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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.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of St. John's Centre; the Member for the District of Lake Melville; the Member for the District of Lewisporte; the Member for the District of Humber Valley; the Member for the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair; and the Member for the District of Port au Port.

The hon. the Member for the District of Lake Melville first.

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Canadian Cancer Society of Lake Melville.

Our chapter held its thirteenth annual Christmas Soiree on November 23. The event was held at the Royal Canadian Legion and included a beautiful hot turkey dinner followed by a dessert buffet of a large variety of homemade cookies, pies, and cakes. The dinner was followed by a silent and a live auction.

The Soiree continues to be the signature event for kicking off the Christmas season and celebrations for Upper Lake Melville and was again filled to capacity with over 250 people purchasing tickets and was sold out two weeks prior to the event.

The 2013 Soiree event raised approximately \$43,000, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: This is a tremendous contribution by the great people of Lake Melville who continues to support the Canadian Cancer Society year after year.

I would like to specifically congratulate Stanley Oliver and the organizing committee, made up

of Stephanie Janes, Wilson Baggs, Cora Hamel-Pardy, Mandy Hope, Alison Haggerty, Stacy Ryan, Janet Payne, Dee Wells, Lynn Durno and chair, Davina Mugford for continuing this great, great event.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing the Canadian Cancer Society of Lake Melville.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the wonderful spirit of volunteerism and care exhibited by the Boys and Girls Club of Norris Arm.

The Norris Arm Boys and Girls Club began in 1989 and have shown great success. They promote healthy and active living through their Walking Club and also through a chefs program. The Walking Club involves teen volunteers who walk with children from school to the club on a daily basis. The junior Chefs program trains youth to shop and to also prepare meals.

The club also has a Tots program, an After School Club, as well as a weekend teen gathering that serves youth from Norris Arm and the surrounding communities. There is no financial cost to any child and no one is ever turned away.

The club manager Eudora Goulding has been with the club since it was established twenty-four years ago. She, like the other volunteers who run this program, gives daily to the youth in their area.

I ask all hon. members to join me in recognizing the great work done by the many volunteers who make the Norris Arm Boys and Girls Club a great success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Humber Valley.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate Melissa Hardy of Deer Lake on her accomplishments in cross-country running with St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia.

Melissa recently won gold in the six kilometre race at the Atlantic University Sport Championships with a time of twenty-two minutes, fifty-two point four-five seconds. This is just the latest in the stellar two-year career of cross-country running at the Atlantic University level. An accomplished student with a Bachelor of Science degree, Melissa is completing her internship at St. Francis Xavier University.

Mr. Speaker, Melissa also went on to compete in the Canadian Interuniversity Sport Cross-Country Championships last month in London, Ontario. There she competed against the top university runners in Canada.

Melissa also represented our Province as part of the provincial contingent at the 2013 Canada Summer Games in Sherbrooke, Quebec, in August. There she finished in sixth place in the women's five-kilometre race.

Mr. Speaker, it is encouraging to see athletes like Melissa compete on a national level.

I ask all members in this House to join me in congratulating Melissa Hardy on her athletic success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise in this hon. House today to pay tribute to a passionate young Labradorian.

Ryan Russell was one of three young men who went missing in a boating accident near Muskrat Falls in 2010. The tragedy touched many across Labrador, especially in his hometown of Charlottetown.

Ryan had a great passion for the outdoors and for the Labrador wild. His love for hunting, fishing, and trapping was evident from the time he was able to carry a firearm.

Ryan was also a tremendous athlete who participated in many school sports, including volleyball, basketball, and floor hockey. His compassion for others became evident during one of his competitions when he unselfishly put his sportsmanship award around the neck of a father who had just lost his son in a snowmobile accident.

Ryan had a talent for music and song writing that was not discovered until his father retrieved his laptop after the terrible accident.

Mr. Speaker, today, right about now, Ryan's family, friends, and community, three-and-half years later, will lay him to rest in Charlottetown.

I ask all hon. members to join me in offering our condolences to Ryan's family, and pray that they find strength in the coming days.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNECT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Stephenville Lassies ladies hockey team who recently won the bronze medal at the Second Annual Exploit's Roofing Ladies Invitational Hockey tournament, which was held

in Grand Falls-Windsor during the weekend of November 22-24.

This team is comprised of players from many different communities of the Stephenville-Port au Port-Bay St. George area. They play in a house league of only two teams at the Stephenville Dome. When they participate in tournaments, Mr. Speaker, they bring together players to form one team. It combines the many skills set necessary to be competitive and to have fun.

These players, Mr. Speaker, range from the age of twenty-two years to sixty-two years of age. They are to be commended for maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle. Winning medals is a special delight for this team, as well as the fostering of new friendships. They will quickly tell you that the camaraderie of the team is the main purpose for traveling to tournaments.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join with me in offering my congratulations to the ladies of the Stephenville Lassies hockey team.

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 rise today to celebrate the brilliant career of a brilliant, feisty woman who has, for forty years, been a tireless advocate for the workers of this Province.

On December 20, Judy Vanta will retire from her job as the Workers' Adviser at the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour. In this role, she helped and advocated for both unionized and non-unionized workers in their dealings with the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission.

Judy has spent decades in the labour movement – a total of forty years. She was particularly active on women's issues and occupational

health and safety. She was President of the St. John's and District Labour Council, worked with the Canadian Labour Congress as a member of the Union Label executive, and more, making incredible changes as a strong advocate.

Last night, the Federation of Labour surprised Judy with a tribute to her at their convention banquet. The respect and love that woman has inspired filled the room, and I was so happy to be able to share in it.

I ask all hon. members to join me in wishing Judy, a straight-talking advocate for workers, a fabulous retirement.

Bravo, Judy Vanta!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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, I rise today to inform hon. members that the Combined Councils of Labrador have travelled to St. John's this week to hold a series of meetings with provincial Cabinet ministers.

The Combined Councils of Labrador represents twenty-six communities throughout Labrador and as many municipalities are isolated, it can be challenging for community leaders to meet and discuss issues related to Labrador. The provincial government continues to financially support the Combined Councils of Labrador by way of an annual operating grant of \$100,000 through Labrador Affairs. This funding enables Labrador's communities to come together and address matters of mutual concern.

Our government maintains a strong working relationship with the Combined Councils of

Labrador. As Minister of Transportation and Works and Minister Responsible for Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs, I am pleased to report that my meetings with the group this week were very productive and I have heard the same feedback from my Cabinet colleagues.

Specifically, Ministers of Advanced Education and Skills; Child, Youth and Family Services; Environment and Conservation; Fisheries and Aquaculture; Health and Community Services; Innovation, Business and Rural Development; Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs; and Natural Resources concur that meetings were very valuable.

Community prosperity, improved communications with government, better services and transportation networks, economic growth, and a sustainable future for the people of Labrador continue to be high priorities for the Combined Councils of Labrador.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador continues to share the vision of the Combined Councils, and we are committed to advancing growth and prosperity in the region.

Since 2004 the needs and opportunities in Labrador have remained a provincial priority. Investments have been made to improve the health and well-being of all Labradorians through expanding infrastructure, improving the delivery of programs and services, and encouraging economic prosperity. Total spending in Labrador has exceeded \$4 billion since 2004 including more than \$500 million to build the Trans-Labrador Highway.

Mr. Speaker, our Province is stronger as Labrador advances and we will continue to work with the Combined Councils of Labrador to ensure steady growth and success.

Thank you.

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 the advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, the Combined Councils of Labrador is a very important group for the municipalities in Labrador, as they continue to advocate for improved infrastructure and services. The Liberal caucus looks forward to meeting with the Combined Councils tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, the CCL was first formed in 1971 in Hopedale to lobby on behalf of the Inuit communities of Northern Labrador. It was not until 1979 that its mandate expanded to include all of Labrador.

It is ironic, Mr. Speaker, that forty-two years later the communities requiring those improvements the most are still Inuit communities of Northern Labrador. Whether it is in transportation, housing, health, justice, or social issues, there is considerable work that needs to be done to improve the quality of life for the residents. The Combined Councils, in partnership with the government, can still play a significant role in ensuring that challenges facing the people of Labrador are addressed.

Both as a community leader and as an MHA, like the minister, I have had the privilege of attending CCL annual general meetings and experience the co-operation and purpose of all communities in Labrador and the things they share with each other. I would strongly urge the government take all of the resolutions from the annual general meeting seriously and address them in a timely manner.

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. When the Combined Councils members come into St. John's, yes, they meet

with Cabinet but they also meet with the Opposition parties. I am looking forward to my meeting with them tomorrow morning.

I am also looking forward to going back to Labrador, this time to L'Anse au Clair, for their upcoming February annual general meeting where we can discuss the many things government refuses to address, such as their concerns regarding poor roads, poor cellphone coverage, and the need to reinstate the three-day air medical evacuation service.

My time allotment stops me from going on about the many other issues the council has addressed in several resolutions from all of their annual general meetings, which are still waiting on the books for this government to respond.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. It is nice to see the work of the Combined Councils recognized here in this House. A collaborative voice is stronger, so having that ability to work with government, to speak on the issues that are important and advocate – and there are many challenges in Labrador that still need to be addressed. It is good to see this dialogue continue. I think all of our communities are stronger when we collaborate and work together with a bigger voice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to rise today to provide an update on the Parental Benefits Program, a universal program that our government created to assist families regardless of their income or status. Mr. Speaker, since the inception of the program in 2008, approximately 27,000 applications have been processed, providing support to families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

This program was introduced in 2008 as a way to support families and includes the Progressive Family Growth Benefit and the Parental Support Benefit. The Progressive Family Growth Benefit provides \$1,000 for every child born or adopted and the Parental Support Benefit provides \$100 per month to parents for the first twelve months for each child born or adopted.

From 2008 to November of this year, about 27,000 applications have been processed through the program, with an average of 4,500 applications processed each year. The deadline for filing an application is within three years after the baby is born, or in the case of an adoption, three years after the child has been placed with the parent. Approximately \$10 million a year is invested in this program.

Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on supporting individuals and families throughout the Province and this program is one of the many ways we are doing that. Since 2007, our government has been able to decrease taxes by over \$500 million a year, creating a competitive tax regime that allows disposable income to go back to Newfoundland and Labradorian families.

Our government has increased the number of regulated child care spaces by almost 70 per cent since 2003. We continue to have the best pupil-teacher ratio of any province in this country.

We continue to provide free textbooks to all K-12 public school students, and our post-secondary education students continue to have the lowest average tuition fees in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, our vision for a prosperous Newfoundland and Labrador is demonstrated in our commitment and investments in important social program, strengthened communities, and the health and well-being of our children, seniors and families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

The Parental Benefits Program of course is useful to many families in our Province. The benefits are paid out regardless of income or social status. I would mention there that we do see many families of low income that are still struggling in our Province today. They really need supports that sometimes are a little difficult to come by outside the Parental Benefits Program.

Raising a child, as we know, is very expensive. The annual cost in Canada right now is just under \$13,000. It would be 27,000 children since the program was implemented at a cost of \$10 million, as the minister clearly points out.

We also know the cost of providing education – the basic necessities right now for families are increasing every year. As MHAs, on a daily basis, we all get calls to our offices about not only finding affordable housing, but just the cost of it. In my own district and even in the community where I live, we still have forty-four families who are currently using the food bank.

The amount of the program, and of course the amount of this program, has not increased since

2008. So it is important that we give the families the tools they need. Decreasing taxes, even though it is something that this government talks a lot about and it has done a lot to stimulate the economy, really does not help those families who are struggling. Regulated child care spaces is indeed an important initiative, yet again we still have families who cannot afford those.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a good initiative, but there is still a lot of work to be done, and we look forward to continuing with that work.

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I want to say to the minister that raising babies cost parents a lot more than the \$2,200 government pays out in a child's first year. If government was really concerned about helping families raise children, they would implement a full government administered and regulated child care program like families in Quebec enjoy.

In Quebec they have universal daycare, beginning with six months, at \$7 a day. They have proven that better daycare can not only transform child development, but also vastly improve the prospects of women and the poor and build a better labour force. Economists have attributed a 25 per cent boost to Quebec's economy because of this daycare program. That is what I would call an economic plan, 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.

In today's complex world, education is more important than ever for our young children. Full-day kindergarten for these 27,000 children would give them a stronger start in school, and a stronger start in life. Full-day kindergarten for five year olds would support early learning and child development, build a stronger school system, and contribute to our long-term competitive advantage.

Let's get this done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Before we move on to Oral Questions, I want to acknowledge a special guest in our galleries today, a former member of this House – the former Member for the District of Bellevue, Mr. Percy Barrett.

Welcome, Sir, back.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: You will notice the House is much more civilized.

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services said they brought in the Children and Youth Care and Protection Act to help improve services for children in care. The act was passed in this House on June 24, 2010, but it was not proclaimed until June, 2011.

So I ask the minister: Why did it take a full year to proclaim this act?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Children and Youth Care and Protection Act is a progressive piece of legislation. It was a child-centred and child-based piece of legislation. It was one of the finest pieces of legislation for children and youth ever passed in this House, I say.

As well, Mr. Speaker, when that bill was passed in June 2011, there were ninety-six policies and procedures that were developed to come into force with that piece of legislation. Today, that has grown to well over 100 policies and procedures that are used by social workers throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I really appreciate the fact that there were ninety-six policies and procedures. My question was about the time that the act went through this House until it was proclaimed.

It was an important document. Why did it take so long?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a very important piece of legislation. It was planned that when this legislation came into force in June 2011, that the policies, procedures, and the framework would be in place to initiate this piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes it takes time to initiate legislation. I will remind the hon. member opposite that when they were in government they brought through an Adoption Act. It was

passed in the House here in 1999. It did not come into force until 2003.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

He still did not answer the question if this was such an important piece of legislation.

Yesterday's report from the advocate revealed that John was removed from his alternate living arrangement because he turned sixteen. The minister is right that John turned sixteen just before the act was proclaimed, just a few months.

I ask the minister: Why did this youth fall through the cracks when you had the legislative authority, the legislative tools available to you for months, to prevent this from happening?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The report that has been compiled by the advocate for children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador was a very extensive piece of work which was carried out by her and the people in her office over a two-year period. It is a comprehensive report that has a number of recommendations contained within it for a number of departments. It is a piece of work that we are studying, we are looking at, and we are currently reviewing.

If we go back to 2011 at that point in time, we had come to terms with the important point that we needed to develop a stand-alone line department for the best interests of children and youth. It comes from a clinical study that was done in 2008.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. DAVIS: I am sure I will speak to that (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Where we are trying to get to is that there was a period of time here where we had a sixteen-year-old child, who had turned sixteen in the spring of that year; the legislation was proclaimed in June of 2011 – this is a sixteen-year-old child. Even after the act was proclaimed in June, you had the opportunity to help this youth and bring him back into your care.

Why did this not happen?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is no doubt this is a very important matter. The best interests of children and youth are very important to us as a government. That has caused us to develop a new department and new legislation, which the hon. member opposite has referenced.

If we go back to the clinical review done in 2008, the author of that review, Susan Abell, was very clear when she commented in that report, in saying that the priorities she had listed in her report will require concerted and sustained focus of strong leadership over several years in order to achieve the improvements of child protection in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is what she referred to. She said it is going to take a long time to develop that.

We have done a lot of good work, Mr. Speaker, to improve services to children and youth in

Newfoundland and Labrador, and we are going to continue to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are talking about John that the report references. He was a sixteen-year-old child who was taken out of protective care.

My question is: When the act was proclaimed and before the fire, before the tragic death of a senior here, why was this youth not brought back into protective care?

AN HON. MEMBER: He could not be.

MR. BALL: He could.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Newfoundland and Labrador was one of the earlier provinces in Canada to provide services for children when they moved beyond sixteen years of age. Right now under the new act, which I have just mentioned, the Children and Youth Care and Protection Act, we provide opportunities for children that when they now reach their sixteenth birthday they can voluntarily stay in care. That is an important piece of work, Mr. Speaker, I say.

Mr. Speaker, it is an important piece of work for our Province because it allows for children and youth who reach their sixteenth birthday, if they so desire and if they wish, to stay in care. Between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, we have new support systems. We have opportunities for them. We have one of the – I would say, Mr. Speaker, we are comparative to any province in Canada on the services that are

available for sixteen up to twenty-one years of age.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was identified yesterday that when this sixteen year old – when this discussion took place, he was not clear and he was looking for help to help make this decision. Right now our fear is that we have other sixteen year olds from that time frame who will still be in the system.

Has the department done an assessment on how many sixteen year olds we would still have in that one-year time frame who could be falling through the cracks?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, there are youth service clients that we have in the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. If they come into our care prior to the age of sixteen, once they reach their sixteenth birthday they are offered an opportunity to voluntarily stay in programs and supports from Child, Youth and Family Services. They can lead that person right up to the age of twenty-one. If that individual chooses to remain in school, in post-secondary education, we will support them and assist them in continuing their education all the way up to twenty-one.

Mr. Speaker, I would say the services we are providing to that age range are comparable to anywhere in Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: As part of that service, as part of the policies and procedures you now have in place, has there been a review done in the caseloads of how many sixteen year olds in that one-year time frame we have in the system right now that could actually be taken back?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, what I just referred to was when a child is in care, receiving services from Child, Youth and Family Services prior to the age of sixteen. We also have an opportunity to allow for children who are sixteen years of age until they reach their nineteenth birthday, that if they are looking for services and assistance and supports, we still allow them to come into our services, but at age sixteen onwards it is a voluntary process. It has to be a decision made by the young person to come into the service, and we will provide those services to them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister said yesterday he needed time to review the advocate's report and the recommendations. He was also in the media saying there was a meeting.

I ask the minister: When did you first receive a copy of this report?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said in this House, this piece of documentation, this report is a lengthy, comprehensive documentation. I did reference

in the House yesterday that my intention is to have a meeting with the Child and Youth Advocate so we can have a full, frank, fair discussion about all the recommendations that are contained within that report, so we can both have a full understanding of what her vision and view is, what her intentions are with each of those recommendations so that we can talk about the work that has already been done, because there has been work done on several of those recommendations already. Some of those recommendations that are there are currently in place.

We have already been reaching out. I have directed my officials today to reach out to the Child and Youth Advocate to begin the planning of that meeting.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The question was not answered.

The question is clear: When did you first receive a copy of the report?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the final report was released yesterday by the Child and Youth Advocate. She released it publicly yesterday morning. It was a public event. It was well advertised and promoted and it was seen throughout the media.

The final report was released yesterday by the advocate, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, the concern is not about the final report.

The concern is about: When did you have this discussion with the Child and Youth Advocate? When did you receive the report from the Child and Youth Advocate?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I have had a meeting with the Child and Youth Advocate. I reached out to her after being appointed as the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services. Our intention is to have a future meeting with her.

My direction to my staff and my officials today was to reach out to her again and begin that dialogue of trying to find a beneficiary time that is available for both of us to have a meeting to further those discussions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I guess I will ask the question in a different way: Did you receive a draft copy of this report in advance? The media is reporting there was a meeting and this was discussed. When did you get the draft copy of this report?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I should probably clarify for the hon. member opposite, the intention of my meeting with the Child and Youth Advocate was not to discuss the report. When I reached out to the Child and Youth Advocate back in October when I first came in the department, my intention was to

have an opportunity to sit down with the Child and Youth Advocate so we could have an opportunity to meet each other, to have a discussion about our goals, objectives, roles, and relationship, and how that would develop and how that was going to operate. That was the intention of the discussion, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Well, in media reports it is saying there was a copy in advance given to the minister.

I ask the minister: When did you get the advance copy?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the final report was released yesterday. The meeting I had with the Child and Youth Advocate was a get-to-know-each-other opportunity so we could have a discussion about our roles and we could meet each other. I have never met the person before and I reached out to have the opportunity to meet with the Child and Youth Advocate and have a discussion with her about our roles and our relationship.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Well, maybe the answer should be just yes or no.

Did you get an advance copy of this report? If so, when?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear about this. The intention of that meeting when I met with her was to have a discussion with her. I have never the person, but to meet with her and to have a discussion. During that discussion, the meeting I had with her, there were many topics that we discussed. This upcoming report came up in our discussions. It did.

That was not the intention of the meeting. The intention of the meeting was an opportunity to meet with each other. This report and other reports that the Child and Youth Advocate had produced were topics of discussion that came up during that conversation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: In the time frame between that meeting and the final copy being released, did you get an advance copy of this report?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was a draft of the report that was provided by the Child and Youth Advocate and I cannot give you the exact date, Mr. Speaker, offhand. I cannot give you an exact date. It was within a week before this release occurred this week, is my recollection, and it was about that time. So, it was some time last week, but I cannot give you an exact date. The final report was released yesterday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the answer, Minister.

Citizens of this Province have a legislated duty to report to the authorities, information that a child is or may be in need of protective intervention. As the Child and Youth Advocate's report on the fatal boarding house fire illustrates, sometimes children need protection from the system itself.

I ask the minister: Will you enact whistle-blower legislation so that workers who know the system best are protected from speaking out on the systemic cracks?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite is probably referencing a topic that we have talked about many times in this House; it is the issue of whistle-blower legislation which, while connected perhaps to the previous topic, certainly falls within my department.

As I have said before, we are quite confident at this point in time that our current legislation within the Province and current laws within the Province provide a lot of protection for workers to speak out. We encourage that, as a matter of fact, all the time.

We want to hear from people. We amended a piece of legislation last week that provides just that particular protection so that people are feeling comfortable about speaking out. At this point in time, there is no intention to bring forward the whistle-blower legislation in this session of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, Recommendation 26 and 27 of the Turner report states that government has a fundamental obligation to ensure proper record keeping. Yesterday's Recommendations 1 and 19 states that government needs to ensure strict adherence

to documentation standards. The advocate found incomplete documentation in all CYFS program areas. Seven years later and it is clear the same problem still exists.

I ask the minister: Why has this not changed in seven years?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is that it has changed. When the development of the new department occurred – Child, Youth and Family Services occurred – there were a number of steps that were being taken based on the report completed by Susan Abell in 2008. We knew and said publicly that once the new department was developed that it was going to take three to five years for the full evolution and development of that particular department.

A couple of things that have happened, Mr. Speaker, are the development of a new training unit in the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. What that training unit has developed, as part of what the member opposite is referring to, is a documentation and case management training module. It is compulsory for all staff and all supervisors to complete that training before they receive any files.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I would note that the Child and Youth Advocate's report was released yesterday. It was new yesterday, and in her report yesterday she said these problems still exist.

I ask the minister: Are you saying that the Advocate is wrong?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: No, Mr. Speaker, I am not saying that at all. What I am saying is that report was based on events leading up to a tragic fire in 2011, a tragedy that resulted in the loss of life.

What I am saying is through that period of time, 2011, 2012, 2013, there are a number of things that the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services has done to develop and improve our ability to provide the finest care for children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador. One of those pieces was a new training unit. Part of the requirement of that training unit is to deliver a new module on case management and documentation that is a compulsory training for all front line people in our department.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I would note that I was at the briefing yesterday with the Child and Youth Advocate, and yesterday she said these problems still exist.

Recommendation 12 in the Turner report states that all activities and discussions must be recorded no matter at which level they occur. Recommendation 2 from yesterday's report says that all consultations and any decisions pertaining to the child must be documented.

I ask the minister: Seven years has passed, why are we still seeing the same recommendations?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thought I just explained that to the hon. member. I will make an effort to explain that to him once again.

The basis of the report released yesterday by the Advocate for Children and Youth in Newfoundland and Labrador was based on a series of events that led up to a tragedy in the fall of 2011. During that time period, and since 2008 when the government undertook a clinical review of child and youth services in Newfoundland and Labrador, one of the decisions made as a result of that report was to develop its own department, its own standalone department, and bring forward new legislation. As outlined in the recommendations from Susan Abell, there were a number of other recommendations.

What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that all of these recommendations are being acted upon by us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I again have to note that I was at the briefing yesterday. The Child and Youth Advocate said yesterday these problems still exist, yet the minister is saying that they do not exist.

I ask the minister: Who is right here?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to take the opportunity to review some of the recommendations by Susan Abell in her 2008 report. It was completed December, 2008. It was in early 2009 when this government announced, for the very first time, that we are going to have a standalone

department for Child, Youth and Family Services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The development of that department was based on this report and the recommendations contained in it. It included legislative reform. We brought through two significant pieces of legislation surrounding the best interests and well-being of children and youth.

Stabilization of our workforce, we brought in social work students from the School of Social Work, one of the best qualified units anywhere to help us in development of social workers. We bring those in now as students and initiate the process. We bring them in as –

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 Abell report was in 2008. It is just about 2014, six years. She said three to five years to have everything in place, so obviously your department is still behind.

Recommendation 13 of the Turner report says that when a child may be in need of protection the worker must seek out and document all relevant information. Recommendation 3 of yesterday's report says that social workers must complete comprehensive assessments. John was left at risk throughout 2010 into 2011 and no one picked up on the red flags.

I ask the minister: Again, the recommendations are seven years apart, why wasn't it fixed?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Susan Abell report was in December, 2008. It was in 2009, fiscal year of 2009-2010 when

this government took the initiative to begin the development of a standalone Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. It was in 2011 before social workers who previously worked under health authorities began to come into the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. The last one did not come in until 2012.

What was said was it is going to take three to five years to develop that department, not from 2008 but from the time the department was first established. We are following that process because one of the things Susan Abell talked about was quick fixes are not going to fix anything. That it takes a long sustained, concerted and sustained focus to make this department work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, Recommendation 15 of the Turner report from 2006 states that when a worker assumes responsibility of a child from another worker, the worker must be informed.

Recommendation 10 of the Advocate's report yesterday states, "...when a child or youth is being transferred from one program area to another, a meeting..." should be held to transfer the client's information. Again, it is all about sharing information on the case of a child.

I ask the minister: Why is there still not collaboration seven years later?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again the hon. member opposite, with all due respect, is failing to recognize that the events and recommendations leading up to this report are events prior to the fall of 2011, which

led up to a tragedy in the fall of 2011. That is what the recommendations are based upon.

Mr. Speaker, in the formation of the department following the clinical service review that was (inaudible), this was a significant piece of work. Nothing like it has ever happened before in Newfoundland and Labrador. Some of the other recommendations that were made were on training and development, and I have referenced that in the good work we are doing in training; and quality improvement, we are doing that. We have a quality unit now. We have an audit process that is compulsory. We have increased our zone managers from five to thirteen. We have increased the number of supervisors for each team throughout –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Last month, the Baie Verte Miners' Registry team of miners, experts, and community representatives, wrote to the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador asking that miners' claims for all asbestos-related diseases be eligible for Workers' Compensation. Today, the minister announced publicly that he will not make a decision about legislative changes. He will just let the process unfold.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Why did he choose to go out in public to make his announcement rather than give the team the courtesy of a reply to their letter?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, our government strongly advocates for fair treatment and compensation for injured workers in this Province and workers who are facing occupational diseases. We have worked very closely with the community of Baie Verte, we have worked very closely with the United Steelworkers, and we have worked very closely with the commission to go through a process. That is the process I am referring to.

We established a registry a former miners that captures their health and their work history, Mr. Speaker. It is going to help in the adjudication of their claims. We have over 1,000 former miners registered to date. We have adjudicated 177 claims. We have seventy-four claims we have ruled in favour of –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Most Baie Verte miners receive more exposure to asbestos in months than the law permits for a lifetime, but only 36 per cent of miners who register with medically verified asbestos-related diseases have been compensated. They have been waiting for many years.

Why does the minister continue to deny former miners the right to compensation for diseases recognized as caused by working in the Baie Verte mine?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to adjudicate claims on a case-by-case basis based on the merit of individual claims. We will base it on the best scientific and medical

evidence available that is out there in the purview in this area. All jurisdictions in Canada and around the world follow these protocols.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government does not need to make any changes to legislation to ask WHSCC to reconsider the rejected claims of sick miners.

I ask the minister: When will he instruct the compensation board to change its policies concerning asbestos claims?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, we rely on professionals to make these decisions. We rely on professionals to adjudicate these cases. Once again, Mr. Speaker, we do it on the best evidence available, medical and scientific. We will continue to do so on a case-by-case basis.

Some claims are not adjudicated in favour of the workers, for various reasons. Various reasons, including some where there was a lack of medical evidence, is one of the areas that you would go down.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing some good work around this. We work very closely with all of the parties involved and we are moving forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The team that wrote the minister had very specific requests, and he has not bothered to respond to them.

I want to know: What does the minister intend to do about all of the rejected claims, and the sick miners, if government will not introduce legislation? He has a responsibility to these people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, we take these claims very seriously. We want to do what is right for the workers of Baie Verte. We will continue to do good work around this.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we will adjudicate these claims; the commission will adjudicate these claims based on the best scientific and medical evidence in front of them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, we are facing the worst housing crisis in our Province's history and the victims are growing. The sexual exploitation report that government tried to hide for years told us of young people having to sell their bodies for sex so they could have a place to sleep.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services: What is he concretely going to do to help our vulnerable youth who have nowhere to live and who are begging for help?

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, at various times during this sitting of the House we have recognized the challenges that we have in various parts of the Province, including Labrador, in regard to affordable housing. We have invested in the past, heavily, through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and various other programs across two or three departments in assisting people with affordable housing challenges.

We are going to continue to do that and work with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing through me, as being the minister responsible, to address the issue. As a matter of fact, it was only this morning, Mr. Speaker, that I met with the Combined Councils of Labrador. The subject that we spoke about the most was affordable housing in Labrador. I have committed to go to Nain next Thursday to meet with the local government and work on that issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: These are young people who have nowhere to live, Mr. Speaker. The Child and Youth Advocate's report, that government could not hide, says youth are not given proper supports for living in the community. Youth agencies are saying the same thing. They are swamped with youth whose lives are at risk, and they cannot keep up with the demands right now.

I ask the minister: What is he going to do?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, as I just referenced, we are going to continue to address this issue. It is a challenge; it is not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador. It is prevalent right across all jurisdictions in Canada, as well as the United States.

In the meantime, we have invested heavily in youth since we took government in 2003, and will continue to do that.

They have my assurance that I, as the minister responsible for housing in Newfoundland and Labrador, will work closely with our youth in our Province to make sure that we can address their issues as best as we possibly can under that program, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, during Question Period, the Minister for Child, Youth and Family Services referred to and quoted from a document upon questioning.

We would ask that he immediately table the document.

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

Tabling of Documents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

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 current government regulations deny busing services to students who live closer than 1.6 kilometres to school; and

WHEREAS parents have expressed concern that children living within 1.6 kilometres of school face dangers in walking to school, such as congested streets and busy intersections, especially during winter weather conditions; and

WHEREAS the \$75,000 review of the school transportation system completed by Deloitte recommended that the Department of Education consider reducing the 1.6 kilometre eligibility zone for kindergarten and elementary students; and

WHEREAS the \$75,000 Deloitte report also noted that only 10 per cent of those surveyed for the school transportation system review agree that the current 1.6 kilometre policy is reasonable for students and families; and

WHEREAS parents are continuing to demand more flexible policies to meet the current needs of school children;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to change the outdated 1.6 kilometre school busing eligibility policy in order to ensure safe travel to school for primary and elementary school children in the Province.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, this is a petition that I have presented on a number of different occasions. Members opposite and members on this side will certainly recall that I had a different petition when we came into the House of Assembly in 2012 about getting a review of the school transportation system.

Thankfully the Minister of Education listened. He listened to the petitioners and he did a review. The review has been done. The results are pretty clear.

I am going to say, Mr. Speaker, and I say to the Minister of Education the next time we get a dirty day and the buses are on the road, I invite the Minister of Education to come up with me. We will start 1.6 kilometres from Larkhall Academy and we can walk down together, I say. He can find out what it is like, on a dirty day, to walk 1.6 kilometres to school and imagine if he is in kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, or 3.

Mr. Speaker, I offer that invitation to the Minister of Education. I will keep you advised.

Thank you very much.

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

MS DEMPSTER: 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 humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS until 2013, calcium was applied to provincially owned gravel roads in and around communities to suppress dust; and

WHEREAS dust suppression is very helpful for residents experiencing health conditions like asthma and allergies; and

WHEREAS the cost of administering the calcium program is very affordable to government; and

WHEREAS dust suppression is an effective way of improving safety for the travelling public;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, beginning in 2014, to reinstate the calcium application program on provincially owned gravel roads in and around communities.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have been up a number of times on the calcium. I will continue to get up until the House closes and I will start again in the spring session. Maybe it will be reinstated into the Budget. It is not a lot of money. I will look into it and find out what the amount was. I believe it is only something like \$300,000 that was being spent in the whole Province on calcium.

When you look at the benefits, the health benefits, you have to look at all of this interconnected. You cannot look at just one thing. If you have people with asthma and allergies, what is that costing the health care? I mentioned before a seven-year-old child the night I was in Cartwright who was medevaced out, and you look at the cost of that. It would not take very many medevacs to add up to the total cost of what it would be to reinstate calcium on our roads.

With most of the Island having paved roads, they would have very little understanding of what I am talking about. On a hot day in Labrador with a breeze of wind, you simply cannot walk on the road. While we are awaiting pavement, which might be three, four, five, or six years, this calcium was a very huge help. Even when pavement goes through, the community road right now will not be paved, so it is imperative that the money be put back into

the Budget for this calcium, Mr. Speaker, so people can go out for walks in the evening.

This is all tied in with healthy living and the benefits associated with that: type 2 diabetes; seniors who hang their clothes on the line, I mentioned yesterday, to keep their electricity rates down because they have to make choices; and the biggest of all, Mr. Speaker, is the safety of people who are walking. It is almost like a whiteout condition in the dust.

I am not exaggerating here, and I would encourage anybody to come into my district with me and I will take you for a walk on those roads and show you just how bad it is.

Thank you.

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

MR. MURPHY: 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 in the past the Town of Conception Bay South has provided space for the Conception Bay South Public Library, but will not be providing space for the library in its new town hall building; and

WHEREAS losing the provincial library means one of the fastest-growing communities in the Province, with a population of 25,000, will no longer have local library services; and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: WHEREAS a library is more than just books; it is an open community space for Internet access, online lending, children's reading programs and community events and services, which improve literacy levels, provide access to information, stimulate creativity and

innovation, and foster the development of strong communities; and

WHEREAS the Town of Conception Bay South has expressed interest in cost sharing a new site for the Conception Bay South Public Library;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to provide the necessary resources to retain the public library in Conception Bay South.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I received this petition today on behalf of the people of Conception Bay South. Signatories include people from St. John's, CBS, Mount Pearl, and there is no doubt of the importance of having a public library within a community. We all know what it does. It provides a meeting place – one of the most important things: a meeting place – for members of the community to meet each other and discuss issues.

The second thing that it provides, Mr. Speaker, that the petition talks about, is resources. We are talking about an access point, if you will, so that people, for example, if they do not have Internet access themselves or they cannot afford Internet access in their own homes, they can go to a public area and they can benefit by having the Internet services that are offered within a public library.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, this is an important resource for the people there, particularly when it came to creativity and innovation; you cannot start up a small business without doing important background research and sometimes you need a library resource to do that. In a growing town like Conception Bay South not to have a library here to help develop the small business end of things, Mr. Speaker, it deserves some thinking on the part of government.

One need only think, Mr. Speaker, at the same time – final thought on this before I present it over to the House – the final thought here is that

government made an immense cut to library resources in this last Budget. They should reconsider that and help the Town of Conception Bay South here gets its library resources back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, Private Members' Day, I now call upon the Member for St. John's South to introduce the motion on the Order Paper in his name.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will read the motion again before I start speaking to it:

BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge the government to consider following the recommendation of their own consultant, Mr. John Noseworthy, and implement a rental rate structure for Income Support clients based on regional market rates.

MR. SPEAKER: Seconded by?

MR. OSBORNE: It is seconded by the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. OSBORNE: No, it was seconded yesterday.

MR. SPEAKER: You served notice on Monday; today you are making the motion.

MR. OSBORNE: Okay.

It is seconded by the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, here is the exact wording from Mr. John Noseworthy's Business Transformation Report on that particular recommendation. His report was very eye opening. I read his report, and it touched on a number of areas and the need to improve how Income Support clients are treated.

On this particular recommendation here is his wording, "AES should have legislative capacity and budgeting flexibility to ensure that rates for such expenditures as rent are adequate in the context of current market conditions. This is subject to the budgetary process and there is no provision to increase funding for shelters unless approved. One recommendation could be to implement a rental rate structure based on regional market rates – other jurisdictions don't have this," but, remember, costs are more for rent in St. John's as opposed to Piccadilly.

He talked about in his report how different areas of the Province have different rental demands. He pointed out, in particular, the fact that St. John's has a much higher rental rate for apartments than Piccadilly does. That is the reason for this recommendation, that is the reason that he made the recommendation in his report to government, and this reason for this private member's resolution today.

Mr. Speaker, you look at the fact – and I have raised it on a number of occasions in the House – that Income Support recipients are receiving \$522 a month as a maximum family allowance to pay their rent, regardless of where they live in the Province. In some areas, Mr. Speaker, that allowance would be high enough to cover rent; in many areas, that allowance is certainly not high to cover rent.

When you are receiving a rental rate of \$522, but you are paying \$800 or \$900, or maybe \$1,000 for rent, you have to take the money from somewhere else. Generally, those clients are taking the money from food. That is a very real concern, Mr. Speaker, the fact that they are taking money from their food allowance to cover rent.

I just want to look at some of the rental rates around the Province to give a better example of why we put this private member's resolution forward, as recommended by government's own consultant, Mr. John Noseworthy.

If you look at, in St. John's, the rental rate for a two-bedroom apartment this year, the average rate, according to CMHC – and they look at the rental rates around the Province, but I am going to just touch on the five major urban areas on the Island. That is what they have covered in the report. I am not leaving out Labrador, because I know there are rental concerns in Labrador as well, but CMHC did not cover it in their report.

I will just speak to the five major urban areas on the Island. We know that in Lab West \$522 certainly is not enough. We know that in Goose Bay it is not enough, with the work on Muskrat Falls and Churchill Falls workers and so on. Mr. Speaker, it is a problem in all parts of this Province.

You look at the rental rate for St. John's being \$832 for a two bedroom apartment. Now a two bedroom apartment, I would argue, is not big enough for many families that are only receiving the \$522 maximum family allowance for rent. If their rental costs are \$832 for a two bedroom apartment, and they are only receiving \$522, that means they need to come up with \$310 from somewhere else. Where are they coming up with that? From their food allowance, Mr. Speaker, and that means they are not eating healthy. They are sending their children to school hungry, and that is a concern.

If you look at a three bedroom apartment, according to CMHC the average rental rate for a three bedroom apartment in St. John's is \$885. You take the \$522 rental allowance out of the cost of their rent at \$885, it is a \$333 shortfall. Again, where are they coming up with the \$333, Mr. Speaker? From their food allowance, and they are not eating healthy.

Bay Roberts was covered as well. For a two bedroom apartment, the rental rate there is \$634. It is a little more affordable to somebody who is only getting \$522 rental allowance. A little

more affordable, but they are still taking \$112 out of their food allowance.

You look at Corner Brook, for a two bedroom apartment it is \$626. If you take out their maximum family rental allowance of \$522, and they are short \$104 for rent. It is unbelievable that government get up and espouse what a great job they are doing on their Poverty Reduction Strategy, but they are expecting people to take \$104 in Corner Brook out of their food allowance just to cover their rent. If a family in Corner Brook is renting a three bedroom apartment, it is \$779 according to CMHC. It is the average rental rate, which means there is a shortfall of \$275.

In Gander, Mr. Speaker, which is the lowest rate for a two bedroom apartment, you are looking at \$605. So you deduct the \$522 rental allowance out of that and they are short \$83. It becomes a little more affordable for a family in Gander who only has to steal \$83 out of their food allowance to pay their rent compared to somebody in St. John's having to take \$333 out of their food allowance, but they still should not have to take \$83 out of their food allowance.

You look at a three bedroom apartment in Gander, \$678, which means there is shortfall of \$156 based on what social services provide, or Income Support it is now called, to a family renting a three bedroom apartment in Gander and needing to take \$156 out of their food allowance just to pay rent.

In Grand Falls-Windsor, Mr. Speaker, a two bedroom apartment is \$662. You deduct the \$522 that Income Support provides for rent there, and they are short \$140.

So you get the picture, Mr. Speaker, on the five urban areas on the Island. Now if you look at what Mr. John Noseworthy, government's consultant pointed out that the rent in St. John's and Piccadilly are two different stories.

There are areas in the Province, Mr. Speaker, where \$522 will cover the cost of rental for somebody on Income Support. That is their allowance and it will cover the cost of rental in

some communities in the Province. In some communities, such as Grand Falls, Windsor, Gander, Corner Brook, Bay Roberts, St. John's, Lab West, it does not cover the cost of their rent. The \$522 that Income Support provides for rent in the major urban areas certainly will not cover the cost of renting an apartment for a family in those areas.

That is why we say this private member's motion is important. What we are asking for is that government implement a rental rate structure for Income Support clients based on regional market rates. It is a very simple resolution, something that government's consultant recommended. It is something that members in our party agree with that recommendation.

We are hoping that government today will vote in favour of this, and in the upcoming Budget, Mr. Speaker, government will look at a rental rate structure for Income Support clients based on where they live as opposed to a flat rate across the Province where some people can afford to pay the rent out of the Income Support allowance that they are getting and some people cannot.

Mr. Speaker, I want to cover a couple of other areas here. Income Support rates are legislated and reviewed annually as part of the department's budget process; however, staff have identified issues – and this comes out of John Noseworthy's report as well. That staff have identified issues with such things as the current maximum rates of \$522, we just touched on that, as the allowable rate for rent.

The security deposits are another issue. Security deposits can also cause issues for clients in today's market rate. Many times most landlords require half a months rent. It varies, some landlords require less and some require more. Most landlords require half a month's rent as a damage deposit.

If you are paying \$1,000 rent for a three bedroom house in St. John's, then you require a \$500 damage deposit. Income Support is certainly not providing enough in damage

deposits either. That is not a part of today's resolution, and I understand that. We are simply looking for a rental rate structure based on the areas of the Province that people live.

Mr. Speaker, the Housing Market Outlook from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation say that we can expect an average two bedroom monthly rent to increase by the end of 2014. We have seen that. They expect it to increase from \$825 to \$875. What we are seeing is that rental rates – in areas where there is a low vacancy rate and a high demand for housing that rental rates continuously rise, but the Income Support rate does not.

Government did something else a few years ago; they took away the Consumer Price Indexing. They discontinued the indexing of Income Support rates to the Consumer Price Index. That saved government money in the Budget. There is absolutely no doubt about that, but it made it even more difficult for Income Support clients who are trying to pay rent, especially in the major urban areas in the Province.

Mr. Speaker, the spring 2013 Rental Market Report from CMHC point out that overall the average two bedroom rent was \$751 per month across the five urban centres surveyed – which were all on the Island as I explained earlier, they did not touch Labrador urban areas – with increases recorded in every centre.

The highest average two bedroom rent recorded was \$832 in St. John's. Gander recorded the lowest average rent at \$605. The remaining average two bedroom rents were \$626, \$662, and so on. Bay Roberts did not record because there were not enough apartments advertised, perhaps because the vacancy rate there was so low, but recorded a \$648 average in Bay Roberts in April, 2013.

Mr. Speaker, I talked about the fact that in areas such as St. John's where \$832 is the average rent for a two bedroom, it is certainly not a big enough apartment for many families on Income Support, but we will talk about the two-bedroom at \$832 where a family has to pay \$832.

They are only receiving a rental allowance of \$522, a shortfall of \$310. They come up with that money out of their food allowance, and they have to make a determination as to whether they put food in the fridge, keep the heat up, or pay their rent. They need a place to live so they are paying their rent, which means there is not enough food in the fridge.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at some HungerCount findings and the key HungerCount findings: 37.9 per cent of children in Newfoundland and Labrador rely on food banks. Many of those families are on Income Support. In fact, 72 per cent of families on Income Support rely on food banks according to these statistics – 72 per cent of families on Income Support.

That is what this resolution is about today: providing Income Support recipients with a rental rate based on where they live, as opposed to a flat rate across the Province. So 72 per cent of families on Income Support rely on food banks.

You talk about the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy, Mr. Speaker, and government will tell you what a great job they have done. I will agree there are some good things in the Poverty Reduction Strategy, but there are many things left out of it, such as looking at Income Support rates for rent. That has been left out of the Poverty Reduction Strategy obviously.

You look at 2008, there were 8,037 families in this Province – that is households, Mr. Speaker – 8,037 households had registered as using food banks. Keep in mind in 2008 there were 8,037 families registered as using food banks. In 2013, there were 8,923 families registered as using food banks, an increase of almost 900 families using food banks.

Now, we know that the minister is going to say –

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): I remind the hon. member his time up.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will have much more time to speak on this as I close.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased and delighted to stand in my place this afternoon, representing the great District of Port au Port, to take part in the debate on the private member's resolution as brought forward by the Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be part of a government that has done so much for the most vulnerable and, in general, for the whole population of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. When we look at the private member's resolution today, that is why we commissioned the former Auditor General of the Province, John Noseworthy, to do some work for the Department of Advanced Education and Skills.

Mr. Speaker, the report that came back was called the Business Transformation Report, and I want to take a bit of time to talk about the report itself. A review was done on the departments, programs, and services. The subsequent report outlined numerous recommendations to improve the services that we provide to the people of the Province.

I want to assure you that the department executive meets each quarter to review the status of the implementation commitments. We have implemented or plan to implement the majority of the report's recommendations, Mr. Speaker; that is very important. We take every report that we commission very serious, because it does affect the people of the Province.

Some examples of the transformation activities completed, Mr. Speaker, include a new integrated case management system that is currently being developed that will provide enhanced services for individual clients and

third-party service providers. The new system will also improve efficiencies in the delivery of departmental programs and services.

Another activity, Mr. Speaker, is one-stop employment centres. As you know, Advanced Education and Skills has streamlined employment services throughout the Province, which has resulted in a single point of entry and eliminated the need for citizens to visit multiple sites to access these services.

Other initiatives that are underway: new case management models being developed for all Advanced Education and Skills clients. The model, Mr. Speaker, will enhance the services offered through the employment centres, and include components such as standardized employment and counselling approaches, documentation standards, and monitoring and follow-up.

Several new online tools, Mr. Speaker, have also been introduced to enhance services to clients and include the following: a new employment and training assessment tool to assist in determining the most appropriate supports for individuals. Since its inception, over 3,800 people have completed the assessment that will assist in developing and implementing an employment plan.

Mr. Speaker, new employment workshops have also been created and, to date, over 2,300 individuals participated in online workshops on topics such as career planning process, employment readiness and retention, skills assessment, labour market information, job search process and methods, and also an overview of the AES programs, what we have to offer, the services and the application processes that are needed and required. We are putting the tools out there to help assist our people to achieve or acquire employment that will put money in their pockets, Mr. Speaker.

The report also talked about the four wage subsidy programs having merged into one program called JobsNL, with online access, and approximately 400 individuals have availed of the online application. JobsNL is again easy

access where the people of Newfoundland and Labrador can go to one site to find out what opportunities are out there for employment in the Province and outside the Province as well. So we are very pleased with that.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about rental for Income Support clients. This government has invested substantially in social housing and many more people today than ever before are able to access social housing in the Province. In addition to funding provided to Advanced Education and Skills clients, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation provides funds and they fund a Rental Supplement Program for low-income individuals and families.

Mr. Speaker, it is worthy to note that we are the only government in twenty-five years that doubled the rent supplement funding for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation from \$4 million to \$8 million per year. This government is fully cognizant of the needs of low-income people in our Province. We are continually providing and improving programs and services to address these social housing needs.

Mr. Noseworthy's report provided 158 recommendations, and the department is doing diligent work necessary to assess and implement many of these recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, when you talk about Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation and how it assists seniors in our Province, we look at the programs. Since the program began in 2004, approximately 547 seniors have been assisted through the Investment in Affordable Housing program, IAH, which has created 800 new affordable housing units throughout the Province in the last five years, 95 per cent of which are occupied by low-income seniors. The units were created in partnership with non-profit community groups and the private sector as well.

Mr. Speaker, 86 per cent or 2,650 of clients assisted under the 2012-2013 Provincial Home Repair Program were seniors with low incomes. This program has helped them make renovations

and repairs to continue living comfortably in their own homes. When we talk about affordable housing and housing, it is important yes that we talk about those who rent, but we also encourage people to stay in their own homes. That is why we are providing these programs and an increase in these programs so that they can stay in their own homes. I think that is dignity. I think that is the right thing to do, if we can keep people in their own homes as well. We are very proud of the investments we make in this.

Mr. Speaker, this past fiscal year Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, through their Home Modification Program, has assisted approximately 358 seniors with low to moderate incomes make accessibility modifications to their homes. That is very important as well, if we are to encourage our seniors and our most vulnerable to stay in their own homes. We have to make it accessible as well. We are investing heavily in that as well.

MR. SPEAKER: I am going to ask the hon. member to link some of this to the amendment.

MR. CORNETT: It is all linked, Mr. Speaker. It is all linked to housing.

Mr. Speaker, Province-wide, the Rental Supplement Program provides a total of 1,732 affordable private sector rental units to households with low incomes. The majority of these households are seniors with an average age of sixty plus.

Mr. Speaker, when we are talking about the vulnerable, the seniors, or even myself, we are all people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is very important to note today as well.

Through the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation's own social housing portfolio of the 5,556 units Province-wide, 34 per cent house seniors who are sixty plus. As well, all seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation's social housing units are eligible for heat subsidies. So, Mr. Speaker, when we give these subsidies we are putting

monies back in the pockets of our people. That is very important to note.

The Residential Energy Efficiency Program provides grants to mostly senior homeowners as well – 83 per cent of the applicants are seniors – to help them make energy retrofits to their homes. That is very important. If we have a home that is retrofitted and it is energy efficient, that again is putting money back in the pockets of our people, and that is very important.

Mr. Speaker, it was referenced earlier about the Poverty Reduction Strategy of our government. That is something that is the cornerstone, a milestone, the envy of the country. The provincial poverty strategy is a comprehensive, integrated and long-term approach to prevent, reduce, and alleviate poverty in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When we took office, Newfoundland and Labrador ranked the eighth-lowest with poverty levels in the country. Today, Mr. Speaker, because of our strategy and investments in our people and in our communities and our families, we are now the third-lowest in Canada, and I can tell you we are going to be number one with the lowest in the country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Mr. Speaker, the goal of the Poverty Reduction Strategy is to improve the health, the living conditions, the education, the incomes, and the overall well-being of vulnerable people throughout the Province. That is the heart and guts of this Province, looking out for our people of the Province. That is what we are all about on this side. That is why a lot of our services and programs reflect that; reflect the needs of our people.

Mr. Speaker, I am ever so proud to be part of a government that looks after the people of the Province; that is the number one priority. In whatever we do, the needs of the people of the Province are always number one with us as a government.

Before our Poverty Reduction Strategy was in place, Newfoundland and Labrador had an incidence of poverty that was above the national average, as I said. Today, we are below the national average and our poverty strategy is considered a model. Mr. Speaker, imagine; our Poverty Reduction Strategy is a model to other parts of the country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: All of these initiatives in the Poverty Reduction Strategy are putting money back into the pockets of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and more so, is enhancing services of programs that our people can avail of to make them proud, Mr. Speaker, to be a part of this beautiful Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, our government has always known that fighting poverty would be challenging. There is no doubt about that. Fighting poverty is challenging and we recognize that poverty is a complex issue. There is no denying that. That is why we are taking a long-term integrated approach in how to combat poverty in the Province, and I think it is working. We have seen the results. We have come from eight to third and we are on the move. We are a like a football team, we are marching down the field, but in this case we are marching up the field.

A key part of our Poverty Reduction Strategy is to ensure that future generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are afforded every opportunity to be successful and to contribute to the Province's prosperity. We only have to look to the future and the things we have done. The future of this Province has never been brighter and we want to give every opportunity to every Newfoundlander and Labradorian to access and to avail of those services, those programs, and those jobs so they can live in prosperity as well.

Mr. Speaker, addressing poverty issues is the balance of opportunity for all. It is truly an essential part of being a prosperous Province, no doubt about that. Moving forward to provide strong social programming, including initiatives

to prevent, reduce, and alleviate poverty, our government is making significant investments to help people vulnerable to poverty.

Budget 2013, just to look at our Poverty Reduction Strategy again, provided nearly \$149 million to continue the important efforts under the strategy so we can become that prosperous people we talk about every day that this government has the vision and believes in.

MR. SPEAKER: I remind the hon. member his speaking time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to be able to get up today and speak in support of the private member's resolution, and I am just going to quote it again, "BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge Government to consider following the recommendation of their own consultant, Mr. John Noseworthy, and implement a rental rate structure for income support clients based on regional market rates."

Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about here today is the basic necessities of life: shelter; that is what we are talking about. Safe and sound housing is key to surviving and thriving in a community. Homelessness is a spectrum from living in abusive relationships, for lack of somewhere to go, or couch surfing, to living on the streets.

Mr. Speaker, in Labrador we are certainly seeing increased numbers. Sadly, you have this going on in places where wealth is increasing, like my colleague would be familiar with in Goose Bay. It is growing exponentially. There is a housing problem, and you have people who cannot afford – the Income Support rate that we are talking about here is just not sufficient. We are always talking about how we are a have Province, but people are constantly being left

behind and that is what we want to raise awareness of here today.

Anyone who has looked for an apartment lately knows that the maximum rate of \$522 for a family is an absurd amount to secure safe and sound housing. We know, Mr. Speaker, that overall the provincial vacancy rates are down and this is stats that confirmed for us that it is much, much harder to get a place to live.

Now, the \$522, Mr. Speaker, that is for a family. The rate for individuals is only \$372. When we look at apartments right now in Labrador, where people are paying \$2,500 a month, and we have a rental rate in place of \$522 – I was never really strong at math, but it is easy to do the math here; we have a serious problem on our hands.

The average for a two-bedroom in St. John's is over \$800 a month. When you look at the wide disparity between the \$2,500 a month in certain places in Labrador and the \$800 a month in St. John's, clearly one size do not fit all. Clearly, we cannot say to someone on Income Support here is your monthly rental rate, take it and pay your rent. It is much better use of the money if we look at a regional rental rate structure, just as John Noseworthy recommended in his report.

I just want to quote him, the exact wording from John Noseworthy's Business Transformation Report. He said, "AES should have legislative capacity and budgeting flexibility to ensure that rates for such expenditures as rent are adequate in the context of current market conditions." That is what we are talking about here today, Mr. Speaker, the wide variances in the market in what people are paying across this Province.

The Income Support rates are legislated, we know, and reviewed annually as part of the department's budget process; however, staff have identified issues with such things as the current maximum rates for rent. Staff who are dealing with this every single day are very aware because staff are the people that these people on Income Support are coming to, continuously, many of them and looking for emergency money.

In the fall of 2013 the housing market outlook from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation said expect the average two-bedroom monthly rent to increase to \$825 by the end of this year and to \$875 in 2014. We see, Mr. Speaker, that the rate increases are going to continue.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about, for a minute, the rates and how people are having to take from their food money to help pay their rent. I want to talk about when you are left with not enough money for proper food. There have been many studies done on the connection between poverty and health, strong links between poverty and health. Low-income, we know, Mr. Speaker, is a primary detriment of health. Poverty is making Canadians sick, leading to widespread preventable illnesses and creating huge costs for our health care.

I believe in Newfoundland and Labrador we are spending close to forty cents of every dollar from our Budget in health care. Mr. Speaker, we need to look at this as a full, inclusive picture and not just separate departments and see how they are all intertwined, and see how giving people more money to be able to afford to eat properly will decrease the risk of some of these health issues and save the taxpayer when it comes to health care in the Province.

Some groups are more vulnerable to poverty than others: mother-led, single-parent families, First Nations and Aboriginal people, and people with disabilities. I want to mention that because sometimes – we know it is a fact that Aboriginal people are more likely to develop chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes. The cost that diabetes is having on our health care is absolutely staggering, the financial burden, and that is going to continue to grow and escalate.

When compared to 20 per cent of Canadians with the highest income, 20 per cent of Canadians with the lowest income – and I am talking about these diseases because they are directly linked with the healthy eating, and that is directly linked to not having enough money to eat if you are using your food money to pay rent – are more than two times as likely to have

diabetes or heart disease, more than two times as likely to have two or more chronic health conditions, more than three times as likely to have bronchitis, and nearly two times as likely to have arthritis or rheumatism, and 358 times more likely to have a disability.

Poverty, as we can see, has a very high cost for health. I could go on, Mr. Speaker, in this area and talk about the limited social and cognitive development in the early years that we see when people do not have enough money to meet their basic living needs, barriers to recreation and social inclusion, and nutritionally deprived food environments. You end up with higher rates of obesity in low-income populations.

Also, we know that when people are living in poverty – we are talking about the many obstacles in making good health choices. The choices people make are shaped by the choices that they have, Mr. Speaker. In low-income neighbourhoods there are few options available for healthy eating, sports, and recreation. We know that some neighbourhoods are not safe and then we can talk about the stress associated with poverty, how isolating that is and the cost surrounding that.

Oftentimes, your postal code may be more important, Mr. Speaker, than your genetic code when determining your health. Where you live influences your health. We are seeing, Mr. Speaker, people are being forced to make choices to take mould infested, unhealthy living arrangements because at \$525 you cannot afford very much. We know that research shows that people who live in low-income neighbourhoods are more likely to be hospitalized for heart attacks, and mental health problems.

Just to clue up the health aspect that I am talking about, Mr. Speaker, simply put, the better off you are the healthier you are and the less health care that you use. I am just trying to state the case that it is all intertwined.

Children who live in poverty often do not get a good start in life. The conditions of early childhood life set the stage for health across their lifespan. Children living in poor families

have much higher rates of illness and disability. We know that children who experience persistent poverty are at an even greater risk than children who experience sporadic and or short-term poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I can think back to many houses that I went to in the spring. Often we ride in and out of communities and we rarely drive through every street in town or go door to door, but when you are campaigning you do that. I saw firsthand at many doors, the lowest income people, the people on Income Support, that was where you saw the frying pan on the stove. That was where you saw things in the garbage container, very, very unhealthy choices, and high in salt, fat, sodium. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker?

We are paying, in some of the places in my area, almost \$6 for a carton for milk when you can go out and get a two litre of Pepsi for half the price. This is one of the reasons we want to bring in a rental rate structure, Mr. Speaker, because health is a prerequisite for economic productivity and prosperity. Any time you can prevent, that is a good investment.

I want to quote the Conference Board of Canada that released a report: Healthy People, Healthy Performance, Healthy Profits. That report concluded, “Well-targeted investments in preventative measures have the potential to produce long-term cost savings through reduced demand on health care services....” Merging economic and health policies, they just make sense, Mr. Speaker. They go hand in hand.

The boarding house fire on Springdale Street, Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing about here in the House the last couple of days. This illustrates that the current government is failing children in care, but the poor as well. We see emerging from this story people with complex needs, mental health and addiction issues, and in the mix of all of that a boy of sixteen, all forced to live under the same roof; adults who had their own issues, a young boy who had his issues. Then you put all of that under one roof, because where are you going with \$500 of rental rate on

Income Support? You cannot get an apartment anywhere in the Province right now for that rate.

We get calls from constituents, Mr. Speaker, living in flooded out, mould-infested apartments, as I mentioned earlier. They cannot go anywhere else. Their choice is heavily compromised by poverty.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Port au Port talked about the wonderful things they are doing in employment, in case management, in counselling. I have to comment on that, Mr. Speaker, because I live in a district where we had six offices that were providing employment-related services. We were helping people. Sometimes people need extra hand holding. We were doing that with people. We were helping them move from Income Support into the job market and we were helping them move from unemployed to employment.

What is happening now, Mr. Speaker? I have communities in my area where people will have to drive 600 kilometres on a gravel road if they want to see a face-to-face dialogue.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS DEMPSTER: I hear the member from across the way, but I am just responding to what I heard when I was sitting down before I stood up.

I just want to say that, too, is having a negative impact. Removing the human face of all of the employment counselling and picking up a phone or going online and filling out a client assessment is not a replacement for that, in any way, shape, or form. Counselling is such a sensitive nature. People are making life choices, sometimes forty-five and fifty-five. Picking up a phone is not the answer. In two or three years, I have said it many times and I will say it again, my fear is when the labour market has never been stronger we are going to have more people on Income Support.

We talk a lot here in the House about the services now that are online. The Member for Port au Port referenced the services available

online. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have many communities in my district that cannot go online. It was brought to my attention yesterday by a constituent in a community where they could always go into the school and use the Internet; they can no longer do that now. We have to be very mindful when we are bringing in changes that those changes are going to be able to benefit everyone, and not just some people in more urban or the larger rural areas.

To follow up on that, one more point on the closing of the EAS. I travel home to Labrador most weekends. This particular weekend, Mr. Speaker, I met a lady in the airport in Blanc-Sablon. Her son is gone to Fort McMurray because he could not get work here and he did not know where to call to find work because the offices are gone.

Every single day in my office I have a call from somebody who needs help, trying to reach somebody about Income Support, needing help with a resume, or something of that nature. We live on the Coast of Labrador in a rural area and the nearest place for them to call right now is Goose Bay, although there is one person serving twenty communities centred in the middle of that district. People are not travelling to her because of the distance and the barriers.

Mr. Speaker, AES staff told John Noseworthy that the rate was not enough. Many people on Income Support constantly apply for emergency funding to get by. We have the highest percentage of people using food banks, twice the national average, with 11,000 kids in our Province living on food banks. Newfoundland has the fourth-highest rate in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we have put forth a resolution that certainly needs to be considered today and we need to obviously change how we are doing things right now because it is not working.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it certainly is a pleasure for me to stand in this hon. House once again and to share some thoughts on this private member's motion today. Mr. Speaker, let me say right off the bat, I believe there is one particular issue being referenced in the private member's motion. That is about rental rates in different parts of the Province, but I think it does tie into a much broader picture.

I was very pleased that you have been allowing latitude here this afternoon discussing it. The member opposite talked about everything from recreation, food, health, drugs and so on, and that is great. There is not much there that I would argue with, there really is not. I am glad you are allowing that latitude. I did not hear the Member for St. John's South talking about relevance when she was speaking, so I hope he not going to do the same as he did to my colleague who was up before.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, we are very fortunate in this Province, we truly are. We are in a place now that we have never been before in our history in terms of the development we see around us, in terms of the new home starts, in terms of our economy, in terms of the wages that we see, the second-highest average wage in the country. The highest disposable income we ever had, the lowest rate of unemployment we ever had in our Province. That is certainly attributed to a number of things. Primarily, I think, the great deals that our government has signed and the great investments our government has made.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, we also realize that there are people in our society who are vulnerable. It is the vulnerable people in our society that this private member's resolution really speaks to in particular. I think we all recognize that. This is not a new phenomenon, unfortunately not. I think we would all wish here that everybody was doing great. I think there is nobody in this House who would not like to see a situation where everybody was doing great.

The reality of it is, if you look today, or if you look at twenty years ago, if you look at fifty years ago or a hundred years ago, we have always had vulnerable people in our society, but as government, as leaders on all sides of the House, we all have a responsibility. We all have a responsibility to stand up for those in need, stand up for the most vulnerable, and certainly from a government's perspective to continually work to improve on programs and services to address the needs of the vulnerable. I believe, Mr. Speaker, the people who elected us feel as well that we have that responsibility because as a society that is certainly how by and large we all feel.

If you look at the generous spirits of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians when it comes to charity, helping others, and helping their neighbours, we see that as a common thread throughout our communities and throughout our history. I really believe the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have an expectation for all of us that we continuously work on improving programs and services for all the population but in particular, I believe, for the most vulnerable in our society.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that is something we all believe; we believe it on this side of the House and I am sure they believe it on that side of the House. The Member for St. John's Centre is up all the time talking about these issues. I would say to her she does not own the monopoly on caring about people and caring about the vulnerable. We all do.

MS ROGERS: Well, then show it.

MR. LANE: We do show it all the time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, she has already started her heckling as she heckled my colleague before. It is interesting how when we are talking about an issue of this seriousness and she wants to stand up all the time on her soapbox and pretend that she is the only one who cares about the vulnerable, but when we are actually here to discuss it in a serious way then she decides that she wants to start heckling. Anyway, I will leave that to her constituents to make that

judgement as to whether that is a good thing or not.

MR. KENT: At least she is showing up these days.

MR. LANE: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, this particular private member's resolution speaks to the Noseworthy report. Certainly, it was this government who brought in former Auditor General Mr. Noseworthy, a very qualified individual. You could certainly not argue the man's credentials. We brought him in to look at the newly formed Department of Advanced Education and Skills and to look at the programs and services that were being offered to people in our Province, in particular the most vulnerable people in our Province.

The government accepted 158 of Mr. Noseworthy's recommendations coming from that report. In discussions that I have had, Mr. Speaker, with the officials in the department, I am advised that 90 per cent of those recommendations have either been implemented already or they are in various stages of review and/or implementation – 90 per cent. I think that is very important to note.

I think it is also very important to note that the private member's motion and the issue or the particular recommendation that has been referenced today as it relates to rental subsidies in various areas of the Province is included amongst those recommendations. It is certainly something this government is taking very seriously and something we are very pleased to be able to do. I think it is a very good recommendation. I think it addresses a very important need in our Province.

There is no doubt when we talk about the prosperity, Mr. Speaker, that we are experiencing it depends on where you go. I think we all recognize that. There are certain areas of the Province which are feeling the boom more than other areas of the Province. That is not to be unexpected.

Generally speaking, this is the capital city and the capital city region. I think it is just a natural

phenomenon that happens in these types of situations, whether it is through oil and gas or other developments that are occurring. The businesses and the developments tend to go in the capital city region. Whether you like that or not, sometimes people maybe in some of the other areas might say: Why don't they come here? I would like to have some of this so we would have more businesses; paying business tax would help our municipalities, and so on. Sure they would like it, absolutely.

MR. SPEAKER: I remind the hon. member to tie this to the resolution.

MR. LANE: I am tying in, Mr. Speaker. I am trying very hard to tie it in. I really appreciate the latitude that you have been giving on this. You certainly gave a lot of it over there and I am glad that you are doing this and it is great. I really appreciate it.

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible). Tell it to the Speaker.

MR. LANE: Mr. Speaker, I think the point is very relevant because –

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible).

MR. LANE: Now the Member for Bay of Islands is chirping again. I do not know why. I never even mentioned him today, but I will give you a shout out. The Member for Bay of Islands, there you go.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at that we recognize that not all areas are going to feel the same boom, but when you get the boom in certain areas because of development, because of natural resource development perhaps – and certainly we have seen Long Harbour where we have a big project going on out there. We have seen Bull Arm. Now we are having one at the White Rose Extension in Argenta, and of course the capital city region. We look at Lab West and Happy Valley-Goose Bay, I believe the Member for St. John's Centre referenced, or maybe it was the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

Because of those hotspots, I will call them, what happens is that the real estate market all of a sudden moves upward, in an upward trajectory in comparison to the hotspots in the areas where we are seeing all the development. We have seen that. While we have always had situations where there have been vulnerable people who are struggling for housing, in boom times that is magnified even greater and you see rents and so on start to go upwards. That is what happens.

It is certainly evident in the City of St. John's. It is certainly evident in the City of Mount Pearl. It is certainly evident in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. It is certainly evident in Lab City. Even areas in, say, Arnold's Cove and those areas, we have heard stories where someone may have been renting a basement apartment, they might have been paying \$300 or \$400 a month or whatever the case might be, and now all of a sudden because we have Long Harbour, because we have Bull Arm in full swing, and you have workers at that site requiring housing who are making very high salaries, the landlord decides to up the rent, to double the rent, triple the rent, or whatever the case might be.

Some people might call that gouging. Other people might say: Do you know what? It is their house, it is their investment, and they are taking advantage of the opportunity to get a great return on that asset and on that investment they have made. I guess it depends on your philosophy on that and where you stand on it.

Nonetheless, it is happening. As a result of that, people who are on low incomes, whether they are people who are in receipt of Income Support, whether they are senior citizens, single parents and so on, Mr. Speaker, those people now find themselves in a situation where they can no longer afford, or find it is more difficult to afford, certainly – maybe we could argue and argue that they cannot afford to live in an apartment any more. They just cannot afford it.

In order to stay there they either have to take money that they would be using for something else, as has been referenced, to pay their rent; or they have to find alternative living arrangements, which means possibly a

downgrade in the actual place where they are living because that is all they can afford. Maybe they have to move out the area where they were living to another area where it is cheaper to live; but, in doing so, then there are challenges around not being close to family and things like that, which I have heard referenced.

In that regard, I think there has to be recognition, and Mr. Noseworthy has said that there needs to be a recognition, of the fact that while \$522, I think, is the amount for a family, or \$299 for a single person, while that may potentially work – he said Piccadilly. I did not use Piccadilly; those were his words, but it could be any other small rural community that maybe is not doing so well, you can get a place. That is not going to cut it in the City of St. John's. It is not going to cut it in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. It is not going to cut it in Labrador City, and there are many other places where it is just not going to cut it.

What he has said in the report is that government, through the Department of AES, or Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, needs to recognize that and needs to look at the way that rent supplements are allocated and perhaps adjust the amounts based on what it costs to live in a particular area.

I am not adverse to that idea, absolutely not, and I do not think our government is adverse to that idea. We have accepted that recommendation. The department is, as I said, in the process of reviewing these things. They have implemented a number of things. I am pretty confident there are some other things that are going to be implemented. Anything we can do, Mr. Speaker – I have thirty seconds left – as a government –

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: Mr. Speaker, the Member for – it does not even matter where he is from.

AN HON. MEMBER: Bay of Islands.

MR. LANE: Bay of Islands, there you go.

AN HON. MEMBER: Terry Loder's member.

MR. LANE: Yes, Terry Loder's member. The Member for the Bay of Islands is over there chirping again.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: Let me say, anything that we can do as a government to help the most vulnerable in our society we are on board for those people, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I am very happy to stand in this House and speak to this motion. What I find quite amazing is to have the Member for Mount Pearl South describe what we do in this House as standing on a soapbox. How disrespectful to accuse those of us who stand and speak about the lives of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and relegate that to standing on a soapbox.

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

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South, on a point of order.

MR. LANE: Mr. Speaker, I never said that all members get up here and stand on a soapbox. I said the Member for St. John's Centre gets up here all the time and stands on her soapbox.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I proudly stand here in this House to talk about this motion because this motion is not about a house. This motion is not about a cheque that someone might get from Income Support. This motion is about the lives of families right across Newfoundland and Labrador.

We are in the worst housing crisis ever in the history of our Province and this government for nine years have sat back and watched it happen. They have watched it happen. They have watched the housing situation unravel, and they have watched how it has affected the lives of men, women, and children all over the Province. That is what we are talking about here right now.

We are talking about people living in poverty, in absolute abject poverty, because the amount of money that is given to people so that they can live in a house, so that they can have a roof over their heads, leaves them sometimes with a \$170 or less per month to feed their children, to clothe their children, to make sure that there is a computer and Internet so that their children can do their homework. We know that those are important things; none of those things are frills.

Having a house over your head is not a frill, it is a basic human right, and to talk about it as if this is a soapbox is absolutely disgraceful. Again, this government has watched the housing crisis come to the head that it has come to at this point. We have to say as a society: What is acceptable? What is an acceptable level of poverty for our people? Is there an acceptable level of poverty? Obviously this government is closing its eyes. It is not listening to the people and saying it is acceptable for people to live in poverty.

What is that acceptable level of poverty? I want to know that. We know that people cannot find adequate housing and affordable housing. It means that we are relegating families to below the basic necessities they need in order to be able to thrive.

We are not talking about just warehousing people, Mr. Speaker. Let's look at the situation of a single mom making minimum wage. If she has a child or two children under the age of six, she has to get child care as well. There is no possible way. She would take home maybe about \$350 a week. That adds up to about \$1,400 a month. We know for her to adequately house her two children she is going to have to pay at least \$1,000 in rent – at least. That leaves \$400, for what?

We know that child care is an average of \$800 to \$1,000 a month. She cannot do it. She cannot take a minimum wage job so she has to rely on Income Support. If she cannot get housing because we know that there is a waiting list for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and it is fine for the government to say that there are only 800 people.

That is 800, some are individuals, some are families, but those people may have been on that waiting list for two years, possibly three years. Mr. Speaker, once you are on the waiting list for a year, after a year you fall off and you have to reapply. We really do not know the number of people in our Province who are under housed, who are precariously housed. That is what this is about. This is about people's lives.

The Canadian Medical Association did a nationwide study and consultation and came up with a document that talked about the social determinants of health. One of the key areas they identified was housing. Housing was one of the key social determinants to health. If you do not have a place to live, you cannot work. If you do not have a place to live, you cannot go to school. If you do not have a decent place to live, you cannot be healthy; you cannot thrive.

Mr. Speaker, if this government does not do something about the current housing crisis, and does not do something about the amount of money that is allocated – not given, but allocated.... One of the reasons we are in this housing crisis is because of the prosperity we are experiencing, but also because it has been unmanaged. There are increasing numbers of victims who are negatively affected by this

housing crisis. The number of victims who are being affected is increasing, and it is seniors, it is single people, it is low-income families, it is working families, it is people with mental health issues, it is people who have been in prison, and it is some of our most vulnerable people.

Again, Mr. Speaker, what is happening is that we are seeing the middle class and the working poor are the ones who are also getting really squeezed by this housing crisis. So we are talking again about people's lives. We are talking about people who, for whatever reason, have to be on Income Support and who may end up trying to feed and clothe their children on a few hundred dollars a month because they have to go into their food budgets in order to be able to afford decent housing.

Is it okay? Mr. Speaker, do we think it is okay that families do not have money to give their children music lessons? Is it okay that families do not have money to put their son or daughter into hockey or into soccer? Is it okay if they do not have any money to buy soccer equipment? Is it okay that there are families who cannot afford to give their children some of the most basic things?

Once again, the Minister of Finance said: We are in a golden age. That is what he said: We are in a golden age. Yet when we are looking at the particular people whose lives we are looking at with this particular motion, these people do not feel that golden age, not at all, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine being a mother or a father and only having a few hundred dollars to feed and clothe your family? You have to decide whether or not you will have Internet, whether you will have cable, and whether there is going to be a phone. It is not possible; it is virtually impossible.

On the other side of the House here, how many times do members say you have to get with reality and you have to be realistic? This is the reality of the lives of these people, people who are Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and who should be sharing in the prosperity. This housing crisis did not happen overnight. This

government watched the housing crisis happen and decided to do nothing about it.

There is no rent stabilization. There has been consultation on it, but we still have not seen any kind of report from that. We know we have increases of families, a huge increase of families, now visiting food banks, families who may never, ever have had to do that before. Do you know how hard that is? Then for a parent to drag their kid along with them as they go to the food bank because there is not enough money, because the rent is so expensive they do not have enough money to feed their families.

Mr. Speaker, if people who have to rely on Income Support and who have to somehow find housing, rent a place to live for their family out of their Income Support, and then are left with only a few hundred dollars a month to feed, clothe, and take care of their families, then we are going to have kids who are living in destitution. We have kids who are living below the poverty line. We have kids who do not have access to things that help them thrive, things like music lessons that should not be a frill. That helps give kids what they need in order to be able to succeed in life. It means making our children equal citizens, the same as their peers when they go to school.

We can afford to do this. We have to afford to do this. If we are in a golden age, the fact that we have families who must live on a few hundred dollars a month because of a housing crisis, that is not a golden age. That is not what prosperity is and that is not what fairness is. That is not what equality is and we know it. We know that, Mr. Speaker.

Minimum wage does not take care of it. I do not know what the member earlier today was talking about when he kept talking about the employment programs they have. We know though, Mr. Speaker, that for a family, a parent who is on Income Support, if they take a minimum-wage job and have to get child care, it is not possible. They cannot afford to work. It is not possible because child care itself is \$800 to \$1,000 a month per child and then trying to

get housing on top of that. It simply is not sustainable. It is not realistic. It is not possible.

One of the things I would really like to stress today, Mr. Speaker, is that we are talking about people's lives and we are also talking about future generations. We are talking about children and we know that if children live in poverty they have a harder time succeeding. We know that; all the studies show that. It is evident. We can all see that. We see poverty. Most of us in our districts see poverty. Most of us in our districts get calls from people who are having a really hard time finding affordable places to live.

I challenge every single MHA in this House, Mr. Speaker, I challenge every one of us to go through the paper, to go on Kijiji tonight, and pretend that you are getting the \$572 a month and that you have two children; I challenge every one of you to try to find a place to live for you and your family on \$572 a month. It is not possible. We know it is not possible we all know that, and we all know this is not what we want for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and we all know we do not want our children living in poverty because it is not healthy for any of us. We know it is not healthy for the children, we know it is not healthy for the family, and we know it is not healthy for our society. All of us know this is not healthy for our society.

Getting up and talking about these issues, Mr. Speaker, is what we have to do. We have to be up here speaking on behalf of our constituents. We are in this great time of prosperity and some people are experiencing a golden age, but not everybody is. We know that our seniors, particularly our seniors, are really vulnerable to this housing market right now.

Seventy-two per cent of people on Income Support go to food banks. I do not know what it would be like if people in this House had to go to a food bank. People are going to food banks because they do not have enough money to live on. They are not going to food banks because they are lazy. They are not going to food banks because they are stupid. They are going to food

banks because they do not have enough money to feed their children or to feed themselves.

Mr. Speaker, this is a reality. The numbers speak for themselves. Again, I challenge every single MHA in this House of Assembly tonight to go through the paper, to go on Kijiji, and find a place to live for a family for \$572 a month.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have spoken to this. I feel it is our responsibility to speak on behalf of the people who are not experiencing the golden age, who are adversely affected by our prosperity, and as legislators it is our duty to do something about it.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

I remind the member her speaking time has expired.

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to get up in my place in this hon. House today to speak to the private resolution that was put forward by the Member for St. John's South.

I will read it again. "BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge Government to consider following the recommendation of their own consultant, Mr. John Noseworthy, and implement a rental rate structure for income support clients based on regional market rates."

Before I really get into the motion itself and the resolution itself, I would like to speak to some of the comments that have been made, particularly by the Member for St. John's Centre. I have spent a lifetime in regard to my private life, my business life, my volunteer life, in supporting and trying to address the issues that would challenge the most vulnerable of our Province.

Mr. Speaker, I had the fortunate part of my life, one of the things I am most proud of, is that I

was Chairman of the Board at the Golden Legion Manor in Gander, which is 119 apartment units that addresses affordable housing in Gander. Has it eradicated the need? Absolutely not, and I am not going to stand in my place here in the House and tell the people of the Province we are going to eradicate poverty any time soon.

We tabled the Poverty Reduction Strategy here in 2009, I believe. It was tabled for a reason, because it set out a strategy and it set out a plan to address the needs of the most vulnerable in our Province. Just one of the areas that our people are vulnerable is in affordable housing.

I heard the hon. Member for St. John's Centre mention that it was the first housing crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador. Well, it was not. The reason why I was involved as Chairman of the Board at the Golden Legion Manor, which has a rental rate today of under \$600 per unit to as high as the new units as \$640, which includes their cable. The reason why I got involved in the early 1970s is because the housing crisis existed even then.

There are 119 units there now. I had the fortunate aspect of expanding that twice under my chairmanship and then it has been expanded once more just recently. I cannot remember exactly how many apartments were built onto it, but it has been expanded three times. Really, there are four units. The reason is because housing has been an issue for a long time. It has been and it is not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Then I heard the hon. member – because I have to point some things out. Is it okay for moms and dads to not be able to pay for music lessons or whatever it may be? The reason why our government invests in the Jumpstart program is just that, to give them equality, to be able to have their children avail of those kinds of recreational and educational opportunities, Mr. Speaker.

As a matter of fact, my wife, back in Gander, has a Celtic dance school. There is somewhere around 700 kids in that school. There are a

number of them who are supported to the Jumpstart program. She is so happy they can avail of the same program that me, if I had small children, my children would be able to avail of as well.

Is it all the answers? No, it is not, absolutely not. It is incumbent on this government, and that is the reason why we have been hailed right across Canada and beyond that, in regard to the Poverty Reduction Strategy. We have been, just recently, recognized by the University of Toronto in doing the right thing. Also, I would say to the hon. member, poverty reduction is not about just taking care of their needs in poverty. It is all about moving people away from poverty, I say to the hon. members in this House. It is not keeping them on Income Support; it is moving them off Income Support.

In regard to that Poverty Reduction Strategy, which the hon. member who tabled this resolution to the House of Assembly was a big part of because he was one of the key ministers at the time and hailed the Poverty Reduction Strategy, as he should, as being the best Poverty Reduction Strategy that was ever tabled in the House of Assembly or Legislature in Canada at the time. He sat at that table, key. I commend him for that because it is absolutely having an impact.

We have less people on Income Support now than we ever did in our Province. We have more people working than we ever did in our Province. We are moving people from Income Support through the sector skills initiative, which I referenced in this House last week and a great success.

It is linking up people of Income Support, people who cannot avail of LMA and the LMDA programs, the labour market programs that we have. It matches them with an employer. They do a certain amount of training. Right now, I will put a percentage on it – as a matter of fact, it was referenced in Gander in regard to our local newspaper there. It was referenced on *CBC Central* and it was referenced in the local paper in Grand Falls-Windsor as being a huge success in moving

those people. That is what poverty reduction is all about. It is about moving people from the system, being able to avail of the opportunities that we have created in this Province.

In saying that, and I think the hon. Member for St. John's Centre has referenced that – one of our members has referenced that it is a soapbox. Because the way she frames her remarks, she makes it look like she is the only one who has a heart for poverty. That is not true, because I am absolutely sure that each and every member in this House, every member in this House has a place in their heart and their soul for poverty, Mr. Speaker.

As a matter of fact, I would not think there is one person in this House who has not donated to a food bank. Actually, I would have to say as well, Mr. Speaker, that yes, we have people who avail of the food banks in Newfoundland and Labrador but I am happy to say that it is down by three point something per cent since 2008 to 2013 while everywhere else in Canada, in jurisdictions in Canada it has risen. So we are having an impact. I am not saying here, do not worry, we have it all solved, absolutely not.

Now I will get really to the resolution. I am happy, to be honest with you, for the hon. member to bring it forward because it was only a short period of time, a year ago, that there was a fair bit of questions and answers in regard to the John Noseworthy report. I am happy to see now they are actually supporting that report.

That report was an important piece of work. We contracted an individual who came with a lot of expertise and a lot of knowledge. He brought forward a report and it was called the Business Transformation review. It came with a number of recommendations. As I think one of my colleagues here in the House referenced, there are over 90 per cent of those recommendations being actioned right now, Mr. Speaker.

As well, you cannot simplify the process. Sometimes when a resolution comes to the floor of the House it is, in my mind, simplified. Because the recommendation was there, you just implement it now. That would be wrong, Mr.

Speaker, because then the chance of failure rises dramatically. There is a lot of work that has to go into each and every recommendation, in regard to analysis and evaluation, and then implementation to make sure it has the desired impact. That is exactly what you have to do. You just cannot throw it and think it is going to fix the world because it is not going to, not at all – absolutely not.

As a matter of fact, in my former life as a pharmacist and an owner of a pharmacy and a medical centre, I served a lot of people on Income Support and a lot of people in poverty. There are a certain percentage of them who certainly do not want to be there. They want to avail of the same opportunities that I have availed of, the people in this House have availed of, and all the working people of the Province have availed of, but sometimes circumstances prevented that.

That is why this Department of Advanced Education and Skills is so important to the people of the Province. I firmly believe that. I am proud to stand in my place in the House today and reference the work that is going on inside of AES, the work they are doing that is having an impact. We have great employees there, and I commend them and I thank them because I believe we are having an impact. Will we work harder? Absolutely, we will work harder.

Mr. Speaker, I have no problem, no problem at all, in regard to supporting this resolution – absolutely none – because to be honest with you it was already started. I have to be honest because the work has been done inside. This one here is one of the ones that is in the process and that is under the evaluation process.

As a matter of fact, one of the things we are considering doing, and we discussed it only recently, maybe a couple of weeks ago I brought it to the table, we said that maybe we should actually have a round table with people affected, the real people. Instead of listening to people talking about it, talking about data, and talking about percentages and all that kind of stuff, well, let us talk to the people. Let us talk to them. Let

us take a number of families as merely a pilot and let us see it.

I say that word loosely. Do not hang your hat on the word pilot, please. If we are going to work here in this House of Assembly to reduce poverty as best we can under our budgets and under being good fiscal managers of our Province, then when it comes to poverty I firmly believe that we have to act together.

I had a meeting today, this morning, with the Combined Councils, which I referenced. I am going to Nain next week and I want to do that before Christmas because I want to see it first-hand in regard to the issues and the challenges they have on the North Coast of Labrador. I think it is important. I really think it is important. I am going to have a meeting and I am going to try.

I am an Irishman and sometimes I pronounce words a little differently than some, but I say to the hon. Member for Torngat Mountains, the Nunatsiavut Government, I will meet with them as well, the President, and probably the First Minister, too. I firmly believe that with a partnership between all levels of government, the local government in Nain, the local government in Hopedale, the local government in Rigolet, the local government in Postville, and the local government here in the City of St. John's, if we work collaboratively and work positively we can find a solution, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we are going to have a real good, hard look and certainly make sure that if the recommendation and the suggestion by Mr. John Noseworthy in his report can be implemented, we are absolutely going to do it. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? It is the right thing to do.

Really, when I am here on my feet I can say with all certainty, since 2003, we always try as a government and have tried to do the right thing for the people of the Province. We are trying to share the wealth. We have to support them to come off Income Support, for the vulnerable people of the Province to avail of. There is always going to be a percentage of our society that will need it, Mr. Speaker, and that is the

reason we have to support it. We will continue to support it and hopefully everybody in this House will support this resolution today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly an honour to rise and speak to this private member's resolution today. Mr. Speaker, this PMR is not something new. This actually came out in Mr. Noseworthy's Business Transformation Report. If you go through the resolution as it is worded that will certainly come forward.

“BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge Government to consider following the recommendation of their own consultant, Mr. John Noseworthy, and implement a rental rate structure for income support clients based on regional market rates.”

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I said this recommendation came from Mr. Noseworthy's report. Given the situation we have today, it is there for a very important reason. We are left through our economy and through our social structure with an impending crisis, as many members have alluded to. The demand for housing or accommodation has caused a sharp increase in pricing for accommodation and this increase is being felt across the Province. Mr. Noseworthy in his Business Transformation Report clearly states, and I quote, Mr. Speaker, “One recommendation could be to implement a rental rate structure based on regional market rates...”.

Now, I have to bring attention to some of the comments made by the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills when he talked about the report, Mr. Speaker. I think he should acknowledge the issue raised by the Opposition when it comes to the Noseworthy report was that it was a blatant handout to a failed candidate.

However, if you are going to pay \$150,000 for a report, it should be at least read and in this case adhered to.

Mr. Speaker, Income Support rates are legislated annually and the current amount stands at \$522 monthly for a family. This is the maximum allocation. In St. John's, as my hon. colleague the Member for St. John's South brought up earlier, rent will rise to \$825 by the end of this year and as high as \$875 next year. Along with this, the vacancy rate provincially has dropped from 2.7 per cent to 1.7 per cent, a sharp decrease in one year. The government pats its back when it comes to development in our Province, but they forget about the social impacts that come with this. Government must look out for its residents, all of our residents, and that includes our seniors and our low-income families.

The minister referenced his visit to my district, Mr. Speaker. In my district I have actually approached the previous minister with some form of resolve to some of the situations that are going on in my district. I was informed that, through his consultation, it was not a priority then, and that was just a very few short months ago. I am glad that the current minister has decided it is important enough to travel to Nain to address the housing needs.

Mr. Speaker, it has been established that not only do we have a pricing crisis for accommodation and rent, but furthermore we have a shortage of accommodation, period, in some areas of our Province. In my district there are cases where there are individuals sleeping in vehicles, couch surfing, and actually looking for tents. When I left Labrador last Sunday, the temperature with the wind chill factor was minus twenty-seven degrees Celsius, with colder temperatures coming.

That is one scenario, Mr. Speaker. Here is another scenario. The best example I can come up with is the current situation in Lake Melville. With all the economic development in Muskrat Falls, rent has skyrocketed and now ranges from \$1,500 to as high as \$3,500 per month, depending on the size of the rental unit.

Mr. Speaker, with a maximum allowance for a housing subsidy, low-income families are subsidized as low as 15 per cent of the rent. This means they have to come up with at least \$1,500 and as much as \$3,000 of rent money from another source. This is what is driving low-income residents into the streets, and that does not include a security or a damage deposit, which I think is half a month's rent, at the bare minimum. So in the case in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, it could be anywhere between \$1,000 to \$1,700 just for a security deposit. Low-income families cannot afford that, and cannot afford it anywhere in the Province, and they are not going to be able to afford it in Lake Melville.

With the increasing numbers that are coming forward with respect to homelessness, we can actually see this number increasing dramatically. The arguments that we are providing here today in support of this private member's resolution that was brought forward by the government's own consultant, Mr. Noseworthy, are expressing the need to implement this private member's resolution, as well, to implement Mr. Noseworthy's resolution.

The report expresses an overwhelming need to implement a rental rate structure for Income Support for low-income families that addresses a structured rate on a regional market rate. We have heard some broad expansions of rent – Piccadilly, where the amount allocated is more than enough, to a place like Happy Valley-Goose Bay where it covers off maybe 15 per cent of the total amount of rent on a monthly basis, which is not even close. I think, Mr. Speaker, given the state of our accommodations availability, which if it has not already become, will soon become a crisis. An impending crisis is what we have.

So, Mr. Speaker, I cannot see this government or anyone in this House doing anything except accepting these resolutions. Furthermore, in the very near future, I would certainly like to see Mr. Noseworthy's recommendations and the content of this PMR implemented in a timely fashion.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: If the Member for St. John's South speaks now, he will close the debate.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will start off by shedding some light on what this issue is really about and how it affects people. I received two or three e-mails while members of the House were speaking, comments on their debate and comments on my debate. I am not setting out to try to embarrass anybody so I am not going to do that, but there was a member opposite who said something to the effect that we are going to take a long-term approach to this issue. I will say that this issue needs to be addressed sooner rather than later. This is not an issue that we can take a long-term approach to.

The member went on to say the future looks very bright. I got an e-mail, Mr. Speaker, and I am going to read that. It said: So-and-so said that the future is brighter than it is has ever been. I am glad something is brighter because certainly not the homes of the folks who have to cut back on their heat and light to pay the rent. This is pitiful.

Mr. Speaker, that is the issue. That is the issue we are speaking about. It is a real issue for the people who are receiving \$522 a month to pay for their rent and they are paying \$800, \$900, or \$1,000 for rent and they need to take money from their food to pay for their rent. It is an issue; it is a real issue. As a result of paying the high costs in rent, they are taking money out of their food budgets and that causes people to go to the food banks.

I did point out just prior to sitting down that in 2008 there were 8,037 homes, 8,037 families in this Province who relied on food banks. In 2013, there were 8,923, almost 900 families more last year than in 2008 relying on food banks. That is not an insult to the Poverty Reduction Strategy as a whole because I agree

with many of the things that are being done in the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The minister responsible for poverty reduction pointed out that I was one of the ministers who sat around the table and architected this Poverty Reduction Strategy, or at least the original Poverty Reduction Strategy. I will say, Mr. Speaker, there are many good things in that, but there are people who are falling through the cracks. There are people who are being left behind, and that is what this private member's resolution is about, the fact that there are 900 more families relying on food banks today than there were in 2008; 37.9 per cent of the children in the Province rely on food banks. That is a staggering number.

Here is the point that I am making with this private member's resolution: 72.5 per cent of those on social assistance rely on food banks. Why? Because they are receiving a \$522 allowance to pay for rent and they are paying \$800 or \$900 or \$1,000 a month in rent. That is the reason 72 per cent of those who are on social assistance are relying on food banks. Mr. Speaker, that is the reason 37.9 per cent of the children in this Province are relying on food banks.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at some of the statistics, Newfoundland and Labrador has the fourth highest rate of child poverty in Canada. That is not something for this Province to be proud of. While there are good things in the Poverty Reduction Strategy, it is not helping everybody. That is the reason this private member's resolution was brought to the floor today because it was a good start, there are good things there, but it is not helping everybody.

When we look at the HungerCount, there are 11,000 children in this Province living off food banks. Again, that is 37.9 per cent of the children in this Province.

You look at the Budget for 2003, when the party opposite came to power, 4.8 per cent of that Budget went to Income Support. Today, Mr. Speaker, 2.9 per cent of the Budget goes to Income Support, yet the Budget went from \$4.2

billion up to \$7.8 billion. The provincial Budget almost doubled, but the budget going to Income Support went from 4.8 per cent to 2.9 per cent.

Now, government will say that is because they are getting people off Income Support. In part, that is true. In part, that is the truth, but there is another side of that. There is another reality to those numbers. There is another reality that even though the provincial Budget almost doubled, the amount of the budget going to those on Income Support went from 4.8 per cent of the Budget down to 2.9 per cent of the Budget.

Here is part of that reality. Yes, while there are people who got off Income Support and went to work because the Province's economy is stronger in many areas, there is great employment in many areas, and you see places like McDonalds, Tim Hortons, other fast food outlets, and Walmart advertising that they are hiring, whereas ten years ago or twelve years ago you would not see those signs – you see those today. There are more opportunities for people to work and there are less people on Income Support.

I will say that is a good thing, but, Mr. Speaker, the fact that Income Support only provides \$522 rent while the rental rates have skyrocketed in many areas of this Province is not a statistic that anybody in this Legislature should be proud. The fact that Income Support provides a maximum family rental allowance of \$522 yet rents have skyrocketed to \$1,000 in some places is not a statistic that anybody in this Legislature should be proud of. That is the reason only 2.9 per cent of the Province's Budget goes to Income Support, because we have not kept up with the rental demands for those who are receiving Income Support.

There is another part of this, Mr. Speaker: \$5 million of the budget on Income Support was lost because government stopped indexing Income Support rates to the Consumer Price Index. That is part of the reason Income Support rates are only 2.9 per cent of the Budget, whereas they were 4.8 per cent in 2003. Not only is the Province not keeping up with the amount of rent that is demanded, it has stopped

indexing Income Support to the Consumer Price Index and took \$5 million out of the hands of those on Income Support. That is not a statistic that anybody in this Legislature should be proud of either. There are very real issues here.

Another member opposite, Mr. Speaker, said that we have always had vulnerable people in our society, and that is true. That is absolutely the truth, but it is our responsibility, the forty-eight of us who sit in here, to provide a social safety net. When you are providing \$522 as a maximum allowance for a family who has to pay rent of \$800, \$900, or \$1,000 in this Province, we are not providing a social safety net. We are sending children to school hungry, and the statistics show it: 37.9 per cent of the children in this Province rely on food banks.

Mr. Speaker, 72.5 per cent of the people in this Province who receive social assistance are those who rely on food banks. That is not a statistic to be proud of. We can brag all we like about how the Poverty Reduction Strategy is working, but it is not helping everybody.

The minister responsible for poverty reduction pointed out that poverty reduction is about getting people off Income Support, not keeping them on it. I will agree with that. Providing opportunities to get people off Income Support is what poverty reduction should be about, but starving them off Income Support by only providing half of the rent they require to pay their rent and having them take money from their food allowance to pay their rent is not the way to force people off Income Support, Mr. Speaker. That is not the way to force people off Income Support. Providing opportunities is, but starving them off Income Support is not the way we are supposed to be doing it.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of the members opposite said when they spoke that they will be supporting this private member's resolution, and I applaud them for that. It is one thing to support the resolution, but this resolution – and I will read into the record again, Mr. Speaker, for anybody who is tuning in and watching this and did not see the initial part of the debate:

BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge government to consider following the recommendation of their own consultant, Mr. John Noseworthy, and implement a rental rate structure for Income Support clients based on regional market rates.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. OSBORNE: What we are saying is that people living in areas where the rental rate that is being charged in that area of \$1,000 and they are only receiving \$522 is not enough, but there are some communities in the Province where \$522 does cover the rent. Having a blanket rate across the entire Province is not working, Mr. Speaker. That has been pointed out by Mr. Noseworthy in his report to government. That has been pointed out.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am glad that members opposite are going to support this resolution. In addition to supporting the resolution, we need to see action. It is one thing to support the resolution, but in the upcoming Budget we need to see action on this. We need to see a rental rate structure for this Province that recognizes that in St. John's the rental rates are \$800 or \$900 a month, and \$522 is not enough to cover it.

In Gander, which is the minister responsible for poverty reduction's own district, people are still taking \$156 out of their food allowance to pay for rent. There are many municipalities in this Province, Mr. Speaker, who are seeing the same fate. While some of the communities in this Province have more than enough with the amount of rent that is being supplied on Income Support to cover their rent, there are many municipalities or many jurisdictions in the Province that do not cover the rent based on the allowance provided under Income Support.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks by thanking the members opposite.

MR. JACKMAN: Thank God.

MR. OSBORNE: The Minister of Education said thank God, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes it is hard to listen to the truth. The fact of the matter is the Minister of Education, above all, should know. He should know because there are children going to school hungry in this Province and he is over there laughing and smiling. This is not something to laugh about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. OSBORNE: The fact that 37.8 per cent of the children in this Province are relying on food banks. I take that as an insult. He is clapping, Mr. Speaker, he is clapping. This is nothing to clap about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, the member –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the member to take his seat when the Speaker is on his feet.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for St. John's South to continue.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The statistics that show that 37.9 per cent of the children in this Province are going to school hungry is nothing for the Minister of Education to clap and smile and laugh about, I can tell you that.

Mr. Speaker, everybody in this House should support this private member's resolution today because this is an issue that has to be addressed. Those who are relying on Income Support have gone too long in some areas of this Province

taking money out of their food budget to pay their rent.

I will conclude my remarks and say, Mr. Speaker, that I am glad this private member's resolution will be voted on and approved today, but I want to see action in the upcoming Budget on this private member's resolution as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is the House ready for the question?

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: We need three members rising if you are calling Division. There has to be at least three members.

Division has been called.

Summon the members.

Division

MR. SPEAKER: Are the Whips ready?

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. King.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CLERK: Ms Shea, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Davis, Mr. McGrath, Mr. Crummell, Mr. French, Mr. Marshall, Mr. Jackman, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Littlejohn, Mr. Hedderson, 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. Ball, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Edmunds, Ms Dempster, Ms Michael, Mr. Murphy, Ms Rogers, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Mitchelmore.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Speaker, the ayes forty, the nays zero.

Unanimous.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, in accordance with Standing Order 9, the House now stands adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, at 1:30 p.m.