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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Scott Reid, MHA*

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The House met at 10 a.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** Are the House Leaders ready?

Ready. Ready.

Is the Third Party House Leader ready? Yes.

Independents ready? Yes.

Admit strangers.

Order, please!

### Orders of the Day

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before we start this morning, Mr. Speaker, I will take a moment to congratulate the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL on the birth of her baby boy in the early hours.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** I believe young Mr. Alexander arrived in the world in the wee hours of this morning. So we forgive her absence today.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, for leave to introduce a bill, An Act To Amend The Credit Union Act, 2009, Bill 46, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the hon. minister shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Credit Union Act, 2009, Bill 46, and that the said bill now be read a first time.

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.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Credit Union Act, 2009," carried. (Bill 46)

**CLERK (Hawley George):** A bill, An Act To Amend The Credit Union Act, 2009. (Bill 46)

**MR. SPEAKER:** The bill has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

**MR. CROCKER:** Tomorrow.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 46 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 13.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Motion 13.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly won't take very much time this morning to talk about this motion.

This is a motion that was introduced about a week ago, which will bring changes to the Parliamentary Calendar for this fall sitting. Where we had the budget and where we sat in October, we've agreed here in this House that our sitting would be prescribed as September 30 until October 8, inclusive; and then from October 19 until November 5, 2020, inclusive, and that the week of October 12 – which would be next week, Mr. Speaker – would be a constituency week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I think the minister has to move and second this motion.

**MR. CROCKER:** Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that we accept Motion 13, amendment to the Parliamentary Calendar.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further speakers?

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just speak for a brief moment to echo support for that, and to let the general public know that this has been a unique situation that we found ourselves in the last seven months, particularly, around how we operate in the House of Assembly. Our standard calendars are set in advance so that the House itself, the line departments when they look at legislation, us, as legislators, representatives, and the staff would have an opportunity to plan scheduling debates around the types of information that are needed.

Obviously, we had some challenges this year with the COVID in not being able to open after we had recessed for a week back in March. We've since then come back a number of times to do specific pieces of legislation that were necessary to ensure things moved forward, particularly around interim funding as part of the process that ensured bills were paid and our employees, who do so much diligent work, particularly around these trying times, were taken care of.

We've since come back and tried to get back to some sense of normality in the timelines; and, contrary to what people may believe, this sitting will actually be longer than most fall sittings, based on the principle that we came earlier. We did a full week where we did some night sittings. We are since then going into a full five-week rotation where we're debating the budget.

While people might say normally you finish in December or late November, the fact is we started early. Just so people would know, everybody in this House are still committed to doing the timelines that are necessary and

having proper debate on any issue – particularly the budget in this case, that, unfortunately, had to be pushed out for a number of months. We want to show some normality that we're still doing our sitting with the same time frames. The plan would be, come spring, to get back to what would be as normal as possible in our Legislature here.

We wholeheartedly support this and we look forward to the next number of week's debate in the House of Assembly representing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Seeing no further speakers, I'll call the motion.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I now call from the Order Paper, Motion 14, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a housekeeping motion this morning. It actually is a quick change to the composition of the Select Committee on Democratic Reform. The MHA for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay Verde is being placed by the Member for Virginia Waters on the Select Committee on Democratic Reform.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Are there any further speakers to this motion?

Seeing none, I'm going to call the motion.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, the Budget Speech.

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

**MR. FORSEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to be in this House of Assembly, of course, and speak on your district. The District of Exploits certainly is a great area to live in. I've lived there all of my life. I love the area; people are great. It has a lot to offer in our district, and it's always good to sit here and talk about the district.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, in recent years we've had some issues in the district. One big one, I guess, is the health issues in 2016. Certainly, the 24-hour emergency service out of the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre created a lot of anguish and a lot of fear for the residents in the area, because it's a big issue. People would like to see that put back.

Also, now recently, the lab services in Grand Falls-Windsor being moved to Gander. It has created a bit of unrest in both districts. My district takes in some of Grand Falls-Windsor as well. Mr. Speaker, health is very concerning, especially our primary care in Central. To see this stuff happening is very disheartening.

I'm hearing stories in regard to the 24-hour emergency service – people in the outlying areas of Leading Tickle, Cottrell's Cove, Fortune Harbour and those areas. I know it can take probably 30 minutes to get from Botwood to Grand Falls-Windsor on a good day, but you take an outlying area like that, even to get Grand Falls-Windsor on a good day from Leading Tickle or Cottrell's Cove, Fortune Harbour to get to Grand Falls-Windsor itself takes an hour

and a half. You don't do that in the winter months, Mr. Speaker. Even from Botwood area itself, you don't get to Grand Falls in a rush, in a snowstorm, that sort of thing, in 30 minutes. It's impossible. To even imply that, it doesn't make sense.

Mr. Speaker, health issues are a big concern, like I say, in my district. I'll keep fighting until I get something resolved in regard to those issues because the people want that. I hear it every day. People talk to me if I see them in the gas station, see them in the stores, phone calls, whatever – emails. It's a top issue in our district.

Also, Mr. Speaker, infrastructure, roads – some of the roads are deplorable. Some of the positions on the highways, like Sandy Point, we needed some safety signs; we need some signage moved there. We don't seem to be getting it, Mr. Speaker. Roads from Cottrell's Cove in to Grand Falls-Windsor, Botwood, Leading Tickle – Peterview is another area – they haven't had a thing done with their roads, Mr. Speaker, in 20 years. It was the last time there was actually some pavement put there. It would be nice to see some of those areas get some attention in regard to the pavement.

I sat here Monday, or a couple of days ago, and I listened to the Members on the government side. I listened to the Member for Lewisporte talk about the pavement he has down in his area, receiving money for wharfs in the budget. We have a beautiful wharf dockside there in Botwood; one of the best harbours you could ask for.

Also, when I listened to the Member for Corner Brook: a new hospital over there, Crown Lands office building, forestry training centre, a new shipping area in Corner Brook, a new greenhouse complex in Pynn's Brook.

I wish I could give those announcements for Exploits, Mr. Speaker, I really, really do. God love them, they got it. It's great for those areas. I'm not in disappointment for the people in those areas, but you don't spend money like that. I've been begging for the 24-hour emergency service ever since I got here, and they can get stuff like that in their districts – wonderful.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, it's things like that that creates animosity within the district down our way because they see money being spent, they see different areas getting pavement, getting buildings, monies going in different districts, but in our area it just seems to stay dormant. There's nothing coming there. I don't know if it's political or what it is, Mr. Speaker, but we'd certainly like to see some attention given to our area.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the economy – well, that fits into the economy in our area. Right now, we have a forestry in there that's pristine. We have 280,000 cubic metres that was allotted from the old Abitibi permits. So there's 280,000 cubic metres there, nothing being utilized for the direct central area. Yes, Mr. Speaker, there's forestry being taken for sawlogs, for milling and that sort of thing. It's going to different parts of the Island, but it's not being produced and it's not being manufactured in the central part.

What I call the central part of the Island right now, Mr. Speaker, would be the Exploits District and Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans where most of the forestry in 10, 11 and 12 would exist. We would like to see some manufacturer there to do something with the product to at least give us some production from start to finish on the cutting, production and selling of the product, to be able to utilize the product that's right there on our own doorstep. We can't seem to get anywhere with it. Now, like I said, it's being taken. It's being distributed throughout the Island for pulp, for sawlogs, for lumber and other forms.

Mr. Speaker, that would be some attention that I would like to see in the forestry sector, especially in the Exploits and Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

Farming, Mr. Speaker, is also an important part of the district, no doubt. The Wooddale area has had a great year this year. I've been in there a couple of times to see what they grow, and they are diversifying in their products. It's good to see that, it really is, because food will be a way of the future in regard to sustaining ourselves, in regard to farming. That part of it seems to be working fairly well.

I did talk to farmers in on Wooddale, and irrigation seems to be one of the biggest problems. They'd like to have some help in regard to irrigation in Wooddale to help with the farming, especially in dry times when the crops need water to exist and be able to grow good. This year has been exceptional, of course. There's some help that needs to be given to farming in there. They employ a lot of people in our area right now, Mr. Speaker. Farmers are a big contributor to wages and the economy in the area.

Mr. Speaker, that's another sector that could use some help right now, and there's more room for expansion of other farms as well. We have dairy farms in there. We have the vegetable farms. We have some animal farms, that sort of thing. We have a diversity of that stuff. So we can use more money in our way, even in the farming industry to diversify that.

Again, there was a big announcement for a dairy farm in Deer Lake. If they can be putting this kind of money to the West Coast or other areas, Central Newfoundland is open for business with regard to spending money in there. We have the product, we have the lands and we have the resources. We have the people that are willing to go to work at that and make it work, Mr. Speaker. So it would be nice to see some attention given to that and make our area viable.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The noise level in the House is a little high. I ask Members to respect the person who's speaking. I'd like to hear what he has to say.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**MR. FORSEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Also, this week is Fire Prevention Week. I'd like to give a shout-out right now to our volunteer fire departments in Bishop's Falls, Botwood, Grand Falls-Windsor and Leading Tickles, all in the Exploits area. They do well. I must say, in the past two or three weeks we've had more fires than normal, but those people are doing a great job to do what they do.

Also, volunteer organizations, Mr. Speaker, the Lions Clubs, Kinsmen clubs, Knights of Columbus, Elks clubs, church committees and church organizations. With the COVID issues this year, even those organizations have been picking up some of the slack in regard to getting food out to people that need it, people who could use it. So those volunteer organizations, Mr. Speaker, have been stepping up to the plate this year. I'd like to put a good shout-out to those people and thank them very, very much. They are a great part of our district.

Boys and Girls Clubs, Mr. Speaker, there is one in Botwood and one in Norris Arm. What they do is phenomenal with the youth. They have a lot of youth programs. They keep the youth busy; they keep them inside. They keep them off the streets and being inside working with programs, working together, working with the clubs and society. They do wonderful work.

Only probably a month ago, I was in Norris Arm and I went door to door distributing cold plates they did for the seniors on that day. So that's the kind of work the Boys and Girls Clubs do. Even that, a little bit of extra money for Boys and Girls Clubs, they really need it. They really could use a little bit of extra help in their areas.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is things like that that makes me want to see more activity in the district. Again, getting back to the health care in the district – tourism, Mr. Speaker, is another interest spot that could be well tapped into in our area when you're looking at investments. The Exploits River itself, the salmon river there in the summertime, it's a beautiful area – one of the pristine areas of the province. We get a lot of people just to visit that area and do fishing there.

There's more interest that can be put into tourism in that area with regard to getting more people from the Island part of it. Especially with staycations this year, it's probably one of the great things that somebody could have taken advantage of and spent some time in our area and do some fishing, spend their money in our area. We have lots of things to do.

We have Leading Ticks; we have Fortune Harbour in the outlying areas. They have great tourism potential. When you're looking for the shorelines, when you're looking for the rugged

coast, when you're looking for scenery, it's there. There are lots of things we can tap into in regard to the tourism part of it, and I'd like to see more interest put into that.

There are lots of ways that the budget can be extended to the Exploits District. There are lots of ways we can use the money; lots of ways we can tap into making things happen in our district. Mr. Speaker, we'd love to see some of that, but right now it doesn't seem to be happening.

Back to the health care issues, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we have a long-term care unit in Botwood that's supposed to be open this October – well needed. Well needed, Mr. Speaker, and we did need that. We have an aging population out there that we need more and more beds for, and they will come in handy. We'll probably fill them up before the time comes to even get it done.

Also, we have one going up in Grand Falls-Windsor. The same thing, another 30 beds there – well needed. It also gives another example of why we need the 24-hour emergency service and why we need the lab services in Grand Falls-Windsor, because we have an older population. We have another 50-bed unit combined, which we do need extra services to compare for that.

Mr. Speaker, on the health issues again; like I say, I've heard stories of the 24-hour emergency service where people had to drive from – I heard of a 92-year-old grandmother, Mr. Speaker. This one is really disheartening. It was earlier this spring, a 92-year-old grandmother from Peterview. They called my office early in the morning asking me why this had to happen. I didn't have the answers for them; I wish I did.

At 92 years old, left Peterview – she's five minutes away from Botwood – at around 7:30. She couldn't go to Botwood, because apparently on the 24-hour emergency service in Botwood if you go there at 7:30 they'll send you directly on to Grand Falls-Windsor anyway. So a 92-year-old grandmother, her granddaughter took her up. She sat in the emergency room in Grand Falls-Windsor, at 92 years old, from 7:30 in the morning until 5 a.m. before they finally discharged her, sent her home, back over the highway in the dirty weather, the blizzard and snow.

The next morning the granddaughter called me; the grandmother was basically hysterical. She really didn't know what happened to her. She got treated, she got looked after, but this didn't have to happen. This is only one story. I have stories upon stories upon stories, and people calling the office wanting me to get it fixed.

Mr. Speaker, the promises have been made. The evaluations are supposed to be done, but until it actually happens people don't care about promises. They really don't care about evaluations; they just want to see it done. I would like to see it done as well, because that's another part. If you're going to recruit doctors in the outport areas, outlying areas, emergency service is going to be a big benefit in recruiting those physicians and recruiting people to come to the Exploits District.

In regard to people moving to the Exploits District, Mr. Speaker, that will depend on our health care. It will depend on our economy. It will depend on our sports items. It will depend, again, on our tourism. So all that part of the Exploits District which can be there, needs to be put in place. It needs some emphasis put on all those sectors so that we can draw people and keep our young people in the area.

Mr. Speaker, I did mention that we do have an aging population, but we still have some young people there that want to stay there, want to stay in our district and want to contribute to our district. They love the area and they want to raise families in that area, but right now we have to try to provide some proper health care for them. We have to try to provide some adequate road services. We need to find some economy in the area.

I've mentioned, Mr. Speaker, the ways that we can do it. We finally have to group together with government, municipalities, individuals, businesses and make this viable for the Exploits District, because we really need it. It's a great area to live. I love it there. I'm not going anywhere. I'll be there until I need long-term care, hopefully.

Mr. Speaker, as for now, I would like to see more attention put into that area. I did the Forestry Estimates last night and there seems to be some, like I say, aspects of the forestry

happening. They're taking the products from Central Newfoundland and they're moving it to other parts of the Island. It's not what we really need, Mr. Speaker. We need an industry directly in our communities, directly in our districts, again, from end products to the sellable products that we can create more employment.

Again, Mr. Speaker, mining is certainly another industry. Marathon Gold is working in our district. That's going to be a very viable industry to us.

With that, if we had our mining and if we had our forestry back – again, if we had more employment created through that, more money put into farming, the Exploits District, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, all that area could be a well-maintained area and it could be a beautiful place to live. It is a great place to live. I'd just like to see more money put in the budget to expand on our area, Mr. Speaker.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you for your time. It was great to sit here and talk about my district.

Thank you.

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to sit and take some time to talk about the budget. As in the past, I will probably split my remarks into two. One will be around the Department of Health and Community Services, which I am fortunate to have as a portfolio, and then the second portion would be around some of the really good things that are happening in the district and the really positive news from the current budget we're debating to see things through over the immediate short and medium term.

I think, from the point of view of prefacing any comments around Health, COVID-19 has changed a lot of things and continues to impact the way everybody does business on a regular basis. I think it's worth just pausing at the moment to once again say thank you to the health care providers, to the essential workers as well, who aren't traditionally regarded as such,

who may work at the local store or the local gas bar in the district and across the province as we, as a province and lately as part of the Atlantic bubble, have really shown Canada and the rest of the world how things can be done.

It's not a cause for complacency, but I think it is a cause for appreciation for the efforts of essential workers, the efforts of health care providers and the diligence of the people of this province as we work through a very difficult time. It's a time of uncertainty, and those uncertainties do continue to generate anxieties and we in Health are doing our best to help allay those, along with support from my colleagues across government.

In terms of Health, we went through the Estimates process last week and for the fourth, if not the fifth, budget with which I've been associated, the Department of Health and Community Services has kept expenditures to a fraction of the increase that you see from inflation. Indeed, we have gained some favourable comments from the Conference Board of Canada as being possibly the only jurisdiction in the country to have not just achieved that but maintained it. That was a curve we flattened long before COVID came along.

In Estimates this year, the global expenditure for Health is probably the lowest since I took office, and for some considerable time before – which is interesting, because we've done that at the same time as maintaining a lot of services and expanding on others in a fairly significant way, all with the aim of improving access to health care.

From the point of view of Health, I think in terms of long-term investment, it's worth drawing everyone's attention to significant infrastructure projects that are on the go. The Green Bay Health Centre is nigh complete and will be ready to be commissioned in the very near future. We've made huge strides in innovative ways of funding construction of long-term care facilities.

The facility in Corner Brook is a model of how things can be done and how things will be done as we move forward. We've cloned that on a slightly smaller scale for districts in Central, including Grand Falls-Windsor and Gander.

Both of those are on time, on budget and have been the subject of some considerable discussion between the project teams and the end-users.

As we get to the stage of final fitting out, those establishments which will be the homes for the people who go there are being made as homely and as user-friendly, client-centred as possible. They've even altered the portico over the main entrance on the advice of a family member who likes to pick his wife up and take her for rides. It's screened from the rain, and he won't get wet when he puts her chair in the back of his car. It's that level of detail that we're seeing, Mr. Speaker, at no additional cost. Indeed, the cost of this project is contained.

The Member opposite was referencing the Hugh Twomey Centre; \$20 million there, Mr. Speaker, in traditional design-bid build; \$20 million in staff to go with it for a protective care unit. An area of great demand across the province, but particularly in the Central area as we deal with the increasing numbers of patients who are suffering from dementia.

I really feel the need to take issue with some of his comments, though, about the acute care facility in Corner Brook and point out, that promise was made well before we took office. I think there may have been 14, or maybe even 17 announcements of what – until we took office – was the biggest dog park in Corner Brook.

The facts of the case are, Mr. Speaker, there is steel up and that building is going up. It, again, is on time and under budget and will be an example of a state-of-the-art acute care facility when it opens on time and on budget.

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** That was a promise they made, we have fulfilled.

We have the new adult mental health and addictions facility, site work is underway. For those people concerned about the memory of Agnes Cowan, the matron of the General Hospital, her memory will be preserved in a way that will be entirely fitting to recognize the contributions this lady made to health care in St. John's, in this province.



I could go on even longer about health care infrastructure, but I think I would like to switch at the moment and talk about the wonderful people of my own electoral district, the District of Gander. I am fortunate in it is one of the geographically more compact, rural areas. It runs from Appleton and Glenwood in the west to Gambo in the east. It encompasses a 55-minute journey along, essentially, one road. I'm very fortunate that it is quite straightforward to visit the communities in there which, from west to east, are Glenwood, Appleton and Gander. There's Benton, a smaller community a little way off, and then there's Gambo.

Over the course of last budget and the ones before, there have been considerable investments made by this government in projects within Gander, some of which are ongoing. When I talk about Gander, I have to be specific. Some of them are peculiar to the town. There is a partnership there for the wastewater treatment plant, which is federal, provincial and municipal. That, again, is on budget and on time.

There is a municipal building which was put up in Gambo through a partnership between the municipality and the provincial government to complement the new fire hall they have. I'm working hard with my colleagues to see if we can get a new vehicle for their fire hall. Obviously, I'll take my turn in the line up, but I'm giving them earache. The road there has been paved all the way through, which will be of considerable benefit to the neighbouring District of Fogo Island - Cape Freels as this is a main arterial route through to that district off the Trans-Canada Highway.

We have, obviously, the long-term care facility in Gander, which I visited recently. I mentioned some of the highlights of that in my comments about health care infrastructure.

The schools in Gander have done well. The academy in Gander is one of the oldest schools in the province. I think it was constructed originally in 1954, and then some years later there was a full-size gymnasium put on there which has the capacity for two full competition size courts. So it's a little out of keeping with what would now be regarded as code for an elementary or a kindergarten school.

One of the triumphs, I think, of the remodeling of Gander Academy has been to preserve that gymnasium and renovate it, because there was still plenty of life left in it, and make it the core of a new Gander Academy. That allows partnerships with local sports and recreation groups. It allows partnerships with the town and the convention and competition season, and so will become an economic boon, as well as a health and wellness asset for the community.

The school, again, local contractors and local companies involved. They have essentially demolished one half and are rebuilding that to a state-of-the-art K-to-3 school. Once that portion is done, the remaining piece will be demolished and replaced with, again, a new state-of-the-art area.

Gander is one of the few communities, unfortunately, in the province that has seen a significant increase in population between the 2011 and the 2016 census. That is not simply an aging demographic in Gander. There has been a significant increase in younger families coming to the community. This has brought with it pressure on the schools, which we have recognized as a government.

I give a shout-out to my colleagues in Infrastructure and my colleagues in Education for helping me advance that and ensure that our real young children will have the best start that they can when they do go to school. There's \$46 million across the province in this year's budget to deal with school infrastructure, and Gander Academy's funding is baked into that, to finish that job.

In terms of other excitement in the district, we've seen under the last mandate the Beaver Brook mine reopen to mine the pillar and veins of antimony. It is a valued metal for work in vehicles and in environmental protection, because it is a key part of the catalytic converters that you see on the environmentally friendlier versions of new cars. We'll continue to work with them to make that as long-lived a project as it can. It certainly brought a significant boost to the school, again, in Glenwood, which is an all-grade school and saw a real boost in enrolment as a consequence of the mine reopening.

Another good piece of news is that New Found Gold has started development work near Appleton. The cores they showed me were very impressive. There is a mine in Australia called Fosterville, which is said to be the most productive mine for gold in the world in terms of the amount of gold it can generate per metric ton mined. The core they showed me, they assured me, in actual fact, is several times more concentrated than Fosterville. If this proves, it could be a really significant economic boost to the mining sector in this province. They already have up to \$250 million of capital potentially available to them to complete that.

In addition to that, they brought in a lump of rock they had found locally near where they drilled, which of itself had gold in it worth well over \$8,000, what they call float. This is extremely exciting, both for the province and for the communities where, again, a significant boost in jobs due to the prospector-friendly approach my colleagues in what was Natural Resources and what is now Industry, Energy and Technology have taken over the last five years. It was great to meet local entrepreneurs getting money from international sources to make developments in my own district. It was very exciting indeed.

In terms of other programs in Gander, we have midwifery within the James Paton Memorial, which is the first site of what I hope will become many as we build on that program and roll it out across the province. It is another choice for women in sexual health, reproductive health and childbirth and early childhood care. It is proven, it works and it is very popular amongst those women who have used it.

It, in discussions with the groups in Labrador, brings back echoes of traditional healing which can then be incorporated in a culturally appropriate way for communities in Labrador. We've seen that already start to happen with Labrador-Grenfell with a birth there recently.

In terms of other programs, my colleague in what was AESL and what is now Education, through the College of the North Atlantic, have introduced extra sites for licensed practical nurses, conscious of the demand for care as our population changes and we alter the skill mix to match the needs of those people. We now have a

fully subscribed 24-seat LPN program at the College of the North Atlantic in Gander.

In addition to that, the college received a significant boost last year with the previous minister committing to double the number of seats in the aircraft mechanical engineering program as well as seed money to acquire new state-of-the-art glass cockpits, which are in turn environmentally friendly. They reduce the weight of aircraft. The local aircraft company, Exploits Valley Air Service, has partnered with them as local agents for this kind of technology and incorporated it into their aircraft. The weight saving is said to work out at 320 tons less carbon emitted by an aircraft per year. That is a really green initiative and I commend them for it.

We have expanded Doorways and, of course, communities in my district have benefited from that. We are looking because of local demand, unfortunately, to expand our addictions hub in a spoke fashion out to Gambo to deal with issues in that community; but also, those arising in neighbouring communities nearby in the District of Fogo Island - Cape Freels where we know we, unfortunately, have significant demand for those services.

Mr. Speaker, rather than continue with a shopping list of items from Health and from issues in my district, I think it would be useful to try and weave those together at the end of my comments to point out that this is an example of a holistic approach, both in Health and a district-centred approach across the province in terms of how this government, now and in its previous iteration, has made conscientious efforts to invest in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is all too easy under some circumstances to say: Well, you know, we'll all go to town and we'll hide behind the overpass and wait for the economy to fix itself or COVID to go away, or whatever the worry of the moment might be. Newfoundland and Labrador's culture, its history is written through the achievements of small groups of dedicated individuals scattered across the outports of Newfoundland and of the coast and of the centre of Labrador. It is the sum of those little stories that makes the history of Newfoundland and Labrador and its culture what it is. This government is committed to rural Newfoundland and Labrador and it is important

that everybody realizes that that is where our strength historically has been and I would argue will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank Members here for their attention and their patience while I have gone through my comments. I would commend this budget to the House. It is a budget for stability in unstable times, for certainty in uncertain times and I would encourage everyone in this House of any shade – independent, orange, blue or red – to support it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**MR. BROWN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a privilege to speak on behalf of the people of Labrador West. It's my lifetime home. I've lived there except for a small stint in Goose Bay, but I like Goose Bay, too. It's nice to sit here and talk about my district and all of the wonderful things that go on there, the things we can improve, the things we can do better and the things we can look at to improve the lives of everybody.

My district is probably up there as one of the more unique districts. We're the most far-flung west as you can go, and right now I'm sitting as far east as I can go within this province. So we're all the way over there. I can get a little further over, but it's home and it's where I grew up. I love the people there, I love being there. It's just an amazing place. There are just so many amazing characters and people and features.

When Labrador West does well, the whole province does well. It's the largest mining district in this province. It has the largest iron ore deposits in North America. It has centuries of iron left in the ground, so I'll be long gone and there will still be people mining iron in Labrador West. Unfortunately, when people look at it they think of it as temporary. It's a mining town; it's going to go away soon. When one of the largest employers and mining company there looks at it and says: You got about 200 years of iron left. We need to have some sense of permanency. We need some sense

of investment, some sense of people are going to be there for a long, long time yet. That's what I would like to see, is more long-term investment in the region for the people of the region.

We have seniors who don't want to leave anymore. At one time my grandfather left. My grandfather is a resident of Fogo Island - Cape Freels now, but he was there in 1959. He was one of the first people up there. I'm told he even told off Dr. Moss, one of the famous geologists up there. Those are people who come up there. My late grandfather on my mother's side, when work started drying up on the Island he went to work for the railway; also a former resident Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

People from all over make Labrador West home. It has a very unique sense there. People from every little outport on the Island, to villages in Quebec, to people from Portugal, the Philippines and India have made Labrador West their home. It's a melting pot of this province. It's so beautiful that we have so much diversity and culture.

I know Lisa always torments me saying I stole a lot of her residents, but –

**MS. DEMPSTER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. BROWN:** Yes. The hon. Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, it's fine because that's where I met my wife.

Labrador West is so unique, it's so challenging, it's so different, but it's so beautiful at the same time. I want more for the residents when it comes to permanency.

Like I alluded to earlier, we have a lot of seniors who want to stay, and by stay they mean right to the end. They don't want to go to any long-term care home or anything on the Island. They want to go into a long-term care home that has a view of the mountains. They want to be home, and that's fine. So that's something we really need to work towards, is we need to take care of the people that have been there since 1959. A strong investment in seniors' care would be a strong investment for Labrador West, which is a strong investment for the economy of this province.

We have a trades school there, but the funny thing is the trades school there, you can't do a trade in heavy equipment mechanic or heavy equipment operator. Those are the two biggest jobs in the mine; yet, you can't get to do a trade in those trades in my district. We have a beautiful, brand new college that has lots of space and lots of opportunity for growth in that.

You can't train as an LPN in Labrador West, but we have a hospital that when it was designed it was designed with the ability to teach, and it's just paces away from the door of the college. These are small investments into a region that will build a stronger economy for this whole province.

I couldn't believe it, when we were all in lockdown sitting home but getting emails from the mining company saying we need more workers. The market is on fire right now, we have so much potential here. Labrador West put out its best production in the history of the region in the last three months during the lockdown. Those mines have never produced so much iron and pelletized iron in its entire history, but during this time we did extremely well.

The opportunity is now to invest in the region and to invest into those communities to have it so that we have a sense of permanency. Labrador West will be here long before and long after we're all gone. That's why we need to stop with the temporary and more with the permanency because the market will fluctuate, there's no doubt about it, but having infrastructure and having the people and the skills in the region may be able to give it a better chance to get through the low times.

We have a great opportunity for tourism in Labrador West, my district. The two towns are right on the Quebec border, but from there for me to get to the next community, which is in the hon. Member for Lake Melville's district, is almost a three-hour drive through absolute wilderness. That's what people want. That is the tourism market right now. People want to see something that's been untouched, something that's absolutely beautiful – the last remnants of what nature actually is. The potential for Labrador West is so great right now for tourism that it's unreal.

Now with the completion of highways in Quebec that will be – they have a few sections of gravel left to pave themselves. You'll have a paved road from Montreal right to St. John's. That will open up so many tourism doors that it's unfathomable. We're the last tourism place that has least investment right now. Labrador West is a whole new game. It's a whole new opportunity that we can change the dynamics of tourism in this province and offer a full range from historical, to nature and everything in between. These opportunities are there right now, but it's a sense of permanency; it's a sense of investment into economic growth. I think these things will improve our economy and build a stable base for this region.

Anything that you put into one region benefits the regions around it as well. Any investment in my district will have spinoffs for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, Torngat Mountains, Upper Lake Melville. We all are connected through family, through economic means. Labrador is very tight-knit community. It's so unique compared to other regions in this province, in the world. It's really interesting.

Even in my role as MHA here, the amount of times I've talked to my colleagues in Labrador, I never thought that was it, but we have to. We have no choice. We're in a very remote place and we have to pull together, because that's just what Labrador is. It's just one big community. There are only 30,000 of us. There are towns on the Island that have more people than in the entirety of the Big Land. We're really just one big community, really one big family, if you start really working it out.

Investments in one region benefit investments in other regions. I hope that my colleagues in other parts of Labrador get similar investments in their communities because, at the end of the day, it makes us all stronger in Labrador. We all face similar challenges. We all face doctor shortages. More investments in Labrador-Grenfell Health in doctor recruitment would benefit all four of us.

Investments in nurse practitioners – I'll tell a quick story. When my wife moved to Labrador West with me, just before we moved in together, actually, she said: I need to go see the nurse. I said: Go to the nurse? She said: Yeah, we'll go

to the nursing station. I said: No, this is Labrador West, we go to the hospital. So I stopped and thought about it and I just laughed it off, you came from the coast, you had nursing stations. But then I thought, that's not a bad idea. Why don't we go see the nurse? If you got a cold or a sniffle go see the nurse.

I thought about it, and it's not a bad idea, in my opinion, to go see the nurse for something that is not life threatening or anything like that. My wife only seen a doctor once every couple of years, she always used to go see the nurse. I stopped and thought about it and it's not a bad idea, go see the nurse. It was the model that worked for Grenfell. I can see it as a model to work for the rest of Labrador.

I know the minister talked about midwifery. I know midwives would do a world of good in my community. We've always had our issues when it comes to sexual health, childbirth and early childhood years in our region. I know when my wife was pregnant with our first child, seeing the specialists, and all that, was always hard because either it was vacant, or they just got there or they just left. I think midwifery is a good step, too, and same thing, it worked in the past why can't it work now? Why fix something that wasn't broken?

I'm glad to see that there is some movement in this world of midwifery, and I applaud them for it because early childhood, sexual health and childbirth is a very important part. We have to do everything in our power and as a province, as well, to increase our population because we want to see our province grow and strive for a better future. So we'll start right from the beginning, at birth.

Labrador West is interesting in a sense, too; it's kind of funny that we're begging for more power. We need more electricity. We're tapped out. We've grown so much that we've used up every last kilovolt we had and these investments in infrastructure would make us grow and strive as a better region. We have so much extra mining potential. We have other potential projects that are shovel ready to go, that can employ 500 or 600 people, and that's just after construction. The construction ranges from 1,000 to 1,500 construction jobs. These projects would do wonders for the economy of the entire

province. I know it's not oil and gas, but right now a project's a project. Putting people back to work, even temporarily, would be a huge boost for our regions and our economy as a province.

These are things that move forward – Wabush themselves, the Town of Wabush, just put a massive expansion on their business park to meet demand of businesses and industry that require more space for more shop space and for more trades to meet the demands of the mining industry. The mining industry in Labrador West, I like to call them dragons, they just keep eating and eating and eating because they need more manpower, more electricity, more resources. They're just two big dragons in our region that just require so much more and we're trying to give them everything we've got, but we need that little bit of investment into the region to get it over the top and hit home.

What comes with that, obviously, with big booms and economies and everything, comes the problems. It's not lost on anyone in this room that Labrador West has always dealt with a higher than average rate of mental health issues, addictions issues. With big job sometimes comes big demons. Addictions always keep rearing their head, especially in my office home in Labrador West.

Before I got here for the first sitting there early September, I helped three people go to rehab. Rehab wasn't in Goose Bay, rehab wasn't there; rehab had to be on the Island. That's a big concern for me. I think we really need to have a push to have rehabilitation services in Labrador – Labrador East or Labrador West – but a more comprehensive service in one of those two regions to help people of Labrador, especially my District of Labrador West, to achieve the goal of completing and finishing rehabilitation to find their better self and to help fight those demons that live with some people.

I really absolutely plead that we really look at rehabilitation services and a more comprehensive program for Labrador so that Labrador West residents, and residents from all Labrador, can help fight those and do it in a region that is home.

I find people that do it outside of Labrador sometimes have a lot more issues when they

come home. Many of them would rather do it in a place they're more comfortable, an environment they're more comfortable with, and to a Labradorian, that's home. That's something that's always with me and that's something I always want to push for is that mental health and addiction services, but the addictions side right now we need to look at a Labrador-based solution.

We always have to keep striving for those investments, those things that help our communities. That's why all of us are in this room right now, Mr. Speaker. We want to make sure that our people are taken care of, places that we call home are taken care of. With that, I want to make sure the people of Labrador West are able to avail of services and stuff as much as possible within Labrador.

When I talk to people, I ask them have they ever visited Labrador. Most people tell me no. Well, I say, every single Labradorian has visited St. John's because most times we have no choice. If we want to see a specialist or anything like that, we have to come to St. John's. All 30,000 of us have been to St. John's, but the other portion of this province, not even a fraction have been to Labrador.

I invite everyone to visit Labrador at least once in their lives. It's a beautiful place. It's the place I call home. It's the place I love so much. I think most Labradorians feel the same way, and I think people from the Island portion of the province will fall in love with Labrador too if they just stop in for a visit.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the people in Labrador West that have worked really hard over the last few months keeping everybody safe, making sure that our communities stayed safe and COVID-free as possible. People put a lot of time and effort and work into it. Some people within the public services, people in the private service, but also volunteers. A lot of volunteers gave up their time and their energies to do a lot of little good for a lot of people.

We've done extremely well. A lot of people still had to work, obviously. None of the mines went into any care or maintenance modes. They produced like they never produced before. All

those people out there, from the shop floor to the hospital floor, pulled their weight and they're all worth their weight in gold, because they did the best they absolutely could.

Labrador West achieved so much. We did very well in the face of a lot of it. I know we have our unique challenges, especially when it comes to rotational workers and stuff into the region, but we did very well. Labrador West did very well and I'm very proud of them all. They're excellent and I can't thank them enough. They worked so well.

I'd like to finish off by saying I'm the luckiest person in the world because I represent the most beautiful district in the world. Thank you, Labrador West, for everything you guys have done. I'll end with that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak this morning in the House of Assembly to the budget. I'll say for the record, as I did in the Finance Estimates to the Minister of Finance, I will be supporting this particular budget.

Given the fact we are in the middle of a pandemic, I do understand the need for stability. Despite our fiscal circumstances, there has to be some level of stability as we navigate this pandemic. I didn't see anything in there that I would consider over the top, either on the expenditure side or in terms of cuts that would have an impact at this time. In that regard, I'll support it. I think it's fairly well balanced and it's sort of a stay-the-course budget, if you will, during a difficult time.

With that said, though, Mr. Speaker, I listened to Members and this year's budget is no different than every other budget. You'll hear Members, particularly on the government side, whoever the government is, and they will start listing off: we're spending \$2 million here, \$10 million

there and we're building this, we're building that and so on. I understand that. The things they're doing, I'm not against a lot of the things.

Who's going to argue that we need to maintain our health care facilities, we need to maintain our schools and other infrastructure, that roadwork does need to be done and so on. I'm not knocking that, but at the same time we must all remember that all these things we're announcing and going on with these big lists, this is all the people's money. Nobody is writing personal cheques here. This is the people's money that is being spent.

In our case, we have to recognize the fact that this is borrowed money. Much of the money we're going to borrow – we've already borrowed \$2 billion. I think we're going to have to borrow another billion, so that will be \$3 billion borrowed this year. I think we need to put that in perspective.

The same thing when we have Members on the other side who are asking for things, saying: How come my road is not done? We need this at our school, we need this in our town, this town needs water and sewer, this town needs this and this town needs that. I don't knock the Members for asking; I do it myself. That's part of your elected role as an MHA.

I can assure you anytime there are any programs, whatever the programs might be, whether it be for the municipality – if it's something for a municipality, I will always do my part to make sure that Mount Pearl gets its share. I make no apologies for that. That's what I'm elected to do.

I'll make sure, as well, that if there are things that can flow to St. John's, particularly the Southlands portion and so on and it's available, then I'm going to be absolutely advocating and hoping that we get our share and it's successful. The same with Galway and so on. So nobody is really doing anything wrong by advocating for these things. It is part of their role, but at the end of the day I think we need to recognize the fiscal situation we are in as a province.

As I indicated, Mr. Speaker, we have borrowed, and in total it's going to be something like \$3 billion with a b this year; which I believe brings our net debt to north of \$14 billion, \$14.5 billion

or something, I believe. Somewhere in that neighbourhood. That's the net debt. That's not counting, I don't believe, any pension liabilities, and it wouldn't be counting Muskrat Falls, any debts on the books there.

We have people, obviously, that are still concerned by rate mitigation, wondering what's going to happen in a year from now. We've heard the government say we have a plan. The former minister of Natural Resources said we already released a plan. Well, the plan that was released talked about electrification of buildings and at some point we'll all be driving around in electric cars and all that stuff. That's all good for the future. I'm not knocking that. I'm not saying that won't happen and they're not committed to that, but it's not going to happen overnight.

The only way we're going to really have rate mitigation and keep rates at 13.5 cents per kilowatt hour is a deal with the federal government, a renegotiation of the loans on Muskrat Falls. That's what it comes down to. It'll be a renegotiation on the loans and/or other investments by the federal government. There's no other way. It's not going to magically go away. I do understand they're in discussions and they can't talk about everything that's happening, but that is another thing that's still hanging over our heads in addition to, like I said, the year-over-year deficits and the mounting provincial debt.

Now, of course, we have on top of that – if things weren't bad enough, now we have the issue with COVID-19, the impact that's had on businesses, on individuals and on our economy. It's had a devastating impact on a lot of businesses and people. There are some businesses, depending on what kind of business you are in, that were fine. They weren't really impacted. There are some people that, actually, this has created a bit of a boom for them, COVID-19. Depending on the type of business you're in, this created a big windfall for them, but the overall picture has not been good.

Now, of course, with the price of oil, something else which is totally out of our control – and we can't blame that on the government. You can try to for political reasons if you wanted to, I suppose, but legitimately you can't blame that on the government. They have no control over

what Russia and Saudi Arabia do to impact the price of oil, but there we have it. As an economy that is a resource-dependent economy that still has a great dependency on oil – albeit we're saying from a GDP perspective that percentage has gone down and so on, but we still heavily depend on oil prices. These are things that are having an even greater impact on an already challenging situation.

I guess where I'm coming from this, Mr. Speaker – and I haven't heard a lot of discussion around this and I think that needs to be much of the focus of our discussion as we talk about the budget – is where we're to fiscally. Sometimes I feel like Nero, was it, that was fiddling while Rome burned. That's kind of how I feel sometimes. It's like we're sort of oblivious to where we really are in terms of our finances. That's how I feel sometimes: everything is fine; we're chugging along. We are chugging along, I suppose, we're surviving, but at the end of the day this is a very, very serious situation.

There are a lot of people that would have liked to have seen some solid action as to how we're going to grapple with this crippling debt, with these year-over-year deficits. I do appreciate, though, as I said from the start, the fact that because we're in the middle of a pandemic and everything else that's going on and the devastation we've felt on our economy, this is not the optimum time to make that even worse. Anybody with any – I don't want to say anybody with any common sense, because people are obviously entitled to their opinions and they differ. I think if you try to look at it from an objective point of view, if I can put it that way, I don't think it would make sense to do anything at this point in time to further jeopardize an already fragile situation.

At the end of the day, at some point in time, hopefully we're going to come out the other end of this pandemic and there will be a vaccine, God willing, sooner rather than later. At that point, we have to be very, very serious about dealing with the situation we find ourselves in. It's fine to say diversify the economy, that's important. A great buzzword. It's more than a buzzword because it is something that needs to happen and we have seen it to some degree.

I recognize the fact that government has made investments in agriculture, as an example, to try to not just increase food security but, obviously, that's a way to try to create more jobs and diversify the economy. They're trying to do some things with our forestry, which is all good, of course. Aquaculture is another one. I do have some concerns on the environmental side and the impact on our wild species. I'd be lying if I said I had no concerns, because I do.

It's important that if we're going to do it we do it right, as I heard my colleague for St. John's Centre say in Estimates last night, and I totally agree with him. If we're going to do it we have to do it right and we have to do it in an environmentally sustainable way as best we can to protect our wild fish stocks. There's no doubt that there is a tremendous benefit in terms of direct and indirect jobs emanating from the aquaculture industry, and there are more on the horizon – there are more on the horizon.

I think of Marbase. I went to a presentation, it was the Mount Pearl-Paradise Chamber of Commerce, last year and Paul Antle was the guest speaker. He did a presentation on Marbase. I have to say there were very exciting opportunities there, there's no doubt about it, for the Burin Peninsula. This could be, as he indicated, duplicated in other parts of the province. There could be two or three Marbases, if you will. There is opportunity there.

We do need to continue to invest in these things, do what we can to diversify the economy. IT, as has been talked about, the tech industry, tremendous opportunities there. I'm not saying anything that government doesn't already know and isn't already doing to some degree. I just ask that they stay the course in those areas and be strategic in how we invest. The education system is going to play a role, certainly, into the technology sector, right from young age and into the post-secondary.

Even with that diversification – and that doesn't happen overnight – the oil and gas industry is still going to be very important for us as the world transitions into clean energy. When you think about our offshore oil, as has been said, from a quality point of view we have some of the best quality resources, as I understand it, in the world. The world will not be totally off oil



any time soon. I know there are people out there, people in our province that you see protesting from time to time who say shut her all down and let's put an end to it. That's not reality. That's pie in the sky.

It's important, obviously. I think many people around the world recognize climate change. I'm certainly not a denier of climate change. I don't think anyone in this province can be a denier of climate change when you think of some of the storms we've had over the last number of years, the impacts in terms of flooding and infrastructure and so on. It is a real thing and we have to be mindful. The world, I think, to a great degree understands that and there is that global shift, but it isn't happening overnight. It's going to take time. Oil will be part of how the world operates still for a number of years to come.

In terms of oil, as I said, we have some of the best product and resources out there in terms of oil. So we need to take advantage – and we have a lot of it out there. I think everybody recognizes based on the seismic that was done. I give credit to the former administration on being proactive with that seismic work, I have to say, and give credit where it's due. I think that work has led to a lot of the drilling that's taken place because of that proactive step. I acknowledge that.

We're going to need oil and we have some of the best. So we need to do what we can to position ourselves that when things turn around with the oil prices, hopefully turn around at some point in the not-too-distant future, we need to be positioned to take advantage of the resources that we have.

I certainly encourage the minister of – I forget the name of the department now – I'm going to say natural resources, everyone knows who I'm talking about, whether it be the Come By Chance oil refinery and certainly the projects we have in our offshore, we need to do everything we can. As the Premier said, I believe, when he was out speaking to the protestors: no stone goes unturned. I certainly hope so.

The reality is that we also need our federal government to step up to the plate when it comes to our oil and gas industry. Unfortunately, we haven't seen enough movement, as far as I'm concerned, not fast enough. The \$320 million,

that's all good, but we need to see more action by our federal government to get these projects on track. We haven't seen it. It seems like there is, I do agree, there seems to be an ideology, if you will, in Ottawa right now that is anti-oil, and that's tough.

It's tough for us because at the end of the day we've got seven MPs. That's one of the issues we have here in Newfoundland and Labrador, regardless of what stripe they are and what stripe the government is, you've got seven people, seven MPs from Newfoundland and they're sitting across the table from about 130 or whatever it is from Ontario, and another 70 or 80 or whatever it is from Quebec, what kind of a chance do you have to move your agenda forward if it doesn't align with the other crowd? It's very, very difficult.

I'm not making excuses for them, because to my mind they have been too silent for my liking, but that is a reality nonetheless. Our minister is the minister of Natural Resources for the country and he is apparently BFFs with the PM. So I would hope that influence could come to bear and we could see some more solid movement towards getting our oil and gas industry up and running here in Newfoundland and Labrador and get those people to work, because that's going to be a critical piece for us as we move forward. Certainly, in the short and medium term as we transition into other things.

Going back to where I started, while that's important, while diversification is important, creating jobs where we can, ensuring that Newfoundlanders benefit first from our resources in terms of local benefits agreements and so on, which I think is very important not to have work going to people from other provinces, as much as we can. All that aside, on the revenue side, increasing revenue, we also have a spending problem that's been identified now for a long time; identified by the Auditor General and many other people that, like it or not, it has to be dealt with.

I just hope that when we finally get to a point, we get through this pandemic, that we're able to seriously sit down and, in a united front, try to wrestle with these year-over-year deficits and this huge debt. It has to be done. They're complex, there's no doubt, complex issues. They

have to be outcome based. I think we have to start at what are the outcomes we're looking for and how do we get there in the most efficient way possible. There are going to be some tough decisions. When that comes, I think we have to all agree that we're not going to play politics, that we're going to all work together to do what's best to get our province back on track.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker; I'm out of time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**MR. PARDY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think as everyone has stated, it's always a pleasure to be able to speak in this hon. House about their district and the matters that you think can affect the course of action going forward.

For many a people who haven't been in the District of Bonavista, the District of Bonavista begins at the newly incorporated Town of George's Brook-Milton. In 2018, George's Brook-Milton was incorporated as the province's newest town. I think, as a piece of trivia in our province, at least now you have the knowledge to know that that is the gateway to the District of Bonavista.

It's nice to just frame out the district before I begin. It starts at George's Brook-Milton, ends at the historic Town of Bonavista and the furthest point to the east would be Burgoyne's Cove. If you haven't visited the plane crash site in Burgoyne's Cove then that's something that should be on your to-do list. The furthest western point would be Bunyan's Cove. Bunyan's Cove is really the furthest that would be adjacent to the Port Blandford stretch, and that encompasses the district.

As most of you would know, the big announcement we had this year was that we would be on the UNESCO Geoparks heritage status site – a huge achievement for the District of Bonavista. Over the coming years, we'll know exactly what those geological features are, even though they've been assessed by UNESCO and the team that they put forth.

So when you start in Trinity and you stretch along 281 kilometres of coastline ending over on

the other side in Bonavista Bay, a place called Tickle Cove, you have unique geological features of which we are very proud of. I think many parts of the world are going to be coming to visit the District of Bonavista as a result of its geological features and how rare they are.

Mr. Speaker, one thing that surprises me, and in a little over a year in this Chamber, I'm surprised at the number of people that watch the House of Assembly from their homes. That's something that I hadn't done in my working career is watch the affairs of the province play out, but as I went around the district I'll have people like Gil Bonnell and Doris Blackmore in Trinity Bay North, Catalina, who watch the House of Assembly. If you move a little further up from Gil and Doris, you'll have Melvin and Doris Freake, very important individuals in the Town of Catalina and they gained significance as the grandparents of the well-known hockey player in Bonavista, Michael Ryder. So these are Michael's grandparents who reside in Catalina, but they watch the House of Assembly; others like Rex Lodge in Port Union.

Probably a female mayor who served as one of the longest serving mayors in our province, Betty Fitzgerald in Bonavista, is an avid watcher of the House of Assembly to keep her finger on the pulse of the province. Without going through an extensive list, but at least it gives you an indication of the breadth of the people that watch, especially in my district. Glenn Ploughman in George's Brooke-Milton, and then we have Randy and Bev Goodyear in Burgoyne's Cove. These were just the ones recently who stated about watching the House of Assembly.

With their permission, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to discuss and have the focus of the remaining time on education. I spent a career in education and I'm very fortunate to be able to participate and have a voice for where I think we ought to be in education; what we're doing correct and some things of which I can put into the official minutes in education. There are many positives in the K-to-12 education system. There's a lot to be proud of that we have, but the ground is ever changing and society is changing and we have to be able to adapt quickly to what our needs are in education.

On September 15, I presented some figures to the House. They were budget figures for the House of Assembly for health care and education. I just want to go back to those figures. The Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation wondered about the data, he may have checked it out by this time.

If we look back in 1990-91, our spending of our budget for health care in '90-'91 was \$712 million; education was \$707 million. That was the first year that the proportion of the budget for health surpassed education in the history of the budgets that we would have in our Chamber and in government. That is 1990.

If we spring ahead to 2020, health went from \$712 million to \$3.1 billion. Education was at \$707 million; it is now at \$836 million. You can see the difference between those two things.

I stated on September 15 that education was underfunded. It is, but I just want to qualify a little further to know that in the unique times that we are – and the hon. Member who spoke before me talked about the expenditures, where we are in the province, and I fully realize that is where we are. The gist of what I present today or what I'll speak on is talking about efficiencies that do not cost money and things that we maybe can find within for the betterment of the province and the people we serve, and also for our coffers.

Here's one of the quotes that the Conference Board of Canada has stated: "Education is ... seen as the most powerful route to improving the private and public prosperity and well-being.

"Educated people not only earn higher incomes but also contribute disproportionately to business innovation, productivity, and national economic performance. There is a strong and direct relationship between educational attainment and economic growth."

If we were looking at investments, I can't think of a better investment, according to the Conference Board of Canada and many, than education.

So the goal and the question would be how do we keep money we can't afford to spend on schools focused on the classrooms? On

September 15, I shared with you my new preferred quote, and it came as a result of the Royal Society of Canada, and I want to repeat that again because I think it has a lot of value. It says: "The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those in the shadows of life," – and that would be – "the sick, the needy and the handicapped."

On September 15, I talked about – or we talked about the long-term care facility in Bonavista, the Golden Heights Manor. A dedicated staff with over 20 on sick leave and an inability to get other resources, casual employees, into the manor. One can say – and we don't have to stretch our imagination to know – that if you can't get employees into a long-term care home to service the needs of the residents in there, then one can only assume that the level of care would be suspect and diminished. I would say that is the situation with the long-term care.

The Minister of Health and Community Services stated, which I commend, that they have a committee struck in Bonavista and he will inform the House on the productivity of that committee. I would say from September 15 to current, I do look forward to that report and probably even getting an update on how that is progressing in Bonavista.

One thing I would say to you, while we probably all acknowledge that the number of hours provided are low, but it's conceivable that the overtime being paid out and the inability to provide the appropriate care is probably leading to additional costs that maybe we ought not to have encountered in the first place.

The Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay would be aware of this because he and I discussed that in his previous portfolio. I feel privileged to talk on education sometimes because the first school in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador was in Bonavista. I would thank Eliza Swyers, which is a mutual friend of the Member's and mine, for bringing that to my attention because I just didn't know.

We know that in 1726 the school opened in Bonavista and that was the first school in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. They

opened it, the archives would say, for the poor children in Bonavista. They wanted them to be able to read. The entity that brought that first school to Newfoundland and Labrador was a society that was called the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. It was under the Anglican Church out of the UK, at that point in time.

In education, for the remaining time that I have, one thing I would state: if we increase our wellness in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador or increase our preventative and proactive measures, research would state that we ought to see a reduction in the need to address the illnesses and the sicknesses that are presented.

I'd like to look at the school system that we currently have in our province. I would contend, and stated before, that we need to focus more on the wellness of the students of whom we have in our care. If you look at the Newfoundland and Labrador Program of Studies, it gives minimum requirements of percentages that we need to have in the province for our school system. For example, physical education, which is tied mostly to the wellness piece, 6 per cent of a 300-minute day ought to be, a minimum, on physical education. Others would be: science, 10 per cent; religious education, 8 per cent; English language arts would be 24 per cent; math would be 16 per cent. Remember these are minimums.

Back when I was teaching, we were looking at Alberta and BC to provide us for their curriculum. We looked at them as being models of the curriculum that we inherited and adopted into our system. One thing that BC and Alberta had was they had quality, daily physical education where those students in their schools would get at least 10 per cent – at least 10 per cent – of physical education. Ours was six. That's a significant difference. Six would equate to 18 minutes a day; 10 would equate to 30 minutes of physical activity a day. That's pretty significant when we look at the wellness in our system. Does it cost more to go from six to 10? It absolutely does not. Could there be improvements in the wellness of our population by increasing from 6 to 10 per cent? I would say, without a doubt.

So quality, daily physical education is the piece that we didn't adopt from Alberta and BC, but we did want their curriculum because they were showing on international assessments and results to be doing quite well; therefore, we certainly didn't want to miss anything. But I would say a piece that was significantly missing was the wellness of the students who were going to be partaking in the international assessments.

I would say to you, 6 per cent, 18 minutes a day. I checked one of the largest primary schools in the Eastern region. This particular school would have four 30-minute periods in an eight-day cycle; four 30-minute periods in an eight-day cycle would be 120 minutes out of 144. They are below the 6 per cent. We had mentions of a gymnasium before that was being constructed and talked about the wellness piece as a result of the new gymnasiums being built, that particular school is below 6 per cent. I would say until we get a handle on the wellness piece, and it doesn't cost extra resources, then I would think we don't change and we don't make that impact on the wellness of our students.

One thing I would say to you, the early childhood education piece, when we look there is a study, and I cite from this study, it relates to early childhood education and the importance of it, it comes from Finland: "Three years of age marks the most crucial phase in terms of establishing a physically active or sedentary lifestyle. The patterns of behaviour and living that are established up to the age of three will stay with us into adulthood."

I would say when it comes to the early childhood education, it is very significant that we have it regulated, regulated within reason – and I'm sure there are issues with that, but, hopefully, we can have the universal daycare maybe even utilizing much space that we have in rural schools in order to be operating out of our own public schools, the early childhood education.

Just to touch on the wellness piece. I know the Member for Terra Nova is aware of this. We do not permit the staff that are in our schools to access and use the wellness rooms that may exist in our schools. It may be due to conflict of interest legislation.

With \$3.1 billion of our cost in health care and we're looking at wellness as being a theme with our children, surely goodness we ought to be able to have our staff be able to utilize the wellness rooms that would be in our schools, because an investment, I think, in wellness will certainly pay dividends in our health care expenses going forward.

I know my time is getting short. Another thing when we construct structures and buildings. We are a northern climate. We have children from September to June. We'd like for them to be outdoors, but sometimes it's not always possible to have our children outdoors. Therefore, we may be in a climate where we make sure we have enough play space for our students in order to play and be active in, to maintain their wellness.

I came from a school in the District of Terra Nova where I was principal for 16 years. We had a gymnasium that was 11,000 square feet – three gymnasiums. We always called it the winter games complex; thus, it was arose from winter games. Three gymnasiums in one – we had as many as 12 volleyball teams that could play in that gym and I think we had a very active school because of the facility.

The only thing I would say to you, this House of Assembly has 3,000 square feet. When we build new schools like Coley's Point, which has 4,000-square-foot gymnasium, I'd like to see the template for the additional construction of having gymnasiums that would be the size of the one in Clarendville Middle School, enable the wellness and to aid in the wellness of children going forward.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your time and for the opportunity.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interesting debate happening here this morning in the Legislature as we debate the budget. Normally, this would be in May, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of years of experience of long

nights, Monday through Thursday, and then normally we did the graduation circuit in May, so this is all kind of different, but an interesting discussion.

The theme of our budget this year: "Today. Tomorrow. Together," and certainly, in this unusual time, going through the province's first ever public health emergency, we have found that we are all in this together. I think the one thing that we've all sort of taken away since March is how many things we thought were important are not important and our health is the most important.

I'd like to start, Mr. Speaker, by commending the Deputy Premier and the Finance Minister – a strong female on our team – for doing a great job in bringing down the budget. It's been a really difficult time. We've seen expenditures going up related to COVID-19 and, of course, revenue was down as things were shut down out an abundance of caution for the safety of the public. That's not a good trend, but, at the end of the day, I think folks from all around the province felt that it was a pretty decent budget.

Interesting conversation from my colleague the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, I listened closely as he talked about needing to do things differently; Opposition asking for things from day to day that they need in their district. While there's truth in that, Mr. Speaker – and I guess one of the things we've certainly learned as a government since late into 2015 as we came in and inherited quite a fiscal mess and there was not a lot of money, we had to learn to do more with less. So it's about looking at, how did we do things up to this point and how can we do that better or how can we do that more efficiently. I believe there are many, many examples we can point to.

I represent a district in Southern Labrador and when I reflect, and I have to be honest – and I'm here now seven-plus years, probably the only reason I got involved in public life – I never aspired to be where I am – was because I knew that I came from a land that was so rich, yet when it came to service we were so, so lacking. We were not treated fairly.

There has been a lot of talk, Mr. Speaker, around oil and gas. It's really unfortunate; we've had

the perfect storm connected to this global pandemic and shutdowns. We were a province that was heavy resource based and we're seeing that we need to find innovative ways going forward. We cannot always depend now on oil and gas. Our hearts are certainly with the families that are impacted. We will commit to working with them to find our way through but we have to move away now and look at other options, and one of those options will be mining.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at, in 2019 I believe the total mining forecast contribution to the province was \$3.7 billion. Guess where 95 per cent of that came from? Mr. Speaker, 95 per cent, \$3.6 billion – maybe you have the 5 per cent, I say to my good friend and colleague, the hon. Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay – came from Labrador, and there is potential to build on that.

While we're challenged, we have about an \$8 billion budget that we bring in, and while there are many, many asks, Mr. Speaker – and I was in Opposition, and I was one of these people that were asking, because prior to this government taking office we lived through 12 years of a Tory reign where we had the most money in the history of this province, but my district in particular, which is what I – it's always a challenge to know what you're going to speak to because you have three hats – is we were weighed in the balance and we were found wanting again and again.

Mr. Speaker, if I have some folks watching today, they will agree with me that when you enter Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair now, the drive is a very different drive than what I started on in 2013. It's not just about spending money, it's about investment and it's about getting return on that investment.

We had that megaproject across the river there and as much as there were many things we were unhappy about – behind schedule and over budget – it did generate a lot of money into the economy at the time. I'm not sure how they would have moved in all their equipment and things they needed if the road had not been built, Mr. Speaker. It is about investment.

When I look back to when I started in 2013, I was driving on 40-year-old pavement in the

Labrador Straits. Ambulances and buses were driving 20 and 30 kilometres. The road was basically reconstructed with cold patch. We've been steadily working on that.

We're not talking about side roads or potholes in Garden Cove. Let's be clear, we're talking about the main trunk that goes through Labrador, the main artery. I'm extremely pleased to be a part of a government where the last money for the Trans-Labrador Highway went out the door in April of this year, so the end is in sight over the next two construction seasons.

We hit a bit of a milestone on the weekend when Johnson's connected with the 80 K coming out of Goose Bay. So 55 is now done and we're hoping they're going to get another five in this week. Temperatures are beginning to drop and we don't want to compromise the quality of the pavement, but then we'll have 140. Mr. Speaker, while we have to find new ways to do things and we have to be fiscally prudent with the taxpayers' purse, for a long, long time we didn't get our share. We certainly contributed and we continue to do so.

I sat down, Mr. Speaker, with the president of IOC about a week ago. Seventeen hundred employees – what they contribute to the GDP of this province, what they contribute to the Provincial Treasury. Right now their sights are set to be good for about 25 more years with the ore coming out.

Then we look at Voisey's Bay. Right now they're looking like they're set to about 2034, so not short-term things. Sometimes I know that even with my colleagues I must grow and wear very thin on them, but you have to put it all into balance, Mr. Speaker. You look at the contribution and then you look at the need.

We were pleased with this budget. Everybody cannot get everything they need, but Labrador is certainly benefiting from our government's commitment to grow the economy in tourism, in mining, in agriculture and in forestry. Just in my district, Mr. Speaker, when I look at places like Red Bay World Heritage UNESCO Site, we've been able to do things like signage in that community; we've been able to improve roadwork in that community.

Then, we head on up another 85 kilometres and you have the gateway going out to Battle Harbour. When I started, that used to be a gravel road drive. There were a lots of motorhomes and things that would stop in Red Bay and not go further. We have a real jewel in the crown in Battle Harbour, a step back in time to when cod was king. It's completely restored. It's an island in the middle of the ocean. You have your 9,000-thread-count sheets and it's a lovely setting. You have the amenities.

We've only begun to market, Mr. Speaker, some of those places that we have. In order to market, in order to open up to what my grandfather often referred to as Canada's last frontier, we needed to make those investments to get the return on the dollar. We went from 1,500, 1,700 tourists in Red Bay to 10,000 people, Mr. Speaker, and we haven't begun to tip the ice. You come a little further up and we have Cartwright, which is the gateway to Mealy Mountains' park, and lots of potential there.

The Makkovik, I think about my former colleague, Randy Edmunds, and how many times did he mention to us the dock in Makkovik and the need that was there. I believe at one point he was down with the divers himself as an MHA and using his own boat to do some work around Makkovik. To see that in this budget, we've been able to allocate over \$4 million to bring infrastructure improvements to that dock, Mr. Speaker, I think it's absolutely wonderful.

One of my colleagues this morning in the House talked about mental health. Mr. Speaker, I would say it's something that all of our offices are dealing with. When I look at over the last seven years the types of calls and constituents that come into my office and how it's changing. In the beginning, because our infrastructure needs were so great, in particular in Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, folks would be in because the road wasn't fit to drive on or folks would be in because we were held back with broadband. That's a file that I worked extremely hard on with my federal colleagues.

When the last round of funding was announced federally, Mr. Speaker, the largest project in Atlantic Canada, \$12.6 million, came to Labrador, as it should. We had hotel operators

that were getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning and going online to check their email to see if people were booked into their hotel. Hard to believe, when you listen to the conversations here in the House, how far behind we really were at this time. I'm pleased to have played a little, tiny part of that, working closely with the strong leadership in our community. Cell service, Mr. Speaker, we talk about tourists coming into the area; everybody wants to do things in real time. What happens when you visit a community like Red Bay and you're looking for somewhere to use a phone or you want to make contact back home? Through a partnership between the provincial government, the municipalities and the NunatuKavut Community Council, we've been able to announce cell service for six communities in Southern Labrador.

My hometown was the second one to come online. Coming in from hauling our nets this summer, Mr. Speaker, my phone starting ringing in the boat. That's something we take for granted in here, but it was really quite something. I had taken my phone, maybe to take a few pictures, and it started ringing. It was somebody that was looking for something.

Those are all examples of progress we've done through partnership, and I'd be remiss if I did not mention NunatuKavut Community Council. We've been working very closely with them and they have made tremendous investment into our communities. We have examples where government cannot afford to put all of the money into these communities, Mr. Speaker, but we can do it through partnership.

When you look at the programs and services we roll out as a government; obviously, folks having access to drinking water, for example, would be a top priority. That's our highest formula of 90-10. Then we get into fire equipment and it's 80-20; we get into buildings and it's 60-40; we get into roads and it's 50-50, but it's doing things through partnership. It's being able to do more with less; there is no doubt, as we think about the very challenging fiscal situation this province is in.

Muskrat Falls, when I look back to 1949 – it certainly predates me – 30 per cent of the net debt from that one project. Mr. Speaker, my

mind went to that yesterday. We held an emergency debate here around Come By Chance – and our thoughts and our prayers are with the families that are finding themselves in a very difficult situation now connected through Come By Chance – an arrangement there between two commercial entities. That agreement is completely separate from government; yet, at the end of the day, government I'm sure will, as the minister said, engage in dialogue and help them.

Folks were calling on us just hours after hearing the announcement, step up and do something. Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about taxpayers' money, when we're talking about the public purse as we are here managing in the people's House, those decisions have to be well thought out. They have to be informed decisions. We have to know the full picture, Mr. Speaker, because we can look at examples of where we made decisions.

Folks here all the time say: We can't look back. It's true, we cannot change the past but we can certainly learn from the past. When we have a project that was sanctioned at \$6.6 billion, Mr. Speaker, and now we're up to over \$13 billion; when we talk about Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe that are worried about keeping the lights on, it's because decisions were made like that, they were rushed.

Mr. Speaker, I get a little wound up about that and I'm going to pull myself back, but it's just because I lived through it as an Opposition Member in this House. During those couple of years I lived through a very tumultuous time. I lived through a time when many of my constituents were actually being pulled off from a gate in October 2016 in a protest and some of them went to jail because they knew that what happened was wrong. So we have to learn from those things.

There are lots of good things happening, but I did want to mention the mental health issues. As we have been finding our way through this pandemic, a lot of the fear, the concern, the anxiety, it's real, Mr. Speaker. It's been said here a number of times before, we're living in a different time. I think, sadly, it's true. We're seeing more mental health and addictions issues on the rise more than ever before. I was a part of the all-party committee and for 18 months we

travelled around the province. We met with community groups and organizations. We also met with people with lived experiences, and those are stories that will stay with me always.

When this government made a decision that it was time to replace the Waterford Hospital, an old institution around from the Victorian days, it was recognized that we no longer need to have one big building here on the Avalon but we need to work harder at putting services out to meet people where they are. Mr. Speaker, this government saw fit. They recognized some of the issues in Labrador, in Central Labrador in the hub. This government has committed to begin work on a new six-bed mental health unit. Very, very positive news, Mr. Speaker. Every day we're hearing from someone, some family that has a son or a daughter that's struggling and they're reaching out for help. Again, I was very pleased to be a part of a government that saw that need, but also saw that we don't need to continue to do what we've always done.

Doorways, Mr. Speaker, in my 18 communities we only have one facility where we have a doctor and that's the Labrador South Health Centre in Forteau. They do fantastic work there. It was this government that actually recently provided them with a new X-ray unit that was needed. So that's the only place we have a doctor. When you come down the coast into southeastern Labrador, it's all community clinics. So, right now, thanks to the great work of my colleague, the Minister of Health – he's like the Energizer Bunny on steroids most of the time, I don't know where he gets his energy and finds the balance; he's been quite busy – folks can walk in without an appointment now even in remote coastal Labrador and have that counselling appointment.

Mr. Speaker, I remember in my early days in this House there would be a lot of conversations around psychiatrists and access to services and long wait-lists. What we have actually found and the direction we've moved in, maybe somebody does need that first appointment with the psychiatrist, but then research shows us that folks do very well with supports like counselling. I was pleased to see that is the direction that Health and Community Services have moved in with the RHAs, working closely with my colleague, the Minister of Health, who



has done a stellar job, a stellar job in helping us find our way through this pandemic.

Sometimes we get questions on decisions that we've made around COVID, working closely with the province's chief medical officer of health, but the facts are, Mr. Speaker, everything speaks for itself. When you turn on the news in the evening and you look across the country at other provinces and territories and you see how well Newfoundland and Labrador is doing, that speaks volumes for itself with the job, how well of a job they have done.

I've been travelling a fair bit around this province since I took on my new roles of the office of the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, Labrador Affairs and Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation. Mr. Speaker, the one consistent thing, whether I've been in Corner Brook on the West Coast, whether I've been in Goose Bay, whether I've been in Central, whether I was up in my district which I just went through Labrador last week, from the border in the south to the border in the west, again and again and again I heard what a great job the medical officer of health and your government have done helping us find our way through COVID. That was very encouraging to hear.

I do want to toss a bouquet to the people of the province; it's been a very difficult time. But day after day when the briefings were held and the public health measures and the prevention infection measures were rolled out; people adhered to them, Mr. Speaker. It's one thing for leadership to say this is what we want you to do but people have to adhere. People made sacrifices in this province for six or seven months now for the greater good and we certainly, as a government, appreciate the sacrifices.

I didn't even get in, Mr. Speaker, to the contributions that this budget have made to some of the portfolios that I am now responsible for but I do hope that I'll have another window to do so because there are a lot of great things happening. I want to thank again the people of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair for their continued faith in me to be their Member. It's a privilege every single day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

With the agreement from the Members of the House, I think I have, we'll recess for lunch, but before we do, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, in parliamentary tradition, this afternoon he's offered to remove himself from the votes where the Member for Mount Scio is unavailable this afternoon, so we thank him for that, in parliamentary tradition.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Mr. Speaker, I now suggest we recess for lunch.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It's been moved and seconded that we do now adjourn until 2 o'clock.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

### Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** Are the Government House Leaders ready?

Third Party, yes?

Order, please!

### Statements by Members

**MR. SPEAKER:** Today, we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Ferryland, Cape St. Francis, Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, Conception Bay South and Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I want to recognize the owners and staff at Alderwood Estates Retirement Centre.

Alderwood Estates Retirement Centre is a family-owned business in Witless Bay. The staff at the facility go far and beyond for the residents. They are kind and compassionate and make each resident feel at home.

The families of the residents at the facility say that they have great peace of mind knowing that loved ones are there and are well cared for. They refer to the staff and other residents as their family.

The facility has an amazing recreation program. They celebrate each and every resident's birthday with a song and a dance. They make sure that all residents have access to fun and safe recreation programs that are all hosted in-house, and as well attend many outside events.

Over the past number of years, the staff and residents have organized and hosted a haunted house during Halloween. This has become a very popular event. Many kids and adults of the communities nearby look forward to this event each and every year.

I ask all my colleagues to join me in congratulating the kind and caring staff of Alderwood Estates Retirement Centre on a great job well done.

Thank you.

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

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

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

Today, I want to recognize District Drugs, a family-owned business that has been operating in Torbay and serving the people of the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis since 1963.

Mr. Jack Hogan was the original owner, pharmacist and a true community leader. Jack and his family has sponsored and supported

every activity in the area, whether it's from schools, churches or community organizations. Mr. Speaker, it would be difficult to find out the number of teams that Jack Hogan personally has organized and District Drugs has sponsored throughout the years.

Jack's son, Keith, joined his dad as a pharmacist and took over the business 25 years. Keith will be retiring this fall and selling the business. Even now, the Hogan's commitment to the community remains, as the family wanted the new owner to be a pharmacist, but be part of the community.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Jack, his wife Elizabeth, their son Keith and the Hogan family, as well as the staff of District Drugs – some of them who have been there for over 42 years. I want to thank them for everything they have done to serve the people, support our residents and communities over the past six decades. You have gone above and beyond, and I want to wish you all the best in your retirement.

Thank you.

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

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

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

Well, I'm very excited to recognize Dawson Mercer of Bay Roberts, who was drafted 18th overall in the 2020 NHL draft last night by the New Jersey Devils. This is only the 7th time that a Newfoundlander and Labradorian has been drafted in the first round.

Dawson's hockey prowess has been long known in the Bay Roberts region and his talent and dedication to the game has seen his stock skyrocket in recent years. Dawson has skated in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League since 2017, playing for Drummondville, then Chicoutimi, with him improving each and every season. Those improvements led him to being selected to the Team Canada 2020 World Junior team – and as we know, they brought home the gold.

He is a hockey player that has the skills and skating ability to make his mark on the NHL, and the people of his hometown couldn't be more proud.

I ask everyone to join me in recognizing Newfoundland and Labrador's newest NHLer, Dawson Mercer.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on October 5, I had the pleasure of attending the Community Garden opening held at the Manuel's River Interpretation Centre, along with my colleague from Topsail - Paradise. This is the second such Community Garden in Conception Bay South, the first being the Gateway Garden which opened last year at the new CBS Arena.

These gardens are great community initiatives and have been lots of fun for families and people of all ages. The Community Gardens give residents the opportunity to learn about growing food and food sustainability. It's a place where community comes together to enjoy benefits of gardening and to take part in special events.

Agriculture is what Conception Bay South was built on, not the fishery, mining for forestry, et cetera. It's good to see our community going back to our roots and keeping in touch with our past. We should always honour our past traditions and keep them alive for future generations to come.

Congratulations to the CBS Community Garden committee and all the volunteers for taking part in the Community Garden grand opening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**MR. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I honour an absolute legend of Grand Falls-Windsor, Mr. Billy Bollard. Billy was born on November 1, 1942 and made the most of his life in service to his community.

A kind and gentle man with an amazing sense of humour, Billy was one of a kind, making many people laugh over the years. He was active throughout his life, swimming at Beothuk Park and speed skating at the stadium where a voice could always be heard: Look out; Billy's coming to the rink. He loved his family and worked alongside his dad loading topsoil to help put his brother Tony through dental school.

Billy Bollard's true passion was having a clean community. He would leave first thing every morning and not return until dark picking up trash and recyclables throughout the town. Our town is a better place because of Billy and he was honoured with the mayor's award.

Billy passed away on September 2, 2018, and he will never be forgotten as one of our greatest citizens. Billy's famous saying was: Not bad b'y; should be worth something. Billy b'y, you weren't bad yourself as your worth to Grand Falls-Windsor is priceless, Sir.

God bless you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

#### Statements by Ministers

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour.

**MR. BYRNE:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to inform the House and highlight the significant success our government and its partners throughout the province have achieved in increasing immigration.

In 2017, we launched the province's Immigration Action Plan, with a goal of 1,700 new permanent residents annually by 2022. Since then, Mr. Speaker, immigration has increased nearly 40 per cent. In 2019, Newfoundland and Labrador welcomed 1,850

new permanent residents and our government increased its 2022 target to 2,500 new permanent residents annually based on our ambitions and our successes.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we all know that COVID-19 has presented challenges, challenges which extend into our immigration outcomes. As one would reasonably anticipate with borders closed, COVID-19 has severely impacted the manner in which people can safely move into Canada and into Newfoundland and Labrador, and this includes potential immigrants.

Despite these challenges and a delay in application processing times by the federal government as they reassessed and reorganized resources to meet some of the internal domestic COVID challenges of our country, our Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism continues to process applications from employers hiring newcomers who want to invest their time and talents right here at home.

We are pleased to continue welcoming newcomers, who make an important contribution to the social, cultural and economic growth of Newfoundland and Labrador, including promoting innovation, creativity and diversity of thought.

The skills and work experiences that immigrants bring to Newfoundland and Labrador enable employers throughout the entire province to fill key gaps in roles and skills and allows us to compete in global marketplaces. This is what's really truly important: Immigrants create businesses and job opportunities for long-time residents as well, building upon a history of innovation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all Members of this hon. House to join me in thanking our partners for their ongoing efforts to help our province welcome new residents and make them feel at home.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Mr. Speaker, I echo the minister's sentiments on the importance of immigration to our province. As it stands now, our province is projected to continue to lose population well into the future. The loss of population is one of the most important and fundamental issues facing our province.

Under population forecasts produced by government, we are the only province or territory that will experience population declines under every scenario. Our population is aging and it's the oldest in Confederation. We need to attract and retain as many young people as possible to help us right this ship. To do this, government needs to create conditions not only to attract these people, but to create an environment that allows them to raise families here.

The reports and surveys commissioned by this government have been clear, that long-term meaningful employment is key to bringing both expats home and increasing immigration. This government has failed to create the conditions for well-paying jobs and, as a result, we will continue to see hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians leaving for better prospects elsewhere.

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

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

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

It's nice to know we are attracting newcomers to our province, but are we keeping them? Our population is declining, which tells me we are not attracting and retaining nearly enough. In fact, there's less money in the budget for immigration this year than last.

Let's properly fund and support the programs designed to help individuals settle and become integrated into our communities and try simple things, like suggesting those from sunnier places take vitamin D supplements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

**MR. WARR:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I recognize five amazing people who were honoured by our government last week during the annual Seniors of Distinction Awards ceremony.

I had the pleasure of announcing the 2020 Seniors of Distinction on October 1 as part of marking National Seniors Day and the United Nations' International Day of Older Persons.

This year's recipients are Doris Butt, Lloyd Colbourne, Rosemary Lester, Paddy McNeil and Emma Reelis. While each of these individuals has contributed to our province in different ways and have different life experiences, they all have one thing in common; and that is, they have made a tremendous impact on their communities and our province.

The volunteer contributions of Doris Butt, of Corner Brook, span the Atlantic provinces and include fundraising, church groups, sports teams, Girl Guides and serving as a foster parent.

Lloyd Colbourne has served as a member of almost every committee in his home town of Robert's Arm, including the fire department, the Economic Development Association and the Public Library board.

Rosemary Lester came here from the United Kingdom, and is a committed volunteer in the area of health care and seniors' well-being, dedicating years to improving the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Paddy McNeil, of Pasadena, is a retired RCMP officer and life-long volunteer, who started the Paddy's Wagon Food Bank Pickup during COVID-19, as well as a group that helps people of all ages learn to play the guitar.

Emma Reelis is an Inuit Elder from Nain, who works at all levels of society to contribute to the cultural, health and well-being of the Indigenous communities of the province. We are honoured

that Emma offered an opening prayer at last week's award ceremony.

Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleagues and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to join me in congratulating the 2020 Seniors of Distinction.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

I join the minister in recognizing Doris Butt, Lloyd Colbourne, Rosemary Lester, Paddy McNeil and Emma Reelis. Seniors are a valuable part of our communities.

Last Thursday we celebrated National Seniors Day and the United Nations' International Day of Older Persons. Each of this year's recipients of the annual Seniors of Distinction Award are deeply involved in their communities. Whether it be sports, fundraising, Girl Guides, volunteer firefighting or whatever, each of these recipients play a vital role in keeping community spirit alive even through these tough times.

Mr. Speaker, myself and the PC Opposition join the minister in congratulating the 2020 Seniors of Distinction Award winners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement and join, along with our caucus, in recognizing National Seniors Day and the UN's International Day of Older Persons and, most of all, in celebrating the remarkable contributions of this year's Seniors of Distinction.

At times when media and society at large portray seniors as frail, in need of care or bound for long-term care facilities, it's important to remember that many families, communities and service organizations could not function without them. They are, indeed, the backbone of our society and, indeed, of our province.

I join the minister, again, in celebrating their accomplishments.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

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

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

We can fully see how proud MHAs are of their constituents. I'm excited in this hon. House to recognize Dawson Mercer, who has been selected 18th overall by the New Jersey Devils in the first round of the National Hockey League's entry-level draft last night.

The 18-year-old Bay Roberts native is the 42nd player from this province to be selected in the NHL entry-level draft, and the seventh to go in the first round. A member of the Chicoutimi Saguenéens in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, Dawson is considered one of the top junior-aged players in the world. His ability and skill is expected to make him a pivotal player of Team Canada's entry at the World Junior Hockey Championship this year, where he will aim to win another gold medal as part of Team Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the Mercer family in the Conception Bay region is well-known for their abilities on the ice. Father Craig was a senior hockey star in this province, brother Riley is currently a goalie with the Drummondville Voltigeurs in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League and sister Jessica plays in Triple A hockey here at home.

Mr. Speaker, Dawson's family must be overjoyed as he certainly is living out his dream.

His family must also be very proud of the fact that so many in the hockey community speak of Dawson's maturity, his magnetic personality and leadership qualities on and off the ice. Athletes from Newfoundland and Labrador are making an impact, and this is the second consecutive year a hockey player from our province has been selected in the opening round of the NHL entry-level draft, as St. John's native – and a constituent of mine – Alex Newhook was chosen 16th overall by the Colorado Avalanche in 2019.

I ask all hon. Members in this House to join me in congratulating Dawson Mercer on his selection in the opening round of the entry-level draft for the NHL and being an inspiration to hockey players across our province and right across the country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**MR. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I wish to congratulate Dawson Mercer on being selected 18th overall in the National Hockey League draft last night. While this year's NHL draft was done virtually, instead of in person, the excitement and support in the province for Dawson is no less. In fact, I know many households in Bay Roberts area and throughout the province tuned in with anticipation to support Dawson.

While I look forward to hearing about Dawson's future professional hockey career, I also want to take a moment to recognize the many coaches, volunteers, supporters and his family who helped Dawson achieved his dream. Those 6 a.m. morning practices have resulted in another Newfoundlander and Labradorian entering the NHL.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the future when we can congratulate Dawson on his very first NHL goal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**MR. BROWN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

For a long time, our province has been home to many professional hockey players. The Members and staff of the NDP caucus would like to congratulate Dawson Mercer on his first-round pick in the NHL draft.

I would also like to send a message to all youth in this province that are chasing their dream of professional sports: it is possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Terra Nova FPSO is still resting in Conception Bay. Bay du Nord is deferred. Come By Chance refinery may close permanently and we've been informed that Husky is laying off workers as we sit, and will make a decision within days whether to mothball the West White Rose structure.

In the face of massive job loss, does the Liberal government have a comprehensive jobs plan for the energy sector?

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These are indeed difficult times. We know the global pandemic has played havoc with the economies around the world, and in particular with the oil and gas industry, Mr. Speaker.

I will say to the Member opposite, the entire budget you would have seen references various investments that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, indeed, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are making to grow our industries, to grow our economy, to support businesses during this pandemic.

I say to the Member opposite, we are indeed focused on economic opportunity, and on jobs for the people of this province. It is unfortunate that we are in the middle of a pandemic, but I can say to the Member opposite we are doing all that we can to ensure economic success as well as safety of our citizens.

Thank you.

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

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** I didn't ask what the attitude was; I asked what the plan was, Mr. Speaker.

Former Prime Minister Mulrooney told a dinner in St. John's last week that the \$320 million was a smaller amount that does not solve the problem. He said the Government of Canada must provide the visionary leadership to guarantee the ongoing success of the offshore and step in and help in a dramatic way, and if he had to come here himself to do it, by God, he would.

Why can't the government leverage their relationship with Liberals in Ottawa to get the same result?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to listen to Mr. Mulrooney – someone I greatly respect. I didn't have the \$1,000 for the PC Party dinner.

What I would say is that I agree with the sentiment and he shares the same thoughts as us all, that we need to take dramatic and bold measures to help deal with an industry that has been battered worldwide by the COVID pandemic and by the oil pricing wars.

What I can say is that our federal partners have been there, they have been responsive. They just delivered \$320 million, and we'll continue to work with them to leverage more for this industry and keep Newfoundlanders and Labradorians working.

Thank you.

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

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** I can only wish the minister the best of luck in that, Mr. Speaker, given the ideological stance against oil that the national government shows.

When national Opposition Leader Erin O'Toole asked the deputy prime minister yesterday about job losses at Come By Chance, he talked about how many workers received the CERB in Alberta. After another question from O'Toole he talked about the \$320 million provided to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to support energy workers.

Given that this money is earmarked for offshore support, does this mean the federal Liberals are giving no support to save jobs at Come By Chance?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, and I thank Mr. O'Toole for the question.

What I would say is we are doing what we can as a government, not just when it comes to the offshore industry, but obviously for Come By Chance, which we are still in the midst of dealing with. What I can say is that we've taken enormous steps to try to do what we can to help this commercial transaction between two private companies. One that we know was terminated.

What we do know is that there is hope for this project. The fact is that Origin, as the Member may know, has been looking at this. They are very interested. In fact, the due diligence has started.

So what I would say is that I hope the Member will join me in sharing, what I would call, cautious optimism towards the future success of this project.

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

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** I share the minister's call for optimism; however, it seems to us in the Official Opposition that matters would have been well progressed along the path of due diligence had the government had a plan B in hand while the negotiations were going on between Irving and the seller.

Did the government have a plan B for the contingency that these negotiations with Irving Oil might fail?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely a ridiculous statement from the Leader of the Opposition and he actually should know better.

What I can say is that back in the early summer, we'll say late spring and June, there was a deal in place between Irving and Silverpeak. I'm not sure why Origin, another private company, who was not party to the deal, would go out and spend the time, money and resources to be the plan B in this matter.

The reality is that this deal was just terminated in the last 48 hours, so you can sit there and talk about what you would have done, but you literally have no idea what you're talking about.

Thank you.

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



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

**MR. CROSBIE:** The unemployed workers, and there are many of them, and their union do not think the idea is ridiculous to keep an avid buyer, who was runner-up in the bidding, on hot standby in case the negotiations fell through. It's obvious there was no such plan.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know the Member is talking about hot standby, but maybe you need to talk to Origin; maybe you have. You said you were the other night.

What I can say is that there was a deal in place between two private companies. I'm not sure if the second company, again, which was not a part of this deal, is going to go out and spend the time, money and resources to be plan B. I don't think that's how it works. I'm not sure if that's how you would run your company if you were doing it.

What I can say is that I am very optimistic and happy about the negotiations and the developments that have begun, the due diligence that started, and I, for one, am certainly worried about the future of the workers at Come By Chance.

Thank you.

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, I can only say that's not how I'd run my government.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Was that a question, Mr. Speaker?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Has the minister or Premier spoken with Mr. Irving about why this deal is falling through and how they can come back to the table?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you to the Member opposite for what I would consider a very reasonable question and a good question.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** What I can say is that we have been in contact with Irving. We actually spoke to them yesterday. What they advised us is that because of the various agreements in place, they were hesitant to give any details that would possibly cause legal issues, but I think they put out a very brief statement indicating that the agreement was terminated. So that's how we have been proceeding on that basis.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Has the Premier or you, Minister, spoken with the CEO of the North Atlantic refinery in an effort to restart these negotiations?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for the question. What I would say is yes, we've been in contact with Silverpeak basically every day when it comes to this situation, which I would note is evolving obviously very rapidly, and it's changing. It's changed from yesterday, it's changed today and it's changing tomorrow.

What I would say is the positive here – and hopefully it's a positive for Silverpeak and for Come By Chance – is that there is an interested party; the work has begun. What I can say is that

even since yesterday I have had contact myself from people that have indicated an interest in this. So what I would express now is a cautious optimism and we will do, as a government, what we can to help in any way to make sure that Silverpeak gets a deal.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, have you or the Premier offered to convene a meeting of both parties, or even the new Origin proponent? Have you offered to sit down and meet with those?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I can say is that the Premier actually has meet with Origin; they have sat down. I was in contact with them twice today. We spoke to the president as well. What they've indicated – obviously, they were surprised at how this went as well, but they are interested and the work has actually begun to do the due diligence to see where we are.

Now, what I will say is that we face – as much as I have optimism – huge challenges. You only have to read the stories that come out every day about refineries are having a huge issue worldwide. Phillips 66 had a closure yesterday. We are looking at closures.

The fact is that refineries are going through a difficult time but, as it relates to this one, we have some optimism and we will do what we can.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, in the House, the minister said that support would be premature. Minister, people are without jobs, as I know you're aware; communities are concerned.

Minister, you or your own government cannot absolve this responsibility to the people. Are you considering any support for the refinery?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I can say is if there is one thing we are going to do; we are not going to absolve any responsibility. We will do what we can. Even though we are not a party to the contract, as I have said in multiple interviews, I feel, as a province and as a government, we have a vested interest in the success of this project and for the success of these workers.

What I will say is that we will consider multiple options to ensure the success of all the parties involved, but what I will say right now is that after speaking to Origin, we will do what we can.

I think everybody, right now, would like to see, as the primary option, the refinery continuing to operate.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister has said that this was not a government decision and I don't feel that I have to explain anything. I disagree. It is the minister who is responsible to ensure that this province has a vibrant energy industry.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Did this deal go off the rails because the minister was not involved in any meaningful way?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Sadly, we live with an industry that fluctuates, the same as the quality of the questions on the other side. We just went from four really good, pertinent, important questions to more of the politicking that continues to come from the Member opposite.

Again, I don't remember saying anything along those lines. I don't appreciate being paraphrased. What I would suggest here is if you have an actual simple solution or suggestion, why don't you put it out here instead of doing what you're doing right now, which is playing politics, because I tell you what, none of our constituents appreciate it.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Mr. Speaker, these are legitimate questions that the people have a right to know, and I speak for the people that I represent in my district.

Yesterday the minister repeatedly said that government does not have a role in the sale of Come By Chance. These were statements that he made. We have a right to ask these legitimate questions of our government.

Minister, if government does not have a role, who is going to look after the interests of the people of the province?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's a completely ridiculous, partisan, biased, nonsensical question. I've sat here repeatedly during Question Period, and you know what? I fully realize the role that government has to play, but maybe you're not, I guess, understanding what I'm saying here. It's a

deal between two private companies. We have a vested interest in here.

Again, what I would say, I look to the Member for Terra Nova. Yesterday he sat here during that debate – very important – and gave a number of positive suggestions and solutions which I marked down. I listened intently and our department will look at it. I say to the Member: What do you have?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Mr. Speaker, condescension and disrespect have no place in this House of Assembly.

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

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Come By Chance is an employer of 500 people, many from my District of Harbour Main, and it supports multiple communities. It supplies the province with jet fuel, propane and fuel used to produce electricity. The province holds environmental liability for this site.

How can the minister accept not having an important role in this matter of critical importance?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think at any point have I said that the government doesn't have a role to play. I would think actually that my answers just then to the Member for Conception Bay South would indicate that we fully realize what we are trying to do here.

You mentioned the environmental liability; yes, that's one of the issues that we must grapple with. It was given in 2014. It's one of the issues we're talking about and there's work being done.

Right now, my primary concern is to do the work, not just myself but the entire staff. I'll

listen to anybody right here because we all have the same goal in mind: to keep these workers working. If you have a suggestion, I would say to the Member, please contribute it.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**MR. PARROTT:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister didn't know how much fuel the refinery produced for the province, but he thought it was in the 40 per cent range.

Minister, how much fuel is produced by the refinery specifically for the province?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I apologize to the Member because I don't have those stats here, but what I would say is it depends on the type of fuel whether it is jet fuel, which it is 100 per cent, but, right now, they're using 30 per cent of historical levels due to the obvious downslide, we'll say, in the aviation industry.

We realize now the importance when it comes to propane and home heating. We realize the importance when it comes to fuel, gasoline. We realize all of these matters.

What I would say, one thing I would point out, it goes to, I guess, the thrust of this question, which is fuel supply right now is not an issue. I will say, and the Member would know, that the longer that this goes on that will be an issue that we face.

I want to thank the Member for the contribution he has made so far and I look forward to continuing to work together to benefit these citizens.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**MR. PARROTT:** I'd urge the minister to investigate the availability of shipping fuel into the province based on draft and getting into the dock.

In 2016, an official with NARL said: If the refinery were to shut down, Newfoundland's supply of electricity would be jeopardized and there would be a serious disruption to the supply of heating fuels, diesel, jet fuel and gasoline as quickly as within one week. Obviously, based on fuel not being shipped in.

Is the minister concerned about fuel supply for the province?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I would say is that it has been indicated to us that fuel supply right now, at the moment, is not an issue and I certainly don't want there to be a panic out there in the public because that's not what any of us want to cause. What I will say is contingencies have been considered; contingency have been planned so we will be ready to deal with this as this moves forward.

It's not just a case of working with the entities to try to figure out a deal, we're also dealing with the other issues that would arise if the closure were to happen.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**MR. PARROTT:** Mr. Speaker, obviously nobody anticipated the shutdown of the refinery so we can't anticipate the shutdown of the tank farm.

Come By Chance is the exclusive supplier of fuel for three of Nalcor's thermal generation stations. If the refinery closes its tank farm what is Nalcor's backup plan?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I can say is that our officials have been in touch with any group that would be touched here, including Nalcor. What I would say is there's no fear being felt on that level right now. There have been contingency and it would be contingencies for any type of situation. I certainly know that the department has prepared and I know that Nalcor would be prepared, that's something that would go into, I guess, the structure of their planning on a year-to-year and on a day-to-day basis.

Right now, I wouldn't say that there's a sense of fear, but, obviously, there's an awareness and a cognizance that's going on of all the implications that could come from a closure.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**MR. PARROTT:** I remind the minister that weather plays a big part in all this, and two weeks ago we were almost out of jet fuel for the province.

Hydro has a limited storage capacity. An official with NARL indicated that if the refinery were to shut down Nalcor's thermal generators would run out of fuel within two weeks.

Minister, we all know any commercial transaction has the potential to breakdown, so I ask, again: What is Nalcor's backup plan?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the questions from the Member opposite.

What I can say is that in our discussions between our department and entities such as Nalcor that there has been contingency planning put in place. So we are confident that we will be okay going forward.

What I would say is that my primary concern is that we don't get there, and that why we'll continue to provide the support that we can to ensure that companies like Origin have the ability to do their due diligence and we'll

continue to be a willing and helpful partner in negotiations, if asked.

Thank you.

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

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

**MR. FORSEY:** The Liberal government stripped the 24-hour emergency service from the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Centre in Botwood in 2016, but promised to reinstate it once the long-term care was completed.

Can the minister provide the House with a date when the 24-hour emergency service will reopen?

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I will probably try and paraphrase or repeat the answer that I've given on previous occasions.

When the new protective care unit is commissioned, when it is then staffed and opened, we will look at the utilization patterns for the emergency departments in the area to see if there is the demand to restore 24-hour emergency in that location. Current demand is minimal, and I would remind the Member opposite that it is less than half an hour by ambulance from Botwood and Hugh Twomey to the Central Newfoundland Regional Health Care facility.

In the meantime, we have also supplemented community care with an 811 nurse practitioner, and we're looking at paramedicine in the community as well, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

**MR. FORSEY:** The Liberal government now plan to strip the lab services from Grand Falls-Windsor hospital and move it to a centralized lab testing hub in Gander.

Can the minister advise the actual timing on this move?

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite misspeaks completely. What the plan for lab reform is concerning Grand Falls-Windsor is an investment of, I think, over \$4 million to renovate their laboratory and a change in their backup machine. There will be no change in the level of service to patients or clinicians in Central Newfoundland Regional Health centre's catchment area. The premise of the question is flawed.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** Our hearts are with the employees whose jobs are at risk. They're worried about how they will pay their bills.

Has the minister inquired about the status of the Come By Chance pension fund and is it fully funded?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an important question.

Government has 180 pension plans representing some 100,000 people that they regulate. They do regulate three pension plans at the North Atlantic refinery. Our government and the Department of Digital Government and Service NL is keenly aware of the issues out there, are looking at the issues regarding pensions and will make sure that all regulatory responsibility for those plans are followed to protect the workers.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**MR. BROWN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The grim outlook of the province's economy has our province facing an out-migration crisis as young people and families look for long-term prospects and opportunities in their lives. We cannot wait for insight from a third party consultant on a task force to direct the Liberal government plan.

I ask the Minister of IET: What is the government's plan to addressing out-migration, giving the best and brightest Newfoundlanders and Labradorians hope and entice them to stay in and return to this province?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the question from the Member because it gives me a great opportunity to fulfill a promise that I made this morning.

I was up on Harbour View Avenue meeting with a group called AltoMaxx, which is actually run by a transplanted Ontarian who came here eight years ago and started this company. The big thing he told me is that he has 13 jobs and they're looking to start more in his sector. The fact is he needs to work with entities like the College of the North Atlantic. He needs to work with government to figure out ways that they can take their technology, which is cutting-edge drone technology, which can be applied to the oil fields. It can be applied anywhere where safety is an issue.

His big thing he keeps talking about is education and the need for us to basically help him fill these jobs. That's just one of those companies, and if I get another question I'm going to talk about another one.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**MR. BROWN:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister alluded to the focus on expanding our technology industry in an effort to diversify our economy. We know the students of this province will be provided with Chromebooks without reliable and affordable access to the Internet.

I ask the minister: What is the government's plan to ensure rural areas in our province without reliable Internet access will benefit and not be overlooked?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That certainly is one of the areas that falls under the new Department of IET, and that would be connectivity, broadband and cellular.

What I would say is that there has been significant investment made, but the biggest thing that impresses me is that with one investment from the provincial government, we've been able to lever that and create huge leveraged amounts of money from the federal government, from ACOA and from private industry.

While we realize that there are still gaps, that there are still issues, I think we are doing quite well and there's an opportunity to grow. If there's one thing COVID has shown us – coming back to the tech sector and the job sector – is that we need to find a way to expand these companies ability to reach out online, which is why we just gave \$2.7 million to NATI to help these companies transition. There will be 170 businesses in this province that are going to transition to increasing their access online and throughout the rest of the world.

Thank you.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, Health Canada has approved the use of two COVID rapid testing products; tests

which can have results in less than 20 minutes. Ottawa announced they will be procuring over 27 million of these for use across Canada as needs demand. The tests are approved for point-of-care testing to be used by trained professionals and pharmacies, walk-in clinics or doctors' offices.

I ask the Minister of Health, if public health nurses will be approved and designated to deliver such tests.

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It's a very good one.

Technology in this area is evolving quite rapidly and Health Canada has, by their own metrics, broken a couple records in getting these devices through the approval process.

We had discussions last week about acquiring this technology. The level of training is part of the discussion between our technical advisory committee in the province and also the federal level. Once I have their feedback on that question, I will be able to answer the Member's question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre, time for a quick question and a quick answer.

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

As part of the province's Safe Return to School plan, government hired an extra five public health nurses.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services, where these nurses have been deployed and how will they support schools during COVID-19?

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We have additional public health resources. What we're looking at is how to magnify their skill and expertise. Five nurses for 268-plus schools is not an equation that makes sense. We need to use the skills they provide to provide oversight for that kind of function within health and we're working with the Department of Education to operationalize that.

I would be happy to answer further if you'd stop waving at me.

Thank you very much.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thought about scrapping these questions after a couple of exchanges I heard between the minister and a couple of Members of the Opposition, but I'll ask them anyway because there is always hope.

Yesterday, the workers of the Come By Chance oil refinery, the many people who are indirectly employed by its operation, the surrounding communities and the province as a whole were dealt a huge blow. If there was ever a time for all parties to put politics aside and work together, it is now.

I ask the minister: Would you commit to regular meetings and communications with the leaders of the Official Opposition and the NDP and work collaboratively with all Members of the House of Assembly on ways of keeping this valuable asset alive and supporting these workers and their families?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the question. It is an important one.

What I would say is that I think we're always willing to collaborate. I cannot commit right now to this, because the reality is a lot of this is

commercially sensitive. The fact is that there are certain things that are legally covered that we don't want to cause trouble, but I think over the last number of months it's been shown that there's a willingness to be collaborative. I believe there are various Members of government and the Opposition and the NDP that have been having regular meetings as it comes to the state of emergency that we fall under.

What I will commit to the Member, who I would note sat through Estimates the other night and asked some pertinent questions, is that anybody that contacts me, I will always contact them back and talk to the best of my ability about what is happening and what we can do.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Mr. Speaker, in a similar vein, we are painfully aware of the many challenges being faced by our offshore oil industry and the many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians whose future hang in the balance.

I ask the minister: Will you likewise commit to collaborate with the other parties to help find solutions and to lobby jointly to the federal government for the assistance required to get our people back to work in the oil industry?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I would say to the Member is, again, I think it's incumbent on us to do what we can as Members, whether that's to lobby the federal government. I know the former minister wrote way back in the fall. I know that the current Leader of the PCs wrote six months later.

What I would say, I look over again to the Member for Terra Nova. He spoke here in the House and suggested a number of actual business case suggestions, actual constructive ideas and solutions. I sat here, we marked them



down and we brought them back to the department and they are being looked at. If people want to put forward constructive ideas, we have every duty to look at that, but it has to be just that and it can't be the usual partisan rhetoric.

Thank you.

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

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

**MS. COFFIN:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Point of order.

**MS. COFFIN:** Mr. Speaker, I note during Question Period the Member for Burgeo - La Poile has violated Standing Order 44 by referring to the Member for Harbour Main and the Member for Windsor Lake as you, and not addressing himself or the Speaker.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I will review the transcripts and the tape and report back on that matter.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### Tabling of Documents

**MR. SPEAKER:** I have a document to table. Pursuant to section 7 of the *Transparency and Accountability Act*, I'm pleased to table the 2020-2023 activity plan for the Office of the Citizens' Representative.

Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Seeing no petitions, we'll move to Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** It being Wednesday, I now call on the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans to introduce his resolution standing in his name.

**MR. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move the following private Member's resolution, seconded by the Member for Ferryland.

Be it resolved that this hon. House urge the government to bring to the House an amendment to the *House of Assembly Act* for deliberation during the current fall sitting to set a fixed date for the next general election in the third week of October 2021, notwithstanding section 3.1 of the act.

For the record, section 3.1 of the current act is the section requiring a general election within 12 months of a new premier taking office. It reads as follows: "Election on change of Premier 3.1 Where the leader of the political party that forms the government resigns his or her position as leader and as Premier of the province before the end of the third year following the most recent general election, the person who is elected by the party to replace him or her as the leader of the party and who is sworn in as the Premier of the province by the Lieutenant-Governor shall, not later than 12 months afterward, provide advice to the Lieutenant-Governor that the House of Assembly be dissolved and a general election be held."

Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to say today is what this resolution is not. It is not about protecting our party from an election or its Members, and we're not ready for it. That's not what it has to do with at all, Mr. Speaker.

We are ready for an election, whenever it is called. We've been waiting for the next election since the 2019 election, when we came within one point of claiming the popular vote. The election in which the people of the province reduced the current government to a minority and put them on a very short leash. It was the

people of the province who did that; they did it for a reason. They are not happy with the direction the majority Liberal government has taken us since 2015. They were unwilling to give the Liberals a mandate to continue business as usual. They were, in effort, creating a situation where the parties of the House would have to co-operate and hold one another to account to get things done in this province. I think we've done a very good job of that so far, Mr. Speaker.

We have been co-operating where we could and always holding the government's feet to the fire. We could have taken action collectively as an Opposition in 2019, or even this year, to express non-confidence and trigger an election, but we always opted not to. People did not want another election right away. They wanted the parties to co-operate, to rescue the province from a worsening crisis. So that's what we are going to do.

This year, the Liberal Party chose to replace the Premier who led them in the 2019 election. Both candidates for the leadership spoke of the need for a fresh approach, Mr. Speaker. That in itself was a clear indictment of the approach the Liberal government had taken since 2015. The Liberal leadership was blindsided, as we all were, by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was supposed to happen sooner but was delayed because of measures the chief medical officer of Health needed to take to protect the people from the pandemic.

COVID-19 continues to rage around the world, and although this province has fared much better than most, the importance of vigilance and caution cannot be overstated. People are very concerned every time a new case emerges. They know a second wave could hit us rapidly with devastating consequences, Mr. Speaker. This is not a normal year, by no means. The pandemic has also ravaged our economy making a bad situation much, much worse. This continues to be a time for all parties to collaboratively guide our province through a tough period.

The people of the province do not want an election this fall. I've heard it throughout my district and I'm sure you have all heard it through yours. I believe the three parties in this House have all said they do not want an election

this fall. The new Premier said the same. On June 17, the media reported that the new Premier, who was then a leadership candidate, promised that he would not call a snap election this fall if he became Premier for the people of the province.

Public health officials believe the pandemic will continue to rage in 2021. Perhaps a vaccine will be available later in that year. Perhaps the pandemic will gradually subside as it has in the past, but public health and sound management of the economy during the crisis are the overriding priorities right now. Stability is paramount. Investors and lenders are demanding stability. They want to see a clear path of action to get us through the worst of the crisis and put us on track for recovery. It's the same thing we all want, Mr. Speaker.

This is not a smaller matter. Thousands of people in the province are without work or risk of losing their jobs. The budget document confirms this. Many people in businesses are teetering on the edge. They're at risk of losing their businesses, losing their homes, losing their sense of security that many of them have had. Many are insulted from the impacts but for most of them, this crisis is real for them. They are scared. They want the government and this House to make the security our top priority, Mr. Speaker. They want all of us collectively to show leadership; to not just talk about doing the right thing but actually doing the right thing. Let's not forget that as we move forward.

We should not be focused on jockeying for political advantage ahead of a snap election that could be called at any time. We should all be focused on people, addressing their pressing needs during this time and collectively, all of us, working together to lead the province to a stronger position from which we can better recover.

The first reason for today's resolution is the best interest of the people must be paramount. There is another reason, and it is also about focusing on the best interest of the people of the province, Mr. Speaker. The concept of fixed-date elections is fairly new but many jurisdictions have adopted it. Why? Because fixed-date elections make democracy stronger.

In the past, governments would use their powers to call snap elections as a tool to use for their own political advantage. All parties have done it. When the polls look good the premier would drop the writ, hoping to catch the other parties off guard and slip back into power for another term. Fixed-date elections take away a great deal of that advantage. All parties agree to be bound by the principle that people are best served when that advantage is removed, when it's a level playing field, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, because of the pandemic, we suggest that the election be held in the fall of 2021, in the third week of October. Once such a bill is brought forward, it can also contain provisions for an alternative date should it conflict with a federal election and make the date subject to the advice of the chief medical officer of Health in the event of a pandemic crisis that makes an election unwise. A well-thought-out piece of legislation can do these things while still respecting the principle of fixed-date elections, which we ought to honour in this House. People are fed up with the old way of politics, Mr. Speaker. Democratic reform is public priority. It leads to better governance and cleaner politics.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the people of the province actually want us to work collaboratively, like we said we were going to do and like we've been doing on many projects, including the all-party Committee that we had going through the pandemic. It was very important to the people of the province and I know it was important to people in my district, as I'm sure it was to everybody else's. To call a snap election is not doing a service to the people of the province. It's more of a self-service than anything at all.

On May 16, 2019, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador gave us their mandate. It's called a minority government. They gave us the mandate because they had been unhappy with the government's mandate since 2015. The people of the province gave us that mandate, Mr. Speaker. They wanted a minority government. You can see how a minority government works with such cases like we had with our Interim Supply. At that time, there were six months that were asked for. We managed to get it down to three months and we did it for the right reasons.

The minority government at the time worked well. That's exactly what it was in place for and we were quite happy about that. All three parties, including the independents, I believe, Mr. Speaker, have called for this in the future, a non-snap election, to give us a date and stick to that date as best we can. COVID-19 definitely threw us into the grips of itself. We're looking forward to better days and more stability.

The biggest thing with this piece moving forward in this resolution, Mr. Speaker, that I can think about, is stability and accountability. That's going to give us both. That's going to bridge the gap between both and it's something that the province needs right now.

We look at our oil and gas situation and it's in disarray, of course, the industry and trade and, most recently, the refinery in Come By Chance. I don't know about the rest of anybody else but the last thing that I need to do right now is to get out there and worry about an election and focus on an election right now at this time. I have no fear of an election. I was ready for another election on May 17, 2019, so that's not what this is about.

This is about putting the people of the province first. That's the main thing here. Not being self-serviced at all. If we can provide stability moving forward in the most unstable time in the world, in our country and right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we haven't seen stability for a long, long time and the people of the province are crying for it.

On the other end of that, Mr. Speaker, we need accountability as well. We know that there has to be an election but it needs its due process. That's not something we need to surprise the people of the province with or go door to door or focus on that right now. I think our time and efforts are better spent right here in the House of Assembly or in our districts helping the people of the province as best we can.

Mr. Speaker, it was only six weeks ago we were fighting to get 76 more people in a 220-seat movie theatre. So how we can go from that six weeks ago to holding a general election across the province anytime soon is beyond me. I think that the people of the province deserve better than that and I think that they're looking for

stability. I truly believe that we have to give it to them at this time.

Moving forward, I'm asked about it every single day: When is the election? When is the election? Because the people have seen the instability here in Newfoundland and Labrador across the province and across the globe. So if we can give the people of the province who are afraid, who are uncertain at this time, if we can give them some sort of stability now with a fixed-election date so we can move on with the bigger matters brought to us each and every day, I think that's something that the people of the province can really appreciate and sink their teeth into. I think they would appreciate that after awhile.

Like I say, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear, we have no fear of an election; it's something that's going to be brought forth at some time. I just hope that we can collaboratively come together on this today and make the right decision and let the people of the province know that we are hear for you, we're not worried about an election right now. It's not something that we need at this time. It's not something that they should be worried about as well, getting people together. All of our efforts are much better right here and in our districts.

The questions today are: Do we respect the best interests of the people? Do we put people first and stand for stability in this time of crisis? Do we respect the principles of democratic reform? Our party says yes. We're going to ask all the other parties and the independents and everybody in this Chamber to do the same, Mr. Speaker.

I'll open up the floor now and I look forward to hearing the thoughts moving forward about why we should or why we shouldn't and see where we go from there. I would love to hear some thoughts from other MHAs and ministers throughout the Chamber to see what their thoughts are moving forward about a fixed-date election for the third week of October, 2021.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will agree with the Member for Grand Falls – I should know; it's my hometown. I just want to make sure I get the right name of the district. Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, I knew Grand Falls-Windsor, seeing I'm from Monchy Road.

Allow me first, Mr. Speaker, to say a couple of things to the Member opposite. I agree with him. We need stability and accountability. I think that is incumbent upon this House and I think it's incumbent upon all of us to ensure the people of the province are thought of first and foremost. I will also agree with him that this province has fared better than most, I would say, with regard to the pandemic and with regard to our health concerns and how we've come through this pandemic. I again want to recognize Dr. Haggie and Dr. Fitzgerald for the outstanding work that they have done of making sure that we're probably leading, not just Canada, but I would say North America and probably the world in making sure we have safety.

I will agree on one more thing, that people do not want an election probably this fall. I can say that the only ones speaking about an election, Mr. Speaker, have been the Members opposite. I can say that categorically.

We do know that the Premier last night won a resounding and landslide victory. He's just been elected to the House of Assembly. I congratulate the Premier on being elected to the House of Assembly.

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

**MS. COADY:** Outstanding. I look forward to having him here. I can assure you that he has said time and time and time again that he has no intention to go to a vote this fall; he has no intention.

Mr. Speaker, the only one that I have heard speak of an election, quite frankly, is the Leader of the Opposition. He said yesterday in this House of Assembly; he said the day before in the media. He said it again; I have headlines here, if they would like me table it, from CBC, from *The Telegram*, multiple articles of him talking about going to an election, Mr. Speaker.

So he is the only one that I'm aware of that's starting to talk about an election.

The people of the province gave the Liberal government its confidence on May 16, 2019; therefore, in normal effect, we would be going until 2023. We have had a change of leadership in the Liberal Party – and, again, glad to see the Premier joining us in the House in the coming weeks – and that has invoked the law, Mr. Speaker, Bill 40, that was passed through this House in 2004. Let me just talk to the people of the province and talk about what we're discussing today.

We have the text of a motion that basically says: "... an amendment to the House of Assembly Act for deliberation during the current fall sitting" – so immediately – "to set a fixed date for the next general election to the third week of October of 2021 ...." Now, allow me to just talk about what they talked about in that particular act, section 3.1, which is in the text of the motion.

In section 3.1, just so the people of the province are aware, it says: "Where the leader of the political party that forms the government resigns his or her position as leader and as Premier of the province before the end of the third year following the most recent general election, the person who is elected by the party to replace him or her as the leader of the party and who is sworn in as the Premier of the province by the Lieutenant-Governor shall, not later than 12 months afterward, provide advice to the Lieutenant-Governor that the House of Assembly be dissolved and a general election be held."

Now, Mr. Speaker, allow me to just talk a little bit about that. It was brought in by the former Progressive Conservative government, it went through the House of Assembly and there was vigorous debate on that particular bill. It was Bill 40 for those who would like to look it up. Allow me to quote some of the *Hansard* from the day. I think the House leader of the day was the Speaker and I'm going to just quote something that he said during the debate.

There were three features he talked about in the bill itself and he said: "The third feature deals with, essentially, that should a sitting Premier

leave the seat of government and effectively resign as Premier of the Province, then what this legislation calls for is that, upon the election of a new Premier – Premier and leader, they would both be the same, I say to my colleague – in the House by his or her party, that individual must, within a twelve-month period – not may, but must – within a twelve-month period, go to the people of the Province to seek their own mandate."

I could go on. There are multiple pages of *Hansard* that talks, with vigour, of that third feature and principle. I could say that the Opposition leader of the day, which happened to be the Liberal leader at the time, questioned whether or not that was the right and true mechanism considering that it was the people of the party that received the mandate, not necessarily do we vote for the leader to have the mandate. It's the people; it's the MHAs that have that mandate. There was a rigorous and full debate around this whole issue.

In December, I can tell you that Bill 40 was introduced by the Progressive Conservative government of the day. It assented in December of 2004. So we're talking about a bill that has been here for quite some time. I can also say that during Committee – allow me to quote from Committee. This again from the Government House Leader of the day, a Progressive Conservative government, and this is the quote: "Let me also say this, with respect to the legislation: It is absolutely probably one of the most progressive pieces of legislation that government can bring forward. Again, I do not think it can be underscored or understated in terms of what we are doing here."

We have before us in this House a resolution that would basically ask for a change rather quickly in the days ahead – rather quickly – to a piece of legislation that the former PC government brought before this House, was rigorously debated, adopted and withstood the test of the last number of years, the last decade-plus. Stood the test of that rigour, Mr. Speaker.

The Member opposite talks about COVID being a concern and the concern of wanting to respect the best interests of the people. Well, I can say to the Member opposite and I can say to the people of the province, we have a law in this

land that we, as the Liberal Party – and I will again repeat it because people need to hear it again. There was no intent to go to an election this fall. The only people speaking of an election are the Members opposite, and, in particular, the Leader of the Opposition. He raises it again this week, in the House of Assembly yesterday. He raises it; it is covered in the media repeatedly and repeatedly.

As I said yesterday, we concluded a by-election in which the current Leader of the Liberal Party and current Premier won a resounding victory. Again, I look forward to welcoming him in the House.

I can say to the Member opposite, the chief medical officer weighed in on that election, ensured we had the proper protocols in place. In saying that, I copied in the media: They are following the protocols put in place by the chief medical officer who said that measures could be put in place; we could have an election. We could have the by-election move through. So I don't want the people of the province to think that the by-election caused concern. It did not. It followed protocol with the chief medical officer involved, and protocols were followed. The person responsible for the election also –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Chief electoral officer.

**MS. COADY:** Chief electoral officer, thank you. That was the word I was looking for.

The chief electoral officer also came forward. So I don't want to leave the people of the province with a concern around this. Everything was followed properly. It was thoroughly followed.

As a matter of fact, the by-election is not unlike other elections that have been held in this country. We've seen one in New Brunswick. I think Saskatchewan is in the middle of one. British Columbia is in the middle of one. I don't want the people of the province to be concerned about that or afraid about that, but let me again reiterate: There's nobody on this side of the House, there's nobody in government speaking about an election. It is always and continuously the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition Party that are raising this issue.

We have a law on the books that says – and for good reason of the day – the Progressive Conservative government of the day spoke with vigour, with force, with strength on why they felt strongly that this legislation they put forward, Bill 40, was so important that they continued to debate it. They brought it forward. It went through second and third reading. It went through Committee. It went through debate, and it has become the law of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I say to the Member opposite, when he says – and I'm going to quote from him. I wrote it down when he said it: they're fed up with the old way of politics. I'd say, Mr. Speaker, this is a bit of political theatre happening here today.

We have a law in this province that we are going to respect. We are respectful of the law of this province. We are respectful of the debates of the day. We are respectful of the fact that there's legislation in place and, indeed, I will say and agree with the Member opposite, people want stability. They want accountability.

These are troubling times. We've said that repeatedly, but playing on people's fears and anxieties is not where we want to be at this point in time, Mr. Speaker. Stability: I will say that this government, our government, the Liberal government has been doing that. They've shown leadership throughout this pandemic. They've shown the strength of that leadership by ensuring the safety of people in this province.

I say to you, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important to also recognize that we have a budget that we are reviewing right now, that we are in a minority government, that there is the opportunity for confidence votes. On May 16 of 2019 we did receive a minority government, and as part of that minority government democracy ensues.

If the Members opposite wish to call a motion of confidence, of non-confidence, they certainly can do so and certainly in this budget they could do so. They could do so in other means and mechanisms as well, Mr. Speaker. There are ways in which they could do that. So when Members opposite talk about catching the Opposition off guard, I would say that is more

they are in control of the confidence motions to this House; it is not this side of the House.

There are a lot of issues facing the province – indeed, a tremendous number of issues. We’re taking time away from those issues today to discuss the possibility of amending a piece of legislation that was brought forward in good faith by the former Progressive Conservative government, brought forward in good faith for these particular instances, Mr. Speaker, and it is law in our province. We have said repeatedly, it is not this government that has any intention of going to an election. Indeed, again, the Premier was just elected last night in a by-election. I’m perplexed that we have taken time away from the incredibly important and concerning issues of this province to open up this debate.

I’m even more perplexed by one other thing, Mr. Speaker. The legislation talks about an election would have to be called before the one-year mark of the swearing-in of the new Premier, August 19. If you look at 35 days from there, we’re talking about the end of September for a possible election. So they’re asking for an additional three weeks? It is perplexing as to why we would take our time away from the important, serious issues of the day, the concerns of the people of this province to open the debate on this issue when we have legislation, a law in place in this province that we should uphold.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**MR. O’DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I want to start off by congratulating Premier Furey on his win last night and congratulate the other candidates as well.

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

**MR. O’DRISCOLL:** I’d also congratulate Dawson Mercer out in Bay Roberts, I’m going to say, on his first-round selection.

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

**MR. O’DRISCOLL:** I played against his dad, so that’s telling you his age. That’s no good.

We’re certainly here in different times looking at all this stuff. It’s a big concern, obviously, to have an election this time of the year. Last night, just looking at the numbers, I think about 50 per cent of the people got out to vote. Do you think if COVID wasn’t on the go that there might be more people out to vote? Not saying it would have changed the vote, but those people have a right to vote and they’re probably scared and afraid to come out of their houses and to be able to get out. It’s a concern for people to not be able to get out.

Safety obviously is a big one. You look at the retirement homes that are in the area, how is that done. You look at an election committee that puts off an election; the cost, obviously, if you happen to have a snap election; trying to get things in place; trying to get buildings ready; trying to get masks ready; trying to get hand sanitizer and cleanups and extra people.

If people don’t realize, I know in my district they had a hard time filling the districts with people to sit in polling stations all day long for 12 hours in order to do this. I don’t know if anybody put any consideration into that, but again you have to start thinking about the little people and the people that put you here, the constituents that put you here. That’s what we forget all the time.

We sit over there; somebody finishes speaking; you get up and you go out. You don’t listen to anybody else; you just move on. Everybody has points to make and everybody has important points to make. That’s why you should sit here and listen. I know if you have a job to do or call to make, you have to do it, but you should be listening. It’s disrespectful in my mind.

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

**MR. O’DRISCOLL:** Oh, yes, I see you there.

It’s disrespectful to get up and leave. You have a call to make, absolutely, but I see Members over there and they sit here all the time listening, and we have them as well. I was taught to be respectful. If somebody’s talking, you sit down and listen to them. They have a good point and

you pick that out. That sticks to anything, wherever you go. People are going to make good points on this election, whether it be our side or your side, and you should take that and run.

We started off – I wasn't here – I'm thinking that it was back in 2004 just reading up on it, that the election, they started in with a fixed date. I think it went 2007, it ran okay; 2011, it went okay. I think 2015; it was changed a little bit. Then, in 2016 or 2015, they had a snap election. Again, I was away when this last election was called. I was in Florida. I don't know if I had any intentions of running at the time, but sitting down, playing a game of hockey and they call an election. You're getting calls: Are you going to run? Are you going to do this? No, I'm not; yes, I am; no, I'm not. You need time.

People need time to plan and that's what is not happening if it happens right now. If that comes in a month's time or if it's a planned date, you can plan around it and you can get people in place. It gives the government workers that are trying to line this up, time to put everything that they need to do in place.

If you call a snap election, the cost goes through the roof as far as I know, and I'm not an expert no that, but the cost goes through the roof. You're snapping it in; you're trying to find places. If you have this planned for whatever date it is, it's fixed. Then they have all their time to plan everything, to get everything in place and everything in order.

We sit here and try to complicate that. I keep saying how we complicate it; we don't listen to each other. We try to make it simple for the common person that can understand it and we want to complicate it and walk around it and go wherever. So a locked date is where it should be, in my mind.

It is my first time here, having a locked date, hopefully it goes and we'll see where it goes from there, but we sit here, we look at the political advantage. Yes, there's a political advantage somewhere along the way. I'm new at it. I hear one day there's going to be an election, the next day there's not; can't trust this one; can't trust that one. I'm not going to say that statement again because I said that the last time

and I got beat up over here about trust. We have to just sit down and think it through to where it should be. A locked election or a locked date would fix everything.

Then you can plan yourself. You've all been at this a number of times. You can plan yourself and be able to do your schedules, line up people to help you out. That's only our own, you're not talking about your constituents yet. We haven't gotten down to that. The people to get out; it's amazing.

We have a Premier here now that just got elected. When he gets in, when he gets his seat in here and we can ask him some questions. He has to get in here and learn, then he has to pass his first budget. Before he gets an election, he should have to pass a budget and then he's running on that budget. Once he gets elected on that, fine, but he should get his budget and have it passed and then be able to get an election on it. Why would he get in and be the Premier of the province and have nothing done on the budget? He hasn't seen it yet, he hasn't passed it.

I worked in a car dealership. I didn't get up and be the manager before I got down in sales or down in service, I worked my way through. You have to get to the lower start and work your way through it. We sit here; it's amazing how it all works.

The locked election for next year, I think the municipal election is next year in September. I'm not sure but I'm pretty sure that next year it's in September. So a month after that you'll have a provincial election. That can happen. I'm going to say a municipal election is a lot smaller than a provincial election, I'm sure it is. There's time there to do it. I don't see that being an issue; I heard that thrown around. I had a little discussion on it, but it does go on a month ahead of time.

If the election is September, then they're out in August and they'll be finished in September. Then if you know it's locked in next October for a provincial election, well then you're going to be ready. You're going to be doing it in the summertime or doing it whenever it is to get ready, if you know that it's a locked time you



won't have to wait to do it. So it's something that you got to sit back and look at.

Over a period of time parties have a poor record of being completely honest and upfront with their plans for governing. That was one of the statements that I wrote down because it changes like the wind. They're not ever held to anything. We're talking about reports that were handed in since I came here. They're that thick, trying to read them. After all of these reports were presented, nothing is ever changed; nothing ever implemented. There are things that got to be done before we ever get to an election and there are rules that we have to make.

The legislation that was there, it's not worth nothing it's written on right now because they change it right away. It was locked in and then it just changed. It should be legislation that is steadfast. Right now, they got it there and there's a clause in it that you can get around it. Maybe for a premier that could be a bit different and I could understand that, but other than that, it should be locked unless there's a new premier coming in. I think that's the way it is, but that's the way it should be.

You talk about honesty and talk about bringing down the government. I came in here in May; we've had three Interim Supplies. We never brought down government. Now, if you want to run today, no problem. We're over here ready to run, but we're not interested in that. If we were, it would be done long ago. We're not interested in that. The people don't want it. If you look at VOCM today, 71 per cent do not want the budget. We're going to sit here and people are going to talk; you say he's asking for it, you're asking for it.

How much?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** The election.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** Or the election. Yes, they don't want the election. Sorry, I said the budget.

Seventy-one per cent don't want the election. What part of that is it that we're not going to sit here and read, 71 per cent, and we're going to try to deviate from that? It's like a deer in the headlights. How can you not look at it and say

b'y, everybody can't be wrong? The other 29 per cent can't be right, are they?

We'll move past and you won't even give it a second thought. After the day is gone, we won't give that a second thought that 71 per cent told us not to have an election. We'll move right passed it like it never happened. B'y, that's 71 per cent of the constituents that voted for all of us that is making that vote and we continue not to listen to them. I suppose that's the way it's going to go. It's out there and we should pay heed to it.

Back to the Premier and running – facing a snap election without seeing any plan from our Liberal government right now. Basically, this budget is from last year's budget – very little change. So when he comes in he should put his stamp on it and be able to call it his budget and then run in the election. In my mind, that's the way I would think. Do you know what? He deserves to do that.

I'm getting good gestures over there. But he should definitely run on that and that would be the fair thing to do. Then if he wins, good for him, but put it out there that if there are tough decisions to make – if we get in we're probably going to have to make tough decisions, but let's make it happen first before we jump to a snap election. It just doesn't make any sense sometimes how we look at some of this stuff. Turn around and call the election and he hasn't done one thing yet only get elected.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER (P. Parsons):** Order, please!

I'm having trouble hearing the speaker. I don't know if the speaker can hear himself speak but I can't. Please, if we can keep our levels down.

**MR. O'DRISCOLL:** I'm probably too loud now.

I'll go back to – and I'll touch base and then I'll leave it at that – the unfortunate incident that happened in Come By Chance yesterday. Those people are home now. Do you think an election is on their mind? Very far from it. I went through it in 1992. July 2, my birthday, the

moratorium was announced and Mr. Crosbie's dad was the one that announced it.

We were sitting home. My mother and father worked in the fish plant. My father fished and the four boys worked in the fish plant. We had no job. So you're sitting there down in the basement, six people, no job in one house – six people. That touches a community.

I can just bear to feel what they're feeling in Come By Chance right now or out in Arnold's Cove. You're sitting here and we all have our jobs here that we're trying to do and not listening to each other. Then you should think about those people because they don't have a job today. They have to worry about their houses, they have to worry about their clothes, they have to worry about their kids and they have to worry about schools.

If you haven't been there, listen to the MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans yesterday. He's been there. When you lose your job it's not the end of the world because I'm still here, but I tell you what, it doesn't feel very good when it happens to you, I guarantee you. Any job you lose – I'm after losing other jobs, there's no question. A place closes up and you're sitting home idle. The world is like it's coming to an end. It's tough, I can tell you. It's tough for them, I can guarantee you. They don't know where to turn today. They're sitting down at their kitchen table having a cup of tea and wondering where it's all going to end. They don't know if they're going away; they don't know if they're staying here.

I'll get back to the election. Do you think they are thinking about an election today or in a month's time? They could care if that blew up; they're not interested in it. Not that we're not interested because this is a part of our jobs. We just don't want it right now and people don't want it. They just don't want it. You have to put yourselves in their shoes just for a day or just for a week now and see how that feels and see if an election is any good right now. That's just unfortunate that it happened yesterday and that I can go relate to it today. We related to it in July '92, that you're home with no job. The last thing on your mind is an election, I can tell you that.

With COVID and the safety that goes on, I think they did a great job. I said that yesterday, I think they did a great job of keeping people safe. We have a low number of cases. We sat home during COVID. I can't compliment enough for the first few months that went on, I have to tell you. The group that I was around thought the same thing, they did a great job. Every time I speak to him he's gone, but it was an amazing job they did, Dr. Fitzgerald, Premier Ball and Dr. Haggie. So I have to compliment them. Everything was about safety. Now, we can't just turn around and throw an election into that.

I will say one thing with COVID right now, with everybody that's here – we've all done it, and I've done it – is we're not taking COVID as seriously as it should be taken. He gives his warnings on TV. People are more lax now than they ever were. We're guilty as anybody, and the general public is guilty. The ones that are not guilty are definitely the ones that are not getting out to vote, because they're nervous.

We have people that will continue to break it, and it's too bad because it's scary, really. If we get a second wave here then we'll have to change the way we do things right here in this House if we get a second wave. I'm pretty sure we will. I'm not pretty sure we're getting a second wave, but I'm pretty sure we'll have to change how the House is done.

I really think people have become lax and I'd like to see people get back to a little more secure. Again, it's all about safety for this election. I really think if you schedule it out and put a fixed date on it – and I think that's where it should lead.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just wanted to respond to a couple of the things that I've heard, and I know the Member who introduced this private Member's resolution said it's all about COVID. I'll get to that in a

moment, but setting a carved date is what the legislation did back in 2004. I was here for that debate; I remember the debate. The debate largely focused on the fact that a premier who wasn't elected by the general public didn't have a mandate to make decisions. You can go back and read it; that was part of the debate.

In fact, when the current Premier, Premier Furey, became Leader of the Liberal Party, in fact, I remember one of the statements in the media by a current Member of this Legislature saying he didn't have a mandate. So things have changed, Madam Speaker. Things have changed, there's no question about that.

One of the Members on the other side talked about the fact that they changed it from a six-month Interim Supply to a three-month Interim Supply for the right reasons. I remember, I was minister of Finance at the time, Madam Speaker, and I said that officials in the department are saying that because of the potential of COVID – now, none of us here took it seriously at the time because we had no cases, but officials in the department were saying because of the potential of COVID we needed the certainty of six months Interim Supply.

Do you know what the other side said, Madam Speaker? We can't have six months' Interim Supply because you're going to call a snap election, we only need three months. Well, two weeks later we were back here getting a six-month Interim Supply. Two weeks later we were back getting a six-month Interim Supply.

Madam Speaker, one of the speakers opposite said we can't be caught off guard with a snap election. I don't think there's a media outlet in the province who hasn't reported the fact, when the new Premier took office, that we are mandated within 12 months to have an election. How anybody could be caught off guard with that, at this point, is a bit of a shock to me because I don't think anybody is caught off guard knowing that the law says there has to be an election within 12 months.

Now, talking about COVID, Madam Speaker. There have been three provinces in this country that have called elections since COVID happened. One of them, Madam Speaker, has actually held their election, and that's New

Brunswick. They called the election on the 17th of August, just a couple of months ago, and at the time they had 15 active cases of COVID. The election was the 14th of September. There were 66 per cent of the eligible voters who showed up to vote.

Madam Speaker, the previous election in New Brunswick was in 2018, and 67 per cent of the eligible electorate showed up to vote. So COVID didn't stop people from going to the polls – didn't stop people from going to the polls.

Madam Speaker, in Saskatchewan they called the election the 29th of September – 138 active cases. We'll see what their voter turnout is in Saskatchewan when they have the vote, but they had 138 active cases and they called an election. In British Columbia, they've called their election the 21st of September with 1,987 active cases. Do you know how many active cases they have today, Madam Speaker? They have 1,384 and they're in the middle of an election.

We've had very few cases in this province. They've all been travel related. I think today we have two or three active cases, as of today. COVID is not really the excuse. It's not really the reason. In fact, I'd argue otherwise. I'm not suggesting we call the election today, but Members opposite are saying they're not afraid. If there was a safe province in Canada to have an election, it's probably us, not British Columbia. It's probably us, not Saskatchewan, Madam Speaker. Let's not use COVID as the excuse.

We just had a by-election in the Humber - Gros Morne District and the voter turnout there in the by-election yesterday was 55 per cent. One of the Members opposite said: I imagine we would have had more people show up if there was no COVID. Well, let's look at the last three by-elections in this province, Madam Speaker.

Topsail - Paradise in 2019: 35 per cent voter turnout. Well, there was 55 per cent in Humber - Gros Morne yesterday. We look at Windsor Lake in 2018: 52 per cent voter turnout. Again, 55 per cent in Humber - Gros Morne yesterday. It didn't affect people going to the polls. You look at Mount Pearl North in 2017: 43 per cent voter turnout. We had 55 per cent yesterday. I

don't imagine COVID stopped people from going to the polls is the point that I'm making, based on the other by-elections we've had.

Madam Speaker, in the general election in 2019, we had 61 per cent. You always get more in a general election than you do in a by-election. We all know that. It was 61 per cent; 55 per cent in the by-election yesterday. COVID is not the excuse. There's absolutely no doubt about that in my mind. In fact, we know the reason.

When the party opposite, Madam Speaker, were neck and neck with us in the polls, there was a constant threat of an election from the other side. That's not the case today. There's not a constant threat and we know the reason why. Let's not pretend it's about COVID. The reality here, Madam Speaker, is that there's a very low prevalence of COVID in this province; there's no community spread in this province and the law is the law.

It was put in place in 2004. As I said, I was here in the Legislature when it was debated and it was about ensuring that the individual who became the leader of the governing party and, therefore, the premier did not have a blank cheque, did not have the ability to stay in office for longer than they should without calling a general election and did not have the ability to make significant decisions without a mandate from the people. That's the reason that law was put there, so I'm not sure why we need to change that law today.

The law was put there to give people of the province certainty that the elected leader of the governing party and, therefore, the premier would have a mandate from the people to make significant decisions, such as a budget, I would add.

Now, I'm not the guy who's going to make the decision on calling the election. We may very well have a budget before the next election. I don't know that. But the reality is the law was put there to ensure that the premier of the province had a mandate from the people to make significant decisions. That's the reason it was put there.

Madam Speaker, if we did what the private Member's resolution is asking, which is what

the Opposition are saying, wouldn't want government to have the ability to call an election at government's discretion, but the odd thing about it is the Opposition would still have that ability. If they didn't like the budget next year, they could force an election, because we are in a minority government.

So they're asking to put handcuffs on us but not on them. Now, that's the irony of what they're putting forward today. I suspect, Madam Speaker, that if the polling was different, the opinion would be different as well. That's just my suspicious mind, but that's what I would suspect.

Madam Speaker, I don't support the private Member's resolution. I don't believe it's about COVID. We are the safest place in the world and we've had other Canadian provinces call elections during COVID. In fact, called elections with a normal voter turnout.

Madam Speaker, I will be voting against this private Member's resolution.

Thank you.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I want to add my voice to support this motion. I think we've heard enough now that there won't be an election in 2020. What we're talking about is the timing of an election in 2021.

Again, I can only go with what I've heard in my district and, certainly, as we have all talked about, nobody is talking about elections. They're talking about health care. They're talking about education. They're talking about jobs. They're talking about the safety of our people.

But I do not think we can underestimate, nor should we underestimate, the impact that

COVID is having on the people of this province. One has only to look at the community of St. Lewis in Labrador who yesterday, because of a fear of COVID, actually agreed to reduce their health care; to not have a nurse come in to their community from outside the province because they were afraid of the spread of COVID and the fact that that nurse would not be self-isolating for 14 days. This is very real to a lot of people in this province. We all have different risk levels, and I understand that, but COVID is very real.

I want to acknowledge the job that the minister and the chief medical officer of health and his department have done. When we stand and question the minister, it's not that we're criticizing the work that they've done, it's more to do with the type of questions that we get from our constituents who are a little concerned about some inconsistencies, especially within the Atlantic bubble. It's our responsibility to ask those questions. They're not meant to say that they somehow or other weren't doing a good job. They are doing a good job. They continue to do a good job. I think it's very important for us never to underestimate the fear that certain people have.

I know of one house in my district where a gentleman has a sign on his front lawn: no visitors; go home. I won't be knocking on his door. People react differently to COVID. I think it's very important for us not to underestimate that. I think that's critical.

I'd also like to read quickly from the Budget Speech of the Minister of Finance. "As we are in a pandemic, this is a six month budget to year end in March 2021.

"Normally we would present a multi-year forecast and firm timeline on when we will return to surplus, but that is not possible in the uncertainty of COVID-19. The Federal Budget is delayed, revenues continue to falter, and extra expenses due to COVID-19 impacts continue to be incurred." All true.

Now we have a situation where most people in this province are looking forward to seeing what the budget of 2021 will deliver. That is the key. We need to see that there will be a budget in 2021, and that we will debate that budget and

the people of the province will get an opportunity to see it.

We understand an election has to be called within 12 months, no problem with that; but, again, let the people decide their future. I look forward to the new Premier coming into the House. He won't get an opportunity to spend much time here in this sitting, based on the rules, but hopefully in 2021 when the House reconvenes we'll get an opportunity to sit down and question the new Premier on his plan and where we're going. We look forward to that, but before that can happen, it's important for us to try to figure out the dates.

My colleague mentioned September month as a potential municipal election. We know that's happening. The dates we proposed are a little outside the 12 months, but not by much. Again, I go back, it has to be about the people.

Let's talk about cost for a second. We know, according to the chief electoral officer, that a fixed election date saves money. It's less costly. As a matter of fact, they said by over a million dollars if they know the election date. I can only go on what's been said.

If I have an extra million dollars, we're in the middle of one of the most significant deficits we've had in our province, so if we can save a million dollars, then let's do it – let's do it. But if you want to spend an extra million dollars, then I have a road in Cold Brook that needs to be resurfaced.

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

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Thank you very much.

I never miss a chance to talk about getting the road to Cold Brook resurfaced.

I also have a lot of people in my district, Madam Speaker, that are concerned about their health care, that are concerned about medical transportation and how they're going to get to their medical appointments. I have people in my district who are concerned about the fact they've been waiting more than two years for cataract surgery. These are real issues that we have to be dealing with and should be dealing with. I look forward to the next year, to the next 12 months,

to the next sitting, to talking about those and getting things done for the people of the province.

Madam Speaker, there's one more thing I want to talk about, briefly, and that is the attack that our oil industry in this province is under. Make no mistake about it; we've been under attack for a while. It started with the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia and their oil dispute. Their fight over the production and the pricing had a huge impact on our revenues, and then along came COVID. I don't have to tell anybody in this House about the impact that COVID has had on our province and on our oil industry, but those two things will pass. They will pass. The scientists in the world will find a vaccination for COVID. It will come to an end.

The one attack that concerns me the most, and I think concerns a lot of people in this House, on both sides, if we're truly honest with each other, and that is the fact that Ottawa is not getting it. Instead of helping, they seem to be preventing us from operating on our own steam. They're bleeding us of opportunities and jobs which, again, is bleeding us of population. We're about to have the most significant job loss – as my colleague alluded to – in our history since the cod moratorium. They seem to be intent on blocking our oil sector from growing, and all of this because – even our own federal Cabinet representative doesn't seem to get it. He doesn't seem to get that oil is a significant part of our economy.

While we're switching, we know we're going to switch to a different type of energy efficiency, but right now the world will continue to need oil for the foreseeable future. While we are eager to transition from fossil fuels to clean energy – and we're actually leading on that front – the world is not going to stop needing oil, petroleum products, plastics and all the products made from plastics any time soon.

Madam Speaker, I would suggest it's better to have that oil produced here from our own light sweet crude, generated ethically in a way that creates local jobs than to kill our local industry –

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. WAKEHAM:** – and let other regimes of the world take our jobs and benefits away. We need to be singing the praises of the Newfoundland and Labrador oil industry because a balanced economy, even one that is driving renewable energy, can still have a thriving oil sector as part of that picture.

It's time to give an ultimatum to the ideologies in the federal Liberal Party who have decided to let our province's strongest growth industry go the way of the dodo. Let's also get support to drive our hydro sector, because that was the plan all along, to let our oil sector help us transition our economy to clean, green renewable energy, but not to kill our oil industry before that was able to happen.

We need to be driving our economy using all of our resources and all our opportunities because we have many that could be sustaining us. It is interesting when I look at the *Budget 2020* document in the Estimates – and, again, no surprise to anyone because it's been said by the Members opposite and by ourselves – the second-largest expense is debt charges and financial expenses: 18.6 per cent. Let's start looking at it. Maybe it's time for us to make a commitment that the next few wells that are drilled off our offshore that produce the oil, that those royalties and those revenues go directly against that account and not increase our expenditures. Maybe that's where we put our focus and we start to pay down that debt.

We look forward, as an Opposition, to budget 2021 and budget '21-'22 and what that will bring. The government has alluded many times in their document to change and, again, we look forward to what the next budget will bring. Again, as the minister has said, this is a six-month budget, we've already spent six months of the year, and so a fixed election date gives the people of the province an opportunity to understand that their government is going to be working for them continuously and that they don't have to worry about a snap election.

They know that the government has their backs and will continue to have their backs. The Opposition will continue to ask the tough questions and at the end of the day we'll go to the polls and the people will have their choice to make.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

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

I don't know if you're familiar with the poem, "A Blessing for Leaders" by John O'Donohue, an Irish poet. In that he talks about: "May you treasure the gifts of the mind through reading and creative thinking so that you continue as a servant of the frontier where the new will draw its enrichment from the old ... May you have a mind that loves frontiers so that you can evoke the bright fields that lie beyond the view of the regular eye."

I'd like to think that this motion is as much about that as anything else. It's about stepping a little bit outside of the box and about doing things differently. In many ways, it offers all of us an opportunity to be servants of the frontier.

We started the process, the Democratic Reform Committee, and there's an opportunity here to come in with a better way, maybe a more modern way, maybe a more responsive way to doing things. There's a good chance, as we realize even in the Committee, that even with the next election, if we look at it by August 19 we're probably not going to be able to get through that work. But it's significant because I think it gives us the opportunity to do things, to chart a new course.

I've had the opportunity, certainly, in my own travels in the organizations I've participated in to see how democracy does work in Nunavut or in the Northwest Territories, where they don't have a chamber set up like this where you have an Opposition and a governing party. It's very much the group selects who will be the ministers, who will be in charge of what department as such. I'd like to believe it offers the opportunity in that to put aside the partisanship as well and to work together and to work together on the different issues. However, this is the format that we're stuck with or that we have right now. It's evolved and it's

probably changed significantly since it first came into being.

Now, I don't know if this is about calling a snap election or not. I do know that in several parts of the city I had several friends call me wondering what's going on because they were polled by a company – and they suspected on behalf of the Liberal Party – wondering how they would react to a fall election. I know it wasn't the NDP calling for it; we'd have to be able to afford that first of all. I don't get it was PCs but I do get from the – and they were asking: Which candidate would best work here? They were polling –

**MR. LANE:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. J. DINN:** It definitely wasn't the Member for Mount Pearl. I'd be very surprised if he was behind it. I'm joining his party if that's the case. I can be bought. I'm just saying for the right fishing trip I can be bought.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. J. DINN:** But, seriously, one of the things we talked about in the Democratic Reform Committee had to do with the cost of an election, especially if we're going with an election at this time, the length of the election. I remember the commissioner talking about the need to make sure we had the maximum amount of time, especially if we're going to use mail-in ballots. It's interesting what he pointed out in that Committee meeting. We would have to allow for the fact that people would be concerned with COVID-19.

Apparently, just for a regular mail-in ballot here within the province, you're looking at \$25. If there are people living away it's going to be significantly more expensive. It works out sending to people who are living in Florida – I think at the time it was \$183 for a mail-in ballot. If I remember correctly, the price I heard for a general election is roughly \$6.5 million or so. I would say it would be significantly more with the supplies that are needed at this time.

We have the issue of timelines, mail-in ballots and the significant cost. I say this because you

can't put a price on democracy for people to have their say. I agree with that but at this time we know the dire straits of this province, we know the many issues that are facing us and I think we need to address them. I know I've heard that there are very few cases in this province. That's today. That's now. We've been told a second wave is coming and so far we've done pretty good here in this province. We've done it, by the way, I think, working together.

Just because other provinces have done it doesn't make it right. We can see that there are two different approaches in both Ontario and Quebec to deciding to flatten the curve at this point, the second wave. In many ways, while we look at what other jurisdictions are doing, I think we have to look at our population here, which is also a lot older than most other jurisdictions.

We also talked about creating a bubble around our schools, protecting our schools. We put measures in place within the larger society to protect our schools. What will that do if we even look at a general election where we do have a larger number of people moving around? How is that adding to that?

With regard to the COVID issue, I think that is a concern to have. We know that the Canadian government has basically gotten their hands on some possible vaccines should they become available, from what I'm hearing. Even if we're looking at the spring of the year, maybe there is a viable vaccine; maybe by a year from now we'll have something that at some level may be able to allow us to get back to some semblance of normal.

I go back to the cost of the election. One thing I've learned here – I've said this before – if this had been a majority government things would have been a lot easier, in many ways, for this reason: because we would have fallen easily into our roles. The governing party could make its decisions knowing full well that the decisions would pass. As Opposition we could rant and rail all we like knowing that even if what we suggested was not going to get a look in, or not get consideration.

Being a minority is hard on both sides, I think, because in some way, shape or form we're forced to work some sort of compromise,

seeking that middle ground a lot more. Particularly, I personally do not want to see an election, for this reason: There are so many problems that are facing our province. I'm looking at my own district here. Housing: Most of the calls I'm dealing with are housing, income support, poverty-related. It's not about the oil refinery. They're looking at are they going to be able to pay their heating bill. I have people who are basically down to \$40 a week. That's what they have left to buy groceries. I have people who are working in jobs who don't have adequate health care or benefits.

Then on the other piece of it we had Fridays, the climate change march. Do you remember that? Remember the numbers that showed up here pre-COVID times? I was at the same one that the minister opposite a few weeks ago. We were at the Colonial Building.

On the other hand, we also have people who just faced layoffs in Come By Chance. So somewhere along the line it requires our best effort.

The Member for Mount Pearl and I had a conversation there yesterday after – and I listened to Mr. Richard Alexander the other day talking about health care and the need to do something about the outcomes; we need to do something about cutting the cost. But here's the thing here: In many ways I think it's difficult to have that conversation, especially in a party system where a decision could get you unelected. We want to have a fulsome discussion, and I think in many ways working together means two things: that we have to be able to share in the decision-making – we have to share the credit – but collectively we take the heat when it comes. That's how it has to be.

Why I support this motion is that it's about an opportunity also of how do we find a way to work together to come to that common ground? I just don't think spending the money on an election at this time, when we have so many other needs, is the best way to use our resources. More importantly, that's a month for an election; then there's the swearing-in; then there's everything else that goes with it and we're back to where we were. That's probably a month and a half to two months really of getting back to the business that we should be attending to.



Hopefully in that time we won't have an outbreak of COVID-19, but we do have issues, I can tell you, in the school system that need to be addressed. In the health care system we need to address it. In my own district, with the housing, poverty, the needs of those who basically have no employment need to be addressed. If this buys us time to get our act together and to find that common ground and to find the mechanism whereby we can find that shared decision-making approach, that means – I can tell you right now not everything on the Liberals do we agree with, nor on the PCs, but there are areas of common ground where we can work together. That I can tell you. It's possible.

We have worked with Members opposite and Members behind us certainly when it came to the Joint Public Health Response Committee. We have worked on the housing, with the Food First initiative. There have been some great examples of where we can work together. I would like to see more of this. That is the model I've been used to for most of my life in the democratic institutions that I've belonged to, whether it was the NLTA or the Canadian Teachers' Federation, where you can have the fulsome debate without having to worry about the partisanship side of it as well.

In some ways, I see certainly what the Member for Mount Pearl has talked about, and certainly in being an independent Member it gives him a tremendous amount of freedom to talk about the issues. There's something to be said for that if that's a model that we can embrace within this House here.

With that, Madam Speaker, I rest.

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

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity.

I won't take my allotted time, but I will take some time this afternoon just to talk about today's PMR and talk about some of the things that are happening today in our province and just reassure the people at home where the focus is of our government.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. CROCKER:** Our focus today, Madam Speaker, is certainly not on an election. Our focus as a government is on the people of Come By Chance, the people that work in our offshore, the people at home that are concerned with rate mitigation. I can tell you, as a government, that's what we do day in and day out is look for solutions to those matters.

The conversation around an election, we have a law that's going to bring us an election by August 19 of next year. I hear Members referencing the cost of an election. Well, an election is something that's budgeted. A Member referenced earlier that the cost of a minority election is higher. I think that is absolutely correct, but the reality is the minute there is a minority government, that is triggered.

I can remember actually back to my days working in the federal system and it was during a couple of minority governments. In actual fact at that time the chief electoral officer for Canada actually didn't even give up the rent on buildings. So the minute a minority government is elected, you actually trigger those expenses. This is not something that we can defer. The expenses of a minority government are incurred from the day you elect a minority government, because that office has to stand in a level of heightened awareness, I guess, that it wouldn't have to under a majority government situation.

Again, it's important for us to follow the law. Changing laws, this House has done this. This was a law that was brought in place in the early 2000s by the previous PC administration. I reflect back to early 2015. I had just been elected, actually, a few months earlier in late 2014. And then Premier Davis actually changed the law that time as well. He actually punted out the election. I would argue that was for political expediency.

So we have a law that's in place; we have a Premier; we have a government that's committed to doing, to working on the issues of today. Our focus, Madam Speaker, is certainly not on an election. Our focus is doing the people's business in this Chamber. It's finding

solutions for the people that work at Come By Chance. It's finding solutions with regard to rate mitigation. It's finding solutions for people who work in our offshore, and it's finding solutions around COVID.

It's not lost on anybody the challenges that COVID has created. One of the Members earlier pointed out – I think it was the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port – there are people that perceive this threat in different ways. It certainly has to be taken seriously.

One of the things about this PMR today that I find a little confusing is the fact that it doesn't contemplate confidence motions. We're going to enter a budget in the spring, God willing, of 2021, if we're not in a COVID situation that puts us where we were this year. It doesn't contemplate confidence motions. The Members opposite have a full range of opportunities to bring in confidence motions in this government at any point in time. That's their prerogative. That makes total sense. That's what you do in a minority Parliament but, again, that is not contemplated at all.

One of my colleagues talked about the successful by-election yesterday. I think the numbers speak for themselves, a 55 per cent voter turnout. I think my first election was in a by-election and I'm pretty certain that one, as well, was under 55 per cent voter turnout.

The Member for Ferryland, interestingly enough, said let the Premier come in here and bring in his budget. Well, I can assure the Member for Ferryland that our Premier, Premier Furey, the newly elected Member or Member-elect for Humber - Gros Morne, will take his place in here and he will vote on his budget in the coming weeks.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** We are a team over here, Madam Speaker. This budget is our budget and, again, I can assure you that our Premier will take his place shortly and vote on our budget.

I'm going to digress just for a minute. Interestingly enough that we've seen in our debates over the last, I guess, number of sessions, there's an important voice that always

seems to be missing when we talk about elections and election calls. There's a voice in this House that never addresses the issue, but the Leader of the Opposition never misses an opportunity to address the election question outside.

I only have to go back, actually, to an article from October 5, 2020, which I think was Monday, the same day that this very PMR was introduced in this House. In the morning there was a CBC story at 8 a.m., the Member for Windsor Lake: "... sets sights on general election ... he is ready to 'topple' the Liberal party." Again, the conversation around elections are coming from the Member for Windsor Lake.

I can go back to February, the Member for Windsor Lake says: Not ruling out forcing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to an election before the Liberal leadership ends. Premier Fury wasn't even elected; he wasn't even our leader when the Leader of the Opposition was out talking about forcing an election.

We can go back to an interview that the Member for Windsor Lake did a few weeks ago with Peter Cowan of CBC where he would not guarantee at that time that he would not force an election over the budget. So you have all of this.

Just yesterday, I think we had a really good debate here in this House yesterday, Madam Speaker. I think we went through some very important issues if you think about the emergency debate. I compliment the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island for bringing that debate forward yesterday because it was a very important debate and we had the opportunity to bring a lot into it and answer a lot of questions. But even in that debate, when we were here in this House very much in a non-partisan mood –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Mostly.

**MR. CROCKER:** – mostly non-partisan mood, again, the Leader of the Official Opposition took that opportunity yesterday afternoon to make a dig about the need for the expediency of replacing this government.

Here this afternoon we have a PMR that doesn't contemplate confidence motions, doesn't guarantee that *Budget 2020* is going to pass. I haven't heard anybody opposite this afternoon guaranteeing the passing of *Budget 2020*. I haven't heard anybody opposite –

**MR. K. PARSONS:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. CROCKER:** I thank the Member for Cape St. Francis for his suggestion.

Madam Speaker, there are opportunities. The Throne Speech is always a confidence motion. A private Member's motion can become a confidence motion. As a government, there may very well come a time – I seen it just a couple of weeks ago when the federal government, the Government of Canada, actually had a motion that was so important with regard to employment support programs for Canadians that the government House leader deemed it a confidence motion.

This is not contemplated today, that as a Government House Leader or as a deputy premier or as a premier, if an issue comes up and it's so important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Government House Leader typically has the ability – the parliamentary tradition – and the Member for Cape St. Francis is agreeing with me.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** It's legislated – you're right, exactly – that the Government House Leader can deem a motion a motion of confidence at any time.

We've seen that just recently in Ottawa. It was successful in getting Supply or extensions of EI and the Canada Emergency Response Benefit for more Canadians. That government had the conviction that this program was so important to Canadians that they would actually make this a confidence motion so that the House of Commons knew where it stood. This is an option that a government has. A government has the opportunity to deem a motion a confidence motion. The Opposition has an opportunity to bring in confidence motions for a government's survival.

Again, there are a lot of things to consider here. We talk about Supply and stability. The reality, when you think about it – there was reference earlier to the idea – and I think the Minister of Education actually raised this point of how the Opposition did back, I think, in March, or late February or early March, take a six-month Supply bill and make it a three-month Supply bill. I don't really see where that was done in a commitment or sincerity towards stability.

Just a few weeks ago, we told the people of the province that we needed Supply and we needed Supply for a three-month period. The Members opposite, and fully within their ability, actually took our Supply bill and reduced it by 33.3 per cent, Mr. Speaker. There's a reality in the power of the Opposition in a minority situation. I think, again, that has to be reflected upon. When we're in this situation, how does this actually work when it comes to that?

I'm going to wind up, Mr. Speaker –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** You might as well use the other three minutes.

**MR. CROCKER:** I'm being encouraged to stay on for three more minutes.

I look to my colleagues across the way and say the encouragement is coming from behind me, not across from me.

I will point out again, Mr. Speaker, for those that are actually watching us this afternoon, that while I have full respect for the Opposition House Leader – good man – there's one voice missing here. It's a voice that's been missing quite regularly on this subject; missing again today. The silence is deafening.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Oh, sorry.

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** I remind the Member the –

**MR. CROCKER:** My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

Is missing from debate, Mr. Speaker. The reality of that is quite concerning when you think that as recently as yesterday – and I guess the blatant

irony that 8 a.m. on Monday morning there was an interview given where – I will actually repeat myself – the Member for Windsor Lake actually says that he sets his sights on a general election and says he is ready to topple the Liberal Party. Then, a mere 6½ hours later, the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor stands up and introduces –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Buchans.

**MR. CROCKER:** Buchans, sorry; Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, sorry, stands up and introduces this private Member's motion. Again, we're not quite sure if he's speaking for his entire caucus.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Again, the comments from the Member for Windsor Lake are quite clear. He is ready to topple the Liberal Party.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak on this motion. I always like to say it's a pleasure to speak on any motion in this House.

Before I go into remarks – I have a lot of jot notes made – there's one thing I should make clear. The House Leader makes great liberties and takes potshots at the leader of our party, and there are others across the way who do, too. But he's the duly elected leader of this party. He's the Leader of the Loyal Opposition. He holds a seat in this House and he holds an important seat in this Legislature.

This is not a card club; this is politics. The rule of thumb, in case some people opposite don't realize it – I'm sure most realize – day one you get elected; day two you spend the next four years, two years, one year trying to get re-elected. You're not sitting in the House – it's not a card club; it's politics. You want to form government. He wants to get in and do what he thinks is right for the province. He has a plan.

We have plans. When the Members opposite were in Opposition, they wanted to get on the government side, too. It's politics.

**MR. DAVIS:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. PETTEN:** Stop heckling there now Minister of Tourism, Culture and recreation and whatever other add-ons they've added to it lately.

Mr. Speaker, if I may –

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** – we're asking for this situation now. Any other time, bring on an election. We're saying right now it's COVID; it's COVID-19. We had 19 new cases in New Brunswick today, Mr. Speaker.

All these examples of when the Government House Leader was with the federal Liberal, it wasn't during a pandemic. All these examples are fine if it wasn't during a pandemic. It's during a pandemic. That's what we're dealing with. People are dying.

Respectfully, play politics and you can play – we debate and I can play the game with the best of them over there, but speak facts. Just because the Leader of the Opposition read an email out in a debate yesterday, the thin-skinned opposite side gets offended. This is politics. I am astounded by it. I go home some days and sit back and know it's a game, I get it's a game, but sometimes people at home can't get this. You wonder – and I can go for about two hours, I only have a few minutes, but I'm getting ready now.

You wonder why –

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Trust me, you don't want me to. Trust me you don't want to hear what I've got to say.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I ask the Member to direct his comments (inaudible).

**MR. PETTEN:** Mr. Speaker, as long as you caution everyone to speak to you, I'll be okay with that.

You wonder why people are cynical; you wonder why the public are cynical because of this House of Assembly. You wonder why people look at 40 of us sometimes and shake their heads. Because do you know what? I shake my own head some days.

We're not asking for nothing to sound unreasonable. We're not afraid of an election. I'm not afraid of an election. No issue whatsoever. Actually, I'm pretty good at elections. I've run an awful lot and I've run in a few. I don't mind going to the polls any day of the week, Mr. Speaker, that's not an issue. The issue is we're dealing with a pandemic that's hitting a second wave and possibly a third wave.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Mr. Speaker, all we want to know is does their leader share (inaudible) of the caucus, that's all.

**MR. SPEAKER:** There's no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** (Inaudible) laughing over there now like a schoolgirl, Mr. Speaker, and that's not fair. That's not fair, Mr. Speaker. This issue is too important. It's not about elections; it's about public health. That's where everyone is missing the point there. We have a new Premier, duly elected, and I congratulate him, but we don't know what this new Premier is about yet; the public don't know what this new Premier is about. Maybe we wonder where our political system is wrong.

I have a family member that comes to my house regularly. Do you know what they said to me a while ago? Our system is a mess. I said, why is that? He said you have a Premier now that has no right to sit in the House of Assembly. I said, that's our system. I never criticized, that's the system we operate under, that works both ways. It's the first time ever in our Legislature it happened. He said, I do not believe a Premier of

this province should be someone that doesn't have a seat in the House of Assembly.

Now, that's not me speaking. That's Joe Q. Public, and the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology can go to his district and find someone to agree with that statement, I'm sure we all could throughout the province.

The point being said, Mr. Speaker, people look at us very cynically on times. They look at us in a way that we don't like to be viewed but we give them no other option. The Member for Ferryland was there today and I listened to him, he spoke last week sometime and he pointed out some great points. Sometimes what happens in this House here, this is an absolute sham.

We bring a private Member's resolution to the House, we know there are a lot of important issues out there; we get that. We totally get that. But this hanging over your head all the time, there might be an election. The Liberal source says this. No, it's not. I'm poisoned with it. If you're going to have it; if you're not, fine. We don't know, but one thing you have to realize, the Premier has the right to call an election any day of the week, it's in the legislation that way. It's there black and white in the legislation. That option is always there.

We're looking for some clarity. The public deserves clarity, Mr. Speaker. That's all we're asking for because people are more concerned about their health than they are elections. If that's going to happen, tell the people of the province, give them some sureties, give the people that are going to have to work in these polling stations sureties. There are a lot of people involved in this, not just 40 of us.

What we're asking for, we're not being unrealistic. We're not being unreasonable. I personally think, based on the circumstances we're into, we're just making a rational response. It's a rational proposal.

You hear the response, you hear the heckles, you hear the laughter across the way, someone over there laughing and calling a point of order just to try to throw you off, which that don't bother me.

This stuff is serious, COVID is serious, Mr. Speaker. COVID is really serious. When it suits

you, you can't have it both ways when COVID is the guiding factor that works. In Estimates, COVID is the blame for everything. If it's not COVID, it's Snowmageddon. It's one or the other.

Then we hear Muskrat Falls. Minister, I would remind you, your Premier said today –

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

**MR. PETTEN:** One of you Members opposite said it.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I remind the Member to direct his comments –

**MR. PETTEN:** You said it, did you? Listen to your Premier who wants to look forward not backwards. Maybe you should listen to the new boss in the House. Maybe take some advice from your new Premier.

Mr. Speaker, you wonder then why they're in a minority situation when you hear that garbage coming across the way; Muskrat Falls, then laughing. I didn't approve Muskrat Falls and I think most of my colleagues, looking around here, they never. Get over it. Move on. We have a problem on our hands bigger than that. There's lots more issues out there. Talk about what's going on today with the refinery, what's going on with the oil and gas. Give us some answers.

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

**MR. PETTEN:** We have chirping across the way again there now from the Deputy House Leader. I haven't heard her today but it's good to see she's finally there. It's nice to see a bit of life.

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Here we go again.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. PETTEN:** No, I tell you what, there could be a lot of apologies coming in this House today

and it should come from your side over there. That will be the discussion tomorrow.

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Yeah.

Mr. Speaker, the issue we're dealing with here today is a simple one. Sure, I can prepare notes all day long. The issue is we're asking for the election to be postponed until October of '21 for the safety of the population; COVID is out there. The public don't want it because they have bigger things on their mind.

Another big issue out there is where's the economy to? Where are the 20,000 oil and gas workers? What about all the families out around the Sunnyside area? What about all the Come By Chance workers? These are real issues. That's where people's minds are to. They want answers on that.

When you ask for a debate on this and you want to move the date, then you get faced with these remarks across the House and this garbage. I think it's absolute nonsense. It's a justified, valid argument and I don't know why they can't look across the way and say that makes sense. Because it's not a bad thing, it's never bad. You wonder why the public feels the way they feel about us.

They want to work together. When it suits them, we're working together. We're always working together. When it fits that right, drop politics, we can't play politics. No, no, we're not going to do politics because we're working together. But you can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker. It can't work that way when it suits you fine. It's valid, valid arguments. Why can't you for once park your politics, real politics, and do what's right? Because people see through this, Mr. Speaker. People see through this nonsense. I see through it and it's the part of politics I don't like.

I thought when the PMR was decided upon, when I looked at it first – I wasn't there actually because I had something else. When I looked at it first, I was like yeah, okay. I didn't really know, but the more I started thinking about it, I said sure, why not. That makes a lot of sense. At first glance we can all have our views.

Here we are now and we're debating it, and some of the comments across the way and the Government House Leader to sit there and start criticizing and being critical of our leader and dismissive. It's like: Yeah, what are you getting on with? That's not what the public wants, Mr. Speaker.

We put a resolution forward; we feel it makes sense. It's for the best interest and safety of the people of this province. It's what we will be supporting. It's what we feel we've done a good job presenting and our leader supports it.

Thank you very much.

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

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, under section 49, unparliamentarily language, it seems that during his debate, the Member opposite actually referred to the Deputy House Leader as a schoolgirl. Mr. Speaker, I would like for you to take it under advisement and go into *Hansard* and see if that was the comment that was made.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I will check the transcripts and listen to the tapes and take this matter under advisement and report to the House later.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South wishes to comment?

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I said she was acting like a schoolgirl, and for ultimate clarification, unlike Members opposite, I will withdraw that comment to the Deputy House Leader because it was acting like a schoolgirl, not a schoolgirl. I apologize if there was any misconception.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour.

**MR. BYRNE:** Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you consider the standard conventions of our

House which indicate that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly in this House. Matters should be reviewed within that context.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I will take this matter under advisement and report to the House at a later date.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to take just a few minutes. I think I have eight minutes before my time is up. I just want to say, first of all, that I'm going to support the motion. I do so, Mr. Speaker, for no other reason than it adds certainty; it makes sense to me in the world of COVID-19, which we are currently living.

We can call an election tomorrow. If this is all about worrying about an election or whatever, call it tomorrow, as far as I'm concerned. I'm quite prepared to go and face the people in my district, and they'll either agree with the job I've done or they won't. I feel very confident, but, at the end of the day, I don't take it for granted. If they decide that it's time for me to move on, I will move on and I'll continue to contribute to my community in other ways.

I'm not worried about the election part in that regard, for me. So there's no politics here, but I would say that I agree with the motion, Mr. Speaker. I'll support it because of some of the reasons that were given, amongst some of the other – I'm not sure what I would call it – unproductive chatter, because what has been said is right.

We're in the middle of a pandemic. We have serious issues facing our province right now, whether it be with our oil and gas industry; we know what's happening now at Come By Chance. We know what's happening with our economy, all the impacts of COVID-19 on our economy; the issues that we're currently facing in our community with all of the restrictions. All the issues around rotational workers, all the issues around schools and everything else, the last thing that we need to add to that at this point in time is another provincial election.

I would add, Mr. Speaker, that if the government were to try to, as some may say, pull a fast one or whatever you want to call it – decide to call an election any time soon, I think they will pay a price at the polls for doing it. I really do. I really don't think the public wants that.

I don't think the government is going to call an election any time soon but it could happen this spring. The question will be will they drop a budget and call an election or will they not drop a budget and try to get a mandate, but we know under the legislation it has to happen by the end of August. What's being suggested here is that it be put off. I don't care if the date is October, September, November, whatever it is, but the bottom line is we're trying to reach out into a time, into the fall.

Hopefully there will be more certainty at that point in time as it relates to COVID-19. Hopefully, there will be a vaccine. Hopefully we'll be back to some sense of normalcy and we can carry out a proper election. Not putting ourselves at risk, not putting the public at risk, not putting returning officers at risk and everyone else involved in this with the movement of people all over the place – putting nobody at risk. That would make sense.

I would add that if we were to get to the third week of October and there still is no vaccine, nothing has changed and there's another potential wave on the move – if that were to happen, I have no idea; I hope it doesn't – then we need to consider coming back and pushing it out further again until such a time that we can have a proper election, all the candidates can be safe, all of our constituents can be safe and everyone who is participating in that election can do so in a safe manner.

Just think about it for a second. I know in the last election there were a lot of people – for example, seniors and so on – that had to vote from home. How is that going to work? What senior or person who has health issues is going to want some strange person now coming into their living room to go voting and having people knocking on their doors, everything associated with that. I know we had a by-election but just think about that on a mass scale. Think about the potential as people are moving around involved in all this and how easily you could spread that

virus if it's still prevalent at that particular time. I think it would be a very, very bad idea.

We have an opportunity right now. We've been into this for a significant period of time with this minority government. Sure, we don't agree on everything but everything has run pretty smooth. As far as I'm concerned it's run pretty smooth. We had some issues over Interim Supply and whether it should've been three months or six months. At the end of the day it all worked out. We're here, we have an Interim Supply and we're debating the budget. It all worked out. Things aren't going to fall apart.

These are uncertain times. These are not normal times. I don't care what was done in the past. I don't care that someone was referencing something that former premier Davis did. I don't care what premier Davis did. I don't care what any of them did. We're talking about the here and the now. Right now we are in the middle of a pandemic. These are extraordinary times. These are not normal times.

Under extraordinary times leaders have to step up and lead. Sometimes you have to step outside the box and do things differently, do things that are not in accordance with normal convention, in the public interest and the public safety. That's what's being proposed here. I think it makes a lot of sense.

Having that certainty for everybody involved so the public knows, so that candidates on all sides know, parties know, I think makes good sense. In that regard I will be supporting the motion.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**MR. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank everybody who chimed in today: the Minister of Finance; the Member for Ferryland; the Minister of Education; Stephenville - Port au Port; St. John's Centre, he used to be my teacher, now I'll give him an A



for his remarks; the Minister of Justice; and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just say a few things here. I see a huge contradiction here today. The Minister of Education said that COVID shouldn't be an excuse, or there's no excuse for this. First of all, it's not an excuse. It's a concern. It's the same concern your party had when you postponed your election for your leader six months. So if that's not that big of a concern, I wonder why the Liberal Party postponed their election six months. If it was a concern then, I'm sure it's a concern now moving forward.

Also, we just heard recently that for the City of St. John's, for instance, they are calling for no door-to-door when it comes to the next election here in Ward 2. So that tells us something, that the City of St. John's is taking a brilliant approach to doing something. I'm sure that we should take that into consideration as well.

I won't take too much time here actually. I have a lot of notes but I'm just going to leave it on one thing here. We've had one election in the past year and a half in one out of 40 districts and during that one election the Minister of Finance, the Deputy Premier, had to get a COVID test. I'm so happy that it turned out well but that one election there was a COVID test for one of our Members. That should tell us that COVID-19 is a threat within the community. It's still a threat within the community.

You can laugh at it. I see the Minister of Finance laughing at it. That's fine. People have died, people are sick, people are out of work and the Department of Health is in tatters.

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

**MR. CROCKER:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Member opposite looks across and points out and says laughing. The fact that what caused a chuckle on this side is that many Members on that side over there were actually staying in hotels in Deer Lake, as well, about a week and a half ago, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it seems this afternoon that they're really taking offence to us pointing out some facts around the law.

**MR. SPEAKER:** There is no point of order, just a disagreement between two Members.

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** On a response to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. While I know everybody is emotional about this situation, it's simple. The discussion here is around safety and around the safety of the next election. That's the incident that he's talking about here, to show an example of how we have to be safe.

There's no point of order here, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the Member be allowed to finish his comments and then we go to a vote.

**MR. SPEAKER:** There's no point of order here, just a disagreement between two Members.

The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**MR. TIBBS:** I'll leave on this, Mr. Speaker. We've been talking for the past while about our economy. It's absolutely being devastated right now. What do we hear? COVID-19. We blame it on COVID-19 but when we bring up a general concern, that's fear mongering.

I'll leave it on that, Mr. Speaker. Thanks everybody for speaking. Let's go to a vote.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is the pleasure of the House to adopt this motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Nay.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Division.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Division has been called.

Call in the Members.

**Division**

**MR. SPEAKER:** Are the House Leaders ready?

The Government House Leader is ready.

The Opposition House Leader is ready for the vote.

The Third Party Members here.

And the independents.

**CLERK (Barnes):** Are they all ready?

**MR. SPEAKER:** They're all ready, yes.

All those in favour of the motion, please stand.

**CLERK:** Mr. Crosbie, Mr. Brazil, Mr. Forsey, Mr. Wakeham, Mr. Lester, Ms. Evans, Mr. Petten, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Parrott, Mr. Pardy, Mr. Paul Dinn, Ms. Conway Ottenheimer, Mr. Tibbs, Mr. O'Driscoll, Ms. Coffin, Mr. James Dinn, Mr. Brown, Mr. Lane.

**MR. SPEAKER:** All those against the motion, please stand.

**CLERK:** Ms. Coady, Mr. Crocker, Mr. Haggie, Mr. Bennett, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Davis, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Loveless, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Warr, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Trimper, Mr. Mitchelmore, Ms. Gambin-Walsh.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 18; the nays: 16.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The motion is carried.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** It being Wednesday – order, please!

Order, please!

It being Wednesday, in accordance with our Standing Orders, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 o'clock in the afternoon.