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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin, I would like to welcome the mother of Minister Dempster, Glenda Goulding.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Glenda is visiting us today from Victoria, BC.

Also, in the public gallery, I would like to welcome representatives from the Mount Pearl Seniors Independence Group. They are visiting us this afternoon for a Member's statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, Harbour Main, Humber - Bay of Islands, Labrador West and Mount Pearl North.

The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

Today we honour Terry Goodyear, a civil engineer graduate from Dalhousie. Terry Goodyear moved back to Grand Falls from PEI to join the family construction business, J. Goodyear & Sons Limited. During the early 1960s and beyond, Mr. Goodyear was involved in the construction of many first roads to isolated communities and dams that now make up the Bay d'Espoir power project.

Terry Goodyear enjoyed scuba diving and recognized the potential of applying this

unique underwater skill in concert with his engineering background and he soon started Newfoundland Underwater Diving & Engineering Limited in the 1960s.

After retiring from the construction industry, Terry remained active in the engineering field and served as the commissioner for the environmental assessment hearings on the construction of the Outer Ring Road in St. John's. Throughout his career, Terry Goodyear has demonstrated an unfailing commitment to community.

He was the first president of the Exploits River Management Association, past municipal councillor and served as deputy mayor of Grand Falls-Windsor, former director of Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, as well as a past director of the College of the North Atlantic and past district governor of Rotary District 7820.

This past December, we said farewell to Terry Goodyear. Thank you for a lifetime of dedicated service, Sir.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

Last week I enjoyed a two-day visit at Roncalli Central High School in Avondale in the District of Harbour Main.

Opened in 1967, Roncalli currently has a student population of approximately 300 students in Grades 7 through 12. The students are drawn from five rural towns throughout Harbour Main District: Holyrood, Harbour Main-Chapel's Cove-Lakeview, Avondale, Conception Harbour and Colliers.

Along with a full suite of academic courses, the school is active in areas of public

speaking, literary competitions, art shows, junior and senior drama festivals, choir, French speak-off, mathematics competitions and they have an award-winning sports program.

What impressed me above all was the level of engagement from the students in these classrooms. Whether we were talking about our political system, civic engagement, women or youth participation in politics, their interest and desire for knowledge was clear. They left me feeling incredibly motivated and hopeful for our future. A young generation of Roncalli students who are not only our aspiring leaders of tomorrow, but our present leaders of today.

A special thank you to Principal Eddie Russell and to social studies teachers Marie Woodford and John Battcock for giving me the opportunity to engage with these beautiful young minds.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: It is my honour to recognize Legionnaire George Cake of Corner Brook who has been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, the highest award that can be granted to any Legionnaire.

To be considered, the individual must have received other major awards including the Certificate of Merit, Life Membership with the Royal Canadian Legion and must be active in the day-to-day life of the branch. Once this is confirmed, approval is required by the Provincial Command and, finally, Dominion Command.

Mr. Cake, a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, joined the Royal Canadian Legion in 1991 and has held many executive positions with the local branch. He has been parade commander, sergeant-at-arms,

service officer, a member of the sick and visiting committee visiting veterans and families in need and weekly visits to the long-term care veteran's wing. He visits schools, assists with the Poppy Campaign, Remembrance Day activities, served with the local chapter of the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping and with the Western Newfoundland Veterans' Pavilion.

This prestigious award has not been given to anyone from Branch 13 for over 20 years.

Congratulations, Mr. Cake, on receiving this prestigious award and thank you for your service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate the racers of Cain's Quest snowmobile race 2023.

It takes months of planning and organizing for these racers and their families to take on the challenge of Cain's Quest. This year brought its own challenges, as the weather quickly changed during the race and decisions were made to cancel the remainder of the race. I commend each and every team for their dedication and drive to complete Cain's Quest.

This year has certainly brought its challenges. Even though there wasn't a finish line, I'd like to send my congratulations to each and every person who participated.

Even with the year's challenges, Labradorians still showcased our unique culture to the world by welcoming teams at each layover and checkpoint. I'd like to give a big thank you to the racers' support crews, Cain's Quest volunteers and all the search and rescue personnel who were called to

action to ensure each team arrived safely back home.

Cain's Quest is one of the most enduring snowmobile races out there and I'd like to ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating each team for taking on the challenge of Cain's Quest.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. STOYLES: Speaker, I rise today to thank the Mount Pearl Seniors Independence Group who is celebrating their 25th anniversary.

This group was started by the City of Mount Pearl council whose goal was to provide services and programs for seniors at risk. After great success, in 1998, a partnership was formed with Mount Pearl's 50-plus group to extend the program to all seniors.

Since that time, the group has grown from 50 to over 500. They are the largest seniors group in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Atlantic Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. STOYLES: They offer a variety of year-round programs, including darts, guitar lessons, friendship groups, crafts, cards, fitness, bingo, tours, afternoon tea and much more.

April 21, 2023, marks the 25th anniversary of the Mount Pearl Seniors Independence Group. Keeping our seniors physically and socially active in our community is the cornerstone to maintaining physical and mental health.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating the board, the staff and

members of the Mount Pearl Seniors Independence Group.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Before we move to Ministerial Statements, I'd just like to also acknowledge that Member of Parliament, Mr. Ken McDonald, is also in the public gallery today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Welcome, Sir.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: Speaker, our investment of more than \$1.1 billion in *Budget 2023* for infrastructure will create hundreds of jobs and new modern buildings in our province, as well as improvements to provincial roads and highways.

Among various planned initiatives in Labrador, more than \$20 million will support the building of a new and accessible K-to-12 school in Cartwright.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: Another investment of \$5.7 million will continue the expansion at the Labrador Correctional Centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, allowing services to be delivered locally and reducing the need for transports. These investments follow the completion of the new mental health unit at the Labrador Health Centre.

Upgrades began on the North West River Highway last year and more upgrades are planned for this year. Our proudest infrastructure moment was on that historic

day last July when paving was completed on the Trans-Labrador Highway. Close to \$1 billion has been invested for this project since 1997, including more than \$230 million since 2016. I had the privilege to walk the last kilometre with the contractor, which was an experience in itself.

Speaker, work continues on a prefeasibility study for building a road into Northern Labrador. Consultations are ongoing and will help determine next steps. Along with our actions in Labrador, such as housing, enhancing snowmobile travel, Family Care Teams and our annual commitment to ferry services, we are excited about what we will accomplish in the Big Land.

We look forward to seeing the results of these investments and the benefits they will bring to all Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to thank the hon. minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Mr. Speaker, anything we can do to improve infrastructure, whether in Labrador or anywhere else on the Island, is a good thing. However, while the minister is busy slapping himself on the back, homeless and transient people are being housed in a hotel in Goose Bay with no supports or supervision. Meanwhile, seniors in Labrador West have nowhere to go.

But let me quickly return to the minister's own department. The prefeasibility study for a road to the North Coast was first promised two elections ago. Lastly, \$127 million in schools excludes Mobile, which was cancelled by this government, but includes millions for buildings which government

hasn't identified a site for. We don't know where they're going and we certainly don't own the land. Does this make sense to anyone?

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

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

As a Labradorian, I remind this government that the Trans-Labrador Highway will not be complete until it reaches Northern Labrador communities. This government has re-announced the funding in three consecutive budgets and a prefeasibility study only just started, yet we still see no physical roadwork.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls for actions specifically to end economic marginalization of Indigenous groups. The road access will help end that economic marginalization. I urge this government to take serious action when it comes to road access to Northern Labrador.

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

After the premiers of the four Atlantic provinces committed to working together to address health care shortages, Nova Scotia offered \$20,000 to nurses in bonuses. Recruiters from other provinces are here on

a daily basis looking to poach our health care professionals.

Is the Premier concerned that nurses will leave this province to work in Nova Scotia?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course we continue to work with the Registered Nurses' Union to ensure that they can understand how much we appreciate and value them, Mr. Speaker. We have put bonuses in place. There are multiple different bonus structures in place for nurses, not only to come into the system, but to stay in the system, Mr. Speaker.

I believe the Members opposite actually supported that and cheered it on as we offered bonuses for nurses last summer, Mr. Speaker. We're continuously talking with nurses. We value them. We'll continue to work with them to ensure that their value is reflected within the system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Obviously, Speaker, much more needs to be done here to attract and retain the nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador. This administration failed to stand up for this province, our province; instead, it's letting other provinces poach our health care professionals.

Likewise, you didn't stand up to Ottawa on the carbon tax and now seniors are worried that they won't be able to afford to heat their homes next year, when the winter comes, with oil.

I ask the Premier: Will he apologize to these people who are worried about how they will stay warm next winter?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If the Member opposite knows – presumably he's had a civics lesson – that is not our tax, Mr. Speaker. That is a federal government tax. We've made our position quite clear, Mr. Speaker. That is not our tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

A. FUREY: It's theirs to administer, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that the federal Opposition leader has used our letter, actually, objecting to the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker. It's not the right instrument at this time, Mr. Speaker, with inflationary pressures on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We've made our position very clear, but it is a federal tax, one that we cannot control. No different than we can control citizenship or borders, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's your administration, Premier, who came up with the made-in-Newfoundland carbon tax that you agreed to. You voted for it and implemented it.

The parliamentary budget officer found that the residents of this province would have to pay, on average, an extra \$1,300 a year because of the carbon tax. Some families will have to pay much more. This means that a senior on a fixed income, who is already struggling to stay warm, could be paying an additional \$100 a month because of the carbon tax.

Does the Premier realize that his failure to stand up for this province is costing residents thousands of dollars each year?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again I reiterate, it's not our tax, Mr. Speaker. It is a federal tax. It's not our tax. In fact, the Member opposite said it was my administration that had a made -in- Newfoundland solution. It was not. It was the previous administration, Mr. Speaker.

We have made our opinions well known, as have other Atlantic premiers. He took the opportunity to identify other Atlantic premiers in his previous question, different political stripes. We're all united in this one, Mr. Speaker. It's the wrong tax at the wrong time, given the inflationary pressures and the externalities that are on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

A little too late now. The barn door is open and we know what happens when the barn door is left open and not administered properly.

Simply put, Ottawa ignored the Premier on the carbon tax. Last week, the federal budget ignored our province and called the Atlantic Loop a series of transmission lines between Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

I ask the Premier: Why is he allowing us to be ignored?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me be perfectly clear in this House, as I have been to multiple ministers within the federal government: Minister Champagne, Minister O'Regan and Minister Freeland. In

fact, the prime minister himself. There is no loop without Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: This is not a matter of opinion, although it is our opinion. It's not a matter of necessity, although it is. It is a matter of mathematical fact. There cannot be a loop that magically generates electrons on transmission lines without a source of generation. We are the source of generation that will feed the loop, and I can assure you the federal government understands that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

Well, obviously from media reports and from what's been outlined in the budget, your Liberal colleagues in Ottawa don't remind or don't remember or don't accept the fact that the Atlantic Loop starts and ends with Newfoundland and Labrador – our assets.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, according to the national media, the omission of Newfoundland and Labrador from budget details was and I quote –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I can't hear the Member speak.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

According to the national media, the omission of Newfoundland and Labrador from the budget details was – and I quote –

no accident. According to Finance Canada, the article states Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are negotiating directly with Quebec on green energy.

I ask the Premier: Have we been cut out of the Atlantic Loop?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me take the opportunity to continue to say there is no loop without Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. FUREY: It's a simple matter of distribution and generation, Mr. Speaker. The transmission lines themselves cannot generate electrons; we all know that. We have an incredible resource in Labrador that can be, will be, should be, and is recognized by the federal government as being critical with the Atlantic Loop, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to be at the table with respect to the Atlantic Loop discussions, whether that's through Minister LeBlanc or Minister Wilkinson in the tables that are appropriately designed for these high-level discussions. I can assure you that we are advancing Newfoundland and Labrador's position to ensure that we are the powerhouse that is required, not only for the Atlantic Loop, but for the rest of the Northeastern Seaboard, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

Maybe I should phone my three PC colleagues in the Atlantic provinces and let them know that Newfoundland and Labrador are the key components and

owners of this asset for the people of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, the federal Natural Resources minister said negotiations are happening with Quebec. And again I quote: Most of the power is assumed to be coming from the Quebec grid.

I ask the Premier: Will Quebec be buying Newfoundland and Labrador electricity for pennies and then selling it to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick at a huge profit?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am not sure where that came from, where that thought came from, Mr. Speaker, but, of course, we're going to assure –

AN HON. MEMBER: More accurate than the study you quoted.

A. FUREY: Which study was that?

AN HON. MEMBER: He don't know.

A. FUREY: Which study was that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, he knows.

A. FUREY: Which study was that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

A. FUREY: I'd love to hear it. Which study?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

You have 30 seconds.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll try to use the 30 seconds to clue up the Atlantic Loop.

First of all, in the preamble, the Member opposite suggested that we work with the other Atlantic premiers, the Maritime premiers. I can assure you they want Newfoundland and Labrador at the table. They have said that in the Atlantic premiers' meetings, Mr. Speaker.

They don't want to be on bended knee to Hydro-Québec either. That's why this is a Canadian project that deserved Canadian input to ensure that, not only did we get the maximum value for our precious resource but that the end-user can also get the value that doesn't have to be on bended knee to Hydro-Québec.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday's announcement of regulatory changes for nurses have left the Registered Nurses' Union with – and I quote – more questions than answers. We just heard the Premier say that they continue to work with the Nurses' Union and they appreciate them.

So with that in mind, I ask the minister: How can your government announce changes without first informing the Nurses' Union on how these changes will work?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was consultation with the Nurses' Union. I know staff in the department

consulted directly with the Nurses' Union. Prior to the announcement, I spoke directly with Yvette Coffey of the Nurses' Union myself, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. DINN: No, that's right; that's not what she said.

Thank you, Speaker.

With 750 nursing vacancies in the province, nurses are stretched thin and forced to work mandatory overtime.

Will nurses be given paid leave and time off to complete the training required to prescribe medications?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is a training component prior to nurses being able to provide medications. If a nurse is interested, there are three modules that will take up to approximately one year, while they're working to attain those qualifications.

Mr. Speaker, we will be working with and in collaboration with the Registered Nurses' Union as that takes place.

I will remind the Member that the Registered Nurses' Union is involved in collective bargaining as we speak.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you.

I appreciate him reminding me of that, but there are still three modules that have to be completed.

Speaker, due to a lack of radiation therapists in this province, cancer patients in Newfoundland and Labrador are being sent to Toronto. Some cancer patients need to fly almost 3,000 kilometres to receive this life-saving treatment.

I ask the minister: When will cancer patients be able to receive this treatment here at home?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, our government and the health authority put the flights in place and made arrangements with Toronto to ensure that cancer patients receive the treatment that they needed in a timely manner, if they weren't able to receive it here in this province. We know that, not only in this province, not only in Nova Scotia, not only in Toronto, but, in fact, globally, there's a shortage of health care professionals.

We continue to work on recruitment of radiation therapists, Mr. Speaker. As soon as we are able to recruit those to open up the additional suite at the Health Sciences complex, we will certainly do that. We have provided additional compensation to radiation therapists to make up for the shortfall.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Anyone who's going through cancer treatment will tell you that they need their supports by their side, and their supports are here in this province. So you need it here in this province in a timely manner.

Speaker, the province is also in desperate need of respiratory therapists. The Association of Allied Health Professionals in this province have said that these therapists are the lowest paid in the country and a number have resigned from Eastern Health just this fall.

I ask the minister: Why are these workers leaving in droves while this Liberal government is supposed to be in charge?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, we've put a market adjustment in place not only for the radiation therapists, we've put them in place for respiratory therapists to bring them up to Atlantic parity. They are receiving those market adjustments.

Mr. Speaker, it's not only this province that has lost health professionals, other health professionals from other provinces have moved here, I'll say to the Member. Every province in the country is competing in a very globally competitive environment for health professionals.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, there is a two-year statute of limitation for civil cases involving children who have been victims of physical abuse. The same limitation does not exist for victims of childhood sexual abuse.

I ask the minister: Why is there such a difference?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I do want to note at the outset that, obviously, there were reports in the media about the *Limitations Act*. There is a case currently before the court, so it would be inappropriate for me to give a specific answer about the interpretation of the *Limitations Act* while there was an ongoing case before the courts right now.

But I will say that, of course, with any piece of legislation, we always review them to see what's appropriate, to look at other jurisdictions across the country and this is one that we will continue to look at as well.

As for the specifics of the case right now, I certainly don't want to influence any decision of a judge of a current case before the courts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I didn't ask about specifics of a case, but nevertheless trauma is a complex matter. Having a timeline on processing trauma is unfair and arbitrary. We in the PC Opposition support the removal of the statute of limitation for childhood physical abuse, just like we see in most of the other provinces in our country.

I ask the minister: Will we see legislative amendments brought forward in this sitting of the House to once and for all address this issue?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, while the question might not have been asked about a specific case, in fact there is a case specifically before the courts right now that is dealing with this issue. We will continue to review the legislation. I do want to note that physical abuse, the

outside limitation period for that right now is 30 years. There is an extended period of time which claimants can come forward with a claim.

We have always looked at every claim that's come forward through the Department of Justice to make sure that victims are fully compensated to the extent that they deserve.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday in a CBC news story school councillors of St. Andrew's Elementary are the latest to speak out about the problematic 1.6-kilometre busing rule. At least 29 students who live in an apartment building are being left by the side of the road because they live 1.5 kilometres from the school. This group is primarily newcomers who do not have transportation, have significant language barriers and are often working, single-parent families with multiple children.

Why is the minister refusing to help?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

Any time children miss school it's always of concern to us in the department. The 1.6-kilometre rule is clear. Those who reside within that fall within what's called a family responsibility zone.

Obviously, the Member opposite references newcomers to Canada who have some challenges. I know the MHA is working to come up with a family-generated solution and some options to help them. Obviously,

we encourage them to work together to solve those difficulties.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, this is a provincial issue. If this is being brought up over at St. Andrew's school, this issue is provincial. We've spoken out about it and we continue to speak out about it. In our Blue Book, K to 6 will be provided busing. At the time that we go over there, we'll provided busing to all those children.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, these parents are the latest to speak out about the 1.6-kilometre busing rule, but many children across the province are being forced to walk to school, often without sidewalks. The parents of St. Andrew's Elementary feel the local MHA has abandoned them. Speaker, students are missing class and parents are afraid to speak up for fear of having their immigration status revoked.

Is this how we are welcoming newcomers to this province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

As I've said, the MHA is working with these families of new Canadians. Certainly, we would encourage them as a group to reach out to the Association for New Canadians. It is a challenge for people who come from different cultures. That support is available, not through the Department of Education,

but through others. I would encourage them to continue to reach out.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, it makes you wonder if these parents need to organize a photo op. It seems photo ops do great when there are newcomers, but once they get the photo op, they're often gone off and forgot about. We're seeing that trend in the province.

That's the new immigration plan for this province: bring them in and leave them on their own. It's not acceptable, Mr. Speaker. It's very shameful.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, the parents have said, "... if this was any other part of town, and any other group of people, they would have a bus to get to school."

Speaker, is this minister waiting to lose another human rights complaint before he will act?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Whilst immigration is not my portfolio and my colleague could address this better, I think that it's unfair and unreasonable to characterize the approach to immigrants as simply welcoming them and abandoning. That is simply not substantiated by the facts.

This 1.6-kilometre busing policy has been in place for some time. It is applied uniformly and fairly across the province.

If there are seats available on buses because of free space, there is a courtesy policy that allows the school district and their bus contractors to take those students. In this situation, unfortunately, those are full. I would encourage the families to work with their local MHA.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I remind the minister that's a bigger issue in rural Newfoundland. Talking about it in metro is kind of not doing well for the people in rural Newfoundland.

Speaker, the latest report from the Seniors' Advocate condemns government's lack of affordable and accessible housing with seniors living in fear of theft, break-ins, mould and rodents.

Why is this Liberal government allowing seniors to live in such deplorable conditions?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, I think in the interest of clarity – and I'm sure Hansard can't turn it around quite that quickly – my previous answer did reference the fact that this was an issue across the province. It was also a provincial policy that was applied fairly and evenly across the province. To suggest otherwise by the Member opposite is somewhat disingenuous.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: (Inaudible) that didn't sound like an answer to the question that I had so I'll talk to the post amble in the fact that we don't have sidewalks in rural Newfoundland, Minister.

Speaker, the latest report from the Seniors' Advocate condemned government's lack of affordable and accessible housing with seniors living in fear of theft, break-ins, mould and rodents.

Why is the Liberal government allowing seniors to live in such deplorable conditions?

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to respond.

I'm assuming that the Member opposite did hear and read the Budget Speech where we are committing \$70 million to invest in 850 affordable housing units across the province with a focus on seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: And we also continue to invest in our home repair programs, again supporting seniors. So if there's a case where a senior is in a situation that the Member indicates, then I'm certainly prepared to deal with that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Speaker, seniors are living in fear in deplorable conditions; 40 per cent cannot do the repairs themselves.

When is the minister going to fix up this mess of unusable, unsafe housing?

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, the first time I've heard the reference to fear in terms of housing in the province. So I'd like to have him explore that a bit further.

But that being said, we are committed to investing in new, affordable housing. We are committed to investing in the Home Repair Program. We are investing in and repairing any and all of our housing units. We are spending over \$140 million on housing programs this year to support housing right across the spectrum, so their needs are being addressed as quickly as we can.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Speaker, sadly the Seniors' Advocate indicated some seniors are skipping meals and going without medication due to high costs of housing. Speaker, this is a provincial disgrace. New units next year are not going to help these seniors today.

Why has the government turned their back on the seniors in our province?

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

J. ABBOTT: Again, Speaker, thank you for the opportunity.

To suggest that the government is turning their backs on seniors would be a gross misrepresentation of anything and

everything we're trying to do here on this side of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: As it pertains to the Seniors' Advocate report, we're reviewing that. As I said yesterday, her main findings, we accept. We need to invest more in seniors' care. We need to invest more in seniors' housing. We need to provide more supports. To me, that suggests we are taking the matter more than seriously; we are addressing it within our fiscal ability to do so.

To say we are turning our backs, again, gross misrepresentation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, the government promised to deliver a poverty reduction strategy, but instead of doing so they continue to push the cost of living with a sugar tax and a carbon tax. Poverty reduction is not a priority for this government.

Why is the word "poverty" not used in the entire Budget Speech if it is supposed to be a priority?

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

S. COADY: Speaker, I have to say I'm a bit shocked by some of the questions from the other side today. I'm a bit shocked. Here we have the Member for Placentia - Bellevue talking about seniors' housing –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I clearly heard the question; I want to hear the response.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: We had the Member for Placentia - Bellevue asking questions about seniors' housing. He's standing here asking questions about seniors' housing. We put \$70 million in the budget and guess what? He's not even supporting that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. COADY: We have the Member opposite, the Member for Bonavista, who just raised the question about investments in what we're trying to achieve here. He talks about sugar tax. Let me just say one thing about the sugar tax. That money is going to help with continuous glucose monitoring and he's not supporting that either.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, some breaking news. If Sandra is watching from Bonavista and her income is \$605 a month and she burns oil, she can't make ends meet.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: The question was: Why wasn't poverty mentioned in the minister's Budget Speech?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

Let us talk about the high cost of living. Here's what the Member opposite from Bonavista is not supporting. He's not supporting the reduction in gas tax – 8 cents per litre. We're continuing with the 8 cents per litre reduction in gas tax.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. COADY: We're continuing with –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: If you want to waste your Question Period arguing back and forth, I'll stand here all afternoon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

If Members continue, they will be named and lose their speaking privileges.

The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, you're losing your speaking privileges this afternoon.

The Member for Ferryland, you're losing your speaking privileges.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

S. COADY: Here's what the Member for Bonavista is not supporting. He's not supporting \$500 that we're providing for home heating supplements. He's not supporting increasing the Seniors' Benefit. He's not supporting the Income Supplement.

Speaker, all I can say is I am shocked, but I'm hardly surprised.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

A 2011 report prepared for the Department of Education and updated in 2018, entitled,

A Review of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in Newfoundland and Labrador, identified gaps in deaf education. I attended several days of the Carter Churchill human rights hearing, and it's important to remember that a child was at the centre of this case.

Can the Minister of Education tell me if all of the gaps identified in the report have been addressed or if any remain outstanding?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The chief adjudicator, as I recall, from the adjudication report on that human rights tribunal felt that the student concerned was receiving the education and the services that he needed at the time the adjudication hearing was undertaken, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I was referring to the gaps that were identified in the report. The hearing revealed that many of the gaps remain unaddressed and almost 11 years after the School for the Deaf was closed.

Will the Minister of Education explain why these gaps haven't been addressed and what he plans to do to rectify them?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I would refer the Member opposite to the judgment from the human rights tribunal

which said that there were gaps in this young man's services in education in the first couple of years of his time at school. These had been rectified and in his current class he was receiving the education and the services that he needed.

For the Member opposite, as part of our new revitalized Education Action Plan, disability services, deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired and inclusion are all going to feature prominently in the work we're doing over the coming months.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

The gap of ASL curriculum was identified, I don't know if that's been addressed. Those are the things I'm asking about.

Will the Minister of Education commit to maintaining an adequately resourced deaf and hard of hearing unit at East Point Elementary, and expand the model to other areas of the province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We have an advisory group – in actual fact I think has its second meeting today – with representatives from the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of the Deaf and the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association with parent representatives on and those kinds of discussions are actively under way in the department as I speak.

There are ASL services being provided to deaf and hard of hearing students at East Point Elementary and that will continue until

such time as the new model is devised or this one is decided to be continued.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

We have heard publicly the account of a young Memorial University student, of her violent sexual assault and the failure of both Memorial University's Sexual Harassment Office and its president to support and protect this victim, revictimizing her all over again.

I ask the minister: What's this government doing to ensure its publicly funded institutions are not revictimizing survivors of sexual assault?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

Violence in any form is not acceptable, period, nor is sexual violence. My colleagues in Women and Gender Equality as well as a panel of ministers has taken active roles in this.

Memorial has policies around sexual harassment and sexual violence, as do the CNA. They are at liberty, as autonomous bodies, to have these and they have already done that.

It is appropriate for support to be provided, and Memorial does this, and when the victim feels comfortable to deal with this through law enforcement – because, at the end of the day, this is a legal matter. My understanding is that has happened and it is now in the process through law enforcement.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains for a quick question, no preamble, please.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Access to timely and adequate health care is essential; people in my district don't have either. They often don't get to travel to their medical appointments and when they finally get to their medical appointments they are often left waiting days trying to get home because they are bumped off of medical flights.

I ask the minister: Will he commit resources so my people can access timely medical care, something other districts take for granted?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ensuring that individuals from all regions of the province can have access to medical care is important to this government. It is part of the reason for the Health Accord, Mr. Speaker. It is part of the reason for this year's budget, the largest ever investment in health care in the province.

Part of this year's budget, Mr. Speaker, we've committed to a medical flight specialist team for Labrador, an additional team for that region.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

S. COADY: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act and An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000, Bill 38.

SPEAKER: Are there any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

P. DINN: Thank you, 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 English 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 that 1.6-kilometre policy for all elementary schools in the province and in junior and senior high schools where safety is a primary concern.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Speaker, myself, my colleague from CBS and others have brought this petition up many times. In fact, there were questions asked today on the 1.6-kilometre school busing policy.

This is a safety issue. This is a pure safety issue. The minister, today, in responding to some questions mentioned that the 1.6-kilometre policy is clear. It's clear. That's his words and he went on to say it's uniformly and fairly implemented across the province. That's where the problem is. That is where the problem is. Across this province all school zones are different. They're very different.

We have school zones that have public busing, that have crosswalks and that have sidewalks that are cleared on a regular basis. But there are zones in this province where kids are walking on main thoroughfares, on shoulders, if there is a shoulder, to get to school.

We hear of individuals – this case this week – people who are less than a soccer field's width away from the 1.6-kilometre zone are forced to walk in terrible, unsafe conditions. So there's the problem.

The minister recognizes the problem because he said it's uniformly applied, and that's the problem. That's the problem. Every district is different but safety is an issue everywhere. Children need to be able to get back and forth to school in a safe manner, and that's not what's happening here.

If you're walking through a neighbourhood to get to your neighbourhood school, that is much more different than walking along Route 60 with no shoulders to even walk on. So this is not a hard fix; this is something that should be done and must be done for the safety of our children.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation has several programs that provide grants for low-income house owners in the District of Bonavista for emergency repairs, accessibility and necessary home repairs. With the cost of inflation on building materials, inability to obtain a contractor and, more often than not, the necessity of low-income residents having to secure a loan in addition to the grant, leads many to not avail of these programs.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to revisit these Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation grant regulations, ensuring not to negatively impact the product but increase availability for those within the District of Bonavista, the province, who greatly need assistance.

My colleague for Placentia West - Bellevue asked a question and the minister responded that we are investing in the Home Repair Program. Keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, we're fully aware that these programs serve people admirably, but they haven't been indexed. So if you think that we haven't seen an increase in what that grant has been for 10 years and if we know what the price of material would be, we know that the availability of getting a job done, an emergency repair, is going to be more problematic now than what it was a decade ago and that is what we're facing.

When we do an accessibility, a ramp, the specs would have a one-inch rise over a foot. Well, if we look at the regulations, we may be able to go to 1.25 inch to a foot and that may allow the ramp to be able to be provided on someone's property in those with less space. The regulations also state that you have pressure-treated lumber. Anybody in the contracting business would

know that pressure-treated lumber is probably 25 per cent more expensive than lumber that can be accessed in the local area.

So I would say we need to revisit the amount that we provide as well as the regulations to make sure that we're making the product and what our intention would be accessible to those that are in need and need the repairs.

In the latest Seniors' Advocate release, when they asked about preferred arrangements for seniors, they overwhelmingly in every region of the province stated that their number one concern was home repairs and maintenance. I would say let's revisit these regulations and the amount being paid, so that we can, certainly, make a bigger difference in the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

J. ABBOTT: Just to respond to the petition. Those are very valid points and something we will be looking at, but we won't be allocating new money this year. Stay tuned for the future.

As part of our review of our housing and homelessness plan, they are the types of issues we're hearing as well and we'll incorporate that in our work in the years ahead.

Thank you.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for this petition or the background to this petition is as follows:

The residents of Noels Pond are concerned with the increased ATV traffic on Wheeler's Road, a 0.8-kilometre stretch of road that runs through the community.

Wheeler's Road is mostly a dirt road and it connects two highly travelled ATV trails in the area. Residents, particularly in the summer, have their homes covered in dust and in the spring and fall the road turns to mud.

The road was last paved in 1976 and only 0.3 of a kilometre was paved at that time. The road is a mess and needs paving and upgrading in a desperate fashion.

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 pave Wheeler's Road to ensure the safety of its residents and ATV users.

Speaker, ATVs, as part of our tourism, have become an integral part in the many communities around Newfoundland and Labrador and access to trails through communities has become something that communities have adopted.

In this particular case, this 0.8 kilometre of road is maintained by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure or at least plowed by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. It's a small 0.8 of kilometre of a road but the increased traffic in that road has raised serious, significant safety issues for children that play on that road and also because of the condition of the road. More to do with the condition of the road, the ATV users probably often think of this as some kind of off-road trail because mostly the paving is at the beginning of the road closest to the highway.

So when you're coming in off the trail and hitting that, they're hitting it at speeds that are fairly high. What the residents are looking for is a commitment to take a look at that road and, in the planning going forward,

let's get that road paved and then maybe some signage put up so that we could get the safety concerns addressed.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for a response.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Am I hearing the Member correctly, that he's asking me for investment into his district when there are millions being invested this year, in the budget, that he's not going to vote for? Just putting it on the record.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I present another petition on retention bonuses for our hospital support workers. Again, the reason for the petition is that hospital support staff have been inexplicably passed over for a retention bonus given to other classifications; and

WHEREAS other and varied classifications received a retention bonus in January 2023; and

WHEREAS the glue that keeps the place together during the pandemic were passed over for a retention bonus because we do not fit into the parameters as defined by the Newfoundland and Labrador government; and

WHEREAS hospital support staff are unable to get holidays/days off because there is no one to cover them and it has been this way for at least three years; and

WHEREAS the Newfoundland and Labrador government made an unprecedented move for clerical by offering a 30-seat, two-year

free tuition at Keyin Tech to address the shortages in clerical at Eastern Health;

THEREFORE we petition the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide a retention bonus to all eligible hospital support staff.

In a letter that the representatives of these clerical workers wrote to their union, they've expressed their total displeasure and that they feel that they've been blatantly excluded from the retention bonus. They were told that secretaries, in particular, are not considered key employees and are basically a dime a dozen so a retention bonus is not needed because there are enough of us easily ready and available for work.

However, at the same time, Eastern Health, in conjunction with Keyin Tech, has recently opened 30 digital health administration diploma program spots and that includes experiential learning, employment focused on administrative support. Yet, this program is part of a solution to address the various clerical shortages within Eastern Health. So on the one hand, this group, the secretaries, they feel like they've been told they are a dime a dozen and on the other hand there are measures being implemented to address shortages.

I can tell you, from my days as a teacher, the school secretary was probably the most important person – the school secretary and the custodian, simple as that. They are the ones that could make a teachers life flow smoothly or not. They knew the area, they knew the people, they were able to do things for you; simple as that. They were the glue that held the school together.

I can tell you that even in my past role as a teacher, every time we would hear a government announcement talk about how valuable we were, we had to wait and see what practical measures were going to

demonstrate that. Not always did we see it, Sir.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

The reasons for this petition:

Whereas in the District of Harbour Main there are many residents who are concerned with the deteriorating cellphone service that they have been experiencing in recent months. There has been a significant decline in the cell service throughout the district, where calls are being dropped and residents are unable to get their calls to go through for no apparent reason.

Therefore we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To work and partner with the various cellular providers and telecommunication officials to stabilize and improve the cellphone service within the region so that citizens have a reliable service that they can depend on.

Speaker, this is the third time I am presenting this petition; November 2020 I presented it; October 2022; and again here today. The situation is getting worse.

In fact, Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador has the worst in Canada for rural cellphone coverage. Those are not my words, nor are they of my constituents, although I am sure most would agree, these are the findings of the most recent Auditor General of Canada report, which was tabled in the House of Commons on Monday, March 27.

Newfoundland and Labrador is basically being underserved. The report indicated that, "Being connected is no longer a luxury but a basic essential service for Canadians." Yet people living in rural and remote areas are not being treated in an appropriate way. Without access to fast, reliable and

affordable Internet and mobile cellular service they do not have the same opportunities as people residing in urban areas.

In fact, quoted in the article, which was in *The Telegram* last week referencing this, a resident of Holyrood had indicated: "I live in Holyrood, which is not terribly 'rural,' and our cellular coverage is absolutely abysmal ... In my home on Route 60, you cannot get any more than one bar anywhere."

This was raised by me in October of 2022 and the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology had responded. He had indicated that he agreed that the service is bad. He basically said that they are partnered and are looking at working on round three of small cell projects that would be applicable to numerous smaller communities, especially in rural areas, and that they were hoping to bring out round three soon.

We need to know what is happening, Speaker. We need to know. Like the minister had concurred, there are so many areas within the Harbour Main District where cell service is an issue. He indicated he had seen this. He has family there. So we need to know why this is not being addressed. The cellphone service is getting worse, it is very concerning and we need to know what government is doing to address this.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology for a response.

A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to stand and respond to this.

The first thing I will say is that there are a lot of times being on both sides of the House where you stand up and you try to say that

something is not an issue, but I'm not going to do that today. The Member is correct. The reality is that we have deficiencies when it comes to cell coverage in this province. We're about –

E. JOYCE: (Inaudible.)

A. PARSONS: I'm being heckled for the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, who, by the way, just had a project two years ago approved for his district. So I'd say you're welcome for that, Sir. I know your citizens are well served.

What I would say is we recognize that there are deficiencies in service. There's no doubt. We've invested – in fact, there's \$25 million in this budget going towards it. There's \$136 million – there are a lot of different parts to this happening but we need to do more. I get that completely.

I will say, as I said in the article, that is not just a solution of the provincial government; in fact, I wouldn't say we're the priority lead on this. The federal government needs to continue to do more. The providers themselves – and when you're partnering with private industry it makes it difficult. That's one of the realities.

We, as the provincial government, have a role and smaller communities have a role as well. One of the things we will be rolling out in 2023 is round three of the small cell-community initiative where there's a three-way partnership between communities, provincial government and provider to see coverage provided everywhere – where everybody is making an investment, we're going to see coverage.

I say to the Member, I appreciate the concern, I echo the concern. We will continue to make strides in the right direction, because the reality is we all agree that cell coverage is important, no matter where in this province, rural, urban, we want to have cellular coverage.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker, I appreciate it and I appreciate the Government House Leader allowing me to present my petition today.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

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

These are the reasons for this petition: The Dr. William H. Newhook Community Health Centre is located in Whitbourne and provides services to residents in the area, in addition to incidents that may occur on the province's largest highway, Route 1.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I wonder how Bill, Sally and their three children are doing. You remember Bill and Sally don't you? The low-income family with a household income of \$16,000 who rented their home and relied on public transit. You know who I'm talking about, the poster family for the 2022 provincial Liberal budget.

The Dr. William H. Newhook Community Health Centre's emergency room has experienced frequent and numerous closures over the last year.

No doubt they've been battered and bruised by inflation caused by corporate profiteering and have watched their already meagre income eaten away by excessive food and home heating costs. I wonder has the Minister of Finance, the Premier or anyone from Cabinet checked in and see how their doing. Did the family make out okay? Did last year's budget help lift them out of poverty? Are they any better off as a result of this year's budget?

The emergency services offered by the health centre are often not available to residents, leading to a significant amount of concern and worry among residents, in addition to residents having to drive to another emergency room.

Probably not. Since the family relies on public transit, assuming there is public transit in the area, and rent their home, they will not benefit from the 8 cent per litre reduction on the provincial gas tax or the reduction in registering a vehicle or the elimination of the retail sales tax on personal property insurance.

Therefore we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately enact a plan to ensure the Dr. William H. Newhook Community Health Centre is fully staffed, open and able to provide emergency health care services.

In the expense of time, I just want to ask the minister, the last time I presented a petition we were at three days. I know it increased after that, but I'm just wondering if he'd be able to give an update today as to improvements that have been made at the health centre in Whitbourne.

Even if Bill or Sally was lucky enough to work full-time at the paltry new minimum wage for 52 weeks of the year, the gross household income would only be about a little over \$30,000 for five people and would not include health insurance or pension benefits. They'd still be unlikely to keep up

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

with inflation or rent increases. The \$500 cost-of-living cheque and other one-off measures would not address the long-term systemic challenges they face.

Now, what good is \$10-a-day child care to Bill and Sally if they both want to work but there are no spaces available for their children? The title of this year's budget is *Your Health. Our Priority*. Really? The subtitle reads: "Our Largest Ever Investment in Health Care." Well, first of all, health care has been the highest spending department for a long time, so that's not a surprise. The \$300-million difference from last year is approximately the rate of inflation. So I'm not convinced government is giving a big boost or spending extra as they claim on what the province needs.

Secondly, it's about time. It took government long enough to start addressing the issue. Thirdly, it would be more appropriately to call *Budget 2023*, the oops budget.

Now government crows about moving to \$10-a-day child care, two years ahead of schedule, but forgot to ensure there was sufficient spaces available for working parents – oops. Build a new St. Clare's Hospital, but no plan to staff it – oops. Let's provide incentive bonuses to health care workers in long-term care, but do it in such a way that it insults the very workers the initiative is trying to retain – oops.

We must all ask ourselves one question: Is the investment in health where it needs to be? Is it part of an overall plan and vision for the well-being of all citizens of this province?

Our caucus has been calling for a coherent, coordinated and holistic plan to address the health care issues facing our province. For the most part, we have been disappointed by government's response. It's tempting to believe that the recent firehose of announcements, initiatives in spending leading up to the budget demonstrates

government is on the ball, has a plan, a vision for the future of this province.

I'm not sure if people are buying it. Certainly the people who attended the St. John's East - Quidi Vidi NDP District Association's public health care panel two weeks ago didn't. Many see government's series of one-off approaches as reactionary. Certainly health care workers in long-term care facilities were not impressed.

Once the two-year term of service agreements for the recently announced bonuses have expired, what then? What is the long-term plan for retention for health care professionals to do their jobs and maintain some semblance of work life balance, for residents of the province to have stable health care and healthy quality of life? Or is this initiative just a cynical ploy meant to get the government past the next election cycle in hopes of eking out another majority? Is that as far ahead as the plan goes?

Now the need for a holistic approach was loud and clear at our health care panel discussion at the town hall in Labrador West in our discussions with constituents, community leaders and not-for-profit organizations, family doctors, nurses and with the many other health professionals essential to keeping our health care system functioning.

That approach starts with a plan to address the deficit in health care human resources, especially in long-term care and senior care. The infrastructure announcement of a new St. Clare's Hospital is an unnecessary distraction and not a priority identified in the Health Accord.

Now, approximately, 117 long-term care beds remain closed in St. John's Metro region because they do not have the staff to open them. As a result, about 100 people who should be in long-term care are occupying acute-care beds in hospitals.

A doctor I spoke to a while ago at St. Clare's made it quite clear that if government wanted to free up beds in hospitals, allow doctors to treat patients and clear up wait-lists, it could begin by opening up beds in long-term care facilities. By the way, he and the other health care workers I have spoken to at St. Clare's were mystified by the announcement of a new hospital. The hospital was fine in their opinion and not their top priority. Human resources were paramount.

So what would we do differently? We'd start with the changing of the skill mix and training up health care workers in the entry-level long-term care positions to take on more supervisory roles. In other words, revive the system that was in place many years ago. Encourage workers to move up, provide incentives and flexible schedules to retrain. Most importantly, we'd make the jobs and the working conditions attractive enough so that workers will want to retrain, will want to work in long-term care. A highly trained workforce of LPNs, LPN IIs and PCAs could be ready quickly to staff long-term care facilities.

How do we fill the positions vacated by those who retrained? Well, I know there are many income support recipients who would welcome the opportunity to return to school, complete their Adult Basic Education, upgrade their skills, complete post-secondary education, transition off income support and enter the workforce. However, this government has made it so difficult to do so, placed so many obstacles in the way of those who have the temerity to break free that many give up, wish they had never begun in the first place or worse, never take the first step. I know because I've seen it first-hand.

I worked on behalf of two courageous women who chose to do exactly that. In return, they were penalized by government policy that robbed them of their housing benefits, exacerbated their financial distress and most despicable of all took away their

health plan benefits. For two people with complex health issues, the last was the most devastating. One woman had no choice but to give up and withdraw from her post-secondary program. Krista Stephens, the other, has had to fight tooth and nail to stay in school. On more than one occasion she has stated that if she had known how difficult government was going to make it, she would never have gone back to school and would've stayed on income support and kept her drug card. Were it not for the encouragement of our office, her school and her family, she would have dropped out.

Yet, six months ago, the Premier and the Minister of Education lost no opportunity for a photo op with Ms. Stephens to present her with the Council of the Federation Literacy Award for Newfoundland and Labrador. Both the minister and the Premier praised Krista as an inspiration to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and offered to support everyone in reaching their potential. Now, despite several letters asking government to change the policies, when it came to doing something practical to help Krista, the answer was no.

As a former teacher, I'm dismayed by how government policy can place so many unnecessary obstacles in the path of those seeking a better life.

Speaker, I wonder how many people would choose to enter the health care workforce if government changed its policies, removed barriers, actually supported people and made it as easy as possible for them to do so. If government invested in the people rather than unnecessary infrastructure, how many long-term beds could we open? How many acute-care beds would free up so people can access the health care they need? How many couples requiring different levels of care could we keep together? How many families could be spared the agony of having their loved ones placed in a long-term care facility an hour and a half away because the facilities in their communities did not have enough staff to care for them?

How many more seniors or people with disabilities could live independently in their own homes if government was willing to fairly compensate home care workers and pay them benefits?

For over half a year, Central Health and the Department of Health resisted Lisa Marsh as she fought to have adequate financial supports in place for her intellectually and physically disabled sister and her caregiver. Now, rather than pay the caregiver a livable wage, they seem prepared to choose the more expensive option of placing the sister in long-term care. Assuming there are beds available in the first place.

Speaker, a budget is, in many ways, a reflection of society, at least the values of the government proposing the budget. *Budget 2023* got me thinking of Charles Dickens, one of my favourite 19th century authors, and whether or not we have progressed as a society. In particular, I thought about one of his most well-known books, *A Christmas Carol*. On one level, Speaker, it's a heartwarming redemption story of Ebenezer Scrooge and it's credited with inventing Christmas. However, it's also a critique of wealth, poverty and government's approach, at the time, to addressing poverty through the poor laws and such institutions as workhouses, debtors' prisons and treadmills. It attacked the new social science of economics, social Darwinism or the belief that the survival of the fittest also applied to society and the ideas of Thomas Malthus that the economy could only support so many people. That those who could not be supported, or support themselves, were the surplus population. If these surplus people would rather die than to go to a workhouse, as Scrooge said, they had better do it and decrease the surplus population.

Now Scrooge was a product of his time, but I have to wonder if our current government's approach has improved and how it treats the vulnerable of our society or is it still about economics?

I have said on more than one occasion, that the zero-based budgeting and budget-based, decision-making practices of this government and its predecessors created the current human resource crisis in health care.

It's a crisis several decades and different administrations in the making. COVID-19 didn't cause the crisis; it merely highlighted the gaps and forced government to deal with them. The focus on finding efficiencies created similar crises and gaps in public education, in housing, income support, dental care, in our social safety net and so on.

Now, I would like to think that the current administration has learned from this and for the need to focus on people. A cursory reading of the budget documents, however, and you can easily see that its focus is very much on economics and the province's fiscal health and well-being.

The Minister of Finance emphasized that expenses were being controlled across all departments. That this is a budget that is positive in that it shows fiscal responsibility, at the same time as making strategic investments. The news release speaks of prudent fiscal governance, strong fiscal management, responsible debt management, of *Budget 2023's* focus being on our financial well-being of a strategic plan to return to balanced budgets aided by balanced budget legislation. No mention of poverty.

Now, I'm all about financial responsibility, but when I hear government promoting balanced budget legislation, I have to wonder who pays the price. What health care, education or social programs will be cut? What community organizations will have their funding frozen or reduced? How will this legislation be used to justify those cuts? After all, the economy can only support so many people, right?

Now, contrast Newfoundland and Labrador's approach with that of New Zealand's where its government has brought in several well-being budgets to date to ensure that their investment decisions are being driven by New Zealander's overall well-being and what government can do to enhance that well-being further. A well-being budget means giving people the capabilities to live lives of purpose, balance and meaning to them.

Now while short-term, one-off stunts are PR worthy, they ignore the big picture and can end up costing the province more in the long run. For example, by my calculation, a person filling up 100-litre gas tank once a week will save around \$416 a year as a result of the eight-cent per litre reduction on the price of gasoline and diesel. Assuming, of course, the person owns a vehicle.

But I've got to wonder what programs these \$63.4 million annual costs of the initiative could have been put towards to enhance the overall well-being of our citizens. Like, I don't know, eliminating the 1.6-kilometre school busing rule, improving the province's ambulance system, addressing the shortage of child care spaces, providing long-term incentives and educational opportunities to people who wish to work in long-term care.

If this government and previous governments had actually put the overall well-being of its citizens at the centre of the provincial budget, if budgets were about giving people the capabilities to live lives of purpose, balance and meaning, if the economy served people and not the other way around, then Carter Churchill would not have been discriminated against and would not have been denied the right to ASL instruction or blocked from full participation in his classroom or prevented from reaching his full potential. Todd and Kimberly Churchill would not have had to launch an expensive and exhausting human rights case on behalf of their deaf son.

Seniors seeking dental care would not be subjected to humiliating, provincial gatekeeping measures. Dental care for seniors would have been a priority for this government rather than waiting on an NDP forced federal initiative. Community centres and other community organizations that serve the people of our province and who depend on our government funding would have that funding indexed to inflation. It would not have taken two NDP private Member resolutions and some public shaming to get government to strike an all-party committee on guaranteed basic income.

Speaker, if the economy served the people and not the other way around, then government would implement measures to enhance learning and help school communities keep staff and students safe rather than building an expensive, new high school for political reasons in the district where the Premier lives and undermine the programming in two schools.

They would increase the Tuition Offset Grant to reduce student debt and encourage students to study at Memorial University. They would move towards a liveable wage, a liveable minimum wage. They would have had an affordable housing strategy in place and almost 300 people would not have been forced into emergency shelters or bus shelters during one of the coldest weekends of this past winter. They'd implement just transition legislation that would protect the environment, our workers, communities and the futures of our children and our children's children rather than further subsidizing multi-billion dollar companies.

Speaker, a well-being budget would make sure income recipients with diabetes have sufficient income to afford healthy food rather than providing them with dietary supplements such as Ensure. It would make sure that the Medical Transportation Assistance Program actually works for the people instead of placing costly

bureaucratic obstacles in the path of those who depend on it.

I could go on, but I hope you get my point. My colleagues and I, in the NDP caucus, want to see a strategic plan to enhance the well-being of the people of our province. We want to see strategic investments in the health care system and to address the social determinants of health. We demand that the residents of our province be granted the capabilities to live lives with purpose, balance and meaning to them. Focus on that, Speaker, and the balanced budgets, the savings and the economic prosperity will follow.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to stand and represent the constituents in the District of Bonavista.

In Question Period I brought up about poverty not being in the budget, and the hon. minister said that I was voting against it. We haven't voted yet in the House. I don't know if she's been presumptive that we're going to vote, so the only thing I would say, this is one of the issues of which I have a problem with, with the current budget.

I raised a petition in the House on the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation and was pleased with the response. I know the need is now. It would have been nice if that would have been part of this past budget that we do have something out there now for those who are having difficulty making ends meet.

You may be surprised but I know that I've got lots of viewers in the District of Bonavista today and I just want to name some of them.

AN HON. MEMBER: The Linthornes.

C. PARDY: The Linthornes were watching, for sure. But I want to say hello to Dolores Whiffen who I visited during my constituency week and whom I'm going to talk about in a short time. I also want to say hello to Sandra Cooper who is watching in Bonavista and Kitchener Pelley, which I want to discuss in a short time, from Harcourt.

Dave and Louise Bishop in Newman's Cove, whom I was talking to this past weekend, and Ben Tippett and June Philips in Bonavista. So I'm glad they're tuned in and hopefully I can represent you well in stating the issues here today on the floor.

I said to the minister, in Question Period, poverty wasn't mentioned. And poverty wasn't mentioned, not really, but the minister went back and said well, we gave those on income support a 5 per cent increase. That is something, Mr. Speaker. The only thing I would say on that cost-of-living measure, the 5 per cent, would be the lady I referenced in my response where I said "breaking news," she lives by herself and she receives \$605. That's including a \$35 fuel allowance for oil that she burns. She lives by herself in her own house since her mom passed away last March. She filed her taxes in '22 and when she filed her taxes in '22, the amount of her gross income was \$6,735.

I would say to you if what we can do is we can say right now that 5 per cent is the best that we can offer now this year in this budget, I think many people would say that's substandard. That's inadequate. If we have the cost of living that we're looking at and someone has to try to make ends meet on that and she hasn't got a choice whether to abort oil and change to the heat pumps or the mini-splits or electricity because she can't take on a loan and the amount that is being offered won't do the transition for her in her house, those are the situations of which I'd like to discuss.

Before I get into my theme of today for my address, I want just to acknowledge that on Saturday I attended a function in Goose Cove. Now, we have 40 Members in the House. There may be one or two that may be unaware where Goose Cove is, but I just want to highlight where that is. I think the hon. minister has a Goose Cove as well on the Northern Peninsula.

K. HOWELL: (Inaudible.)

C. PARDY: No, I wasn't there. I was at the one in the District of Bonavista, which is adjacent and in between Trinity and Dunfield.

The Fort Point Lions had their 44th Charter Event. Forty-four years in service serving the community. The Member for Exploits is an honorary and a lifetime member involved with the Lions, so he appreciates that.

We celebrated the great things that they did. They celebrated that. But I just want to highlight between the Port Rexton Lions Club and the Fort Point Lions Club, they cosponsored a young 13-year-old student from Bishop White all-grade school in Port Rexton in the Lions International Peace Poster Contest.

The young girl, her name was Trinity Hogan. She was one of the finalists of 23 of the international poster contest – one of 23. Never before has anybody won or placed in the merit category of the Lions International Peace Poster Contest – never before in Newfoundland and Labrador until this year when Trinity Hogan –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I'm hoping that the first day back after the Easter recess, when we'll be out in our districts, first day back I would hope she would be in attendance and I look forward to presenting that Members statement to Trinity Hogan.

My theme today is real life examples in the District of Bonavista – real life examples. A couple of people that are viewing now are going to expect that I'm going to give that real life and their example.

When we look at real situations that we have in our district, we have to look and say someone has to take responsibility. And that's fair enough. I'm their Member. I'm an MHA in the District of Bonavista. There are some good points in the budget, I am not totally enamoured about it, especially with the stories that I am about to share with you.

Watching today is a 73-year-young lady by the name of Dolores Whiffen. She may have her friend with her, Aletha Ricketts that could be watching with her. Sadly to report that on January 27 she had a stroke. She woke up in the middle of the night, en route to the bathroom, she had a serious stroke and she fell. She managed to get to the phone and when she got to the phone, she had called her sister, who had difficulty getting in to the apartment because the door was locked, as she lives by herself. Eventually, when she went to the hospital to get checked on, they X-rayed her hip to make sure that it wasn't fractured and she went home, but she never had the use of her left arm or her left leg.

Later that day, after being released, the family decided that she had to go back to the hospital. She went back to the hospital, they transported her to Clarendville where they did their CAT scan and said that she had a significant stroke. She was sent to the Miller Centre, which she would rave to this day and said about the quality of the care and the service in the Miller Centre. I'm not surprised. I've heard a lot of great things about the Miller Centre.

She goes home to live independently. I visited her last Tuesday. So I walk in and when I walked in and met with her, she would walk with her cane. Her left leg, she would move it slightly, she could slightly

move across. She can't use a walker because again her left arm is not recovered enough.

She requested that she could have some home support for a couple of hours in order to prepare meals. She has difficulty getting in and out of the shower. She is determined that by July she'll be able to do all those functions on her own. But the only thing being, she's unable to get the home support now that she would need.

We've arranged now for someone to go do an assessment for her, but that was a real-life example of somebody going home, desiring to stay independent in their own home, determined to get well and to live healthy in her home.

I would hope that works out for Dolores. I know that all MHAs are listening here intently. I would hope that that works out for her because everyone that we wish to stay in their own home, we ought to make sure that there is every stone turned over that they can live comfortably in their own homes.

The next gentleman I want to highlight and mention for you is a great chap, a senior from Harcourt. His name is Kitchener Pelley. We all know that at 75 years of age you'll have to get a medical examination, when that time comes. Well, he did. He got a form come that all of a sudden he has to have a medical examination before they renew his licence. But Kitchener never had a family physician. He wondered where to go, so he went to emerg and they didn't want to complete the form at emerg. So he reached out to me and wondered where can he go?

I had sought direction. The direction that I provided back to him was he was to go to emerg to get it completed, and that's understandable because we don't know, but he went to emerg. Anyway, I called the hospital to indicate that Kitchener would have to come. Kitchener went to the

hospital. We had said that he would go between 8:30 and 10 to make sure that was his best chance of not waiting a long time.

Well, Kitchener went at 8 and he waited. He got in at 12:30, but at 12:30, they weren't overly keen on getting the report done or doing it, because they know that they were busy, I assume, but he wanted to get his report done.

He ended up not getting it done, but we did get a stay in order for him to be able to get someone to fill out that form in due course. So Motor Registration was great in providing an extra couple of months for him to be able to get access and get clearance on his medical system.

We talked about poverty and one thing that we talk about – if someone threw out a statistic at you and your province and said that one-in-four children are living in food insecure homes. That's a rather concerning, daunting statement to make: one-in-four children that we have in our province. That is concerning. That was my sincere question today when I had asked about poverty not being mentioned in the budget.

I would say that is something that we ought to have a plan to know what we're going to address. I know that we have an All-Party Committee on Basic Income. I'm not sure if that's going to totally address it or not, but it's a good thing. We're headed in that direction. But we do have a significant amount of time where we have one out of four children in our province are in food insecure homes.

So that's something that I would wish that we would have seen in the budget was a plan. Much the same as the one that was back in 2005 that had the rave reviews until 2015, the poverty reduction plan which gained a whole lot of prominence and favour across Canada. It was a good plan.

I've got a short time left and I just want to pivot to something else in the budget that

would cause me a little bit of concern and that would be the fishery. The lack of prominence of what would be in the fishery.

We all know that this land was settled on the fishery. We all know about the valuable resource that we have off our shores. We ought to be – and I think we probably all agree; I thought we did last year. We thought that this industry should be bringing in \$3 billion to \$5 billion a year. We all, I think, agreed at one point in time that our fishery could be doing more.

Glenn Blackwood would say it is only our true mega renewal project that we've got is the fishery. We would look at that and we would need a plan to make sure that it, not only maintains itself, but it does reach to the level that we would desire it to be – \$3 billion to \$5 billion at minimum.

I want to read to you – I know I have four minutes left, but it won't take long to read a section in the budget related to the fishery; it will only take a minute.

Here is the fishery: In Newfoundland and Labrador, the fishery is important. Last year, when the budget was read out, there was a whole lot of desk thumping over on the other side because the fishery was something that was held in high regard. We all believed that. We hold it in high regard. But the proof is in the pudding. It's in the action. It's in the plan, the budget plan. Here is Newfoundland's fishery, *Budget 2023*.

"The fishery is an integral component of the provincial economy, employing over 17,500 people from over 400 communities. The sector's value is in excess of \$1 billion, with exports to 40 countries.

"To help ensure continued success, \$5.1 million is allocated to the Atlantic Fisheries Fund. We have also allocated \$500,000 annually for three years for multi-species aquaculture development and the collection of oceanographic data."

That's some good points, but if anybody who is a harvester involved with the fishery would look and say, if this is the extent of what we have in this industry, I would think that they would say that's pretty underwhelming – pretty underwhelming.

The minister, in the *Navigator* publication, states that the Premier asked me where I'd like to see the fishery in 20 years. In 20 years, I'd like to see it as strong as it is today.

I would say we know there are peaks and valleys in every industry, but we have got to have a plan for our fishery – we have got to have a plan. In the absence of a plan, you'll find that we often ride the economy and sometimes we don't yield from it what we ought to do.

I've got two minutes left and I just want to end on the sugar tax. I know that we had a healthy conversation the other day and I know the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board had tabled a document. The Premier referenced it yesterday, that we ought to read what was tabled on the sugar tax because that was from the *British Medical Journal*. I know that I copied it off, printed what was on there.

You know what; we all agree that we've got to reduce our sugar consumption. Nobody disbelieves that in this House. If we talk against the sugar tax, don't misrepresent that to say that we're not on board with reducing our sugar consumption. We are. We're 100 per cent on board; the only thing being we disagree that taxing it is the best route.

We believe that education is a prevalent way of doing it, not taxing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: The minister and the Premier, the article that they referenced or what they tabled in the House to validate the sugar tax, the title is: "Consumption of sugar from

soft drinks falls within a year of UK sugar tax." Italicized behind that, underneath that topic says this: "Findings suggest sugar tax might benefit public health without harming industry, say researchers."

If you read down in the article they would say: "Overall, they show that compared with pre-announcement trends, the total volume of all taxed and untaxed soft drinks purchased did not change one year after implementation." The only thing I would say to you, taxing is not the way to do it, but we do need to reduce our consumption.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always important here to get up and represent the District of Exploits, especially at this time of the year. Of course, every time I go home on the weekends and during the holidays, there's always some discussion that you'll have on different parts of your district and different things that are happening. I've got to say that health care probably rises above all most at the time when I'm home in the district. I know that people have big concerns with regard to access of a doctor, clinics and that sort of thing to get the treatment that they need and the service that they need.

So over the past little while, I know that the Grand Falls-Windsor has had an advisory committee. I know the Town of Bishop's Falls now is just formed an advisory committee and they're looking for doctors. They're going to be working with the health authority in looking for doctors. Only last year the Town of Bishop's Falls lost the last doctor they had and left the community of 3,000 people without a family doctor. Botwood, again this year, lost another doctor, leaving more people without a

doctor. Grand Falls-Windsor, again, now the hospital up there is going to lose another doctor which keeps leaving more people without doctors. Doctors certainly become a big issue in the Exploits District in the Central region.

So I'm glad to say that I do have a meeting with the minister tomorrow and some of those issues will be discussed. I'm looking forward, especially, for him to make sure that he's got all the stakeholders involved when they make their decisions, especially now under one health authority which happened April 1 and the Health Accord starting to be introduced. There are a lot of players at stake.

In the geographics of the Central area, there's a lot to be discussed: doctors, advisory committees, all the stakeholders. So that's something that I will be sitting down to talk to the minister about tomorrow, as they move forward on the health care in Central Newfoundland to make sure that all the stakeholders and all the people and everything is taken into consideration, so that moving forward we'll be presenting the best health care we can to the residents of the Exploits District and of Central Newfoundland. I'm looking forward to that meeting with the minister tomorrow, and I do thank him for that.

I will also be bringing up, of course, the 24-hour emergency service in the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre that was again promised by the Liberals, two elections, and was never availed of. So I'm certainly going to bring that up. I do believe that they did mislead the people of Exploits when they said that they were going to open the 24-hour emergency service in two different elections. So that certainly is going to be brought to the forefront as well.

I'll be looking forward to meeting with the minister tomorrow and discussing those issues. Hopefully, moving forward, we'll bring the best health care we can to people

of Exploits District and parts of Central Newfoundland.

But, Speaker, also I'm hearing about housing. Housing is a very, very poor situation right now in Central Newfoundland. I did present a petition here yesterday regarding the housing situation. We know there are 300 on a list in Central Newfoundland; we have housing units that need to be upgraded. We need probably more housing built and more affordable housing. But I know there is some money in the budget, which is good to hear.

But this has been happening for a long time. The eleventh hour is here now; people are out on the streets. I got two, three phone calls last week, separate occasions. A couple was left in the cold last Friday. All last week a single mom and her 10-year-old child, no place to go, looking for housing. Another person, a single parent with a couple of children, looking for housing. None available, Mr. Speaker – none available.

Now I know there are some subsidies sometimes that Housing will pay for apartments, but a private apartment is not all the time the easiest route, not always the easiest way to go. We have certainly got to pay attention to the housing situation. At least right now in Central Newfoundland get the units that need to be upgraded and needed to be in place and painted and upgraded and fixed so that we can at least start moving some of those people in. We have some people in some desperate situations. Especially with the high cost of living, they can't afford it. They can't afford to pay some of the rents that are out there now. They're being forced down to the housing units and even with places with nowhere to go.

We certainly need that addressed. It's a situation that's in dire straights out there, becoming more and more. Like I say, it's been ongoing. This just didn't happen today. This has been happened for a period of time

that should've been addressed, should've been fixed, but we're to the point now where it's just overloaded, everything is maxed out on the housing and we're getting people out on the streets and this should not be happening. It should not be happening.

Again, medical transportation, that's part of the health care situation, so it's something else we will discuss. Medical transportation, I have people in my district having to go further now because of the doctor situation, people with no doctors in the area. They're having to go further like Corner Brook and St. John's to get treated or assessed with their problems. Lots of times I'm hearing they'll have an appointment set up in St. John's at the Health Sciences or St. Clare's, when they get there to the appointment, they're turned back home. We have no beds. They're turned back home.

That creates a great problem, especially to the seniors in our district that have taken the day to travel at that expense to come out to St. Clare's or the Health Sciences just to have that appointment with the doctor and to get there to say: B'y, your procedure is cancelled, your appointment is cancelled, go back home.

That is uncalled for; that's not fair for the seniors and people to be treated like that. To go get a hotel room that they can't even afford and to drive to St. John's in the beginning and to be forced to get hotel rooms and meals. All the expense is on them. I know there's a little bit of MTAP, but when it gets down to that, it just doesn't cover the situation of what they have to do. So that's another area of health care that's lacking.

Long-term care, again, I spoke about it the other day, long-term care in Central Newfoundland. The former minister came in and the Premier came in a year ago and opened the long-term care in Central, which could take the pressure of the acute-care beds in our hospitals, try to move surgeries

up so people could get in and get their surgeries done.

They came in last year, they announced the opening of the long-term care; everything was going to be up and running, and good on them. Everything was going to be up and running; I'm glad it was. It seems like there was some movement there. All of a sudden, we're hearing there are 30 beds not used. I think they're down to 25 this month; 25 beds in the brand new facility of the long-term care that we could be moving people into.

I'm getting calls from families concerned about their loved ones, they would like to get them placed in long-term care but there are not beds available, which leaves the strain on the other health care services, especially families. The strain on the families who are trying to get those people into long-term care and the acute beds being taken up because of the long-term care situation that they can't get into those beds and people can't use the acute care beds, which is holding up, like I say, surgeries and people wanting to get the surgeries done.

Another thing, Speaker, I'd like to address – oh, first of all, I have to take a page out of the Member for Bonavista's book. I know that over the weekend I was talking to Doreen Carter. I told her I would say hello to her the next time I was out. So hello, Doreen. I hope you're having a great day.

Also to Ray and Golda Guy, they were residents of my district but they're after moving to the St. John's area. The last time I was home I met them and I told them I would say good day to those people as well. I must say Happy Easter and I hope you have a good one.

Getting back to where I was, Speaker, the seniors in our district – actually, I got a phone call from a senior and I can use their name. I said: Can I use your name when I speak in the House today? She said: You can certainly use my name, Annie Perry in

Point of Bay. She said: I just got oil. Just filled up my oil tank, she said. I just paid \$95 tax. So she said: When I get my money from the carbon tax, tell the government I'll give it right back to them because I can't use it. She said: When that happens, tell them I don't need it anyway. So all that tax will be going back to the taxes on the taxes. I told her I'd pass that long for them, so I did so. I had a chance to do that for her.

But that's not the only senior with the taxes like that and, again, the sugar tax, making those choices. They can't fill up their cars. Go buy fruits and vegetables today. We've all been to the supermarkets. We've been there. We know what it costs. So those seniors, people on fixed incomes going to make those choices in the supermarket, especially fresh milk. Make your choice: fresh milk or a bottle of Pepsi. Just make it. It's hard enough for us sometimes to make it.

So you're going to go with the bottle of Pepsi and pay your sugar tax that the government would get back, rather than bring the prices down on milk and let them have a healthy choice, which some of those choices are there anyway, like the Tetra Paks. We always thought it was good juice: orange juice, apple juice, the Tetra Paks. We always did. We were reared on them. We were told that they were good drinks. Actually, they put them in the schools for the school breakfast program. Now they have to pay the sugar tax on them. They have to pay taxes on them. It don't make sense.

Anyway, that's the kind of choices those people have to make because of decisions that other people make. So that's where we're to.

Forestry: I'm getting a lot of calls again from the forest permits home. There are no permits to get. All the permits are taken up by the big companies again, of course. There are three big companies with all the forest permits. Small loggers can't get any permits; can't get their industry started up;

can't get enough to work with. That's sad to see. The locals in Central Newfoundland, they see trucks going down the highway all the time. They see loads and loads of timber, loads and loads of logs beating away on our roads, beating out over the roads, and gone. They can't avail of permits to get those logs out of the forests.

There is no industry basically in the Central area. Yes, there is industry in forestry in Newfoundland and Labrador but there is no forestry in the area. We should be looking at more plans to utilize our forestry in Central Newfoundland.

Agriculture: we'll just touch on agriculture, which leads to food self-sufficiency. I talk to small farmers that are trying to produce to get our food self-sufficiency up to where it should be, but they can't afford to work the farm anymore. The price of fuels, the price of parts for their farms just to clear a piece of land is enormous. They can't even afford, probably, to clear that piece of land.

I've been talking to young farmers that have probably been there for two or three years. The price of it where they need more land now to expand so that probably they could make a profit. They can't get that piece of land and they can't get more crops growing. They don't see their way in the next two years. They don't see themselves beyond the next two years when they'll have to fold, which is causing red tape and hardships to young farmers that want to get into the system but can't see their way to get into the system because of the red tape. It's not feasible for them to get in there. By the time they get in there and get through it all, they're just finished with it. They're done with it. They're poisoned with it and they're moved off to something else.

Even our farmers in Wooddale. I talk to our farmers in Wooddale. They've got some good farms in there. They've been at it for years. They're local farmers. They've been at it for years.

Some of their roads in there – they're beating up their trucks coming out over the roads with their farm equipment because the road is not done in there. They need that done just to – they've got an operation there. The ones in there in Wooddale, they've got big farms. They've got big operations, but the road is not fit to drive out over. All they want, most of the time, is it graded and made smooth so they can bring a truck out over it. Most of the time they can't get out over it. I get the calls.

I appreciate the roadwork that the minister is certainly bringing to our district this year, but I'd like to also see a little bit more grading to the farmers. The farmers, themselves, would like to see some more grading in the area. So we're glad that he's going to pay some attention to that as well.

So back at that again, Mr. Speaker, irrigation in that area, I know I've been talking to them with regard to irrigation in that area. They could use some help with regards to the water supply, especially last year was a hot, dry summer and we know what happened in the hot, dry summer last year.

B. WARR: Never got a salmon.

P. FORSEY: It caused forest fires in there and that was really bad. The Member from Baie Verte - Green Bay got a point there as well, that didn't happen as well.

Speaker, again, like I said, to help those farmers in that situation in regard to their lime and their roads and their irrigation would certainly go a long way in our food security.

There are lots of things that we can do. We've still got a long way to go with regard to getting food security up, especially for the agriculture. Like I say, with regard to getting a piece of land to be able to grow extra crops, especially the root crops so that they could get their business going.

When they're looking for another piece of land that – when you bring up Crown lands today, that brings up another issue as well because they can't even buy the land today because of the adverse possession or squatters' rights that was brought in from '56 to '76. So to get a piece of land today to say that they can have the land, even if it's leased, it certainly puts them in a hard position to grow that crop.

With that, Speaker, there are still a lot of issues in my district that people are concerned about especially again we'll go back to housing. Housing is certainly a big, big issue out there and I'm hearing more and more of it in the past couple of weeks than I ever did before. It's sad when you get those calls and people can't get housing. They can't get places to stay. They can't afford to get apartments. They just can't afford to live. It's a sad situation to see those people, with the high cost of living, trying to get housing and try to stay on their own two feet. It's very, very frustrating to them.

It gets frustrating to us at times because we're the ones that they're reaching out to for answers and they want us to have the answers. They want us to do right and we should do right and we can do right, but we don't wait until the eleventh hour to do anything that we should have done leading up to this. We have to be on the ball, see this is happening and we have to be able to fix the problems before it becomes a bigger problem that it becomes issues that it's out of our control.

With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat and I'm sure I'll get another chance to speak on the budget, what can be happening in my district, what I'd like to see happening in my district and things we can be doing.

With that, I'll take my seat and let somebody else have a chance.

Again, thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to thank the Member for Ferryland for letting me go next.

Mr. Speaker, it's certainly a pleasure to rise in this hon. House and speak to the budget. I think I'm going to have a couple of opportunities, at least, from what I can gather, so this is will be, I guess, the first go around.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that in sort of looking at the budget in a general sense, it's like any budget, there are some things there that you think are really good. There are some things there that can you say I might have done a little differently, whatever, taking a different approach with. But from an overall perspective, I'm not put out by this budget. I will say that, I'm not put out by this budget. Certainly, I've seen a lot worse budgets in the past, I'll say that for sure.

There's no doubt that there are some investments here that, obviously, I would support; I think most Members would. One that was very important to me and to my district, based on the number of calls and emails and messages I've received leading up to the budget, was the whole issue of early childhood education and the availability of spaces.

Everybody loves the fact that we're down to \$10 a day in terms of the cost. That's wonderful. That's fine and dandy if you have access to it. If you don't have access to those spaces, it does nothing for you and, if anything else, it only just makes you more and more angry when you hear about people take about now I only have to pay \$10 a day when there are people who can't get a space and now they're paying maybe \$45, \$50, \$60 a day. Some of them have to,

I will say, be abused to some degree because of the fact that they have no choice but to put their children with certain daycares and babysitters and so on who are really milking it for what it's worth in terms of what they're charging people and the expectations they have for the services being provided.

Of course, that's the people who can actually get child care at all. There are others who cannot get child care at all. I've heard from a number of them. As I have said in this House before, a number of them have been health care professionals. I've had nurses. I've had two doctors who have reached out to me and have said: Here we are talking about the fact that we have a shortage of health care professionals, here I am a doctor or a nurse, whatever the case might be, and I can't go back to work because I have nobody to look after my child. I just had a baby; I don't know what I'm going to do. We don't have anyone to look after the child. It is a big problem.

We kept hearing about this new ECE wage grid. I think we kept hearing stay tuned, stay tuned, and we did, waiting for it to come out and hoping that it was going to solve the problem, or at least help solve the problem.

I will say that if you are somebody who is new into the field or someone who is thinking about going into the field, from what I can gather, for new ECEs, I guess they would be called Level I, I suppose, there is a significant increase for those people, new people getting into it. I think a lot of them would be pleased with that and hopefully it will have a desired effect in that regard.

But I just want to put it to the attention of the government and to the House, just for information purposes. I'm not here to try to be critical for the sake of being critical, but I will just say I've heard from a couple of people in my district who are an ECE II, I believe is what they're categorized as. These are people who would've already

been ECEs in the system for a period of years.

In one particular case a person who messaged me from Southlands and she was an ECE. I think it was 12, 14 years been doing whatever, considered an ECE II. When they did the math on the new wage grid because they implemented a new wage grid and then they took away – because government would pay I think it's quarterly stipends or whatever. So many times a year, you'd get a stipend from the government, and that's on top of your wages that you were getting from your employer. Under the new system, they put in a grid for their wages but removed the stipend.

In the case of this particular person what they came back to me with when they do the math on they were receiving and what they're going to receive, it means \$600 per year. That's the increase, \$600 per year. To which this person said, in their view, it's a slap in the face. That was their words, not mine. Quote, unquote, this is a slap in the face. Because they were expecting something obviously more significant in terms of retaining ECEs. Six hundred dollars a year really is a joke when you think about it in terms of day-to-day expenses. You take \$600 bucks and taxes have to come out of that and everything, so what are they really left with.

I'm just putting it out there not to be critical for the sake of being critical. I wasn't aware of that being an issue until a couple of people came to me about it, constituents of mine. So that all Members on all sides are aware – and the minister is probably aware; I guess he is. But it is an issue in terms of you're trying to maybe in terms of the attraction piece, you've upped the wages for people getting into the industry as an ECE, but people who are already there, at least some of them, there was no substantive increase whatsoever. If anything, it just upset them and made them feel like, like they said, a slap in the face. Being

undervalued, taken for granted, whatever. Call it what you like, that's what this individual felt and another one who reached out to me as well.

It's something that I encourage the government to have a look at. Maybe it was unintended. Maybe it wasn't realized at the time when you were doing the numbers that that's how it would work out. But that is how it's worked out, apparently, for some people.

It kind of ties into a little bit in a similar vein as to, I suppose, what we're hearing with bonuses, retention bonuses and so on where somebody gets a bonus and then the other person doesn't get one or someone gets – I think nurses said well, \$1,000 retention bonus or \$1,500, whatever it is, is really a joke compared to a doctor what they got and so on. I suppose it's a similar kind of concept. If you have a group and you do something significant for one part of the group and you don't do anything for the other part of that group, well then that part feels like somehow they've been slighted. I think that may be an issue.

So I just ask the government to go back and have a look at that wage grid again and how it impacts all ECEs, not just new people getting into the system but the existing ones as well.

The budget allowed for \$127 million into the Future Fund. I believe we all supported it. When the Future Fund idea was brought forward, I think it was unanimously passed. I don't think anybody could argue that, you know, having some money set aside that we could utilize – I know it's in the future. That's why it's called the Future Fund, but it's not necessarily a bad idea to have that ability.

My concern in the debate at the time was the fact that there are some loopholes in those clauses that would allow a government to withdraw money from that fund without getting approval of the House of Assembly. That was the only issue I had. I don't think the government should be able

to take a cent out of there. Get approval from the House. Other than that, I supported the legislation. This year there's \$127 million going in. Seeing as how I supported that legislation, obviously, I would support that.

The multi-year Roads Plan, \$1.4 billion, I hear talking about the biggest investment ever and so on. Look, there's no doubt. I don't think anybody is going to argue with the fact that there are a lot of roads in this province that need significant upgrades. There a lot with bridges, roads, underground and aboveground infrastructure. I'm certainly not going to argue against that.

I do kind of get a bit of a laugh over the fact, you know, we're talking about, oh, it's the biggest investment ever and you wouldn't know but we're writing personal cheques here. Ultimately, it's the people's money so all we're doing is spending the people's money. That's not a slight against this particular government or administration but we've seen it over the years when we talked about we spent millions on this and billions on that and millions on this and you wouldn't know but we're writing personal cheques. We're all excited after giving ourselves a pat on the back for spending taxpayers' money.

Anyway, \$1.4 billion going in. No doubt it's needed. No doubt I'm sure we could double or triple that and still wouldn't have all the work done. I'm sure that's the case, too.

We're always hearing Members in this House talking about we need money for my district for roads and so on. I don't think there are going to be too many complaints over that. Certainly, from my perspective in my district, I don't have a lot of dealings with the department, but I am glad to see the work taking place to bring that new entrance into Galway. That's certainly something that's needed. It's going to, I think, help with the traffic flow that's pouring in to Park Avenue. Because everybody in the east end has decided to go to Costco, they take

Team Gushue and on to Park Avenue and Ruth to get there. Hopefully, the east end traffic will now go in that new route out by Barbour's Irving and go in through the back entrance of Galway. I'm hoping that's what's going to happen.

I know there are people who might be listening and people I've talked to from other parts of the province who will say we need basic roads. I'm here with potholes and stuff and, really, should we be spending money here on convenience some people say – on convenience versus necessity. But it's important to remind people that like it or not, this is the metro area. It's an urban environment. It is the metro area. It's the seat of government. It's where the vast majority of the services are, the businesses and so on. A lot of the taxes are coming from this area so there's a lot of traffic. The bottom line is call it convenience, call it what you like, it is a necessity in a busy urban region to have these roads up to snuff and to have the proper connections. So I'm certainly going to support that.

The only thing I'll say I was a little disappointed in is I never heard anything in the budget about the completion of Team Gushue Highway. I'm hoping – hoping – that at some point in not-too-distant future they're going to save that for a big announcement for Seamus when he hauls out his campaign signs and says I'm running again. He will be here with his little white hard hat on at the Team Gushue Highway saying I'm getting her done, b'ys, vote for me. I'm hoping that's going to happen. It wasn't in the budget. I would have loved to have seen it there, but I got a feeling it's going to happen.

The single ambulance service, that's a move, again, that I think most Members, in concept, agreed with. I understand it's going to be a public service, not a private one. I do support that when it comes to our ambulance services. I think we very much had a two-tiered ambulance service in terms of the public one here in the metro region,

versus some of the issues we've had. That's not to say all the ambulance operators were bad ones, but there have been issues. There's no doubt the employees have not been treated equitably and, in some cases, not treated fairly. In many cases, that impacts public safety for the citizens in the rural parts of the province. So something had to be done to fix the ambulance service. I'm hoping this is going to be a start and something that's going to help.

The 10 new Family Care Teams, in addition to the eight that we already have, that's a good announcement, again, in my view at least. The non-emergent centre in St. John's metro that's going to be constructed, I will just say that I agree with the concept but I just want to say to government that it's only going to work if you have the bodies to staff it. Because it is pointless, to my mind, to take a crowd of people out of the Health Sciences emergency and St. Clare's emergency who are sitting there for like 12 and 14 and 16 hours and simply move them to a different building where they're going to sit for 12 or 14 or 16 hours. That's doing nothing. All you're doing is moving them to a different space to wait. That is of no use.

So I support it in concept but the staffing has got to be there to support it. And I know you know that. There's nothing here that's rocket science, but it is important to note that.

The continuous glucose monitoring pilot project for diabetics, I think that's a fantastic initiative. I know we're doing a pilot project. Hopefully, it becomes beyond the pilot project and it's something that, hopefully, if it works out well and the bugs are worked out of it, it's something that all diabetics will be able to avail of. Obviously, it's great for the individual, it's great for our health care system and while health care really shouldn't be about dollars and cents, the bottom line is government has to be cognizant of the money we're spending because it's the people's money. It will save money, I have no doubt. I think that's a

proactive approach and I certainly will support that.

Now, there are a whole bunch of announcements that have been made as it relates to physicians in terms of attaining new physicians, new nurses, and retaining them. This budget had a lot of focus on health care and investments in health care. I was very pleased by that. I think a lot of people will be pleased by that.

The only thing – and I would agree with my colleagues in the Official Opposition, the leader, in the sense that I would have liked to see more of a plan. It almost feels as if it is sort of by the –

J. DINN: Piecemeal.

P. LANE: Yes, piecemeal, that's the word. It feels like it's piecemeal. It feels like it is just sort of being reactive as it comes; that's how it feels. I'd feel a lot better about it if we could see that this is a plan and this is why we're making this investment now and then this is the investment we're going to make next and this is what we're going to do next. It would all fit together so it would all make sense.

But when you're just making random announcements of we're going to open up a facility here; we're going to modernize one here; we're going to upgrade one here; we're going to put in something for doctors here; something for nurses here; all these teams here, here and here. But you don't see that full picture, that puzzle, where it all kind of makes sense as to why you're doing this or what you're going to do next and then what you're going to do and what the outcomes are going to be. Then it makes it a little more challenging to get behind it, not because you're not behind the investments, but trying to understand if it is going to work. You can throw all the money at anything, but throwing money at it is not necessarily going to solve it, unless you're putting money in the right places at the right time

and all the pieces come together. So that would be, I guess, a bit of a criticism there.

I was also glad to see that \$7.7 million going to \$9.1 million or \$9 million next year for self-managed care, that's the home care. That's something that I have talked about in this House of Assembly. Home care is totally inadequate, we know. How many times have we heard people talking about keeping people in their own homes is the way to go? It makes for a happier life for the individual. We know that putting people into facilities and institutions, not only is it not good for their mental health and their quality of life necessarily, but it also is the most expensive thing we can do. Prisons and hospital beds, acute care beds, those are the most expensive things we can do.

So keeping people at home is really what we need to do, but right now it is so discouraging for people who are relying on home care; it really is. People who have to try to manage it themselves, especially when you have to get someone who can come in for two hours today and three hours tomorrow and all this kind of stuff, or two hours in the morning and then go home and come back for another two or three hours in the evening. How can you expect anyone as a worker that's going to want to be doing that? A lot of these workers then have to get taxis to go from one client to the other or, if not, they have to try to depend on a bus or whatever the case might be because they don't have cars because of the low income involved. It's a mess. It really is a mess.

Now, my only concern is it all sounds good to say \$7.7 million going to \$9.1 million. Well, what does that mean? I want to know what that means. So I'd love for the Minister of Health to tell us what does that mean? What does that mean for the average person who is relying on home care? What does that mean in terms of the wages for a home care worker? Does it mean they're going to go from \$16 an hour to \$16.50? Or does it mean they're going to go to \$20 an hour? What does it mean? We're looking at

one general big number but it doesn't really tell a story. Once again, what's the plan?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see I'm out of time. I'll have a lot more to say when I speak again.

Thank you.

SPEAKER (Warr): Thank you.

The Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to start off my remarks this afternoon by talking about the report of the Seniors' Advocate, and to compliment her and her staff on what a magnificent job they have done for us in highlighting the extreme issues that face seniors in our province. I'd just like to read, in their news release, some of the key findings that the Seniors' Advocate has pointed out.

She said: "1) Seniors are equally concerned about access to health care and the cost of living. 2) When asked to rank their priorities, the number one priority was supports to age well in their own home, followed closely by addressing the cost of living and then access to health care. 3) 32% of seniors do not have enough income to meet their needs. 4) 16% of those noting they did not have enough income to meet their needs were receiving greater income than the lowest income seniors in Newfoundland (those in receipt of GIS). 5) Seniors who do not have enough income to meet their needs (32%) report being unable to afford food (40%) and going without food (60%). 6) Seniors who do not have enough income to meet their needs do not purchase needed medical supplies and devices (57%), personal items (51%), special dietary requirements (34%) nor attend social events (60%). 7) Seniors noted inability to access primary health care providers and wait times as their most frequent unmet health care needs, which was significantly higher in Labrador. 8) Family members noted home

support as the highest need for those living with dementia, followed by training and education for caregivers and family members. 9) 40% of seniors identified home repairs and maintenance around the home as needed to stay in their homes, while 46% of family members/caregivers reported home support as required. 10) 23% of seniors said they were looking for an apartment or condo, and 21% said a senior or retirement community complex. All noted that these were not available in their community or not affordable and had long waitlists."

In my previous life, I had the opportunity to work all over this great province of ours. I was one of the lucky ones, I didn't have to leave home or leave the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to work. But I did live and work in many communities in all parts of the region, whether it was in the West, the East, Central and in Labrador.

In all those communities you find people who are very proud of where they live and they want to stay there. They want to stay in their own homes; they want to stay in their own communities. But right now they're finding it extremely difficult to do that. They're struggling with the costs.

It's easy for me to stand here today and use the word seniors. These are people – these are people. These are your mother, your father, your sister, your grandfather, your brother, your sister-in-law. These are real people with real challenges. Sometimes I'm not so sure we give justice. But I also like it when my colleagues here on this side of the House stand up and reference and make it personal sometimes and talk about people in their communities and the challenges they face. Because, to me, that brings that home to our House, to this House right here and allows us to understand and hear their concerns.

I've had a number of people reach out to me recently. I had a gentleman in St. John's West who called me up because he was

concerned that he would not be able to afford the cash to meet the minimum amount of fill up required by the oil company when they come to fill up his tank. He doesn't have the cash to do that.

I spoke with an 84-year-old gentleman who lives in Corner Brook who was complimentary of the \$500 that the government had given him for heating oil supplement. But he wondered out loud to me why the neighbours three doors down, who made \$180,000 between them, were getting a cheque for \$1,000. He couldn't understand that. Nor could a lot of other people in this province, I'm afraid.

That's the problem. His income was a grand total of \$24,000. He was very appreciative of the fact that he had gotten the \$500, but couldn't understand why somebody making \$180,000 between them would be getting \$1,000.

I also have heard recently from a lady on the Northern Peninsula. A 70-year-old lady with a disabled son who is required to bring him to see a specialist in St. John's. This lady travels down over the Northern Peninsula with her disabled son and has been asking the Medical Transportation Assistance Program for help, especially in the winter months. She would much prefer to be able to fly rather than drive. I'm sure people that live up the Northern Peninsula and the Member would certainly appreciate the extent of that drive, especially in the wintertime, down over the Northern Peninsula into St. Johns for medical appointments.

In the past, that used to be provided to her but now the Medical Transportation Assistance Program is denying that, telling her she must drive. She must leave her home on the Northern Peninsula and drive to St. John's for a medical appointment in the dead of winter. That is not doing justice to our seniors. That is not helping anyone.

We talked earlier in the day and we had talked about the word "poverty" and where that exact word had not been mentioned in the budget. We recognize there are a lot of significant dollars being spent, but it's how they're being spent that's the concern.

Poverty is a complicated issue and it requires a long-term, sustained effort if you're going to alleviate and help people. A former PC administration had a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. As a matter of fact, as a result of that strategy, Newfoundland and Labrador went from having the highest poverty to the lowest levels in the country. That was back in 2015 they achieved that. Imagine, having the best in the country, the lowest by 2015. Now, seven or eight years later, we are here with huge systemic problems because we provided band-aid solutions. We have not had a strategy and that I think is part of what we're talking about here. We need a strategy.

We recognize our province is spending tens of millions of dollars on a variety of programs and services without knowing if we're getting the desired result. Not knowing if the right people are getting the services and the supports they need. Not knowing if they encourage and support citizens' engagement in the whole process.

So it's not about just throwing money. It's not simply about measures. We have a lot of measures. There are a lot of measures announced in the budget. It has to be a strategy and it has to be a long-term strategy if you're really going to make a dent and have a real positive poverty reduction strategy. That is the key. If we're going to do this, we need to engage all of the stakeholders, the people in our province who have an opportunity to help with this and to be engaged. Whether it's the business community, labour and individuals and develop a new poverty reduction strategy.

Speaker, I would suggest that what we need is a complete review of our Income Support program. A complete review, as well as an evaluation of all of the programs and all of the services intended to support vulnerable people in our population. That's the type of direction we need to be taking.

Speaker, one of the challenges, of course, that people on fixed income in our province are having is the high cost of living. If you're on a fixed income in our province right now or a low income, you're hurting – you're hurting. Things like carbon tax and sugar tax do not help.

Now we've heard the Premier speak today about carbon tax and express passionately his displeasure with carbon tax. I can only think back to last May if the Premier of the province had expressed that same displeasure last May when his government were voting to increase the carbon tax on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: It wasn't just the Premier who supported carbon tax. Let me read out some quotes from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change: "... it may not be something that we're all excited about, but it's something that's going to help us in the longer term.... I have no issue with supporting a carbon tax based on how we're going to be moving as a people, not just in this province, not just in this country, but in the global community. That's where we have to be."

The Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Let's allow the speaker to continue.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: The Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

T. WAKEHAM: As soon as the minister responsible for chirping stops, I'll continue.

The Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development said: What are the best policy instruments that we can be using to influence behaviour and reduce greenhouse gas emissions? It is a carbon tax. The carbon tax is the right policy instrument and we need to stick with it, come high or low, when it comes to how popular it is or it is not. If only last May they had turned around and listened to this side of the House who said no to carbon tax, who continue to say no to carbon tax –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: But now, I'll be anxious to hear the minister stand up and agree with their own Premier now who is opposed to carbon tax, according to today's statements. So I would look forward to the minister's turning around and telling us how they've changed their mind, because clearly there's a difference between what they voted for last May and what they talk about right now. That's what's going on.

Mr. Speaker, let me just keep going while I'm on taxes and really get talking about sugar tax – the great sugar tax. The government introduced sugar tax and told us it was going to modify behaviour. It wasn't a tax. It was simply going to modify behaviour. We were going to make people healthier. It was all about choices. That's what it was all about. Yet, at the same time, let's look at the results because if it was truly about modifying behaviour and having success with people consuming less sugary drinks, one would think that the amount budgeted would go down, not up.

So now what they've done, instead of a budget of \$9 million, they've increased the budget for sugar tax to \$12 million. This is nothing to do with modifying behaviour or helping people or healthy outcomes. It's about taxation, all about taxation. At the same time, as they stand here and say we're going to use that money and we're going to actually start a continuous glucose monitoring program – a program which, by the way, our critic for Health has been talking about for two years and it has been every Blue Book that we have had since –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: That's what they talk about; they're going to use it for that.

I would argue and suggest that maybe if they didn't have to spend \$5 million on a Rothschild report, they could have used that for continuous glucose monitoring program. A report that we cannot see, by the way. We're not allowed to see and apparently there's a phase two Rothschild report that's coming this year, which we do not yet know anything about. I'm sure it will come out in the Estimates when it comes to the total cost of what that program would be.

These are costs, Speaker, things that are impacting people in our province. These are having a significant impact on people of our province, having a total impact on people of our province.

But I want to go back to the title of the budget and the idea that it's all about health care. Why? It's the highest expenditure on health care that we've had as a province. I would argue that your health, your priority with record spending, the biggest question that I'm getting in my district is when? When will people get access to a doctor? When will people not have to pay to see a nurse practitioner? When will those long-term care beds get open? When will the ambulance services be improved?

Of course, the other question is why? Why did it take so long? Why did it take seven years in order to start dealing with some of the reports that were on the minister's desk since 2015?

The ambulance review: we've now seen the government is moving forward on this recommendation. Moving forward on a recommendation that was in a report back in 2015, which called, by the way, for central dispatch. Maybe if we had met with the ambulance operators at the time, with the community operators and with the public system, we could have designed an ambulance service back then that would have been up and running right now and people like those in Trepassey would not be standing up and having their Member stand up and ask questions about where's our ambulance service? Those are the things that have been missing. They have been missing.

So now we're starting to see this is being done, which is a good thing. I would suggest again to the minister, as you review ambulance services in this province, make sure it's not just road, it's air. I would also suggest to you that you seriously take a look at a routine air ambulance.

We have routine road ambulance services in this province, which takes some of the pressure off the emergency ambulances that people need, and it's a good program. But a routine air ambulance would help people in Newfoundland and Labrador that live outside of the tertiary care centre.

Let me tell you a quick story. A young man in my district had severe burns, but it wasn't life threatening so he was in hospital in Stephenville and required transfer to the burn unit at the Health Sciences. They called the air ambulance to come get him and the air ambulance could only come get him if they didn't have another flight booked because he was – quote – not life threatening. So he waited. The air ambulance didn't come. It was on its way

and then it got deferred for an emergency case. So he was put on a road ambulance.

Now, think about severe burns to your body and you're in the back of an ambulance and you're travelling for 10 hours over the highway with a nurse in the back giving you morphine for your pain every so often. That is not a standard that we should have in this province of ours. We need to do better. We can do better. We will do better. I would suggest that routine air ambulance is part of that.

I'd also suggest that when we do take someone by air ambulance into a tertiary care centre because they need to be transferred, do not abandon them, because right now we are. We are abandoning people. When you are transferred by air ambulance into a tertiary care centre here in St. John's and the staff and the professionals take care of you and you're ready to go back home, you're on your own. You have to find your own way home.

So imagine being airlifted in from Labrador, into St. John's, an air transport on an air ambulance and then the lifesaving procedures are accomplished and you're ready to go home. You have to find your own way home. There's no support. The only way there's support is if you're actually being transferred back to another facility.

So these are things that need to be addressed. These are things that, if we're talking about ambulance review, need to be addressed. I look forward to seeing those announcements in the budget when the details are released.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll start in the way back machine they used to say. So July 1954, the first load of iron ore mined in Labrador was shipped out. It was the beginning of the royalty scheme of iron ore, the royalties that the province collected from Labrador West. That continued unbroken for 69 years. So this July 2024, it will be 70 years of continuous mining in Labrador West for iron ore. That's 70 years of billions and billions and billions of dollars in iron ore royalties coming to the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. BROWN: In the meantime, the outlook is great for Labrador West. We have, I think, it's roughly about 200 years of iron ore left in just the immediate Labrador West area right now. So we could continue for 200 more years of royalties from Labrador West going into the coffers of this province, but this only can happen if we invest in the people of Labrador West.

It's no good to have a great big iron mine up there and nobody to work in it. It's not great if you go up there and there are no doctors in the hospital to look after miners. It's not great if there are no child care workers working in daycares. It's not great because we actually have a shortage of health care workers, we have a shortage of teachers, we have a shortage of child care professionals, we have a shortage of government service employees, we have a shortage of occupational health and safety officers, we have a shortage of highway enforcement officers and we have a shortage of actual people to work in the DMV. We actually have a shortage of everything. So why would someone go work in Labrador West, in the great paying mining industry, if there are no services to surround them?

This is my problem right now that I have, there's no clear plan to address some of these issues. There's no clear plan to address my teacher shortage. There's no clear plan to address my shortage of

occupational health and safety officers. So this is the thing that I will say: we've committed 70 years of providing billions and billions of dollars on the health and safety of 2,000 miners into the province's coffers, but I have no commitment of investment in the people of Labrador West. That's my problem with this budget because I have no clear plan on how we're going to address this issue.

We're far flung from the rest of the province. I'm a day's flight out from here in St. John's. I'm on the far western edges of Labrador. I understand that, but at the same time, I have over 10,000 people living in Labrador West. It's not like we're some outpost camp, we're vibrant, large municipalities. This is the thing that is bothering me is that I don't see any clear vision here on how to address issues like that.

I have a housing crisis in Lab West. I have 70-year-old houses going for \$600,000, a little two-bedroom house. I have people calling my office daily saying I can't find anywhere to rent, I can't find anywhere to go. My homeless shelter has three beds in it. These are the things that are bothersome.

The people that are calling me don't qualify for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. The people that are calling me looking for housing make good wages, it's just that there's no affordable housing because there's no investment into my community.

This is the issue. We want to be a part of the revenue stream. We want to be a part of the economy of this province, but, at the same time, we have no tools to deal with the situation and the issues of the region.

We have seniors – and I'll thank the minister for this, he did come up and met with us when I asked him to come up and met with us. He did do that. I'll give credit where credit is due on that situation. We have seniors that gave their life story. They came here in the 1960s. They were only

supposed to come up for a year to work, to see if they liked it. They ended up staying forever and a day and they don't plan on ever leaving Labrador West.

They shouldn't have any plan to leave Labrador West. They built the community; it's their community. They have every right to stay there. But they can't because there is no adequate seniors' housing. They have no place to go down to because the houses that are there, these 60- or 70-year-old houses are not adequate for a senior. They were never designed to be accessible. They were never designed to actually meet the needs of senior citizens, and that's fine. So that's one issue.

But on top of that, I only have a very limited number of long-term care beds. I have no level 2 facilities for individuals, so a senior's house might be a little too much independence, they need a little thing – I have nothing. The answer is ship them out. Ship them back to a place they've never heard of on the Island, never been in their entire life, and that's where they're going to send them to live out their retirement and their years because there's no investment into the people of Labrador West. There's no investment into the people that continued to stay there.

These families that came up to Labrador West, they came up there for – they were only going to stay for a couple of years, they ended up building a family. They built families and their families built families. I'm the fourth generation to live in Lab West. My daughter is going to be the fifth. The thing is we keep making more miners. We keep the economy of Labrador going. We keep the economy of this province going because we're an actual community, we're not a camp. We're a vibrant community and we keep having families and we keep growing the region. The thing there that we do is we keep passing down the mining jobs to our children. I know a situation where a grandfather, a father and a child all work in the same spot in the mine.

It's almost like it's a generational thing, passing it down. It's no different than how the fishery even worked. We keep passing it down. In Lab West, we keep passing down our mining tradition, which is interesting in itself because there are not a lot of places left in the world that actually do that, but we still do it.

I had an interesting one where – it was just aired on CBC, *Still Standing* – he actually interviewed the current USW president for Tacora and talked about his grandfather was in the department, his father was in the department, he was in the department and his uncles were all there and their last name was Joy. They actually made the joke that you can always find a Joy in Wabush mines. They actually mean a person named Joy.

Interestingly enough, that is the reason. But at the same time, will this continue? Can we continue this or are we going to be downgraded to no more than fly-in, fly-out because the investments are not there, the needs are not being met.

The actuality of it is that we provide a great global product when it comes to mining. We have some of the best iron ore in the entire world. We have actual companies lining up wanting it. But if there is no one there to mine it, it is really hard to sell something if you can't get it out of the ground. The people that get it out of the ground are the people of Labrador West. Once again, they have been doing it for 69 years; it will be the 70th anniversary in 2024 of continuous iron mining in a region.

There are not many places in this world that get to say their mine was open for 70 years, but I get the privilege of saying that. I get the privilege of saying that my grandfathers worked there, my dad worked there, I worked in the mine service industry and, hopefully, one of my two children will work in the mining industry. If not, so be it, but at the same time, I really do hope that they pass it down because it is four generations of people that worked in Labrador West.

At the same time, we just want the investments. We want the same thing that is attributed to every other part of this province. Other parts of this province get retirement facilities. They get the investments in the health care and that.

I know we're talking about right now we have some issues around the other – but a lot of the issues that other parts of this province are dealing with recently we've been dealing with for at least minimum of a decade. We have always had issues with recruiting doctors and stuff but there was never anything back then to even help us. Only now that we are seeing stuff, but even what we're seeing now is still not exactly what we need for Labrador West.

I have never seen it in my entirety of life in Labrador West that we actually had a full complement of doctors up there. Now we're reinventing health care and all that, but at the same time there was never any help afforded to us when it came to that stuff.

I remember writing the minister when I first got elected in 2019 asking for help for recruiting doctors and now we're still really needing them.

At the same time, we have a teacher shortage. I have teachers telling me that they're constantly on internal coverage. I have IRTs telling me that they just don't have the help to keep up with the workload. I have teachers telling me if the situation don't change, they're quitting. So I'll be short even more teachers.

So how are we supposed to get the next generation ready? How are we supposed to actually provide an education at the same level as everyone else in the province gets to enjoy? There's nothing here I've seen so far that gives me the confidence of knowing that recruitment and retention of teachers in rural places, including Labrador, is a priority, because it's all great, fine and dandy to have all these things but it's not great when we have no teachers. It's an important part

of society. It's an important part of life to have our youth ready, but they need an education. They need to make sure they have a proper education.

I make the point, too, starting this year, we'll have a deaf child starting kindergarten in Labrador West. They've been trying to recruit the right people to fill that role, but with the way the recruitment and retention is and the lack of affordable housing in Labrador West, will we even be able to get the right people or the right educated professionals to help that deaf child? Because he has a human right to that education.

Unless something changes we're going to be still spinning our wheels and just the same thing, internal coverage and unfilled roles and combining classes and all that stuff. None of that was ever heard of when I went to school. It's only a more recent kind of situation that is happening there. I've had teachers tell me when we were under the Labrador school board the stuff that they're seeing today would never fly. Now they're noticing less maintenance work being done, less recruitment efforts made for teaching.

So what happened? Where can we fix it and where are we going to put a stop in? Because I know one thing is, yes, affordable housing, but lucky enough the Labrador school board left an apartment building to the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, and it has a great empty bottom floor, that used to be apartments, that is sitting empty, that could actually solve some of the issues, but I don't see anything in the budget to fix that up.

MTAP – and I know it's something I mention a lot. Yes, I know that it got moved over to a stand-alone Labrador Affairs department. That's one thing, but unless we make the meaningful changes that actually is patient focused, that actually is more focused towards helping patients get out to their appointments and get back from their appointments, or in the case of an

emergency situation get back from an emergency trip out of the region, then it will be no different. That's what a meaningful change has to make. Is that we actually need a plan to address the issues with MTAP and to actually make it a patient-focused program that wants to help people. End red tape, bureaucracy and foolish policies that actually hinder more than help.

That's what I want to see, but we only just see a line that said MTAP is moving from one department to the other. So until we see the actual details of what is actually going to happen there, then there is no change. That's one of the things that I know my district really wanted to see. That was one of the biggest things they wanted to see because it's something that affects them every single day that was a problem, a hindrance to actually receiving health care.

Speaker, it's an important thing that people receive health care in a timely fashion. A part of the social determinants of health is actually receiving your health care when you need to receive it. People holding off appointments because they can't afford to go out or trying to hold off one appointment because you know you might have to go to another doctor while you're out there, to try to group it all together so you only have to make one trip, because that's all you can afford, is actually affecting people's health, especially seniors. As you age, there is more chronic illness and things like that. It's actually the biggest group of people that kind of group their appointments together to try to afford it, to be able to get out of town, is the seniors. This is where we have to have a more senior-focused thing with MTAP as well.

That's one thing I wanted to see in this budget but I didn't see it, was actually changing that program. We have a few other things that we want to see changed, that we want to see that actually focuses in on how we actually deliver health and stuff in Labrador. One of the things we've been asking in Labrador West is more nurse

practitioners. We understand that we can't always get a doctor; we can't always receive that in Labrador West. We understand there are still challenges, but we want to see some solutions and that.

I know that a lot of people in Lab West would say it's trying to get more nurse practitioners working to the full scope of practice inside the hospital. Because, at the same time, there's just a lot of people in what we call emerg – in the emergency room, outpatients, all kinds of different names for it. There are individuals that are waiting for things. They don't have a family doctor; they don't have any other means to get that, so they're in emerg waiting for different things that they don't need to be there. They need a different avenue, a different route, a more clinic-based approached.

I've asked for that even before 2020. In 2019 I asked for that. We haven't seen any of those kinds of changes or anything like that, that actually were patient-focused that were helping with the social determinants of health, but also trying to help ease the system in a way that the mom up there with a child with a fever, or someone up there for a prescription refill because they don't have a family doctor, those kinds of things. These are changes that we were asking for, that we wanted to see in Lab West. It was 2019; we're now into 2023 going on 2024. We haven't seen it come to fruition, we haven't seen any consideration and we haven't seen any actual help with any of those things.

I'm still waiting. I asked the department in 2019 – still waiting. But at the same time it doesn't work unless you have any recruitment and retention. We'll see, but I just want to know, where is the recruitment? Where is the retention? Where is the actual plan to do these liberties? Lab West isn't St. John's. Lab West isn't Gander. Lab West is Lab West. It's a unique place that actually has unique challenges that needs its own approach. I can go back to the dissolving of

the Labrador School Board and the current situation we face in education in Lab West now.

Now we have the end of LG Health and this new provincial board. We talk about, you know, the uniqueness and challenges of Labrador, but is centralizing all the services without any voice really going to work for Labradorians? We were used to having at least a say, at least some decision-making power when it comes to Labradorians, but at this point right now it's a bit of scepticism. We saw what happened with the Labrador School Board at the end of that and the Newfoundland and Labrador English School Board where we have actually seen a reduction in services, we received a reduction in attention paid to us and we've see a reduction in that. This is what our fear is now with the way the system is going to be set up for the regional health councils and the now more centralized board for the delivery of health care.

We don't want a repeat of what happened with the education system in Labrador to be a repeat of what happens with the health board. We don't want that. We want to have our say. We want to give our opinion but also at the same time we want to give our perspective of how rural that our region is.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Always a pleasure to stand and represent the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and specifically my District of Terra Nova. Nelson Mandela said: "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

We just received a budget where the word "poverty" doesn't appear. If you leave and drive out around our communities, you will quickly see that poverty is rampant. Every community in Newfoundland and Labrador have people that are struggling to survive. We sit here and we talk about what we're doing to overcome these things on a daily basis and we present a budget and we chirp across about why people are going to support or not going to support, but the reality of it is I believe everyone in this room thinks there are things in this budget that are good. It's the things that don't go far enough.

When you have a senior who is choosing between home heat and food and travelling to see a loved one and we offer them 19 cents a day as a solution, we know that's an issue. When we have seniors that are struggling every day whether they should take a full dose of their medication or a half a dose or any medication whatsoever because they can't afford it, then we have issues.

When we look at this province and we talk about poverty, I think the one thing that we overlook, and we overlook it with just about every single thing that we do in this House, and that is our issue with population and geography. We think that all things are equal, but all things in this province are not equal.

So when we address things, we need to address things on a level where it affects everyone in this province, not just certain segments. I say that by means of, as an example, MTAP. We all know there's an issue with MTAP. I believe we all believe that it shouldn't cost somebody more to be sick if they live outside of St. John's or Corner Brook or Clarenville, somewhere where they can receive those levels of care, than it does if you live in rural Newfoundland. But the fact of the matter is, it does and it costs astronomically more. Our solution is to move MTAP to Labrador.

That was the solution. There's no outline as to how it's going to fix the problem. It's not just people in Labrador that suffer. Now I will say I grew up in Labrador; my mom is still in Labrador. I've dealt with health care issues from people from Labrador, I know what it costs and, yes, it needs to be addressed immediately, but so do the patients that leave here that go to Halifax for a kidney transplant or Toronto for a heart transplant, those things need to be addressed. When we've got patients up there for three, four, five, six weeks that haven't received funding from MTAP, it's a big problem. They're taking their poverty from Newfoundland and they're transposing it to another province while they're waiting to get care. They can't afford to eat. They've got families with them that are there looking after them, and they're not getting looked after.

We need to look at population and the geography of this province and understand that problems that exist in St. John's and the metro area exist outside. A great example, our initiative with busing for low-income people. Great initiative, 100 per cent, but guess what? If you live in Eastport, Newfoundland or if you live in St. Anthony or anywhere and you need to get somewhere, that's \$72 a month. I think it's \$72 or \$76, what the bus pass is equal to. If you're on social assistance, I guarantee you, you could use that \$72 or \$76. You could use it, I guarantee you. When you don't know if you've got enough money to buy Kraft Dinner, turn on your lights or take your medication and you've got to get a doctor's appointment, which isn't funded upfront, that \$76 could go a long way, and you need to take into consideration there is no busing. Most places don't have taxis. They don't have anything.

But we set up plans for St. John's and we forget about how it works right across the whole Island, because it's different everywhere and that is what we need for solutions. That is why I don't support the budget, because the budget looks at this

province as a whole and doesn't understand that the problems that exist in certain centres, exist everywhere, they're just different; all things aren't equal.

We need to treat people as equals in this province. The people who put us here deserve to live with the same dignity no matter where they are.

Then you look at all of the other things that happened in this province with regard to not for profits that help people out. If you think for a second that there's a Gathering Place in Clarendville, there's not. If you think there's a Gathering Place in Lewisporte or Springdale or Port aux Basques, there's not. So where do homeless people go? Where do down and out people go? I'll tell you where they go: nowhere. They don't have those options.

We forget about that every day. We think that we're doing the right things, but we're not doing the right things. If you're a senior in St. John's and you're struggling, guess what? You turn your heat off, you get aboard the Metrobus, you go to the mall, you sit down and you do what you can that day to make do. But if you're in rural Newfoundland, you don't have those options.

No different last year – and this year, obviously – with the heat pump solution that we put out. I own a heat pump. I was skeptical. I think it works remarkably well. I was actually shocked at how low my bill was, but I'll also say this: there are a lot of people in this province who cannot afford to put a heat pump in. It doesn't help them. Not only does it not help them, but there are a lot of people in this province that live in rural Newfoundland where they have 100-amp service. They don't even have the ability to put it in.

So we can talk about what we're doing for people, but sometimes we need to understand what it is we're not doing for people. People that live in rural

Newfoundland have different needs. They have different struggles and different problems than people who are living in the larger centres. That's where the budget misses. It misses people, the men and women in this province, that don't live in larger centres.

Geography and population is going to be a huge problem with everything we do, whether it's health care or regionalization or any of the things that we consider. Unfortunately, this government has always gone and said we're going to do what Nova Scotia has done or we're going to do what Ontario has done. Well, it doesn't work. It's not going to work.

I'll give you an example. I talked to a gentleman a couple of weeks ago, he lives in rural – no water to his house. So guess what he did? He took a risk. It's his risk, 100 per cent assumption of risk by the individual. He needed to get an artesian well. We all know when you get an artesian well they may or may not hit water. If they hit water, it could be salty water; it may not be any good. He took a risk. Most artesian well companies tell you that you will be charged for a minimum of a 200-foot drill. One hundred and thirty feet is what he had to go down to hit water, still got charged for 200 feet – \$12,000.

Guess what water is? It's essential. No different than the air we breathe, no different than the food we eat, water is essential. This is a 72-year-old man who had to go into his savings in order to pay for it. Guess what else happened? He got taxed on it. Guess what else? We sit here and we talk about choices and sugar taxes and we say people have choices. Guess what else we tax that nobody ever talks about? If the government wants to talk about healthy choices and their ability to help people, perhaps instead of implementing your sugar tax, they should have eliminated your tax on water.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: If you want to talk about doing something good for the people; if you want to talk about a province where there is 180-odd boil orders every single day, where communities don't have access to drinkable water, where they don't have access to it on a daily basis, yet we tax water; think about that.

I'm not talking about municipalities taxing for water that is used in a household. I'm talking about the individuals that have to drive to a store to buy bottled water or the individuals that takes it upon themselves to dig a well, get a liner, put an artesian well in; they get taxed on that. Government is taxing on an essential necessity of life and they brag about sugar tax and forget that water is taxed. We tax water and it is shameful.

So we talk about our wonderful sugar tax and the choices that people have, the choices that people should make; they should be drinking water, I have heard that; they should be drinking water, but we've got so many communities in this province and individuals that don't have access to water, it is absolutely shameful. So there is a good way to help people; why not eliminate the tax on water? Why not eliminate the fees associated with putting an artesian well in. Why not give people healthy choices where government doesn't reap the benefits from it. That's what we need to do.

So \$10-a-day child care. It's a wonderful idea; everybody should have access to child care. Child care is essential if we're going to spur on the economy, get people working, attract professionals to come here, lower income people, giving them an opportunity to get back into the workforce. It is a great idea but it is a very novel idea because the fact of the matter is you can take your \$10 and you can give it away to whoever you want but you have to have somewhere for your child to go and those places just do not exist. They do not exist.

I hear the other side talk about math all the time and we talk about taxes and all the

great plans and things that they do. I'll give you a good example of math – regressive taxes.

Home insurance: the elimination of home insurance tax only helps people who can afford to have home insurance. Now, think about that.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: If the minister wants to get up and speak about the people in rural Newfoundland that are choosing between insurance and heat and food, he is welcome to get up and do it. If not, give me my leeway, please.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: Stand up and speak.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: The bottom line is there are people who cannot afford to get insurance. So here is what 10 per cent of zero equals, this is the math: 10 per cent of zero is zero. That's the benefit they're getting; 10 per cent of zero is zero.

AN HON. MEMBER: Forty million dollars.

L. PARROTT: Fair, it is helping people who have money and can afford insurance.

AN HON. MEMBER: Forty million dollars.

L. PARROTT: Exactly, rich friends, people who can afford insurance. We have people in this province that cannot afford insurance, period. If you go to rural Newfoundland and you go somewhere where there are no fire stations, no ability of getting insurance in some of these places, tell me how it benefits those individuals. It doesn't. But it's okay, we tax water and we tax sugar. It is just as well to give the breaks on the other things, isn't it?

We talked about the carbon tax and how it's not the idea or this government's tax. Well, last May, the reality of it was this government right here supported the carbon tax. The Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation said I do support the price on carbon. I think it's important. The Member for Lake Melville said Newfoundland and Labrador is the third dirtiest of a subnational government in Canada. On a per capita basis – now, think about this. This is going right back to the whole idea of geography and population. On a per capita basis, the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, frankly, have the greatest carbon footprint. We need to step up and join in because, frankly, we haven't been doing that.

I'll remind the Members that we have Fermeuse. We have St. Lawrence. We have Muskrat Falls. We have Churchill Falls. We have LNG NL trying to bring natural gas out of the ground. We have Bay du Nord which will be one of the cleanest oil projects in the world.

If anybody in this House thinks that Newfoundland and Labrador isn't doing their job and trying to make this a greener, cleaner economy and place, I don't even know what we're doing in this House. The reality of it is the carbon tax is a regressive tax that this government over here supported, bragged and boasted about a made-in-Newfoundland solution that is gone by the wayside and now this tax will affect Newfoundland and Labradorians more than any other province in the country – more than any other province in the country. And what do we hear? I can tell you what I hear, crickets, not a word – crickets.

Roads announcements: We just got a big road announcement, certainly for this year, the \$240 million. It's great. I would argue we need more. I questioned if it just keeps up with inflation. I would say that the cost of tar and the cost of doing work has gone up substantially. I would argue exponentially, but I'd also say this announcement brings

into consideration millions and millions of dollars from last year. It would be great if once the government stood up and gave the true number. They left out the bridge in Shoal Harbour, the \$17-million bridge that's been announced three years in a row and is part of this money. There's no great increase. Smoke and mirrors, no different than last year's budget – smoke and mirrors.

Go to the 19 cents a day for seniors. Just think about that. As a young man, 19 cents could get you 19 gummy bears. You can't get gummy bears now for a cent a piece, I guarantee you. Just think of a senior sitting at home and they were just told that they were getting this raise – and that's how it was put out, it's a wonderful thing. If you do the math, it equals 19 cents a day.

Now, you tell me what 19 cents a day is going to do for you: \$6 a month, \$72 a year. Go get a new car, go pay your heat bill. You don't need to go to the mall to walk around. We got your back, seniors. We got you covered.

Long-term care facilities, level 3 – our hallways are full of seniors who are sick, sadly, some dying. We have long-term care facilities here who currently house level 3 patients that don't get paid for it. On a regular basis, they're released from these private home care situations to the hospitals. We need to find a way – because we all know that there are personal home care units that can look after level 3 patients. I'm not saying all things are equal and I'm not saying they all can do it, but they are out there and they can do it.

If government wants to look at a great way to certainly eliminate some of the strain on the hospitals, some of the strain on the homes, they would immediately find a way to do it. They do pay some homes in this province for level 3 care. They need to look at a way to do it for more. Every time a patient gets taken from a personal care home to a hospital, it creates a larger

burden on not just the hospital but it creates a burden on the families and the individuals involved. There's no way that anyone in this House can tell me that a 75- or 80-year-old man or women strapped down because they're a dementia patient in the hall of an ER is dignity. Nobody deserves that. We deal with it on a regular basis. It happens all the time.

We talk about health care and the strain on our ERs. Certainly, we've heard all about level 3 and level 2, Category A and B. The strain that, as an example, the hospital in Bonavista has put on Clarendville is monumental. We don't look at the roll-on effect of what happens. If we are to look after health care, we have to look after everyone. The bottom is it goes right back to the beginning thing I said: population and geography. If you live in Bonavista, as an example, or Trepassey for an ambulance or whatever, at the end of the day you need to know you have a level of care and an ability to get to the hospital or the care is there waiting for you or triage, some form of care. It's a very long way to go from Bonavista to Clarendville. You go to the ER and you get turned away and you don't know if you're going to make it or not – and we all know that we've had that happen. We know that it's happened.

We talk about our health care and it's interesting to listen to the minister the last couple of days talk about the combination of the health authorities. Now, we know that it has happened, but we don't know what it's going to do. I'd love for somebody to stand up and tell me that the combination of health care authorities is going to create 750 jobs for nurses and we're going to get them. We're going to have doctors. Nobody can tell us what it's going to do. The reality is that the administrative functions in the hospitals are not the problem right now. The problem is with the shortage of doctors and nurses and people's ability to get the care they not only need but deserve. Again, geography and population.

Talk about regionalization and the talk is gone quiet, but I always looked at the plan and I always thought Southwest Arm is an example. What a great little area for regionalization. Eastport Peninsula, what a great area for regionalization. They tried shared services and they got turned down by government. They applied for equipment and they were told that they couldn't get it because they're not a region. It makes no sense. We've got communities that are trying to work together and they're getting turned down. That's what this budget lacks.

This budget isn't about what's in it. It's about what's not in it, and what's not in it is a comprehensive health care plan and we can talk about, you know, the report – it just isn't getting implemented as long term. Short term is what we need. What isn't in it is a poverty reduction plan. What isn't in it is a solution for poverty for seniors. What isn't in it is an education plan, the things that are required to move the province forward.

We've got lots of exciting things on the cusp between wind energy and hydrogen, and there's no arguing that. If any of these projects come to fruition, it's a great stepping stone. If Bay du Nord moves forward, it's great. I actually believe the government, when they say they want all the work for Bay du Nord to be built here. I believe them. I give them that latitude in leeway but what upsets me is when projects like Terra Nova leave this province, after all the money we put in it, and they go to Spain after we hammered in this House that the work could be done here. With the exception of the work on the hull, we said it not only could but should be done here.

We have the women and men that can do the work. We have the skilled trades. We have the ability. We've proven it in the past that work should and must be done here. Guess what happened? The Terra Nova sailed to Spain for six or seven months. It had all the work done. It sailed back to Newfoundland. Guess where it's going now? It's on its way to Bull Arm for four or

five months to get all the work redone by Newfoundlanders.

It's shocking that we allow this to happen time and time again. We've seen it on multiple projects in the past, modules that have been built overseas have come back to the province when men and women in this province could have done the work, and when it goes to get commissioned, they find all the rework that has to be done and we end up doing it here anyhow. We should demand that that work gets done here. It should be done by the men and women of this province.

Anyhow, Speaker, over the next few days I'll have lots to say about the budget.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to stand and represent the people of the Humber - Bay of Islands any time in this House of Assembly on issues that they bring forth. Again, I thank them all for their confidence and the support that I get back home in the whole District of Humber - Bay of Islands.

Of course, the big topic now is the budget and, again, I've been on both sides. I've been here back in '89 and '90s when budgets were brought in by Clyde Wells and then in the Opposition part when I was here in the Opposition in 2003 and 2011 when we were here. So I had the privilege of being on both sides and understanding it.

Balancing a budget is hard for anybody, for everybody. I said that when we were in Opposition before, when we were in government and now again as the

independent, it is difficult. But there are times when you feel that there should be a focus on a certain group or a certain sector of our society.

I just want to say, and I know it's not out there in public yet, that there was in the budget, and I know there was a misunderstanding there, I say to the minister, and I know that, there are 500 new cataract surgeries going to be done in Western Newfoundland in the budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: I know it's supposed to be in the budget and I know it was a mistake not to have it slipped in the budget, so it wasn't intentional. It was just something that happened there, but there are 500 new cataract surgeries done. I know myself and the minister was going back and forth for a while on it but it worked out. I know now that the minister is in contact with the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association.

T. OSBORNE: I always listen to good advice.

E. JOYCE: The minister is in contact with the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association to try to make this annual because of the demographics and the program that they have in place that there will be a certain number every year. I know the minister has reached out to the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association in consultation to try and get this on an annual basis. If this is done, which I have full confidence that it will be done, there should be never another wait-list for cataract surgeries in Western Newfoundland again.

So I have to recognize that and the work that was done with that. I just want to say to everybody who supported me – I won't name names but they know who they are – and the people and the minister himself to get this done so I have to recognize that.

The big winners of that are the seniors, who right now their quality of life has dropped a lot. Now, please God, with this in place, they'll get back their quality of life and never again will another senior be able to have that misfortune of not having the eyesight done in a proper manner. I have to recognize that from the budget itself.

Another thing that is out in Western Newfoundland, I heard the minister answer a question today talking about the number of affordable housing projects that are going to be done in the province. It's not brought up in the House as much but I have written the minister, and I will give the minister credit, the minister does respond and he does try to put the issues that I bring forward to get done in a timely manner.

There is a housing crisis in the Corner Brook, Western region. There are a lot of people still staying in hotels. I know the minister just extended funding for emergency shelters for mainly men out in the Corner Brook area. I think last year they had 70 referrals, 75 referrals, no place to go and the funding was going to expire on March 31, but the minister did find the funding and it is extended for another year, which is great. So that is another issue that is in the Corner Brook area. We have a lot of requests for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

I'll say to the minister, and I know he's listening there attentively, there is a unit in the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing which needs repairs. I can name the building itself, it's in that area. The building itself can house about 60 families. I'm going back three or four years, at least 2020, at least 2019, that these repairs, if they were done there would be another 60 families with a place. This is the issue when you have a shortage of housing.

Then we always hear about, okay, what we have to do is we have to put more money into it or go get private companies to start doing subsidies when there is a building

owned by government that you can do the repairs. You don't have to spend millions of dollars at it but you can do repairs and you would satisfy 60 families in the Corner Brook area with that alone.

I know I wrote the minister on that and I trust that the work is going to be done. That would help a lot with the housing crisis in the – and a lot of those places, they've got three and four bedrooms; it can take the larger families.

So it's something that I'm bringing to the government's attention. I wrote the minister on it and, again, I'm saying, if there's money there that you're going to do repairs to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing –

P. LANE: He's nodding his Head.

E. JOYCE: He's nodding his head. I know now, I give the minister credit that he does respond and he does help out where he can. If he can't, he gets back to you and gives the rationale why it can't be done.

But that's something else, Mr. Speaker, that I asked the government to look at that will help the whole Corner Brook area, not just the Humber - Bay of Islands. It's going to help people that live in Pasadena, people who are living in apartments in Massey Drive, for example, and other areas in the Corner Brook area that it can be done.

The other thing I asked the government and I brought it up on several occasions, the LPNs, licensed practical nurses, there are many on the West Coast that would love to go into practice. Do you know what they need? They need two things. They need the government to help them set up an office because they wouldn't be able to keep a full-time office; set up an office for them and let them bill MCP.

P. LANE: Nurse practitioners.

E. JOYCE: Nurse practitioners – set up an office, let them bill MCP. But what you can

do, if for some reason because of the *Canada Health Act* you can't bill MCP – nurse practitioners – what you can do is hire them on through, say, Western Health, increase their scope of work and pay them reasonable and then you can do it that way. So you don't have to bill MCP. It's done. It's done around this province.

That would take such pressure off the shortage of doctors in Western Newfoundland that it would make some difference. That's an easy solution. You're not breaking the *Canada Health Act*. You're not breaking any rules and there are lots of spaces out – and I'll give you a good example. The old Canadian Tire building out there. We already have Western Health in that facility. We can find three or four offices in that facility, get the LPNs and put them under Western Health. There are three or four of them already under Western Health.

Get them to go out in the public and do the scope of practice. Give them remunerations for the work that they're going to do. You'll find some difference in the health care delivery. You'll take away from the wait times at the emergency departments in Western Newfoundland at the regional hospital, it would be unbelievable.

I brought that up before on several occasions and I know the government said a couple of times: well, what's your solution? There's the solution. There's the solution to help people who don't have doctors in Western Newfoundland: Corner Brook, Deer Lake, Bay of Islands area, up in Humber Valley, up in your area also. That would be a great solution and it can be done. The only thing we need to do is have the will to do it. That's another solution that we can help out a lot of people in Western Newfoundland.

I know that the Minister of Health and Community Services made an announcement that they're going to have nurses be able to give out some prescriptions and that and they have to go

through a system. Well, we have people there now who could do it – LPNs. We have people who could do it now. We have them right now.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: Pardon me? Sorry about that.

So that's another suggestion there for government that would help out a lot. The biggest concern that you hear all around Western Newfoundland is health care. Health care is the biggest concern. The other biggest concern that I hear on a regular basis is support for seniors.

I'm going to give a suggestion to the minister now, and I'm going to put it in perspective the way that a lot of seniors give it to me. A husband and wife are living in a house; they've lived there all their life. They're able and living in their house. All of a sudden, one spouse passes away. That house then has the same expenses but only has one income.

So my suggestion to the minister, if we're going to do some refund to people, let's target the people on that lower end. Let's try to help out the seniors, the lower end people, especially seniors especially if you're living in one house. It's hard to isolate that, but there has to be a way to do it. For example, if a senior is living in one house, it's the same expenses, and your spouse just passed away and you want to stay in your house, you're able.

You still got your licence, but all of a sudden you got the same heat bill, you got the same light bill, you got the same taxes. Those seniors are the ones that we need to target. I think there has to be some way to have a program put in place that we can target those seniors and the low-end earners of Newfoundland and Labrador. There has to be a way that we can do that.

If you can help out the seniors to stay in their own home, it takes away from the

health care bills that we're going to have, like long-term care. Long-term care will benefit from that. So that's something that I was asked to bring up on numerous occasions about the seniors. It's a tough balancing decision; it's tough. I've been on both sides, as I said, but these are the major concerns that I'm hearing out in the Humber - Bay of Islands and the Corner Brook area is seniors who just can't afford things, just can't afford it.

We have to come together as a government ourselves to say we have to find a solution. We're not going to get all the problems solved. All of us here can sit down here and if we all had a basket full of money, we're still not going to get all the problems solved but we have to help the people who are most vulnerable and right now it's the seniors who are vulnerable in the whole process in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm going to bring up another issue that I'm proud of and it's the new hospital in Corner Brook. I noticed there's money in the budget for the new hospital in Corner Brook. I know that one of the specialists here in St. John's, the Department of Health just put out that they're asking – put out a little package for people to go out because of the radiation in Corner Brook, to help start up the radiation in Corner Brook. The keys were supposed to be turned over.

This is the other thing – and I'm preparing government now, I will prepare government now and I'm giving you a heads up – in October the keys will be turned over to government. That's the plan in October, I think. Is it next year? Is it this year or next year? Anyway, the keys will be turned over. But here is the expectation that people of Western Newfoundland have that the hospital will be ready to go in October, but it won't be.

So I'm just saying here now to the government, I'm giving you a heads up because I don't want people to have this expectation and then all of a sudden be

dropped. We should put out the idea now that once the keys are turned over, it's going to take a while to make sure all of the deficiencies are done. It's going to take a while to move the equipment over to the new hospital. But that has not been explained to the people because people who come to me say the new hospital is opening in October. I say no, they turn the keys over. The radiation won't be starting in October – it won't be starting.

So that's something for the minister, if he wants to take a bit of advice from a person who is out there and who has seen it before, is the expectations. And what's going to happen then is the people who got all the expectations are going to be saying, well, where's our health care? Look what's happened with our health care. A lot of people are going to be planning that the hospital is going to be open and it won't be.

It can't be. It's not that it's going to be delayed. This is not critical. This is not being critical. This is just being factual. When they move into the new long-term care facility, they build it in phases. There is still a wing not open yet. They build in phases.

So that's something I raise to the Minister of Health and Community Services, that if you went out and had a discussion with some Chamber of Commerce and explained that about the hospital, you'll get the keys but the facility won't be up and running in October 2023. I can tell you that, that's just a bit of advice that I have.

I'm glad that the radiation – I'm glad that Health and Community Services put out a proposal, let's get the people to move out to start it up because it takes a while to get the equipment and what you need and get the staff for the radiation for the new hospital in Corner Brook. I know that's in the process because I know the person who's looking forward to coming out – the specialist who is going to look forward to coming out and help settle it up. I'm looking forward to that.

The day that a person from Western Newfoundland won't have to come to St. John's to get radiation will be a proud day for all of us here. It will be a proud day. It will be a better day for the people who don't have to leave their loved ones, come into St. John's. They will be able to go, have the comforts of their home, have the family supports there and have the supports of the (inaudible) hospital. That's going to be a proud day. That's something that I'm going to look forward to and, hopefully, when it's up and running, it will be soon in late '23, but I say it will be more in 2024.

I'm going to speak about the district for a few minutes, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak about the Humber - Bay of Islands. I know I sent an email to the minister about the capital works water for Lark Harbour. To be fair to the minister, I only sent it the weekend and we had one conversation with it and he's going to look at it. There's only one place in the whole Humber - Bay of Islands now without water and that is the Lark Harbour, Little Port Road. That's very important. They asked for the priorities and I put in Lark Harbour has the number one priority. Do it as a one-shot deal. They just did about \$3 million worth of work in the lower part, all done the summer— one summer, all done. Walk in and get it done.

I know I've brought it to the minister's attention. I know that the minister is going to review it. I just hope that will be done because people without water in that area — and there's a lot of them who don't have water or don't have access to any source, any brook, any spring, they're always carrying water.

This day in Lark Harbour people are still carrying water, especially in the summertime when it is dry, they have to go further and further to carry water. I know MP Gudie Hutchings made this a priority when she spoke to the town. I'm just raising this on behalf of the Town of Lark Harbour to let the minister know the urgency of this project and that it is the number one priority that I

made — to make that priority number one, do it as one project instead of piecemeal; doing it half this year, half the next year, a bit the following year. Let's walk in and give those people the dignity and the quality of life that they deserve and give them proper drinking water. I know the minister is going to look at it. I look forward to a very positive decision on that and, if not, I guess I'll be bringing it up again on a few occasions.

Again, these are concerns that I'm hearing, even in the budget. There are some good things in the budget. There are some things the nurses aren't pleased with in the budget; the nurses are saying they were left out. The teachers are left out of the budget.

I'm going to bring up again — and I heard it brought up today — the 1.6-kilometre busing. I know the decision was there when I was in government but there were accommodations made. I know when the PCs were in government, the same thing. But now with the high volumes of traffic and all that, we have to do better with the 1.6 kilometres so kids can get on the bus. I know there is a recommendation for K to 6, but there has to be a better way. There just has to be a better way.

I know a person home, he lives in Curling, they are 1.51 kilometres away, they can't get the bus; 1.51 kilometres away, but they can go get on a courtesy bus. For them to walk down and walk opposite from the school for them to get the courtesy bus, they have to walk further. It's just wrong, it's just wrong. I urge the government — and I support the PC Opposition in that move and I will support anything that is going to help eliminate the 1.6-kilometre busing.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Again, it's a pleasure to speak on behalf of the constituents of Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans and everything that's going on out in that district and, of course, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'll start out, of course, it's a running theme here with the budget not seeing the word poverty and stuff, but I'm going to take a little bit of a different route and just highlight one thing that I'm happy with, with the budget and then I'll throw over again, but that's the Lionel Kelland Hospice.

I know a lot of work goes into budgets and the Lionel Kelland Hospice will be getting an operating budget of \$1.2 million a year. It's great news. Hopefully, that goes far enough to operate it for the year and they don't run into any issues because it's a very important project, not just to Central Newfoundland and Labrador, but to the entire province.

I believe Central Health put in a quote of \$2 million to operate it a year. The former premier put in about \$1.3 million, I believe, but this government landed on \$1.2 million, which we'll see if it works, but we are happy with. I am happy that there's operating money for the Lionel Kelland Hospice so the people out there that are fundraising can fundraise for other things, not just the hospice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Having said that, when the other side talks about you're going to vote against this, this and this sort of thing, I don't think it's a fair comparison. I'll just try to give you some sort of an analogy to compare it even better again.

If I were to buy a house at \$200,000 and they said okay, well, it comes with a beautiful garage, beautiful fenced backyard, brand new stainless steel appliances, four bedrooms, two bathrooms. Sounds fantastic, it's a great price. I'd buy it. If I went down into the basement and they said the only problem, Tibbs, is they've got a

small crack in their foundation along the bottom here and it does tend to leak from time to time. If I don't buy that house, I'm not turning down a garage, I'm not turning down a beautiful two bathroom, four-bedroom house, a beautiful backyard, stainless steel appliances, I'm not saying no to that. I'm saying no to the overall deal. I think that's a better comparison when we're talking about the budget because we're not saying – whichever way the vote goes – if it's a no vote, it's not a no vote against the entire budget. We're just saying that there are things in there that we would have liked to see differently, we would have liked to have done differently and so on and so forth because there are things there left out.

I'll start off with the seniors, and I know it's been touched on quite a bit here today so far. Nineteen cents a day: we're all going to be there one day, we are. I know the fiscal restraints, I'm well aware of them. But \$72 a year, \$6 a month, or whatever it is for seniors, by God that doesn't even come close to keeping up with inflation where we were three years ago. It doesn't even come close to it. Unfortunately, the seniors now have to carry this with them and it's unfair.

The Member for Bonavista stood up and talked about a lady in this district, \$650 a month. It's impossible. It's impossible. These older folks, we're all going to be there one day, like I said, and it's important now that we set the foundation to ensure that everybody is taken care of as they get older. Because, believe it or not, that's going to play a very important part when it comes to getting people to come to Newfoundland and Labrador, our immigrations status, people from all over Canada – we want them to come here. We want to boost our economy, but we need the people power to do it. So that's what I would say.

So if somebody is going to move to Newfoundland and Labrador, they're going to ask themselves some questions, of course. What's there for young families? What's there for employment? How are their

seniors being treated? What's their poverty reduction plan? If we want people to come here, including health care professionals, then by God we had better get a handle on those things to make Newfoundland and Labrador the most attractive province in all of Canada to move to where somebody can't say no. We want those people right here in our own backyard because it'll help our province grow and it'll grow even stronger. That's something that we should be looking at and something we should be invested in.

Crown lands: it's been brought up by my neighbour from Exploits there numerous times, years and years of waiting and red tape for Crown land. If somebody wanted to come here and buy a piece of land and build a house, it's crazy. Right?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

C. TIBBS: I've sent files. We don't want to get personal because if I start bringing about –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

C. TIBBS: Not a problem. We will.

So I just got a commitment from the minister that he's going to fix my Crown land issues. So to my constituents, you should have them cleared up by the end of the week.

Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that.

I'm going to move over to health care for a second now.

Back in the fall when –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Order, please!

I in no way want to stifle debate, but I would like for us to be respectful in the House.

The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you.

If the minister spoke that much when he was supposed to it would be a lot better.

I want to move on to health care. When the new Minister of Health and Community Services took over his portfolio back in the fall, I believe it was or whenever it was, I sent him an email, immediately, and asked him if I could meet with him. Less than an hour he had a phone call to me and it was absolutely phenomenal. It was great. It was phenomenal.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: I asked him if he would come and meet me in Grand Falls-Windsor and see on the ground, right there, the health care workers, what they have to say, the patients and what not. This happened last week. Kudos to the minister for coming in and meeting with some of the doctors, some of our advanced care paramedics, the nurses, of course. It was a fantastic meeting. I believe that everybody learned something and I hope that it was a takeaway where, when you were talking to those people on the ground, you get a different sense of really what's going on.

Because when you look into the eyes of the people who don't want to be here anymore because they're so overwhelmed, you don't get that sense on a piece of paper in a report. You need to talk to these people and these people need to be heard. The health care professionals of Newfoundland and Labrador are very important and they want to be heard so we thank him for that.

One admirable moment I had, I tell this story, John Campbell is a doctor in Grand Falls-Windsor, he's a friend of mine, a great doctor. When we went into his ER, the minister said, okay, what do you need first? John Campbell turned to his seven or eight

nurses and said I need more of these fine people right here in order to do this job.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: That was very admirable. I thought that was great on John, but it reflects what the doctors and health care professionals truly believe within Newfoundland and Labrador. The nurses are the crux of what we need. They're our bedside manner. They're the people who sit with those when they die in palliative care. They're the ones that are comforting the families as well as the doctors. Do you know what? We need to take care of them. We don't want them to feel disrespected or left out, by no means. We know it's definitely a battle for them right now.

The minister talked to one doctor there, she said, the money is not the problem for me. I'm overwhelmed. I can't do this anymore. I'm on the verge of leaving this province.

So just talk to the nurses, talk to the doctors, see what the issues are because sometimes it might not be just money. It might be something else. I know you're dealing with thousands of personalities, but to not listen to the health care professionals – I know we've talked about this many times – to not listen to the health care professionals, it's a complete slap in the face to them.

They are the ones that will tell you what they need. They will tell you exactly what they need. Now it could be something small, it could be something big, but they will let you know exactly what they need to get them to stay here. Once that ball starts rolling, because this Catch-22 of health care professionals being short handed, overworked and then leaving because the stress can be too much sometimes, well that just creates a vacuum once again for less and less health care professionals, for more and more health care professionals to get overwhelmed and you get your Catch-22. It's a rolling ball that just doesn't stop. If

we can get a handle on that and start to get people to stay here, more people will stay because that's the biggest thing I hear is that they are just overwhelmed and they are overworked.

We talked about virtual care with the minister when he came out. We showed him how it was run in Grand Falls-Windsor, the downfalls, what we needed for supports there. Virtual care is very important, it is, I truly believe that it is important, it has a place in Newfoundland and Labrador and all of Canada, but it has to be done right. It needs to be done right, that the supports are there. The only people that are going to tell you how to do it right, again, are the people on the ground that are doing it day in and day out.

The ambulatory care in Grand Falls-Windsor, the same thing. We have one ambulance to service a lot of people and one ambulance on call. We want to make sure that we don't have any big, big emergencies in Grand Falls-Windsor and surrounding areas because one ambulance just might not cut it.

We talked about the human resources challenges once again. We want to ensure that they're taken care of for whatever they need. Human resources challenges are everywhere. In Grand Falls-Windsor we experience them a little bit differently because with so many diversions, shutdowns and doctor shortages, well, we get that influx from all over surrounding communities. It's just the way it is.

When I wrote the minister back in September I told him Grand Falls-Windsor is a contingency plan. There is no backstop to that. Those communities that lie outside of Grand-Falls Windsor, they need our hospital. If something happens or if the acute care in Grand Falls-Windsor is not taken care of in a proficient manner to ensure the success of it for the future, well b'y God, then we're in a lot of trouble I can guarantee you.

So I'll throw it to doctors, nurses and all the support staff in Grand Falls-Windsor hospital. Thank you so much for taking on the surrounding communities around you. You're all heart. I got nothing but love for you. It just goes to show that we are one community in Newfoundland and Labrador. But they are overwhelmed and it is because of the shutdowns and diversions in other communities, but they take it on every single day. My God, it's great to see.

I have one nurse in Grand Falls-Windsor, her and her partner are both nurses. She has MS and was just diagnosed. She needs a drug to continue to do her job. I wrote and asked the department about it and basically they said, no, they will not cover it. She has her own insurance plan, which does not cover it as well.

The drugs are a little bit expensive but that's okay. We're hoping that somebody else takes a look at this, because if she can't get her drugs covered, I guarantee you they'll be covered in another province. Somebody will find a way to get these two nurses to come to their province, because to cover a drug might be worth keeping those two nurses right there. If they leave, again, that's two more nurses that we can definitely have or that we should have, but, unfortunately, they're going to be gone as well.

I'd like to take a quick moment and talk about mental health. I enjoy getting up and talking about mental health because I think it's very, very important. You can't do anything when your mental health is at stake. It affects every facet of your life. It affects your work, your family life, your leisure time and your sleep. It affects every facet of your life and we've all felt it here. Some take it on and control it a little bit more than others and some people, well, they have difficulty controlling it altogether and it just seems as though they slide deeper down that rabbit hole, as it affects every facet of their life.

So I'd like to see a little bit more towards mental health. I know there are some things there and we're very happy to see them as well, but without proper mental health supports in this province, we will crack like the foundation I talked about earlier in this speech. We will crack and crumble. It will affect our economy. It will affect our health care system.

To those people out there, I know in my district, I'm sure in any district, if you need the supports to find, if you don't know where to go, reach out to your MHA. Everybody here should have those supports, should have a list of those supports. Sit down and meet with them, just listen to them. Sometimes you just have to listen to them.

I talked to a couple of people – just a couple of quick stories about dads in my district that I talked to. One husband, his wife hasn't had her hair done like she usually gets done in a couple of years and he beat himself up over that. He beat himself up real, real hard over that. That's what he said, Chris, I don't need anything for myself. I just wanted to give my wife the money to get her hair done like she used to. Something as simple as that.

Another dad I was talking to talked about white milk. He goes to his fridge and if there's just a small bowl of white milk left, he's got a family of four or five; he doesn't drink it. He leaves it for them. So the parents out there, the societal pressures that are on you can be enormous sometimes but a lot of them are fake and they can be ignored, trust me. You don't need everything; the consumerism is absolutely crazy. You don't need everything out there; just right now sustain the family love that you have, come close to the family. Lean on those supports, we have them in our offices. We can help, I guarantee you.

So mental health is something that I've been advocating for quite some time now. Again, it affects every facet of your family.

Oil and gas and mining industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, we need to lean on that like there's no tomorrow. It's huge. Oil and gas it's not going anywhere. It's here to stay. We need to embrace it. We need to love it. We need to know that it pays for our schools, hospitals, our health care system. We're so lucky to have it. I want to ensure that it's in Newfoundland and Labrador's future for quite some time to come, generations to come even.

We talk about electric vehicles and stuff, but listen we're years out from that. When you think about electric vehicles, it's not the most – when you're mining cobalt and stuff like that in the Congo or in Africa, you want to see some of those conditions people are working in. So to say it's ethically right, I think is a bit of stretch when it comes to those things because there are a lot things that people do not know about these minerals that are sourced each and every day.

Oil and gas is here to stay and it should be. Newfoundland and Labrador, we have the population of less than half of the City of Edmonton – half the City of Edmonton – we have our population of that in our entire province. We should be able to get this right as we move forward.

Mining in Central, it's picking up and we couldn't be more excited about it. But we want to ensure that the red tape is gone, that the red tape is little to no existence for new companies that want to come in and give it their all and employ people and stuff like that. We have a government that welcomes them with open arms, rolls out the red carpet and is willing to work with them in whatever they need, when it comes to the future mining right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We're going to be happy about that.

I'll just take the last minute here and congratulate – if I don't get a chance to do it again – all the graduating students that are about to graduate this year in 2023.

Newfoundland and Labrador can have a bright future; it will have a bright future.

I was so proud of this place. I remember going away to work and people would say something about you love your home province. I always used to make the same joke. I would say if that Island sank in the ocean tomorrow, I'd sink with it. That's how much I love this province and I still do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: I believe we can get that pride back. We have to get that pride back so graduating students don't want to go anywhere else. They want to stay right here in Newfoundland and Labrador because we have so many things to offer.

The future can be bright. It will be bright. We here in the Opposition tend to give it everything we got to ensure that those students have a bright future and they stay right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It's been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

If I can have your attention, just before we adjourn, I just want to remind you that the Moose Hide Campaign will commence tomorrow morning at 8:15 in the Speaker's boardroom. We do have some special guests coming. We'll be coming to the Assembly at 8:45. So I'd encourage all Members to come out and support the Moose Hide Campaign.

This House now stands adjourned until 10 tomorrow morning.

On motion, the House adjourned at its rising until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.