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Speaker: Honourable Scott Reid, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin today, I would like to bring to Members' attention my commentary of September 14, 2020. In that commentary, an attribution error was made as I inadvertently attributed particular remarks to Speaker Sauv  and not, as appropriate, to Speaker Scheer.

In order to correct the record, the remarks: "The *sub judice* convention is important in the conduct of business in the House. It protects the rights of interested parties before the courts, and preserves and maintains the separation and mutual respect between the legislature and the judiciary. The convention ensures that a balance is created between the need for a separate, impartial judiciary and free speech."

That quote should be attributed to Speaker Scheer in his ruling of March 27, 2013. In that ruling, he quotes from O'Brien and Bosc, as it was then, page 100 and so that is the correct citation for that quote.

I note that this is an attribution error and my ruling on the matter remains unchanged.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, can I comment on that for a second?

MR. SPEAKER: The Speaker's ruling is not a debatable matter.

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: I've heard enough on this matter. The ruling is the ruling and if the Member wishes to challenge the ruling he can, but a ruling is not a debatable matter and we're going to move on.

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: No, this is not a debatable matter. I'm going to move on now.

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: We can discuss that later; we're not going to discuss that now.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today, we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Lake Melville, Ferryland, Mount Pearl - North, Labrador West and the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

MR. TRIMPER: Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Happy Valley-Goose Bay SPCA opened as Labrador's first and, currently, only chartered location in 2000. Thanks to the vision of Lee Hill and her group of dedicated volunteers, this busy facility serves 33 communities over a 300,000 square kilometre area. Their adoption network extends across Atlantic Canada.

The SPCA charter is to assist abused, neglected and abandoned animals from across Labrador. Annually, the shelter and associated foster homes handle up to 500 animals. Each is provided necessary routine veterinary care such as vaccinations, deworming and spay/neuters where otherwise they would not have had a chance. It is not a stretch to say that they have saved thousands of lives.

This registered charity enjoys private, corporate and in-kind support. However, they are in constant fundraising mode to cover wages for staff and other expenses. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health guidelines have made both organized events and daily operations particularly challenging when responding to the extensive need from all over Labrador.

They keep at it simply because the animals cannot help themselves.

I would ask this House of Assembly to please join me in thanking the Happy Valley-Goose Bay SPCA for their 20 years of compassionate service for all of Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Today, I recognize the recent passing of a well-known constituent from my district, Mr. Tom Best, who passed away March 31, 2020.

Tom Best was a fiercely proud inshore fish harvester from Petty Harbour who dedicated his life's work to advocating for sustainable fisheries and communities. He chaired the Petty Harbour Fishermen's Committee. He strongly believed that fish harvesters should be actively involved in their own affairs. He became the founding president of the Petty Harbour Fishermen's Co-operative, and served as president for most of the past 36 years.

He, along with the Petty Harbour Co-op, hosted many international groups in Petty Harbour to demonstrate how communities benefit when people come together. He travelled to several parts of the world to support sustainable fisheries and co-operative development. In 2012, he received the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal.

In recognition of Tom's commitment to fisheries resource management, his family has established a memorial scholarship through the Marine Institute to continue to protect our fisheries resources.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all my colleagues of this House to join me in honouring the life of Tom Best and the great contribution he has made to our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since the COVID epidemic, many businesses are struggling to keep afloat; however, in Mount Pearl there is one business working around the

clock to keep up with the demand for their product.

Lori Wells, along with her daughter-in-law and business partner, Kayla Wells, started their business last October, Karma's Kreation, and began to create athletic wear.

However, upon arrival of COVID just five months later, there was not a demand for their product, so to keep things going they decided they would make a few masks. Lori said they started off slow, producing about 30 masks a day, but soon they were producing 500 masks a day. At one point, they had seven seamstresses and thus far have made more than 50,000 masks.

Lori says the work is hard and she works 14-hour days, but they enjoy seeing the popularity of their masks and says they have now become known as the mask ladies. She said clients first bought masks for safety, but now they look for new masks to coordinate with their outfits and different occasions.

I ask all those present to join me in congratulating Karma's Kreation for their ingenuity and success, and for helping us keep safe.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to recognize the Labrador West Community Gardens. The Labrador West Community Gardens have been around for more than 40 years, starting out as just a local club and grew to become what it is today thanks to the generosity of community donors, volunteers and pioneers like Alex Duffitt and the current president who just passed away, unfortunately, the past week, Nelson Clarke.

This year is the biggest year yet, with the 176 gardens and 135 members. Members want to learn more about growing a variety of fresh produce in the Big Land. We have this beautiful community garden that they use to share their passion and take on the challenges of growing different crops. There were a few contests this

year, one was for the most diverse crops grown, and the daigon radish and corn were the result.

The Community Gardens were able to donate fertilizer and seeds to the Green Thumbs program at our local schools, 50 bags of potatoes to the United Church and 100 bags of potatoes to the local food bank. As well, produced enough crops to have a successful Farmer's Market in September.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Labrador West Community Gardens on a successful year and wish them continued success as they continue to grow.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in 1997 the Presentation Sisters converted the school on Barnes Road to a community centre called The Lantern.

For 23 years The Lantern has offered programs and events to improve personal and corporate wellness, develop individual and collective spirituality, and pursue justice for marginalized community members.

Rental revenues from their fabulous facilities help cover the cost of community and peer support groups that meet regularly at The Lantern. Groups include AA, Narcotics Anonymous and other peer support groups focused on mental health and trauma. It also includes community initiatives focused on art and music therapy, the Ruah Counselling Centre which provides subsidized individual and group counselling services. They also provide space to The Gathering Place for its clothing boutique.

With only three staff, The Lantern relies on volunteers and community support. Recent partnerships with the Community Sector Council, the Association for New Canadians and Memorial University Centre for Social Enterprise has given new Canadians and

students valuable work experience and training in the non-profit sector.

The Lantern recently celebrated 23 years of service and I wish them so many more. I ask the hon. Members to join me in celebrating the loving community that is The Lantern.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, today I recognize Foster Families Month, which is held during the month of October.

Currently, 600 foster families throughout our province provide safe, nurturing homes for children and youth in care.

As the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, I want to recognize the vital role that foster families play in helping to make children and youth in care feel protected and secure.

The role of being a foster parent is also important as foster families support the relationship of the children and youth they are caring for with their families. This allows for connections to be maintained and supports reunification when it is in the best interests of the child or youth.

Mr. Speaker, foster families are truly remarkable, as their commitment and encouragement to those in their care is truly inspiring.

From helping a child find their smile to joining the child's parent for a doctor's appointment, foster families are making a difference in so many lives.

Let me also acknowledge the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association's staff and

board members, as well as social workers and many others who are part of the fostering team.

I invite my colleagues in this hon. House to join me in thanking foster families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador for sharing their compassion and dedication to the children and youth who need it most.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

It is important to recognize Foster Families Month because we each play a role in enhancing the lives of children and youth that are in our foster care. The connections made through a loving foster home is essential in child development and helps encourage our young people to grow themselves to become confident leaders in our communities. Like the minister said, helping a child find their smile makes a difference in so many lives.

As a government, we must find more ways to support our foster families and encourage others to consider becoming a foster family.

We join the minister acknowledging the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association and in thanking all foster families in Newfoundland and Labrador for all their hard work in ensuring our province's children have a safe and loving home.

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 I join the minister in celebrating Foster Families Month.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association and the 600 foster families in our province provide supportive homes for children and youth as they await reunification or adoption. Foster families are an integral part of a team and operate in the best sense of the saying that it takes a village to raise a child, and they deserve our praise for that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

MS. STOODLEY: Mr. Speaker, as another season of warm weather in Newfoundland and Labrador comes to an end, I bring attention to the work my department has done to help combat a common problem in many of our communities during the summer: loud vehicles.

Regulations made under the *Highway Traffic Act* specify that all vehicles are required to be equipped with an exhaust system consisting of pipes or chambers which ensure that exhaust gases are cooled and expelled without excessive noise. They also prohibit the use of a vehicle with a muffler that is cut out, defective or disconnected; has a baffle plate or other parts removed; has the exhaust outlet opened or widened; and has a device attached which increase the noise emissions.

These regulations apply to all vehicles, including motorcycles, operating on any highway in our province.

Mr. Speaker, highway enforcement officers in my department focus on commercial vehicle safety and perform roadside inspections. They are trained specifically in detecting mechanical defects and, through a partnership with the RNC Traffic Services division, have helped train officers to help them determine when an exhaust has been modified or suspected of modification.

We also updated the Official Inspection Station Manual to include motorcycle inspections, allowing law enforcement to direct the operator of a motorcycle to have an inspection completed when they suspect that it does not meet road safety requirements, including for their exhaust systems. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, my department will also make officers available to assist with inspections during future RNC-led enforcement initiatives.

Together, we will continue to work toward peaceful enjoyment for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, we in the Official Opposition welcome any and all efforts to address some noise infractions caused by some vehicles and motorcycles operating on the roads throughout the province.

As the minister knows, my colleague has presented multiple petitions here in the House on this very issue. I know we all would like to see these issues addressed. It is fine to say that regulations under the *Highway Traffic Act* prohibit this, but if the laws are ignored or not enforced, then nothing will change.

We certainly appreciate the work of the highway enforcement officers. It's a challenging job that is made even more difficult without a full complement of officers. We encourage government to get to work and ensure that there are an adequate number of officers on the road to enhance safety and protect the motoring public in our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement.

Noise from motorized vehicles has been a long-standing issue in our province, especially in urban areas. It is also a popular topic in many town council meetings and newscasts, as towns and government grapple with the situation.

Let us make sure that the enforcement officials have the tools and backing required to enforce this section of the *Highway Traffic Act*.

Thank you.

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.

Industry stakeholders are reporting that the West White Rose project will not resume in 2021.

As a shareholder in West White Rose, was the Premier notified of the merger and has he spoken to the CEO of Cenovus?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, let me welcome Cenovus to Newfoundland and Labrador's bright future in offshore oil and gas.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER FUREY: I think it's a good signal that they diversified their portfolio and are working with Husky in this new joint venture,

especially using our low-carbon footprint oil to deliver to the rest of the world.

We've reached out to the executives of Cenovus to have discussions in the oncoming days. I'm confident that we will have great discussions about their future and how we're so supportive of the oil and gas industry here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I take it the answer is no; he didn't get notice and he hasn't spoken to the CEO.

Husky is the operator of the FPSO SeaRose and the White Rose oil field. Has the Premier, in between times welcoming Cenovus, received any guarantee from them that production at the SeaRose will not be shelved in favour of other projects, and why not?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned, we're reaching out to the executives of Cenovus now to see. This is all new news to the markets; it's new news to Canada in general. I take it as encouraging news that there's opportunity here with a new operator in the system, a new believer in Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore oil and gas.

We will be working through those details, as I'm sure the Member opposite can appreciate, over the next few days – certainly by week's end. I look forward to having good, healthy discussions with the new owner, Cenovus, and the new partnership to ensure that asset is delivering the maximum value to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: From that answer, Mr. Speaker, we can deduce that there's been no

conversation between the Premier and anyone in authority at Cenovus and no assurances given.

I have to question why the Premier is so optimistic and welcoming when the news announcement of the merger did not mention the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore at all. The CEO of Cenovus said that the companies' offices will be merged.

What assurances – probably none – does the Premier have that the Husky office in St. John's will stay open and staffed?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I'm sure the Member opposite, given his previous profession, can understand, there are commercial sensitivities presumably between two large companies in an acquisition and a merger of this size that are surely commercially sensitive and not fully revealed. But these details, I'm confident, will come over the next few days and we'll be there at the table supporting Newfoundland and Labrador's interests and protecting the jobs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians moving forward.

The Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology continues to have healthy discussions with the Husky representatives here on the ground in Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm confident that there is a bright future for this project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I don't think unemployed workers are going to take much reassurance from that answer.

Earlier this month, the current owners of the Come By Chance Refinery reserved NARL Terminal Inc. with the Registry of Companies.

What assurances can the Premier give to workers that the refinery will not turn into a tank farm?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm certainly happy to answer this important question.

That is a topic that came up towards the end of last week and have spoken about it publicly now. What I've said is that particular topic of discussion has not come up in any of our conversations with Silverpeak; although, it is an issue that has been around for some time now and it's been rumored and discussed. It is not a part of the conversations we have. It is not a part of any plan that we have.

Our goal is to continue to work to find a purchaser for the refinery to keep it whole and that's the plan that we take going into the future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I can appreciate the Come By Chance oil refinery's fate and its workers may be beneath the notice of the Premier, but he has said we need a change in the culture of the House of Assembly so we can have healthy debate.

I'm asking the Premier if he would make a start on that by answering the questions when he's asked them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. A. PARSONS: Again, if the Member opposite would stop heckling so I could answer the question.

It's also a time-honoured tradition that ministers responsible for departments, who are fully

engaged in the department, can answer questions.

I will point out for the Member's notice that I look forward to tonight, actually, to having a teleconference with three Members of your caucus, mayors for that area and the MP for that area. I would ask you if you would like to join in also.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Back to the subject of Come By Chance oil refinery.

A warm idle will keep the refinery saleable. The current owners have asked for financial assistance from the provincial government to do this.

Premier, will this assistance be provided?

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

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

There's no doubt that this refinery is going through a troubled time, as it has in numerous times during its past. Again, in any of the calls that I'm on, especially, we speak to union, we speak to communities and we speak to perspective buyers. We realize that this whole industry is going through a tough time. We're not just seeing it here, we're seeing it all around the world.

The reality is that our primary goal here is to help facilitate or broker a deal between a perspective buyer and the company. We have said that nothing is off the table. Right now, the interest is there to ensure the continued livelihood of the refinery itself.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Dominion strike is over two months old and no sign of a resolution in sight. These hard working and essential employees want to get back to the bargaining table while communities lack an important food security option.

Will the Premier offer mediation and conciliation to these parties?

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

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

A conciliator officer has been engaged with this process since November 19, 2019. We'll continue to assist these parties to finding a resolution to the outstanding issues.

The issues are not lost on us as a government. We work very closely with those parties. The conciliator officer is actively working with both parties to decide the appropriate time when they can bring parties back to the table, and the best deal is a negotiated deal between the two parties at hand.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We all witnessed how government's hands-off approach caused a crippling ferry strike. I note in the Premier's extensive mandate letter to the minister responsible, there's absolutely no mention of labour relations.

I ask the Premier: Are you using all the tools at your disposal to get a resolution to this strike?

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

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I've said to the hon. Member, this conciliation officer approach is something that we take very seriously. We're working very closely with that to ensure that both parties come to an arrangement. We want those parties to negotiate in good faith with each other. That's the best deal that can come from an outcome, when both parties are together at the table.

Our conciliation officer is going to continue to provide whatever assistance will be required to successfully find a conclusion to this dispute, which is what we all want in this House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Most eligible businesses that applied for the Essential Worker Support Program have received funding; however, we've heard from some workers that they have not received their money yet.

I ask the minister: Are the distribution of funds to workers being tracked? If so, how many workers are still awaiting their money?

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

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a very good question that the hon. Member raised here today. I think 98 per cent of the applications that have been received have been processed. I think \$33 million has been passed out in benefits. About 25,000 essential workers have received that and there's, I think, been 2,000 applicants at the time frame there. I can get some more detailed information if the hon. Member would like to chat after.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there are more than 30 employees at the local Walmart in Stephenville who, during the early days of the pandemic, volunteered to work overtime and now have been told they don't qualify for the Essential Worker top-up because their wages exceed that of the limits.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Will she adjust the program to base eligibility on regular wages and regular hours rather than gross wages?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you very much.

The Essential Workers program has been very important to the workers of the province. I just noted in the last question how many people have applied, over 2,000 corporations have applied. I do know there's been over \$1.3 million paid out to Walmart workers in the province and over a thousand employees have been eligible.

I'll certainly look into the matter that the Member opposite is suggesting. I know that the criteria was set at a maximum \$3,000 monthly income, but it certainly might be something the department could investigate further, now that he's brought it to my attention.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: I want to thank the minister for her answer because I think all of us know the value of these essential workers have when they actually went into work while many of us stayed home.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WAKEHAM: People had to wind up taking their vacation pay, working overtime and all of those now, because of the way it was set up – I don't think it was intended, it's a good program. If we could just base it on regular

hours and regular wages, then I think a lot more people would be able to apply for it.

I appreciate that. Thank you.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will advise the Member that it's the federal government who set the limits on the program. In fact, this government actually pressed from a \$2,500-per-month to a \$3,000-per-month limit, but certainly we'll take it under advisement and see if we can go further for that program.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: (Inaudible) response. I just want to thank the minister for that and say let's do what you did for the rent and let's get it done for this program and base it on regular wages.

Thank you.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad the Member acknowledged what we've been able to do for the rent program. We've worked very hard, Mr. Speaker, with our federal colleagues to change that program from a landlord-based to a tenant-based program. I'm glad that the Member opposite recognizes the work that we've done in this particular area, because it is important for all businesses in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Many families and individuals in our province are suffering the financial hardship, but

government legislation is preventing them from accessing their money.

Where do we stand on locked-in pensions?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

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

As I've mentioned in the House before, we just concluded consultations on the pensions and unlocking pensions, specifically LIRAs, not all pensions. I'm currently waiting for a recommendation from the team. We've received feedback from engageNL.

I'd like to remind Members and the public that these locked-in pensions, they are designed by employers as a part of an employee's benefit package. When an employee works for a company, the pension that they receive, the LIRA or the other type of locked-in pension, that's part of their employment contract. The provincial legislation is simply legislation that governs those contracts, the locked-in pensions. We are looking to change legislation and I look forward to bringing that to the House in an upcoming session.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I've sat here through three ministers now and haven't gotten any answers. Christmas is coming and people are worried about their houses, they're worried about their cars. We know you just can't take it out to do a renovation on a house, but it's critical for these people to have answers to get their money.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'DRISCOLL: Almost all other jurisdictions in the country provide some level of pension unlocking. A laid-off worker in Alberta can access their pension to pay their

mortgage but a laid-off worker in our province can't.

Minister: Why is the government preventing individuals who are struggling from accessing their pensions?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

MS. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As a government, in the legislation we do allow people to access money in their locked-in pensions under two situations. The first is if they've a shortened life expectancy, and the second is if there's a small amount in the pension. We know that across Canada each province has slightly different criteria for removing money from these types of locked-in pensions.

I look forward to receiving the recommendations from the consultations and changes, potentially, will be coming forward to the House in an upcoming session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. O'DRISCOLL: Mr. Speaker, again, I've went through this and we know how slow it is to change the legislation. People are struggling right now and they need to get access to their money. It's too late in December and January, when they have nothing for their kids for Christmas. It should be looked at and it should be acted on very swiftly.

Consultations finished a month ago. When will we see legislation this session, in the next two weeks, to allow people to access the money in their locked-in pension funds?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

MS. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly appreciate the Member's passion. I've received many requests from my constituents and other Members' constituents looking for access to their pension funds. I certainly empathise with the families in the province who have a difficult financial situation, especially coming up around Christmas.

Just to set expectations: I don't see any changes coming, though, before Christmas, unfortunately, but in an upcoming session, we, hopefully, will have changes to unlocking pensions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Even the Child and Youth Advocate has spoken out about the unreasonable delay into the Innu inquiry into children in care.

I ask the new Premier: After more than three years of inaction, blaming the consultation process with the Innu, when is his government going to take action to make this inquiry happen?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that important question.

Since taking over two months ago, I've made some good progress with the Indigenous leadership on this file and we're moving towards a solution. This is a priority for me and our government. Frankly, too much time has passed. We need to move on and we need to make sure that we're doing this in a timely fashion. I look forward to continuing to work with Grand Chief Rich and others to get this done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate him talking about in a timely fashion, but it's been three years. Innu children are continuing to die. Other children are forced to suffer new generations of intergenerational trauma while in care of this government.

I ask the Premier: When are you going to step up and give us concrete timelines and make this inquiry happen?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member has asked a very important question. Certainly, our government committed to do an inquiry into the treatment, experiences and outcome of Innu children in care. I think the Premier just did a very good job of outlining his commitment.

The Member speaks of three years; this Premier has only been in the portfolio since August. He's already made it very clear to us that we are proceeding on this.

We have been working with the Innu leadership. The Premier has sat down already with the Innu leadership and those newly elected. Mr. Speaker, we want to complete a process. We want better outcomes at the end of the day. There have been some issues along the way with securing the people that we needed, but this file is progressing and a top priority.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since I was elected I witnessed this government blame its failure and its inaction on delays due to consultation with Indigenous groups. Methylmercury poisoning – Muskrat Falls is a prime example of delaying of excuses.

When is this government going to stop blaming the Innu and the consultation process with the Innu? How many more Innu lives are going to

be ruined before this inquiry begins, Mr. Speaker?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, what I will tell you is that as a minister new to this department, Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation since August, I was very proud and humble to take on the portfolio. In my mandate letter from the Premier, he asked me to build upon a principled relationship with all Indigenous groups in this province and that is what we are doing.

The Innu inquiry is something that we have committed to and the file is progressing. I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to a day when we see very positive outcomes and we see less of their children in our care and more at home with their families in communities.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier direct his Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to disclose all financial information related to the new mental health and addictions facility, and why taxpayers will pay an extra \$40 million and it will take a year longer to build?

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

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

In due time and in due course, Mr. Speaker, we will reveal all the transactions dealing with the new mental health facility. We will make that public.

Right now, we're going through the process in which the unsuccessful bidders have an opportunity to come in and review, meet and debrief with us. After that process, there's more information that will come out to the public.

After that time, if the hon. Member would like to come over and have a sit-down with members in my department to further explain the situation and how it all transpires – the Member is saying how much it would cost. We're looking at the new mental health facility being built for the best value, on schedule, on time to replace a facility in this province that is a much-needed replacement to take the stigma away from mental health, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: I don't agree with the minister. I don't think people in this province have a year to wait for a mental health facility.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, heavy equipment is already rolling. This is ridiculous.

When will the Premier disclose to the people of this province why it's an extra \$40 million and an extra year to build?

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

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, as I said, there's no political involvement into this decision whatsoever of the type of building that's going to be built to replace the Waterford Hospital.

This is being done by the professionals in our department, the health care professionals, the professionals in mental health, Mr. Speaker. It is easy for the Member opposite to say he don't agree with it. If you don't agree with it, base it on some facts.

We will have the facts provided to the Members opposite and to the public of Newfoundland and Labrador that we are doing what we promised to do. We are replacing the mental health facility with a new facility that will meet the needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The most recent COVID case was for a non-resident individual who came to the province after being granted a travel exemption.

What reason was he granted an exemption, Minister?

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

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

The challenge in answering a question like that in a specific case is the issue of privacy, Mr. Speaker. The Member opposite well knows that individual privacy in this province is protected and as the Minister of Health I am responsible for the *Personal Health Information Act*.

The individual concerned was granted an exemption by the chief medical officer of Health. That is the only requirement that person needs to fulfil to be able to visit this province under the circumstances described. It is not for prurient curiosity and the benefits of the Members opposite. The information that's released is based on the requirement to protect public health and the health of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker, not nosiness.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are not noseys. They don't want to know the individual's name but they want to know if an individual is coming here to do work as an essential worker that could be done by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, by minimizing the risk to people in this province by bringing the COVID-19 virus to this province.

I ask again: Was this a work-related essential worker who was given an exemption to come to Newfoundland and Labrador to work?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, if the Member opposite read our news releases every day, he would note those exemptions or those reasons for travel that are associated with work, it's stated so. This individual had a legitimate exemption from the chief medical officer of Health.

The Member opposite is simply trying to stir the pot and he is being a little bit disingenuous with what he knows. As a minister of the Crown, I cannot divulge about people's personal medical information, Mr. Speaker. He knows damn well where he's going.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The only thing being disingenuous in this House is the fact that certain people are not standing up for the rights of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker, and that's not good enough.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Negotiations between government and its provincial road ambulances have –

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the people of this province, in my humble opinion, have been very well protected by Dr. Fitzgerald and her team.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAGGIE: I really think it is a little unfortunate, to say the least, that the Member opposite should cast aspersions on a small, but very hard-working and very diligent group of individuals who kept the people of this province safe since January of this year, and it's beneath you, Sir, to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier has been touting \$25-a-day child care but we continue to hear from child care providers that the current system and the proposed system is flawed as it cannot pay a living wage.

I ask the Premier: Will he address the needs of child care providers so they won't close their doors?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Over the last two or three years, government has significantly increased the wage subsidy to our child care providers. As the Premier has pointed out, the \$25-a-day daycare is a solid first step.

We continue to review early learning and child care in this province, Mr. Speaker. We have a consultation process starting early in the new year for both regulated and non-regulated, for parents and for anybody who wishes to participate, to look at what the future of early learning and child care looks like in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, a minimum-wage worker in this province will need to work four hours at the current rate in order to be able to afford one day of daycare.

How is the minister going to ensure that those who need this extra support the most are able to afford child care?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure about the numbers the Member has brought forward. Not only do we have the Operating Grant for early learning and child care centres, Mr. Speaker, but we have a subsidy. There are a large number of parents in this province who don't pay anything for child care based on their wages. It ranges from nothing up to \$25 based on wages. If a family earning minimum wage is below the threshold, they are further subsidized over and above the \$25.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has assembled a task force to chart a course for the province's future.

Will the Premier also introduce a concurrent review of the *Labour Standards Act* and *Labour Relations Act* to ensure that all workers in this province are protected?

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

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

I know that labour standards, just to go to the Member's initial question, which was dealing with minimum wage, we established a Committee of three individuals – one from labour, one from the employment side and one independent chairperson – that determined that there would be announced four increases in the minimum wage to bring it to at least \$12.65 by October 1 of 2021. That includes increases based on the national consumer price index, which is an important piece.

Obviously, like any piece of legislation and any standards, we always look at those for the best interest of the people of the province and we'll continue to do that in the department as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, the Premier in his budget debate talked about working together. This weekend in a media interview he boasted about his desire for collaboration.

I ask the Premier and his Liberal government: Are they willing to work along with our goals towards labour legislation reforms to bring in anti-replacement worker legislation and bring back automatic certification legislation?

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

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the question.

I go back to my previous answer, to say that we always look at the labour standards within this province for the best interests of the people of our province and we'll continue to do so. I know we have highly skilled staff in the department that look at these issues on a daily basis and we'll bring forward those concerns and make sure that those concerns are heard and brought forward and reflective in the labour standards as we look at those standards in the coming weeks, months and years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West, time for a quick question and a quick answer.

MR. BROWN: I'll ask it again: Will they bring in anti-replacement worker and bring back automatic certification legislation?

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

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I don't want to sound like a broken record, but as I said before, we look at all labour standards with respect to the best interests of the people of our province, both from the balance side that has to be looked at between the needs of the employees and the needs of the employers. We always look at the balance.

As labour ministers, you always look at the balanced approach. So from that standpoint, we'll always be looking at labour standards where we can make improvements when they can be made and where they need to be made.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, I give notice of the following private Member's motion which will be seconded by the Member for St. John's Centre:

WHEREAS income inequity in Canada and in the province, in particular, has been on the rise in recent decades; and

WHEREAS Canadians from all parties and all walks of life, including CEOs, senators, doctors, community support workers and economists are now championing some form of basic income program; and

WHEREAS the federal government is already pioneering a provision of income support to those who are in most need, the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit; and

WHEREAS the current income support system amounts to a poverty trap and still leaves many to fall through the cracks; and

WHEREAS the Canadian data from the basic income pilot project have shown that programs increase public health, foster improvements in nutrition, improve mental health and well-being, lower the immense public costs associated with

poverty, encourages entrepreneurship and allows people to pursue education and training;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the House consider truly ending poverty in this province by establishing an all-party Select Committee on basic income with the mandate to review and make recommendations on eligibility, minimum income amounts, interactions with existing income supports, cost-benefit analysis, potential models for such programs and a timeline for implementation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House ensures that the Select Committee has the resources it needs to conduct this work.

Thank you.

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

MR. J. DINN: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 63(3), I advise the House that this PMM will be the one to be debated this Wednesday.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The majority of Newfoundland Housing units permit smoking. Currently, there are only two seniors' buildings that are designated as non-smoking.

Second-hand smoke can seep into multi-unit dwellings from many places, including vents and cracks in walls or floors.

Exposure to second-hand smoke can lead to serious health problems, including lung cancer, heart disease and stroke, and it can make asthma worse in both adults and children. It is especially

dangerous for children as it can result in permanent damage to their growing lungs, and cause respiratory and other illnesses like bronchitis and pneumonia, ear infections and even sudden infant death syndrome.

Based on several studies, an estimated 44 to 53 per cent of multi-unit housing residents that do not allow smoking in their home have experienced second-hand smoke infiltration in their home from elsewhere or around the building.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call on the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to designate 75 per cent of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing family units to be non-smoking.

Mr. Speaker, this is my fourth time presenting this petition. I do appreciate the work of the previous minister as to looking into this matter and doing a jurisdictional scan as to how this can be implemented. I do now look for a response from the current minister as to the status of this initiative.

As I've said in my preamble, there should be no reason why an individual should be subjected to the pollution of cigarette or cannabis smoke when they choose not to smoke themselves. It is an issue that I feel very passionate about myself, being a non-smoker, having members in my own family with health issues that I can see are compromised and complicated by the exposure to smoke.

I believe that we should be doing more and we need to act faster, because once the damage is done to our children's lungs or individuals who are subjected to smoke, unfortunately, much of it is irreversible.

I now ask the minister to reply to my petition and provide us with an update.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development with a response.

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for his petition.

As the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, it's the first time really that the petition has been placed in my lap.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation owns and operates over 5,000 public units and currently 139 of those units have a non-smoking policy in place. Province wide there are seven smoke-free buildings and an additional two are taking a grandfathered approach to moving to non-smoking.

Smoking cannabis is prohibited in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation properties where smoking tobacco is also prohibited. In those properties where smoking tobacco is allowed, smoking cannabis is also allowed as per the federal rules and regulations.

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation is currently analyzing information from other jurisdictions in order to develop evidence-based policies around the use of cannabis.

I take the hon. Member's petition under advisement, Mr. Speaker, and I'd be more than happy to work with him on that.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

MR. P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS many students within our province depend on school busing for transportation to and from school each day; and

WHEREAS there are many parents of school-aged children throughout our province who live inside the Eastern School District's 1.6 kilometre zone, therefore do not qualify for busing; and

WHEREAS policy cannot override the safety of our children;

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to eliminate the 1.6 kilometre policy for all elementary schools in the province and in junior and senior high schools where safety is a primary concern.

Mr. Speaker, I'm losing count on how many times I've actually presented this petition on behalf of residents in the Topsail - Paradise area. I know my colleague from Harbour Main has done the same, my colleague from Conception Bay South has done the same, my colleague from Conception Bay East - Bell Island has done the same and we will continue to do it.

This past year, as we know, with the COVID pandemic put a strain on busing but government was able to – better late than never – bring together a number of extra buses and drivers to deal with this issue because it is a safety issue. I can tell you, children in the areas I've already mentioned who have to walk to and from school, who do not have buses, who are walking on shoulders of the road, and as I mentioned in a previous petition on roads – the roads up in the Topsail - Paradise area, I can guarantee you some of the shoulders are gone.

We're asking school-aged children to walk along these roads, and winter's coming, there's going to be even less of an area for them to walk. So this is truly a safety issue.

It would be horrendous if we have a child who is killed or injured by oncoming traffic because we did not take the initiative to bring in busing that would accommodate them. We have courtesy busing and courtesy seating but it is not doing what it should do. There are still children who have to get to school and who do not have a safe way to get there.

So with this petition – and I'll continue to bring it forward – I think the residents in these areas are very concerned and they want to see a safe and happy route to school for school-aged kids.

Thank you.

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

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Other Post-Employment Benefits Eligibility Modification Act, Bill 49, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the minister have leave?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

MR. SPEAKER: Leave.

It is moved and seconded that Bill 49 entitled, An Act To Amend The Other Post-Employment Benefits Eligibility Modification Act, be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this bill?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Other Post-Employment Benefits Eligibility Modification Act," carried. (Bill 49)

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Other Post-Employment Benefits Eligibility Modification Act. (Bill 49)

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 49 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 move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, for leave to introduce a bill, An Act To Amend The Auditor General Act, Bill 50, and I further move 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 the bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Auditor General Act, Bill 50, 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 Government House Leader to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Auditor General Act," carried. (Bill 50)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Auditor General Act. (Bill 50)

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 50 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 15.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, October 26, 2020.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion has been moved and seconded.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 3, Concurrence Motion, report of the Social Services Committee.

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

MR. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For all those who are viewing at home, we're looking at the Social Services, and a significant part of the Social Services, five components of government operations, would be Education and Early Childhood Development. It is from that of which I'll speak mostly in my time because that is what the concurrence session allows us to do, Mr. Speaker.

Before I get into that, I had a revelation in Victoria, BC and that might spark your curiosity. We were over there representing the Legislature here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Mr. Speaker, you were there as well. Myself, representing the District of Bonavista, the Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Municipalities was there as well, as well as the Member for Labrador West.

The revelation that occurred at that time while we were sitting down having a discussion on the

proceedings that we were engaged in, he had stated to me that we could take the whole of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and transplant it in his district. I didn't speak to it at the time because I was a little leery as to whether that was accurate.

MR. BROWN: Labrador as a whole.

MR. PARDY: The whole of Labrador, okay. Therefore, now he's absolutely correct.

I often thought that if we were in a school situation, we often look at things, we look on the news. A lot of us will look on the news and we'll hear Labrador referred to as the Big Land and us here in the Province of Newfoundland. But when we watch our newscast, we'll see that the Province of Newfoundland on a newscast is so much larger than the Big Land.

For all intents and purposes, the hon. Member for Labrador West is totally correct. We can place the Island of Newfoundland and Labrador, almost three times our mass, into the Big Land. In fact, we can take every other province in the Maritimes, PEI, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, they will all fit in the Big Land as well.

I say that little anecdote because I know when we look at the great physical distance we have in order to serve the needs of our residents, it is certainly challenging. There is no doubt about that, because we do have the Big Land in Labrador, and in Newfoundland and Labrador we certainly have a big land as well, even though not as big as Labrador.

We always look at statistics, and when we spend – sometimes we look at statistics, but if I may just give a few provincial statistics from the latest census comparing populations from 1971 to the current year, 2020. It's very significant, Mr. Speaker, when we look at education, we look at what we do and what resources we would put into place, because the population is very significant.

In 1971, we had 530,000, and I'll round off, 531,000 in our province. In 2020, we have 522,000 in our province. For those between the ages of zero and four, the population in Newfoundland and Labrador from the ages of

zero to four – in 1971, we had 62,000 youth between zero and four. In 2020, Mr. Speaker, we have 20,000 between zero and four in that time frame.

I look at our oldest demographic, which would be 90 years and older. In 1971, where we had more population, Newfoundland and Labrador, 587. In 2020, we have 3,594 residents. Data will show you that you have 150 per cent chance of getting to that bracket, 90 years and older, if you are female. That is the data which we have. Inherent in that, there are many challenges and factors and discussions that occur due to the data that is presented.

I would say to you, when we look at the population between zero and four, while we have a reduction in that number and we currently have 20,000, the significance to education is significantly greater now than what it was back in 1971. Society is changing more rapidly. We're embracing technology. If we're slow on rolling out curriculum, by the time it's rolled out, you'll find that it's outdated.

The speed of which we do things is much faster in 2020 than what it was in 1971. I would state, we need now conceivably to make an investment in education based on what we want in our society and to meet and to keep up with the ever-changing society.

I just want to go back again. While I went back to 1972, I just want to restate again, Mr. Speaker, that the first school – and I had mentioned this before in the House – in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador was in my district. It was in the community of Bonavista back in 1727.

A document written by Garfield Fizzard, which now can be found at Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland, I just want to read an excerpt from a cited transcript that Mr. Fizzard had cited. When he references the start-up of the school, here is what he had stated, quote, from the archives: "The people finely [*sic*] are willing...to set up a Charity School.... I raised by subscription £8 am promised more, for the teaching the poor children to read for the year 1727, have ordered a Schoolmistress to begin to teach them early this spring."

Now, several things stand out to me there, 8 pounds, and if you did a translation at 8 pounds you'll find that it equates to today's salary of \$14.29. Wonderful; \$14.29 was a significant amount of money back then, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing was the poor children they referenced. We all know that in our history we had quite a struggle with poverty in our province. We still struggle today with poverty in our province. The chance with Estimates is that we get a chance to go over every budget line in every department of which the government operates. This is what the concurrence does here.

One thing I had mentioned before when we looked at productivity in our education system was the wellness of the students of which are in the system. I'm not sure if the last time I spoke to the wellness of the education system as to the rationale why, I mentioned to the Minister of Health and Community Services that the healthier the children that we have in our school system, the less interventions on the health care system will be now and into the future. So we look at it as an investment; an investment that will save the energy and the expenses of interventions a little later.

I would also content, Mr. Speaker, that healthier children make better learners. Generally, healthier children will make better learners. Their attention may be better, they attend better, and the more active they are, the better the education system would be.

I talk on wellness because the 2020 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth – and we discussed this in our Estimates – the benchmarks they use is that 150 minutes of physical activity within the school systems and the provinces in Canada. So that was the benchmark they looked at, 150.

In our schools, we have 6 per cent, which will give 120 minutes, but 18 minutes a day is what we prescribe. It is in our allocation of time that we ask schools, when they create their timetables here is 6 per cent. I threw out of a couple of statistics before: math would be 10 per cent, religious education is 8 per cent, and health as a curriculum is 5 per cent. I would say to you, if we increased the amount of physical activity

in the schools, it's quite possible that we will see an increase in the student achievement in what we get in return from the sessions and our teaching time because they'll be more productive.

What did the ParticipACTION Report Card find about the children in Canada? The overall activity, physical activity, they gave a score of D plus and that would be the percentage of children and youth who meet the physical activity recommendation within Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines for children and youth, at least 60 minutes of daily moderate to vigorous physical activity.

Inactive play, we received an F. In offering physical education, which is the quality part of skilled development, we received a D plus and in 24-hour movement behaviours we received an F. I would say when it comes to the wellness of children, we need to give some attention to that going forward. My suggestion would be that we would adopt what the schools in Alberta and British Columbia do, and they achieve the greatest, the best results in the PISA, the international assessments in the areas of math and science, and we adapt their curriculum. They also offer the greatest percentage of daily physical education which is 10 per cent of the timetable.

I want to move on to the staff allocation, Mr. Speaker. When we look at the staff wellness, it is significant, but one thing that we don't permit in our school systems is we don't permit the staff, teaching our children, to access the wellness rooms in our schools and that is under the legislation from the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, the Board of Trustees. Their policy is that they don't because they contend that it would breach the conflict of interest legislation.

The legislation that they refer to, in this case, is as follows, section 7: "A public office holder shall not, directly or indirectly, accept a fee, gift or personal benefit, except compensation authorized by law, that is connected, directly or indirectly, with the performance of his or her duties."

We would contend that the educational staff in a school cannot access and utilize the equipment

rooms in our schools because of a conflict of interest. I would contend, Mr. Speaker, that if we have those wellness rooms in our schools, we would welcome and entice the staff of those schools, who are the role models for our children, to use those fitness rooms. In using the fitness rooms, they would improve their wellness and, obviously, model some good behaviour that we want modelled. That is something that I would think we ought to be contending.

Another thing that came up in the Estimates in Education was the fact that back in 2015-16 to 2019 the teachers' sick leave had increased by 20 per cent; in fact, it broke over the \$18 million mark of teachers' sick leave. When we hold that alongside the fact of the conflict of interest of not permitting staff to use fitness rooms, I would say it ought to be a no-brainer, Mr. Speaker, that our staff, as well as our students, ought to be able to freely and be encouraged to use the fitness rooms within our schools.

Just talking about technology in our schools in the short four minutes remaining. We all know the importance of technology going forward. I think the minister mentioned Kraken, but one industry he did mention was in the Clarenville area, which was SubC. All these tech companies are moving and addressing the needs within the society for the resources that they create.

SubC was created, I would think, out of two schools that occurred in our district. Heritage College had an underwater robotics club. It wasn't in the curriculum, it was an after-school activity that was held, as did and does Clarenville Middle School and Clarenville High. Members of that underwater robotics club are also employed now within the SubC Imaging in Clarenville, which is a growing company.

I would say to you we need to move the underwater robotics into the curriculum and allow those who have to travel by bus for 45 minutes in order to access the technology piece in our school program, put it into the curriculum and have it available to everybody regardless of how close to the school they are.

Another thing I would mention before I go on to a couple of district points to drill down on would be the Internet connectivity. I haven't heard

much recently on the Internet connectivity within our province, not a lot. When the schools closed, we know the significance of it, but I haven't heard many discussions on the floor of this House as to where the improvements would lie.

In Southern Bay, Leah Hollahan with three children would be asking. Her Internet is just as bad now as what it was pre-pandemic. There isn't one word as to what I can pass on to her and the other myriad of parents within Winter Brook, Portland, Jamestown and Bonaventure. They would like to know, when can we expect to see the Internet connectivity in those remote areas?

Another thing district specific – and I'm sure it's in the Estimates as well, not quite the Social Services but in the Estimates – we were hit with a significant weather event last winter along coastal Newfoundland and Labrador, and Bonavista wasn't spared of it. The seawall that protects people's property and our municipal infrastructure was damaged significantly. We had an assessment done. They went and did the assessment and said it ought to be looked after; what was damaged by the storm will be looked after.

Here we are now in the later part of October with another winter coming and many of these personal properties and municipal infrastructure are more exposed than it's ever been in the past 50 years. The early part of the summer it was checked off and it was okayed and to give. The people constantly ask: Where are the repairs to the seawall and the trestle that's there in Bonavista that's about to fall into the brook, that was damaged? We haven't heard anything in relation to that.

Mr. Speaker, in the 20 seconds remaining, I shall talk a little faster.

I look forward to this upcoming weekend where they have the virtual Relay For Life in Bonavista. Last year it raised \$54,000. They have to do it a little differently this year, but we wish them luck. The co-chairs of the events are stating that they are very hopeful that there will be much success again this Sunday.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to speak on the district part a bit and I'm going to read something into the record. I know I can't dispute your ruling, but I'm going to read a few things into the record later.

First of all, it's a pleasure to represent the people of Humber - Bay of Islands again. I look forward to the next election. Some people say it may be in November or December – I'm not sure – or maybe next spring. Whenever that is, I look forward to the election and I thank the people that have supported me over so many years. It's an honour and it's a pleasure to do that, Mr. Speaker.

I understand the situation that the government is in financially, but there are only so many times we can say: Okay, we'll do it next year, we'll do it next year. We have to make a plan to try to get the province out of the financial crisis we're in, and it's going to be tough decisions. It's going to be tough decisions no matter what government is in power after the next election – no matter what government – but we have to try to make sure we take the steps for that.

There's one interesting part that I noticed and it hasn't been brought up yet. I know there's a committee gone out now – and I thank the people for that – on behalf of the province that's going to do some work on bringing back some way that the province can move forward and guide us in the future. But the strange part I find about that, Mr. Speaker, it's been in the process for so many years, is that report is due April 30, the budget process starts November, December, and the budget may be brought down in March.

Here it is we're setting up a process that's going to guide us for the future and the budget is going to be tabled before we even see the report. That hasn't been raised in this House or out in the media yet. When the Premier and others go out and say here's our guiding document, the

guiding document is going to be after we put the budget in place.

I know one year, I think the budget was passed here on March 27. It was introduced and read in this House on March 27. We were going to bring the budget down in March or early April, usually before Easter, and then the report that's going to guide the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador for the next five or 10 years, nothing is going to be in place – without the budget in place. So are we going to change the budget? Are we going to be waiting for the budget?

By the time you get the report at the end of April, you're looking at May, June that we're going to have another second Interim Supply, so we can follow that report? That's something I noticed, and I haven't heard a clear answer. Are we going to use that to guide the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador?

A lot of people are concerned about the deficit. We understand – everybody understands – that the province must help out people in this pandemic. Everybody understands that. Everybody is hurting in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, but we have to start being prudent. We can't keep saying – even the situation that we have when we came back approving the second six months of the budget, we said we'll wait until the next budget.

Now we're going to wait for the report to come out, which will be April, if you look at it, it's going to be May or June. So it's something that government hasn't fully put out to the general public yet, if it's going to be a guiding document or is it just going to be something we're going to be working on after the budget is put into the House of Assembly. That's just something that I throw out there as someone who understands the budgetary process that is going to be done.

Mr. Speaker, I look at the District of Humber - Bay of Islands and I'm going to speak about the district itself. As I said, the former minister and the current minister – the road improvements so much this year definitely will improve tourism in the area, and safety on the roads for the people travelling on the north and south shore of Humber - Bay of Islands. I know cellphone coverage for Lark Harbour and York Harbour should be coming in the next couple of weeks;

they're out there working on it. I know the minister has an update for the people and they're very pleased.

Just that alone, Mr. Speaker, will help tourism in the Humber - Bay of Islands. A lot of people these days, when they go on a few of the mountain hikes out there – there are a lot of great hills – they love to have that protection, that if anything goes wrong they can make calls. There are only certain areas out there, when you go up Murray Mountain which is about a three-hour hike, that you can get cellphone coverage because you have direct range.

There are a lot of mountains in the Lark Harbour and York Harbour area. They're pretty steep, two or three hours. People want to have confidence that if they twist an ankle or whoever they're with gets a bit hurt, that they can call. I know a few instances out in Lark Harbour where people came down over Lark Harbour hill and, tragically, one trike tipped over and had no way to call out and it wasn't a good ending.

I know other times when people go up on Lewis Hills and Lark Harbour hills and get a bit lost and they don't have cellphone coverage. What happens is search and rescue and the fire department put their lives in danger to go and find these people. I know last year there was a couple of instances that they had to go and get them but they had to track them down instead of having the cellphone coverage.

That's going to be a big benefit. Also, business-wise, a lot of people can carry on business while they're out there which is great. Hopefully, that's going to improve a lot.

Mr. Speaker, I know McIver's in Cox's Cove is going to be applying this year also for cellphone coverage in their area because there's no cellphone coverage in their area. That area, itself, is a great improvement for the Humber - Bay of Islands.

I know the Member for Corner Brook, the former minister of Fisheries and agrifoods mentioned redfish. That's going to be big if the biomass improves in the Humber - Bay of Islands. Right now, I know they're doing an exploratory fishery on it. All signs that it's looking good. The redfish and dealing with the

Qalipu, if that could be produced in the Humber-Bay of Islands or portions of it, it would be a great employment boost.

I don't think people realize the size of the fishery in the Bay of Islands with three plants operating and all the fisher people operating in Humber-Bay of Islands, it's fairly big. It's a big operation. I know Bill Barry now, he does a great job of creating employment in the area. There's a lot of employment in the area. There are a lot of fisher people in the Bay of Islands itself that fish, they go out in the Port au Port area also for lobster. The fishery is a big part.

I know also that the Kruger is stable, I know the port authority is doing work now to ship paper out from the port authority, from the port itself, to be able to ship it directly to the markets which is great. Hopefully, they can start shipping fish from the port of Corner Brook, if they're not already doing it now, which is a great benefit. It's much cheaper to get the product there quicker and safer.

I look at the hospital again, and I've said many times that if we can get as many local workers as we can – just to follow up, I said last week that there was a meeting with the company from Quebec and the carpenters union. They did have the meeting; they had a very frank discussion, from my understanding. The people who are in Corner Brook representing the company are going back to their owners and trying to work something out.

I don't want to jinx that one bit, so I'll just let them work on it, but there is an open discussion on that to keep local workers working. Safety also for that, Mr. Speaker, it's big. It's big for that. Hopefully, that's going to work out, because it is two, 2½ years of work that they have there that they can stay home. They don't have to travel away and come back and go into the rotational workers where they have to isolate for so many days. It's a great improvement. So that project is well on track itself.

Also, for the first responders around, I know the government has worked hard and worked well with the first responders around for this pandemic. There are a lot of people who sacrificed since February for the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador, which is great and we all thank them.

When you're dealing with the town councils, and I can go through each one, they're still working hard for their towns and we must recognize that. We must recognize the work of the volunteers that they're still going to keep the towns working: the town clerks, the town managers. They are definitely – definitely doing a lot of hard work for the towns during this pandemic.

I know I was speaking to the Minister of Education on the school busing. There is still one outstanding that we have to try to work at. We're working at it, actually the measurement now, I think it's down to 1.87, I think it is or 1.89. So it's about five steps too short, but yet we can't get on the bus. So I know the minister is working on that. I brought it to his attention several times. We'll continue to work on that to try to get this student to work out. I know everybody's trying the best they can to get it worked out if there's capacity on the bus or not. So that's going to continue also, Mr. Speaker.

I look at again if you take out the rural parts of the district, there are a lot of seniors clubs. I know there is funding there that we're going to try to use, Mr. Speaker, Community Healthy Living Fund. We're trying to help a lot of seniors groups. A lot of their fundraising has dropped off and some are having online auctions, silent auctions. Actually, I have my basement full of stuff. I go on a lot of the sites just to drive up the prices and I end up with the prizes themselves. It's a great way for the seniors to raise funds because just the socialization, getting out and just being together. They need the funds.

I know there are a few applications in to the minister and I know the minister is working at them to try to get them approved also. I know in Meadows there's going to be work trying to get the gable ends of the arena done, so we're working on that.

In Gillams, I know the recreation department through the town has done great work. Scott Blanchard and Linda and all the recreation committee has done great work out there to build a softball field to get kids active in the

summertime. They start as soon as the snow is gone and they go right up until – even now you go over there and there are a lot of people on the field in the nighttime and in the daytime. Hopefully, we'll be able to help them out in some way.

Mr. Speaker, the City of Corner Brook is where both of those – in Humber - Bay of Islands there are certain parts, the Curling part, and the Humber Heights part is a big part of the City of Corner Brook. We work well with the City of Corner Brook. It's a combination, through the last five or six months, of their hard work of a lot of people, city staff, for the Curling, Humbermouth area. Also, all the councillors. They're working hard also to ensure the safety of the residents in the area.

When you go down to see a lot of the improvements that have been done, I know – to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Lark Harbour and York Harbour still doesn't have a complete water and sewer system, but they have \$3 million ready to spend. Last year, there was an issue with the design out the bay. They have \$3 million that's going to be spent, Mr. Speaker, to bring those services to the Lark Harbour area.

I work well with the government officials and work well with the government people themselves. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, they think that you come to them and you're a bit persistent. Mr. Speaker, I think if there's any Member in this House who's not persistent when it comes to their district – I see the former minister of Transportation and Works looking at me and saying, no, no, you're not persistent, you just push your point across. I agree with that. I'm not persistent but usually when I get something –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. JOYCE: Some people say I am. I guess being the youngest of 14 kids, if you see food on the table you better get it quick. That's a part of it but, Mr. Speaker, in the context of it, you get persistent but you get results because people know when you're persistent with it, it's the urgency of it. The point about it is we understand that we're all fighting for the district.

We're all fighting for issues and bringing issues forward, which we should be doing.

Then there's still the relationship there, we can banter back and forth but yet – I'll give you a good example, Mr. Speaker, again, it's the roadwork that we couldn't get done through the federal government, that's finally done where the roads are safe. I know there's one spot that was very dangerous out in Little Port Road, that's going to be done now. That's bringing the information, and that's what MHAs should do. That's what people expect us to do to ensure that safety and other major concerns in the area are

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to get back to something you were talking about today. I'm not disputing anybody's ruling but I always say that your right as a Member should be adhered to. I'm just going to read – and I'm not disputing your ruling, but I need to put this on the record, Mr. Speaker, on the ruling that you made two weeks ago. Also, I'm going to put it on the ruling that Madam Sauvé said, because you said today there was something left out. I'll show you what was left out today, Mr. Speaker.

In the ruling, and this goes back – to let the people know – when you put in a point of privilege, and the point of privilege I had was that the information from the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, that there were statements made in the Management Commission – which there were no minutes taken by the way. Absolutely no minutes taken, which is unheard of; no minutes taken in the Management Commission meeting of October 24, 2018 – no minutes, which is unheard of. One of the reasons why there were no minutes taken in that meeting, which affected me as a Member so much, because they said it wasn't discussed, the body of the report.

Mr. Speaker, I don't mean to single this person out, but the Deputy Premier of this province – she's here in this House right now – asked a question in that meeting, did all MHAs participate? The Commissioner for Legislative Standards said no. The minister of Justice and Attorney General at the time said, who never? He said Eddie Joyce. So Eddie Joyce never participated? He said no, he never.

There were no minutes taken at that meeting; yet, the information that's given is there was no name ever mentioned. This is the point of privilege I brought up, is that there was information came forward that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General – I give him credit to stand up, who has the courage to stand up for the truth; I give him credit for the courage – went outside the House and stated it, which he wasn't allowed to state in this House. That's why the point of privilege, because my rights – which I'm not going to stop anyway. I'm going to work for the Bay of Islands no matter what.

I just want to read the ruling, Mr. Speaker. When myself and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands met with you – and the part that was left out of your ruling. Now, I'm not disputing your ruling but I need to put this on the record, if it's okay to put this on the record. Here's what Madam Sauvé – because you used Madam Sauvé as a precedent setting on your ruling. I just need to put it on the record for my own piece of mind so people in this House don't think I'm just going off and saying something that's not true.

Here's what Madam Sauvé said, the part in your ruling, Mr. Speaker, is: "... the sub judice convention to stand in the way of its consideration of a matter vital to the public interest or to the effective operation to the House and its Members." There was something you added there from another speaker which wasn't even identified, that wasn't even dealing with this.

Here's what Madam Sauvé went on that was out of your ruling, Mr. Speaker – I'm not disputing your ruling but I have to put it on the record – that was not included in your ruling. This is very important, and I know the people in this House – here's what Madam Sauvé actually said, which you used as a precedent-setting ruling in this House but wasn't included in your ruling.

"Given the precedents I have studied, it is clear to me that while the Hon. Member could seek a remedy in the courts, he cannot function effectively as a Member while this slur upon his reputation remains. The process of litigation would probably be very lengthy and there is no knowing how long it would take before the issue was finally resolved.

"I have therefore decided, in spite of the reservations I have expressed, that this complaint should be given precedence as a prima facie case of privilege in order to provide the Hon. Member with the speediest possible route toward the re-establishment of his reputation. I am prepared to entertain a motion to refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections."

That's what Madam Sauvé said. So, Mr. Speaker, when you mentioned today in this House about there was a misunderstanding in your ruling, it wasn't even put in there, that wasn't even in there. Whoever wrote that for you left out those two paragraphs where she allowed it.

I'm asking, Mr. Speaker, if you can go back and reconsider your ruling, because I'm not sure if you've seen this part. I can provide you with a copy of it.

I just want to thank the people of Humber - Bay of Islands for their –

MR. SPEAKER: I want to caution the Member. The Member says he is not challenging the ruling, but if he goes on to challenge the ruling then he is negating his initial comments.

The ruling is the ruling. The ruling I've referenced, there was a citation error in it. When making a ruling, a Speaker has the option of taking quotes in relation to the other ruling as he or she sees fit and for various reasons. Sometimes it's to explore the issue and to show how the decision-making was made.

If you look at the full ruling, it's up the Speaker to determine when a sub judice situation exists based on the particulars of the situation here. In this case, I outlined in the ruling that the reason was, at that time, we had three Members of this House who were involved in a court case. We had an independent Officer of this House who was also involved in the ruling.

The situations of this case clearly justify sub judice. I ask the Member to confine his comments in this regard.

MR. JOYCE: Did you see this before you made the ruling? That's all I asked.

MR. SPEAKER: I'm not going to answer in the debate. The hon. Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaking to the Social Services Committee, and in particular relating to the Department of Education, as all Members know, Education now encompasses everything from early learning and child care through K to 12, through to the post-secondary, both public and private post-secondary institutions.

Today in Question Period, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Labrador West had asked a question about child care and subsidies. I wanted to provide some additional information based on that question.

There are 1,343 families receiving a child care subsidy. Just to keep in mind, there are two areas where child care is made less expensive for families. One is the Child Care Subsidy and the other is the Operating Grant. Under the Operating Grant, there are over 8,000 registered child care spaces in the province. Over 70 per cent of those operate under the Operating Grant Program, so that's close to 6,000 – 5,600, 5,700. If my math is correct, it's over 5,600 children operate under the Operating Grant or receive the Operating Grant, Mr. Speaker, but the families receiving a child care subsidy, there are 1,343 children in the province receiving a child care subsidy.

Of those, there are almost 700 children who receive free child care because the family income is less than the income threshold, which I believe is \$35,000. I'll double check that and provide that to the Member, but I believe if the household income is less than \$35,000 then they receive, not only the Operating Grant, but the subsidy and, therefore, the child care is no cost to the family.

Anywhere above \$35,000, it's then on a sliding scale, so they pay somewhere between zero and the \$25 as of January 1 for the children that are going to have child care under the Operating Grant Program. It will be somewhere between zero and \$25. Once you come out of that scale,

obviously, the remainder of the families would be paying the \$25.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's important information, especially for any Member who didn't realize that there are close to 700 children going to daycare in the province that pay nothing, the families pay nothing for those children.

Mr. Speaker, in speaking about the K-to-12 system – I should go back actually before I do that and talk about the Early Learning and Child Care program and a little bit more about the \$25-a-day child care program before we get into the K-to-12 system.

I know that part of this, as the Premier said, it's a very solid first step in improving early learning and child care in the province, Mr. Speaker, \$25 a day. We do have a consultation process that will be starting early in the new year. That consultation process will look at what the future of early learning and child care looks like in the province. We'll be speaking to those who – operators who are registered, non-registered operators as well. We will be looking at, starting today – in fact, starting a week or two weeks ago, we started to look at what red tape was there, but that will be part of the consultation process as well. Whether or not we can reduce the red tape for the child care operators who are non-registered who are looking at becoming registered and assisting those as well, Mr. Speaker.

We look at the Income Supplement. The Income Supplement, which essentially is on top of the wages that early learning educators are paid by their employer. The Income Supplement ranges from \$12,900 to \$16,900 for those who qualify. That is one of the best in the entire country, Mr. Speaker, and that \$16,900, based on the number of hours, if it's a 40-hour week – and I have to do a little more research – but based on a 40-hour week, you're looking at \$7 or \$8 an hour in terms of an Income Supplement.

We know that there are still challenges. We've increased the bursaries now up to \$7,500, Mr. Speaker, in terms of bursaries, once somebody graduates from an early learning childhood program in the province. We provide \$250 per course for those who are upgrading, and \$2,500

in bursaries as well. So government is certainly looking at and trying to increase the number of people working in early learning and child care, providing child care to our children pre-school, pre-K-12 system. We do understand that there are some challenges in recruitment in some areas of the province still. I know Labrador, for example, Labrador West has had some challenges in recruitment.

Mr. Speaker, we are coming out with the casual caregiver pilot program. I believe the operators have been informed of what's entailed in that already. If not, you've heard it here first, breaking news. I think the early learning and child care operations have been informed at this stage of the pilot program to try and allow operators, if somebody is off for one reason or another, to be able to get additional staff in.

Mr. Speaker, in looking at the Early Learning and Child Care program itself and the pilot program, that is, as I said, to allow organizations to get staff where there are finding challenges.

If there are areas of the province where capacity is still a concern, Mr. Speaker – I know I spoke to the mayor of one municipality – there is the Child Care Capacity Initiative, which is available for both non-profit organizations and municipalities to create child care spaces in the province. It does help with needs assessment, start-up costs, equipment, furnishings and even building plans or renovations. That's been put in place to try to increase the capacity in areas where capacity has been an issue. We'll continue to look at ways that we can help with that.

There's been \$62 million allocated annually for early learning and childhood development programs in the province, Mr. Speaker. That does include the bursary program that I talked about of \$7,500, as well as the Income Supplement for early learning and child care operations or employees.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to talk a little bit about the K-to-12 system. I'm trying to talk a little bit about each of the areas of education in the province in the 20 minutes that I'm allotted to speak in this Committee.

If you look at the K-to-12 system, under the *Education Action Plan* – which is something that our government introduced about two to three years ago – this year there are over 350 additional teachers in schools under the *Education Action Plan*. That includes 200 teacher learning assistants, 104 reading specialists, 39 resource teachers and eight English as a second language. That is in addition to the additional administrative positions that we've added and the student assistant hours that we've added as a result of COVID this year.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we've added 145 additional buses in the province to accommodate the over 6,000 eligible students for transportation that would have been without transportation. Since school started, not only have we looked after the over 6,000 eligible students, but in a number of areas we've been able to look after the courtesy students as well.

Mr. Speaker, the courtesy students, I'm not sure of the total number of additional passengers on buses as a result of the 145 buses. I can get that information in terms of courtesy. I know administrators, schools are continuing to work on courtesy students. In some cases, Mr. Speaker, because of the additional buses, all courtesy students have been looked after for schools. In some cases, there are courtesy students that ordinarily, last year and other years, would have received transportation that either still haven't or may not.

It has been a very complex year in terms of student transportation. We've worked through it and the vast majority of issues have been resolved. I've worked with a number of Members of the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, in resolving issues in their districts. We continue to work on some of the other issues.

Mr. Speaker, also the kindergarten parents, we were able to have them visit even though visitation to schools has been restricted this year. I know extracurricular activities, such as school sports, have started. We continue to work on that.

Mr. Speaker, I believe, as the sports governing bodies in the province aligning with the ordinary or the usual start of those sports in the province, the English School District and the francophone

school district as well are allowing the sports to happen within the schools. We continue to work on that, on a very measured basis to ensure the safety of not only the students but school staff as well, Mr. Speaker, whether it's custodial or other.

We've increased as well – talking about that – the custodial hours within the schools and put in place additional protocols within the schools as a result of COVID this year. It is an unprecedented year. There's absolutely no question about that. We've seen some significant changes to the school year.

The laptops; some teachers, I believe, are now receiving laptops. Hopefully the laptops that have been ordered this year, Mr. Speaker, will all be delivered, if they haven't already been, to teachers. We also have the Chromebooks that are going to all students in seven to 12 in the province to help not only with introducing the technology in the schools and the possibilities that brings and what it's going to mean for distance learning and the other advantages to children, but in the event of a second wave.

We have been very lucky in this province, every case we've seen over the past couple of months has been travel related. There has been no community spread. Hats off to the Minister of Health, the chief medical officer of Health and those in Public Health for doing a very, very solid job in this province, but we do have to prepare in the event there's an outbreak in a community or in a school or in the province itself, as we've seen with other provinces.

Part of the introduction of the laptops and Chromebooks is to help deal with that and to deal with virtual learning if the need arises. We've seen from last year, the challenges with students being off for two-and-a-half or more months in terms of COVID. Trying to get ahead of that and deal with that, I have been assured by the English School District that we are ready to deal with that should the need arise.

Mr. Speaker, for the 2019-20 year for Memorial, there were 18,308 students enrolled at Memorial University. For the fall semester of 2020, we had 19,429. More than 1,000 more students enrolled at Memorial this year. The largest year-over-year growth since 2003. We're still looking at

that, analyzing. Obviously, you don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

We've seen a significant increase in enrolment at Memorial and we are very, very happy with that; looking at where those students are coming from, whether the majority are local students or Canadian or international. In terms of enrolment, we know that learning, for the most part, at Memorial is virtual this year. There are some labs and other cases where students have to be in class and on campus and that is the case in some cases, Mr. Speaker, but the vast majority is distance learning.

We've seen at the College of the North Atlantic, last year's enrolment was 5,449 students. The fall semester this year, as of September 24, was 5,814, a 6.7 per cent increase over last year. We've seen a significant increase in online enrolment at both Memorial, as well as the College of the North Atlantic.

Mr. Speaker, I have had some discussions with private institutes. I know even in some of the private training institutes enrolment is up this year as well. Whether that's related to COVID and people having more time or people working from home having time to sign up for courses online, we're not sure yet.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at Memorial, whether it's the Grenfell campus, the St. John's campus or the Marine Institute, I'm very encouraged by the new president of Memorial, Vianne Timmons. I've had a number of discussions with her about some of her ideas and her approach.

She is from this province, so the fact that she is at Memorial and she's come home to run Memorial, Mr. Speaker, I think is a tremendous asset to this province. I'm very encouraged by her and what she's going to bring to Memorial University. Absolutely just thrilled to have her home and running Memorial. She has an extensive background, extensive career in post-secondary education. I feel very positive about being able to work with her and her leadership at Memorial University.

Likewise, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the College of the North Atlantic, Liz Kidd has been in the college system for a number of years. She's just

recently taken on the role of running the College of the North Atlantic; I've had a number of meetings with her. I'm equally pleased with the vision I believe she's going to bring to the College of the North Atlantic, and some of the ideas that we're sharing and talking about in terms of growth and the College of the North Atlantic into the future and the concept of training students for the jobs that exist.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, of the challenges within the tech sector. That's an area where both Memorial University, including the Marine Institute campus and the College of the North Atlantic, have students in the tech sector and training for the tech sector. We know there will be a deficit in the future in terms of people to work in that sector. I know that both institutes, as well as our private colleges, are looking at enhancing information technology programming and offerings for students.

Mr. Speaker, I see that the 20 minutes has very quickly run by. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on these topics today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank, obviously, the wonderful constituents of my beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue that have given me this honour to represent them in this hon. House today.

Going through the budget through CSSD, one thing that I think stood out to me more than anything was that we talk about CSSD as Children, Seniors and Social Development, but there's another big portion to the portfolio: taking care of people living with disabilities as well.

This is a very vulnerable sector. It's something that needs the attention that it does get and does deserve. It's about inclusion and it's about accessibility and stuff like that. As we know, there are some people with physical disabilities, whether they were born with it or through an accident or anything like that, and then there are other people with cognitive disabilities. It's

incumbent on us all to make sure that this vulnerable sector is looked after. I believe that as a province, we are doing well, but in the meantime I think it needs to be a part of the name on the department for sure.

I'd like to thank Minister Warr and his staff for the professional evening we had in Estimates. Like I said, I asked a lot of questions. Some were financial questions; some were more on the social side. They did answer my questions. I'm waiting on a couple of reports, but, for the most part, I think we had a very successful Estimates.

I would also be very remiss if I never thanked Jackie Lake Kavanagh, the Child and Youth Advocate, because her input and reporting to the department is very important to this very vulnerable sector. Like I said, that's our future and we should be taking that time to take care of our youth and our children.

I'd also be very remiss if I never thanked Ms. Suzanne Brake for being the Seniors' Advocate and bringing her reports to the department as well to make sure that we're all on the same page and we understand what the major issues are; not all the time are they presented to us without hearing it from a report. So it's a very vulnerable sector of the province, but I think we have a lot of proponents, including myself, that take it very seriously and really want what's best for our Children, Seniors and Social Development and people currently living with disabilities.

One of the things that brings this full vulnerable sector into this, and we talk about our children and youth and our people living with disabilities, is our students. I'm talking about secondary students from kindergarten to 12. Something that's been bothering me since day one of coming in here to represent the beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue is the whole 1.6 kilometre busing.

I tell you what bothers me the most about it, to be quite honest, is that we talk of our children as eligible and ineligible, which I think is a very big disservice, because nobody needs to be known as being ineligible. We found money for extra busing, we found for computers, we found money for this or that and, personally, I don't think any child should have to walk to school if

they want a ride. That should be paramount to anybody that sits in this Legislature.

I never understand why a kid that is 1.6 kilometres is able to get their own way to school, whereas 1.7 kilometres, it could be their next-door neighbour, gets a ride to school. I just don't understand the courtesy seating and stuff like that. A lot of times it's the more vulnerable in our society that are dependent on these seats. I think it's incumbent on us all to find a better solution to busing, and I think it would be the elimination of the 1.6 kilometre rule.

My kids have never rode the bus, other than to go on a school outing or anything like that, because we do live within that 1.6 kilometres. But for my youngest son's school, there are no buses except for a special needs bus. I understand that everybody's fairly close and stuff like that. A lot of parents can probably bring their kids to class and get them to school but there are some families out there that are not. For that reason, I think that it should be incumbent on, not only this department, but the Department of Education, to look at the fact of – hearing these stories, understanding what the application is for and understanding that accommodating somebody is life changing for most people because not every family in the province has a car or two.

Like I said, I just don't like the whole thing of the eligible and ineligible students, that doesn't bode well with me. It doesn't speak to the piece of inclusion. It doesn't speak to the piece of accessibility. I just think it's very important for us to make sure we're treating all students the same, because it's not like the families within the 1.6 kilometres are getting a tax break because they're not paying for busing. They're paying for busing as well out of their taxes. They deserve the same access to transportation for their kids as well as everybody else, whether it's within or outside the 1.6 kilometres.

Just looking at the next piece, I heard the last speaker, the Minister of Education, talk about the tech sector. When we talk about diversifying the economy, this is really where it starts; to make sure that we're educating people for what's coming down the road. If we have Memorial University and we have CNA and the Marine Institute and stuff online, then that's how

we can explore innovation and technology and diversifying the economy.

Diversifying the economy is not taking money out of the oil business and putting money back into the oil business. It's about taking money from one sector and starting a new sector that the province can move in to. Like I said, I understand that we are going to be moving to more green energy, but, unfortunately, we're not there right now. I think we need to take advantage of the oil and gas industry here in Newfoundland and Labrador to put our people and our province in a better financial position so that we can move into that green economy when the world is ready for it.

I don't think the world is quite ready for it. We're moving that way but it's not going to happen overnight. As we saw with the electronic age, it took 20 years pretty much for that to be fully implemented and now we see due to COVID and stuff, that we're taking on the next section of that and saving a lot of money on travel and stuff by having these virtual meetings and stuff. We are moving in the right direction here in Newfoundland and Labrador in the tech sector, but I would say that more needs to be done and it needs to be done around the education piece.

I personally don't think we need to be doing certain courses in high schools that don't really translate to real-life learning. I think every child coming out of Grade 12 should be able to know how to do their own taxes. I think they should have an understanding of that, whether that's doing one course or doing three or two courses over the life of their high school. I think it is incumbent on them to understand how the tax regime works in Canada and to understand it for budgeting purposes and things like that. It will keep our most vulnerable from making poor decisions financially.

Talking about the schools, we see they were talking about the schools having the gymnasiums closed down due to COVID, yet we do have some gymnasiums inside the overpass kind of thing that are offering private lessons. These children are able to avail of that just because they live in an area where there are private offerings.

I will contend, Madam Speaker, these gymnasiums outside the overpass are the real meeting place of most towns, because it's the only offering they really have to be able to have some kind of organized sports or anything like that. I think it is incumbent on the Department of Health and the Department of Education to realize that opening gymnasiums in some of these smaller communities is really about healthy living and giving them that opportunity to make healthy decisions when it comes to their physical activity.

It's not only from our children's side; it's certainly from our seniors' side too. When we talk about inclusion, one thing I was really happy to see in the budget this time around was the continuation of funding for 50-plus clubs. As we have an aging demographic, I know that these 50-plus clubs are very robust. They're very involved in our community. They have community gardens; they have little trips they plan. They meet with other seniors. They have a head of the 50-plus, Mr. Rogers. Like I said, it's very incumbent on us to make sure our seniors are creating and achieving social development because, as we know, as we age we get a little bit more complacent to change.

We have a lot of seniors now that are computer literate. We have young people that go out in the communities and help out seniors to understand their programs and how to operate their computer. We bring everybody into that digital age where it's an advantage to everybody. That would be a big piece in the inclusion side, and inclusion doesn't mean exclusive rights. It just means being involved with what's already been in place. So for that I think our seniors' clubs and Lions Clubs and stuff like that will be able to avail of this new small business money that just came from the federal government as well.

It was really nice to see \$400,000 in the budget to make vehicles more accessible. That's a very important initiative, because whether it's somebody calling for a taxi or it's on our buses or it's a family member that has converted their vehicle to help out another family member, then I think it's incumbent on the government that this is not found and lays upon the feet of the person that needs it. I think we're doing some good things. Is there more to be done? Absolutely; I mean, that's what we strive for.

The most important part of our Children, Seniors and Social Development is really the programming we have in place, Madam Speaker. The biggest thing for me is the kinship programs. It's very incumbent on us to make sure that these programs are in every community, whether it's the PRIDE program or anything like that.

We have to make sure that if children are going into care, whether it's foster care, adoption or anything like that – these kinship programs are very important when it comes to that, because any child that's able to stay within their family nucleus, I think that would be more beneficial. Just for the simple fact that they will get to stay close to their cultural heritage and their family members for support, and to understand what they have dealt with in the past and that they can make a better future together. I really think the kinship programs, like PRIDE, are very important.

When it comes to the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, we find that, obviously, our front-line workers, the same as any department, are pretty overworked and they certainly need a little bit more help. I would suggest, as I suggested in Estimates, we kind of look a little bit more toward the front-line achievements instead of making benchmarks on the management side because we wouldn't want the department to be failing children while making sure that they're not failing management. We want to make sure that the people who are meant to be helped are being helped.

One of the things I noticed within the department on the side of housing was that we have a lot of aged infrastructure right now. One of my questions in Estimates was, do we have a program where people that are living in housing currently would have an opportunity to buy the house they're in based on the age of the house or the domicile, based on the fact that they would want to stay there and now they can afford, through a program like a purchase or a buyout, that they would be able to not only stay in a home they've probably enjoyed for many years, but we would also be able to get rid of some aging infrastructure to put the money into building new accessible housing for other clients.

Currently, there's no program in place like that. After asking about it, it doesn't seem to be the propensity of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, and people living with disabilities, to sell off any provincial assets in order to build and purchase new ones.

Emergency shelters: I asked a lot of questions on that because a lot of people in the province really wonder about the money that's being spent on emergency shelters and what the standards are for an owner to become an emergency shelter. I asked for regular inspections to be carried out and how often that was. They said it was annually, but, in the meantime, I think that if you have many people that are going to be frequenting these emergency shelters then they need to be probably inspected a little bit more often to make sure that they're up to standard with good living conditions for people that are in a very vulnerable sector.

A lot of times with housing there's no real expiry date on any application and sometimes people are over housed. For example, a single mother that's raising her child and her child consequently has a child and they are living with that parent. Obviously, as they are able to get on their own two feet – they're probably in a three-bedroom place – once the daughter and the child or the grandchild moves out it's just the one person left there and there's still a three-bedroom house. To me, it might be better to look for a one bedroom or a two bedroom even for this person and let a larger family move into the three-bedroom place. Like I said, we don't need to have people that are a single resident in a three- or four-bedroom house or a condo.

With that being said, I know my time is coming to a close. I would like to say that while we have a very vulnerable sector here in Children, Seniors and Social Development and persons living with disabilities, I would like to say that the department needs to stay up on the numbers, be replacing people that are currently no longer with us and make sure that the kinship programs are introduced; have a look at the gymnasiums as the importance outside of the overpass; look at that 1.6 kilometre busing; and I think we should strike from our vernacular eligible and ineligible students.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER (P. Parsons): Thank you.

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

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I'll start by telling a little story. I guess, not so much a story, but just my – and my colleague for Bonavista will probably appreciate this one. One of the greatest pleasures that I experienced when I first went to the NLTA and when I started working here – and most teachers will tell you that when you get into a job that doesn't involve the classroom, you can pee any time you want, on your own schedule. It tells the excessive demands, and only a teacher would really understand. You can't just walk out of a classroom and take the break you need because you still have a class that's there.

My bit today, I'm going to speak about education and also about poverty, which crosses over a lot of the departments that I attended Estimates on. Also, it's in education that you see the intersection of poverty and schools themselves.

I will add one other thing to a comment that my colleague from Bonavista mentioned. He mentioned fitness rooms. Interestingly enough, the equipment in a lot of these fitness rooms, the money was raised by the very teachers who are no longer permitted to use them. That's the irony of ironies there. It's the teachers there who basically helped raise the money in many cases.

I'm going to go back a bit further about budget-based decision-making, zero-based budgeting versus needs-based. The first time I heard zero-based budgeting was in *Budget 2019*. I would call it budget-based decision-making because schools operate on needs-based; it's a different criteria that's there. Why we just can't look at investment and what we spend in terms of money and we just can't look at it in the dollars spent, we have to look at it in the long term.

Every time I start talking about investing in education, guaranteed someone is going to say: Jim, how do we afford it? Where do we get the money? In the end my answer is this: We pay for it anyway. Not pay but we invest money into

the schools or we pay later in poor health outcomes in the health system.

We invest in schools that look at restorative justice that deals with developing social skills, or we pay for it in the justice system down the road in prisons and so on and so forth. We help students meet their academic needs or we pay for it later down the road in unemployment. Treat the mental health issue in the school or deal with it later on. One way or the other, we will pay for it. It's going to come there.

I'm often reminded of a saying that my late brother would say: Poor people like us can't afford to buy cheap. His comment was that you buy the best gear that you could so you only had to buy it once.

Brother Jim McSheffrey – I don't know if any of you know or had the pleasure of knowing Brother Jim McSheffrey but he was the person who basically started the MacMorran centre.

Now, I had the pleasure of working with Jim in educators for peace and other social groups. I remember he used to say he was going to the government, he would hit the government up for \$130,000 or something, whatever it was at the time, to start a centre and would be turned down; they couldn't afford it. He picked that number, the number at the time, that specific number for a reason because that's what it would cost to incarcerate a person for one year, at that time, whatever the amount was.

However, if he could take that money and invest in to preventative measures and supports, there's a payout. The trouble is we'll never know unless we can have some sort of a dual reality where we could see how it would turn out, some sort of social experiment. That was Jim's theory and one I think holds true.

I'm going to tell a little story – well, actually it's a synopsis of a story. I don't know if any of you have ever heard of the Blueberry Story. Maybe you have, maybe you haven't, but certainly you're going to hear it again, if you did.

MR. LANE: I only heard about the bakeapple story.

MR. J. DINN: The bakeapple story, well here we go.

Anyway, it's told by Jamie Vollmer who was an executive in an ice cream company. One of the best in America who had, that year in the 1980s, won a prestigious award for its blueberry flavoured ice cream. He was giving – as people who want to do, who have no experience in education sometimes – an inspiration speech to teachers and basically said: If I ran my business like the way people ran your schools, I wouldn't be in business long.

Of course, it doesn't take much for a teacher to bristle at that comment. One teacher had the temerity to speak up and say: Well, we're told you managed the best ice cream company in America. He said: Yes, it's rich, smooth, only the best ingredients, only the premium ingredients.

The teacher more or less asked this one simple question: "when you are standing on your receiving dock and you see an inferior shipment of blueberries arriving, what do you do? His comment was: "I send them back."

The teacher's response I think is instructive because she said: "... we can never send back our blueberries. We take them big, small, rich, poor, gifted, exceptional, abused, frightened, confident, homeless, rude, and brilliant. We take them with ADHD, junior rheumatoid arthritis, and English as their second language. We take them all! Every one!"

When I was in university, I volunteered at Exon House. Now, Exon House is actually where the Fisheries and land resources building is. Basically, that was an institution for children who had severe disabilities. It was sort of like a home, I guess, for lack of a better word, but Exon House was closed in the '80s. It had children there who had severe psychological disorders, neurological disorders and physical disorders. What it was is they were not in the school system, but when they closed Exon House these children were put into the school system, inclusive education, where they belonged.

All of a sudden schools were dealing with children, not just with whether they didn't get

homework done, but they were dealing with children with severe needs. What was needed most were resources, because school is not a business. It's not about the numbers. It's not about how many in a class or anything like that. You look at the needs of the children. That's what teachers look at, they look at needs and teachers respond to that. Whether a government meets the needs or not, they have to meet the needs of those children.

I can tell you back years ago when I was teaching, teachers were spending anywhere from \$500 to \$700 a year in school supplies for their classrooms. By the way, if you go into any classroom – I said this already – the posters, the books, the consumables in many cases, a lot of it has been purchased by teachers. I know, I live with a primary teacher, especially, and I can tell you what she spent.

I can tell you that teachers spend anywhere from – and survey after survey – 50-plus hours a week at their profession. That includes, of course, the time in class. That doesn't include the supervision they undertake. I can tell you that teachers are behind, in many cases, the school lunch programs and the breakfast programs and the fundraising activities and the school dances and so on and so forth. So it's in their nature, and it's why I fight so hard even now to make sure that schools and teachers have the resources they need.

Any profession that deals with people is challenging, and if anything else that you need in it is you need people. I would have loved to have had my own personal constituency assistant like I have right now when I was a teacher; or to have the ministerial support that goes with being a minister; or to have the support in place that I have as a Member of a political party in this building. What a teacher could do with that.

Teachers are often balancing, too, between the fact that, well, I have a 40 minute lunch, half of that's taken up with duty. I have to figure out some way of getting the photocopy done, eat my lunch. Oh yeah, I have to get to the bathroom, too, somewhere along the line. Now, they're not complaining about it, but I'm going to say it. This is the reality of it. This is what it is to be a teacher.

It's challenging with people, but throw it in to young people who, in many cases, have not learned to regulate or learn just the basic, the premise of sometimes or who are dealing with their own challenges. I can tell you that primary and elementary are already seeing cases of anxiety, mental health and suicide ideation and so on and so forth. What we need most in a school is time, and that translates into people. You can't underestimate the value of having people in a school.

Now, I can think of Marg Croft who was a secretary up in Baltimore High School. Marg wasn't a teacher, but she was the best resource in that school. I was a new teacher at the time, and I remember I was going to call a parent to have a talk about a student. Marg said, who are you looking for? Because she knew everyone. She happened to say to me, why are you calling? I told her, and she said it's probably not best to call that parent because that child will get a severe beating as a result of it. As a new teacher, I didn't. Instead, I chose another path. But having that person there sometimes, having a person there, people in the school is what makes a school function. It's what allows teachers and allows the staff to deal within, to help the children in their place.

We can talk about an *Education Action Plan*, we can talk about the extra 145 additional buses, but we need to also talk about the fact that in failing to delay the school year a bit, it meant that principals spent days before the school opened trying to get letters out to parents that their children weren't on the bus and there was an appeals process. That's sending out individual emails to every parent in the school. That meant that since school began administrators have been dealing with this busing issue. It's been hanging over their head, when they could have been dealing with other issues within the school that are more important: the social and emotional well-being of their students and their teachers.

Is it a complex year for educators? Yes, it is. It's a complex year for educators when they're trying to figure out if they can get the school cleaned with the one janitor. It's a complex year when they're dealing with the children who still have issues in front of them.

The worst thing any CEO – of the English School District or a minister can say, and I can attest to this when I was a teacher and when I was president of the Teachers' Association: I'm not hearing anything. Well, you just have to sometimes ask the question.

We know that laptops – I can tell you, I've been speaking to teachers already. They're not seeing the laptops. There are many out there; they don't know where they are. They don't know when they're coming or when the Chromebooks are coming. It is now November, at the end of this week, and these laptops will still have to have the necessary programming put on them. I can tell you it's having an impact on school accounts in many cases, that schools had to fundraise themselves. It's having an impact.

I want to draw this then, when it comes to resources, to the whole notion of poverty. I'm going to start with an article in *The Telegram* again which says that the MayTree survey, an Ontario-based anti-poverty advocacy group, noticed that "Nationally, the survey found that food insecurity is most prominent in households with children, particularly for single parents.

"Food insecurity is more prevalent among households with children than those without children across the country. In 2017-18, 16.2 per cent of households with at least one child under 18 years of age were food insecure, compared to 11.4 per cent of households without a child under 18 years of age," reads the report."

I would suggest that's more than the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands said when he said he had to get to that table early. We had seven kids in our family. If you got there early enough, you got seconds, too, sometimes.

"Among households with children, the risk of food insecurity is much higher for the lone parents than couples. In 2017-18, 11.8 per cent of couples with children under 18 were food-insecure, but this rate rose to 21.6 per cent for male lone-parent households and 33.1 per cent for female lone-parent households with children under 18."

Those are the children who are then coming to school. They're just some of the children. When I'm looking at a child in front of me, I don't

know who had a meal that day. I don't know who's going home to a meal that day. I don't know who's coming from or going to a safe and secure home at the end of the day, or if they're going to be couch surfing or if they have a place to go to or if they've been kicked out of their house because they've come out as LGBTQ. Those are the challenges that were faced.

My district has four schools: two English-stream schools, an independent school and a francophone school. There are a variety of needs there. If I have time, I'll come back.

I do want to mention the whole notion of food banks. It's interesting; I was speaking to one of the food banks in my district and the president of it noted that during the pandemic, they're expecting the need for food to go up, that the demand on food banks would increase. But it didn't. Do you know why? CERB. Usage of food banks went down because of CERB. It did what it's supposed to do.

Yet, at the same time, here we have a government policy that, basically, those who are on CERB will have their social assistance in some way clawed back here. What will it do to food banks once this starts to kick in? Somewhere along the line, folks, we have to start to looking at – the CERB was a good thing; let's not add to people who are vulnerable, to families who are vulnerable.

Supportive housing is a way where we need to be investing more into it. I've spoken here to a number of ministers in the portfolio, Minister Warr is the most recent one and Minister Dempster as well and I will say, Madam Speaker, that I often look at the Grace general hospital site and what could we do with that to provide housing, affordable housing, supportive housing that would be run by the not-for-profit sector. We've got land available in my district that, I think, could be used for that as opposed to some high-end housing development. I think, in many ways, we can take the positive action and we can take the steps we can do.

I will end by saying this: An investment in education is not an expenditure; it's an investment. Money put into alleviating poverty is going to have a payoff for society in terms of reduced crime, reduced poverty and better health

outcomes. Put the money there. Look at the people who are vulnerable, and I can tell you there are many who are vulnerable who do not have the wherewithal to be agents for themselves.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Gander.

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Nice to be addressed as the Member for the beautiful District of historic Gander, crossroads of the world, lifeboat of the Atlantic and all that kind of good stuff.

AN HON. MEMBER: And the home of *Come From Away*.

MR. HAGGIE: That's right, indeed.

I, being Minister of Health and Community Services which is what I usually get recognized as by the Chair, was one of the portfolios that presented to the Social Services Committee. In actual fact, I'd like to take up a theme the Member opposite was just expounding.

The Department of Health and Community Services in philosophical terms is something of a misnomer because it actually started as the department of illness. It was designed many years ago to return people rapidly from acute illness to – as one cynic in the UK once said – taxpaying status. But really and honestly what we are actually now trying to do, and what I hope came over in the Estimates, what we are looking to do is to restore that so that we do become a Department of Health and not purely representatives of an illness-based system. In doing so, I would follow the theme laid out by the Member of the Third Party who just spoke, who referenced education as an investment.

Spending on health, I would argue, Madam Deputy Speaker, is not a cost to this province, it

is in an investment in the present and the future of this province.

One of our challenges has simply been around the fact that a lot of the focus for historical reasons has been called a patch and repair. Over the course of the lifespan of medicare, particularly and certainly over my career in acute care, it has become increasingly apparent that the issue around patch 'em' or 'treat 'em and street 'em' – as some emergency room docs often refer to their trade – has been replaced by episodes of care in what is otherwise a continuum of illness management, of disease management, or of lifestyle adaptation to chronic disease. Really, we have tried and are continuing to try to meet that challenge as we look to this fiscal year and indeed the period ahead.

There will, I'm sure, be a lot more to come on this once the Premier's Task Force on Health gets to grips with what I think their mandate is going to be, which is to look at a significant role that social determinants of health play in wellness. We've known for decades that health is not just a product of a health care system, and that up to 75 to 80 per cent of a population's health is actually coming from factors such as environmental, genetic, economic and social. It's not purely health care providers.

So, again, in the presentation of Estimates and the discussions that we had, the Members of the Committee were very good, I think, in teasing out a lot of policy issues around our spending, rather than necessarily focusing purely on the dollars and cents. They did both, and to be fair, I think the due diligence was certainly done, because it cannot be avoided, the fact that the Department of Health accounts for a significant portion of government expenditure.

We have, however, in the Estimates that were presented, shown a total health care expenditure this year of \$3.055 billion, which is the lowest number, in absolute terms, since I sat in this chair in late 2015. Some of that reflects some COVID money that we have from the federal government, but even taking account of that and changes in the way some of the capital money is being accounted, we still have either zero growth or growth that is a fraction of 1 per cent.

That again, Madam Speaker, is consistent over the last five years. We are, I think, the only jurisdiction who has been able to do this, and in that regard we lead the country. We have been compared, rightly or wrongly, with territorial expenditure. If just as a coarse metric one were to use health care expenditure per capita, ours starts out at the top of the provincial league table.

What I would draw to people's attention is the margin between number one and number two has shrunk dramatically over the last five years, to the point that if you take the graphs that independent third parties, such as CIHI for example, the Canadian Institute for Health Information produce – not our own figures, if anyone thinks there's any taint or suspicion about the fact, there are figures.

If you take their data, graph it and extrapolate, you'll see that within three or four years those lines will cross and Newfoundland and Labrador will be in the middle or bottom of the pack of provinces by per capita health care expenditure. We have done this through hard work in the department and the RHAs, but done in a way that has actually allowed us to expand our services, because within this constant envelope the pie has been resliced in significant ways.

There were questions today about the new adult mental health and addictions facility and the cost of that. The cost is way less than was originally budgeted in the run-up to the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. The balance of money, the well over \$125 million that we have saved from that or avoided, has been repurposed and will be plowed back over the lifespan of the *Towards Recovery* action plan into community-based services.

So we will end up with a lower barrier, easier access, community-based, patient- and family-centred system that is not built around a new building or an old building on a hill somewhere on a main road. That is not the nature of mental health and addiction services, nor, Madam Speaker, is it the future of health care.

Technology has its place in health care. I, as a clinician, and my patients have benefited from those devices. By and large, for the population now that we are starting to serve in larger

numbers as our demographic ages, we are talking about frequent low-intensity, low-tech interventions that will make a significant difference to the quality and comfort of life for the individuals who receive it.

Just to highlight some of the elements from the Estimates Committee. We had a very robust discussion around virtual care. We did have plans in the works and were working along a measured pace to introduce virtual care, and then COVID arrived. That kind of changed things. It accelerated the process and really allowed us to think, if you'll pardon the pun, with COVID out of the bubble. We certainly moved very rapidly. This is one area where we have seen a colossal expansion in services. Depending on the month you look at, the increase in virtual care services – again, its baseline – has been anything from 7 to nearly 900 per cent.

At the same time, face-to-face consultations, albeit reduced, have continued and we are at the moment looking at the data to see how that balance has shifted. It is not a specialty or a primary care only bias towards virtual care, it is an equal opportunity access. The decision is down to the clinician, the nurse practitioner, the midwife, the family doc or the specialist as to how best they feel this patient's concerns can be addressed.

There are off-ramps to allow face-to-face or in-person visits, and those have been relaxed to be totally in the hands of the physician now for many months. I think the system is working way better than anyone had predicted. We look to see how we can improve that, how we can broaden it and how we can also use the older technology, which is the Max House telehealth system which is hard wired and facility based. Because, certainly, Allied Health providers who are based in facilities have found their access to that has eased up and they've been able to use it. They, too, have seen a modest increase in their ability to provide care in non-traditional ways through this system.

Other highlights of the budget at the provincial level, again, continuing to redeploy cost avoidances elsewhere. We have \$2.3 million in this year's budget for new drugs which will annualize to an increase of just under \$5 million

in the next fiscal year. We do our best to keep on top of those drugs that go through the pan-Canadian purchasing Alliance process. We have the safest drugs in the world, and I would argue that access in this province is as good as you will see elsewhere for those recipients of the relevant drug plans.

We have allocated an extra \$1.7 million this year for the Insulin Pump Program, which will annualize to \$3.3 million in the next fiscal year. That will make the program universal, all be it means tested for anybody beyond the age of 18. We will become the insurer of last resort, but the access to insulin pumps for Type 1 diabetics will be based solely on the recommendation of their care provider and will continue to be administered through updated mechanisms through the Eastern Health program. Ultimately, we look to shared services and provincial purchasing to leverage further savings and cost avoidance on equipment and supplies that can then, in turn, be plowed back into the system to help deal with demand.

Now, given the changes in portfolios, there's been a shifting of funding for infrastructure and how things are done but between myself and what was the department of Transportation and Works and what is now the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, with input from what was municipal affairs and environment which is now a different name, which I think involves municipalities and my colleague to the left, we have seen significant investment in health care and in communities.

For example, we have seen investments again in long-term care facilities in Central Newfoundland. Grand Falls-Windsor and Gander both are getting 60-bed units, both are on time, both are on budget and both have had their final kitting out, as it were, modified by advise from local patient advisory and health care provider groups who have the opportunity through our processes to actually get in, as it were, literally on the ground floor and shape how the furnishings, how the services were provided in a room to make it both patient and family friendly and also better ergonomics and workflow for the staff.

Moving slightly sideways, we have a partnership for a new running track, for example, going back

to the idea of health and wellness rather than disease. This will be a regional resource for Central Newfoundland; it is based opposite the new elementary school in Gander, which again was completed on time and under budget.

We have seen district investments, and I'll change gear because this is kind of the pivot topic here, because it allows me to highlight some of the issues that we've been able to address in my own District of Gander. We have the complete rebuild of the Gander Academy K-to-3 around a gymnasium, which still has lots of life left in it and is a true regional asset, being a double-sided adult competition size, which would not be the code now for a K-to-3 school.

With negotiations with TW and now TI, we've been able to see a very troublesome stretch of Smallwood Boulevard paved from the Trans-Canada Highway to the boundary with my colleague for Fogo Island - Cape Freels. That has produced a significant improvement in vehicle wear and tear, but also allowed walkers access to nicely managed shoulders.

Emphasizing investment in the community, Gander with its aviation traditions has a College of the North Atlantic campus, which did the aircraft mechanical engineers program. Under previous investment, there was a doubling of the enrolment there, as well as promise for money to invest in new hardware. In the aviation world, the glass cockpit rules, it is supreme, and between a partnership with EVAS Air, Gander Flight Training, Garmin and the College of the North Atlantic, there is now hardware provided at government expense to the school to train on. There are installations going into EVAS's Beech 1900D and they have flight-training equipment in the form of a Cessna, which is full-glass cockpit. So the flight school, the AME program, the business of aviation, suffering as it is at the moment because of the difficulties of COVID, we have done our best to support.

I would just drift slightly sideways to make a plea to my federal colleagues that their predecessors once regarded the railroad as the way that Canada was forged and Confederation was built. It was the backbone, the spine of Canada. I would argue now that in the 21st century, it is aviation, particularly for us in Newfoundland and Labrador, that serves that

same purpose. That is the backbone of Confederation; that is the spine of Canada, and we need to get onboard our federal cousins to make sure that there is significant support, not just for the national carriers and the big centres, but also to take aircraft such as these into airports like Wabush, for my colleague in Lab West, where we are challenged to keep physicians who can't fly in and fly out in the way that they would like. It needs to go to places like Goose Bay; it needs to do to St. Anthony. I could list everywhere that has an airstrip. We need that support from our federal colleagues. I have made that quite plain to my contacts both locally and in the business.

To go back to support for local endeavours, we have a school lunch program coming to St. Paul's Intermediate. I again refer back to my immediate predecessor in the House who spoke eloquently about some of the challenges of his blueberries and his children in schools. We, too, have those challenges. I would be remiss if I didn't mention Ms. Hicks from the Salvation Army sponsored housing support program in Gander who has worked diligently to get her colleagues to box up lunches for between 40 and 70 students every day, five days a week when the school is sitting.

I could wax lyrical about this further, Mr. Speaker. We have addiction problems in our district, just like everywhere else. We have hubs now across the province. There is one in Gander, and I reference that simply because it's my district. It's not the only one by any stretch of the imagination. We're trying to put a spoke in Gambo – and that doesn't mean it the way it sounds for those with an English heritage. We are trying to support a community there who have substance use issues, and we hope to get that spoke up and running in the not-too-distant future.

Once again in my last 30 seconds, Madam Deputy Speaker, it has been the thrust of this department to regard health as an investment and health as a fundamental underpinning for doing what we need to, to keep Newfoundland and Labrador vibrant well into the 21st century.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll take my seat and thank you for the time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure once again to speak on behalf of the residents of Mount Pearl North and the people of the province, which I am so privileged to represent.

I'll open up by looking at the items on my desk. As part of our environmental initiative, it's clear we can do more. I'm looking at a bottle of water that was packaged in – pardon my vision, I'm over 40 so I need my glasses – Aberfoyle – Quebec.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. LESTER: I'm only 48. That's technically over 40.

This bottle of water was bottled in Quebec. The last time that I turned on the tap here in this Confederation Building, it was perfectly potable water. How much did it cost the environment to transport this bottle of water all the way from Quebec, when we have perfectly good water here in our own taps? That's where we can focus our environmental initiatives: making simple changes.

Same thing with this bit of hand sanitizer, which is largely composed of water – 94 per cent water. This was actually bottled in China, so it was shipped all the way from China. This water was shipped all the way from China. Simple things like that are what we can be looking at.

People will argue, oh, well, they have the volume; they have the economy of scale. But that's where we can intervene as a government. That's where we can intervene as MHAs. I know nobody likes to hear the word tax, but there should be a tax placed on all these items that cause grief to our environment, a tax that could be used to encourage our productivity; our own diversification; our own establishment of production, be it bottled water or hand sanitizer, right here in our own province.

In the initial stages of the pandemic's overtake of the world, it had a positive effect on the environment. China, alone, in the first six months, produced 200 million less tons of carbon dioxide into our air. Madam Speaker, unfortunately, that's changed. Despite our lives not returning to normal with our, I guess, extensive air traffic travel throughout the world, it is projected that we are now within 5 per cent of our pre-COVID greenhouse gas emissions.

Why is that? Well, number one, factories are trying to catch-up, trying to catch-up on lost production. In countries and economies where it was so devastated that the governments have implemented aggressive infrastructure plans and business expansions – there are actually coal plants being built. Coal plants are widely known to be some of the dirtiest productions of electricity and the biggest producers of carbon dioxide in our globe.

Under, I guess, the veil of financial, not collapse because I don't like saying that, but under financial hardship that's been caused by this pandemic, unfortunately, the environment has taken a back seat and probably even hitchhiking on the side of the road when it comes to the public's attention.

Yes, we've implemented the plastic bag ban and the, I guess, much hated but little attention given to it, carbon tax, which I'll get into in a few minutes. But the reality is, we are really concerned with what's happening in our economy, and so we should be. But, at the same time, we could look at simple things like bottling more water here, producing more liquids here that would save in transport, save in the cost to the environment in transport.

There's no reason why we couldn't be producing way more of our beverages here in this province. Bringing in a concentrated form, adding our delicious, gorgeous, clean water and that way we would be reducing the cost of living on the environment here on this Island.

To the carbon tax, every cent, every penny, that is collected in carbon tax goes into general revenue. It goes into general revenue. Now, how do we know what positive effect the carbon tax has had on our environment? Living on an island, and on the peninsula of Labrador,

basically we depend on just about everything we do to be transported here, to and fro our province. It's done by diesel, it's done by fuel oil, and it's done by jet fuel. Every one of those fluids is subject to the carbon tax. There is no way that we can currently avoid paying carbon tax on our daily lives. We cannot, at this point, feasibly substitute diesel transportation for any form of non-carbon tax activity.

I've asked the government on several occasions: Can you provide examples of what environmental initiatives have been enacted or sponsored by revenues from the carbon tax? To date, I have none. I think that it would be much easier of a tax to pay if we could actually see that this was not just another financial grab out of our pockets. We need to see concrete results; we need to see actions, not collection. That's basically what's all been happening.

Madam Speaker, I'm to the second portion of what I would consider my critic role, being the municipalities. There are a couple of numbers that I'd like to put out, well, ratios: 394-1, 52-1. Do you know what they are? That's the amount of people per kilometre of paved road that is on our streets, being 52-1, versus 394-1 in Ontario.

For every kilometre of paved road in Ontario, there are 394 people on it. When you think about traffic congestion, I guess we're all taking a sigh of relief that our ratio is not that high. But the reality is that's 394 taxpaying individuals that will be able to support that kilometre of road, whereas here in our little province so widely spread out, we only have 52 people who are potentially paying tax to support the same kilometre of road.

By far, we are over paved and –

MR. CROCKER: Tell (inaudible) that.

MR. LESTER: That's it. Our infrastructure is spread out too far for what we, as a population, can support.

A couple of years ago, when I first was elected to office, I had the privilege of attending a briefing from the municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador group. They had expressed to us, as a caucus, that there has been over \$1 billion of highlighted infrastructure deficit throughout

our province – \$1 billion. That ranges everything from schools to sidewalks, to water, to sewer, to waste water treatment, to road infrastructure, to cellular service: all these types of projects that, yes, they're very important to the people of our province, but the reality is we cannot, at this point in our history, afford to provide all these services that everybody feels entitled to.

I'll share with you a little story now. Last week, I was looking at my pickup truck, and as a farmer we need a pickup truck, we need a pickup truck on the farm. Now, that pickup truck has to function. As many of you have probably seen, my truck has got dents, scratches and scrapes. It's probably not going to win a congeniality contest, that's for sure.

AN HON. MEMBER: Get a new one.

MR. LESTER: Yes, one of my sons – I just heard somebody say: Get a new one. Well, one of my sons is after me to get a new truck. But do you know what? My business, just like many other businesses in this province and just like the financial position of this province, has been greatly affected by what's happened through the effects of the pandemic. But not only in our province have we been affected on our finances with what's happened in the pandemic; our province was spiraling and has continued to spiral towards complete and utter economic destruction. Without us taking appropriate action and balancing wants, needs and affordability, we're going to be in big trouble.

But back to my pickup truck for a second. So, yes, I would like to have a new pickup truck as well. I would like to have another nice, shiny new pickup truck. But the reality is the one I have is working just fine. If I was to invest in a new pickup truck now, that would add another burden on the solvency of my operation, the solvency of my business. At this point, I wouldn't burden the other business partners in my business or the future of my business on my wants. Even though we do need a pickup truck, as it stands right now, we will still have to make due with the pickup truck I have.

Back to the \$1 billion worth of infrastructure deficit throughout our province. A question I posed to the panel was: Of that \$1 billion, how

much of that is in communities outside the major urban centres or centralized towns where the population is either stable or growing? Their answer was not very promising. They were not aware of any populations that were stable or growing.

It is actually predicted that many of our rural communities will not be able to exist within 20 years. So when we have only so few dollars to go around – actually, we have no money to go around. We only have borrowed money; borrowed money that is laid against the future generations of this province. We really have to be careful how we spend it. We have to make sure we're getting the biggest bang for our buck, and that has not been happening for far, far too long.

Right across the country, right across the globe, we have seen a transition from rural towns to centralized communities or we've seen the regionalization of municipal governments and community governments. That's an initiative and I guess a study that the current sitting administration initiated back in 2016. Consultations were held, reports were created, but nothing has been done.

Forming regional governance and forming a regional administration of said governance is a way to reduce the cost of operating our province, and that has not been done. Why has it not been done, Madam Speaker? I ask, why has it not been done? I know everybody in the back of their mind is taking a deep, deep sigh. The realization of why it hasn't been done, it is not politically popular to make changes to existing structures. It is not politically popular.

I've often been accused of not being a very good politician – I guess, I have to admit that I'm not – because I'm a practical person. I'm very practical. If I don't see the practicality in doing something, I don't do it. I don't like the theatre of politics, never have and I probably never will, but what I do see is now we need to be practical more than ever.

I do see the value in cellphone service. I do see, as my fellow colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands had said and seen the statement of safety that is provided by a cell service. We do not have the finances to be able to do that. So we

have to look at how we can provide that safety through other means. One of them can be through better and improved services of our safety systems; be it ambulances, be it fire services, be it municipal infrastructure. As I said, one of those ways to do that is through regionalization which has not been enacted.

I'll give you an example, if we have community A, B and C, each one of them has a fire hall. Each one of them are within 30 kilometres of each other, maybe only 20, maybe only 10. I can guarantee you that a fire hall set up in B and properly funded would give far better service to A and C than their own small fire halls.

What would happen if MHAs went out and said we're going to close your fire hall and we're going to move it to the community next door? That would be political suicide, and that's what we have to try to overcome in order for our province to survive. We've heard it time and time again there are tough decisions. Do you know what? The only bad thing about a tough decision is when it's prolonged and never made, because that tough decision gets a lot tougher. It's a lot graver. The consequences of not making a decision is far more detrimental to the future of our province than actually doing it.

That's where we have to rethink our whole system. We have to rethink our whole system and we don't need more consultations, we don't need more expert opinions, just like when people talk about diversifying our economy. One of my colleagues was speaking of this today, so I'm not going to take credit for it, but I came to a huge realization. When you look at our economy, our economy is diverse. We have everything from high-tech to primary industries. Where we're missing the boat again is we're not maximizing the value of our economies.

We have to maximize the value over our output. We have to increase the amount of value we get from our resources. There's no reason why we can't afford the social programs. There's no reason why we can't afford to have our class ratios much lower than they are, other than the continued mismanagement of our resources.

I have several schools in the district I represent, and a couple right on the borders. They're in my good friend and colleague's from Mount Pearl -

Southlands. Many of the constituents that are in my district go to those schools. I drove by one of those schools this morning and it was absolute chaos. In a school that I went to as a child, that was meant to only have 300 students, now has over 700 in that exact same school. Another school is also three times its capacity. That is a recipe for disaster.

The parking lots alone are absolute mayhem and chaos. The administrators, the teachers and the volunteers are doing an absolute fantastic job, because to my knowledge there's been no accident yet, but what we've concocted with the overcrowding within our schools is just a disaster in waiting.

We often hear the minister opposite stating we have one of the lowest class ratios in the country. Yes, we do, if you look at there are many schools throughout our province that have less than 10 students. It's not fair to say we are low class ratio when in reality we are not. We are low population. We have an underutilization of resources in many communities because the population has declined so much that it's just infrastructure heavy and support heavy; whereas in the higher population areas, such as my district and even in the industrial centres like Wabush, Gander, Grand Falls, Marystown, Corner Brook – those are areas where people are finding jobs. They're areas where we're able to efficiently provide services.

That's something we have to look at it. When we have so few dollars to spend, we have to look at how we can maximize the use of those dollars. I don't think that government – not just this government, but past governments have not done a very good job of it.

When we look at our contribution to the environment, being on an island, it is a challenge to recycle effectively. It's easy to collect and recycle, but finding a use for that product is questionable. Largely, all of our products that we can collect are shipped off the Island at a further cost to the environment. We need to be more creative as to how we can use those products here on the Island.

As a matter of fact, I would suspect that because we are, again, on the end of the supply and logistical chain – and I've seen it myself – much

of the cardboard we collect and divert from our traditional waste streams is, indeed, ending up in landfills. Again, it's because there's no demand for it elsewhere and it is just too costly to ship off this Island. We need to find a use for that.

When it comes to our oil industry, as has been stated on all sides and levels of this House, our oil offshore is some of the lowest carbon footprint oil in the world, but because we have –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

MR. BENNETT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's great today to be able to speak to concurrence, which falls under the Social Services Committee, as the Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Municipalities. I'll also, if time permits, discuss some things happening within my district; the people that elected me to this seat back in November 2015, and had the confidence to re-elect me again.

Before I do get into some of the items that I'd like to discuss, and to address some of the issues that the Member for Mount Pearl North brought forward, I'd be remiss if I didn't, first of all, send my condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Victor Baker. Victor has been a long-time resident of Pleasantview Manor in Lewisporte, and on October 24 at the youthful age of 103, Victor peacefully passed away.

Madam Speaker, since Victor turned 100, and I got elected, I had an opportunity to do a Member's statement on Victor. He was a very active 103-year-old gentleman that every year looked forward to getting out into the garden and planting the vegetables and also the flowers at the Pleasantview Manor facility. He's definitely going to be dearly missed by his family and friends.

Just reading a post there from the owner-operator at Pleasantview Manor, she made

reference that over the number of years that she'd known Victor, at no time did she hear anybody speak negatively towards him, nor did he ever speak negatively of anybody else. He was the oldest living gentleman in my district, and again I'd just like to pass my condolences to the family of Victor Baker and his family and friends.

Madam Speaker, I'm just going to talk a little bit about some of the things happening within the department. I'm going to give a couple of updates on some of the initiatives that we're doing. First of all, the retail plastic bag ban that came into effect on October 1. I have to say that, from our department and the conversations and the emails that we received, it has been very well received, positively, throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador has been a long-time advocate of this initiative and they were very supportive that we did – even though in a pandemic – fulfill our commitment to implement that ban.

I attended the rally for Fridays for Future event about a month ago and at that event I did make the commitment that I would be willing to sit down and do a virtual meeting with organizers from that event. Since the event, myself and my officials did sit down with members of that group to listen to some of the ideas and suggestions that they had in order that we can do a better job to address and deal with the issues of climate change.

It was a very productive meeting. I must say, I enjoyed the opportunity to speak to those youth. I think we'll be doing another follow-up meeting within the next few weeks to a month.

Madam Speaker, just last night myself and the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture met with an individual who was originally from my district, Mr. Shawn Bath, he represents a group called Clean Harbours Initiative. Shawn has been, for the last two years, doing some great work throughout Newfoundland and Labrador cleaning up our harbours.

I don't have the actual statistics with me on the amount of items that he cleaned out of the harbours but it is equivalent to thousands of tires, old nets, garbage, things that people,

traditionally, years ago, either out in the boat or alongside the wharf, used to just throw overboard. Shawn has spent his last two years, his own money and through donations to do a lot of this harbour cleanup. I commend him for the work he's doing.

As I said, we met with him last night and we'll sure be doing a follow-up meeting to see how, as a government, that we can also assist him in the initiative that he's doing.

Madam Speaker, last week, I did a Ministerial Statement on Waste Reduction Week, which took place from October 19 to 25. That's an initiative that happens throughout Canada, but in Newfoundland and Labrador it is initiated by the MMSB. Just some of the statistics that they provided during that week is: over three billion beverage containers have been recycled since the program first began.

The Member opposite did reference his water bottle, I don't have one myself. I use a reusable bottle whenever possible, but that's three-billion containers that have been recycled; seven-million tires – and, again, the Member opposite referenced that we need to be doing more with regard to reusing some of these products. That's an initiative that, through the MMSB and our department, we're looking very closely at.

I did have an opportunity to visit the Waste Management site in Central Newfoundland about six weeks ago and at that time they were in the process, then, of shredding the tires. Typically, we ship them to Quebec, but now we're looking at other options right now. While they were shredding them, the walls of the tires were being stockpiled and being prepackaged, which I understand were being shipped away to Nova Scotia for the agricultural industry. The actual chips, which contain the tread part of the tire, they were being stockpiled on site in Norris Arm. We're looking at various options where that can be reused, whether it be for aggregates on roads or possibly trails or stuff like that. To see some reuse of these products would be great.

As mentioned, and I'll always say that we can never do enough to protect our environment and every Newfoundlander and Labradorian – yes, government has a key role, both federally and provincially, and municipal governments, but

every resident in Newfoundland and Labrador has a job to do to protect our environment.

In our landfills right now, approximately 40 per cent of what is going into our landfills is organic waste. Madam Speaker, personally, I'm a firm believer in composting. I've been doing it for 10-plus years and all of my compost does end up either on my vegetable gardens or in my flower beds. I think it's something that we, as residents of the province, should look more seriously at and to consider composting more frequently.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to touch on a couple of other programs that recently came out within our department. On October 16, I had the honour to announce a funding program for arenas and swimming pools. It was a one-time funding program for up to \$10,000 per municipality, but also available to non-profit organizations, private or partnership pool or arena operated facilities. That funding was made possible through the Special Assistance Grant and applications are now available online.

Our department has received numerous calls of interest in this program. We do know the negative impacts that COVID-19 had on our recreation facilities. On the onset of COVID back in March, pretty well all of our recreation facilities immediately shut down. Obviously, that has had a great financial impact on the revenue generation for these facilities. Although it's not a significant amount of money, \$10,000 per eligible facility will be a great plus to help them to get up and start again.

Being a former recreation director myself, I know the cost to operate these facilities, more so an arena. It's not uncommon to have electricity bills of close to \$10,000 per month to operate these facilities. It's a little help to get them started again and to encourage them to get back to operating in a safe manner as we learn to live with COVID-19.

Madam Speaker, Special Assistance Grants also falls under my department. That's a program that helps municipalities that get into emergencies, whether it be a sump pump breaking, work needed on a road. There are many different areas that can avail of that program. I'm glad through *Budget 2020* that we did not see any cuts in that funding allocation.

The program has been unrolled and going quite successfully.

The Community Enhancement Employment Program is a program that we did put a small increase in funding this year. Approximately \$5 million goes into that program. The Community Enhancement Employment Program is a program designed for municipalities and non-profit organizations to be able to run programs in the communities that will assist individuals that are in need of hours to be able to avail of unemployment services.

This year, in the light of COVID-19 and all the federal programs that have been implemented both through the CERB program and, most recently, the EI program where individuals are going to be credited 300 hours, our department has taken the stance that – in previous years, people would require a minimum of 20 hours to be eligible for this program. We've basically taken the stance that where everyone is credited 300 hours that pretty well most individuals would qualify for this program.

The funding allocations have been going out to the municipalities, so we're encouraging individuals, if they have any questions to reach out to their local sponsors, the communities that will be sponsoring these programs. If they want to reach out to our department to get a list of sponsors, then they can gladly do so and we'd be happy to help. This program greatly helps a lot of communities to fix up their walking trails, do work on their fire halls. Pretty well anything within a community to stimulate economic growth, plus also fitness and health and active lifestyles are a big component that many communities avail of in the program.

Madam Speaker, I have about five minutes. I'm going to touch on a program that has been receiving a little bit of controversy – not a program, sorry, an advisory council, known as WERAC. About a month ago when I was over on the West Coast, I did sit down and meet with the chairperson and some board members, along with others that called in and attended the meeting virtually.

Madam Speaker, I was kind of taken aback on some of the comments they made, because I think the misconception has been out there in the

general public that WERAC is a committee on their own that's basically designed to put together a protected areas plan. I just want to let the public know that WERAC, basically, is not much different than our seniors' advisory council. WERAC was put in place approximately 25 years ago to put together a plan for the provincial government to identify protected areas. On October 1, they concluded phase 1 of the plan.

Madam Speaker, phase 1 of the plan basically was to evaluate all of the consultations and all the information that they received, and then they will be presenting a report to myself for our consideration. I have to say, the amount of time and effort that group has put into that plan is certainly commendable. They've done some exceptional work.

Again, there has been a lot of misunderstandings of what the plan is, what the restrictions will be on the protected areas. A lot of the calls we received and emails we received of people addressing concerns, whether they can go hunting, fishing, their cabin lots, et cetera, et cetera; they just want to protect that. I'll be honest with you, in most cases, what people are asking for is exactly what the plan will bring. It will protect areas so that future generations can enjoy hunting, fishing, berry picking; the way of life that we've had the honour of living for so long.

Again, I do commend them. There has been a number of comments made towards them, threats, personal threats to some of these members. As a volunteer group, they definitely are not deserving of this. It is a group that has been put together on behalf of government. I commend them on the work they've been doing. I do look forward to their report and putting together future directions as they move into phase two, which will also involve a detailed consultation process with each of the areas so that people know and can voice their concerns of what exactly the protected areas will involve.

Madam Speaker, I have about a minute left and I'm going to move into one of the items that was addressed by my critic, the Member for Mount Pearl North, and that's regional government.

A number of comments were made regarding the political sensitivity of regionalization. No government wanted to push or force communities, residents into regional government, but our department have been working very closely with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and the professional municipal administrators to put together terms of reference for what regionalization will look like.

We've had several meetings, and we will continue to put together a strategic plan on how to unfold. Regionalization doesn't have to mean shutting down fire departments. Regionalization doesn't mean that communities will have to lose their identity or lose their community name. There are a lot of great success stories right now of regional services.

I have a couple in my district. I've referenced it before because I think it's one of the more success stories of fire protection and that's within the community of Summerford, a small community on New World Island. That regional fire department provides fire protection for 15 different communities. This is the type of thing that we promote.

The Town of Lewisporte have recently signed an agreement with Brown's Arm to provide fire protection to three or four communities there.

My time has expired, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. Member's time has expired.

MR. BENNETT: I appreciated the opportunity to speak.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, the motion is that the report of the Social Services Committee be concurred in.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MADAM SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Report of Social Services Estimates Committee, carried.

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now recess until 6:15 p.m.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MADAM SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

This House is in recess until 6:15 p.m.