the residential energy rebate announced in the Budget of 2011, which provides an 8 per cent rebate on electricity and other eligible products. The Home Heating Rebate in 2001-2002 was a maximum rebate of \$100, with approximately

15,500 people receiving that benefit, with a cost of \$1.5 million.

Today, 2012-2013, the benefit has gone up to \$250 on the Island to \$500 in Labrador, with a little over 60,000 people receiving the rebate, and the cost of \$14.8 million that program today is costing. We have gone from \$1.5 million to almost \$15 million since 2002. The investments we are making, not only to seniors but also to low-income people as well, they can all avail of this program.

I do believe somebody mentioned drug coverage and drug coverage for seniors. It was mentioned by, I think, one of the members from the other side, saying that seniors were not eligible for the drug program, which I find difficult to believe, Mr. Speaker. The prescription drug program provides financial assistance for the purchase of eligible prescription medications to more than 126,000 residents and covers over 6,400 drugs.

More than \$1 billion has been invested in the NLPDP, the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program. In 2012-2013, Mr. Speaker, more than 50,000 seniors benefited from the NLPDP. In 2012-2013, more than \$73 million was paid to cover prescription medications for seniors using the NLPDP.

Seniors can benefit from the following plans under the program. There are actually four different categories they can benefit from, so I find it strange that a senior is not eligible for the Prescription Drug Program. Those are the Foundation Plan, the Access Plan, the Assurance Plan, and the 65Plus.

In recent years, our government has made significant enhancements to the drug program. Most significant to seniors, is that no senior using the 65Plus Plan will pay more than \$6 a prescription, Mr. Speaker. So that is another tremendous initiative by this government and it is geared toward seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Yes, so we should applaud this government. I think it is a great initiative, one

of many we are providing for seniors in the Province.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to get into some of the other seniors' investments in health, and community health and wellness funding that the department does and the government does. I know the Member for Cape St. Francis got involved in it a little bit. He touched on it. What a member. Our government, under the leadership of Premier Dunderdale, has made great strides in supporting community-based organizations including seniors' groups and the shared role we have in enhancing the health and well-being of residents of all ages.

There are some very important notes I made there, but I want to get – because I do not have a lot of time left – into some of the figures and some of the investments we are doing for seniors through the Department of Health and Community Services, Mr. Speaker.

The reason I want to do that is because, like the members in this House and the Member for Cape St. Francis, I get involved with the seniors' groups out there as well in the District of Exploits. Whether they are in Bishop's Falls, whether they are in Botwood or Peterview or Point Leamington, we get out there and we support them. There is funding available for the groups so they can get active in the community and enjoy more recreation, which keeps them healthier.

Of course, that is why we have brought in the Healthy Aging Strategy, and it is working. I see it out there myself because I do get invited to some of –

MR. JOYCE: Do you take part in it?

MR. FORSEY: I take part in it, I say to the Member for Bay of Islands. I do take part in it, Sir, and I will probably be taking more time to take part in it in the near future.

The Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Grants Program was launched in 2010 and has provided \$320,000 to thirty-two communities throughout the Province. In addition, fifty-nine

seniors' organizations have received \$435,000 through this program, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: In 2010, more than 100 seniors' organizations, including 50 Plus groups, have received over \$750,000 to promote healthy aging. In 2009, the Seniors Community Recreation Grants Program has provided 232 grants, totalling more than \$728,000 for programs and services focused on increased physical and leisure activity aimed at seniors, Mr. Speaker. Everything is geared towards seniors, and this government has made huge investments in seniors.

Since 2010 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. FORSEY: I hear a lot of heckling from the other side, Mr. Speaker, but I think most of them will probably be joining some of these programs pretty soon.

Since 2010, the Healthy Aging Seniors Wellness Grants Program has supported forty-two projects at a cost of \$544,500. I say, Mr. Speaker, that this is not to be laughed at or sneered at, and I would certainly like to pass that on to the Opposition and the Official Opposition, too, across the way, who seem to think that the investments and what I am reading out here today that is geared towards seniors is funny.

I think it is shameful. Because if that is the best that they can do as a group over there is to laugh and heckle like they have been doing, I have seen better in a chicken coup, Mr. Speaker, and I have heard better.

Examples of innovative programs include \$1.3 million for the Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Transportation Pilot Project – I suppose they are still on a high from last night, Mr. Speaker – which supports five groups to provide affordable and reliable transportation for seniors and individuals with mobility challenges.

MR. JOYCE: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands, on a point of order.

MR. JOYCE: I would just like the member to know that we were not laughing at what you were saying. We were laughing at the minister's poverty reduction plan, handwritten. That is what we were laughing at.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Exploits, to conclude his comments.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Apparently, if they were laughing at something else, they really were not paying much attention to the investments and to the value that we show towards our seniors, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, I guess they just do not have much regard for it, or they would have been listening to this, and not reading off jokes or something on their paper that they have over there on the other side, I say.

My time is up, Mr. Speaker, but I would just like to say that there is no doubt that this government is making substantial and important contributions in support of seniors in this great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I certainly and, hopefully, along with all the members of this House, support government's decision to provide the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member that his time has expired.

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

AN HON. MEMBER: The motion is defeated.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

It is now 5:00 o'clock. This House now adjourns.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: I did not hear a positive response from very many in the (inaudible).

Division

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

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, could I ask a question of clarification of the Speaker? My understanding is that –

MR. SPEAKER: Are you raising a point of order?

MS MICHAEL: If I may make a point of order, if that is how I have to do it.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes.

MS MICHAEL: Yes, a point of order.

I have always understood that when a vote is called, at the moment that the vote is called that is when Division gets called. You ruled that there was a vote. You ruled on what the ruling was. Division was called after the House Leader stood and said they did not accept what you said, and now we are having Division. I want clarification on that, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: There can be Division called on the vote in the House. That is what we are doing here now.

Thank you.

Are the Whips ready?

All those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Ms Michael, Ms Rogers.

MR. SPEAKER: All those for the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. King, Ms Shea, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Davis, Mr. McGrath, Mr. Crummell, Mr. French, Mr. Marshall, Mr. Jackman, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Verge, Mr. Littlejohn, Mr. Hedderson, Mr. Dalley, Ms Sullivan, Mr. Kent, Mr. Felix Collins, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Cross, Mr. Forsey, Mr. Hunter, Mr. Dinn, Mr. Pollard, Mr. Brazil, Mr. Sandy Collins, Mr. Lane, Mr. Cornect, Mr. Peach, Ms Perry, Mr. Little, Mr. Russell, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Edmunds, Ms Dempster, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Mitchelmore.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

CLERK: Mr. Speaker, the ayes thirty-nine, the nays two.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

This House now stands adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, at 1:30 p.m.