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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, in the public gallery today, I would like to welcome Trinity Hogan, who will be recognized in a Member's statement this afternoon. Trinity is joined by her parents, Blair and Kelly, and her siblings, Tiffany and Ty.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of St. John's Centre, Terra Nova, Topsail - Paradise, Torngat Mountains and Bonavista.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House to congratulate Mom's Girls comedy, a sketch comedy group based in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, on representing the province in this year's Toronto Sketch Festival. An annual festival that chooses groups from all over Canada and the US to perform.

The group participated in the Comedy Road Trip panel, where they highlighted the history of comedy and culture in Newfoundland and Labrador and how it influenced them to become artists. They also had the top selling show at this year's festival and sold out both of their shows – no joke.

Members Elizabeth Hicks, Andie Bulman, Allison Kelly and Stephanie Curran formed Mom's Girls comedy in 2018 with a shared mission to make the comedy community

and its content more accessible, welcoming and safe for all.

Since formation, they have left their mark on the arts community in the province with over eight sold out shows, a children's TV show on Bell Fibe, titled *Tales from the Floordrobe*, and just last year all members were asked to audition for *This Hour Has 22 minutes*.

I ask Members to join me in honouring Mom's Girls comedy on continuing the long tradition of comedy here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Clarenville All Stars that participated in the 2023 Winter Games in Grand Falls-Windsor.

After years of cancellations, these Special Olympians had the opportunity to rise again. This multi-sport competition saw over 400 athletes, coaches, managers and mission staff, not to mention the numerous volunteers that made this event successful.

Every person should watch a Special Olympian compete to understand what true sportsmanship is. They are truly happy for each and every competitor.

I'd like to take this time and ask you to join with me and congratulate the athletes from the Clarenville All Stars. In the 100-metre snowshoe race: Kate finished first; Diana, second; Angela, fifth. The 200-metre snowshoe race: Diana, first; Kate, second; Angela, fourth. In the 400-metre snowshoe race: Kate, first; Angela, third. In the 800-

metre snowshoe race: Kate finished second.

In team bowling, yellow division, gold medallists: Bradley, Brent, Nick, Rod and Katelyn. Bowling individual awards went to Brent, Bradley, Rod, Nick and Katelyn also.

The never-ending dedication and support from teachers, friends and family is key. The smiles on their faces will never be forgotten.

Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, recently I had the pleasure of attending the annual Conception Bay South athletic awards and Hall of Fame induction ceremony at the Manuels River Hibernia Interpretation Centre where some of the best were nominated. Most of the nominees were in the junior male and female Athlete of the Year categories. In total, there were 44 nominees in seven categories and four lifelong achievers inducted into the Hall of Fame.

The breakdown for the awards for 2022 are as follows: Senior Male Athlete of the Year, Ben Stringer; Senior Female Athlete, Hope Bishop Frizzell; Junior Female Athlete, Anna Snow; Junior Male Athlete, William Osmond; Executive of the Year, Krista Tobin; and Team of the Year, the CBS Kiwanis Minor Baseball Association's Under 13 AA team.

The four lifetime achievers inducted into the CBS Hall of Fame were: hockey official and administrator, Wayne LeDrew; basketball, softball and hockey standout, Mark Duff; multi-award winning hockey, fast pitch softball and golf player, Russ Parsons; and pioneering hockey goaltender, Rene Perrin.

Speaker, everyone are winners and I congratulate all who are nominated and being recognized as one of the best in the area.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Simeon Nicodemus Nochasak was born in Hebron in 1936. Forced resettlement took Simeon and his young family south to Hopedale in 1959, and then to Makkovik in 1961 to join his father.

In Hebron, Inuktitut was spoken. Only upon moving in Makkovik did he begin to understand English, but he remembered that our grandmother, Muriel, always spoke to him in Inuktitut and that made him feel good.

First, he fished, but then found solid work as a carpenter with Ted Andersen building houses in Makkovik, also stages and docks at fishing places such as Turnavik, Black Island and Iron Bound.

Simeon's legacy is his faithful service to the Moravian Church as organist and Inuktitut church reader. Initially, Simeon played the Inuktitut services, later doing both Inuktitut and English. Quite the task during festival days and Holy Week, with four church services per day. All his time was volunteered.

Simeon passed away February 2 this year, leaving our community with great emptiness. His expert knowledge of old ways and music now gone. No more asking him about church traditions. No more humming tunes of hymns to play for the next service. His knowledge and smile are now just memories.

Thank you, Simeon, for your service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, Trinity Hogan, one-third of a triplet born to Blair and Kelly, is a 13-year old, Grade 8 student from Bishop White School in Port Rexton. Trinity is very active in athletics, exceptionally strong in academics and recently achieved something that no other Newfoundlander nor Labradorian has achieved prior.

Trinity was the recipient of one of only 23 Merit Awards in the 2022-23 Lions International Peace Poster Contest, theme of Lead with Compassion. The posters were judged at multiple district levels before reaching the international level, at which point they had narrowed down to 120 posters.

Competing with over 600,000 applicants from 60 countries, Trinity's art submission based on parameters of its originality, artistic merit and portrayal of the theme, was the recipient of this outstanding achievement. Such a high degree of positivity and commendable vision from a future leader.

Trinity recites a quote: "Peace is our help offered to those in need. I want to inspire people to be united because the future is in our hands, and in order to build it, we have to help each other."

I ask Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the outstanding achievement of Trinity Hogan, Port Rexton.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize that April 22 was Earth Day.

We are experiencing the impacts of our changing climate each and every day. This is why we are working hard to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect our natural environment and reduce waste.

This year's theme was Invest in Our Planet.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, our investments of time, energy and funding to battle climate change are paying off. The most recent greenhouse gas emissions for 2021 are 8.3 megatons – a 13 per cent decrease from 2020 and this is the second lowest level of emissions since 1992. This positions us on our course towards achieving our net zero and emission reduction commitments.

We continue to advance on our Climate Change Action Plan, and through our energy efficiency and fuel switching programs we are anticipating another reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by a further 615,000 tons by 2030.

Today and every day, I encourage my fellow Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to find more ways to recycle, conserve energy we use in your homes, plant a tree or participate in local neighborhood cleanup – we can all do our part to protect the environment for future generations by making greener choices each and every day.

Thank you. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

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

Speaker, I join the minister in rising today to recognize Earth Day that occurred on April 22. The Official Opposition recognizes the impacts of climate change in our province, our country and planet as a whole.

The theme of this year's Earth Day was Invest in Our Planet and, with the abundance of renewable resources that we have here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we are positioned to do our part. As we move through this period of transition to renewable sources of energy, the Official Opposition encourages everyone to do their part for the planet and for generations to come.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement and join him in recognizing Earth Day.

I remind this government that we continue to pay for the impacts of climate change. You need only to ask the people of Port aux Basques or Central Newfoundland for that. We need to ensure that municipalities have climate plans with the appropriate financial support to carry out those plans. We also need to adjust transition legislation that the minister committed to on a CBC radio interview earlier this year.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there are further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, we're all concerned about the price of crab and the viability of the market. This is a billion-dollar industry in this province and people don't know where to turn. They don't know how they're going to pay their bills.

Premier, what are you going to do to help these people?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, let me say how much we value the fish harvesters and the people who work in the plants around our province, Mr. Speaker. They not only contribute to the economic value of the province, but contribute socially to why we're here.

I have to say that I can appreciate the symbolism of the question, Mr. Speaker, but of course, as the Conservative Members would know, there is no role for us to play in dictating the marketplace. We can't dictate supply or demand. We can't make billions of people in Asia buy crab. We can't make 330 million Americans buy crab. What we can do and what we will do is commit to help those who have been displaced, and I am happy to say that our minister has written the federal government to ask for supports, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to make it clear to the Premier that the Progressive Conservative Party in Newfoundland and Labrador supports the fishing industry and all components and people in that industry of all parts of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, while our province's strongest fishery remains at a standstill and rural Newfoundland and Labrador hangs in the balance, the Premier doesn't seem to be paying enough attention to this valuable industry.

Premier, what are you going to do to get the billion-dollar industry going again?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, we appreciate the hard-working women and men who work in this industry. We will be there to support them. I'm at a loss. Does the Member opposite suggest that we should be subsidizing crab, Mr. Speaker? Does he think that we have control of the Chinese marketplace? Does he think that we should be phoning the president of the United States and demanding that they buy crab?

The problem is the marketplace and, as a Conservative, I would think that he would understand market dynamics and the invisible hand that shifts the market, Mr. Speaker. It's not our hand.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'll say, as a Progressive Conservative in Newfoundland and Labrador, we want somebody to take the lead and do something for the fishing industry of Newfoundland and Labrador, like we have in the past.

Speaker, last week in the media the Premier said that he was interested in exploring outside buyers. Has he made a decision?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to clarify words that are being put in my mouth. That's not what I said. What I said was if the FFAW came with a proposal – that was a question that was posed to me in the media, Mr. Speaker – if the stakeholders involved suggested that that was a good idea, we'd be open to a conversation about it. That was the only comment I made, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: So, again, no stance on the fishing industry in Newfoundland and Labrador – typical.

Speaker, the crab fishery helps fuel rural Newfoundland and Labrador. When the fishery fails, all of Newfoundland and Labrador fails. Plant workers, truckers, grocery stores all suffer.

What is the Premier going to do to get our most lucrative fishery going again?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we've said many times, we hope that the parties will continue to speak. They both recognize that this is a marketplace dynamic that's beyond either one of their

controls, frankly, Mr. Speaker, and beyond government's control. It shouldn't be in the purview of government to dictate a marketplace.

I would think that a Progressive Conservative or a Conservative by any other name would understand that. He's asked what we will do to help, Mr. Speaker. We will be there with the federal government, I'm sure, to continue to support this vital industry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a sad day when the Premier of the province doesn't know the Official Opposition and what their party is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: St. John's, Newfoundland. We're not on Parliament Hill, Mr. Speaker; we're in St. John's, Newfoundland, House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please, on both sides.

The Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker, I couldn't resist.

Speaker, parents with the Autism Society have spoken out after dozens of children have been thrown out of daycares across the province due to a lack of staff and inclusion workers.

What is the minister doing to reverse this injustice and ensure that parents of children

with autism can avail of early childhood education?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me take an opportunity to address the preamble before handing it off to my minister, Mr. Speaker.

While there may be a confusion and an identity crisis, it's one of ideology on the other side. Regardless of the name, you should be true to your principles, Sir, which is, I would imagine, a Conservative principle.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: I won't divulge too much but we are very proud of the Progressive Conservative principles and we look forward to the day when we sit on that side of the House and govern this province properly.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: So I'll give the minister another opportunity, unless the Premier wants to answer this for me.

What is he doing to reverse this injustice to ensure parents of children with autism can avail of early childhood education?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

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

No child with or without exceptionalities should be displaced from a daycare for reasons like this. It is utterly unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. It has unfortunately being

going on in one form or another for decades. We have recognized this as a problem. We began a review of the inclusion program. We are engaged with the operators and we look forward to progress rapidly.

It is of interest perhaps to the Member that we actually have more disability inclusion staff working now in child care than we had in 2019.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Maybe the minister should talk to the media more and explain this because we're all waiting for answers from him. Finally, we're getting some today.

This is not a new issue, as he said, but why are we still having children sent home? Children with autism are being sent home and it's unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, it's outrageous. Young children with autism are thrown out of daycares with absolutely nowhere else to go.

Is the minister saying segregation, not inclusion is the way forward on a \$10-a-day child care?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: I agree, this is not at all acceptable, Speaker. I have said that. It's interesting, however, that the Member opposite chooses to use his time to discredit this program. Is it because he, along with his federal cousin, is proposing to abolish

the program? No more \$10-a-day daycare. They don't want to vote for the budget and his federal leader has come out and said we are canning \$10-a-day child care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Well, now we have two over there that don't realize where they're to.

I remind you, it's St. John's, Newfoundland. We're in the House of Assembly, not in the House of Commons.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: He doesn't even know which province he's in, Mr. Speaker.

We support \$10-a-day child care. What we're critical of is the rollout and the planning. Poor planning leads to issues like this. I've said that repeatedly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: The minister doesn't need to cherry-pick what I say, my message is always clear, he should listen more.

Speaker, operators have pointed to a 2017 policy change by the Liberal government that further restricted the ability to find staff.

Will the minister make the necessary changes to this policy to ensure children with autism are not left behind?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Early childhood educators are a profession. They have not been recognized as such by

previous administrations and we have remedied that with our wage grid.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HAGGIE: We are concerned about quality early learning and child care, not government-funded babysitting. We, in 2017, brought in changes that enabled people to upgrade. They simply have to register and they can learn while they earn and we will pay them for their learning and their earning.

We have more inclusion workers now, by 10 per cent, than compared with 2019. It is working.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Speaker, what an insulting comment to make. We have a lot of great inclusion workers out there that don't have their Level 1. They're at an age that they don't want to go back to school. Yet, they're great inclusion workers and they'd be a great asset in any daycare in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: For the minister to say stuff like that is terrible – terrible.

Speaker, families have gone so far as to leave the province – believe it now – leave the province to access inclusive early childhood education, yet he said it's working well.

What message does this send newcomers and parents of children with exceptionalities?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

Just to inject some more data: we have 10 per cent more inclusion workers in child care in 2022 than we had in 2019. We have not lost any child seats of those children with exceptionalities. Indeed, for the interest of the House, Mr. Speaker, in the last two weeks, we added 145 fully staffed child care places in this province in two weeks alone.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a terrible message to be sending the people of this province with families and children that are looking for spaces. That's outrageous for the minister to get up in his place today and say that is terrible.

Speaker, is the minister going to wait for another long, expensive human rights complaint like the Churchills – because we used to hear comments like this on the Churchill case – before he orders an appropriate accommodation for these families?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

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

Child care in 60-plus per cent of cases in this province is delivered by private businesses. Two week ago, the Member opposite got up and berated me for interfering in the running of a private business. Now he is essentially telling me exactly the opposite.

What we need to do here is point out that there is a discussion to be had between parents and the child care operators. If the

parents feel they've been discriminated against, we would be happy to support them in helping them in that regard, but these are private businesses. The Inclusion Program, which is used by more than half the child care centres, is currently voluntary. Maybe that needs to change.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, the Liberal's pay equity legislation was long overdue and woefully inadequate. The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour is now calling on the Liberal government to amend the legislation to improve the lives of women in the workforce.

We know the government has a history of delaying action on pay equity, so I ask the minister: Will you bring in any of these amendments?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I commend the hon. Member for raising this and keeping this very important topic at the forefront. But I can't help mention that she talks about delay; I will say, Speaker, that our government is the very first government in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador to do anything to advance pay equity here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: I am also happy so say, Speaker, that in the last six months alone we have passed the *Pay Equity and Pay Transparency Act*. We've appointed a pay

equity officer, updated the Job Evaluation System for core government to ensure that they are pay equity compliant and have launched a consultation process to inform the regulations of the act, which is currently under way.

I look forward to putting forth the best legislation for the people of this province, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, five-year delay, we know what the government has done. They have consistently delayed and delayed this legislation.

It was also recommended that both public and private employers be required to ensure pay equity and pay transparency.

I ask the minister: When will this be done?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, I am always happy to get up and talk about this topic alone.

As of April 1, we know that pay equity has been implemented in our core government and in the public. We know that we're doing consultations now to implement pay equity legislation for the private sector. Again, the consultation process is currently under way; I'm happy to say there is good uptake on the engageNL platform, as well as targeted stakeholder consultations.

I invite everyone to have their input on this very important legislation so we can put

forth the best pay equity legislation for the women and gender-diverse people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: So clearly, Speaker, there will be no pay equity for private sector employees, obviously.

The legislation only covers women working permanent jobs in the public sector and ignores part-time or temporary contracts.

Will the minister do the right thing and ensure pay equity for all public sector workers?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

I am very pleased to say that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is pay equity compliant, fully. I can tell the people of the province that up to most recently was 85 per cent followed under the four key elements of pay equity which are: skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions.

The executive management of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador do not have working conditions as part of their pay equity. We have now added that. We're completely compliant on those four conditions for all of the core public service as of April 1.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, while government continues to be in denial about the cost-of-living crisis, new figures recently released confirm this province has the highest proportion of social assistance usage in the country. Numbers don't lie.

Will the minister admit we have a cost-of-living crisis?

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

S. COADY: You know, it has been a difficult year, not just for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but for Canadians and those around the world with the cost of living. Speaker, that is why in Newfoundland and Labrador we have provided back to the people of the province over \$500 million – half a billion dollars that we've been able to provide back to the people of the province through our cost-of-living measures. Measures like reducing the cost of gasoline by over eight cents per litre.

Speaker, we have the second lowest provincial gas tax in the country. We've been able to increase the Income Supplement. We provide now \$77.5 million in Income Supplement. We do the same thing, Speaker, with –

SPEAKER: Your time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I remind the minister no props, please, unless you want to table it.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

When we want to know how effective what we're doing, we ask the people of which the actions that we took as to how effective it's been. I would say if you want to know if we got a cost-of-living crisis, ask Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and they would say we do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, surging rental rates, skyrocketing food costs and fuel increases have all combined to push more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians into Income Support programs. Seven per cent of residents in our province are on income support, the highest level in the country.

Why is the government refusing to reinstate the Poverty Reduction Strategy that they cancelled?

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

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

In terms of the Member's question, the actual prevalence of people applying and on income support has actually come down, significantly, and it continues to come down.

Secondly, we are reviewing our Income Support program to make it more responsive to the needs of individuals who, through no fault of their own, need support through government coffers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. ABBOTT: We're also increasing and improving, through our wellness plan, how we can improve the overall response to individuals needing, not only financial support but other supports through the Health Accord. So we're pulling all of that together in a plan under the Health Accord.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, if the numbers are down and we still lead the country, then I would say that is unacceptable for

Newfoundland and Labrador to lead the country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, during Estimates, we also learned that 75 per cent – yes, 75 per cent – of income support clients are single adults. This is a shocking statistic.

Will the minister admit government's lack of a poverty reduction strategy has left a generation of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians behind?

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

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

When you look at our overall caseload, as I said earlier, the caseload numbers have come down. They've come down significantly from 15 per cent down to 7 per cent, relative to the rest of the country. The only other province in that category would be Ontario.

What we are doing right now is addressing the needs of those individuals who may apply for or need support through our Income Support program. We are focusing on youth so that they can avail of employment opportunities without having to lose some of their income support payments. We're also making sure that we have a targeted program to support youth who may be coming out of our children support services so that they, too, can get supported outside the Income Support program.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, if the numbers are coming down, just imagine what we would do with a poverty reduction plan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: What we can do.

We know that food insecurity is the single strongest predictor of high cost health care use, we know that. Speaker, 75 per cent of income support clients are single individuals. These young people want a hand up versus a hand out.

Again, why is the minister satisfied to write cheques versus job offers?

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

When we look at those individuals who are our income support caseload, as the Member said, 75 per cent are single individuals. A much smaller proportion are under 30 years of age and we are focusing on those individuals so that we can provide them education opportunities, employment opportunities and, at the same time, not being penalized in doing so. That's where we want to focus, on prevention and early intervention. That will be the focus of our work going ahead.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: It would be nice to hear that plan fully as well, Mr. Speaker.

Our labour market is hot, virtually in every occupation.

Why is government not being proactive with career counselling and job support to help give these young people a start in life?

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

J. ABBOTT: Well, it's obvious the Member didn't listen to my answer for the previous question because that's exactly what we are doing. We are focusing on working with the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills to make sure that we can target our dollars to support individuals so that in fact they are working, they are in education programs, they are in training programs and we will continue to invest in that.

You have to look at the long run. And as one of my colleagues just mentioned to me and I think it's worth repeating, our numbers of people on income support are well below those when you were in the government five years ago.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

During Estimates, we learned that wait-lists for housing and placement has exploded 55 per cent over two years.

Will the minister finally admit our most vulnerable residents, like seniors and single parents, who are looking for affordable housing, are being failed?

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

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

In the Budget Speech, we have committed to spending \$70 million over the next three years on affordable housing. That will go a long way in addressing the need. We're also increasing our rental supplement program to support individuals who rent in the private market. We are also expanding our shelter and supportive housing units across the province. So we are going a long way to addressing the need and we'll be working

with the federal government to accelerate that over the next number of years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

While we're happy to hear that over the next three years, we have to look at the previous eight years and what has been done leading up to this.

Speaker, the minister will spend millions to keep people in hotel rooms but won't help seniors stay in their own homes, which is shameful. The wait-list has grown from 1,523 to 2,352; that's an increase of 55 per cent. The numbers do not lie.

Why is the minister allowing our housing crisis to get worse?

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

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

As mentioned in previous comments around that, we are supporting seniors to stay in their own home. That is the focus of our policy. We have a Home Repair Program that allows that. We have a home renovation program that allows that. That is the focus of our work there and we will continue to invest in that work.

At the same time, we are increasing our spending on rent supplements. Again, most of those will be going to support seniors and the amount of money we are spending, the \$70 million on affordable housing, most of that will go to seniors, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

While the minister can't seem to make much progress in addressing the wait-list, some 290 – yes, 290 – housing units sit vacant and we still have hundreds of people staying in hotels and emergency shelters.

Why is the minister allowing the wait-list to grow while almost 300 of his own units sit empty?

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

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

In our budget of last year and again this year, we have money allocated to address any of our housing units that need repairs and that need to be open for families to move in. We will, over the next 12 to 18 months, make sure that those over 200 units, that are currently not available, will be available.

At the same time, we are expanding the housing units and new housing units here in St. John's, in Central, in Labrador and on the West Coast, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Speaker, if we can help the government suggest a part of this problem, some 20 per cent of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation staff positions are vacant, these are the people who fix up and fill the 290 units the minister has empty. Again, this equates to 60 positions vacant at the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, 290 units vacant and over 2,350 people on a wait-list.

Why is the minister going backward on every measure?

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

J. ABBOTT: Well, one thing, Mr. Speaker, that I've never been accused of is going backwards. I'm a forward-looking person and will continue to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, as I mentioned, we are investing the largest provincial investment in housing in this province through this budget. What we are currently doing is addressing any of the deficiencies, any of the gaps in service that we know about and we will continue to do that.

In terms of the units that the Member speaking of, we have a plan to make sure they are fully occupied over the next 12 to 18 months. Part of the challenge is making sure we can get contractors in place. It isn't a money issue; it is a logistics issue that we're working through.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, we're all relieved to hear that the federal government, at the NDP's insistence, is introducing dental coverage for low-income seniors this fall. In the meantime, countless seniors are living in pain because of dental health issues. Last year, government spent about \$2.5 million less on dental care than had been allocated, over \$12 million less since 2019.

I ask the Premier: Will this government agree to immediately increase the budget allowance for its adult dental program and extend it to cover low-income seniors until federal coverage kicks in?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member has identified, the federal government are coming out with a program for children and for seniors and vulnerable populations, Mr. Speaker. We've got a program in this province that also covers children up to the age of 18, that covers vulnerable individuals that are on income support and others. There is a program, Mr. Speaker, for those with serious dental issues that are vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, we anxiously await the federal program. We are in discussions with the federal government waiting on details of that program. The time to implement the program, here in between, Mr. Speaker, I don't even know if that's possible.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

The provincial plan is inadequate and simply making sure we spend the full budget would be a big help.

Speaker, Golda Nichols, who is in the public gallery, is a 72-year-old woman in St. John's Centre who lives with excruciating pain from her dental issues. She would be eligible for extractions if she had uncontrolled diabetes but because her diabetes is under control she is forced to deal with the pain and is unable to sleep and eat.

Does the Minister of Health and Community Services have any suggestions for Golda, who's here, and perhaps hundreds of others who are in a similar situation?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, what I would suggest to the individual that the Member speaks of is contact the Department of Health. We can determine whether or not there are programs that the individual would fit under. Other than that, Mr. Speaker, we are anxiously awaiting the federal program. We understand that is to be implemented this year, Mr. Speaker. That program should cover individuals, such as the individual that you just outlined, Mr. Speaker, but, in the meantime, ask her to contact the department. We will certainly look into that particular case.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, we have multiple times since November and have gotten nowhere.

Could the minister explain why cases like these are being denied? Is it based on health needs or is this yet another example of budget based decision-making?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is a scope of items that are covered under the provincial program, Mr. Speaker. I can't speak to it on the floor at this very moment, what the details of this particular case may be, Mr. Speaker, or what others may be in this particular case, but we do know that vulnerable individuals in this province qualify for assistance under income support and other programs for dental care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Last fall, the minister told me in this House that a minister should have the ability to put pressure on departmental operations when there are grey areas, to exercise discretion when a constituent's right to service is not black and white.

Now, I have asked the minister to intervene on Golda's case and I'm prepared to go that route again. I have a letter to that effect, but my question really is: Why do we live in a province where a person can be in agonizing pain for months at a time and it takes intervention from a Minister of the Crown to get her some relief?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are criteria that need to be met under any program in this province. If there are grey areas, we can look at it. If an individual qualifies, Mr. Speaker, they qualify. If there's a grey area, that is where oftentimes the department can put additional pressure on the health authority or others like the dental care program.

Mr. Speaker, I can't speak to this individual case, at this particular time, without seeing the details in front of me, Mr. Speaker. But I can say that if staff in my department have looked at this and looked at the case and were not able to assist, we do look forward to the federal program, Mr. Speaker, which is comprehensive enough, we do believe, that this individual should be able to be assisted.

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I'm pleased to present report two of the Public Accounts Committee for the 50th General Assembly.

This report reflects the Committee's review of the Auditor General's report respecting the *MV Veteran* and *MV Legionnaire*.

In tabling this report, the Public Accounts Committee wishes to acknowledge Auditor General Denise Hanrahan and employees of the Office of the Auditor General for their work on this audit and their support to the Committee in completing its review and follow-up.

The Committee also wishes to thank the current and former public servants who participated in the public hearings on this matter for their co-operation and thorough testimony.

Additionally, the Public Accounts Committee acknowledges the service of the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, who served as Chair during much of the Committee's work on this matter.

As the new Chair, I wish to thank all Members of the Committee for their diligence and hard work on this matter: the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, Vice-Chair; the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay; the Member for Exploits; the Member for Labrador West; the Member for Mount Pearl North; and the Member for St. George's - Humber.

Speaker, I recommend this report to the House of Assembly.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Are there any further presenting reports by Standing and Select Committees?

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

SPEAKER: I do have two documents.

Pursuant to paragraph 20(1)(f) and section 51 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, I'm pleased to table the House of Assembly Management Commission annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2022. This report includes a summary of the work of the Commission for the period of April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022.

Also, I would like to table in accordance with subsection 19(5) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* minutes of the Management Commission for meetings held on the following dates: January 26, February 16, June 1, June 14, June 21, June 24, June 28, July 6, August 17, October 3, October 17, October 19, November 24 and December 5, 2022, and January 13 and January 31, 2023.

Are there any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled An Act To Amend The Memorial University Act, Bill 39.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: That notwithstanding Standing Order 63, this House shall not proceed with Private Members' Day on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, but shall instead meet at 2 p.m. on that date for Routine Proceedings and the conduct of Government Business.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move, in accordance with Standing Order 11(1), that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 27, 2023.

SPEAKER: 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.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Children with exceptionalities attending daycares are being let go due to a shortage of early childhood educators.

Early childhood educators are suffering from burnout due to higher workloads and, thus, are leaving daycare operations, resulting in the elimination of the child care inclusion support program.

Early childhood educators are struggling to support the needs of all children in homerooms. They're being pulled from their rooms to maintain room ratios in other

rooms at the daycare. This leaves children who require assistance without the support they require.

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 develop a strategy in the short term that will allow daycares to employ child care workers that are either retirees, former teachers or other support workers that have the credentials to be grandfathered in and assist with the current shortage of early childhood care workers.

Speaker, this is an extremely serious issue right now. We all applaud the \$10 daycare, but it's come with some many unintended consequences that need to be addressed.

The minister, today, spoke that no child should be displaced from daycare. He went on to say it's utterly unacceptable, and we agree. They should not be displaced. To speak of more inclusion, 10 per cent increase over the years, that may be correct, but the \$10-a-day daycare program has created some issues within a daycare. We know from people who have called us that children with special needs are being displaced, being terminated from daycares.

So we're not here to criticize. I want to see solutions. We want to see solutions here. The legislation that was changed in 2017 allowed for the renewal of trainee certifications and you could have four renewals. Until all our early childhood educators that are enrolling now, when they get on stream, why can't we, in the interim, extend those renewals for another two years? Or allow retirees to participate in the daycare, grandfather some in, allow support workers to come in? Why are we ignoring this solution that's right there that will help us transition?

I've heard from daycare workers in there 50s and 60s who want to work and can work, but they're not able to go back and do

the training. So this is an issue. We need to put children first.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

These are the reasons for the petition:

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador ended Memorial University's historic tuition freeze, resulting in a tuition increase of 150 per cent for domestic students. The cost of a degree is \$25,480 compared to the \$10,200 students paid during years when the province froze tuition fees.

The average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 97 per cent, meaning they will pay \$41,810 more for their Memorial University degree than they did before the cuts. This means that Memorial University will be the most expensive university in Atlantic Canada for international students.

Students are currently facing unprecedented threats to accessible and affordable education in Newfoundland and Labrador. Young people and families across this province and country are terrified for their futures as their ability to access even a marginally affordable post-secondary education is being ripped away. Low-income students and folks from marginalized backgrounds are watching as their opportunity to attend university disappears.

Residents of Newfoundland and Labrador believe that historic commitments to funding accessible and quality post-secondary education must be honoured and protected to ensure prosperity for future generations that wish to study in the province.

Investments in post-secondary education and affordable tuition have supported the growth and health of diverse communities across Newfoundland and Labrador for over 22 years. Cuts to post-secondary education have jeopardized the growth of these communities.

Education is a public right that all students, both domestic and international, have the right to quality and accessible education in this province.

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 uphold the province's historic commitment to accessible education by committing to free education for all and eliminating all differential fees. Eliminate all student debt for existing and provincial student loans. Sustain the college and Memorial University with healthy funding levels that secure good jobs and uplift the post-secondary sector.

Speaker, it comes down to an investment and also whether we look upon education as a public good or as an expenditure or a commodity. If we believe that Memorial is a way to attract newcomers to our province, then it's an investment. If it's about making sure that we have a healthy future that we have an educated population that will benefit future generations, then it's a necessary investment.

These young people are our future. That's what this comes down to. If they're burdened with debt, they're not going to stick around in this province. If they're unable to pay that debt back, they'll go elsewhere. So we're calling upon this to invest in our public education system.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

We, the undersigned residents of Noels Pond, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide funding for the paving of Wheelers Road in Noels Pond as soon as possible. This request is to ensure the safety of all residents in the community due to a major increase in high-speed motor vehicle, ATV/UTV and snowmobile traffic through the community. This is the result of upgrades completed to the T'Railway system on the trail known as Wheelers Run.

As well, future planned connection of the road between Logger School Resource Road and Cold Brook Resource Road will further increase vehicle traffic of all types through Wheelers Run and subsequently to Wheelers Road. A proactive course of action for prevention of accident or injury to the residents of Noels Pond is needed through paving, signage and lighting for the road.

Speaker, this road is 0.8 of a kilometre long. We are, obviously, as a province, as communities, promoting the T'Railway and ATV usage. Many municipalities allow ATVs to travel through their communities at the present time. This road is maintained by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

The residents are seeing, as they have highlighted here, a significant increase in the amount of traffic. They would like to see Transportation and Infrastructure commit to paving that 0.8 of a kilometre of the road to increase safety because they believe that ATV and vehicle travellers will see the paved road as part of the highway infrastructure and realize that they have to obey traffic laws in the community.

Right now, they're concerned about dust levels. They're concerned about high

speeds. This is a dead-end street. The kids play on this road all the time. Now we have ATVs and those type of vehicles entering onto that road and pursuing up to the next point of entry for the T'Railway system.

It really needs to get done sooner than later. It's not a big project, but it is a project that will increase the safety and concerns that people have and the parents have for their children in this particular road.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Witless Bay Line is a significant piece of infrastructure. Whereas many commute outside the Avalon on a daily basis for work, as well as commercial, residential and tourism growth in our region has increased the volume of traffic on this highway.

Therefore we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to upgrade this significant piece of infrastructure to enhance and improve the flow of traffic to the Trans-Canada Highway.

Speaker, I have done this petition many times and I'm certainly going to keep pushing on it for sure. The Witless Bay Line is a very important piece of infrastructure. As we discussed before we left here on break, it is not fit to drive on, basically. We have eight or nine kilometres that are not fit to drive on. If somebody says to have a coffee on that, you'll need a sippy cup or a bib on yourself to drink because it is not fit to drive. It is really not fit to drive.

We have this used by truck drivers, obviously. We have it used by many people that are commuting back and forth over to Argentina, to Long Harbour. Now Bull Arm is

up again, there is some work going on over there. People use this a lot in our district.

You get the campers in the summertime that most times don't use the Witless Bay Line; it is a shortcut for sure, it takes about a half hour off your ride. They don't drive the Witless Bay Line. They go out the Southern Shore Highway, take the Trans-Canada from Mount Pearl and drive out across the Trans-Canada. They avoid it if they can. It's too hard on their equipment.

Only a couple weeks ago I got a call, one person lost two tires on the right side of their car. They struck a pothole late in the night going 80 or 90 kilometres, two rims, two tires gone. It's not acceptable. You go in there and you fill it up with cold patch and a heavy rain or a frost or thaw and it's all gone out of the potholes. It is certainly not acceptable that this is happening in the district. We certainly need more work to be done in that area. With everybody that is travelling there, it is something that should be done and done as soon as we can.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

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

S. COADY: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for St. George's - Humber, for 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, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board have leave to introduce a bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act and An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000, Bill 38, and that said bill be read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act and An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000," carried. (Bill 38)

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act and An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, 2000. (Bill 38)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 38 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure again to stand up and speak again on the budget during the budget debate. It's a great part of parliamentary tradition and these debates are important because it gives the people of the province a better understanding of what direction the government may be going in with their money because it's still the people's money that we're talking about here and nobody else's.

So today I thought I'd use my time to talk a little bit about the budget and highlight some of the things that I guess are in the budget but that perhaps will need further explanation, and things that are currently in the budget that, when the Estimates of Finance are dealt with later this week, that the minister will be prepared for the questions that are going to come the minister's way as it relates to this particular budget.

The first thing I want to talk about briefly is the Rothschild report. Again, in last year's budget, we spent close to \$5 million for Rothschild to do a report that was supposed to inform us on what assets are going to be sold off or could be sold off. Now, we have no idea of what's in that report because, as we all know, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are not allowed to see that report. It's hidden from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who actually are the ones who paid for that report.

In this year's budget – and I stand to be corrected – there is monies allocated for part two of a Rothschild review, but we have no idea what that amount is. Is it \$1 million? Is it \$2 million? Is it another \$3 million or \$4 million? What is the purpose of that second review by Rothschild? Is the province, is the government finalizing the sale of assets of

the province? What exactly is going to happen with the second Rothschild report? Will it be made available to the public before any action is taken? Because right now, we don't know. So I'd like to understand exactly how much money is being budgeted in this fiscal year for another report by the Rothschild group. I think that's a fair question that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador would want to know and would want to ask about.

That's one. The second thing, of course, is our infamous sugar tax and the fact that the Rethink your Drink program has completely failed. The reason I say that is simply based on the budget, because they've gone from a projected \$9 million in revenue from a sugar tax to now projecting \$14 million in revenue from the same sugar tax. So that would indicate that the behaviour modification that the government was hoping for has resulted in simply a modification in the amount of money you have in your pocket because you are now paying a sugar tax. That tax was ill conceived, ill prepared and ill planned. It does not need to be there. It should not need to be there.

In the Budget Speech we were told that this sugar tax and revenue from the sugar tax would be used to fund a pilot project for Continuous Glucose Monitoring. So maybe, during Estimates, the minister will tell us exactly how much of that \$14 million that they're going to get from sugar tax is being budgeted for this pilot project for Continuous Glucose Monitoring. Is it \$5 million? Is it \$6 million? I don't know the answers, but hopefully we will get those answers.

The bigger question is: Why did it take the government to increase taxes on people who could least afford it to introduce a glucose-monitoring program? My colleagues on this side of the House have been asking for this program for the last number of years. The reason we have asked for it is because it has been proven to actually reduce health care costs.

That is the reason why we, on this side of the House, have advocated for this particular program. It will help all of those people who can benefit from it. It will help them tremendously. It will keep them healthier. It will actually reduce health care costs, but this government refused to bring in a continuous glucose-monitoring program until they found a way to tax the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to make them pay for it. That's what the sugar tax is doing. But again, \$14 million, how much of that is actually being spent on the pilot glucose monitoring program?

The second thing we were told was that this \$14 million – some funds were going to be allocated for the Physical Activity Tax Credit. Again, I ask the question: How many millions are being allocated from the sugar tax revenue to go towards the Physical Activity Tax Credit? That's a question, again, that we will ask and that needs to be asked. I don't know the numbers. They're not in the budget document but, hopefully, we will get them soon.

Again, let's think about this for a second, a Physical Activity Tax Credit – in order for you to apply for the tax credit, you have to spend the money upfront, over \$2,000 or \$2,500, I don't know the exact amount. Then, as a result, you get back a portion of that on your income tax when you file your income tax, 17 per cent or something in those neighbourhoods and you get a benefit. But is that really getting at the source?

If you think about physical activity and the need to encourage more people to enrol their children in physical activities and if you think about all of the people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador who may not be able to spend \$2,000 or \$3,000 to enrol their children in those type of programs or buy the equipment that's needed to play sports, whether it be hockey or any other sport, they don't have that money upfront. These are the people that we should be targeting. The people whose

children are missing these type of programs because, with no fault of their own, Mom, Dad or their guardians just simply can't afford the dollars to put them in and enrol them in those programs.

How many places across this province right now – how many children in this province right now are not participating in the form of physical activity program because, unfortunately, Mom or Dad has had to say we just can't afford it? Giving the high cost of living that's happening right now and the high inflation rate, this is one of the things or one of the programs that will probably get dropped. When you have to make decisions about food on your table and gas in your vehicle because you have to go to work, these type of extracurricular programs, oftentimes for those with less income, are the things that get cut.

We had a real opportunity here to participate and for the government to help those people but, instead, we've turned around and said we're going to allocate money for this particular program here which is based on you spending money first and then you get a small portion back. So, again, a misguided fund. The intent is probably good, but certainly not targeted at the people who really need it. That, again, is part of the problem if you think about where we are with this budget. This budget includes all kinds of dollars and measures toward helping people with cost of living but that's what they are; they're just measures.

What we need is a real Poverty Reduction Strategy. That's a complicated process but it's time that we went back and had a real strategy. Measures are fine, but they're all short term and they really don't do anything about the cycle. So I believe that what we need is a real review of Income Support programs and we need review of all of those programs that provide funding to help people because, right now, we have missed the boat on a lot of funds that are being allocated. We're spending the money, but are we achieving the results that we thought

we were going to achieve? Are we really helping the people that really need our help?

The \$500 that went out to every citizen – over 300,000 people got \$500 cheques. They all took them and cashed them, I'm sure. But, at the end of the day, did that do anything, really? Or could some of that money have been better used in other areas? It seemed like it was a reactionary program or a measure as opposed to a strategy, and that's where I think we need to be going. We need a strategy.

There are lots of other programs here that I would like to talk on and I'll have more time to talk about it. But before I finish, I cannot sit down without talking about the recent announcement this past weekend that the Minister of Health does not see nurse practitioners as a solution to health care access for primary care providers in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador because, essentially, what the minister said, we're not going to entertain nurse practitioners being able to practise on their own. They're going to have to be part of the public system.

I would argue they want to be part of the public system, but they want to be part of the public system in a way where they can see patients, see people and still build a public system. Just as physicians right now, who can build a public system from a private operation, some will choose to remain on salary, just the same as physicians sometimes choose to remain on salary.

But for all those nurse practitioners out there who have stepped up at a time when 100,000 people in this province have said we don't have access to a doctor, when they have stepped up with their own dime and literally set up clinics to help people have access to primary care physicians. Yes, the unfortunate part, instead of saying thank you and let's work on a mechanism to

reimburse you or to find a way of paying for those services, our government has said no.

So it's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who have to haul out their credit card or their debit card and pay from \$35 and up to see a primary care provider or nurse practitioner in our province. That is not a step in the right direction. That is not showing these nurse practitioners the value or how we value them in our health care system. That is not telling them that they are part of the solution. That is simply putting up barriers at a time when the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are saying to their government: help.

They want to be able to see an access to nurse practitioners, especially in those communities where they are the option. Yet, our government has turned around and said no to them. You can only work in Newfoundland and Labrador if you work as a salaried employee of a health authority. Is that the message that we're really sending to nurse practitioners in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador? I certainly hope not. I certainly hope that is not the message and that there is, in fact, a way that the nurse practitioners can be compensated for the great work they're doing. That seniors on fixed incomes and other people will not have to pay to see that nurse practitioner.

I know in my particular neck of the woods, out in my District of Stephenville - Port au Port, a nurse practitioner clinic is a valuable source, a valuable place where many people go to have their primary health care needs met and in other places across this province, whether it is in St. John's, whether it is in Corner Brook or anywhere else. They are providing a service and, unfortunately, right now, it's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who have to pay for that service.

Yet, at the same time, they are more than willing to step in and offer that service. All they want is a government that is willing to

listen, to say that we are part of the solution. We can help, we are there to help; let us help. Don't simply handcuff them.

In the health system right now, in our health authority, how many nurse practitioners are practising, not in the medical profession but are assigned to other duties, are really not working to their full scope? That needs to change; that needs to be looked at. How many of them are actually reporting to managers in another department and we're paying wage differential subsidies to those managers? It could be \$250,000 or more, but that, again, is part of the problem. We need nurse practitioners practising to their full scope. Just like we talk about in the Health Accord. We want everyone working to their full scope of practice and certainly nurse practitioners are one of the most valuable resources we have at a time in our province, as I have said, where so many people do not have access to a physician.

The nurse practitioners are there to step up; they have stepped up; they continue to step up. Now what we need is we need their government to step up. We need their government to acknowledge that, yes, we will find a way to include nurse practitioners in the solution and we will find a way so that those people do not have to pay, to take money out of their pockets, to see a primary care provider. It's happening every single day in this province of ours. It's been happening when the previous Minister of Health was there. We, on this side of the House, have been asking for this for a long time.

So I would hope, that despite the news reports, that this will not happen, that nurse practitioners will be considered to be, and will always be, a valuable part of our health care system and we will find a way to ensure that they get funded.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I thought somebody on the other side was going to get up, that's why I was delayed. Sorry about that.

Discussing the budget, when we look at the budget, I guess, it continually increases. We're talking about borrowing money to pay for all our government services, which is fine, if that's the position that we're in. My position is that, I want us to turn the corner on our economy, Speaker. I want us to start putting our own people back to work. That's not going to come from having Terra Nova out in Bull Arm and having all the managers and everything coming from the Mainland. We built Bull Arm and I'm pretty sure that we can manage it quite responsibly.

When we look at that, albeit the Terra Nova has been adding to our coffers for a while. The government here was obviously very fortunate to fall into a price of \$86 on average for a barrel of oil throughout the year. That's where a lot of this fiscal prudence, I guess, that we're being told about is coming from.

You know, we're looking at another \$167 million deficit, but we're putting a Future Fund forward of \$122 million. To me, we're borrowing and paying interest on money that we're squirreling away, which I don't know if that's going to be a great benefit in the end of the day because that creates its own opportunity cost at that point in time.

To me, what we're doing here with the Future Fund, it's not that I disagree with the Future Fund, but that's a type of thing that we can do when we're being a little bit more fiscally responsible and we have a little bit more in our coffers to be able to put that away. To me, it's like going to the bank and starting a savings account with your credit card. It just doesn't make sense. It's not fiscally prudent.

The other thing is that we talk about how fiscally responsible government has been when it comes to this budget. It was only two budgets ago that they raised the income tax on every Newfoundlander and Labradorian that's working in Newfoundland and that's also garnering an extra \$500 million a year.

So to say that we're giving back \$500 million to the people of the province, yes, I guess so, because we took it on them – that was extra, over and above what they were paying two budgets ago. You know, we always hear too – like, I tell you the thing that almost antagonizing, to be quite honest. We always hear about that's not just unique to us. It's global pressures and all this kind of stuff. I understand that. I do, but we can't take credit for the global pressures when it seems to suit us. We have to take an understanding that – you can't be hiding behind global pressures either.

If you're going to take credit that this was happening because of global pressures, then you can't turn around and say that, you know, we're going to hide behind global pressures as well. Because we've seen with COVID and all this kind of stuff, it just seems to be one excuse after another after another. I mean, quite honestly, the people of the province are fed up with it.

Before we left to go to the Easter break, the Minister of Finance alluded to the fact that we don't agree with the budget. It's not that we don't agree with the budget. There are just items in the budget that we can't agree with. I'll tell you the one thing that I do agree with is the glucose monitoring for people ages 18 and under as a pilot program and, hopefully, that will go to the adults. I'll tell you right now that is an investment in our own people that's going to save us money in the long run and it's going to save us significant money in the long run in health care.

So to say that we're going to vote against the budget and cause an election, that just

signifies to us that there are three or four over on that side that don't agree with the budget either. If that's what the minister is alluding to then, you know, they can come on over. We're ready for them. We've got all kinds of room here. We can put three desks right up there right now.

In a majority situation, we cannot create a call for an election. Although this is a non-confidence vote that's going to happen on the budget and on the amendments, the thing is that this can't trigger an election. They've got a majority. So that's probably the reason why we haven't heard anybody stand up and defend the budget.

When we look at all these things that I just listed, we've all heard of spin doctors. Spin doctors are people that I guess, for lack of a better term, it's called wag the dog. So it's people that are bureaucrats that give politicians an idea of how to meander around a certain subject and stuff like that.

But if we change a position to fit our own needs, that's a very narcissistic view of how we run the province. There's no one silver bullet. I've said this in many addresses and had my Liberal colleagues in the audience as well. There's no silver bullet, but there's no one crowd have all the right ideas or anything like that. I think everybody has great ideas. Just that some need to be built on a little bit more to bring them to fruition. There are a lot of intelligent people in this House. Now I would say that probably the people there at the centre table are a little bit further along than the rest of us because of what they do, but I will say that the people in this room do have good educations, do know how to stand up for people, do know how to represent people, but we can't spin it to whatever fits the mood of the day.

We have to take it on head-on because that's the only way that we're going to consciously represent the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and equitably, whether that's urban or rural. I can tell you

as an MHA from Placentia West - Bellevue, there are a lot more issues in rural Newfoundland than there is in the metro area.

I will also say that when we're giving out bus passes to people – and I agree with that. I don't disagree with that. But what's the supplement for a person like a senior that needs to go to Clarenville to see a doctor? As my colleague just alluded to, from Stephenville - Port au Port, I'm looking for a nurse practitioner now the last three or four years. There's still neither one in place. Yes, I'm working with the department; I'm working with the town. We're after putting a lot of different contingencies in place to make this a very lucrative opportunity to make sure that we do get a nurse practitioner or a doctor in a very strategic area of Arnold's Cove. That's a reality. But when we announce about subsidizing buss passes and stuff like that, that has nothing to do with anybody in rural Newfoundland. We don't have buses in rural Newfoundland.

I would say to the Minister of CSSD that if he wants to look out for seniors care and stuff like that, I would certainly see if he could push through the GoBus that I've been looking for in the Marystown area for quite some time, because this will alleviate a lot of the pressures that have been created with the decommissioning of this Canning Bridge in Marystown. That needs to be done sooner rather than later. Because we're already into this thing about Canning Bridge about, I would say, close on 12 weeks now.

So some solutions need to be brought forward of how we're going to alleviate the pressures that have been added to the people of Marystown and Labrador before it becomes a liability situation.

We understand – we're not looking to blame anybody or anything like that. I hear from the seniors that have filled me with, I'd say, about 50 petitions. I gave them a blank petition and I said if you need more, copy

them off. When I went and met with the 50-plus group in Marystown, they gave me a stack of papers. But that was about a stack of 30. They're after giving me another stack of 20 or 30 the week prior to that. So all their membership is listening to what we're doing. We just need to make sure that we're listening to what their needs are. That's what we are as government.

I've said it in here before. There are 40 Members that got to look after 530,000. Let's do that. It's not about one person having the silver bullet or having all the answers. There's nothing that's infallible, but for every problem there's a solution. We just need to find it but we need to find it together, as opposed to putting the onus on any one person, any one department, or anything like that.

We need overarching things that look at it. Again, we can't take credit for global pressures when we talk about the \$86 a barrel of oil on average and then hide behind the fact that COVID hiccupped our economy. That's not the way it works. We've got to take the good with the bad, we've got to put on our big boy, big girl pants and we've got to realize that we're here for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, bottom line, that's it. We're not here for our own selves individually. We're not here for just our friends and our families. In a lot of cases, those people are constituents as well. In my case, it certainly is. I thank them all for supporting me in the way that they've supported me.

But we can't take credit on one hand and then blame it on global pressures when we're talking about hiring nurses and doctors and nurse practitioners and all this kind of stuff, because that's all it seems to be to me. It's like whatever is convenient for the day. Let's make sure that we take credit here, but we don't take blame over here. It doesn't work like that. It all works hand in hand. For every bit of credit you take, there is probably somebody that doesn't like that.

Nobody in here, not one person in here, won their election by 100 per cent of votes. I don't think anybody won by acclamation. So the thing about it is that you also have to represent the people that don't agree with you. As I do, as all my colleagues do. But we do it with integrity and respect out of the fact that they're a citizen of this province and they deserve representation from the MHA that was elected for their district – period, simple as that.

But like I said, when we take credit for upward swinging global pressures that helped our economy, we also have to take the negative pressures in the fact that we gave \$500 million to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Well, we also took it out of their pockets.

I'm really baffled, to be quite honest, about the sugar tax. I wasn't really going to go on the sugar tax today; I was going to keep that for the main motion. But the thing that bothers me about the sugar tax is that colleagues opposite are saying that this is going to help them make better choices. Obviously not. An estimated \$9 million income on sugar tax has now ballooned to over \$12 million. People are not making better choices, if that's what we're calling better choices.

I'd like to know how many of my colleagues opposite have read any studies on the effects of aspartame on the brain. We're taking away from the sugar tax to make people healthier, yet we're not taxing aspartame, which is known to be very harsh and detrimental to the brain. I certainly don't drink aspartame, as you can tell. The thing about it is I also don't drink a lot of pop, I'll be quite honest.

The thing for me is that we can't cherry-pick. That's not what governments do. Governments have to, like I said, pull up their socks, tie up their boots as tight as they can just so that their shoes don't fall off and they don't get their socks wet. But they're going to get their feet dirty. They're

going to get their feet wet. They should be right up to their knees in it, if they're doing their job.

But for me, like I said, I really am baffled how we can take credit for the price of oil being so high, the fact that we increased income tax and received another \$500 million out of the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that can't afford it that are telling us on this side – I can't imagine that they're not hearing it on the other side – that the cost of living is out of control. It's pretty hard that we don't hear it from the other side. Especially that everybody has seniors in their district.

One of the things that really tormented me about seniors, I have to be quite honest, was you gave them a 5 per cent increase. Now, inflationary pressures have gone up above this now. But at the time that this budget was being presented, inflationary pressures on seniors at that point in time was 5.2 per cent, so we gave them a 5 per cent increase. We kept our foot on their forehead just far enough so that they could keep their nose out of water and breathe.

That's not fair. Why don't we take some of this money and put it into giving them programming of getting their eyes, ears and teeth and feet checked? I mean, instead of this coming straight out of their pocket, \$2,500 for a hearing aid – and like we do with all other programs, if you have insurance, that's the primary, and government will be secondary. But, right now, we don't have any of that. So it's all primary. A lot of these people, these seniors that I talk about, worked in fish plants in rural Newfoundland and worked in different areas where they didn't carry a pension into their retirement.

I've also suggested to the minister that we pass legislation that let's – like if my mom didn't have insurance in her retirement and I have insurance with the job and the career that I have, I should be able to take my mom on as a dependant for the last 25

years or longer of her life. She took care of me for the first 25 years of my life, while I went to school and got my education and everything.

So why, when she turned 65, if she hadn't purported any benefits into her retirement, why shouldn't I be allowed to take her on for the next 25 years? She'd be 90 then. There are not too many insurers out there after 90, unfortunately, but at least she'd have benefits and it wouldn't come out of a fixed income that she didn't see coming.

Whether it's getting cataract surgery, whether it's getting hearing aids, whether it's getting teeth, all these things are so important and it gives back the dignity and the quality of life to the senior that blazed the trail for all of us to be even in this building. Every person in this building owes some senior in our province a debt of gratitude. Not a handout and say what's next?

Or hearing from our federal Liberal cousin that the veterans are asking for just too much right now, that we can't give. That, to me, was one of the worst political statements I ever heard in my life, yet we have veterans over there that are not getting prescriptions. They fought for us. They stood up for us, but we're not standing up for them. Now I know that's partially on the federal government, but the proposal that I've made wouldn't cost the government anything. It would cost me as an individual to have my mom on my insurance, and I'd pay that \$100 a month or whatever it is – I think it's \$120 or \$130 a month there now, but I could take her on as a dependant no different than I can take on my children or my spouse.

But that's what people need; they don't need a \$500 cheque. A \$500 cheque is not changing your cost of living. A \$500 cheque is not making you not worry about the oil in your tank next week. A \$500 cheque is not putting groceries on your table for more than two or three weeks. So I would say that

this needs to stop being looked at as extra money that is really uplifting people because we took it out of their pockets in the first place; we're just replacing what we took.

But we need to have a little bit more respect for our seniors and our persons with disabilities. We see what is going on now with people with autism being asked to leave the daycare. I have a son with autism and I will tell you right now you're lucky he is not in daycare because this House would go up. Because I'll tell you, what we are doing right now, we're going down the same slippery slope of the same education that other kids are getting, that others are being left behind.

We talk about our budget is about our people, then make it about all of them. Make it about the most vulnerable but also give the people that are actually out there working in a blue-collar industry an actual opportunity to survive. We don't need to keep taking more money out of their pockets, the sugar tax, income tax and all that kind of stuff. It is just not feasible; it is not going to work. What we're doing is we're recycling money out of pockets, back into pockets; it is not new money. New money means we're exporting and we're actually getting our own people back to work.

So that is what I think that our economy needs right now. You look at my district, a very industrial district; we just had a symposium down in Marystown with the Chamber of Commerce from the Burin Peninsula and the Chamber of Commerce in the Arnold's Cove Area; great speakers, lots of really good information. But that is what the impetus needs to be, is that our people go back to work and we are all going to be successful. We don't want anybody coming on our shores – we're open for business, but we don't expect anybody to come on our shores and break even or lose money.

What we are trying to promote is that their success is our success. That is where we need to go; that is the type of economy that we need. We don't need to keep taking it out of our own pockets. That is just recycled money. We are not going to get out of any kind of deficit situation by doing that. We need to attract new money, new dollars and we need to spread it out over the most vulnerable in our province, and for that I will always stand here and represent the people of Placentia West - Bellevue and the people of our province.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It is a pleasure to stand up and talk about the budget again today. Of course, as my colleague just talked about, there are good things in the budget and there are things that we do disagree with. So I am sure we will be touching on that over the next few weeks coming.

If I could just take a moment and touch on health care for a couple moments here in the Central region. The Grand Falls-Windsor hospital, the hospital in my hometown, is the backstop. It's the contingency plan. There is no contingency plan outside of that hospital.

Many other communities, whether they're on diversion or shutdown, get funnelled into Grand Falls-Windsor hospital, which, do you know what? We're more than happy to help out whoever we can, sort of thing, we're all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. But at the end of the day, the amount of stress that it's putting on the staff and the infrastructure in Grand Falls-Windsor, it's huge. It's immeasurable and we hear it every single day from the doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists and support staff. Unfortunately, it

doesn't seem to be getting any better just yet. We are hopeful for the future, but until we get a handle on this, I believe we're going to see more of an exodus of health care workers, which, again, if they don't have the support, they're going to continue to roll over and leave the province which just compounds the issue as we move forward.

But I'll take one moment and just point out one of many fantastic doctors in Grand Falls-Windsor. We have a medical doctor there, an internist. Her name is Wendy House. She is absolutely fantastic. We are so blessed to have her in Grand Falls-Windsor. She takes on a patient load like you wouldn't believe. A young doctor, very qualified and extreme bedside manner. It's absolutely fantastic and we got to see this just this past couple of weeks as my CA lost somebody very close to her. So I want to thank Wendy House and all the doctors, nurses and support staff at the Grand Falls-Windsor hospital for taking on everything that you do.

The emergency room in Grand Falls-Windsor is very notable when it comes to an issue that we have there. Right now, we have overflow into the hallway, which most would think it would be a temporary thing. Well, it's turning into a permanent thing. We have curtains put there now in the hallway to go around the gurneys. We also have charts next to these gurneys in the hallway. I'm not sure how much privacy these patients have. It's little to none, if any, and we feel as though they deserve better than that.

So we look forward to seeing what the government's going to do in the future to ensure that the pressure is taken off the hospital and the staff in Grand Falls-Windsor because it's not fair to them. We'll continue to see that mass exodus if it continues to go that way.

We're also hearing of other doctors that are leaving, or nurses, and I'm just wondering –

I think I brought this up before and I'd like to talk to the minister about it sometime – is there a strategy to red flag, as soon as somebody puts in their notice or somebody thinks about putting in their notice, or is there a team to talk to somebody that wants to put in their notice, that wants to leave and possibly go to another province?

Obviously, if there's a strategy out there where a team can meet with them, ask them what their needs are, ask them if they have anything specific that we can do to keep them here, I think it would be beneficial to the province. I'll be looking for that strategy. I'm hoping one day when we're on that side, we have a strategy to ensure that we keep people here and do everything we can to keep people here.

In the event where somebody has made up their mind in the health care industry and they wish to leave, obviously, we wish them the best of luck, but I would like to talk to that person to find out exactly why they are leaving so we can address this issue down the road with other health care officials to ensure that they don't leave and try to catch them at the gate.

So as soon as somebody puts in their notice that they're leaving our health care system, I would like to see a red flag immediately go to the Department of Health and Community Services to ensure that they can reach out to that person the day that that goes in to ask them is there anything else this province can do within its means to try to keep those people right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I'll be looking for that and I would actually like to be involved in something like that as well.

You know, in Grand Falls-Windsor, we still have an ambulance problem. We have one ambulance there and if that goes out, we have one ambulance on call with the paramedics that are sat home waiting for that call, which, in my opinion, isn't good enough. If you have a catastrophic event, you need two ambulances. Well, by God,

one's going to go out but you've got to wait for the second one, for people to get dressed, come in and take that ambulance on the road.

For a hospital that services so many communities, I feel as though there should be that second ambulance on call 24 hours a day with the paramedics in the hospital ready to go. If you ever look, sometimes I've seen up to six ambulances in the bay in Grand Falls-Windsor, some with patients still in the back, so there's no shortage of that. We need to ensure that those resources are there for the time when we need it.

Sticking with health care, again, a big shout-out to the Lionel Kelland Hospice board, the Lionel Kelland Hospice fundraising team and, of course, their motto is: Every Moment Matters. If you are a dying loved one or if you have a dying loved one, you'd better believe that every moment matters.

In saying that, I just want to send out my condolences to the Walsh family. They lost a very important family member of theirs last night. So, again, it was, I believe, in the hospital, in a private room, but, still, you're wheeled though the hospital to get to that private room, you're in that last moment, those last hours, the family are there. The Lionel Kelland Hospice, Newfoundland and Labrador's first community hospice, is going to be a blessing for all of us in Newfoundland and Labrador. We look forward to it getting off the ground.

There are some initiatives coming up to support the Lionel Kelland Hospice and the fundraising team, such as on June 3 to June 10 we have the Hike for Hospice. I did it last year. I'll be looking to do it again this year, a fantastic initiative, raised lots of money to ensure that that hospice gets off the ground.

Of course, from May 1 to May 7, we're going to have the smile cookie. I want to thank Tim Hortons for everything they do. We raised a lot of money last year and that

same initiative, I'm happy to say, is going ahead this year. So in Grand Falls-Windsor or wherever else in Central, make sure that you get out to Tim Hortons between May 1 and May 7 and get those smile cookies, as many as you can to support the Lionel Kelland Hospice, Newfoundland and Labrador's first community hospice. We are happy to see that. Again, the fundraising team has done a great job. Some stuff in the budget for the hospice as well, so we're very happy to see that.

Lionel Kelland Hospice is not only going to service seniors, it's going to service any age, any family member, sort of thing, as they say goodbye in a very respectful way to their loved one. It can't be an easy thing, I'm sure we've all been there. We're all going to be there one day as well, so I want to ensure that when that gets off the ground, it's all hands on board and we work out any kinks that they may have. It's going to be very beneficial to not just my community but all of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Many seniors live in my community in Grand Falls-Windsor. There's actually quite a few MHAs here from Grand Falls-Windsor as well and ministers, which is nice to see. But the seniors who are living in Grand Falls-Windsor, Buchans, Badger, Millertown, we see it every day, we hear the stories of course, some of these seniors are living on \$800 a month. I had a senior sit down with me yesterday afternoon, before I come out this morning, and they're telling me that they live on \$800 a month, which, me, as a dad and husband, a family of four, seems unfathomable. I can't imagine living on \$800 a month. You can only imagine how they have to squeeze their dollars. They have to squeeze their dollars.

I'm going to tie that to the sugar tax. The sugary drinks that we have here in the province and the tax that are on them, it's supposed to be a help out with making the better choice for better drinks sort of thing. Do you know what? I hope people do make a better choice. But at the end of the day, if

you're going to throw that tax on, but you have seniors living on \$800 a month, who literally have to watch every single dollar that they spend, every single dollar, they're not going out and buying \$160 worth of fruit. It's just not possible.

The seniors are buying the most low-cost, anti-nutritional food you could ever imagine. Because that's the way our society is geared right now and, unfortunately, that's the way. Unfortunately, it's low-income people, as well as seniors, that have to put up with this and that's just not right.

To stand on our high moral ground with the sugar tax, I think, is very disingenuous because these seniors at the end of the day are buying the most non-nutritional food possible. So what sense does it really make at the end of the day, especially for low income or seniors throughout the districts here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The cost of living is absolutely outrageous when it comes to groceries and whatnot. Listen, I'm not saying that the government can put any limits on the amount of groceries. I don't know if they can or whatnot, but I'm sure that's not their forte; that's not what they're in the business of doing. Government should be in the business of facilitating the proper safeguards here in Newfoundland and Labrador or the proper resources to ensure that people can get by, that people can get nutritious food and those low income and seniors can avail to all the nutritional food. Unfortunately, they can't right now.

You see the seniors all the time going through a grocery store looking at something, trying to get the sales, looking at the price, debating it. There's nothing more heartbreaking than watching a senior put a healthy item back on the shelf because they just cannot afford that at the time. They're also going through their own health pandemics: with their dentures; diabetes is huge as well. Until we get a handle on the nutritional value for the rest of the food, and

the cost of living is thrown into that as well, a sugar tax just doesn't make any sense to me. It just seems like a band-aid on a gushing wound right now. That's just not good enough.

I'm just going to flip a switch here and move on to something that we're very proud of in Central Newfoundland and Labrador – my colleague from Exploits has touched on it many times as well and I'm sure the Speaker right now can attest to it as well – those are timber rights in Central Newfoundland and Labrador. It's what Grand Fall-Windsor and Buchans and everywhere else was built on. Grand Falls-Windsor started a timber town, a logging town.

Unfortunately, right now, there are many small, small groups, or even individuals, who are trying to make a living, who are trying to cut timber. At the end of the day, they cannot get the permits to do it because the bigger sectors are eating them all up. They have the rights to so much timber out there, more than 99 per cent of what the little guy is asking for, less than 1 per cent, and they still cannot get that little bit.

I have people in my district who have cut wood for 50 years and they cannot get a permit right now to cut the wood for their small sawmill, because the bigger industries are coming in and swallowing up all that resource. We're not against the bigger industries. We know that they employ a lot of people here in the province and we are happy for that. But there has to be some sort of give and take for the people in my district, in my town, who have been doing this for half a century and now they're told that they can't do it. They're not happy with that, I'm not happy with it and I'm hoping in the future something like that changes to ensure that everybody gets a small piece of the pie so everybody can survive and thrive and be very successful moving forward.

Being it is the end of April, we have May and June coming up, and we're going to see

another graduating class here in Newfoundland and Labrador and these young men and women who are ready to take on the world sort of thing, we want to make sure that they get out there and they do their best. I know my son, Declan, he will be graduating this year and I'm very, very happy about that. He's going to be attending MUN and he's going to be a teacher. I really appreciate him sticking around.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: We need more of him. I'm really happy about that.

Collectively, 40 MHAs, ministers, we have to get this right. It can't be just tribe against tribe day after day, either. We need to ensure the 40 of us do whatever we can to ensure that whatever graduates graduate this year, next year, the following year that we do everything we can to entice them to stay, to show them that Newfoundland and Labrador is a profitable place. It is the viable option to keep them right here. We have positions open. There is a future here. There can be a future here. But just to watch these graduates leave year after year to find schooling or work elsewhere is absolutely heartbreaking and we want to ensure we keep our sons and daughters right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Back in the day I left, my brother left, like many other people, but by God, if I can keep my two sons here I'm going to do everything I can. If I can keep your sons and daughters here, I'll do my best to do that as well, because no parent wants to see their children leave the province.

Sticking with that, rotational workers, again, there are any estimates between 18,000 and 20,000 of them here in Newfoundland and Labrador. You have to remember, these are the men and women who go off to work all around the world and bring home every penny to this province. That's money that did not start in this province, but is being brought into the province. Do you

know what? A big shout-out to all the men and women who go away to work and bring all your money home here to stick it into the Newfoundland and Labrador revenue. It's much appreciated and it's much appreciated by all the business owners I'm sure as well around the entire province.

The road to Buchans – I said this before; we have Marathon Gold up there – it's getting worse and worse and worse and the people up there are starting to get pretty sick of it. These heavy trucks come in. Again, we're happy to have them, but at the end of the day it's the residents who are going to pay for the damages that are done on the infrastructure they've been using their whole life.

There has to be sort of a happy medium, a give and take where government can take a portion of the taxes and put it towards the infrastructure that is supporting these massive megaprojects. There has to be some sort of a middle ground there where they can find the money to ensure that the residents are not on the hook for damage done to their cars, their tires or anything else. That's happening up in Buchans right now and toward Millertown, and we want to ensure that up there, the road is being taken care of because it's very, very important.

I think I'll end on mental health, like I usually do. For those who know me, I try to be an advocate for mental health as much as I can. It's a huge crisis in this province right now. There are ways to deal with it. If you're watching right now or if you watch this later on, there are ways to deal with it. Try to eat properly, try to exercise as much as you can, talk about any issues you have, reach out to my office or any other MHA or minister's office because I'm sure that they have a list of resources there that could help you.

But the resilience of people that are going through any mental health crisis right now, you will be okay. This too shall pass. If you are home right now and you are feeling the

crunch and you've been feeling it for quite some time now, this too shall pass. Those are my words to you and part of my mantra that I feel as though I've heard it a long, long time ago and it's stuck with me, sort of thing, and that goes: Everything will be okay in the end and if it's not okay, it's not the end.

So anybody out there who's feeling the crunch right now within your family, you know, moms and dads trying to keep up with the consumerisms, trying to keep up with the expectations as parents, it's a tough job. It's one hell of a tough job right now on a lot of people. You see so many moms and dads out there just trying to do their best, keep the food in their fridge and keep the lights on in their house.

Necessities that we took for granted at one time because it was a little easier at one time. Of course, now with the rising cost of living, it's a lot harder on parents which make it a lot harder on kids.

When these kids see their parents struggle, they want more, and that's okay. But parents out there, at the end of the day, if you're surrounded by your healthy family and you've got a belly full of food and you're in a warm house, you're doing better than probably one-third of the planet. So I want to just practise gratitude or allow you to practise gratitude, be grateful for what we have as we look for a path forward to have everything that we can here in Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure that our families are taken care of.

The mental health crisis, it's real. It has to be dealt with and, again, if anybody has any questions, feel free to contact my office or, I'm sure, any minister or MHAs' office right here. The help is there. I know that we have a shortage of psychologists and psychiatrists here in the province, but do you know what? Talk to your friends, talk to your neighbours. Keep talking. We need to keep talking.

Too many times we've heard about suicides. So far in this job, I've seen quite a few of them. I've seen quite a few of them in my district. I've seen quite a few of them across Newfoundland and Labrador. I've had some people very close to me who have taken their own lives. Unfortunately, I can't say I could ever know what they're going through, because nobody does, to have that as your last resort. To have that as even an option, I can't imagine what's going through that person's head. It can't be easy.

So we need to reach out, and if you see somebody that you feel as though needs the help, try to strike up that conversation with them, it's extremely important. If you do not have your mental health and mental wellness, if that is not in good shape, the rest of your life just seems like it's falling apart. So we need to ensure that we stand tall, we get through the storm together and as you come out on the other end of the storm you will not be the same person, you will be stronger and we will come out through this together.

You know, we've been through storms together in Newfoundland and Labrador and we're going to get through this one as well. We just need to ensure that we watch out for each other as an entire group of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

It's not up to government to save you; it's up to government to facilitate a home that is easy to access, jobs, easy to access electricity, food. That's something that we need to get back to and I'm sure we will one day.

So if you're out there and you need to talk to somebody, please ensure you talk to somebody. Keep an eye on each other's mental health.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Warr): The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

It is an honour once again to stand here and speak in this House of Assembly on the amendment to the budget. I'm honoured to serve the constituents of the District of Harbour Main.

I want to just comment on some of the words from my hon. colleague from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, because those words of idealism and optimism and hope really need to be considered carefully.

I can say that those sentiments I got the opportunity first-hand to hear in the last couple of weeks when I attended out to some of the schools in the District of Harbour Main. Who else better than to hear these words of encouragement and support and idealism than from our youth, our young minds.

I found the opportunities that I had to speak at the schools, in particular, Roncalli Central High School in Avondale, to be – I called it a daily dose of inspiration and motivation because these students were so attentive, they were lively and engaged and wanted to learn.

I must say, though, their interest level was very humbling because they listened and they were concerned because I raised some of the issues that we face here in the House of Assembly and some of the things that we tackle on both sides of the House in terms of trying to improve the lives of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Some of the things that they were concerned about, just on a local level, for example, I had one student say to me she was so worried about the cellphone service in the district because she had been driving and her car broke down and her cellphone,

there was no reception. So could not reach any family members or anyone to get help.

So to help them understand our political system and really the role that they can play in politics and in our political system, I said well, this is exactly the kind of thing that we do here in the House of Assembly. In the Opposition, for example, we call on government. We raise these issues with government. I, for example, had raised a petition about that very issue, cellphone service in the District of Harbour Main in particular, really bad in Holyrood, but pretty much every area. I explained that this is the place; this is the forum where those important decisions are made, where you can influence your elected officials.

I think they found that really important to understand the role that we, as politicians, play because I think that they weren't really sure about what we do as elected representatives in the House of Assembly.

One of the things that I think is really important and the teacher had said when she introduced me, she said it was the first time she ever had a politician actually ask to come in to the classroom. I think that's something we all should try to do to educate our young people more about our political system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

But getting to the underlying tone of the time when I was there, it was just so heartwarming to see these young minds who really want to know more about politics, they want to know more about what we do. So I invited them, of course, to reach out to anyone in the House of Assembly to find out more information.

I also think the onus is on us, as elected officials, to really, vigorously reach out to our youth and really invite them to get involved, to get interested because, as we've heard it said, they are our future. Our youth are our future; they are going to be our leaders. They are the ones that are going to carry the torch when we leave.

It was also interesting last week. I attended a volunteer appreciation dinner at Holy Cross Elementary school in Holyrood. That, too, was so inspiring and encouraging. The principal there, Tyson Bennett, and some of the teachers and the parents, had a Jiggs' dinner. They had that for the volunteers to appreciate the volunteers. It was interesting that the volunteers that were there were all women, they were mothers. They had their children with them at the dinner because they, too, are involved in supporting their family and their parents in volunteering. These are some of the volunteers of the breakfast club, for example, or coaching sports teams.

It was really great to see that these – and they were young – young mothers are out there. Most of them are working full time, yet they're getting up at probably 6 in the morning to go in to get ready for 7 or 7:30 for the breakfast club to help the kids, to make sure that they have healthy, nutritious breakfasts at the school.

You see these volunteers – and last week was Volunteer Week – it's just so encouraging and it's so positive when you see the community mindedness, the commitment that so many people have to do this voluntarily, of their own free time, to help better their community. So we see this from the teachers and the principals who also give up their own time after school.

Again, as with Roncalli, I was completely inspired by the teachers there, Marie Woodford and John Battcock. They were engaged. They want their young students to learn about our political system here in Newfoundland and Labrador so that they will be prepared when they leave school to hopefully get involved or at least vote. That's one of the things that I encourage them to do, is to increase our voter participation.

As well, I saw another excellent example of volunteerism and a community commitment down at All Hallows, down in North River. I

attended there on a number of occasions and to see the volunteers – they've had volunteer appreciation dinners and Christmas dinners down there. I've gone down to read to the students and they love it. They love when their politicians, their elected representatives come in and they're like who are you? What are you about? They want to know. Even at that young age, they're keen and they're encouraged.

The same thing in Colliers at Immaculate Conception – that's the elementary school there in Colliers. I went out there for literacy week. Again, reading to the students, they were engaged and they want to know. They want to soak it up. They want to understand. So that is our responsibility here as elected Members of the House of Assembly, I believe, to do that. To encourage that interest and to further it along.

As well, Ascension Collegiate in Bay Roberts, though not in my district, but they are very committed. I have many of my constituents within the District of Harbour Main that attend at Ascension Collegiate. The principal there is a very inclusive. Mr. Neil Kearley is very inclusive in terms of engaging all students. There are no exclusions. I felt that spirit of collaboration and really trying to engage all students in his classrooms and in his school.

I have attended there at the camp and gown events and a very moving Remembrance Day ceremony that he had, which involved all of the children, there was beautiful music and there were guest speakers: it was a wonderful thing.

So I think it is important – taking off from what my colleague, the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, had stated – we have to remain positive and we have to be encouraged. That's when I feel the most encouragement and pride is when I attend and see our youth in the classrooms or when I am out at events: they inspire me.

Having said that, it is also something that I shared with them, what our responsibility here in the Official Opposition is to hold government's feet to the fire. They didn't really understand that concept and they're like, what do you mean, we hold their feet to the fire? And I'm like, well, what it really means is accountability. Accountability is such an important part of our political system. It's to make sure that our government, who holds the majority, that they are representative and they are accountable and that they are transparent. I had students say, well, what do you mean by that? What does that really mean?

It means that we have to hold them to a standard. We have to question them. Yes, we have to be critical. I often hear people say that's all you do, politicians. You're just critical; you criticize. Well, we have to question. That's how we can find out what they're doing. I mean it's just an important, fundamental part of our political process in the House of Assembly. We have Question Period because we question them on what decisions they're making, what policies they have. It's very important and it's something that it was important for me to explain to them the role of the Opposition, that we do question.

It's not just about politics. Sometimes we hear that from government saying, oh, you're just being political. Well, guess what? This is what we have to do. It's not about political; it's about questioning you. You are making very important decisions that impact the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians so we have to hold you responsible. We have to question you and we must. If we don't do that, then we fail. We fail in our responsibility as Opposition Members. That's why we are diligent and we are very 'fierciful,' if you will, in questioning government and our ministers.

This isn't to be a personal thing. This has nothing to do with personal – it's not politics. It's not about personalities. It's about the role that each minister has. For example,

the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality, she has a standard that she has to uphold and as the minister she is responsible. If I, as the critic for Women and Gender Equality, ask her questions that may be uncomfortable because it may question the decisions that she's making, that's the way it is. That's what we have to do. We will continue to do that with all the vigour and passion that we have.

When it comes to understanding the political system, I think there needs to be more education in terms of the curriculum, I would submit, in our schools. Because it did become evident to me – and the teachers in the classes that I attended agreed – that we need to have more education, more curriculum, more classes about politics and about the political system. The lack of understanding is somewhat concerning, in my view, amongst our young people. So we have to focus our attention on that and that is something, I would suggest, that needs to be an important plan.

That get's me to the budget, *Budget 2023*. Why not? Why not *Budget 2023*? What is the problem with *Budget 2023*? Well, there are many problems, Speaker. I mean, there are some things that I was very happy to see and pleased to see, as were my colleagues, in some of the areas. But we have some overriding, overarching and serious concerns, Speaker.

First of all, it's about the plan and we've talked about this a lot. Is there a plan? We cannot vote for something that involves just random spending without a plan, Speaker. We cannot, in good conscience, support a budget that really is aligned with random spending. It's my submission to you that's what the government is doing in this budget. It's basically throwing around money at different things without a comprehensive, without an organized strategy, and without that, Speaker, it's hard to have confidence.

It's hard to have confidence in a budget that has this money going one way and going

another way. A budget is supposed to be a fiscally economic plan. Speaker, with all due respect, I don't see that here. It certainly, in my view, does not align with that. It's more like a spending spree. Well, fortunately, the oil revenues are very high and that is why we are in a position now to see this spending spree.

But without a plan, Speaker, how does anyone know that they've made the best choices? You can't evaluate the plan. You're just hoping, oh, they'll put money here and let's hope for the best, or let's throw it there or there and let's hope for the best. But is this really giving attention to the real needs? Is it assessing the needs and the different areas that are wanting in our province?

Speaker, I'm concerned about the way this budget fails to acknowledge and really look at a balanced, organized and systematic strategy going forward. I don't see it, it's not evident and that's really what our concern is.

Let's look at whether it's an economic plan. Let's look at that, for example. Is this budget, *Budget 2023*, an economic plan? Well, I would submit that the government is just coasting on the high oil prices. It's coasting on the high oil prices and crossing its fingers. Well, things look good there, but really we can't rely on that, Speaker. I mean times are good right now but that, as we know, fluctuates. So I worry about that.

If oil prices tank again what's going to happen? Is there a plan to get the province through it, or is it going to be just back to cuts, cuts, cuts? I need to stress that. I would say that we in the PCs, when we were in government we did have strategic plans for virtually every sector. For example, the Poverty Reduction plan was just something we talked about in Question Period today, so why not government?

At this point, Speaker, however, I would like to move a subamendment, seconded by the

Member for Exploits: That the amendment that was previously presented, the non-confidence motion, be amended by changing the period at the end thereof to a comma, and also by adding immediately thereafter the following words: "and that this House also faults the government for its failure to hold the Federal Government to its obligations to Newfoundland and Labrador to provide sufficient health funding and other transfers, its failure to participate in implementing the Health Accord, and its failure to do enough to drive economic growth and diversification for a secure, sustainable future in our province."

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

This House stands in recess so we can take a look at the amendment to see if it's in order.

Thank you.

Recess

SPEAKER: Are the House Leaders ready?

Third Party good?

Order, please!

After careful deliberation, I find that the subamendment is in order.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

So when we look at this subamendment, just for clarification, the essence of this subamendment really is about faulting the government because it hasn't held the

federal government, the Trudeau government, the Trudeau Liberal government, to its obligations to Newfoundland and Labrador.

So we're talking about the federal Liberals in Ottawa and the fact that they have not provided sufficient health funding and other transfers to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, who is in this Confederation. It has failed to participate, this government, the provincial government, has failed to participate in implementing the Health Accord and its failure to do enough to drive economic growth and diversification for a secure, sustainable future in our province.

When we look at the federal government, and we can draw attention to some of the failures with respect to the federal government in Ottawa, but how does that relate to our government here in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Liberal government here in Newfoundland and Labrador? They have the same name, both Liberals. There's no plan to hold Ottawa to its obligations, Speaker. There is no plan, I'll repeat, to hold Ottawa to its obligations. I haven't seen it. Now, I've only been here – it'll be four years May 19, but I have yet to see a plan to hold Ottawa to its obligations.

What are we asking for here? What are we in the Official Opposition asking this government, this Liberal government to do? It's to hold Ottawa – it's to put the party before people. That's what they're doing. This government is putting their party, the Liberal Party, before the people. It's in essence, Speaker, I would argue, letting Trudeau off the hook.

Where do we see it? We see it with respect to the carbon tax, but we see it, in particular, with respect to the transfers that are in place. Trudeau came to office in Ottawa in 2015 promising to make transfers fair for Newfoundland and Labrador. Well, guess what? He didn't. Is that a surprise? I don't know.

We have been shortchanged, Speaker, in our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have been shortchanged on transfers like equalization. We have been shortchanged. We have been –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: – shortchanged.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Order, please!

I'm going to continue to get louder.

Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

SPEAKER: Let's bring it down a notch.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

So Trudeau came to office, Speaker, in 2015 with all these promises to make transfers fair for Newfoundland and Labrador, but he didn't. We were shortchanged on things like transfers, like equalization, on the health transfers as well, Speaker.

With respect to equalization, we're looking at the tune of billions, not millions, billions of dollars. We were shortchanged on health transfers, but our Premier, our Liberal Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, says that's fine. So what we want, again, to know is, is there a plan? Is there a plan here? Is there a plan to make Ottawa accountable?

I mean, we are in this Confederation, but there is no plan. This is nothing new and there is no plan. So sadly, Speaker, the theme of my speech, it seems, goes back to the fact that there's no plan and that will bring me to the issue of seniors.

I've had the opportunity in the last number of weeks, in particular, to go out to many, many places in the District of Harbour Main and talk to many of the seniors. Just Saturday night at a 70th wedding anniversary, I talked to seniors who are hurting, Speaker. Newfoundland and Labrador seniors are hurting. I went to Colliers on Sunday at a volunteer appreciation and many of these volunteers are our seniors. They are our seniors. Yet they tell me, and I'm sure that we hear it, not just on our side but on government side as well, I know with confidence that we all hear how hard it is for our seniors. One of the main issues was the cost of groceries. I mean, they cannot afford to eat healthy.

That's another thing a couple of seniors said to me on Sunday. This government, they want us to eat healthy but we can't afford to buy healthy food. We can't afford to. If we do buy the lettuce and the healthy vegetables, they go bad so quickly, but they said that they are having such difficulty, they're struggling.

I've heard this in Colliers. I've heard this in Brigus, in Harbour Main, in Holyrood and Avondale. It's the same thing. It is such a concern and it's really a crisis right now.

Speaker, they're not the only ones saying it. The seniors have reached out to the Seniors' Advocate. What I found really amazing – and this is an example of how to do something right. I will say that the seniors' report was excellent. It had such a large sample size, Speaker, from the response of seniors. They had extensive consultations. They were overwhelmed almost. It was unprecedented the feedback that they got from seniors, that the Seniors' Advocate got for her report. It painted a very

sad picture. It was a very clear picture, but it was a very sad picture of what our seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador are experiencing today, what we heard and what the needs are and the concerns –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I'm hearing, from the other side, ministers heckling here and saying we're criticizing. Well, guess what? We're in a democracy and if you don't like criticism and questions, you're in the wrong place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, this is why we're here. We are legitimately allowed to ask these questions and to hold you to account. So when you –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Pardon me?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I'm telling the seniors' story. It's not my story, it's the seniors' story and it's the Seniors' Advocate. The Seniors' Advocate came back from her report – which was an extensive report, extensive consultations, large sample size from a response of the seniors of this province – 60 per cent are going without food, Speaker.

That may be one side of the story, but it's unfortunately a sad side. It's an important part. It's what our seniors are enduring and you need to listen to this: 60 per cent are going without food; 57 per cent aren't buying medical supplies or devices because they can't afford to; 32 per cent don't have enough income to meet their needs. That's one-third, 32 per cent, Speaker. These are our seniors in our province. Seniors in our province are struggling, not just with living and with the cost of living, but with accessing health care too.

Many feel that they're near the poverty line. As has been noted, we've heard this in the House that they're skipping meals and they're going without medication due to the high cost of living. I found this astounding – and we've heard this. This is fact; this is not one side of the story. They're cutting prescription pills in half to make them last longer. They're cutting out social events because they can't afford to go out there. But, Speaker, this year's budget, how can we sign off on a budget like this that leaves seniors worse off while yet it claims it's enough? How can we, in good conscience? I cannot. I cannot support a budget that fails seniors in this way.

So, Speaker, I'm saying this because this is the reality and what we need to see is more concentrated effort at listening. That's a very simple, simple thing, but it's listen to the people. When I go out and speak to the seniors, for example, on Sunday afternoon, I said okay, tell me what your issues are. What are your problems? What should I be doing better? What do you want to see me do? You are my voice and really that seems cliché, but it's the reality. We are their voices. They expect us to come in here, especially in the Opposition, and report on what's happening to them in their communities because it's also very easy to forget that when you are in higher positions in government.

So it is our responsibility, in terms of trying to improve the lives of the people that we represent, to listen because they are the best authority. They are the authority. They know what they need. I mean, we often have people in high positions making decisions but they never really experienced what it's like. Unless you've walked in someone's shoes, you can't really understand. But surely by listening, we can. We can gain a better understanding of the real needs of the people that we represent.

Speaker, this report from the Seniors' Advocate, she openly criticized the government. I hear the minister over there

saying oh, well, you criticize. Well, the Seniors' Advocate criticized the government saying that this was not enough. What they did in the budget was not enough. Basically what she said is that it, in essence, failed seniors. She called for indexing of seniors' benefits. She called for help for seniors that don't have enough money to make ends meet, but it didn't materialize. So, again, it goes back to listening.

Now we see the government has a \$9.8-billion budget – \$9.8 billion. Wow, that's a lot of money. Surely that money could have been spent and allocated more appropriately to assist and to help our seniors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Yet, they did not listen to the Seniors' Advocate or to the Opposition, who daily, when we're in the House and in our advocacy work, bring these issues to their attention. I'm sure that they get the same concerns from their constituents that they represent.

So, Speaker, it's very important. Our seniors are hurting and they need to perhaps go back, look at this report carefully, look at what the Seniors' Advocate said, digest it, try to – it's never too late; you can make changes. You have the power, government – you have the power. We in the Opposition don't right now, but the government has the power to make the changes, to listen. They did it in last year's budget. They came out and made a whole bunch of different changes after the fact. They can do it again. So listen to your seniors; listen to your Seniors' Advocate. Now is the time.

Speaker, with respect to the budget, those are two areas. When I look at the equalization transfers, I look at the fact that the federal government is let off the hook, basically. They are not fulfilling and honouring their responsibilities to us in this Confederation. They're not doing it and this government is not holding them accountable. They have the power to do that too, but they're not. They make a choice and they've chosen not to. Also with

respect to the issue of seniors, we need to look at this; we need to make changes. Government needs to act. This is a call of action for them to do something, to listen to the people that they represent.

Speaker, one other thing I want to mention, too, there are many areas in the budget where I could direct that I feel there's no plan. I wonder, though, when I see the debt that we have. I believe the net debt now is \$17 billion? No?

S. COADY: No, \$15.7 billion.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Pardon?

S. COADY: It is \$15.7 billion.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: It's only \$15.7 billion now.

S. COADY: It's down.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Only –

S. COADY: I didn't say only.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: No, I'm saying only. You're saying \$15.7 billion; I'm saying only \$15.7 billion. Okay, that's nothing to brag about, I would say. This is more and more of our tax dollars that is going to pay interest on our debt.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm only interested in hearing the Member for Harbour Main.

Thank you.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, more and more of our tax dollars are going just to pay interest on this debt.

Spending problem: well, a \$9.8 billion budget. All I say about that is when you're minding the public purse you have to make

the right policy decisions. That's the problem. That's the problem that we in the Progressive Conservative Party have with this government. They are not making the right policy decisions.

I will tell you, when we get in government – which we will – we'll show you the right policy decisions. We will.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Final warning to both sides of the House. I'm interested in hearing the Member for Harbour Main.

Thank you.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker, I appreciate that you're interested in hearing me.

I wonder when I get this reaction are we striking a nerve? Sometimes the truth hurts, but they are using our hard-earned tax dollars. They have to use it wisely, that's what we're saying, Speaker. That's simply what we're saying. Use our tax dollars wisely. Allocate it in the places where it's needed: for seniors. When we see the Seniors' Advocate report, you have evidence of where it's needed. Act on it. That's all we're saying.

Speaker, in conclusion, I see I only have a couple of minutes. I want to end with this: yes, there are concerns. I started talking about how inspired I am by the youth of our province, and there are so many youth. I am still inspired. I'm inspired by the seniors when I go out to these events and I see the spirit that they have. I've learned never to underestimate the potential and the power of the human spirit of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I've learned never to underestimate the intelligence of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So we've seen the strength and we've seen the spirit when times are tough, like they have been through the pandemic, but we adapt. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians adapt and that's the key: adaptation. But now we see them facing serious problems, especially our seniors, and our seniors represent such a huge percentage of our population in Newfoundland and Labrador, but they are finding it difficult. They are facing serious financial problems in dealing with our economy.

Speaker, we live in the most amazing place in the world. We are a province so rich in resources, in our people, we are rich in opportunities; we have to seize those opportunities. The people of our province are counting on each one of us, the 40 of us, all of us, not just government MHAs, but collectively the 40 MHAs. Let's not disappoint them.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

After the last bout, I guess I'm going to have to change the worm on my hook.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

P. FORSEY: Anyway, Speaker, it's always nice to get up here and speak for the constituents of Exploits. They're the ones who put me here and they have a lot of issues with the district.

First of all, I'd like to acknowledge Volunteer Week. Last week was certainly Volunteer Week in our district and across the province, of course.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: And we all know how important our volunteers are, especially in each other's districts. I know we have them

there. They're busy at all times. When we need them, when they can provide financial help, when they can help out with whatever program they can, they're always there, especially for people in need, to do what they do for our communities and for the service they provide. Hats off to those people. I'd like to thank the volunteers in my district very, very much.

But, Speaker, again, over the Easter break, certainly we're hearing a lot of the same problems again in the districts. It's always a recurrence. You go to a grocery store, you go to a gas station, you pull up anywhere and somebody is always reminding you of something.

As of late again in Central, of course, there's a doctor situation. We're certainly hearing of the doctor situation in Central. I know Bishop's Falls lost their doctor last year; still no replacement as of late. Botwood last January lost a doctor; still no replacement with that doctor. Grand Falls-Windsor has lost a couple. There's another one going this spring, which is leaving lots of people without a family physician and they can't get access to the health care that they need. They call the hubs; they can't get through to the hubs. If they do get through to the hubs, it's referred that you go see a doctor, which doesn't help the program a bit with regard to seeing a doctor. Try to get their prescriptions filled, it's go to the emergency services. The doctors are not there to get that done. So we're hearing big issues on doctors in the Central region.

Emergency units, of course, we've been hearing that through the Easter break again, emergency units closed here, emergency closed there. You are diverted to go here, to go there. In Grand Falls-Windsor, we find that's our regional hospital and when we get diversions up from the Connaigre Peninsula, from Green Bay, from Lewisporte, it creates a bottleneck at the Grand Falls-Windsor hospital. We've all seen it and we've heard the stories. We saw

it, people out in the hallways. It's a terrible situation.

I know that's because the doctor situation is not there. So we need to certainly put more monies into that. I know there are some monies in the budget for doctors, but it's not curing the situation right now. It's only as of Easter that we did see it again, the bottleneck situation at the emergency services.

You take somewhere in the Green Bay area, down in LaScie, you take somewhere in the Connaigre Peninsula area, down as far as probably Harbour Breton when they're pushed up to the emergency units in Grand Falls-Windsor, both ends you probably have a 2½ hour drive. That's where they have to go for emergency services, which puts a lot of strain on the patients, puts a lot of strain on the health care workers that's transporting them. It sometimes creates terrible, terrible situations. So it's something that we certainly need to look after.

Long-term care, again, same thing. Same thing again, we still have new units in Grand Falls-Windsor, new units in Gander, 30-bed units not fully occupied. We certainly need that occupied to relieve patients that are in acute care right now, to move them into the long-term care so that we can streamline the health care system, get people into surgeries, have their surgery corrected and have their surgeries done so that we can get that streamlined. So the 60 beds in there with 30 beds to go, hopefully in the near future we get enough of those beds open and get all those units accessed so that we can free up some of the time in our emergency hospitals that are already there, our regional hospitals, to streamline some of that.

The 24-hour emergency unit in Botwood, that's still down. That was reduced by the Liberal government in 2016. They came in and cut the 24-hour emergency service. Again, with two promises, to reopen it and

reinstate it. It hasn't been done yet, the promise in the 2019 election and again in the 2021 election. By opening that 24-hour emergency service in Botwood, it could streamline some of the services that's going to Grand Falls-Windsor right now that's bottlenecking the situation up there. So if that was reinstated like the promises were, then that could certainly streamline that area and take the strain off some of those services. So that's something in the health care.

MTAP is another big situation I'm hearing in the Central region and I'm sure all over the province. We've heard stories, we listen to the news, the *Open Line* and that kind of stuff that we listen to. We hear all those stories. I've got a person in my district, of course, and he had to go out of town for the service that couldn't be provided here. He ended up in Alberta. It cost him, I think, \$5,600 or \$5,700 for the trip and it was only covered by MTAP probably half that amount. For a service that couldn't be performed here, you know, is that what we're doing to our patients, our people here, driving them further to get more acute care done?

Of course, even from Central Newfoundland out to St. John's, even our local hospitals here, MTAP is not covering the costs and not covering what they need, especially with the high cost of living right now. Everything is gone up. There have not been any changes in the program and everything has gone up. The cost of hotels, the cost of gas, the cost of meals, all that's extra. So that certainly needs to be looked at.

When I look at volunteers, when I mention the volunteers and MTAP, volunteers are filling a big gap in the MTAP sector right now. What MTAP doesn't cover, they're going to the Lions Clubs, they're going to the Kin centres and they're going to the K of Cs. They're going everywhere trying to get some help from what they can't get from MTAP because they're so desperate that they need that surgery done, they need to

see a physician, they need to get some treatment done and they need to get some service done or changes done. So, MTAP right now, the volunteer sector again provides a big gap into what MTAP is not providing at the time.

Another big part of the district again: housing. I know the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans was questioning housing recently in the House today. Housing is certainly becoming a major, major problem in the Central region, all across the province of course. I'm hearing it every day. I'm talking to constituents that can't get places to stay, can't get housing. We have units in the Central area – I know we do. There are some units there that need to be refurbished. The upkeep on them needs to be done to bring them back up to standards. We could start there and put those people back in those units. There are some units there that certainly need to be refurbished. Instead of long term, down the road, on affordable housing which, of course, is another part of it too that certainly needs to be done, but to correct some of the immediate program that we need right now, fix up some of those houses that we already have there. Get those people in.

Not in a hotel room in Gander, where I know there are a lot of people living right now. Going from Central Newfoundland, that's where they're staying right now. They're keeping them in a hotel room in Gander and probably have been there now for three to four weeks. That is where they're going. Those are couples that I've seen go out on the street in the past two weeks – that's two weeks prior to Easter. Single parents with children, same thing, being put up in hotel rooms. We need to put some more emphasis on that. We need those housing units to be fixed up and more affordable housing built that can be instated too. So that is other things that we can do.

Seniors, again, in their own homes – I did hear the Member for Harbour Main talk about seniors and she went very in depth

into the seniors and what she said is coming from seniors, because I hear it myself in my district. I certainly hear from seniors; I really do.

Back in 2016, we wanted the seniors to stay in their own homes. There was a program for seniors to stay in their own homes; it was already there. What happened in 2016? You cut the subsidies for seniors to stay in their own homes and increased their contribution to what they pay. What kind of balance was that? What kind of balance was it? So it cost you more to stay in your own home; we're not going to help you. Now you have the cost of living and they can't stay in their own homes. I'm hearing it every day. They can't afford to stay in their own homes. They can't afford the cost of food, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, what seniors need. Especially when the government is talking about healthy choices that they want people to make. They want people to make those healthy choices. Those seniors cannot afford those healthy choices. They cannot. The fruits and vegetables that they so duly need, they can't afford it anymore. They can't afford to keep their heat on most of the times. They can't afford to stay in their own homes.

So that's something that the seniors need. We need to try to keep the seniors in their own homes as much as possible. It's a fact. It's probably better for the health care system. Seniors in their own homes are more content. There's less stress. There are less physical issues with them so they're more content in their own homes. They're staying in their own homes. They're not reliant on the health care system, because they're in their own homes. They're able to eat better.

That's a fact. That's a known fact. Anybody in the physicians' area would tell you that's a fact, that people staying in their own homes is a less strain on the system. So instead of cutting those programs, like you did in 2016, add more to seniors so that they can stay in their own homes, be well

looked after in their own homes. You know, maintain the living that they know in their own homes. The people around them are coming to see them. It makes for a lot better living situation, so it's something that has certainly got to be done.

When we're talking about the seniors' stories, that kind of stuff, those stories are not coming from us. Those are true stories, what we hear in our districts. I'm sure you hear them, too. No doubt you do. You got to. I'm sure every day somebody says to you: I can't afford to put oil in my tank this winter and the longer this winter goes, the worse it's getting. I'm sure you do. When we get up and talk about those seniors, that's coming from those seniors. I've talked to them and I see it every day.

The cost of living, of course, is all across the board. Not only from seniors, it's for low-income families. It's from families, right now, that are doing quite well. They can't live the same way that they used to. When their jobs were good and that kind of stuff, some went out and bought vehicles. They went and bought houses but they did it when the work was good. But now that the cost of living, like with the milk, again, fuels, fruits and vegetables, it's just things are getting out of reach for them.

It's things that we have to look at to bring down the cost of living on that kind of stuff because it's very hard on people today, especially, again, I mentioned the single parents with children. Single parents with children can't afford to keep milk in their fridge, a staple food of our own province. We're abundant in milk. We're very abundant in milk here in this province. We always have been. Milk is very abundant in this province.

Our low-income people, single parents, can't afford milk to put on their tables. It's a fact. It's there. Again, those are stories that we're hearing from those people, that they can't afford those staple foods. So if they can't afford the staple foods, they can't

afford housing. It's a bad predicament to be in I guarantee you that.

Sugar tax: another one, of course, that belongs to the cost of living. Now, I'm glad to see that the minister did say that in the health part of it that there was going to be some money for glucose monitoring. I am very glad to see that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: – because that is very important to the people of my district and other areas.

Actually, I did a walk last year with a young fellow, Brett Samson, in Peterview. He does a walk every year for the monitors to help people with their sugars in diabetes. He walks every year to raise money. He's a very bright little child. I think Brett now is 10, 11, I'm not sure, somewhere in that area, but he's always raising money.

One of the programs that he raised it for was glucose monitoring. So I'm very glad to see that there are some monies. How much and how it's going to be implemented, well, actually we would like to know that as soon as possible, because I know that young Brett has asked me the same question. A 10-year-old can ask me a question about glucose monitors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: I was very intrigued with that. As soon as we can get those answers for him, I'd certainly appreciate being able to tell him that.

Industry again – I know my colleague from Grand Falls-Windsor mentioned industry in Central Newfoundland. It's good to see the mining coming back. It is. I've been up to Marathon Gold, been up to the two pits that they have there. It's great to see that coming back; it's something that we certainly do need in the area.

We have more resources in the area that we can avail of, no doubt. The more we can do of the gold, coppers and zinc – whatever minerals are in those grounds – the more we can do, the more we can move this ahead and have the environmental assessments done, which is good. It's good to announce the projects, but I mean to say we have to protect our environment; we need to protect our lands and make sure we get the best profit from our own lands. It's our resources. At the end of the day it's our resources, so we need to make sure that we protect those resources. That's our resources that we can rely on at the end of the day. Again, it's good to see the industry, the way that it's coming back.

Forestry, of course – well, the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans did mention forestry. It's a shame that in 2017-2018, I think it was, the minister of the day and the premier of the day unlocked 280,000 cubic metres of fibre from the old Abitibi permits. It's a shame that it went everywhere outside the Central area. All the bigger players got a cut in it: 280,000 cubic metres. No industry there for the people of Central Newfoundland. We're watching it; they are watching it going out in truckloads. They're watching all their timbers, they're watching all their fibres being whisked away, used up. A few jobs? Yeah, it might be a few jobs on the truck-driving part of it, probably somebody using a harvester, but there's no secondary industry – none.

To see 280,000 cubic metres unlocked – which was a good thing, don't get me wrong. That was a good thing not to have that tied up in old Abitibi permits, but to give it away? It was something that certainly could've been done there. Why that was done I have no idea. I have no idea why that was fully given away like that but, anyway, it was done. Now, it's still locked in for another five years because of the zoning that's on it.

Speaker, it's always good to get up and talk about the issues in my district. Those are

some of the issues that I've been hearing. I know people hear them all across the province; you hear them every day. They are stories that we hear. They are stories that are true to us, that are told by the people of this province. As long as the people of this province want us to get up here and talk about it, then I'll certainly do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time. Right now, I'll take my seat for another time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: That was quick. Now I have to find where I was going to start.

Thank you, Speaker.

I'm looking at part of the subamendment, especially when it talks about the diversification and a secure, sustainable future for our province. I'm going to take an approach from this as a former educator and where I see the school system and the need for resourcing there to make sure that we have the resources available for a sustainable future in our province.

Now, over the last few weeks, I've had the pleasure of being invited as a special guest – I don't know how they meant special, but nevertheless – to act as a special guest to primary and elementary schools to talk about the work I do as an MHA.

To say that the primary grades were absolutely enthralled at the work I was doing, well, it would be an overstatement. Nevertheless, the one thing about it, I'm a high school trained teacher. That's where I spent most of my career. The youngest grade I taught was Grade 7. Different individuals. But no doubt about it, primary teachers are a special breed. There are no two ways about that, in terms of the issues that they face.

So in trying to explain in as short a term as possible to primary students what we're doing, even to explain the role of the Speaker, we decided to get into a debate on whether pizza should have pineapple or not on it. I hit upon that, after about four or five classes, realizing that everything else I was saying was going over flat, no matter how much I tried to make it appropriate to the age level.

Now, my colleague from Bonavista, having been in the primary and elementary school, I don't have to tell him what the challenges are. High school is a different creature altogether, but we had a wonderful experience.

I also looked at, when you're sitting in front of primary students and you're seeing children, in some cases they haven't yet learned to self-regulate or to self-control. They're all over the place. They're very much in need of hugs more than anything else.

AN HON. MEMBER: Kind of like the House.

J. DINN: Like the House.

I did point out to them that when things are getting out of control, the Speaker has to stand up and I said: Do you know what happens then? They said: Yeah, everyone has to be silent. I said: You've got it. It works in theory.

I was in one kindergarten class that had 12. It was a beautiful space, but 12, I thought, that's a pretty reasonable size there to get what you need done, because even in that you still had three children there who were having supreme issues with just settling down and paying attention. Now, I've got two grandchildren; I know what that's like. But think about this, where I'm going with it, because I have a lot of admiration for the primary teachers. My wife was a primary teacher. My daughter is a primary teacher. Anyone who's a primary teacher, there's no

doubt about it, they earn every cent of their money and more.

But a maximum class size for kindergarten is 20. For Grades 1 to 3, it's 25. For Grades 4 to 6, it's 28. For Grades 7 to 9, it's 31. Put that in perspective. When I taught high school, basic English, I had 15 students in that class, sometimes followed by an academic English 3201, that's the level III course, which had 30-plus students in it. I will tell you this, in that academic class I was more tired and more exhausted and at the end of my rope after the 15 students in front of me, who had those challenges, than I was when I came out of the class of 30. Even then, in a class of 30, it altered the way I would have instructed the class. Certainly it's very hard to have group discussion in a class of 30, so your teaching approach changes.

Now, why I say that is because it comes down to – we've had lots of discussion in the House here, we've talked about teacher allocation. I look upon teacher allocation as an investment in the education system and then by extension an investment in the economy, in the future of this province. Because budgets that don't address the needs of the classroom, of the students in that classroom, is a budget that fails to basically fund education properly.

That's the harsh reality about it. Because to go back to my experience in high school, I don't know how we picked the number of 20 for kindergarten as the ideal number. I don't know how we picked 25 for K to 3, but unless we're looking at the needs of the students in that class, then we are just simply randomly picking numbers out a hat. No different than if I said well, how many lifeboats does this ship need? Is it five, 10, 15 or should it be dependent upon, well, how many people are going to be on that boat? That's the first thing.

Often when we pick numbers, I can't help but think in terms of, when it comes to the education system, we pick numbers totally

divorced from the needs of the students in that class and we're doing a disservice to the teachers then and to the students themselves.

Now I've brought this up before in Estimates, I think a couple of years ago and the person responding to me said that the single most important factor in the success of a student is the teacher. I would agree with that.

I would say that the single most important factor in putting out a fire in your house is the firefighter. But if the firefighter does not have the hose, does not have the fire truck, does not have the oxygen mask, does not have the equipment, no matter how good that firefighter is, he or she is not going to be very effective. That's what it comes down with teaching. You can put a teacher in with a class of 30, but what it comes down to is, there's going to be very little in the way of inclusion, very little in the way of instruction because you're basically not going to be able to, first of all, get the students engaged, no matter how good you are.

It's about giving the resources to people that we have in the system. Anyone who wants to, by the way, accompany me – I still have the extension – I'm willing to go teach in a primary system with any minister over there on that side and we'll spend a week. Why primary? Because I have no primary experience, so we'll be on an even footing. We'll see how frazzled we are by the end of it.

I was speaking to another school. They have in one Grade 3 class, 37 students; two are home-schooled. They're already way over cap so they removed 10 from that. Another Grade 4 class, 37. Reduce that by eight, you've got 29. Now, take a listen to the numbers. Twenty-five and 29 in primary grade levels. So what they have now is they'll have one class of Grade 3: 25; one class of Grade 4: 29; and a combined grade of 18.

No matter how you cut it, it's coming down to a numbers game, Speaker. It's nothing to do with making sure that students have the best academic success. It comes down to what I've said in this House before with regard to budget based decision-making. We see this in other areas as well that, rather than looking at what do we need to make this work? Well, here's your budget, see what you can fit into it. That's what happened with the Carter Churchill case. Very clearly it came down to find the resources within the system. As opposed to what supports does this student need to succeed and others like him? It ignores the composition.

I had an email from a parent who has children in Grades 1 and 3, both in classes of 30. I remind you again, the caps for Grades 1 to 3 is 25, but, you see, we have this insidious little policy of soft caps, which allows for that variance. I don't care, I will challenge anyone to teach in a class of 30 of primary students; they're not high school students but primary students. You're not giving them a fair chance.

But let's put into that class then children with needs, who have diagnosed learning exceptionalities, who may have language issues, who may not even speak the language, who may have learning gaps because, if they're newcomers, they are coming from areas where they have not been in school. I've taught students who the first time they were in school was when they entered high school. Children in some cases suffer from PTSD. I remember this when I was NLTA president visiting a school where the Syrian children would go from class to class with their backpacks on because they didn't know when they would have to flee or hiding under a desk with a plane going overhead or the bell goes, being traumatized by it.

So I say this because the students aren't a bunch of blueberries in the classroom where they're all of a certain quality and everything else and they're all uniform. They come

from different backgrounds. They come from families where maybe they don't have the supports in place, where they didn't have breakfast, where they're going home hungry, where sometimes it's attending an afterschool event or a group that they get fed.

I'm thinking that was back in 2013 that I had that conversation with people in the Department of Education at that time. Here we are 2023 and we're having similar conversations.

Now, I attended the NLTA convention, not last week, the week before, two weeks ago, and it's interesting, these are some of the issues that we heard: large class sizes with no reference to composition, classes that have been doubled up to meet operational requirements. Doubling up the classes so that you can keep the students in – now there's no learning really taking place, but as long as they're in the school, we've met the operational requirement.

How is that about making sure that we can have a sustainable future, when all it comes down to is it's a numbers game or internal coverage?

Now, most people – we'll call them prep periods, every now and again, like using your free period. There's no such thing as a free period, it's a prep period where you use it to catch up on your photocopying, calling parents, do the correcting, talk to the students, you name it. But when you lose that period, you lose that opportunity to do that preparation.

Fractional units: how in the name of God do you expect to have someone teach who has a 0.25 position? Where are you going to attract people to go to a remote community if we got a 0.5 position because the expenses are not 0.5 or 0.25 or the workload is not 0.25? You're not. That's been the case. Let's do away with it. Give a person a full-time job, not 0.9, 0.75. If you

want to recruit and retain teachers, that's what you start doing.

No legitimate pathway to permanence, recruitment and retention, paid internships, these are some of the suggestions people brought forward there as to how we can increase the recruitment and retention. A number of teachers talk about the make-it-work attitude. Here it is, make it work. We don't care how you do it, make it work, which was the same approach, I guess, used with Carter Churchill.

The lack of substitutes, young teachers are disillusioned before they begin, salary increases. You know, we talk about recruitment and retention, and we did have a retention policy at one time, an incentive. It was called severance. We've got rid of that. I shouldn't say we, the government got rid of that. That was a way of incentivizing people to stay in the profession. But we removed that and we wondered well, why aren't we attracting people to the profession?

In many cases, I will say that teachers work is invisible. Therein lies the problem. If we walk into an emergency room, we'll see the work that's going on. Unless we walk into a school, we won't. But I had one teacher there – now keep in mind this is in the context of the class size and the needs in that classroom. This was from a primary teacher who was one of the candidates, Speaker, for the provincial executive: In my class, my job expectations would require Wonder Woman. That I am not, unless the NLTA has those magic wristbands that I know nothing about.

Here are some of the requirements that she listed off. I've seen this from my wife with Grade 3; I've seen the workload that she takes home. In addition to just trying to teach: literacy assessments, reading assessments, listening assessments, report card essays, reading behaviour checklists, universal design learning, literacy folders, social-emotional learning integration,

trauma-informed teaching, modification of curriculum, duty sometimes up to four times – do you know what? When I took over NLTA, the one thing I didn't have to do was duty. Holy jumpin'. Lunch was my own to do what I needed to do.

Then it's the RTL, responsive teaching and learning. She had a warning that for junior high it's coming, which, basically, you'll need to collect data, extensive assessment, analyzing data, create targeted intervention and intensive intervention. Basically, you'll still have to teach your Grade 3 class. She said: The arse is out of her.

P. DINN: She's gone, b'y, she's gone.

J. DINN: Gone.

Now, it's been pointed out that the RTL –

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

I ask the Member to retract his previous statement.

J. DINN: I'll retract arse. No problem, Speaker. I'll put a bottom in place.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

J. DINN: I just figured I'd push the limit and see what happens.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: You're not the first one.

J. DINN: RTL is fine in theory, but, Sir, currently it's inadequate because it falls on the shoulders of the classroom teachers who have no resources.

Now, most of what I've listed here, Speaker, has to do with assessment, about collecting data, about checklists, you name it. There is a saying we used to have in teaching: You can't fatten the pig by weighing it. Yet, that seems to be what we're up to doing here in the education system.

We're trying to fatten pigs, increase the learning by evaluating and assessing as much as possible. Instead of, I will tell you this – and I saw this in action shortly after we had full-day kindergarten. I was visiting a school in Central Newfoundland and there are 11 or 12 children in that class. Here's what was remarkable for me. While I was talking to the teacher, there was a young student there, one of the kindergarteners, who came up. He asked a question and he said something, he said: Wow, did you see that? Actually, it's one of the things that he learned. He met one of the outcomes in that, that understanding.

There is the beauty of a small class. A class that also takes into consideration the needs of the students, because it allows the teacher for that interaction and some meaningful, authentic assessment and teaching and learning. That's what happens. But when you crowd young children into a class of 25 and we say we can have that variance of the soft cap. Speaker, I can promise you that their experience is going to be vastly different.

The parent who spoke to me – her Grade 1 child comes home with a headache every day. Every day that is what that child comes home with. Parents, who are friends, said the only way you're going to get that individual learning is put them in private education, and she's refusing to do that because she firmly believes in public education. So do I.

It's going to come down to, I really think – and I'll end here quickly because when we come up to debate again, I'll probably speak to seniors. But here if we want to address the social determinants of health, if we want to drive the economic growth that's called for in this amendment, if we want diversification and a secure, sustainable future in our province, then let's start by investing in the foundation of that society in our school system, in our professionals who are there, in the students who are there that come from all walks of life, all experiences,

so that they have the best chance of success in school and for a successful future.

To me, the only way we're going to do that – I challenge anyone – walk a week in the shoes of a primary teacher and you'll soon see why it's not just a numbers game; it's about resources.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a pleasure and a privilege to stand in this hon. House to represent the constituents of my beautiful district, and, of course, I'm happy to stand and speak to *Budget 2023*.

Speaker, on Monday, March 27, just about four weeks ago, it marked two years since this 50th General Assembly was voted into office. Two years seems like a long time, but it wasn't a very long time going. So I'd like to thank, once again, the constituents for putting their faith in me to represent them.

Speaker, I can think back to one of the first times I sat in this House. I was on the floor next to the Table. We were in COVID operations at that time. I was sat on the floor. One of the first times I had to sit and speak was to say I was going to work with the 39 Members of this hon. House for the benefit of my constituents, which I'm happy and proud to say that I have been doing, and, of course, to acknowledge when something is done for the benefit of the people of this province.

Well, many of my colleagues said over the last while in debate that there are very good points in this budget. I've told the hon. minister the same thing. There are good

points in this budget. I'm happy to say that many that have been approved in the budget were many of those that we advocated for here in the Official Opposition.

I know my colleague for Topsail - Paradise – it has been mentioned by several Members today – through petitions and questions in the House and debate in the budget was on the Continuous Glucose Monitoring. That's one I'm very happy –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: – that we had a part in that. I know the minister is listening when we do speak. I know that and I appreciate that. I take a little bit of –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Speaker, the minister is always listening. I know that, for sure.

But I can tell you, I take some solace in that when I look at the Municipal Operating Grant for municipalities. I stood many times in this House in questions and in budget debate and Estimates and spoke to the hon. minister about increasing that. Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador were quite clear and they were looking for a \$6-million increase. Well, in this budget there's \$6 million over two years. I'm happy that that's there. Again, we advocated for it and I'm glad that government listened.

Many times I've had the opportunity to join my colleague for Harbour Main in Estimates on Justice and Public Safety to speak to Fire and Emergency Services. The first year I came into this House, the budget went from \$2.2 million to \$1.9 million and it stayed that way. This year, there's an increase to \$3.76 million. I'm glad that it's there. I've spoken to many volunteer fire departments, the two in my district, others around the province, who are happy that that's there. There are good things in this budget.

My colleague for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: If the Member opposite cares to stand up and take his 20 minutes, I'd be happy to listen to him.

Right now, my colleague for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans advocated for the Lionel Kelland Hospice and there is \$1.2 million in this budget. There are good things in this budget and I acknowledge that. I do, and I'm happy that they're there.

I know that we had a break from this House. It gets us back in our districts where a lot of work is done, you see a lot of your constituents, you speak with them and I took the opportunity to ask them about the budget. Will this budget meet the collective needs of the people of our province? Will that meet the collective needs of the people of our province?

Well, when you look at education – I'm going to focus today on several topics: education, health care, seniors. When I spoke to my constituents, they were cautious. They were cautious with respect to this budget. As I said, there are good points and there are other points that have been depicted today that were not left out but that could've had more attention.

I will start with education. I understand – and the minister can correct me if I'm wrong – there's \$12 million in the budget for education with respect to the increase.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. WALL: Yes, thank you.

So I'm proud to say that I have five schools in my district: Cape St. Francis Elementary, Holy Trinity Elementary, St. Francis of Assisi, Juniper Ridge Intermediate and Holy Trinity High School. I know from speaking with many of the teachers, many of the

parents, you can only go back and look to the NLTA and what was said after the budget came out: "... the budget does 'nothing more than maintain an already inadequate status quo'" when it comes to teaching. This is not my thought; this is not the thought of the Official Opposition. This is what's coming from the NLTA.

So when you're looking at the increase – and I know my colleague said earlier about teaching and supports, and when you're looking at what does this budget do for class sizes? What does it do for the soft cap or the hard cap? Or what does it do for the splitting of classes, a one-two split or a two-three split? What does it do for that?

I know that teachers now and administration are considering their allocations for the fall. I'm hopeful that they're going to have adequate allocations, but as my colleague from St. John's Centre said, what do you do with a 0.25 position? I know it full well, Speaker, as my wife is a kindergarten teacher. I know the time and energy that she puts in to teaching her students and, of course, what's required out of pocket as well to run a classroom.

So when you're looking at all of that – and I note there are other people here in this House can speak to it much more eloquently than I can with respect to teaching. But when you're looking at this, what is the plan to retain the teachers in our province for the benefit of our children? What is the particular plan?

I know that there are many teachers unhappy with the budget. Some are speaking out, some are not, but teachers were expecting more. I understand the parameters that the minister is working under; I have no illusion other than that, Speaker. However, teachers were expecting more. They are saying that the lack of planning is driving some teachers away, out of province to other provinces here in the country. But when you boil it all down, our

children's education is suffering when it comes to certain areas of our province.

I'd like to take a minute just to sidestep and to throw out a bouquet to Industry, Energy and Technology today. Several colleague Members and I had the opportunity to attend the RISE Awards here in St. John's this afternoon to recognize 15 students. Two, I'm happy to say, were from my district: Fiona Park and Andrew Moyles – on receiving their awards and I'm very proud of that. These are our future leaders. These children are being taught by our top-notch teachers, but it causes us to wonder, as we move forward, if teachers are not retained how are we going to continue having outcomes such as this with respect to our education?

Speaker, we can talk about health care until the cows come home, and we've talked many times in this hon. House about doctors and nurses and nurse practitioners and emergency rooms. Today, I'd like to just take a few minutes to speak about nurses because they do require our support and should be acknowledged whenever we get the opportunity.

When the budget was released, the Registered Nurses' Union of the province said, "... this is not the worst budget we have seen over the years, but it is one that is clearly trying to contain a crisis versus creating longer-term strategies and solutions" So that's what the nurses are looking for, longer-term strategies and solutions and they're saying that this budget didn't provide that. As I said, there are good things in this budget. There are other things that the professionals across our province are reaching out to say wasn't there.

When we look at the plan to address the health care crisis, Mr. Speaker, what is the plan? The plan cannot be random. I think my colleague from Harbour Main said earlier today that it can't be random. We can't be just putting out fires without a plan. We need a solid plan going forward with

respect to this here, with respect to the nurses and how we are going to retain our nurses. What is the plan to address the nursing retention crisis?

The nurses are being offered more in other places. They're being offered less than what recruits who come in. What we're looking at here is are we overlooking the experience that our seasoned nurses have and are providing on a regular basis? I know there's only so much that they can provide when you're looking at – well, go into emergency rooms and the overcrowded emergency rooms.

Unfortunately, I had a resident in my district who passed away last week, who was sick on Thursday and called for an ambulance when they were in red alert and had to wait for an ambulance. He got to the emergency room and he was on a stretcher for two days in the emergency room. Unfortunately, he passed away on that stretcher. These are the stories – not stories, life experiences that are coming in from our emergency rooms.

This is one, of course, of many, but it hits home when you've known the individual since you were a boy and the volunteer service that this gentleman provided through so many areas in my hometown. To know that this was how, as a senior, he was treated in his last hours, it certainly causes me to reflect on what we are doing here and what is going to be provided going forward with respect to a plan for health care in general, doctors, nurses, emergency rooms, long-term care.

There's a wait-list in my district, Speaker, for long-term care the length of your arm. We're trying to keep seniors in their homes longer. They say that is the best option for them, but as my colleague from Harbour Main said and my colleague from Stephenville - Port au Port said, they can't afford to live in their home from the lack of supports.

I have constituents who are calling out begging for assistance to stay in their homes with respect to the care that they need to have in order to stay there. It's not there. Why isn't it there? Well, it has something to do with the low wages, the low hours that are being offered with respect to individual care. All of these things certainly make a difference.

So when we stand here in this hon. House and we speak to the budget, these are the life experiences that are coming to me, from my district, and how people are coming to me with their thoughts on the budget, what is there and what is not there. So I can only speak honestly when it comes to that.

With respect to emergency rooms, I know we have many across the province that are still closed. Does government have a plan to reopen them and keep them open? We're looking at Bonavista. We're looking at Whitbourne. We're looking at different areas around the province. We're asking what is the plan?

I'm not being political, Speaker. I'm probably one of the less political people in this room, but I can tell you wholeheartedly, we'd like to know what the plan is for the benefit of the people of our province.

So I stand today, Speaker, with much on my mind when it comes to the budget. There are many things we can look at. Early childhood educators: spoken about many times with respect to the spaces available. As my colleague from CBS said, yes, \$10-a-day daycare is a great thing, we applaud it, but I have people leaving Pouch Cove and driving to Kilbride on a daily basis for child care because there are not enough spaces available.

I know it was spoken about earlier, but what is the plan to increase the spaces for child care? The budget this year, if I know correctly, is about \$5.4 million less than last when it comes to early childhood education. Down about \$8.7 million this year to a line

item of \$66.7 million, if I'm not mistaken. So with less money going in this year, what is the plan going forward for the benefit of our children and our young families? Many who are moving into my district are looking for child care, looking for available spaces, which, unfortunately, many times they're not there.

Speaker, I know we speak regularly with respect to – I want to go back to education for a moment, back to the NLTA. Speaker, the NLTA finds it hard to believe that the budget contains no long-term vision for the education system or the commitment to address the reality teachers face each day. That is from the NLTA; heavy words when you're looking at how they're looking at a budget.

I spoke to my colleague for Bonavista a couple of weeks ago regarding guidance counsellors. A very important area in our education system are the guidance counsellors. Well, the national recommended standard for guidance counsellors is one to 250 students. In our province, Speaker, it is one to 500 students. So it is double the national standard when we're looking at guidance counsellors in our education system.

What does that say and how does that affect our teachers in the classroom? How does it affect the administrators in the schools when you don't have enough guidance counsellors to deal with individual issues when you're looking at the day-to-day struggles that individual schools have? You don't have enough guidance counsellors; additional stresses go on the teachers and the administration which then affects the level of education that is being given to our children. So it all goes hand in hand, Speaker. I can certainly tell you that it does go hand in hand.

In my last couple of minutes, Speaker, I would like to touch on violence prevention. Something that my colleague for Harbour Main advocates for and speaks to regularly.

Back on April 5, I had the privilege of standing with my caucus colleagues here and some of the Members opposite for the Moose Hide Campaign. If I remember the names correctly, Sage, David and Alexandra were here for the Moose Hide Campaign.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, it is very profound when you stand and you listen to their life experiences and why we're actually sharing that particular campaign across the country. Well, Speaker, I can certainly tell you, as a father of a 20-year-old daughter – and I am sure many hon. colleagues have daughters of their own – I worry every day when she goes through the door. If she's at work, if she's on campus, if she's at the gym, if she's at the pool, not a moment goes by, Speaker, when I don't worry about her, knowing what's going on in our world today with gender-based violence.

We ask the hon. Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality: What is the plan? What is her plan for violence prevention in our province? It has been asked many times. I've listened intently; I don't miss a word. I've yet to hear a plan when it comes to protection for gender-based violence.

Speaker, I have women in my district who can't reach the help line or can't find a shelter, who are suffering from violence in their homes and looking for help. I can tell you, sitting at the kitchen table or sometimes at a coffee shop because they don't want to be seen at their home, and listening to their stories, a plan is needed when it comes to gender-based violence in our province. I'd like to know what the plan is. So we'll continue to ask the questions with respect to what is the plan for that as well.

As I said, my colleague from Harbour Main is passionate about it, but I can speak for my caucus that all 12 Members of our

caucus are passionate about it as well when it comes to finding a solution for gender-based violence.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Speaker, I know I'll have many more opportunities to stand and speak to this budget. I appreciate the opportunity and I, once again, thank the fine constituents of Cape St. Francis for having me in this position. I look forward to the next opportunity when we can stand again to debate the *Budget 2023*.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister for Education, that the House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: 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.

This House do stand adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow.

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