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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.

First of all, I would just like to welcome everyone back into the public gallery and our Members back to our spring session.

Before we begin regular proceedings, I would like to observe an old parliamentary tradition. I have the pleasant task of formally welcoming the Member who was duly elected in the election of January 30, 2024. The Member is Fred Hutton representing the District of Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

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

**SPEAKER:** I have been advised by the Clerk that the Member has taken his Affirmation of Allegiance to the Crown as required by the *Constitution Act, 1867* and the Affirmation of Office as required by the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* and also has signed the Members' Roll.

We welcome the Member.

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

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

**A. FUREY:** Mr. Speaker, it's my distinct honour to present Mr. Fred Hutton, the elected Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

**SPEAKER:** You may take your seat, Sir.

Welcome.

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

**SPEAKER:** I'd like to welcome a new Page to the Chamber today, Emily Conway. Emily worked with us last summer as a summer student and conducted our House of

Assembly tours. Emily is from Mount Pearl and she is currently enrolled in the sociology program at Memorial University.

Welcome, Emily.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Speaker, thank you.

I retract my statements of October 19 – Thursday in October.

**SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

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

**A. FUREY:** Mr. Speaker, I, unfortunately rise in the House today to remember and reflect on the life of our friend and colleague, Derrick Bragg.

All Members in this House, and those in his life outside the walls of the Confederation Building, knew Derrick Bragg as a man filled with passion and pride for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Throughout his lifetime, Derrick showed his passion for our province by giving back, serving Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as minister of Municipal Affairs, minister of Transportation and, of course, Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

But that service began in his beloved hometown of Greenspond for years as a clerk, town manager and fire chief – never missing a beat in his community.

To honour his legacy and commitment to Newfoundland and Labrador, we renamed a road to the causeway in Greenspond as Derrick Bragg Way – so generations, including his family, will know him and learn about his contribution to this province.

Derrick once famously declared, right out on those steps outside the Confederation Building, that he “had more guts than brains.” What he didn’t realize, is that it takes a lot of brains to have those guts.

To his family, friends and those who knew him best, let me again offer my deepest condolences on your loss, on our loss.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Speaker.

On April 12, 2016, Derrick Bragg stood in this House to give his maiden address. He opened saying, and I quote: “... I find myself standing here today with a whirlwind of emotions.

“To be one of 40 who will help shape this province for the coming years is not to be underestimated. Mr. Speaker, looking back over the past 30 years until now, I muse when I think of where one’s life may lead them.”

With humility and humour he recounted the moments of his life from tiny Greenspond, which started out an island, to the far reaches of Canada and into this House of Assembly. He told of the car they built from two 10-speed bikes and a Ski-Doo motor that went fine until the bicycles turned in two different directions. He told of his brother Clyde, who was always by this side; his parents Stuart and Millie who nurtured his need to volunteer; his wife Beverley, a nurse at Brookfield hospital who shared every twist and turn of his path; their daughter Allison who he said was involved in every school sport and activity known; his uncle Mike and his dad, who chatted with him about his urge to get into politics before they passed away.

“I’ll be honest,” he said, “most called me nuts.” But Derrick was made for public

service, we all saw it. He took on every challenge, worked his fingers to the bone, made friends out of strangers and won the love and admiration of everyone who came to know him.

He clued up his speech eight years ago saying, “That my fellow colleagues is how I got here and a little about the district I plan to serve to the best of my ability. I can only hope this political life can be as rewarding to me as my past experience with my job and volunteer work.

“A lady once asked me: Derrick, will you change politics or will politics change you? I’m guessing only time will tell,” he said. “I’m anticipating a little of each. I look forward to serving this province and the people of Fogo Island - Cape Freels.”

And serve he did and none have served better. We can all imagine him in his place, right there. He has changed politics and left a legacy that touches all of us. The outpouring of grief and compassion at his far-too-early passing is a testament to that.

We only get so many years to make an impact in this world, Derrick’s impact will not be forgotten and he will live on through everything he has done and through his family and his grandson, Drew.

On behalf of our entire caucus, I express our deepest condolences.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Speaker, before we are MHAs or have served in this House, we are people; people with family, with friends, children, grandchildren. I guess that’s how I certainly remember Derrick. He was friendly, approachable, great sense of humour, quick turn of phrase and a quick wit and definitely positive and unflappable. He was committed

to his portfolio and to his district and we saw that every day in the House of Assembly.

I had the honour of attending his funeral on January 26 at St. Stephen's Anglican Church in his hometown of Greenspond. It was evident that he was greatly loved and deeply respected by his constituents and the residents of the community.

He was engaged and, I would say, courageous. I still remember the incident where he confronted angry fish harvesters, and when many would have turned and walked back into the building, Derrick went down to speak to those fish harvesters and to engage in dialogue. If anything else, that certainly earned my respect because that shows a commitment to the issues and the courage to stand your ground and to engage in dialogue.

On behalf of the NDP caucus and the Members of our party, we would like to extend condolences to the Members of the Liberal caucus, to his family, to his friends, to the people of his district and to his community.

I know he will be missed and the House of Assembly will be lesser for it.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** I ask all Members to rise for a moment of silence.

(Moment of silence.)

**SPEAKER:** Thank you.

### **Statements by Members**

**SPEAKER:** Today, we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Bonavista, Cape St. Francis, Conception Bay South, Exploits, Ferryland and Stephenville - Port au Port.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Speaker.

Barbara Keats and her three young boys moved to Bunyan's Cove in 1978 from Buchan's after her husband Calvin was seriously injured in an industrial accident. In Calvin's home community, they raised their three children and Barbara quickly became involved in the community by joining the Port Blandford-Winter Brook Development Association in 1984, one of 59 provincial regional development associations.

Months before provincial funding was ended in 1995, Barbara was voted its president and fulfilled the role until November 2023; 39 years Barbara served the communities of her regional development association.

The District of Bonavista had four regional development associations serving the peninsula, but the Port Blandford-Winter Brook Development Association is all that was left in 2024. Thanks to Barbara's leadership, energy and perseverance, it is financially sound and the core building is in great shape. The association is a huge success story, helping numerous organizations in the region as well as purchasing land for the restoration of the railway station house.

Barbara gave her all to this association, until retirement in November 2023.

I ask the Members to join me in celebrating the service of Barbara Keats to the residents of the Bonavista District.

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

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

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Speaker.

Today, I rise to recognize a constituent, Jack Hickey from Torbay. Deputy Fire Chief – retired – with St. John's Regional, Jack

has competed in the Firefighter Combat Challenge, an annual event developed to showcase physical fitness inside and outside of the fire service.

Wearing full bunker gear, including the apparatus, competitors simulate the physical demands of real-life firefighting by climbing the five-story tower, hoisting, chopping, dragging hoses and rescuing a life-sized victim as they race against their opponents and the clock.

On a national, international and world level, Jack has been a welcomed addition to the Canadian team and is well-known by others around the world as one of the most decorated and respected competitors. His accomplishments include: four world records, 11 world championships, five national championships, one US championship and one international championship.

As a result, Jack was inducted into the World Firefighter Hall of Flame in 2023.

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

**J. WALL:** Speaker, I ask my colleagues of this 50th General Assembly to join me in congratulating Jack Hickey on his success in the Firefighter Combat Challenge, his induction into the Hall of Flame and for being a wonderful ambassador to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, on February 7, I had the pleasure of attending the 50th Anniversary Business Recognition Celebration hosted by the Town of Conception Bay South. This event

was an extension of the town's 50th anniversary festivities from 2023.

In the District of Conception Bay South, seven locally owned businesses were honoured for being in operation for 50 or more years. The businesses recognized include: Taylor's Fish, Fruit & Vegetable Market, established in 1962; Sun Construction Company Limited, established in 1968; Dawe's Plumbing and Heating business, established in 1969; Foxtrap Automotive, established in 1971; Jefford's Enterprises, established in 1971; Eric Taylor Ltd., established in 1973; and Denver's Fine Foods, established in 1974.

This celebration highlighted the economic impact of local business and its crucial role in driving the prosperity of Conception Bay South. It was a wonderful celebration of businesses sharing stories and acknowledging our community's rich history and significant growth.

I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to these businesses for their dedication and commitment to the community at large. To be in business for over five decades is extraordinary. Best wishes to another successful year of growth and I wish you continued success for years to come.

Congratulations.

Thank you.

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

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

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

On February 24, I attended the 50th anniversary of the Kinsmen Club of Botwood.

The club was chartered on January 22, 1974, with a membership of 39. Since then,

the club has been active in community engagements, providing assistance to other groups and organizations, like the Botwood Kinsmen Public Library, schools, minor hockey, food bank, figure skating and BGC Botwood, just to name a few.

The Kinsmen Club has also been involved in helping individuals with medical needs and donations to cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis, Children's Trust Fund and Ronald McDonald House.

Speaker, I would like for all Members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating the Kinsmen Club of Botwood on their 50th anniversary and to thank them for their volunteer service.

Thank you.

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

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

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Speaker.

I stand in this hon. House today to congratulate Chrystal Kelly on her appointment as captain of the Witless Bay Volunteer Fire Department. Chrystal is the first woman to become captain in its 34 years of operation.

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

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Chrystal has been a member of the Witless Bay Volunteer Fire Department for over the past 15 years. Some of Chrystal's many attributes are her communication skills and her calm personality. These skills are a true asset to the department, as she is known for being able to de-escalate tense and complex scenes. These skills enable her to reassure most people in an emergency situation that everything will be okay.

Chrystal is a talented and skilled firefighter and a wonderful member to the team.

Chrystal is a great mentor and role model to all members of the Witless Bay Volunteer Fire Department, but especially to new recruits as they navigate through the ranks.

Can you please join me in congratulating Chrystal Kelly on her new appointment as captain of the Witless Bay Volunteer Fire Department.

Thank you.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Speaker.

Thirty-four years ago, on June 21, 1990, upstairs on the ninth floor of this very building, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney addressed this Legislature – a rare event. He was making an impassioned statement about his vision and love for Canada. I challenge everyone to read his speech in *Hansard*.

Here is just one thing he said in that speech: "... my interest in the promotion of Hibernia is not because I view Hibernia as barrels of oil, although it is that, I view Hibernia as dignity and opportunity for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Hibernia is a unique opportunity, finally to get a quality of opportunity for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador."

Brian Mulroney was a nation-builder who loved every province. None more so than Newfoundland and Labrador. That is why he gave us the Atlantic Accord, which he signed downtown in February 1985 with Brian Peckford, John Crosbie, Pat Carney and Bill Marshall.

His Atlantic Accord entrenched joint federal-provincial management on an equal footing of the offshore oil and gas resources we brought into Confederation, guaranteeing that the people of Newfoundland and

Labrador would be the principal beneficiary of the development of those resources, including jobs, training, technology, transfers, royalties and tax revenues.

He said: I am not afraid to inflict prosperity on Newfoundland and Labrador. That is exactly what he did. His bold decision as prime minister changed the trajectory of Newfoundland and Labrador's fortunes. A decision that keeps on giving billions upon billions four decades later. The reason we became a have province and stopped relying on equalization for the very first time, and proved that yes, we can stand proudly on our own strength in this federation.

Brian Mulroney was not just a visionary and a nation-builder, but a true gentleman, a statesman, a Conservative who gave us free trade across North America, and a progressive who led the global fights against racism and climate change. Canada needs more leaders just like him.

On behalf of the Official Opposition caucus, I extend our deepest sympathies and gratitude to Mila, Caroline, Ben, Mark, Nicolas and the entire Mulroney family for sharing this giant of Canadian history with all of us.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to reflect on a true leader, whose wisdom and counsel crossed political party lines, and who saw our great federation of Canada as what it truly can be – working to make it better for all of us.

In the passing of Brian Mulroney, our 18th prime minister, Canada has lost a true patriot and statesman.

Ever a friend to our province, and despite the political differences of affiliation, a friend to me as well, Mr. Speaker, Mulroney had a lasting impact on Newfoundland and Labrador through the original Atlantic Accord, shaping our offshore oil industry and setting a new horizon for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

From the Health Accord to the economy, I treasured his insight and his advice. The last time we spoke was in the fall of this year, Mr. Speaker. We discussed the current state of politics, extremism and personal attacks in the current national context and how Canadians deserve better from their leaders and better from that debate.

Always a gentleman, and so generous with his time, Brian Mulroney did not simply understand what it really meant to be Canadian; he lived it.

As Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, I extend our provinces deepest condolences to his family, friends, colleagues and all Canadians mourning his loss.

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

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

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

Speaker, the decisions of any politician rarely please everyone, and the best a person can do is to act with integrity and treat people with respect. Obviously, Mr. Brian Mulroney attempted to live by those principles. He rallied against apartheid in South Africa, and in a true act of non-partisanship he appointed Stephen Lewis, a former leader of Ontario's NDP, to act as Canada's ambassador to the United Nations in 1984.

Recently, a constituent of mine wrote to me about his passing: Though I have never voted for the Tories, I'm saddened that Canada has lost one of its elder statesmen. I never had the chance to meet Brian Mulroney in person, but I know from the numerous correspondence I had with him during most of my university years, he treated me with respect.

Speaker, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, I extend deepest condolences to the people of Canada, to his family, to his friends and to his colleagues.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** I ask all Members to rise for a moment of silence, please.

Thank you.

[Moment of silence.]

**SPEAKER:** Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Thank you, Speaker.

The Premier and the Fisheries Minister spend thousands of taxpayers' dollars travelling around the province asking those in the fishery for their views regarding capacity and outside buyers. Boats are getting ready to go out and we have no update.

I ask the Premier: Why?

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And, indeed, we did travel around the province last year to hear from harvesters, to hear from plant workers, Mr. Speaker, in the wake of what happened at the start of the crab season last year. It was with a great deal of respect that we received those opinions. We heard loud and clear that there has to be a more fulsome look in a lot of the different aspects of the fishery; the fishery that we honour, the fishery that we respect and, importantly, the fishery that we want to create, not just for the harvesters and the plant workers, but for all Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

Our top priority, right now, is to ensure that the boats get in the water on time this year, both for the harvesters, plant workers and plant owners alike, Mr. Speaker, and for the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The Minister of Fisheries has continued to look at how to best address the situation and some of the multiple, multiple, multiple issues that were raised when we heard from the harvesters last year and we are on it.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, the Premier is right, there were lots of promises made at the Premier's meetings with the harvesters, including a resolution on capacity and outside buyers, prior to the start of the season. Yet, here we are again weeks away and once again we find harvesters not in their boats, but on the steps of the Confederation Building and actually in the gallery behind me.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** So, again, they are here looking for answers.

I ask the Premier: What do you say to them?



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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I say to them, first and foremost, how much we heard them, how much we value your input, Mr. Speaker. I had also said to them at the conclusion of those trips, that we would be looking at a different process for next year that was informed by an outside committee of both a union representative, a private business representative, an independent chair with respect to the crab price –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**A. FUREY:** As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, both sides are still at the table, largely driven together by the fact that we made that commitment. We heard from them. They heard that the formula would be a reasonable resolution and two sides are very close, as I understand it, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Obviously, the people that are here in the gallery today have not heard anything about a resolution to their problem.

Speaker, on January 12, 2022, Liberal lobbyist, Jordan O'Brien, reached out to an aide in the Premier's office to introduce a company called Canadian Health Labs, which led to \$36 million in spending over five months for travel nurses.

I ask the Premier: When did your office, or you, authorize this sole contract to be awarded to this particular Canadian Health Labs company?

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for the question, as it begs an important discussion around the use of travel nurses.

Let me be perfectly clear how much we value the nurses who are working in the system, working day in and day out. I work alongside them, Mr. Speaker. I know they're doing a lion's share, heavy lift and how much we do value the work that they're doing.

That said, the health authority was faced with the dilemma, Mr. Speaker: Do we use travel nurses or do we shut down emergency departments? Do we shut down surgeries? Do we shut down dialysis unit, Mr. Speaker? As a result, we're faced with the decision of how to do the least amount of harm and the best for the most people in the province.

It's an unfortunate circumstance. It's one that no one wants to find themselves in. In fact, I met with the president of the Nurses' Union this morning to give her my reassurance that this government is working hard towards ending travel nurses, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, the Premier admitted – and I will use his words – sometimes things go off the rails. What we've seen reported in the news media certainly begs to the content of this particular contract.

So I ask the Premier once again: Did you authorize the signing of this contract that gives away air fryers and travel bonuses and all of those things related to this particular contract that have come out in this report?

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I'm happy to address that. Simply, no, Mr. Speaker, that was the health authority that governed that contract.

But let me take an opportunity to discuss – sometimes in this House of Assembly we're left with hypotheticals, with what would Members opposite actually do? Well, I can tell you when faced with the dilemma, the Member opposite decided to take nurses away from the system, Mr. Speaker.

Here we are as a government putting nursing resources into the system; the Member opposite took away resources from the system.

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

**A. FUREY:** Took away, closed clinics, wanted to close clinics, close clinics, which will lead to a backlog without the system, wanted to make sure that they were taking nurses away. We're not going to do that here on this side, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** I am so glad the Premier brought it up again because once again the Liberal government, elected in 2015, decided to cut health care, not only the nurses in Black Tickle, but OR nurses in Western, closed clinics in Central and took over 100 people out of Eastern Health, at the same time, cutting \$50 million out of the health care budget. Perhaps, if they had done that and listened to the nurses who are arguing about needing more nurses, not less, maybe if they had listened to the Nurses' Union back in 2015, we wouldn't have to use as many travel nurses.

So, again, I ask the Premier: You're trying to convince us that this health authority turned around and entered into a contract for \$36

million without the consent of the government.

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

**A. FUREY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the Member opposite, in his former role, had a choice, Mr. Speaker. He could have defended nurses. He could have said that he was going to put in more resource. He could have cut the executive staff. He could have come up with efficiencies.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**A. FUREY:** Instead, he decided to take –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

**A. FUREY:** That said, Mr. Speaker, as the Member opposite knows from his previous role, he was CEO of a health authority, presumably he knows that the Premier does not direct contracts within the authority, nor does the department.

It was the due choice, it was the due diligence of the health authority itself, Mr. Speaker, that not only signed that contract, but governed it, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** So, once again, the Premier is alluding that the health authority undertook this contract, signed this contract, without any approval from his office or the minister's office.

Is that what the Premier is telling the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? I'd like to understand that.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I didn't plan on getting up on the first day on health questions and I find no delight in doing so, but when the Member talks about the situation that we found ourselves in, in budget '16, he didn't mention Muskrat Falls and the work that we have done around that and tough choices had to be made.

Speaker, I will –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. DEMPSTER:** I will say again, Speaker, that when tough choices had to be made, instead of looking inwardly to find –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. DEMPSTER:** – efficiencies in the back room, he decided to reach into the most vulnerable in Newfoundland and Labrador, an island in the middle of the Atlantic and leave them without medical services. That was his choice. That was not the government here. He was asked to find efficiencies because we were dealing with the fiasco that their government left the people of this province in.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Again, Speaker, it's too bad that the minister opposite didn't know about the decisions her government was making, because she wasn't in Cabinet and we weren't allowed to tell her. But the decisions

on what got approved were made by the Minister of Health at the time, that's where the buck stops. It doesn't stop at a health authority. It stops at the minister's office or the Premier's office.

So, once again, I ask: Who authorized this contract?

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

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

Mr. Speaker, there are two issues really with agency nurses. One is the cost; we're all appalled with the cost. The other is whether or not the contracts were followed to the letter of the contract. That's what the Comptroller General is investigating, Mr. Speaker.

But I will ask the Member opposite when he was chair of Lab-Grenfell Health, did he get the minister then to authorize his use of agency nurses? Because, Mr. Speaker, the Member himself signed off on agency nurses in Lab-Grenfell as the CEO of Lab-Grenfell Health.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, travel nurses have been used in this province all the time, as the minister alluded to. As a matter of fact, the expenditure on travel nurses used to be around a million dollars, not \$36 million in five months.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**T. WAKEHAM:** I can tell you that the first people we talked to were the Nurses' Union, whenever the need arose.

But I ask the minister again, he just mentioned the fact that he has asked the Comptroller General to investigate. The Comptroller General will investigate to make sure that invoices were approved and those type of things. What we really need, though, is the details of this contract. Who authorized what? How did we wind up paying \$1.6 million for meal allowances that were never paid out? This is where we need the Auditor General

So, once again, I ask the minister: Will he call in the Auditor General?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, it's funny how we change gears so quickly when he was the one who signed off on agency nurses as CEO of Lab-Grenfell Health. We now get a different question about the Auditor General, but I'm happy to answer that as well.

We have asked the Comptroller General, who is independent and appointed on address of this House of Assembly to review this, just as I did when I was minister of Finance and a similar issue arose with NLC and we asked the Comptroller General – she provided her report to the Auditor General, who then carried out her own assessment. It was also referred to JPS and the law officials.

That is what we are doing, due diligence. The Comptroller General does not answer to the minister or anybody else. They are independent.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**T. WAKEHAM:** One more question.

Speaker, at the end of the day, I want to ask this minister or the former Health minister, which one of them signed off on this contract that was awarded to this particular company.

I ask the minister: Did you sign off on the contract?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, the Member knows the answer to that question because the Member himself signed off on agency nurses as CEO of Lab-Grenfell when Lab-Grenfell was the only region in the province using agency nurses.

Who signed off on them then, I ask the Member. It was you, wasn't it?

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Again, I simply ask the minister: Did you sign off on these contracts or didn't you? Yes or no.

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, the answer is no, I did not sign off on these contracts. However, when you were CEO of Lab-Grenfell did you sign off on agency nurses because I believe the answer to that is yes.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Speaker.

We have the pass-the-buck day. We are gone back nine years. I'm in 2024. I think they are still in 2015, but they should catch up; people are waiting for them to catch up.

Speaker, it's a full fiasco and the buck stops at the top at the Premier's office. Nursing students don't understand why the Liberal government is searching for nurses in other countries when there are local nurses on the ground who cannot get a permanent job.

I ask the Premier: Why are you ignoring our nursing students?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, there are full-time, permanent positions in this province for nursing graduates. I would be highly disappointed if the health authority were not offering those jobs to nursing students. They have assured me that they are, Mr. Speaker.

Nursing students, when they graduate, some want to work in a particular area where there may not be full-time, permanent positions, or in a particular discipline of nursing where there may not be full-time, permanent positions.

But there are enough positions in this province – of the roughly 700 vacancies, 300 of those are available to new graduates. I hope those new graduates accept those positions, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to waiting for areas of their choice, because we absolutely need them. However, the health authority will assure that if they want to be in the area of their choice, that they do get short-term contracts.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Maybe the minister can tell the constituent of mine who was offered a temporary, full-time position and is accepting the position in Nova Scotia at their health authority – it's a permanent, full-time position with a signing bonus. Maybe you should tell her that because she's not here and you're telling the public that they're not getting it, Minister.

Speaker, even after all the controversy and exorbitant costs of travel nurses and urgent need for more nurses, newly graduating nurses are not being offered permanent jobs. I say it again – and the minister is telling them to temper their expectations, he's trying to tell the House now. How do you justify that?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, there's only one MHA for Conception Bay South. We probably wish there was more but, Mr. Speaker, there's only one MHA. So, somebody can't say they want your job without running for it and getting duly elected. If there are only so many nursing positions in pediatrics, we can only hire so many nurses in pediatrics.

There is full-time, permanent work available for every graduating nurse. If there is a nurse that wasn't offered that opportunity, bring me the name. I will challenge the health authority. Absolutely challenge them, because I have asked them and it is my expectation and this government's expectation that they can be offered full-time, permanent work. But if they choose to work in their area of choice, Mr. Speaker, where a full-time position does not exist, they will be offered temporary positions, absolutely.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'm doing quite well in CBS, thank you very much.

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

**B. PETTEN:** Nice try, Minister, and he can never deliver a joke. He can never get his joke right. He needs to stick to facts. He does a much better job delivering facts instead of jokes.

Speaker, the Registered Nurses' Union expressed concern about travel nurses – the cost, terms and effect of morale on the public sector nurses. Why didn't the government listen to nurses?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with those statements. I am concerned about the morale issues when you have a travel or an agency nurse working side by side with one of our valued, permanent nurses in this province.

But the alternative would've been, as the Leader of the Opposition chose not to close emergency departments in Labrador when he hired agency nurses, it was the same with the CEOs that were in place with the four regional health authorities when presented the choice of either closing services or hiring agency nurses.

Mr. Speaker, I've been on record for months and months of saying I want a return to pre-pandemic levels of agency nursing in this province, which has been around for decades. I want to put an end to it. I've been on record. I've lobbied my federal counterparts and I am pushing the health authority to find ways of reducing (inaudible).

**SPEAKER:** The minister's time is expired.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I remind the minister that the Leader of the Opposition never signed off on \$36 million of unaccounted money for air fryers, for cabs, for coffee, the list goes on, accommodations.

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

**B. PETTEN:** No, he signed off on a million dollars back 10 years ago. But I will remind the minister it's 2024 now.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Move to your question, please.

**B. PETTEN:** You'll have a turn to ask a question later, Minister.

Speaker, the buck stops at the top. Nurses are left feeling disrespected, demoralized and disregarded. Our nurses deserve better.

Why won't the Premier apologize for this fiasco? Why don't you apologize to the people of the province, Premier?

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

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

We value all of our health care professionals, Mr. Speaker. Registered nurses, practical nurses, nurse practitioners, physicians, radiologists, technicians – every one of our health care professionals are valued by this government.

Mr. Speaker, we absolutely need them and we are doing our best to recruit so that we can reduce our reliance on agency nurses. To recruit full-time, permanent nurses to work side by side with our valued registered nurses in this province so that they are not

mandated overtime, so that we don't need agency nurses to ensure that they're not mandated overtime and so that the health authorities don't have to shut down valuable services.

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** When asked recently by the media for an update on pay equity legislation, the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality replied: There's no update since – nothing new. At the same time, a spokesperson for the minister said: We're not going to respond to any more pay equity questions. Unbelievable, Speaker.

I ask the Premier: Why is his government refusing to be accountable to the media and to pay equity groups in our province?

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

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

I thank the hon. Member, of course, for the question. I will say that the statement that she just read, it's simply untrue. My communications director was with me. We were at a wonderful announcement, actually, of over \$400,000 for violence prevention initiatives here in this province.

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

**P. PARSONS:** And of course, as we all know, media scrums, you're subjected to other questions and the reply was, there were no new updates; but by no means did any official in this government say we are not responding to the media, and it's simply untrue.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Speaker, that is a true statement and I reject the minister's comment that it is untrue.

Furthermore, like pay equity legislation, there is nothing new on mobile crisis response units either. These units include a team of health care professionals and police officers working together to respond compassionately when people are in mental health crisis.

RCMP in the Trinity-Conception Bay North area have reported that mental health calls for help have significantly increased in my district. Maybe the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Health will finally respond meaningfully and once and for all commit to putting a Mobile Crisis Response Team in place in the Conception Bay North area.

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

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

I know that officials are looking at Mobile Crisis Response Teams in areas of need. We do have a budget coming up; I would say that all of these things and any additional spend like this has to go through a process, but we always look where there is need. If there is a need and it's an identified need and we are able to match that need, we will certainly do so.

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Speaker, I met with the minister personally, the Minister of Health personally back in May, and I was given the same excuses and rhetoric, kicking the can down the road, but no action.

For years now, the Joint Council of Conception Bay North and the RCMP in Bay Roberts and Harbour Grace areas have been advocating for the implementation of a mental health crisis unit, yet their pleas have been consistently ignored and dismissed by this government.

Maybe the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation or the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality will join together, stop their silence, and please speak up to voice your support for the immediate implementation of a mental health crisis unit for the constituents that they represent.

**SPEAKER:** The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

I can say, Mr. Speaker, that the folks that work in mental health and addictions, both within the department and within the health authority, look to solutions and there have been a number of positive measures put in place in this province, Mr. Speaker, to deal with the need, such as the FACT teams and ACT teams, Bridge the gapp, Doorways.

There are a number of initiatives put in place to deal with mental health and addictions throughout the province, not just in the Member's area, Mr. Speaker, but in every area of the province.

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

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, today I attended an announcement for a high school in Paradise.

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

**P. DINN:** The minister, in her comments, talked about this announcement being a long time coming and it certainly has been a long time coming. The past PC government had this in their budget back in 2014-15 and this government sat on it for nine years – almost nine years.

I ask the minister responsible: What is the timeline for this school actually being open?

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

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

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you to my hon. colleague for the question, which I'm sure he meant to say, he's super excited that he finally got the announcement –

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

**K. HOWELL:** – for the school in Paradise.

We had the opportunity today to gather in Paradise with the community members, with the advocates for the school in Paradise, for a high school and the Member opposite, as well as a number of my colleagues who've all worked diligently together to make sure that his became a reality.

I can't speak to what happened before June 2023, but I can tell you there's been a lot of business that's happened in the Department of Education since then.

So we continued to work on infrastructure –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**K. HOWELL:** – as a priority and this is one is one of the key elements in ensuring that



our students have appropriate environments for learning.

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

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

It was a good announcement, but that's what it is.

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

**P. DINN:** That's what it is, it's just an announcement. We need details. The group that I work with, the parents of Paradise who want this, they want details now. They're not giving up on this.

The minister announced that they're going to start looking at the site, looking for a site. So, to look for a site, you have to have some indication of the size of the school you're going to put there.

So I ask the minister: Will this high school accommodate all the high school students in Paradise?

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

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Speaker.

Again, what I'm sure the Member opposite is trying to relay is that we've made great steps forward in providing educational opportunities in the district and in the community of Paradise and, as with any of these decisions, they're all subject to budget decisions.

So, I do believe somewhere in that message he said that he is going to be voting for the budget.

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

**K. HOWELL:** That we can enact all the proper regulations and policies to ensure that we have an appropriate-sized school on an appropriate site that will service as many of the students in Paradise as possible.

Thank you.

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

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

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

A one-year contract awarded to Canadian Health Labs ended on February 27, with no plan by Newfoundland Health Services or the Department of Health and Community Services to cover shifts and forcing some nurses at Western Memorial hospital to work 21 out of 24 hours.

Will the minister table a plan – emphasis on plan – in this session for an orderly phase-out of private agency nurses and a reinvestment of those funds back into the public health care system to retain nurses so that they don't continue to shoulder the fallout from government's failings in health care?

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

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

A couple of messages that I want to relay. First of all, that the Member would like the general public to believe that this problem is only in Newfoundland and Labrador; we don't have an issue of a shortage of registered nurses in any other province in Canada. But *The Globe and Mail* article, Mr. Speaker, that raised the concerns had talked about Nova Scotia having the same problem, New Brunswick having the same problem, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, it's felt across the country, which is why there's been a boom in agency

nursing in Canada. But we had met with the Registered Nurses' Union president, myself and the Premier, this morning. We are looking for ways, including recruitment. We just signed – the Minister of Finance and the president of the Registered Nurses' Union signed a collective agreement that addresses many of the retention issues – \$110 million –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The minister's time is expired.

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

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

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Speaker.

The former Housing minister was in Lab West last week making some commitments to a roomful of community leaders. They were promised affordable seniors' housing will be built, that there'll be new NL housing units built and an emergency shelter will be staffed and expanded. The following day a new minister was appointed.

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

**J. BROWN:** I ask the Premier: Will these get priority in this year's budget or were these just hollow commitments to Labrador West?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Housing.

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is an honour to stand in this House, today –

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

**F. HUTTON:** – to speak to you, to speak to the Members on this side and on the other side, and to those that are watching at home and in the gallery.

I would be remiss if I did not say that it is also an honour to be standing in this position where the hon. Derrick Bragg once stood, and it is not lost on me.

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

**F. HUTTON:** I was not in Labrador West last week with the Premier and other Members of this government, but I can tell you, commitment to housing in Newfoundland and Labrador, and especially now that the Premier has appointed me as the sole Minister of Housing in that portfolio, will be an even sharper focus than before.

Thank you.

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

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

**J. BROWN:** Speaker, I'll hold the minister to that.

Speaker, the cost of infrastructure development is a key problem preventing housing development in Labrador West. Both municipalities identified this at the summit the Premier briefly attended.

I ask the minister responsible for municipal infrastructure: Why hasn't your department recognized this and developed a funding plan to allow municipalities to put in new roads, water and sewer to bring down the cost of housing development, especially places like Labrador?

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

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

I did hear the Member talk about this through the media and again here in his question. As we develop our municipal infrastructure budget, we work with

municipalities to determine how best to allocate the scarce resources we have.

If you think and project forward, in the absence of federal funding, we're going to have a big challenge on our hands. So, one of the things that I plea for everybody in this House is to put pressure on the federal government to make sure it comes forward with its infrastructure funding so we can address the issues that the Member raised.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

Now that the Grace General nurses' residence is being demolished.

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

**J. DINN:** It is good to see, Speaker, that they rejoice at things being torn down instead of being built up.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**J. DINN:** Now that the Grace General nurses' residence is being demolished, will the Minister of Housing inform the House of Assembly what the plans are for the former hospital site to be used for affordable housing?

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

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

I wanted to sort of apologize to the Member opposite for not inviting him to the occasion when we started the demolition of the nurses' residence, which has been long

overdue, and which the Member has advocated for. It was a great day to see that happen, it allows us, then, to explore, with the City of St. John's, with other stakeholders, how best to use that site on a go-forward basis, whether it is a new hospital, whether it is housing, whether it is a downtown clinic or other uses. That is the process we are involved in right now and we'll certainly inform the Member opposite when we make those decisions.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

#### **Tabling of Documents**

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much, Speaker.

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I'm tabling six Orders-in-Council relating to funding precommitment for fiscal years '24-'25 to '29-'30.

**SPEAKER:** Are there any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

#### **Notices of Motion**

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

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend Memorial University Act, No. 2, Bill 69.

**SPEAKER:** Further notices of motions?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Repeal the Economic Diversification and Growth Enterprises Act, Bill 70.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: That the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's be appointed Deputy Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** 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 Tuesday, March 5, 2024.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: That notwithstanding Standing Order 63, that this House shall not proceed with Private Member's Day on Wednesday, March 6, 2024, but shall instead meet at 2 p.m. on that day for Routine Proceedings and the conduct of Government Business and that, if not earlier adjourned, the Speaker shall then adjourn the House at midnight.

**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, March 7, 2024.

**SPEAKER:** Any further notices of motions?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

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

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Speaker.

Local Service Districts, LSDs, serve a valuable role in providing services within their rural communities to make life more manageable for residents of our province. In fact, we have 175 Local Service Districts in our province and they receive no operational funding from government.

The role of local governance in our province is significant and with Bill 54 now engaging Local Service Districts to look at recreation facilities and programs as well, some source of funding is requested.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to allow the Local Service Districts to maintain their utility tax, their 2.5 per cent of their annual utility usage that is currently received by government to be returned to the LSD for operational funding.

One of the bills that we have is the *Taxation of Utilities and Cable Television Companies Act*. Section 6 reads: "A utility shall pay to the Crown" – utility being the power company, Newfoundland Power, or Bell, Eastlink, one of the other cable companies – "an annual business tax at a rate prescribed by regulation and not more than 2.5% on the gross revenue of the utility for the preceding year derived from the areas of the province which are not incorporated as a city or a municipality."

I see many Members looking who've got LSDs in rural areas in the province. They pay the government, through their utility and through their cable company, 2.5 per cent a year. Some would say, well, what does that amount to?

George's Brook-Milton, when we were a Local Service District, Newfoundland Power alone, \$20,000 that we paid in George's Brook-Milton went to government. Lethbridge, which is down the road from George's Brook-Milton, has double the population. One can only assume, not including Sexton's mill, they ought to be \$40,000-plus per year that government receives the revenue for. Now they look after recreation, but they get no funding.

I would say to you, the last note, Mr. Speaker, how much did the government collect from these LSDs and unincorporated areas in 2023? Two million, three hundred and fifteen thousand; let's give them some operational funding.

**SPEAKER:** The Member's time is expired.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I've presented this petition many times. Let's try it again.

WHEREAS Route 60 through Topsail is a heavily populated area with physically active residents; and

WHEREAS residents and young children who walk daily to school are finding it very unsafe with the deplorable state of erosion along the shoulders of Route 60 through Topsail;

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 find a more permanent solution and

install curb and gutter to the areas affected by erosion.

Since I have been elected, I think I presented this petition many times. I have spoken to four different ministers of Transportation and Infrastructure, including the most recent, and every time we sit down, we have a great conversation. We hear that, yes, we are working on it. We'll get some work done.

In fact, I'm taking that many pictures of the conditions. I went out at this last call for this five-year road plan. I have made a submission on that. I happened to get the pictures taken just before the snowstorm on Valentine's Day. It is beyond deplorable, some of the conditions of that road, Route 60 through Topsail. I have heard from residents who have badly sprained ankles, some who have broken ankles. We see the erosion on the crosswalks going to the schools in the area.

We met recently with the Conception Bay South Seniors' Advisory Committee and this was one of their key issues: the deplorable state of the roads. There is absolutely no place safe for them to walk, unless they are out in the middle of the road. Even in the middle of the road, the potholes are so big that that's not safe for walking.

This has gone on for a while. We see this time of year the potholes starting to come out again and this section of road will be in a terrible state and something needs to be done sooner rather than later. The patchwork to this section of road is just not doing it. It's just not doing it.

You know, 6,500 to 7,000 vehicles travel that patch of road each day. During rush hours, we've seen up to 600 cars per minute. So, this needs to be addressed, it needs to be addressed in this current budget and hopefully, next year, there will be a safe way to drive and to walk around Topsail Route 60.

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

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Petition: Anti-Temporary Replacement Worker Legislation for Newfoundland and Labrador. These are the reasons for the petition:

Anti-temporary replacement worker laws have existed in Quebec since 1978, in British Columbia since 1993 and the federal government has beyond committed to introducing such legislation by the end of 2023. As we can see, they're going ahead with it, and it seems like it is going to go pretty well.

The use of temporary replacement workers during strikes or lockouts is damaging to the social fabric of a community, the local economy and the well-being of its residents.

Anti-temporary replacement worker legislation has shown to reduce the length and divisiveness of labour disputes.

Since 2015, the right to strike has been clearly protected under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* because it helps to stabilize the power imbalance between workers and employers.

And the use of temporary replacement workers undermines that right.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to enact legislation banning the use of temporary replacement workers during strikes and lockouts.

Obviously, I've done this petition a few times now. Once again, I bring it to the floor, given the change in dynamic in the federal government now where it looks like it will be a federal law for federally regulated workplaces. Workplaces where my wife works is a federally regulated workplace and so she'll be protected by a federal

legislation, but there are a lot of workers in this province who will not be protected the same way.

I'm calling upon the hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour to take this serious consideration and actually work to introduce it here in this province so that way we match our federal counterparts in protecting workers in this province.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour for a response.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for bringing forward the petition, yet again.

I would like to say that as Minister Responsible for Labour, we have to balance both the needs and wants of the employers as well as the needs and wants of the employees. So, you've got to balance that legislation. It's a very divisive issue, as the Member brings forward.

We are consistently working on this; meeting with our key stakeholders on both sides of the issue, trying to find opportunities where we can find commonality. We're working very closely with our federal colleagues to see how that legislation plays out right across the country, as well as other members of the federation.

Thank you.

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

**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 an increased the volume of traffic on this highway.

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

Speaker, I've certainly done this petition on a number of occasions and the amount of people that use this are incredible. The condition of the road is even more incredible. To go in there, this time of the year, and to avoid 10 kilometres of potholes and zigzagging around the highway is unbelievable that the government could have the state of this road for this long.

We've got people that travel to Argentia. We've got people that travel to Long Harbour. We've got people that travel to Bull Arm. We've got teachers and people going all across that Witless Bay Line on days that are not fit to go and coming back in the nighttime is even worse with potholes and trying to avoid distractions and then try to do it in the fog.

So, you know, there are all kinds of businesses that use it. We've got fish plant owners that are trucking their crab across Witless Bay Line and they're trucking it to and from, to be truthful. There are people over picking it up and going across. We've got campers that use it. They avoid Witless Bay Line. They go out around and go the long way and come back the Trans-Canada in order to go across the Island; too hard on their campers, too hard on their trucks. We've got motorcyclists who do the same thing. They go in there and they said they're zigzagging all over the road.

So, I think in this budget, the Member for St. John's North or St. John's has to have a

look at this in his budget and let's see if we can get something done with Witless Bay Line.

Thank you.

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

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

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

Speaker, I present a petition, a call to establish a plan and timeline to end the use of travel nurses in our province.

Reason for the petition: Concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador urge our leaders to take action to address the growing use of private agency travel nurses in the delivery of health care in our province. The recent revelation that \$35.6 million was spent on a sole-sourced contract with Canadian Health Labs between April and August 2023 for the provision of nurses is unacceptable.

Nursing students are reporting difficulty finding full-time, permanent positions, while nurses in our public system are routinely expected to work overtime and are being burned out.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to implement a plan and timeline to eliminate the use of private agency travel nurses in our province and focus on retention and recruitment efforts within our public system.

Speaker, it is pure rhetoric and meaningless rhetoric at that to refer to travel nurses as necessary evil and how other jurisdictions face similar problems. Basically, I would argue that other jurisdictions are in the same boat because they followed the same race to the bottom, austerity measures that saw funding to our health care system cut.

The pandemic didn't cause it, but the pandemic did highlight the long-standing issues and deficits.

The Premier and the minister can talk all they like about how they've met with the Nurses' Union. I've heard the same rhetoric when it comes to ministers speaking about how they've met with the Teachers' Union and so on and so forth. I heard it when I was president. Such meetings are only meaningful when they actually bear fruit. When meetings become substitutes for meaningful action, then it's hollow.

The fact is, Speaker, we set dates all the time. Say the date – we set a date for when we're getting married, for when we're planning a wedding, for when we plan to start a family, maybe even when we're going to buy a house. The House of Assembly sets a date for when it's going to open and close. When the legislation is going to come in, we know when the budget is going to be brought in every year. The fact that once a date is set, Speaker, it forces us to plan for it and that's what we're asking here, to set a date, to come up with a timeline and then plan for that.

I don't think anyone on this side is saying cancel all contracts right now, but we all want to see a clear plan to move in that direction and preserve our public health care system.

Thank you.

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

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

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

Residents on Route 350, 351A and 352 in the Exploits District are concerned of the road conditions on those routes causing safety issues and damage to vehicles.

We, the undersigned, urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately have roadwork done to upgrade and improve conditions on these routes.

Speaker, I've been at this ever since I've been elected in regard to petitions for those routes. Again, another spring of the year is coming, no doubt about it, and the roads will be in deplorable conditions. We certainly need those roads to be attended to, upgraded and roadwork done.

We get it every year in the same areas and people feel that the safety of their vehicles and safety for ambulances to get down through the routes, if there was a case needed for an ambulance to get down that way. The routes are poor and they would certainly need some roadwork done in those areas.

I've had meetings with former ministers. We've talked about those areas. Still, no roadwork done in the lower sections of the kilometre zones, that's in the 60s, 50s and 40 kilometres and even the ones going through communities; there's no work done on those.

We certainly need government to step up and give us some roadwork in the Exploits District, especially on those Routes 350, 351A, 352 to ensure the safety of residents in that area.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 9.



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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1), this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, March 4, 2024.

**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.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 4.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Repeal the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission Act, Bill 44, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill, An Act to Repeal the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission Act, Bill 44, and that said bill be now 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 Repeal the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission Act," carried. (Bill 44)

**CLERK (Hawley George):** A bill, An Act to Repeal the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission Act. (Bill 44)

**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 44 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

**J. HOGAN:** I call from the Order Paper, Motion 5.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015, Bill 45, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill, An Act to Amend the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015, Bill 45, and the said bill be now 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 Justice and Public Safety to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015," carried. (Bill 45)

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act to Amend the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015. (Bill 45)

**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 45 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting the Practice of Pharmacy in the Province, Bill 66, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill, An Act Respecting the Practice of Pharmacy in the Province,

Bill 66, and that the said bill be now read as 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 Health and Community Services to introduce a bill entitled, "An Act Respecting the Practice of Pharmacy in the Province," carried. (Bill 66)

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act Respecting the Practice of Pharmacy in the Province. (Bill 66)

**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 66 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 7.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting Recognition of the 75th Anniversary of Confederation, Bill 67, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the hon. Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill, An Act Respecting Recognition of the 75th Anniversary of Confederation, Bill 67, and that the said bill be now 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 Government House Leader to introduce a bill, "An Act Respecting Recognition of the 75th Anniversary of Confederation," carried. (Bill 67)

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act Respecting Recognition of the 75th Anniversary of Confederation. (Bill 67)

**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 67, read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 8.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Lands Act, No. 2, Bill 68, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill, An Act to Amend the Lands Act, No. 2, Bill 68, and that the said bill be now 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 Government House Leader to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Lands Act, No. 2," carried. (Bill 68)

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act to Amend the Lands Act, No. 2. (Bill 68)

**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 68 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

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

**S. COADY:** Speaker, I wish to inform the House that I received a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

**SPEAKER:** All rise.

As Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I transmit a request to appropriate sums required for the Public Service of the Province for the year ending 31 March 2025, by way of Interim Supply, and in accordance with the provisions of sections 54 and 90 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, I recommend this request to the House of Assembly.

Sgd: \_\_\_\_\_

Lieutenant Governor

Please be seated.

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that the message, together with a bill, be referred to a Committee of Supply.

**SPEAKER:** The motion is that the message, together with a bill, be referred to a Committee of Supply and that I do now leave the Chair.

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.

On motion, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, the Speaker left the Chair.

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh):** Order, please!

We are considering the related resolution and Bill 63, An Act Granting to His Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2025, and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service.

### Resolution

*"Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened as follows:*

*"That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to His Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2025, the sum of \$3,286,755,700."*

**CHAIR:** Shall the resolution carry?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Today we introduce an Interim Supply bill. Now, for those who are tuning in today – and I'm sure my hon. colleagues would be familiar with this – this is to ensure that we have, while we debate the budget coming up this spring, that government operations can continue, including payroll and income support and other expenditure obligations, including calling and awarding of tenders.

It is an important bill that we're debating today, but before I get into my remarks today and talking about the amount of money we're going to require and before we move into, what I am going to call, the substance of the debate, allow me first – I

know my colleagues in this hon. House will join me in this – in recognizing and thanking the incredible, hard-working, dedicated, talented, professional members of the team in the Department of Finance.

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

I can tell you, I have had many, many years in business, as a business leader, chair of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce – I can tell you, without a doubt, this is some of the most talented, dedicated, smart people that I have worked with and I thank them every day for their efforts.

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

**S. COADY:** They really do work diligently on behalf of the people of the province and I am honoured to work with them.

The Interim Supply bill is required to be passed by the House of Assembly to continue ongoing operations for the period of April 1, 2024, to June 30, 2024, while budget 2024 and the associated main Supply bill is being introduced, debated and approved by the Legislature.

The total allocation is \$3,286,755,700. This legislation will need to be passed by the House of Assembly and receive Royal Assent by the Lieutenant Governor by March 20, 2024, in order to meet payroll, income support and other expenditures coming due effective April 1, 2024.

The Interim Supply bill represents approximately 33 per cent of the '23-'24 budgeted current and capital account gross expenditures. It is based on allocations approved during *Budget 2023*. So, remember that; it is based on allocations that have been approved in *Budget 2023*, which was unanimously approved by the House of Assembly in May of 2023.

Government operations include payroll, income support and other expenditure obligations, such as the calling and awarding of tenders. This is very important; that's why the sum is substantive, because we also could call and award tenders as well as annual contractual obligations that must be encumbered pursuant to the *Financial Administration Act*.

The Interim Supply bill will have no incremental impact on government's financial position in '24-'25 beyond what is included in budget 2024.

So, as I mentioned previously, the total allocation for the Interim Supply bill, April 1 to June 30, is \$3,286,755,700 – a tidy sum of money. Why do we need this amount? The Interim Supply bill accounts for approximately 33 per cent of the '23-'24 original budget figures. The base amount of the Interim Supply is calculated on funding for seven pay periods and expenditures anticipated to be paid or due during the first three months of the fiscal year.

Not as simple as just dividing the dollar figure by the number of months. Departments make adjustments after the original calculation to account for items that are required in the first quarter. Again, if we want to meet obligations that we have under the *Financial Administration Act* or we want to call or award tenders.

Spending requirements vary and are based on what part of the year we are working with and for the type of expenditure. For example, if a department enters into a contract to spend funding, they must encumber or set aside the total value of that contract so they would need the total amount included in Interim Supply.

Interim Supply is required to provide funding for an additional three months so that normal operations can occur while budget 2024 is being debated and discussed here in the House of Assembly.

The majority of funding for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure comes upfront because they need funding available to enter into infrastructure contracts and all of us in this House would like that to occur. Other departments need to encumber funds to allow for contractual commitments as well.

In this three-month period, the highest amounts could be attributed to health care – that's always the highest level of expenditure. It's not abnormal; it's normal. Transportation and Infrastructure is the highest percentage of budget required in Interim Supply to enter into contracts for large-scale infrastructure projects. We don't want to lose time heading into the building season. Education is the second highest level of expenditure next to Health.

It should be noted that Interim Supply does not have any incremental impacts on the province's financial position in 2024 beyond what will be included in budget 2024. It is simply an advance on funding for the upcoming budget. It allows government to continue normal, day-to-day operations while the budget is being debated in the House. When budget 2024 is approved, the amount allocated through Interim Supply will be deducted from the total amount required through the main Supply bill.

So why do we need this additional three months? It's needed for the period between when the budget is delivered and when it is approved. Three-month Interim Supply is very, very standard. Three-month Supply bills have been there for every month, pretty much from 2010 to 2018. Then, of course, we started into the COVID period, but we have gone back to the three-month Supply bills in 2022 and 2023.

How many numbers of days required to debate previous budgets? Just to give you an example, in *Budget 2023* we released it on March 23 of 2023 and it was passed on May 25. Again, similar time frame, budget 2022 was released on April 7 of 2022 and

was passed on May 19 of 2022. All, Chair, I will say that I've delivered in this House. *Budget 2021* was released on May 31 of '21 and was passed on June 23.

I can keep going back as far as 2016 when the budget was released on April 14 and was passed on May 31. So, just to give some idea of the time frames as to why we're asking for that three-month Supply.

Administration of Interim Supply is through the officials in the Department of Finance and Treasury Board Secretariat. They spend a significant amount of time keying the numbers of the approved bill to ensure that payments are made on time and such payments include things like income support, payroll and general invoices. In order to meet payment obligations on April 1, we need Interim Supply approved by no later than March 20.

So, again, I will kind of give some – on a technical level, it allows for the financial administration of ongoing government operations during the interim period while budget '24 is being introduced, debated and approved. As the Members here in this Legislature know, we do a tremendous amount of work during the spring of the year, especially in the Estimates process of going through line by line, review by review, every expenditure that the government does commit to.

Specific requirements the Interim Supply include the following: Consolidated Funds Services and Executive Council. The transfer of sums voted under specific areas of these departments to other departments, if needed, avoids issues from unexpected cost.

Digital Government and Service NL, for example, Interim Supply allows for the continuation of the Motor Registration Division services; Vital Statistics services like birth certificates; and MyGovNL, government's highly successful online portal; Public Procurement Agency, the

Public Service Commission, the Transportation and Infrastructure, Health and Community Services, Justice and Public Safety, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, to name but a few.

In conclusion, Chair, Interim Supply keeps our dedicated public service who deliver all of government's services paid and working, supporting their families and contributing to local economies. With that, Chair, I conclude my remarks and take my place. I look forward to hearing remarks from the Members opposite and I will certainly take the opportunity to speak again as required and necessary.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Chair.

Sometimes we work together and people don't know what we're really doing, but let's say we work together.

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

**B. PETTEN:** Yes, thanks for that.

It's a pleasure to stand in this House, of course, this spring sitting. It's only yesterday, actually, I started counting up how many budgets and the list is starting to get high. I know the Minister of Finance – we came in the Legislature the same time, so she's on the same number as me and it starts – wow. I remember when I first came here, if someone told me they had this many sittings under them – and I'm not even going to mention to the Minister of Health how many sittings he's had.

In any regard, you know, it comes a point in time you stop and you do the math and you start counting it up, and it has been a lot of sittings in this House and a lot of faces

come and go. Our colleague and a good friend, actually, Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, Springdale - Green Bay – great individual, wonderful man.

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

**B. PETTEN:** I always admired and I think our caucus as a whole admired and I know former colleagues of mine would agree to this – namely, I don't mind – I shouldn't say their names but I'll probably risk it. Kevin Parsons and Dave Brazil, we used to always acknowledge – he'd sit down and he'd listen to us. We'd be in debate and we're in a filibuster in 2016, which I know you remember, and he'd sit there 3 in the morning and he'd listen to us.

I mean, I had trouble listening to us. He'd sit there, quite honestly, he'd sit in his seat and he'd listen and he wouldn't miss a word and he was engaged. It always amazed me, but I always had such respect for that and I always acknowledged it the times I spoke and I always told him. So he is a big loss to this House and he's a person that I consider a friend and I think he's a friend to most people in this House. I was saddened –

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

**B. PETTEN:** – when he left and I wish him all the best in his future endeavours. I'm sure we'll cross paths again. I felt it was important to acknowledge that from this side of the House, because today has been a bit about a reflection. But I thought that was important to note, because me and him came in here at the same time in the same 2015 election.

As we get into Interim Supply and we talk about budget items and the debates, there are lots of topics. Someone said to me today the House is open, what are you going to talk about? There's so much we can talk about, so much out there, so many concerns and there's so much debate we can get into. We just went through Question Period today and the debate is over a

nursing fiasco, or as we're referring to it as the nursing fiasco.

Then it turns into we're talking about what our leader's former life as an administrator, what he did and didn't do. That's sometimes the debate, the good, bad and ugly of debate. The important part of it is we're debating issues that are important to the people of this province.

I stand in my place here today, and whether it's today or last week when I'm out on the steps of Confederation Building – me and the Minister of Health were out there, actually, for the rally – we're speaking about stuff we care about. We don't always agree and we're not here to agree on everything. Because I think if we all agreed, we wouldn't come up with good policy and good decisions.

Our role is on this side to oppose, sometimes. It's probably not always to oppose. I don't like the word oppose so much as debate. Because I believe that it's very important, the checks and balances in this Legislature and governments and around the world, that we have a very important role to play to keep government accountable and hold them accountable.

When you look at one issue, we're looking at passing Interim Supply and a budget in the coming days or weeks or what have you, we spent \$36 million on this nursing agency. No one wants to take accountability; no one wants to take ownership of it. Do you know what? Rightly or wrongly, I get that, I understand that, because it's not one that anyone should be proud of. It's about the Premier saying one day it's come off the rails and the minister saying you would do the same thing if you were in the same position and what else were we left to do? If anyone else were there, they'd do the same thing. It wasn't meant to be this way.

All that's fine to the naked eye, but when you get behind the scenes, government are

responsible. The buck stops with the Premier's office. He's the head of government, and with his minister and his Cabinet this is where it all stops. It doesn't stop at a health authority. It stops at the Premier's office; it stops in the minister's office.

This is what really not infuriates, more so than it just kind of annoys. It annoys a lot of people out there. It annoys me, too. Take ownership, take responsibility. No one is going to say – I find this a bit puzzling, and I've been around politics a long time, the best way to defuse a situation is take ownership. Come right out from the get-go: This is not acceptable. We don't agree with it. We're going to bring in the proper authorities to get this looked in to. We're very sorry this happened, but it's not our plan and do so.

We go through days and days and days; it goes on and it's back and forth. Then the Premier was great in his wisdom, he announced that he was going to get the minister to investigate both of them. I'm not sure what universe but I know what universe I was on when he announced it, I was flat-footed, I was here and I think I might have been in St. John's when it happened.

I mean, it defies logic. You don't investigate yourself. That's not accountability. Accountability is bringing the AG in. Accountability is what our leader asked for, bringing the RCMP in. That's accountability and that will cut you a lot of slack in the public eye. They'll look and they'll say: Do you know what? This makes a lot of sense. You're taking it serious; you're dealing with it head on and we respect that.

But you have the Comptroller General, and no disrespect to the Comptroller General, but that's a transactional review. They're going to go in to look at how payments were made. They may pick up some things, but we need to find out how we got to where we got. There are questions that started on the



eightth floor and that's where we need to get. That's why the AG or the RCMP need to go in and have a deeper look. You have this person who started the initial contact with the eighth floor. That's where it all started from.

They are serious questions that need to be asked. If there's nothing done wrong, that's fine. But you'll never get clarity. You'll never get the answers. You'll never get what the public is looking for and that's clear, unfettered access to the information. Lay it out there and let's get a report and then we'll decide on it then.

But when government don't do that, when they hide behind Black Tickle and Muskrat Falls and you signed a nursing agency contract and it was like, pick your number across there today, they were taking turns jumping up. Take accountability; take ownership of that issue. That's what the public are looking for.

I'm on this side of the House and I've been on this side of the House a long time and I might stay on this side of the House, but I'll never back away from asking those questions. I believe if you're on that side of the House, you should answer those questions. I truly, truly believe that. I really do. If the time comes down the road that I am on that side, you will see that. I don't believe it and I don't think the public appreciates it.

I said this in the House before, we wonder sometimes why people's view on politics is what it is. We're our own worst enemies because the general public see this. They see the smoke and mirrors stuff. They see this falsehood. They see this talking out of both – I'll use the words – both sides of our mouth. You're saying one thing, you mean another. People are smart now. Our electorate are very smart.

There was a time when you could get away with that. Not anymore. We have a very intelligent electorate that sees through these

things. But for some reason government – and I see it in this government a lot and a lot has become really prevalent – they think that this is the norm. They think that they can do this and laugh and smile and carry on.

You have a situation; we just had a by-election. So, you know, you go and knock on the door. When you knock on the door, as an Opposition, you can't make promises – other than if you get in government – you promise to do your best. You promise this and you'll try to do this. But that's all you can really do and anyone outside the governing party, that's all you can do.

If you want to even the playing field, if you want to do it right, drop all the promises. Take the candidates, go to the parties they represent, and whether it be Independent or the three other main parties, knock on the doors and present yourself as the candidate and what you're willing to do for the people. You can't promise things until you're elected in government.

That's not what happens anymore. We saw a prime example – and ironically, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, the Independent Member, I heard his commentary actually after it, and it was really interesting because I was thinking the same thing – it's not a fair playing field. That's not the way it should be.

Now we see it, the check boxes. They are checking the boxes. There's a shore-based manager being advertised, there's a new school that was announced this morning, I think there may be lots of paving coming and lots of black gold down that district, too, I'm being told.

Is that fair? Is that right? Can anyone compete with that? You know what the term was – and we did it earlier today and one of my colleagues googled it – pork-barrel politics. And that's exactly what it is. But will anyone say it? I will. I got no problem saying

it because it is actually fact. That's exactly what this is.

I've been around long enough to know. I mean, I'm not old enough to really remember Joey much, but I remember vaguely of Joey days and that's exactly what this is. But is that what we are trying to aspire in 2024? Is that where we need to be because that's where we are headed to.

So, when you see your friends got looked after first and if you know the right person, you get your road paved; if you know the right person, you're going to get a new school; if you know the right person, you're going to get extra ferry runs put on. Is that where we need to be?

I don't think so. I think that all residents in this province are taxpayers and pay a lot of taxes and pay into these revenues, the \$8 billion and \$9 billion, to this government. We are the engines, and CBS and Cape St. Francis and Terra Nova and all throughout the province, constituents on this side of the House pay their fair share of taxes just like the Member's on the other side of the House, their constituents. We should be treated fairly close to being the same.

I get you'll never be treated the same. I get that comes with government, but what you see happening, and it's happening over time and it's evolved, and I've really seen it evolve over the last number of years especially, it is really getting to a point that's probably worse than you've ever seen.

My guess is you'll see roadwork announced, and I've always been on the roadwork conversation over the years, every Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, except, I guess, the current one because he got no provincial roads in his district, everything has been pretty good. The road projects have been going quite well in their districts.

All the while, everyone else goes in with cap in hand and with their hand out looking for a kilometre of pavement here and a kilometre

there. If you're so lucky, you get the minister to go tour your district. When the end of the day comes back, you don't get much. You get very little; you get crumbs.

But on the other side, it's steady as she goes and I'll guarantee you, this year being an election on the horizon, if you stay in the same spot long enough an asphalt spreader may run you clear over, pave you right into the ground and that's the reality. That's Joey's politics and it's alive and well.

Now, do anyone else want to comment or jump up and say it? You don't hear it in the media these days, because the media are sometimes only reporting – I don't know what they're reporting – I don't know what universe they're in. They might be in a similar alternate universe like government on the other side.

But I know what universe I'm in, I'm not in the one the media is in and I'm not in the one this government is in. That's the reality. You talk to people, that's what they will tell you. Everyone sees it, but a lot of people won't say it. But I will say it and I'm going to probably say it more and more as time goes on because that's what you're seeing over and over and over again.

There's no shame. As someone said one time: Do you have any shame? There's no shame. It's like we don't care. And someone said one time: It's the Liberal way. And maybe it is. Maybe that's the right way to be because it seems like it doesn't really matter.

I really and seriously think it's a major problem in our society today, in our governments and the way we do business. It is a sad statement.

I've spoken over time about procurement in the province, some of these big projects. We just had the penitentiary bidder. Twice now and we still got one bidder – one bidder.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** No, it's a partnership.

**B. PETTEN:** Now, I can ask a question – it's a partnership, right.

But I can ask a question and I'm not making no – this is a fair question and everyone out there can answer this question: Why do we have one bidder? Can anyone answer me why there has been one bidder the second time? So, nobody wants \$500-million worth of work? There is no one out there wants to do \$500-million worth of work.

Why is there one bidder? That is the really simple question that nobody – and I'm tell you nobody – can provide that answer to me. I know, but I've been told it quietly. But do you know why I have been told quietly? Because if they come out, there is retribution. So, I've been told quietly why there is only one bidder and there are a rash of reasons for that, but they will not say it publicly.

So here I am, I know the answer, but I know that's the reason why. There is one bidder because they won't come out for obvious reasons.

But is that right? Is that the best way of expenditure of our money? Is that the way our money should be spent? Is that the way we should be spending \$8 billion or \$10 billion of public expenditure every year? Because do you know what? It's not the Premier's money, it's not the Cabinet's money, it's not the Liberal's money; it's the public's money. It is our money, everyone that's in this province, that's our money.

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

**B. PETTEN:** I think that's a fair statement. We're debating now \$3.2 billion in Interim Supply to get us through until, I guess, the budget comes down. That's our money. That's every person in this province. There are 500,000-plus of us; that's our money. We own that money.

When you look at the debt, it is so much per capita. Every person owes so much; every man, woman and child owes so much. Well, that's our money and we should have more say.

Just because you're red doesn't mean – if you're blue you don't get any pavement. If you're blue you don't get any schools. If you're blue you don't get a ferry. Because that's what it's really coming down to and that's a real sad statement.

I've said this. I mean, people go back in *Hansard*, like I said when I started, I've been in a lot of budgets here and I've said that over the years at different times and different statements, you'll probably hear me say it more the spring, again. But that's the real sad reality we're living in today.

For some reason – and it's beyond me and I say it all the time and I'll put my money where my mouth is to – it seems like you can say what you want. There's no challenging. There's no actual investigative journalism going on and digging down in these issues because they're there. They're presented to everybody on a silver platter for everyone to see. It's laid in front of them but nobody takes the ball and runs with it. That's what needs to happen.

So, whereas, in Opposition, we can do what we do here. We stand up every day and we'll debate and we'll oppose and we'll challenge, to the best of our abilities, every decision government makes. We should be. That's our role, a role I take seriously and, I think, all of us take seriously.

To anyone out there that want to pay attention, that's what they need to really start considering. There needs to be more hard-hitting questions asked. They're not being asked right now. I don't think they're nowhere near – outside of us in here, and when we get out around in the media, they're the challenging questions that need to be asked and until we start doing things like that, the message and the impression

on politicians in this province will never change and we'll all wear it. But I'm willing to step outside that shadow and speak my mind and today I have and I'll speak about it more.

Thank you very much, Chair.

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

**CHAIR:** The Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I appreciate it.

I know we're debating Interim Supply and I understand that we've got to get to budget time and stuff like that, but the minister mentioned about tendering, about going out, we've got to get the upfront cost, but I noticed, especially in my district, it's later and later and later that the tendering has gone out.

We had a washout and two culverts – they had a narrow on the highway. It happened in the middle of November, there was a rainstorm in November, which was very strange for Lab West, and now it seems to be the new normal, but these culverts collapsed. It wasn't until August of the following year before the government went out and tendered for to fix these culverts. I pressed the minister and pressed the minister: Why? What's the delay? What's the delay?

So, it wasn't until almost a full calendar year for that and that work is still not done. This road is still narrowed. The contract is out, but by the time that the tender went out, no company had the resources to fully do it until this coming construction season.

Then I have to ask myself, in the Roads Plan, they talked about we're going to do 503, that's the section of highway that connects Labrador City to Wabush. It's been long overdue. It was on the books in the Roads Plan in 2018. It was in the Roads Plan in 2019 and it mysteriously dropped off

and then it just came back up this past Roads Plan.

So, I ask again: Is it going to be tendered in time that this work is actually going to get done? This road is in desperate need of resurfacing, but the minister here said in this Interim Supply is to make sure that tendering goes out, but will it be tendered in time that a company in Labrador – because it's not just as simple as turning on an asphalt plant or anything like that. They're not going to even turn the asphalt plant on unless there's enough actual asphalt to put down. There are times that no roadwork gets done in Labrador for about two years, so they can build up enough work to actually turn on an asphalt plant.

So, we talk about tendering early, getting it out on time, but will it get tendered and put out in time? So, 503, that's about a four-kilometre stretch of road. Is it actually going to be tendered early, like the minister says, that's why we have to do Interim Supply or am I going to have to wait until August to see that work done and then get carried over to a whole other calendar year?

So, I applaud that, but if we're going to actually start doing early tendering, I actually want to see it because I haven't seen it in my district yet.

The minister mentioned about the Interim Supply, about Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, getting those tenders and contracts out again, too.

Once again, I say, there's a lot of work to be done there. We just talked about it in Lab West at the conference that we just had, about the need to actually get more housing built in this province, but we look at my district here, we're looking for actual concrete help to the municipalities to actually open up land, put in infrastructure and to actually start building some houses.

We have land. Lab West has land available that's for housing, for multiple things. Lab

City has multiple times put out RFPs wanting developers to come up, but the feedback we keep getting back from developers is just that the cost is just too much. They cite labour. They cite transportation costs, getting equipment up into a region that is. Let's be honest, it's not massive when it comes to construction; when it comes to mining, no problem, we can dig a hole no problem. Putting up houses: a bit of a challenge there.

But we've asked once again: How can the provincial government come to the table and actually help get some of these costs down and to actually help municipalities, who are experiencing growth, grow in a reasonable and fair way? That's one of the biggest drivers.

So, with the budget coming down and the considerations, we have to look at these things. We have to look at how we can get money into the hands of municipalities who are experiencing growth to help them grow and develop.

We get money out and tenders out in a timely fashion so that contractors and stuff can actually reasonably bid on it and actually get some of the work done in the short construction season that places like Lab West have. If you don't get it out the door very soon, well, it's not going to be done until the following calendar year and that just pisses off a whole group of other people.

So, you know, here I am. I got a brand new highway from Lab City to Happy Valley-Goose Bay and there's a section narrowed down because of a washout from 2022. So, we had a washout in 2022 and the problem is still not fixed.

So, brand new highway was touted as completed last year. Well, guess what? It's ready to be repaved again. That's actually not the only bad section on that highway; there are actually a bunch of other sections

that need to be redone because it didn't take very long for it to show its age.

We want to have this done. We want to have tenders out early. We want to have tenders out to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing so they can actually get some of that work done that they need to get done, like in my district. There are still some units that still haven't been completed yet and there were challenges of recruitment and retention and getting contractors up there to actually do some of that work that needs to be done.

We had two units burned. Hopefully, we'll see the tender out for that in a reasonable time frame before construction season completely ends in Labrador West. Like I said, if it's not out now, it's not going to get done this year.

I also want to mention that we look at the municipalities (inaudible) and I talked about how we have to get money into their hands so they can actually grow and maintain, but there are also other things. There are a lot of municipalities around this province that we need to actually have a conversation about how we're going to keep funding to make sure they stay in a path forward where they actually can grow and develop and maintain some of their things.

I have been to a lot of beautiful communities in this province, but at the same time there are opportunities there that we can actually start expanding and growing on. The tourism season is coming up again. We see that continued growth, but a lot of these smaller municipalities do need help. They need help to build, to maintain and to also upgrade because there are a lot of challenges when you're a small seasonal-based community, but they want to be their best. They want to have their best. They want to be able to offer the best.

That's another consideration when we go back is making sure that we keep increasing funding to the municipalities and the

municipal governments so that they can actually do what they do best, and that's showcase how great their little community is.

Thank you, Chair.

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

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Chair.

I am waiting for my pilot light. Oh, there it is, good. Thank you.

Chair, it's great to stand up and speak on behalf of the District of Bonavista and those residents therein, those wonderful residents of the District of Bonavista –

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

**C. PARDY:** – and to talk a little bit on Interim Supply.

Ten minutes doesn't provide it, but for the benefit of those listening in the District of Bonavista in the province, we will have other speaking time to be able to expand upon what I mention now in the short 10 minutes. But before I get into that, I want to discuss or throw out two things for the benefit of the House.

Just before Christmas, there was a group of residents from the Bonavista District, from Bonavista, who travelled to Uganda to do humanitarian work. We look at poverty and we strive to reduce poverty, but when these stories come back from Uganda it is a different type of poverty. I presented a Member's statement on this group, and people like Cathy Harris, Sandra Durdle – who I spoke to the other night – Eileen Faulkner, Joan Marsh, Pauline Fleming, Courtney Street, Betty Lou Genge, Ivy Harnett from Fogo Island, native of Bonavista, and Lora Swyers and Eliza Swyers, they go down in a ministry group

and they help out by providing food, building housing and providing items for which businesses can grow.

I mentioned to Sandra Durdle that I was going to start off with my address today, the first opportunity to speak. But she wanted me to mention, as well, the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands. The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands has been doing this for quite a number of years. In fact, she tells me that the last trip he was down, he was removing what is called the jigger flea from the feet of the children that were down in Uganda. That's a pretty noble thing for a person to be doing. These fleas live in sand. But to think that he's done that for years and years, I just think that deserves a lot of credit, as does the mission group in Bonavista. So well done to the Member.

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

**C. PARDY:** The second point before I get into the Interim Supply is that in 2024 the first Newfoundland pony foal born in this year is in the District of Bonavista in the community of Bunyan's Cove, Danielle and Chris Hobbs.

This is Newfoundland's pony, and the only thing I would say is that the numbers seem to be increasing in my district. The Hobbses in Bunyan's Cove now have 11 of these Newfoundland ponies. No government funding. In 1996, the Newfoundland pony was officially granted heritage status under the *Heritage Animals Act*.

We had one housed at Government House until this government or the RNC – one or the other, or both – removed it from Government House. I think that we ought to be giving a little more attention to the Newfoundland pony because of its rich heritage and the culture of which, really, we inhabited this Island. They were the workhorses that enabled us to live where we did.

I would like to talk, in my remaining time, on the Interim Supply. The minister had stated that it's a certain portion of the budget. Interim Supply is a certain portion of the budget. Last year, when the minister stood in this House before she presented Interim Supply 2023, she had stated in *Hansard* that the figure she was presenting was 37 per cent of the budget to come. This year, it is 33 per cent of the budget.

One would say, well, the Member for Bonavista, we're only talking about four percentage points –

**S. COADY:** That's a lot of money.

**C. PARDY:** A lot of money is right, the minister states.

Last year, for 37 per cent, we had \$2.9 billion – for 37 per cent. This year, we have 33 per cent, and we have close to \$3.3 billion. So, the amount is significantly more. One would say – the Ada Tuckers in Bunyan's Cove who're watching now are going to say well, that is quite a bit of money, quite a difference. If it's a higher percentage last year, and that was \$2.9 billion, this year is down to 33 per cent and we're up to \$3.3 billion nearly, that's a significant amount of money that we're bringing forth.

But that is probably not the core issue. We need it to operate. And whatever we need to operate, whether it's Transportation and Infrastructure, we need to bring that forward.

Let me mention to you a couple of issues that the people in the District of Bonavista may be interested in and may have questions and would hope that their Member would be challenging the minister in the budget debate that lies ahead.

The Auditor General puts a report out in 2023 on the financial statement and the audits of government. The Member for Conception Bay South mentioned their per capita spending. Well, the Auditor General

states it. It's in the consolidated revenues. In 2019, the per capita net debt for this province per person – woman, man, child – was \$29,000-and-some. In '23, it is \$31,000-and-some. So, we do have the net increase per capita. One would say, where does that stop? The question is, do we need the money; where does it show; how is it presented? But that is a significant increase over those number of years.

The net debt in billions in 2019 was \$15.4 billion. In 2023, it is \$16.5 billion, and that is our net debt. Our borrowing in 2023 was \$16.7 billion and that's pretty significant. They're going to say, well, we challenge the government and what they do. Our job as an Opposition is to raise some meritorious items that we can throw out for the government to address.

I just want to mention a couple that I will have some time to talk about a little later. The C.D. Howe Institute talks about the accountability of governments. They do the accountability of governments and they rate the government on their accountability financially. It shows in the presentation of their budget. Well, which province in Canada received the lowest score? This is not the Opposition; this is the C.D. Howe Institute. Which province? We did. When we look at the red tape – which I look forward to speaking to a little later – by the Canadian independent business association, well, only one province in Canada on red tape and regulatory received a failing grade. And I would say it was the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I look forward to speaking on that when the budget debate arises, Chair.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's always a pleasure to speak in the House.

Before I get to Interim Supply, I just want to say that last night, I did have the occasion, myself and the Member for Mount Pearl North as well, we were out at the St. John's Airport and welcomed back our Special Olympians.

There was a great turnout of people there to welcome them, and certainly we're proud of all their accomplishments. I know we had the floor hockey team that represented – well, they were Team Newfoundland, but they were actually the Mount Pearl Special Olympics floor hockey team, and they got a bronze medal and they were so thrilled to be there and to participate and they did us proud, as did all the athletes from across the province.

So, just a big shout-out to our Special Olympians.

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

**P. LANE:** Chair, it's interesting that – I have to say that I really enjoy listening to the Member for Conception Bay South, got to say.

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

**P. LANE:** And I would say that when the Member for Conception Bay South got up and spoke just a little while ago, I could say ditto to basically everything he said. I agreed with him 100 per cent, I have to say. Quite often I find myself – it's interesting, I quite often find myself on the same page as that Member, and very often when he's speaking, I say: My God, he must be reading my mind, because everything I want to say he's saying the exact same thing. And he should take that as a compliment, that he's thinking the same as me. But he was right on the mark with his remarks again today. I agree with him 100 per cent.

We're very limited, of course, on the time we get to speak today, 10-minute intervals, and we've already got into, I guess, the whole mechanics of what Interim Supply is all about; it's basically just to pay the bills while we pass the budget. But as we go through this exercise, of course, it's the money bill, so Members are able to speak about any aspect of government that they choose to, anywhere where public funds are being expended.

So, with that in mind, there are so many topics we could talk about, but the first one I want to talk about today, and there will be other opportunities to speak, I feel kind of sad to have to even bring it up, but I want to talk about Memorial University. This is something that I find troubling because I think it's fair to say that all of us in this House of Assembly, and I think people in general across our province, are very proud of Memorial University.

We're very proud of the legacy. We're very proud of what it stands for. We're proud of the fact that we're honouring our veterans and we're proud of the many accomplishments of Memorial over the years. We're proud of the fact that we've had so many graduates from Memorial University who have gone on to be great leaders, not just in this province, but across the country and around the world. You will find Memorial University graduates all throughout the globe that are excelling in leadership in various areas and making their mark and they graduated here at Memorial University. So, I think we have a lot to be proud of as it relates to Memorial University.

Now I have to say that when they decided to cut out the "Ode to Newfoundland" – and, again, I'll go back to the Member for CBS. He was very vocal on this one, much more vocal than I was, but I agreed with him. I was with him in spirit on that one, too, I can tell you. I was one of those people in the camp, I think, that was very disgusted, quite frankly, with the fact that that happened, and I hope the decision gets reversed.



But that's just one little thing. The thing that bothers me the most was when the Auditor General came in and did a review. I have heard – and I'm sure we've all heard from people over the years, concerns raised by constituents, concerns raised by people who worked at the university, perhaps students and so on, we've all heard little stories over the years about concerns that people had about the expenditure of funds on different things, the management of things, the fact that they were total autonomous and, even though there was taxpayers' money being spent – a lot of it – that there didn't seem to be that accountability.

So that's why I certainly supported the government – this government at the time – who brought in the legislation to bring in the Auditor General. That was a good thing and I applaud this government for bringing in that legislation. But, of course, once the Auditor General went in – perhaps not a huge surprise to a lot of us – the Auditor General uncovered a lot of things that were very concerning around the management of the university.

The fact that we could have a university – we never even had a flow chart, apparently, not even a flow chart for the university, an organizational chart. So, people saying they weren't sure who's in charge of doing what and so on, which is kind of mind-boggling, really, and a lot of other managerial issues that have come to rise.

It's kind of ironic, actually, when you look at the fact that we have a school of business that's teaching people to be business leaders and teaching all this stuff and, at the same time, it's apparently not even happening at the university itself.

So that was very disturbing, and is very disturbing, and I guess the point for raising that is that while all this has been uncovered, my concern is that maybe these issues don't get addressed the way they should be. Who's following up on behalf of

the taxpayer to make sure that the recommendations brought forward by the Auditor General relating to the university – who's going to make sure that those things are implemented and that they're implemented in a timely fashion?

Are we going to go back to MUN and say: You manage yourself like you did before this audit came out and we'll just trust you to take care of it. Or is the Minister of Education and the government – and I'm not talking about interfering in academics here, I'm talking about the management, the fiscal management and so on of the university – is the Minister of Education and the government, somebody going to be a liaison at least and get this message back and forth to MUN and make sure that the issues that have arisen in that Auditor General's report are actually being actioned in a timely manner.

That's a question, that's a concern I have. We cannot just simply walk away and say: We did our job, we brought in the AG, she uncovered all these things and now we're going to walk away and hopefully it gets a rest. Hopefully don't cut it when there are all these taxpayers dollars going into that institution – a public institution – hopefully doesn't cut it.

So, I would say to the government, you need to make sure – maybe you're already doing it, I hope you are – but you need to follow up to make sure all the issues that arose in the Auditor General's report for Memorial University, somebody has got to be keeping on their case to make sure that the things that were recommended are actually implemented.

Now, sticking to MUN, we had a student, Matthew Barter, we're all familiar with him, who stood up in protest against the former president of the university and how he was treated, and that's a different issue. But he put in an access to information request looking for, I think it was a C-CORE, the Centre for Fisheries and Management and

the Genesis Centre. He put in an access to information, wanted to find out what bonuses were paid out to executives at MUN in those MUN institutions, if you will, and I think travel allowances. It was denied. The university denied him.

He contacted me. I said: That's not right, they shouldn't be denying you on this. They said it's because we incorporated these three entities. They're incorporated so we don't have to give you the information. I said go to the Privacy Commissioner and put in a complaint. He did. Mr. Harvey came back and said: You need to provide that information. Guess what? MUN is now challenging Mr. Harvey's recommendation. They're taking it to court, expending more money to take it to court. They will not release the information on bonuses and travel expenses for those three entities because they're saying they're incorporated.

I say to the minister, I say to the government: We cannot have the tail wagging the dog. You need to look into this. I think they should be told: Just release it. But if they don't and if it goes to court and there's some technicality whereby because they incorporated it, they're allowed to hide the information, then come into this House of Assembly with legislation and bring in legislation that prevents that from happening.

We cannot have government agencies, ABCs and places like MUN and health authorities and everything else, we cannot have them simply –

**CHAIR:** The Member's time has expired.

**P. LANE:** – creating divisions and (inaudible) incorporating them (inaudible).

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

**CHAIR:** The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

Thank you for that lively debate. I appreciate the Member opposite's concerns about Memorial University. I'm sure the minister will take some time during debate or during the next number of weeks that we're in this House of Assembly to address them.

But I want to address some of the questions that I received from the Member of the House of Assembly for Bonavista. He asked why the required amount is different than what it would have been last year. That was one question he asked: Why 37 per cent versus 33 per cent, et cetera?

Allow me to say this is based on last year's expenses, so the expenses in '22 would have been less than the expenses in 2023. You're taking percentages of different years; therefore, that's one answer for your question.

The other is, it's also a reflection of how much is required by departments. Obviously, the Department of Finance goes out and talks to departments and determines with talking to, for example, on infrastructure, how much is going to be – remember in last year's budget, we had a record amount for infrastructure? Because we're taking a percentage of that to go out – so those are some of the reasons why the numbers are different.

I wanted to make sure that you had that information for you. It's because, a, different year, different expense basis, so the baseline expenses are different; but also because when you go out to departments and you say, for example you're going to the department that's responsible for infrastructure and they want to get their contracts out early and the percentage of that would be in there as well.

That was one thing I know the Member was questioning. He also questioned about our growth of our debt since 2019. Now, I know the Member opposite clearly will remember and reflect upon the fact that we did have

COVID. So, in the COVID times, we had very high deficits. You'll remember that; we had very high deficits. And because of that, those deficits get added to our debt. So, this is one of the reasons why this government is saying that we need legislation that says to this House, we need to have balanced budgets.

The Member opposite will well know that I speak about the incredible need for us to get to balanced budgets. And the reason I say that is because we have a growing debt. I don't mind, and I'm sure the Member opposite wouldn't mind borrowing money to build a school, because you have an asset. Or borrowing money to build a hospital; you have an asset. But when you're borrowing money to pay – because it's basically borrowing on your credit card – when you're borrowing money because you don't have enough money to fund your day-to-day operations, I find that problematic.

So I implore the Members opposite, actually, to understand why balanced budget legislation is important. I know it's been indicated from the Members opposite that they will not be supporting balanced budgets, but I would implore you to reconsider that. Because it's really something that we have to have the discipline in this House to ensure that we, as my mom would say, cut the cloth to suit the garment. There will be times when we have to borrow because we have a deficit. COVID is one of them. But I would say to the Member opposite we also need to really make sure that we are disciplined enough in Newfoundland and Labrador to address our expenditures.

Now, I will give you some solace because I'm a businessperson. I always have performance indicators; I always watch my performance indicators. So if you look at from the time we had a new Premier, so 2020-2021. If you go back to 2020-2021 when I became Minister of Finance. When I became Minister of Finance, our debt to GDP ratio, 57.1 per cent.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** What is it now?

**S. COADY:** It's down to approximately 41 per cent.

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

**S. COADY:** We're trying to be extremely pragmatic and responsible. I would also say that our net debt, if you remember back, I remember the former minister of Finance raised during July of 2020 saying that the debt at that time would be \$17.1 billion that year – \$17.1 billion in 2020. We're just hitting that now. We actually paid down debt.

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

**S. COADY:** Our debt expense has remained constant, which is a good thing. I will say we've made payments to the Future Fund. I know the Member opposite is not in favour of the Future Fund, but let me tell you, we have \$300 million in our Future Fund now.

That's discipline. That's taking non-renewable resource revenues, revenues that this government receives, and based on a formula, putting it away. The only thing we can do with that money is pay it down on debt for the next 10 years. In 10 years' time, we should have – all things being equal – billions in that fund.

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

**S. COADY:** So it's really practical, pragmatic, responsible.

I will say, at the same time, that our debt expense as a percentage of gross revenue, another key indicator. Debt expense as a percentage of gross revenue has gone from 16 per cent to 10.9 per cent. I think the indicators are showing to you how disciplined we have been. At the same time, making huge investments in – I'm going to point to the Minister of Health. In the last four years, this government has increased

spending by almost \$1 billion – \$1 billion in Health.

So we made some very significant investments, at the same time as being financially responsible. It's that kind of balance that I think that Newfoundland and Labrador needs as we move forward. I just wanted to answer the Member's questions and take that moment to do so.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The Member for Ferryland.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Chair.

Certainly, a great opportunity to get up and represent the people of the Ferryland District, and I thank them again for putting me in here to try to battle some of these issues that we face in the district.

First of all, I'll start at an incident happened probably a couple of weeks ago in Trepassey when the breakwater collapsed during one of our storms. It wasn't considered a major storm, I guess, but it was a major storm for them. The breakwater came down over the last year and a half, I guess, Hurricane Larry is where it started, and they had a million dollars worth of damage – \$975,000 was the number at the time, I think. And they're working through all the details. All engineers coming in, they figured out what they've got to do, go in and build it, and less than six or seven months since it was finished and it's down on the ground again.

When I was in meetings with the councillors in Trepassey and the mayor, at the time, I said, we're going to put this breakwater up here and we – not only me, they had said it before the engineers were there. They had said it that if you're going to put in a breakwater, then you've got to do it properly. It's not the contractor's issue is

what happened on this project; it's an engineer issue as far as we can tell.

They put up that wall. It's not far enough down into the sand. If you look at a breakwater, it's into the sand and into the beach rock that's there. There was no armour stone put in front of the breakwater to stop it first. There is on the far end, there are some rocks put there to save it, but not where they put this cribbing to.

They needed to put this wall up and they needed to do it properly. They needed longer sticks to go deeper into the ground – and I'm not an engineer; I don't profess to be. But you don't have to be an engineer to figure out that this wall is coming down pretty quick when the forces of the universe are going to take it down, which is the water. No one can control the power of the water.

And when that comes in there at that storm or any storm, they're going to be suspect – and there's 25 homes on the other end of Trepassey that are going to be cut off, from people being able to get down there. So when they do this engineering, they got to listen to the people from the area. They put up a wall – the recommendation from them at the time was to put a cribbing right behind the wall. But then when I phoned the department – and this is federal and provincially tied. You call up and make some suggestions, well, we can't do that. This is a part of Larry, so this has to be done first before we can do that.

Well now, look where we are today. They've got a million dollars spent and a million dollars gone down the drain. Not acceptable. They should be looking at this stuff. This is where government – and we're all voted in here to make stuff logically happen. This wasn't logical. You could tell when you go up there that it wasn't going to stand for it. You need armour stone in front of the breakwater to be able to break the water so it wouldn't get in to flatten the wall or put a cribbing behind it.

Neither one of those things happened, and now we sit there today – and the town paid, I think it was \$100,000, \$120,000. The government goes up and visits it last week or the week before. They're going to get back to them and they're going to have to go back and probably it will cost the town another \$100,000 on something that they just spent last year. This is a small community, 250 people. Where are they coming up with this kind of money?

This should be something that the government should be looking at and do it properly, talk to the feds. Provincially, we've got to get it together and get this right. It's not acceptable what's happening out there now; \$100,000 to a town that really can't afford to have it. They can't afford to pay it. It's just not feasible. They've got to get together and figure this out.

This is where, if we sit down logically, we can talk to each other, across a minister talking to an MHA and got some ideas, but we can never seem to figure it out.

Here we are spending \$1 million – gone, wasted, gone out the harbour, basically. You've got to start again. So, are they going to go back up and build a wall? Are they going to put armour stone in front of it? Are they going to put cribbing behind it? These are all logical questions that people need answered. They need answers.

So, that's one of the issues in the district that I got up to speak about. Also, I have some issues that we had certainly brought up during the term, 24-hour snow clearing. That's something that we certainly hung our hat on. But there's one example that I had from a resident – not from my resident, it was over in Carbonear area last week. He said that he was travelling from Carbonear to the TCH between 5:10 and 5:50 and the roads were a sheet of ice.

This is a flash-freeze that we had last week. No one heard on the radio or no one heard from the weather forecaster that we're going

to have a flash-freeze? At 5:10 in the morning, the roads are still slippery. That doesn't make sense. There's no planning. It doesn't make any sense to me that they know that there's a flash flood coming – or a flash-freeze. There was a flash flood before that when the rain hit the roads, for sure, and then it's a flash-freeze. It happened pretty quick; we knew it was happening. We heard about it and it didn't get taken care of.

So, to say that they've got them on call and they're going to come out. I don't know this person. He knew that I was the critic for this department, so he emails me telling me: 5:10 to 5:50, not a truck to be seen – not a truck to be seen. That's not only in this area; that's right across the Island. So there's –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** You're fear mongering.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I'm fear mongering when I got up and did that, when I brought that up before. But we're talking about storms that are happening in the middle of the night. You don't wait until 5 o'clock in the morning to go clean the roads. The roads need to be cleaned. People are going on these roads at 6 o'clock.

They should be out at 3:30, 3 o'clock, to go get these roads ready for the people that are on the roads at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning. There are people going to Argentia at 7 o'clock. There are people going to Bull Arm. There are people going to Long Harbour. They're over there waiting to go and they message you and send you pictures of the road conditions. It's not acceptable.

I get all kinds of calls from nurses and doctors that have to show up in hospitals and the government decides: Well, we're going to close the building. Safety issue, there's a storm coming. They don't close the hospitals. They've got to get to work. They have to get into the buildings. So these roads should be cleared.

I know people that tried to go in and I know people that had to stay there longer because people couldn't get in, the roads weren't cleared. We know there are storms and that's going to happen at times, but not as often as is happening now. We close down this building. These people still have to go to work and the responsibility should be on the government to get these roads opened so these people can go to work. You're expected to be there. You're expected to show up for work and that didn't happen. The government can close down, these people still have to get out there and they don't get there.

It's not acceptable that these roads are not cleared and not cleaned. It's not the people on the trucks that are to blame. It's certainly not the people on the trucks, I can guarantee you that. They get the most grief because they're living in the communities where they are. They go down to the stores and they get most of their grief, there's no question about it, they take all the grief, but it's not them that gets the responsibility to get on the roads. It's the government that are giving them the rules and regulations that they have to operate by. They go out at 4:30, go out at 5 o'clock, and they stay in until 1 o'clock and the next shift comes on from 1 to 9. What happens after 9 o'clock? We're going to pray for no snow after 9 o'clock.

It's not acceptable. It's not acceptable and we should be sitting down trying to figure this out. Again, it's just one of those things that happens, but it should not be happening. It should be more discussion on it. There just should be more discussion on it, it's just not acceptable.

I've heard the Member for CBS bring up about one person bidding on a contract. Well, I know that if I was a company and I owned a company – well, if you have a company the way you're running it, if you're a private contractor, you'd be out of business long ago, the way we're running some of this stuff. It's incredible. It's a good

thing we have people's money to survive on because the way it's ran, it's not ran properly for sure.

But if you bid on a contract and you're \$39 million lower than the other person and you didn't get it, would you waste your time bidding on a contract again? You probably spent a million dollars trying to do that, on this size of contract, so why would you waste your time doing it if you know you're not going to get it?

That's the point that we're trying to make. It's not acceptable to have a one-person bidder and we know why. We don't want to talk about it, that's the problem; we don't want to talk about it. So, to have these P3s and only having one bidder, it should be looked at very hard. It is not something that we should let pass, definitely not acceptable that we'd let this pass.

So now we have a penitentiary, we have a one-person bidder, one-company bidder, and no one else is going to bid. It just doesn't make any sense. Makes no sense. But if I had a company, I wouldn't want to bid on it either if I'm going to waste a million dollars of my company's money and end up knowing I have no chance of getting a contract. Why would you bid? Why would you bid? It doesn't make any sense.

The Minister of Transportation, I will thank him for going up to the department. We went up one time in December, I think it was, the middle of December, late December and we did have some discussions. The two things that we did discuss – one was a 550 truck that we're talking about in the district that we still haven't seen. I know that it's not there. The other one would be a shed in the area that they're trying to help.

I know this is how government works. This is December. Now we're into March. We've got three months later. Build a shed, I'd say you'd have a shed built, wired and ready to go in a month's time. Now we're three

month's time and we don't see anything happening.

So these people are looking to utilize this equipment. The equipment that they're looking for, I know that they could do some maintenance and all kinds of stuff they can do in their district that they can help out with. I know we had a great discussion and, hopefully, as he said, a Christmas present that he's going to get. He didn't get it yet, but, hopefully, he might get an Easter present that we get a 550 that he's looking for and get it in the district and help him out to do his job that he does so well right now.

Thank you. I'm out of time.

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

**CHAIR:** The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**E. JOYCE:** I'm going to have a few words here today, Madam Chair, and I'm going to first off – the Member for Bonavista who mentioned the ladies who did the work in Uganda.

If you have seen the work that these ladies have done, you'd be amazed by just a bunch of volunteers raising a few dollars in Bonavista that's helping out. The family that they're sponsoring, the mother just had triplets. They're paying the rent for this lady because the father walked away with six kids. This is the work they're doing; it is life changing. Those kids, the oldest now is in school. Without education in Uganda, you'll always be in poverty.

The second family that I went and met on their behalf they helped them start a little small business. Now, this mother, Rose, is taking care of her family, the whole family because of those three ladies in Bonavista.

I just want to recognize that. I have seen the work that they have done first-hand. This is a type of example when you see so many things around the world that we cringe

about, all the fighting and the wars and people getting killed and you see these positive things that those ladies are doing.

Congratulations to the group I've got to say because I witnessed it first-hand what they did and well for you, for the Member for Bonavista, to recognize them and keep supporting them as time goes forward. Good job.

I'm going to bring up a few concerns today. First of all, the former minister of Housing, I know me and you were bantering back and forth about a 32 unit in Corner Brook that wasn't done. I did get a letter back from the federal minister's office and they did not approve that. So you were 100 per cent correct on it. I wasn't sure, but I just want to recognize, you were correct that the federal government did not put the funding in for that development in Corner Brook. I received a letter on Friday and I just want to recognize that when you went public and said the federal government didn't sponsor it, you were correct. I wasn't sure. I didn't say you weren't sure, but I wasn't sure. But you were 100 per cent right on that; that's why that development wasn't done. So, I just want to recognize that.

I say to the current Minister of Housing, there are still issues in Corner Brook that we need addressed. The place where they have the emergency shelters, they're starting to move people out to Gander and Stephenville. They are moving people out to Gander and Stephenville for that. I say to the new Minister of Housing: I can assure you that I'll work with you to do what we can to improve housing in the Corner Brook, Bay of Islands area, because it's just not Corner Brook. It is the Bay of Islands that's affected; it is the Humber area – Pasadena, all that area, they're all affected. From Stephenville in, they're all affected.

So, if there is anything I can do – I could take you out and show you the units that are still vacant as we speak. I can definitely help with that because if we work together, we're

going to help the people in the Corner Brook, Bay of Islands, Humber area. That's what we're here for and I have absolutely no problem working with you on that as I was working with the former minister on that to improve the housing up there.

So, I just want to bring that up to the former minister about the letter I received on Friday and I will work tirelessly to improve the housing in the Humber - Bay of Islands.

Chair, the other thing that I'm going to just bring up in general now, because it is a debate on the funding, is the roads in Humber - Bay of Islands. Again, I have to recognize the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. When he was in Corner Brook, he actually sat down and met with the three mayors on the road conditions. They expressed their concerns on a very serious basis of the need and how this has been put off for years. I just want to recognize the minister for that, to sit down with them and hear their concerns.

There are many letters from all the towns on these safety concerns, especially gabion baskets in the Bottle Cove area on the road as we mentioned. Coming up through on Route 450, there are some areas and Route 440 there are some areas. I will be bringing them again to the minister, but I want to recognize that the minister heard them first-hand from the mayors and especially the water concerns for Lark Harbour, Irishtown-Summerside.

Thank you, Minister. They were very pleased with the meeting and the frank discussion that they had with yourself and the deputy. Hopefully there would be some progress in that because it is a great need for that.

Chair, the other thing I'm just going to mention here is the hospital in Corner Brook. I know the minister says in April – hopefully. I know they're starting to gradually educate people and then have

time to move in because it will be a timely process to move into the new hospital.

Again, I'll say publicly, although they weren't recognized at the announcement, I want to thank the hospital committee. They were tirelessly – I'm going back to 2007 when this group started with Israel Hann, Gerald, Wayne and a few more. They started the process of the new hospital and this is the kind of thing that sometimes you feel why do people step up to do it, because when the announcement came up, those individuals weren't even invited.

**P. LANE:** What?

**E. JOYCE:** Weren't even invited.

They're just ordinary citizens. I can say to the minister: When the PC government were in, they were critical and they were in their face. When the Liberals were in in 2015, they were critical and they were in our face. This was a non-political group.

So, I just want to recognize the hospital committee group, and I also want to recognize the group at the hospital. They have a committee set up for this transition. I've got to recognize the work that they're doing also for the transition because it is a big transition. There is a big transition and there are a certain number of staff that are assigned to this and they're doing a great job of it. It's going to take time.

The other thing that I'm going to be bringing up is the radiation unit. I know now since 2016 that this was on the radar of government and we were part of it, getting it approved and getting it started to work, is the staffing for the radiation unit. It's major. I know there are some out there. I know the chemist that is out there. I've met him personally, and there are a few radio techs that are hired, husband and wife, that moved down from Alberta for it.

I just hope, as the minister mentioned, that the radiation will be up and running when



the hospital is opened in April. That would be a great – how can I put it for people who have got to travel to St. John's, get radiation and then stay in here without family and friends? That's so emotional for so many people, that the radiation can be done and you can go home. People from the Northern Peninsula to come up and remain closer to their families on a regular basis, people from the whole West Coast, Labrador – you could take off the load for St. John's.

It's so emotional for a lot of people who have been through it. I just hope that this is going to continue and that it will start in April, as the minister mentioned in a question that I asked last fall. He's anticipating that it will be starting in April.

Those are some of the concerns that I have right now and the major concerns that I hear in the district and around Corner Brook is the housing. It is the roads in Route 450, roads on Route 440. The gabion baskets – I'll just explain to the public out there so they would know about the gabion baskets. They were put in back in John Efford's day. They were six, seven feet high and they're down to three feet now, beaten down with the rocks. There are always rocks on the road. Any time there's rain or there's a melt, there are rocks on the road.

Even Transportation and Works had a tractor next to it, when they knew there was a major rainstorm or if there was major flood, just to move rocks off the road. So, I know it was brought up to the minister. I want to make sure that the safety concern of all that is brought forward to it.

There's another concern, I say to the Minister of Education, is I wrote you several times now on the school in – Sacred Heart been around now – my family went there; I went there. Sacred Heart, it's an elementary school. They're looking to get some work done. I wrote the minister several times on it. I haven't received a reply on it. I spoke to people out in the Corner Brook area and they said, well, we don't have the authority

any more now. We really wanted to do something.

So I ask the minister look at those letters because those kids want to have pride in their school. The families want to have pride in their school. When you have a school that's almost rundown, because of lack of painting, lack of other things in the inside, people lose their zest for their school.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you, Chair.

Before I start, I would like to say congratulations to you, of course, for taking on a new role. I had a chance to work with you in other Committees and I'm sure you'll do a great job in your new role. Congratulations to you.

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

**P. FORSEY:** It's always nice to get up here and talk about Interim Supply. Our public service is very important and our servants that we have there doing the great jobs that they do, it's always nice to have the Interim Supply and we certainly need to pay attention to that so that we can certainly look after our public service.

Having said that, Chair, I'll bring up some situations in Exploits. It's always nice to get up here and talk about my District of Exploits, the people who put me here. They've still got concerns in their district; they've had them since 2016, and I'll start with that one, I guess. In 2016, of course, they stripped the 24-hour emergency service out of the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre.

When my constituents come to me and ask me when that's going to happen. I say well, look at the 2019 election, Liberals went out and promised it, going to reinstate the 24-hour emergency service. In 2021, new

candidate, new Premier, same Premier as now, going to reinstate the 24-hour emergency service. Still not done.

People in my district ask me: Pleaman, how can they have a by-election in Conception Bay East - Bell Island and then make all the promises that they can? They're looking at me and saying: When are they going to commit to the promises that they already made to us, instead of some of the promises that was made in a by-election?

We've heard nothing only promises and announcements and plans in the past few months. They're going to do this; we're going to do that; we're going to do something else. But to go back to the promise of 2019, 2021 – still not done. Twenty-four-hour emergency service, it's supposed to be done – still not done.

That's one thing. Roads in the district again, same thing. We talk about the five-year Roads Plan, that sort of fell apart. You look at some of the other districts, lots of roads there, lots of work being done. The only way we get roadwork done is through petitions. I've got to get up here to try to get some of the roadwork done through petitions in the lower zones, like the 60 zones, 50 zones, 40 zones, that sort of stuff, ones that are running through the communities or towards communities and probably on the main highways. We've got to get it done through petitions instead of the roadwork plan. It's terrible for this stuff to be happening. That's the kind of stuff that I see in my district.

Medical transportation: I hear again of a lot of people with medical transportation. It just don't cut it. They're trying to get – especially now with the lack of doctors, of course, in Central Newfoundland because they're leaving left, right and centre in Central Newfoundland. So the lack of doctors in there that now they have to go to the bigger centres, of course, which is the Health Science or St. Clare's to see a surgeon, to see another doctor or get a second opinion or some sort of thing that they got to come

out. They're probably leaving their homes in the Exploits District, coming out here. I know they are doing it all over the province, but they're coming out here and they're spending time at facilities, probably travel, might cost hotels, gas, accompaniment, you know, someone to accompany them on their route.

All that becomes a stress, becomes a burden to the ones in the situation with the health care need. That's an added stress to them which don't need to be there, but they sort of have to find ways in order to cover the cost of their transportation to get to that appointment that they so dire need and the medical transportation doesn't cut it.

I hear them going to our service organizations, like the Lions Clubs, Kinsmen Clubs – I mentioned them earlier – trying to get some monies to take care of the rest of the needs that they need just to come to St. John's for an appointment. Even times when they get here – I've heard – their appointments are cancelled. We can't do you today; can't do you tomorrow, go back home. We might fit you in later. Hopefully, they get a chance to get back and get that done.

Like I said, the medical transportation of that cost just does not fit the plan that they need to be getting done in the district and medical transportation doesn't cut it, so that's another thing that needs to be looked at.

I'm hearing, again, in the district, seniors in the district, of course, are suffering. They are finding it hard to live in their own homes again now – the cost of living, of course.

Again, a magic year 2016 was because it seems like they had a lot of cuts in taxes that didn't work out, I guess, but in 2016, they cut the hours for the seniors and they increased their (inaudible) that they had to pay, which caused another stress for seniors to be living in their own homes. That's the kind of stuff that's happening in my district.

I'll look at the forestry part. In 2018, they unlocked 280,000 cubic metres of fibre from the old Abitibi permits, which was good, nothing wrong with that. It was great that they did it, but it all disappeared, even the portion that was supposed to be there, if there was any industry in the forestry to happen in Central Newfoundland, that went – all gone. If we had to get an industry in Central Newfoundland with forestry, we have to wait until at least five years for the permits to run out so the allocations can be done again, which when 280,000 cubic metres which could have been allocated – no. So we could have got some more for Central Newfoundland.

Even the permits for Central Newfoundland, people are having trouble getting logging permits, getting domestic permits even now in different areas and it's not because we didn't have it there. I'm certainly sure they could have allotted that in a different way with a management plan of the forest plan in there, they could have certainly made room for that kind of stuff in Central Newfoundland, rather than just ignoring it and saying: Okay, don't matter. We're going to bring in our three biggest groups and give them all the permits and let them work away. They're all concentrated, by the way, on 10, 11 and 12, because of the good fibre that's in there. We're known as the fibre basket – about the good fibre in the there. The lands itself are more flat, easier to get at, so they all want to congregate on there, cut all that out and take it away.

Not saying we don't need forestry or anything in parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, because we do. It's all a help. We certainly need that happening in Newfoundland and Labrador. But the Central area alone, we can't get permits. People can't get access to it now because everything is locked down, everything is locked, everything is gone, which is terrible because of the industry that could have been there for Central Newfoundland, we can't even get a chance to have an industry there.

So that's just some of the things in my district, Chair, that I certainly just wanted to bring up. Again, like a lot of things, it goes back to health care, especially with doctors leaving the Central region. We're hearing it every day, doctors leaving; closures and diversions in the emergency departments from Baie Verte to Lewisporte to the Loop, down that way, down in Wesleyville area, all across the area in Central Newfoundland, Connaigre Peninsula; again, closures and diversions of emergency units that have to go into Grand Falls-Windsor at our regional hospital and we just don't have the doctors there to look after them.

That's just a few things, Chair, and I'll get a chance to talk about my district a lot more in the coming days.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**J. ABBOTT:** Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to participate in the debate on the Interim Supply bill.

Just reading down through the Schedule, so my department, in terms of the Interim Supply bill, is looking for \$698 million. Which is a hefty amount of money and was the whole budget for a year not too long ago.

In terms of our department in looking at why we would need that amount of money early in the year is to allow us to continue on with the significant roadwork that we have budgeted thanks to the Minister of Finance last year, where we now have a five-year budget of \$1.4 billion, along with some other work – the Team Gushue Highway and some twinning projects that we want to do.

We need those funds as early as possible, obviously, to allow us to award tenders that would be coming out in very short order. We

have a lot of work to do and we have a very short construction season in which to spend that money. That is very important for my department. Obviously, it's important for the Department of Health to get on with its new initiatives, as well.

The Minister of Finance commented about the progress the government has made in terms of its financial and fiscal management since 2020 and 2021. I think that's significant, which allows us to have a significant capital budget, which allows us, because of sound, fiscal management, to go to the capital markets to raise the money to either pay down our debt and/or, in this case, to incur new capital expenditures.

Since I've taken on this portfolio, I think it's been fair to say that we have a very aggressive infrastructure program. We need to build new hospitals. We need to build a new penitentiary. We need to do expansion on our highway system. We need to build new schools, such as the one we announced for Paradise earlier today. All of that is going to take significant sound management and good engineering to make sure we get these projects done and get them done on time and in budget.

One thing I did want to comment on as well is around our highway maintenance and our winter maintenance program in particular. There have been, obviously from the Opposition, some criticism of our program this year – maybe in past years. One of the things I've been spending my time on with our senior management, as well as talking to the folks on the front line is, obviously, what services do we need; what resources do we need to make sure we get this work done in an expedient manner, a safe manner and, obviously, meets the needs of the motoring public.

The Member for Ferryland talked about our joint visit to the depot in Tors Cove, which was very insightful – very dedicated group of individuals who are making sure that that section of roadwork in the province is up to

standard. The things they mentioned to me are we need more equipment, we need the right equipment and, obviously, we need to make sure we can get that done and allocated to them as quickly as possible.

One of the challenges we're facing right now is we have a lot of our new equipment on backorder. So I think we will get the – if it wasn't this past Christmas for the 5,500 truck, it will be by next Christmas, for sure. So we are very committed to making sure we've got the right resources in place and that particular piece of equipment is perfect for the off main highway roadwork, whether it's on the Southern Shore or elsewhere in the province, and I've seen the benefit of that type of equipment.

I certainly want to commend our folks who are on the trucks and on the plows. It's not an easy job by any stretch and if you've seen the type of equipment that we have to use, the manipulation of the plows and the side plows and the sander and if you're trying to do all of that in real time, it takes an extraordinary amount of skill. It is not for everybody to do that.

So, I'm very impressed with the folks that have taken that on. We need more plow operators. We need more folks in their trucks and one of the challenges we've had this winter is that we are short on equipment and we've been short on staff. That's not for the sake of trying. It's just a reality that we faced this particular winter.

We've left it to our front-line supervisors and superintendents to jockey the equipment around to meet the needs of the motoring public. In that sense, some of the side roads did take a while to get done, but pretty well within 24 hours all the roads were plowed and salted and maintained and we will continue on that basis.

The other thing people may have heard about is 24-hour snow clearing. Well, we've never had 24-hour snow clearing on all our roads. The most we had was on 14 routes,

and that was for a short period of time back 10 years ago. What we have done is, based on need, accelerated up to 24 hours based on the snow conditions and the forecast conditions, so we're able to meet the needs of the motoring public based on that policy.

Now, we'll keep adjusting that to make sure that we have the main routes covered as needed. But the challenge that we've had is not because of whether we had 24-hour snow clearing or not, it's that we were down equipment and we were down staff. We are doing everything we can. We have the budget to do it, so it's not a fiscal issue. It's strictly a resource availability issue to make sure we can meet the needs of the motoring public, whether it's here on the Avalon, in Central, west or up in Labrador.

Interestingly enough, the further west you go and the north you go, the less issues we have. Part of that is because people are more comfortable with driving when there's snow on the road or in snowing conditions versus on the Avalon. Folks on the Avalon are more inclined to seek and expect that we will have dry pavement while the snow is falling. I'm not being facetious in that. Some of the complaints we get are just that.

We know where each of our plows are at any point in time, so we can respond to any concerns, any criticisms about where the plow is, where I was as the driver in relation to that. When we have found that we're deficient, we will talk to our supervisors and the front-line folks to make sure that, on an ongoing basis, those issues get addressed. I'm certainly committed to making sure we have the safest highways that we possibly can.

For those who travel across country during the winter, comparing our road snow clearing operations versus anybody else's, I would put ours up against anybody's in the country. We do an excellent job, but we have the most severe and variable snow and winter conditions and I think we can all appreciate that is a known fact here.

We are really calling upon our folks on the front lines of our snow plow operators and the like to make sure that they keep those roads as clear and as clean as possible, and I think they do an excellent job. I think it is incumbent on all of us, too, I think, to acknowledge that.

For the coming year and certainly for the coming highway construction season, we're going to have a very, very busy season. We will be carrying over work from last year. We'll be doing work on the Team Gushue Highway, so the Member for Ferryland and myself, who live in his illustrious district, can get back and forth to the Confederation Building in even a much speedier time, obviously, following the speed limit, of course.

We have got a lot of work to do. We'll be talking more during the budget discussions and Estimates on the details of our department.

With that, Chair, I'll take my seat.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and to echo my colleague from Exploits, congratulations to you on your new position.

It is good to be back in the House of Assembly. It is good to be back in the people's House. Today, we are debating Interim Supply: The spending authority to be made available to the government – and in the minister's own words – so government operations can continue. Today, we are discussing \$3,286,755,700 in order for payroll and income support to be met and, of course, for the awarding of tenders and contractual obligations.

It was good to hear the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure just speak with respect to the early awarding of

tenders. I do have some work that is in my district that has been approved on the Roads Plan – and in the minister's own words – tenders to be out in very short order. So I'm hopeful that tenders will be called, work will commence and the work to be done in my district, specifically, for the residents in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cover on Marine Drive. I'm looking forward for that to be done.

I've said here before, Madam Chair, I'll give credit where credit is due, to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, I did have an issue in my district with respect to roads and traffic lights. I brought it to the minister's attention. Him and his staff visited my district, I met him, we worked through the issue and the issue has been resolved. So, I will thank him for that with respect to solving that issue.

Madam Chair, when I came here in 2021, and the good people, the voters of my district, put their trust in me to represent them in the people's House, I sat through our first Interim Supply and, of course, each year after we listen and we debate Interim Supply at this time each year. I went back through my personal notes, just the little jot notes that I took at the time, and here in 2024, we are discussing the same issues that were brought forward in 2021. They are very much the same, some points may be a little bit more drastic.

At that time, we discussed health care and we discussed the lack of family doctors, the availability of nurses, of course, with retention. Now, here today, we are discussing travel nurses, and as my colleague from CBS has said, the nursing fiasco; when we looked at ambulatory services and the lack of ambulances that can respond to any given call. Unfortunately, I have personal experience with respect to ambulatory services, when a call is made for a gentleman in Pouch Cove and an ambulance has to come an hour and a half from Whitbourne. That's unacceptable.

I can speak to that personally, Madam Chair. It is not good enough. It's not good enough for the people of this province when they have to wait an hour and a half for an ambulance to come from Whitbourne to Pouch Cove. Of course, then that goes into lengthy wait times when the resident or the constituent is brought to the hospital and waits in the ER and waiting on a stretcher for 32 to 40 hours on a stretcher in the emergency room. That's not good enough.

I've said it before, we discussed this in 2021, here we are, 2024, three years later, discussing the same issues with respect to health care. And I can assure you that the people of my district, just like the other 39 districts in this hon. House, deserve better when it comes to ambulatory services and when it comes to care being provided in our emergency rooms.

As my colleague said earlier with respect to the closure of emergency rooms, that's still happening today. We have many ERs that are closed. When we look at the proper care that's going to be provided to the constituents, those emergency rooms need to be reopened, and, of course, discussing that today as we did three years ago.

Of course, with respect to seniors and home care, especially I'm finding it hard in my district, Madam Chair, to find home care workers for individuals so that we can keep them in their homes. It is an issue. It's an ongoing issue with respect to the level of availability for workers who are in home care. That's what we want for our seniors; we want to keep our seniors in their own homes. We want to do our best.

I have many friends who have family members in their 80s and 90s, who require a certain level of care, and the best option is to keep them in their homes. That was discussed back in 2021; we're discussing the very same thing today when we're dealing with the cost of everything.

Madam Chair, I can tell you with surety that I've sat at many kitchen tables with seniors, with working couples, with families – families in their 40s – who are having to sell their home, having to file for bankruptcy because of the soaring cost of living. They cannot make ends meet. And here we are again in 2024 discussing the same issues as we did years ago with respect to cost of living.

We have increased attendance at our food bank. I'm sure other Members in this hon. House are witnessing the same thing with increased attendance at food banks. It is only getting worse. What are we going to do, Madam Chair? What are we, as the people here in the people's House, going to do about that? How can we solve that with respect to providing what people need to live, to be able to stay in their homes? It's becoming increasingly alarming when people who supported the food bank are now attending and looking for donations from that food bank because of the cost of living. And it's only getting worse day to day with respect to the people who are suffering in our province.

Madam Chair, since the last time we sat in the fall sitting, I've had many opportunities to visit the schools in my district and speak with the teachers, speak with the staff in the schools, the teaching assistants, and we go back to resources to support our teachers. We discussed that, again, when I was here my first year in 2021. It's on both sides of the House that we need to do more to support our teachers and, in turn then, the support that's given to the students.

I can see it first-hand, the level of dedication that the teachers bring to their positions, day in and day out, but more is required of them, day in and day out. And they're doing it with less. They're doing the work in the classrooms to educate our young students and it's becoming increasingly harder. I have one teacher with 25 students, four with special needs, and a half-time teaching

assistant. How can that teacher do justice to that classroom?

So, I ask the Minister of Education, when it comes to what was discussed in the Think Tank, I do hope that many good opportunities are going to come from that Teachers Think Tank to support the teachers, to meet the needs that are in the classrooms and to do justice to the children that we have, to the students, our future leaders who are going to be in this House of Assembly one day. We need to do better with respect to the resources that we provide to them, to the teachers, to their support staff.

I know the administrations in the schools are swamped as well, trying to do their best with what they have, but I do know that teachers are reaching into their own pockets many times just to provide what needs to be in the classroom. They are providing the resources that will need to be in the classroom.

It's concerning, Madam Chair, when we discuss this time and time again. The public and the people of our districts are not doing as well as they should be doing. We need to be doing more for them, and I can certainly say that with respect to education and the students that we are educating and for the teachers, we need to do more, not only on the class sizes. That needs to be looked at again, as we discussed in this House many times.

But I will have another opportunity to speak again. I have much more to speak on with respect to in this Interim Supply debate, but I do thank you for your time.

Just one thing to the Minister of Finance: I know I speak on behalf of my caucus, thank you to your staff in the Department of Finance for doing such work time and time again, year after year.

Thank you so much.

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

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is a pleasure to rise in the House today and speak once again. I guess first up is our Interim Supply bill. That's what we came into, very important, of course, very important to the budgetary process.

For those of you who may be listening at home or in the gallery still, health care takes up a huge amount, the largest amount of our budgetary process, and for good reason because it's lacking throughout the province. It's not a reflection on the health care professionals; it's the attention that is given to these health care professionals or should I say lack there of.

When we talk about recruitment and retention, there are challenges in our health care system, 100 per cent, no doubt. Recruitment is a huge challenge to try to get health care professionals here but, on the back end of that, it's the retention part. How do we keep health care professionals here? I would argue the first part of that is paying attention to their needs and the supports that they have been asking for, for quite some time now.

On December 14, 2022, I sent an email to the Premier and the Minister of Health, talking about the collapsing health care in Central Newfoundland. And if that sounds like it's out there, it's too far beyond, there's no way that health care is collapsing, let me give you a little bit of backstory about Central Newfoundland and our health care facility, Grand Falls-Windsor hospital.

The Grand Falls-Windsor hospital must take in the overflow of patients every time that an ER shuts down or a diversion goes on. It is the backstop. It is the Alamo. It is the last stop in Central. There is no contingency plan if this health establishment collapses

and the people collapse as well. There is no backstop. This is the contingency plan. Our needs in Grand Falls-Windsor in Central Newfoundland are not taken seriously.

This past week, government received a letter from the four doctors in Grand Falls-Windsor that give cancer care in the clinic out there, the internists. It's the only place in Newfoundland where it happens inside the clinic. They see anywhere between 300 to 400 patients a month. You average that out, it's 45,000 patients a year get their care right there. They come from all over.

If they couldn't get the supports that they wanted just to do their job and make sure that the patients are being taken care of in the proper way, they are forced to close the cancer care clinic in Grand Falls-Windsor as of March 25, 2024. That's less than three weeks. Did this jump up on us? Are we just learning about this now?

Madam Chair, if you'll indulge me for one moment. I wrote an email, like I said, to the Premier, to the Minister of Health 14 months ago. I'd like to read the email, please: Minister, I'm requesting a meeting with you here in Grand Falls-Windsor in person at your earliest convenience – credit where credit is due, the minister did join me, and I appreciated that.

The current health care crisis continues to affect both health care professionals and patient care here in Central due to staff shortages and ER closures throughout communities close by Central Newfoundland Regional Health Centre.

As bad as this situation has gotten, the men and women here in Grand Falls-Windsor have taken on the overflow and stretched themselves well beyond what a committed health care worker should. Because of their hard work and sacrifice, this impossible infrastructure and the treatment of so many have not collapsed – yet. Fourteen months ago.



Somewhere along the way, health care workers were told to shut up and show up. This is not good enough and I will not put up with the status quo any longer.

If this is the Premier's idea of progress, to ignore our health care professionals, I will become the wall progress slams itself into. In what dimension of this world are we to learn about real problems in health care by keeping our front-line workers silent? Those men and women on the front line that know exactly what it takes to keep this going. We have hard-working, dedicated men and women who have something to say. And for those who have no interest in hearing them, my advice would be to find a new line of work.

I want to be clear, Minister, this is not a personal attack, but if this piece of health care we have in Grand Falls-Windsor is not fixed sooner rather than later, there is no contingency plan, as we are the contingency plan. Most days, we have a full ER, lobby, hallway and added to that today five ambulances in a cold parking lot filled with patients. Where are the solutions?

Why is there a Premier's office in Grand Falls-Windsor that is open by appointment only, besides spending taxpayers' dollars or trying to undermine myself and the Member for Exploits? It is doing nothing to address the collapse that we are seeing in real life. Where are the supports for the people that are told to shut up and show up? Why do we still have a CEO who is competent but, no doubt, living in a different province than where she is needed? A broken health care system that is fading pretty fast that does not have a CEO even in the province, how is this acceptable? It isn't and we have had enough.

We have internists providing cancer care here in Grand Falls-Windsor who are unhappy because they cannot get the support that they need, 14 months ago. I am told I am old school, where back in my day someone could walk into the boss's office,

have a chat, to ensure success but what are we telling our health care workers, book a plane ticket to New Brunswick and sit with the CEO up there.

Again, I reached out 14 months ago to inform the Minister of Health, to inform the Premier that this was going to happen and in less than three weeks, those committed doctors, those valuable doctors – what makes them valuable? They stayed. They stayed in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**C. TIBBS:** They put everything on the line to make sure that they could stay right here where they want to be, where they want to deliver care and are handcuffed by this government who have chosen to ignore them.

I'm not done with this yet because there are a lot of people in Grand Falls-Windsor and surrounding areas that can't sleep at night because they don't know where they're going to get their next cancer treatment. Do they have to go to St. John's? How much more of a burden financially is that going to put on the province? Because you've ignored four doctors who have given up everything to ensure the people of Central are taken care of.

Let me put it in a different perspective for you. One phone call by a Liberal lobbyist, \$36 million for that Liberal lobbyist –

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

**C. TIBBS:** – and 14 months, not a phone call, not an email. The Premier always boasts about how he will reach out to the doctors themselves. Well, by God, it's been 14 months and they haven't received a phone call yet. Is his phone broken? I hope not.

So if a Liberal lobbyist can get \$36 million with a phone call, I ask the minister, can we get four additional staff to ensure that those

people in Grand Falls-Windsor and surrounding areas can get the cancer treatment that they truly need? Because if not, like I said in my email, maybe it's time to find a different line of work.

Am I irate? Yes, I'm pretty irate. These aren't just my constituents. They're my family, my neighbours, my friends. I talked to the Salvation Army pastor this past weekend; he's finding it hard. He buried three men in their 50s this past week – three – mostly because of cancer.

What these people have to go to bed with at night wondering if this is going to be there in the future for them and their families. It's not fair, Minister. Premier, it's not fair. To know that 14 months ago is one thing, receiving a letter from the Official Opposition myself, but to receive this letter last week and we're within three weeks of a cancer care clinic closing in this province and all you had to do was reach out, which nobody's done yet, by the way. These doctors have not been approached yet.

By God, where did we go wrong with this?

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

**C. TIBBS:** Where did we go wrong with this? All it takes is to pick up a phone: What can we help you with? Well, maybe we could do this and this for now and with the new future budget maybe we can do this as well. But not even a phone call, and we're talking about we're doing everything we can to retain doctors. By God, we're not. We are 100 per cent not, because if we were, we would have had a phone call sometime this week.

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

**C. TIBBS:** So there's nothing I would like better now, and I'm going to ask that the Minister of Health and Community Services, please stand in this place after me and say we are happy to give the supports to keep this cancer care clinic open. It's not for me.

It's not even for the doctors. It's for those patients that now have to try and go to sleep with this at night, not knowing what their future is going to be.

Minister, it's time we start taking care of the people that take care of the people.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to talk a little bit about recruitment and retention, especially as it relates to education. The irony is not lost upon me that when this government talks about its efforts to recruit and retain, that it's also the same government that eliminated one of the measures that was designed to retain people: severance – couldn't wait to get rid of it. But the whole purpose of severance was to have people stay in a job long enough to get acclimatized that they would stay there 10 years, but now that incentive is removed.

But I want to talk a little bit about education and about recent announcements to address recruitment and retention to address the crisis that's in our education system. I'll start by saying this, what I used to say as president at one time, what teachers would tell me is that the working conditions of teachers are the learning conditions of our students. If the teaching conditions of our teachers are such that they cannot do their job, then it's incredibly difficult for students to do theirs.

I've heard department officials talk about how teachers are the single most important factor in a student's success and I would agree. I would agree that a firefighter is probably the single most important factor or person in putting out a fire, but if that firefighter is only given a garden hose, he or she is not going to be terribly effective.

The question becomes: How many times does government have to be told before it actually acts in a meaningful way?

So, in the past couple of months, in response to a number of issues that have come up in the media, we've had a Committee to address recruitment and retention; \$450,000 or so to expand mental health supports; 125 hours per day to total allocation of student assistant hours – worked that out over 255 schools is what that means; PD day; two floating teachers for the Francophone system; we've had a Think Tank; the promise of an Education Accord; and the call by the Premier and the minister to modernize the education system, whatever that means because, as long as I was a teacher, there was constant modernizing of the education system.

So, in many ways, if we want to address what's really in the system, then let's take a look at some of the reports that have been around. I'll go with the report by Dave Dibbon, *It's About Time!! A Report on the Impact of Workload on Teachers and Students*. In 2004, this report was written. It hasn't changed. It identified that the average teacher works about 52 hours per week. That's what he or she puts into their system. It's not a five-hour day. By the way, that's in addition to what the Member here on this side talked about, the financial investment that teachers put into the classrooms, especially teachers at the primary and elementary level. So, it is a significant investment.

The report also talked about the need for more preparation time. No teacher walks into a classroom without having almost as much preparation time, either collaboration with his or her colleagues or on their own, to be able to go in and teach effectively; administrative time for report cards – these are some of the recommendations that came out in the *It's About Time!!* report by David Dibbon – remove the demand for supervision.

Now, think about this, and I used to see it in the primary education system especially, where a teacher would come – predominantly female at that level, predominantly female now in the education system, but you can imagine at the supervision level it increases. A teacher then has usually about 40 minutes, half of which on most days, three or four days out of the week for supervision and that's 20 minutes then to come in and get a bite to eat, maybe they do some photocopying, use the washroom. If you're female, again, having to deal with periods and so on and so forth. So, the fact is, it is a significant challenge.

He talked about class size and class composition. Now, I will say this: if you want to increase the efficacy in the classroom, if you want to retain and recruit teachers, then start addressing this. Otherwise, we're just picking around the edges. That's 2004 this report was written, 20 years ago; yet we still need a Think Tank, an Education Accord and a Committee to talk about how we might improve recruitment and retention and how we might improve the learning conditions of the students in our school system.

Now, I can tell you that I taught at the high school level – I'll have more to say about this later – but I can tell you –

**P. DINN:** What's a high school?

**J. DINN:** That's one that you're apparently getting now.

**P. DINN:** Yeah, I hope so.

**J. DINN:** I can tell you that at the primary level, if you've got 25 primary children, Grade 1, 2 or 3, in a class and a significant number of them have diagnosed exceptionalities, it's a challenge at the best of times. But do that math. Each student you add to a class, that reduces the amount of time that a teacher can indeed spend with that child.

I think if we're going to start addressing recruitment and retention – and, by the way, it's not just recruitment and retention for the sake of recruitment and retention; it's about making sure that teachers have the time to do the work that they have been hired to do. Otherwise, I guess, I've got to go and issue another challenge to the current minister; let's go teaching for a week in a primary system and we'll see, because I can tell you it's a whole other world. My wife taught primary. My daughter is a primary teacher. They are a special breed of teachers and they deserve – if you want to increase recruitment and retention, then you start making sure that they've got the most valuable resource that they can have, which is time.

Now, it's interesting. I was looking over the NLTA bulletins and back in 2016-2017, there was an upfront article by the president at the time: me. Guess what one of the issues was? Violence in the classroom. Yet, in 2023, we hear from a teacher in December of last year, talking about the failure of the inclusive education system, not because the idea was wrong but because the way in which it was resourced was inadequate.

He was speaking about the fact that it hasn't changed. The issues there – I have spoken to teachers this year about the same issues that I was speaking about 10 years ago, that the presidents before me and since have been speaking about it, that presidents of teachers' unions across this country are speaking about, the same thing, it comes down to resourcing.

So, I'm going to end here on this little bit. We can strike committees. We can strike thinktanks. We can have education reports. We can call it the PERT report. We can have the Premier's task force. We can do all we want, but until government is prepared to actually invest real money into addressing the fundamental issues in the education system, which is about the need to address class composition, class size,

you can put all the committees in place, but you will not be able to recruit and retain teachers if the working conditions are such that they cannot do their job effectively.

And the one thing I know about teachers, they have a high sense of professionalism and that's what they desire most to do. So put the money where your mouth is, please.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, the Speaker returned to the Chair.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

**S. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered the matters to them referred and directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of Supply reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and

directed to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

**J. HOGAN:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

When shall the Committee ask leave to sit again?

**J. HOGAN:** Tomorrow.

**SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this 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 1:30 o'clock tomorrow.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, at 1:30 p.m.