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Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Today I wish to inform Members of the recent passing of Norma Jean Richards, who was a Legislative Librarian of the House of Assembly from 1967 to 1997.

In her time, Norma Jean was a legend. Upon her retirement in 1997, MHA Harris noted she was a very dedicated member of the staff who has taken great pride in her work and great pride in her involvement as Legislative Librarian. She served during the tenures of eight Speakers and six premiers, and was awarded the Canada 125 medal in 1993.

Norma Jean was known for her ability to provide extra context and nuance to the information she provided, a skill which was attributed to her long service and dedication to her craft. She can be credited with building the foundation of the library collection still used today.

I'm sure all hon. Members join me in extending condolences to her family and friends.

Today, in the public gallery, I would like to welcome Betty Neil, who is the subject of a Member's statement today. Betty is accompanied by her husband, Herman.

Welcome to our gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Conception Bay East - Bell Island, Fogo Island - Cape Freels, Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, Gander and Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East-Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to honour a resident of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's who was recently awarded the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador. Retired Major Michael James Pretty, who served for 33 years, was recently recognized along with seven other deserving Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

In 2006, Major Pretty coordinated the pilgrimage of the entire Royal Newfoundland Regiment visit to the battlefields of France and Flanders for the 90th anniversary of Battle of Beaumont-Hamel. It was the first time the entire Regiment had returned there since the First World War.

Following his retirement, he founded the Trail of the Caribou Research Group. He and more than 200 members have identified over 13,000 individuals from Newfoundland and Labrador who served during the First World War alone. He has replaced damaged headstones, added commemorative plaques and educated many, many people – many generations of people – from Newfoundland and Labrador and other places around the world about our proud military heritage.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Retired Major Michael Pretty for his past and continued service to Newfoundland and Labrador and the great country of Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to acknowledge the Shorefast Institute on Fogo Island.

For two decades, Shorefast has had an unwavering commitment to Fogo Island, working alongside our fishery to create opportunities for Fogo Island to thrive in the global economy. Shorefast's approach involves holding on to place, culture and heritage and reaching out to the world to learn, build relationships, adapt and grow.

Led by the founder and CEO, Zita Cobb, Shorefast is an economic development engine on Fogo Island. Between 2013 and 2024, it generated more than \$235 million towards Newfoundland and Labrador's GDP; the median income on Fogo Island has increased by a greater percentage than the provincial average, with over 230 jobs created.

Shorefast's procurement policies ensure all organizations' expenditures support the local and regional economy by sourcing goods and services close to home. In 2024, \$1.3 million in goods and services were purchased on Fogo Island, and \$1.9 million in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Businesses like Fogo Island Inn, Fogo Island Workshops and Fogo Island Fish are some enterprises successfully operating on Fogo Island resulting from the commitment of Shorefast to advance economic development.

I ask all Members to join with me today in recognizing the exceptional success of Shorefast on Fogo Island.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador has and will continue to

produce great hockey players in the hockey world.

Today I recognize three Maritime Junior A hockey players from Newfoundland and Labrador graduating from the three-year journey with the Yarmouth Mariners organization: Liam Dutcher of Stephenville, Keegan Warren of Conception Bay South and Ryan Loveless of Paradise.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: Their time in junior hockey represents far more than games played, goals scored or wins recorded; it reflects years of early mornings, long bus rides, tough practices and a commitment to your teammates and your community. Wearing the Mariners' jersey means being part of a proud tradition, one built on hard work, resilience and passion for the game.

I say to all past, present and continuing players, the lessons you've learned and will learn through hockey, teamwork, discipline, perseverance and leadership, will serve you well no matter where your path leads next, whether that's continuing your hockey career, pursuing education or beginning a new chapter in life.

Liam, Keegan and Ryan, thank you for the memories you've given your fans and families and for the pride you've brought to your team. Congratulations on everything you've achieved and best of luck in all that lies ahead. Once a Mariner, always a Mariner.

Join me in congratulating them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognizing a moving and impactful project of the Grade 8

and Grade 9 students of Smallwood Academy in Gambo, a project of remembrance of the Ocean Ranger disaster.

Under the leadership of Ms. Jo Anne Broders, the students researched the tragedy of 44 years ago and created an immersive tribute. They wrote poems, letters, speeches, created artwork and a replica of the monument.

With support of principal, Mr. Mervin Parsons, on February 16, the students hosted a commemorative ceremony, with each name read aloud and a candle lit for every soul lost at sea. It was especially meaningful to hear Margaret Blackmore and Noreen O'Neill share their memories. Both lost their husbands, Kenneth and Paschal, on that terrible day.

Teaching the history of our province in such an engaging and personal way leaves a lasting impact, and I commend Ms. Broders for her teaching approach. Speaking with the students, it was clear how much they learned and how much they felt the weight of this disaster and the importance of remembering.

Speaker, I'm mindful as well that today is the anniversary of the Cougar Flight 491 tragedy. We remember those lives that were lost on this day 17 years ago.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, Betty Neil of Spaniard's Bay is a woman who continues to demonstrate leadership with passion and grace. Betty currently serves as the president of the Goodwill Seniors Club, a role she's held for the past six years.

The club has approximately 70 members and offers a wide range of recreational activities, outings and social gatherings, including card games, darts and cornhole. Throughout the year, members also enjoy special events celebrating the seasons and holidays.

In celebration of our government's recent Come Home Year, Betty and her team launched a Taste of Newfoundland summertime community meal. It was such a success that it now continues annually, bringing people together to celebrate local food and community spirit.

Betty and her husband Herman, and a dedicated team of volunteers – including vice-president, Francis Coombs; treasurer, Debbie Coombs; secretary, Marina Hutchings; and second vice-president, Florence Coombs – also host open-mic nights and are currently preparing for an upcoming gospel concert.

Beyond her work with the Seniors Club, Betty has spent a lifetime volunteering with organizations such as the Beavers, Cubs, Sunday school and the local food bank. She is always ready to lend a helping hand and warmly reminds everyone that all are welcome at the Goodwill Seniors Club and the kettle is always on.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

March 12, 2009, remains one of the most tragic days in our province's history, and our

hearts are with the families, friends and colleagues of the 17 individuals who lost their lives on Cougar Flight 491.

Each year, the anniversary of this event serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of ensuring safety in our offshore.

The individuals aboard Flight 491 were doing what so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians do almost every day: travelling to workplaces offshore.

Speaker, we work every day to learn from this tragedy. Following the Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry in 2010, all levels of government have worked along with the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Energy Regulator to improve safety for our offshore workers. Changes have included providing better safety equipment, better training and faster search and rescue responses.

The provincial government continues to collaborate with industry partners and regulators to ensure that we continually strengthen the regulations to ensure our workers stay safe and come home at the end of their shift.

Their loss reminds us that safety, vigilance and accountability must guide every decision in our offshore.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this hon. House to pause today to remember the lives lost on Cougar Flight 491 and to reflect on the lasting impact this tragedy has had on families, co-workers and communities across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I join the Premier in remembering the 17 people who lost their lives in the tragedy of the Cougar Flight 491 crash.

Seventeen years ago, Newfoundland and Labrador was shaken by a loss that touched communities all across our province. The men and women who boarded that flight were loved ones, friends, workers and colleagues. Their absence continues to be felt deeply by the families they left behind and by the many people whose lives they touched.

Today, we remember them. We remember their contributions to our communities and to the offshore industry that has played such an important role in our province's history. We also recognize the strength and resilience shown by their families over the last 17 years.

Anniversaries like this are never easy, and our thoughts remain with them. It is crucial that we continue to learn from this tragedy.

Mr. Speaker, may we continue to honour the memory of those who were lost, by keeping them in our thoughts and by standing with their loved ones today and every day.

Thank you.

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

J. DINN: Thank you.

I thank for the Premier for the advance copy of the statement.

The tragedy of Cougar Flight 491 remains a stark reminder of the risks many workers face on the job. I join the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in remembering those who died. In particular for me, a former student of mine from the Southern Shore was one of the victims of that crash, and I do remember to this day attending her wake, so young and to be lost so soon.

We owe it to those workers to take every possible step to improve workplace safety, and that's why we continue to call for a dedicated occupational health and safety clinic to publish employer safety records, because if we're to truly honour the memory of those lost, we must strengthen protections for all workers.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, today we announced more than \$250 million for highway construction projects in 2026-27, as part of the annual Roads Plan, reinforcing our commitment to safer communities and improved road infrastructure.

The plan outlines major construction projects for the upcoming season, as well as a partial list of projects for 2027-28, including work on key highways, regional routes and provincially owned local roads.

Our government has worked to identify ways to improve efficiency and ensure value for taxpayers. That is why this year's Roads Plan focuses on larger and more strategic projects.

This approach will cut down on having more equipment in and out of multiple places, save money by doing more work from one location and help contractors work more efficiently, especially when setting up quarries and asphalt plants.

Speaker, I also want to thank the residents of the province for more than 500 suggestions for road improvements we

received, which were considered alongside our engineers' technical assessments.

When government and industry work together, we achieve better outcomes for everyone, especially the public we serve. Getting projects done at a reasonable cost – without sacrificing quality – requires collaboration, transparency and trust on both sides.

This is what we'll achieve in this year's Roads Program.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

The Official Opposition welcomes this investment; \$250 million directed toward the province's roads and highways is indeed meaningful, and Newfoundlander and Labradorians deserve nothing less.

Safe, well-maintained roads is not a luxury; they're a lifeline for our communities, businesses and our families. Speaker, that's why we must speak honestly. While our caucus welcomes this investment in provincial roads, we must sound a clear warning: Road-funding decisions must be driven by engineering assessments and community needs, not by political considerations. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve transparency that ensures every dollar reaches our roads that are in the most need. So far, we've seen too many decisions from this government made without merit-based processes – case in point: the new hospital.

I will add that this is the same government that made a solemn commitment to 24-hour snow clearing for our highways – one we have yet to see fulfilled.

With that said, I do agree with the minister in that mobilizing doing bigger contracts is something. Thank you – the first time I got the wag. Sorry about that, Speaker. But, again, we can't neglect the smaller ones that gets moved down.

So, Speaker, we'll study this plan carefully and continue to hold the government accountable.

Thank you.

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

S. O'LEARY: I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement, and I ask please provide lots of advance public notice ahead of beginning the work.

We ask that this government also prioritizes public safety in and around the construction sites. Finally, past governments of both stripes have been criticized for awarding these contracts in districts that they represent.

The NDP, therefore, ask that this government share the data in its road asset appraisals publicly so that the people of this province can be certain that decisions are based on need rather than politics.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Growth and Rural Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PADDOCK: Speaker, today I rise to highlight our provincial government's \$15-million investment in Venture Newfoundland and Labrador III, managed by Pelorus Venture Capital. The first VNL fund with Pelorus was established by a Progressive Conservative government, and we are very

proud to carry forward that legacy of supporting innovation and economic growth.

Last night, I had the opportunity to join founders, investors and partners to celebrate the launch of VNL III and to see first-hand the strength and momentum within Newfoundland and Labrador's technology sector.

This investment reflects our commitment to building a strong, innovative and diversified provincial economy – one that creates opportunity, supports entrepreneurs and delivers real results for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Over the past 11 years, Pelorus has helped make highly successful investments in local tech companies – attracting \$348 million from other investors, creating hundreds of jobs and building a portfolio of shares in Newfoundland and Labrador companies that now have a collective value of over \$1.59 billion.

This success is being felt in communities right across our province – from Appleton and Bay Roberts to Lab City, Pasadena and Port Rexton, as well as across the Avalon Peninsula – through the creation of highly skilled, well-paid jobs and the development of world-class talent.

Our investment in Venture Newfoundland and Labrador III signals confidence in Pelorus as a proven fund manager and in our own Newfoundland and Labrador entrepreneurs who are building the next generation of globally competitive companies right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and who are driving strong economic growth and diversification in our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

The investment in Venture Newfoundland and Labrador III is an important movement for our province's innovation ecosystem.

Pelorus Venture Capital has a strong track record, and the results highlighted today – hundreds of jobs created, significant private investment attracted and a portfolio now valued in the billions – show what is possible when local talent is supported.

During my time as minister responsible for industry and innovation, I saw first-hand the impact Pelorus and the team members, like Chris, Sarah and Greg, were having across our entire province; announcements with companies like CoLab, Mysa and Sequence Bio, among many others, were not just business milestones, they were moments filled with excitement and pride for young people and community members who could really seize the opportunity of taking shape at home. The smiling faces make it very clear the kind of support that means on the ground.

Speaker, the success stories we see in our communities, from Appleton to Lab City, show what's possible when innovation is nurtured –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

We commend this government in its efforts to diversify the economy and support promising firms in the tech sector. We hope that this investment will create jobs, raise tax revenue and grow the economy.

However, I remind this government that we will not stand to take advantage of these opportunities as a people if we don't make the proper investments now in education, as well. So, please, address class sizes and collaborate with Memorial University and CNA to ensure that they can retain quality and affordable programming.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: After months and months of keeping this Legislature closed, we've finally been able to ask questions on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; but sadly, the Premier and his ministers have done everything they can to avoid giving answers to every question.

So I'll ask a simple question: The staffer in the Premier's office being paid with health care funds, can the Premier tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the first day he was in the office after the election, whether it was paid by MCP, whether it was volunteering, and whether it was part of a secret transition team?

One date would be an answer we would really appreciate, and so would Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I make no apologies for taking the advice of health professionals in this province who are working on the front lines of our health care system. As I have said before, if you want to fix a health care system – and we certainly know this health care system needs fixing – then go talk to the people that work in it. That's exactly what we're doing, and we will continue to do, Speaker.

That's why when we talk about nobody having to pay to see a nurse practitioner, that's something that we will take care of. The over 300 people that are currently sitting in acute-care beds right now, waiting for proper placement, that is something that we will deal with, Speaker. We will continue to advocate on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

As we've been saying for weeks, there's a difference between bureaucratic advice and political advice. This individual is under a political staff contract.

So I ask the Premier: Is the advice he is getting and taking on health care political only? Is that what we're doing with the health care system, politicizing it? It certainly seems like it, so thank you for that. I hope the Premier can answer that and I hope the answer is he's not politicizing health care, even though it seems that that's what they're attempting to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, we were elected by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to improve health care, and that's exactly what we're heading down the road

to do, by investing in MRI machines in rural Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – so that people will not have to travel long distances to have basic services again. By making sure that we will pay 100 per cent of their transportation costs. That's the movement that we're talking about. By working with the Nurses' Union to establish a made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador solution, so that we never have another travel nurse scandal like we had in the past costing taxpayers \$240 million.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, zero for two, didn't get an answer. I certainly see where this is going.

I ask the question again: Why wasn't the advice followed that was given by the public service to the Premier's deputy chief of staff, Steve Outhouse, to not politicize health care? Why didn't he take the advice and pay the individual in his office out of the political staff budget, rather than the health care budget?

He is clearly politicizing health care. Please explain to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians why you've chosen to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, the advice was followed and, the other day, I asked the hon. Member to table any documents he

has related to that. I'd be certainly welcome to take a look at them.

But, Speaker, let me keep talking about what we're doing for health care, because we're turning around and actually making those investments in health care. We're talking about adding more seats to the nurse practitioner program. We're talking about making sure that when our students enter their programs and health care programs that we're actually going to offer them a job on the way in, not on the way out. We're going to actually have a human resource plan, a health care human resource plan, that is actually in place and working and not done by AI.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, again, we're talking about the secrecy and non-transparency of this government; what we received was a redacted email. They have the unredacted email, so I would say, if you want all the information out, you table the unredacted information.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I don't expect you to do that, and I certainly don't expect the Minister of Energy to agree with anything about public disclosure; because, yesterday in the House, he continued his stance to refuse to release the Bay du Nord agreement. He spouted a bunch of facts he expects everybody to rely on, when the easy answer would be to show us the agreement so you can back up what you're saying.

The Premier, however, overruled his minister and said he will release it and there will be a review process, but the public can't be expected just to rely on rhetoric in the House of Assembly.

Why won't the Premier table the agreement here today so we can all see it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give the Leader of the Official Opposition a little history lesson here today.

In the 10 years they were in power –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – not once – not once did they ever publish a benefit's agreement, in 10 years. So you either never got any or you wouldn't put them out.

SPEAKER: Address the Chair, please.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Not one – (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask Members to address the Chair.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: I can tell you what we did table, an agreement worth \$225 billion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: I can tell you what we did do, we opened up this House of Assembly for four days to debate this.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I can tell you what we did, we brought the experts onto this floor so we could ask questions, to make sure everybody knew how good this deal was for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: So I got a little history lesson for the Minister of Energy –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: I said order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: I got a short, little lesson for history for the Minister of Energy as well, because I know he likes going on Facebook.

Go on my Facebook page; see the videos about you talking about debate; see the videos about you saying the documents should be disclosed, and take a lesson from yourself from 2020.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You would think, given his previous career, he'd know the difference between a benefits agreement and an MOU. That's the first thing.

The second thing is, we go on his Facebook page and, guess what, he won't listen to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. He has his comments turned off, and that's the specific reason why they didn't vote for them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I very much do know the difference. The difference is the MOU was not binding, so we gave Newfoundlanders and Labradorians an opportunity to see it before we signed it behind closed doors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: We gave Newfoundlanders and Labradorians an opportunity to see it before it was signed; however, the Minister of Energy forgets that he said everybody should see every document and contract like this before it was signed. They chose to sign it behind closed doors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: They chose to keep a secret. They chose not to tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians what they're doing behind the scenes.

So, again, go look at my Facebook videos, Minister, and tell people why you've changed your tune before the election and after the election.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

October 14 was the date, just remember that. That's when the people of Newfoundland and Labrador said they didn't want the MOU.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: But I'll go back, because 179 days he was the Premier, and he –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – ignored the building trades; 179 days, he ignored Energy NL, he ignored Equinor and he came up with nothing, and now he's grasping at straws.

Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what, 10 years and not once did the Liberals put a benefits agreement up – not once.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

We welcome the democratic process and we accept the results of the election. We're disappointed that the MOU is not moving forward, but it certainly sounds to me the Minister of Energy took the election to mean that we will not be proceeding with the MOU. That's what he just said.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

J. HOGAN: So, Minister, can you confirm that you will not proceed with the MOU, and wasting \$475 an hour to pay three

individuals to tell you what you already want to hear is a waste of money.

Please tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians what we already know, you do not want to proceed with the MOU and the \$225 billion for our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: During the election campaign, Speaker, we committed to doing an independent review of the MOU; a review that would not –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

A review that would not be handcuffed by the terms and conditions.

We heard the Member opposite from over in Corner Brook area, Humber - Bay of Islands, who talked about the fact that the recommendations for the review that they had thought were going to be a part of this review were all changed, and so the review that they had talked about lost its effectiveness. We've now set up an independent review that will bring its results in April.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

While we see that deal slip away, we see the hundreds of billions of dollars that we

could use for important things, like child care in this province, because parents in this province have been receiving letters warning them that the Conservative's new policy, which contains no wage increases for early childhood educators, may lead them not to renew the Liberal-created \$10-a-day program.

Will the Premier commit to parents in this province that he will update his policy urgently so children won't lose child care spaces?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

As I've said many times since I've gotten up here and in the Opposition, child care is our most valuable resource. They are the most valuable resource in this province.

We've reached out, we're trying to clean up a mess that was left to us with this Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program. We have contracts that have been signed –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Did you hear me say order?

The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

P. DINN: I appreciate the protection. Thank you.

We have an agreement that was signed that does not address the needs in this province.

It's underestimated, the number of child care positions that are needed. We're going to try to fix that. It's going to take some time –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I think the minister, when families hear that they think it's a mess that their children are in child care so they can go to work, and deliver good early childhood education for the children in this province, and to call it a mess, I think the minister will be hearing from a lot of parents on that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I say, as well, the minister said yesterday that, despite promises that were made, he's looking at creating pensions over the next four years. He just said that he will try and create new spaces.

Minister, trying and looking at things will not deliver child care spaces for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Again, this was a promise that was made in the Blue Book, which is now the mandate of this government. Will you promise, as you did before, to deliver on those commitments to families in Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: I don't know what to call what we were left with; a mess is what comes to my mind.

I can tell you, since I came in, I've written the federal minister; I've gone to Ottawa to meet with my provincial counterparts to clean up this mess; I've had an individual meeting with the minister; I've written letters with my four Atlantic partners.

I've done everything I can. I'm going to continue to do it, because the parents in this province need more than what they did.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. DINN: This government actually signed a five-year extension with no additional money.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, I'm glad you wrote some letters; I'm glad you had a wonderful trip to Ottawa. Unfortunately, the obligation is on this government to deliver for children here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: So will you do more than just travel around the country and write letters on your computer and commit Newfoundlanders and Labradorians' money in this budget to deliver child care spaces for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Innovation Program is a federal program. It's a federal program; they may not know what they signed, but it's a federal program. That's why I'm gone to Ottawa, face to face, dealing with this issue. Something that hasn't been done.

They signed it; they signed an extension, no additional money – no additional money. And they think they put early child care first? (Inaudible.)

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you.

We can talk about the federal program if that's how they want to deflect. So let's talk about some provincial programs that he does have control over, because the government and the Minister of Education in particular is doubling down on his 100 per cent enrolment provision in these new contracts. This will cause children born earlier in the year to age out of their present classrooms before vacancies open up. Where does the minister expect parents to send their children?

Will the minister fix his provincial discriminatory policy and immediately protect the Liberal-created, \$10-a-day spaces?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Because of the inadequate approach that has been taken, we need to fill spaces. Enrolment is where that goes. That's not attendance; that's enrolment.

Just to clarify, we're consulting with the stakeholders out there. We have not changed that policy today. We have gone out to the stakeholders and asked for feedback. It's a policy that's going to transition in over the year based on feedback from the stakeholders that we talk to. That's where it is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

That policy says final draft, so I think the Department of Education should be clear with early childhood educators.

Speaker, the Conservative campaign and, now, mandate, budgeted \$5 million for pension for early childhood educators. Will the Premier confirm that this will be in this year's budget? I also ask, what kind of pension can this government think that they can buy for \$2,700 per early childhood educator?

Thank you, Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Thank you the hon. Member.

As we know, the budget will be coming this spring, and we are not at liberty to be able to share what would be in the budget; the only thing being is that we have a vast number of issues within the province that have been listed in our platform that we've committed to.

Without repeating our three pillars, I can say that the Opposition would know that off by heart, all the pillars will be addressed within the upcoming budget.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Speaker, the Conservatives promised paid sick leave for early childhood educators in their election campaign. The Minister of Education failed to incorporate this into the wage grid as part of the new contracts.

Will the government deliver on their commitment for paid sick leave or try to bump that down the road for four years as well?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, early child care is important to this province, and our early child care educators are even more important because they're the ones there looking after our most valuable resource.

I've said it already in this House; it's right here in our Blue Book, what we're going to do over our next four years: "Support Early Childhood Educators by promoting access to pension plans and paid sick leave."

It's there in black and white. I don't know what else I can do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Speaker, the Conservatives ran on a promise of lower taxes, but all they have delivered so far is keeping the taxes the same. We asked the minister yesterday if he would support a reduction in the gas tax and all we got was a joke for an answer.

Why won't the minister help people and lower the gas tax even further?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, I'm glad to get that question because, as the Member opposite said, we have committed to making the reduction in gas tax permanent.

Now, we heard a lot of Members yesterday, during debate, talking about the fact that, if they had to be still in government, they had intended to make this permanent, but the creative budget that they worked out of last year – the creative book that they used – forgot about a chapter about planning because there was nowhere in the fiscal forecast for any money to have that gas tax reduction permanent.

Speaker, as a result, I will tell the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that we will put \$67 million in our budget this year to cover and make that permanent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

In the Conservative Blue Book, the mandate for this government and on social media, the Premier committed to open the Whitbourne Emergency Room 24 hours a day.

Does the Minister of Health stand by this commitment, and when will this Conservative government deliver 24 hours of emergency services to Whitbourne?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I don't think anyone can really hear over the noise sometimes, so sometimes I do have to pause but I am doing my stopwatch, Speaker.

Yes, Speaker, in the Blue Book we committed to restoring Whitbourne to 24-hour service for emerg. We're actually working now with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services and we're making sure that it doesn't impact recruitment and retention for the area and it doesn't impact the physicians that are out there.

We have to work with everyone involved to make sure that what we provide is actually the best service for the patients, and we will live up to our commitments in the Blue Book.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. STOYLES: Speaker, the Conservative platform promised to help create affordable and independent housing for seniors.

How many new senior-specific housing units have been funded since forming government?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing, and Poverty Reduction.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

Housing for seniors is very important to us as a government. In the 135 days that we've been here, it was in the first month that we came into office, we had a groundbreaking for seniors here in the province. Speaker, this is important. I'm working with my staff as we move forward.

Housing for seniors is of the utmost importance and we are going to put what we can into that. It's not just in St. John's or the metropolitan area; it's right across our province. I'm working with people on the West Coast. I'm working with people in Central, on the Burin Peninsula. We have many places, Speaker, that need housing for seniors. Our Premier and our government will address that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. STOYLES: Speaker, most of this stuff the minister spoke about was stuff that we had put in place before they took government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. STOYLES: Where is the implementation plans, outlines, timelines, locations and funding for seniors? Will funding for this new housing be in the new budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing, and Poverty Reduction.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker. That was very close.

Speaker, I appreciate the question from the Member opposite; we are certainly doing our part.

As the Finance Minister said, we cannot disclose what's going through the budgetary process right now, but I can certainly inform the people of this province and the Members of this House that we are working for the people of the province. We are listening to them. We are taking their needs very seriously, and we will come forward with a plan for housing for seniors in this province that the Opposition will certainly be proud of.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Can the Minister confirm the CT scanner at the Health Sciences Centre is currently out of commission and that patients are being routed through the Janeway's pediatric scanner and, if so, what is the timeline for having that scanner back up and running to help with the now growing backlog?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I had to wait until the cheering settles down.

One of the things I want to point out when I'm answering the question though is that we've had a Liberal government here for 10 years, and they've actually allowed a lot of the equipment service to fall into disrepair, Speaker.

We are having trouble with the CT scanners, yes, we are, but we've actually mobilized a mobile unit to the Health Sciences. We're going to have that up and running in the next couple of weeks. I think

March 30 is the target date, but we wouldn't have this problem if there was actually a plan in place to maintain the equipment so we wouldn't be faced with these breakdowns –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. EVANS: We wouldn't be faced with these breakdowns.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, we understand that equipment breaks down but why didn't this government –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. DEMPSTER: – go out and tell the people? We, maybe, wouldn't have got so many calls on the disruptions with that in the last few days.

The Conservative blue book estimated the cost of offering free medical travel for patients who must travel for essential medical care, as well as the free parking which still hasn't been done, it was estimated at \$4.6 million.

So I ask the minister: Is that number accurate?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, the one thing that we will do is we will live up to our blue book promises. We promised –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: As the former minister and the former government knows, we know that MTAP needs to be improved, Speaker, and we're going to do it. We're not going to take 10 years to do it. The Premier promised that MTAP will be increased to the 100 per cent coverage for medically essential travel, and we're going to do that; just watch us.

The problem with the caucus over in Opposition now, they're afraid that what's going to happen is we're going to actually take real action to improve the health care, improve health transportation.

Speaker, we're going to do it; just watch us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday, in response to a question on Western Memorial Regional Hospital, the minister said her government supports increasing beds and will expand capacity for long-term and alternate care level patients. Beds and expanded capacity require health care workers.

I ask the minister: How? What will her department do to recruit and retain the necessary health care professionals needed to care for the people in these beds?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you.

I'd like to thank the Leader of the Third Party for his question; it's a good question.

One thing we're going to do is we're going to plan efficiently, but we are also going to

deliver. What we witnessed is 10 years of neglect of our elders that need an alternate level of care, Speaker.

The thing about it is we're going to look after our elders because they looked after us when we were growing up and they need our help. We're going to increase the capacity. We're going to also look at recruitment and retention. We are left with, basically, a problem with recruitment and retention. It's not effective. We're going to actually go in and work with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services now to make sure the retention part and the –

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

The minister will have ample opportunity this year; unions representing many health care workers will be negotiating new collective agreements this year.

So I ask the minister: Will your department work with them to address the recruitment and retention concerns that health sector unions have been fighting for in the past number of years?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, recruitment is key, but also, retention is key. We are struggling with what we've been left – I consider it a mess, Speaker.

We hear stories and we've been hearing stories for years now of people trying to actually access jobs and not getting a call back. I've actually had occupational

therapists basically have to ask for leave because her partner was actually going on family leave and she was denied. She came back and said: If I don't get the leave, I'm going to have to resign. They sent her the letter, the form on how to resign. That's not retention. That's not retention.

We are going to–

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, in a pre-election questionnaire sent to those running for premier by Act Now, Premier Wakeham promised to implement an ankle monitoring program for those on bail for intimate partner violence within two years of being elected.

We know that work has been done on this, so I ask the minister: When will we see ankle monitoring brought into this province?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I can say that intimate partner violence is of serious concern to our government. It is alarming when we see the numbers of individuals that are subjected to intimate partner violence, gender-based violence and family violence in its entirety.

I can say that we have had numerous meetings in the short time that we have been in office. I've met with many groups already – End Sexual Violence, PLIAN, Iris Kirby House, Libra House and Georgina McGrath – all discussing this important

issue when it comes to implementing ankle monitoring. So we will be looking at the feasibility of this. This is very important.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, so undetermined.

Speaker, at least 10 residents in the apartment building in my district are being priced out of their homes because of skyrocketing rent increases driven purely by financial gain.

I ask the minister: When will your government implement rent controls to stop unfair rent hikes and prevent people from being forced out of their homes and pushed towards homelessness?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Government Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Mr. Speaker, that's a very important question; I want to thank the Member opposite.

Since coming into this role in the last four months, I have met with many stakeholders and I'm here to work with every stakeholder. I signed up here to serve in the best interests of the residents outside these four walls, that's what I'm going to continue to do.

As we have a billion-dollar deficit, the struggle is to implement certain asks and wants, but that's what we're committed to do is to improve the lives of others and

we're going to do that for all of us, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, First Light is proposing an Indigenous-led collaborative care clinic in St. John's that will serve urban Indigenous people currently without primary care.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services, and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, will she support this initiative and allocate the necessary money in the upcoming budget to support the clinic?

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services, for a quick answer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, we met with First Light. We're reviewing their proposal now.

We actually support improving access to medical care for Indigenous people in the province as a whole, and we do understand that the urban region is where a lot of resources need to be placed to ensure that they can get access to adequate and effective medical care.

So, Speaker, we are committed to working with First Light and Indigenous leaders across the province to make sure that the Indigenous people, whether in urban or in rural, will get the supports, but we're especially looking at the urban region. We are actually looking at the report to see where we can support them, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before I move on, I would just mention there that, during Question Period, I did hear one of the Members mention, I believe, the Premier by his surname, and just to remind all Members that you don't mention anyone by their actual names.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I give notice, as per Standing Order 11(1), that this House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 17.

Speaker, I give further notice, as per Standing Order 11(1), that this House do not adjourn on Thursday, March 19, at 5:30 p.m.

SPEAKER: Any further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of First Light Indigenous Health Clinic. The background to this petition is as follows:

Of the 7,000-plus Indigenous people who live in the St. John's metro area, 1,300 or more have no family doctor, 60 per cent are living with a chronic condition and one in five report experiences of racism from health care providers. These figures represent a systemic failure. Urban Indigenous residents in the metro area urgently need access to a model of care that is culturally safe, trauma informed and rooted in ceremony, moving beyond the clinical treatment toward a model of holistic healing and wraparound wellness.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, request that the House of Assembly urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to establish a funding partnership with First Light St. John's Friendship Centre to support the sustainable long-term operation of the First Light Indigenous Health Clinic.

Speaker, I'm pleased that the last, or second last question maybe, today was from the Leader of the Third Party about this very specific issue. Clearly, they've had conversations with First Light, as we have, and, as the Minister of Health acknowledged in her response, they have as well.

They're a fantastic advocacy group, and they do a lot for people here in the urban population for Indigenous people here in St. John's and surrounding areas. I want to thank them for their work and thank them for their engagement and, most importantly, thank them for their forward thinking. They try to come up with creative solutions to deal with health care for individuals that they serve and, as noted, they do plan to open a health care clinic on Quidi Vidi Road here in St. John's. They want to staff it with a physician and two nurse practitioners and a focus on 1,300 people, Speaker – 1,300

people in this part of the province that need health care and will get health care once this clinic is up and running.

As noted, though, there are 7,000 urban Indigenous people here in St. John's, and they are looking for a creative way, as I said, to help deliver them access to the primary health care that they need and that they deserve. What they are really doing as well, Speaker, they are looking to alleviate some of the burden that's already on the system. So not only are they looking after individuals that they care about and that are close to them, they are looking to do that in collaboration with the provincial government and with NLHS.

They recognize that by them building and operating and running this facility, it will take the burden to the tune of potentially \$1.9 million or even \$4.4 million out of the health care system, that can be used for other things.

So that is certainly good to see, and when I look at all the signatures, people who are very engaged in the community and know a lot about health care, so many individuals, a long list of people, and when we look at what they do, they're all pharmacists or in medical fields or physicians. So they certainly know what they are talking about.

This government has talked about taking advice from people on the front lines. Well, they need to look no further than reading this petition here today, Speaker. When I met with them, it certainly sounded like what they were proposing was essentially a Family Care Team with additional services. I asked them essentially was it a Family Care Team plus – and I know the minister spoke to the media and she was concerned that there would be limited resources and competing with resources and a duplication of services. I can assure the minister in no way that is what will be happening.

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

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services for a response.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the Member for presenting the petition on behalf of First Light. I also want to thank First Light for their strong advocacy over the years and their leadership in service delivery for Indigenous people.

They have actually filled a lot of gaps that Indigenous people are falling through, and the gaps include things that harm and create mental health issues, physical health issues, socio-economic issues. It's the leadership of First Light here in the St. John's urban region that has really made a difference for Indigenous people.

I want to say, coming from the Northern Labrador and representing six Indigenous communities, I know all about failures to be able to access adequate and timely health care. I've stood up in the House of Assembly many times and presented petitions. Speaker, for my district a lot of the patients who require specialized care, where do they go? They usually come to St. John's. I tell you, if they need any supports, First Light has been there.

Speaker, I take their proposal very, very seriously, and what I know and what the Premier knows is that we have to start finding solutions and have real action. Real action for health care delivery for Indigenous people. We are committed to supporting First Light. We're also going to be engaging Indigenous leaders –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, thank you.

First of all, my apologies to the Premier. I respectfully tabled a petition: Implement GPS ankle bracelet monitoring system. These are the reasons for this petition:

Intimate partner violence numbers in Newfoundland and Labrador are unacceptably high and immediate action is needed. Women live in fear and some have died. Those accused of violent IPV crimes are often released on bail with few conditions.

When arrested for breaching, they are released again on similar conditions. This pattern increases danger to victims in our community. Last year Provincial Court judge, Wayne Gorman, expressed his frustration in a judgment saying, why are release orders so spectacularly unsuccessful in protecting women from their intimate partners when those partners are charged with assaulting them?

In Newfoundland and Labrador, electronic monitoring is currently only used as a pilot project for convicted offenders on parole or probation. Ankle monitoring for bail release is used in Quebec, PEI, Ontario, Alberta, BC, Manitoba and, in some places, specifically to protect women from their abusers, and it is proving to be very effective.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to implement an active GPS ankle bracelet monitoring program immediately as an option for the courts when those accused of seriously violent or repeat IPV offences are released on bail conditions. To ensure its efficiency, the program should include GPS base zones of exclusion around dwellings, workplaces and schools, and GPS mobile zones of exclusion for victims who request this.

I table this petition, Speaker, with almost 1,500 names and more coming in. So I respectfully table this, and, Speaker, if I could ask for leave to just say a few additional words.

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: You have three minutes. You've got a minute left.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

I would like to acknowledge several visitors in the gallery from Act Now, who have been instrumental in the creation of this petition. Urgent action is needed on intimate partner violence in Newfoundland and Labrador, and women live in fear and some have died. Those accused of these crimes are often released on bail with few conditions and then released again on the same conditions when they breach.

Active GPS ankle monitoring has successfully reduced IPV in Canadian provinces. Although cost is often mentioned as a barrier, PEI's in-house program cost \$15 per active device per day. This program will ease pressure on police and an overloaded court system. Police support the petition; the question has been overwhelming and, with the VOCM Question of the Day showing 96 per cent respondents in favour of the ankle monitoring and NTV Question of the Week coming in at 97 per cent in favour, the public want it.

In a pre-election questionnaire –

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you.

First of all, I'd like to thank the Member for bringing this important petition forward, and I'd also like to thank the members in the gallery who have committed significant advocacy work towards this initiative.

I would like to say, as well, that our government recognizes that the numbers of intimate partner violence in our province are unacceptably high. We also recognize that it is incumbent upon us, as a government, to continue to advocate and to see meaningful and systemic change. We need to reduce intimate partner violence in our province. We need to reduce gender-based violence and family violence in our province.

In that regard, I can advise the Speaker that I've met already with numerous individuals and groups with respect to this issue. I applaud all of the individuals that are committed to ending violence and intimate partner violence in our province.

We are looking at the feasibility of implementing electronic monitoring for persons who are pre-conviction. Right now, there is a program for individuals post-conviction but this is something we are committed to assessing. I look forward to meeting with –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright- L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I have a petition today on The Aging Well at Home Grant. These are the reasons and the background for this petition:

WHEREAS we are the most rapidly aging population in the country; and

WHEREAS approximately 25 per cent of the population is over 65 years of age; and

WHEREAS with the high cost of living seniors are struggling financially;

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to double the amount received for The Aging Well at Home Grant.

Speaker, like most of my petitions, I have a broad range of people that are signatories to this petition, ranging right from Happy Valley-Goose Bay in Central Labrador to Paradise River as you come south – right here, actually, one from St. John's. I have Goose Bay; I have Red Bay, all signatures on this petition.

Speaker, we talk a lot about seniors in this hon. House. We talk about how they paved the way for others. We talk about how difficult it is to live on a fixed income and, yesterday, we talked about gas tax and how high the cost of living is right now. We talked about the gas tax that we had removed in *Budget 2022* and every year since, and now that's been made permanent. That's good news. We wanted to give the Finance Minister the power so that if the price of fuel is going up, that he can give a little break to people like seniors on fixed income.

Recognizing the tremendous need for this particular class of people – almost 40 per cent of our population – we did a number of measures, Speaker. One was the Aging Well at Home Grant. We know that it is cheaper for the public purse to allow our seniors with the right supports to stay at home in their own communities, and that's why a whole range of our programs and policies were changed to help accommodate that.

In addition to that, we put out an Aging Well at Home Grant. If Nan needs somebody to shovel her snow because she's going to live

alone; if Uncle Joe needs somebody to have the groceries delivered – and these little things help them. I can tell you, Speaker, that next to the forest fires, the most feedback I have ever got was the Aging Well at Home Grant. I did a post; there were 133,000 hits on that.

Recognizing the tremendous need for that, we made a promise in election 2025 that we would double the Aging Well at Home Grant, because there is a tremendous need across all four corners this province. So I am calling on the government, as you navigate your way through preparing your first budget some time this spring, to honour that and to double. You know, we've got to sometimes put our money where our mouth is. We've been part of the budget process for a long, long time ourselves. We know that there's never enough money, but it comes down to what you prioritize.

So I ask you to seriously consider, for the benefit of the seniors in our province, to double the Aging Well at Home Grant.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. PARDY: Thank you to the Member.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: We certainly see value in anything that helps seniors in our province, without a doubt. I think we probably would share with you the value of putting money in a targeted approach to seniors to enhance their affordability. It's why, when we came in, we immediately said that we would honour that program and roll the program out.

We made sure that we adjusted the threshold so that we wouldn't lose anybody

due to the federal indexing that may put some people over that threshold. We also made sure, because our goal was to make sure, on the red tape reduction, that we would roll it out quicker. We have data that can represent that we did get that money out quicker because anybody that applied last year didn't need to go through the same process again just to identify, to let people know or let us know, that nothing changed since last year, and we could fast track their payment.

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi had said there are many ways to put money into people's pockets in relation to affordability. She's 100 per cent correct. I'm sure the Member opposite would look at the 20 per cent bump in the Seniors' Benefit as being a good one to help out seniors in their affordability. There are a whole lot of other measures as well that we will roll out in the budget.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time is expired.

C. PARDY: Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Orders of the Day.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 5, second reading of Bill 5.

SPEAKER: Okay. Seeing no further speakers to the bill, if the Minister of

Finance now speaks, he will end the debate.

The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

C. PARDY: Okay.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

I thank the House for the input into this bill, Bill 5, and, for the people at home, Bill 5 is An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2.

I think we had some healthy discussion on this bill and, if I were to read the House correctly, I would think that we're all in favour of it. We were in favour of making sure that, at the end of this month, the taxes on our fuel at the gas pump will not go up by 8.05 cents per litre. We all agree.

Now several things; one, I look forward to getting into Committee, that we may have some questions asked about this or if anybody has any suggestions that they're going to bring to the Committee for any adaptations, and we would welcome all of that.

We had the Member for Gander and I think the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune mention that, whatever we do, we need to make sure that we put a rural lens on it. I think I may have picked the right two that stated that. We represent, in this House, a lot of rural districts and many Members in the first reading had stated about the need for people out in rural areas to travel large distances. Sometimes large distances to get medical appointments, too. Sometimes they need to go for groceries at some considerable distances. So we know that this bill is really going to serve those in rural well, because we will see no increase in the provincial tax.

We also heard our colleagues across in Opposition stating that it's almost as if that they were going to do the same thing if they

got in. The election in October, if they got in, they were going to do the same thing. The Premier spoke to, in answering a question – and we've shared some time looking at budgetary items. I would say that there was nothing in the forecast for this year in order to allow this to occur, and whether it was planned, it's not showing up in our budgetary projections. It wasn't there.

The way the budget works is that if you value a program, you'll make sure for the out-years of the next three years that you're planning for, you've got that budgeted going forward, because you value it and if you want it to continue, you've got it in the budget line going forward.

We will do it in our budget this year, the things we value; and if you look at it, that is two years out and not the third one, you probably need to ask the question, well, why isn't it in the third year out that that program is not accosted and not in the budget? I'm not sure whether in the council of Corner Brook – that's the way we do it. All I would say to you is that it wasn't in the budget of which you did last year to project for any expense this year for this gas tax reduction. Maybe someone will speak to that in Committee, but it wasn't in your forecast.

Someone also said, well, we're saying it's permanent, but there's no guarantee. Whoever stated that – which I'm sorry, I can't recall – that's correct. The Member for Virginia Park - Pleasantville –

B. DAVIS: Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

C. PARDY: Okay.

That is true, but the only thing being that it's got to come right back to this House of Assembly again for a debate if it's going to be adjusted and changed. It's got to come back to the House of Assembly, where democracy happens and where we can engage each other on any change that will occur. That's the House of Assembly.

Another thing that I think the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi had mentioned, that we look at balance. Everything we do, especially in the budgetary, we look at balance. We look at the revenues and we look at the expenditures. I stated that in the fall fiscal update. We want to increase our revenues so we can provide more of the social programs and the affordability.

The Minister of Health and Community Services said that we need to make sure that we plan efficiently. And we're going to plan efficiently. It takes time to make sure you plan efficiently, and when you launch something, you get it right. That's why the word was used yesterday on a knee-jerk reaction – that you don't on a knee-jerk reaction.

So I'm going to take my seat now.

I just changed my mind again, to the Leader of the Third Party.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: It's not the first time I changed my mind pretty quick. If I'm going to change my mind, I'm just going to have a few more items to – I talked about balance – I thought I saw the wrap sign.

The only thing we said yesterday about our financial coffers, I think there has to be a whole lot of energy in making sure that we raise our revenues. Not from raising taxes, because we are lowering taxes, but we raise it on the productivity and the industry that we would have. All 40 of us in the House of Assembly would say that we've got a lot of option to raise revenue in industry. We've just got to make sure that we do it right and we do it often.

Nothing is ruled out. We've had different programs that were mentioned here, but everything is fair game for us because our goal would be to increase productivity in Newfoundland and Labrador – that doesn't mean worker productivity, because I think

we are in a good spot for worker productivity. We just need to make sure that we create industry for more people to get back to work.

Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, he had mentioned a windfall for the provincial Treasury due to the bump in the price of oil – a windfall for the provincial Treasury. He is correct in that. As the price goes up, it adds to the Treasury. But I stated yesterday, as the Minister of Finance, I do not know what the bump in the Treasury or the bump in this latest oil would mean to the province.

If we read the oil market and look at what it's trajectory would see, we'd often find that, for every peak, usually it follows over a certain period of time where it becomes a big valley – it drops. I know the Premier had stated, wishing the end to the conflict in the Middle East, and all we have to do is to look at the scenes on the various news channels, and you'll find that it's disheartening.

So we do wish for an end of the conflict in the Middle East. So not a big windfall. We don't wish for a windfall at the expense of an ongoing conflict, but the only thing we would say and caution is that, contrary to what may have been done in the past, we can't count our chickens before they are hatched.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: With that, Speaker –

SPEAKER: You changed your mind again.

C. PARDY: – I'm going to take my seat.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 5 be now read a second 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.'

The motion is carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2. (Bill 5).

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

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2," read a second time, referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently. (Bill 5)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that the House resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 5.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair, and that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 5.

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.'

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Power): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2." (Bill 5)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Mouth Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for those remarks in second reading. I just want to give a few remarks in Committee.

We've talked a lot about the sunset clause and the fiscal forecast. I know my colleague from Virginia Waters - Pleasantville – I know one of my colleagues mentioned this yesterday. So, last year, when we did bring this in and we did not remove the sunset clause, we just added another year, that was prior to the federal government announcing that they were getting rid of carbon tax. That was why we kept in the sunset clause.

Then, I guess, to the Minister of Finance talking about the fiscal forecast, I would've expected, as the minister described, for it not to be in the fiscal forecast because it hadn't yet been legislation and we were going to have an election. So, obviously, you can't put something in the fiscal forecast that is not yet reflected in the

legislation. So I would never have expected it to be in the fiscal forecast. But I commend the government for bringing this change in. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians certainly would not want the price to go up, so we're glad that they're keeping it status quo.

I do want to talk about how much money the government is bringing in now, as a result of the additional oil prices. I've been having a look the last day or two. Since we've been in this Chamber, Chair, the price of oil has gone to over \$100 US; it's back down to \$99 US. But that's significantly higher than \$66 a barrel, which is in the current budget that was in August, as well as the Minister of Finance updated it in his December financial update, which is excellent for the Newfoundland and Labrador Treasury, but bad for drivers in Newfoundland and Labrador, so it's both sides of the coin there, Chair.

I do want to recognize, as I mentioned, \$66 a barrel, and considering exchange rates, obviously it's not a perfect science, but for every \$1 US change in oil prices, that results in a \$30 million change to the Treasury over a year. So as oil prices go up and down, there is a significant financial implication to the Treasury of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I was doing some math last week, if we look at \$88 a barrel versus what was in the most recent fiscal update of \$66 a barrel, that could work out to over half a billion dollars extra for the Treasury of Newfoundland and Labrador, Chair. So a significant amount of money.

As we know one of the government's key pillars is lower taxes, which is excellent. So given the extra money that this government now is bringing in since the election and based on their numbers of their most recent fiscal forecast, I would like to move an amendment that outlines how they could have lower gas prices for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: So what we're proposing, and I'll read the actual amendment in a second, but it would be another 3 cents off 51(a), off propane fuel and gasoline; another 1 cent off gasoline for the purposes of seagoing vessels or boats, other than a pleasure craft; less 1 cent off diesel; the same for aircraft tax; and less 1 cent off other grades of gasoline, Chair.

We believe that this would cost about \$30 million, but the government has already made way more than \$30 million since the last fiscal update. So we believe that this extra revenue would more than pay for itself, so this would be neutral for the government.

Chair, officially, I guess, I move, seconded by the MHA for Burgeo - La Poile, that clause 1 of the bill be amended as follows: paragraph 51(a) be amended by deleting the number '\$0.07' and substituting the number '\$0.04; paragraph 51(b) be amended by deleting the number '\$0.035' and substituting the number '\$0.025; paragraph 51(c) be amended by deleting the number '\$0.095' and substituting the number '\$0.085; and paragraph 51(e) be amended by deleting the number '\$0.075' and substituting the number '\$0.065.'

Section 51 would then read as follows: 51. A person who acquires gasoline at a retail sale in the province shall pay to the Crown at the time of the sale: (a) on propane fuel grade of gasoline, a tax of \$0.04 per litre; (b) on gasoline for the operation of seagoing vessels or boats, other than pleasure craft, a tax of \$0.025 per litre; (c) on diesel fuel grade of gasoline, a tax of \$0.085 per litre; (d) on gasoline delivered for consumption or use in an aircraft, a tax of \$0.025 per litre; and (e) on all other grades of gasoline, a tax of \$0.065 per litre.

Chair, that's my amendment. We anticipate this would cost the government about \$30 million, which they've already made more

than that in the extra amount of royalties they've been getting from the higher price of oil since the fiscal update and since the election.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: We'll recess at this time to consider the amendment.

Recess

CHAIR (Power): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

The amendment is in order.

I recognize the hon. Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Well, that is fantastic, Chair. I'm delighted that this amendment is in order.

Thank you very much.

This change, if passed in the House, would reduce the price of gas at the pumps for taxpayers in Newfoundland and Labrador and vehicle owners by three cents for the price of a regular grade of gasoline; for one cent for sea-going vessels or boats; for one cent for diesel; no change for airline fuel; and all other grades of gasoline, reducing it by one cent.

We estimate that this would cost the Treasury approximately \$30 million, and that is much less than the extra revenue that they've earned since the price of oil has gone really high. It was over \$100 US today already since we've been in this Chamber, Chair.

I know that the price of gas is very important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and it's also extremely complicated how the price of gas is set and all the different components. So I thought I'd talk about that for a few minutes, Chair.

Today, for example, on the Avalon in Zone 1 – I should also say, on the Public Utilities Board website, they outline and break down all the different zones, all the different prices in all the zones, and they have all the orders, so every time they announce a change that's all announced on the Public Utilities Board website. They have an excellent document that's a seven-page overview of the history of pricing of gasoline. So if anyone's interested in the history of gas prices, I recommend you read the seven-page, condensed history of gas pricing in Newfoundland and Labrador, Chair.

Today, a maximum price of 166.4 a litre, and that's on regular petroleum for your car. Of that, taxes are 39.21 cents. The retail markup is 14.28. So that's the amount the gas stations get, they make, when they sell a litre of gas. They make 14 cents on every litre of gas. That's what the gas stations make, and as a result of the most recent petroleum products review, that amount has gone up significantly.

Over the last, I would say, two years, gas stations in Newfoundland and Labrador are making a lot more of the price of gas, and so that helps them stay afloat, helps gas stations in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

The wholesale markup is 15.65, so that's what Irving, North Atlantic, that's what those wholesalers make on a litre of gas. The carbon price adjustment is 5.40, so that is so that the wholesalers can meet the requirements of the *Clean Fuel Regulations*. It is somewhat controversial and I'm happy to discuss that further with anyone who's interested.

I would also recommend the federal government get rid of the *Clean Fuel Regulations*, because I think it – well, I know that it's unfairly impacting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and residents of Atlantic Canada. Currently, there is five cents on our price of gas for the carbon price adjustment

that the Public Utilities Board sets, and then the benchmark price today is 91.90.

So that is the price that is based on the New York Harbor price, and there are two different pricing mechanisms in Canada. Some provinces use one benchmark; we use the other. The Public Utilities Board recommended the most recent set of regulatory changes that we go with – I can't remember the name of it, but it's in the regulations. So that is the benchmark price, and that changes all the time. It probably changes multiple times a day. The Public Utilities Board sets that based on the benchmark price.

All of that together, Chair, makes up the maximum price of a litre of gasoline. The maximum today in Zone 1, which is kind of St. John's and the Avalon, 166.4. So our recommended changes today would reduce that by three cents, would cost the Treasury approximately \$30 million and would save Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on the pump in perpetuity; until the government decided to remove it or add either a different sunset clause or change the prices.

We do have another amendment coming which will give the government more flexibility, but I imagine now, since it's in order, the government is going to want to speak to the amendment, so I look forward to hearing from them.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Chair.

I thought I'd stand up for a few minutes and give my minister a little break for minute before he gets up and delivers what, I know, will be an eloquent speech, and an eloquent chat on this subject.

I don't always start off talking about another leader, but I will start off by talking about the Leader of the Third Party for a minute. Because, a few days ago, in our last debate and our last discussions, and I heard him interviewed outside on the news channel when he was asked about gas tax and the relief on gas tax, he rightly pointed out that gas tax was just one of the measures that could be considered when you talk about poverty reduction. He's not wrong because that's exactly what this is.

This is only one of several measures that we have included in our budget, or will include in our budget, to help people of Newfoundland and Labrador and lower the cost of living for them. I also want to remind the Members opposite a little bit about budgeting and how the process works.

Normally, when you do a budget and you prepare a budget, the budget also includes a forecast for the next number of years that you're going to continue on with a program. You don't wait until the middle of the year to say, oh, we're going to do that next year too. If you're truly committed to a program, you turn around and you forecast that you're going to continue to commit to that expenditure year after year after year, and the Minister of Finance has talked about that.

So when the hon. Member talks about how this amendment would only cost \$30 million more, I need to remind Members opposite that they did not include any money for a reduction in gas tax in the coming fiscal. There was nothing; zero money in the fiscal forecast to make sure that this reduction in gas tax would be permanent.

So we, on this side of the House, have committed to making that happen. We have brought in legislation; we've introduced this legislation that will make this a permanent tax. As I said earlier today, we will put in this year's budget \$67 million to make sure that this gas tax debt reduction stays permanent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: But I also need to remind the House that there are other programs that are related to cost of living that had been announced in the past. I don't know whether it was deliberate or they just didn't do it, but let's talk about the Home Heating Supplement Program as part of this. There was \$12 million – a good program to help people with their home heating supplement, but guess what? No money in the fiscal forecast to continue on with that program. None, zero. So that means there's another \$12 million that we will put forward to make sure that program continues.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: I could keep going, because when we introduce programs that are meant to help people, we have to have the conviction that we're going to continue on with those programs, that they're not going to end. You do that by putting them in your fiscal forecast to make sure year over year over year that they're there and there's no issue with it.

Motor Registration, the fee reduction – a great decision, a great plan, a great move. Guess what? No money in the fiscal forecast to continue on with that program. None, zero. What does that mean? That means now we will have to find an additional \$25 million in this year's budget to continue on with those programs. That's over \$100 million of commitments that were due to expire, that were about to expire and there was no money actually budgeted for in the fiscal forecast. So that's the kind of thing that we need to be planning for.

So when we stand up here and we talk about introducing programs and we talk about making sure that the measures we're introducing, number one, yes, we got to make sure we can afford to do it; and two, we got to make sure we can afford to do it beyond one year. We need to make sure

that we have a plan in place. All of these measures are a part of a poverty reduction strategy.

When you think about poverty reduction, when we think about affordable housing, when we think about cost of living, all these measures are all part of what makes up a poverty reduction strategy. Income, having a job, having a place to live, having clean drinking water, all of those things are all part of the social determinants of health. Those are the things that we, all of us in this Chamber, when we talk about doing things to help people, we need to make sure that what we're doing is we're committing to programs and we're committing to them so they're not just in and out, in and out, in and out.

That's been the problem, when you find out that there is over \$100 million of initiatives that you thought would continue but there was no money to continue them on. So we've taken the first step on this one by turning around and making sure that the gas tax reduction is made permanently. That's what this legislation will do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, the other day, I listened to the Member opposite from Burin and he spoke very well about some of the challenges that he saw, not only in his community, but in the province with his time in government.

He talked about the oil to electricity program, you know some of the challenges with that program that need to be addressed. He talked about the need, again, on child care spaces, especially in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. He talked about those type of things. He talked about, also, increasing the thresholds because, he's right, if we haven't increased our thresholds there are too many people being left behind; people who would be eligible for programs that, unfortunately,

because their income goes up, all of a sudden they're no longer eligible.

That's what the Finance Minister talked about earlier when he spoke, about making sure that we increase those thresholds so that we don't leave people behind, and we're committed to doing that. We are committing to a review of that.

The same as we said we will review every single tax that we charge, every fee that we charge. We know there are over 300 of them, but do we know if we're really making any money? Because why are we charging a fee if we're not actually making money, because we've never been able to decide. We know all the revenue comes in and goes into government coffers, but all the expenses are strewn throughout different departments of government. So when I ask the question, how much money are we actually making on a fee we're charging, nobody can tell me.

So it's time we started looking at that. If we're charging a fee to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it's actually costing us money to charge it, why are we charging it?

Those are the things that we've got to start looking at, fundamental principles of how we govern it and how we do things. It's not going to be done overnight and it's not going to be done in 30 days or 100 days. Maybe in 1,000 days we'll certainly have a good handle on a lot of it, but I tell you, that's the thing, if we don't start, we will never finish. That is why it is so important for us to start this review, to focus on better access to health care, to focus on lower taxes and to focus on safer communities, and that's exactly what we're doing, Chair.

This is one measure – one measure – towards a poverty reduction strategy that we will introduce, that we will want to, again, make it the best poverty reduction strategy in all of the country.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Chair, I move that Committee rise, report progress, and ask leave to sit again.

CHAIR: The motion is that Committee rise, report progress, and ask leave to sit again.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

It's carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, the Speaker returned to the Chair.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for the District of Labrador West, Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

J. POWER: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred, have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed them to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 7, Bill 7.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly an honour here today to stand up and introduce my –

SPEAKER: I ask the minister to move and second the bill.

P. FORSEY: Oh, I'm sorry.

I move, seconded by the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, Bill 7 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act." (Bill 7)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Speaker, it's certainly an honour today to stand up here on my first bill, An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act. It's certainly great to do that.

The intention of the bill, part of it, is Newfoundland and Labrador is home to unique wildlife and plant species and some

need our help to survive. The American marten, Long's Braya and Red Crossbill are examples of species that are at risk that are part of our landscape and their loss would forever diminish our natural heritage.

We've managed to conserve Newfoundland and Labrador's biodiversity and wildlife resources for all of us. The *Endangered Species Act* provides special protection for plant and animal species considered to be endangered, threatened or vulnerable in our province and fulfills our commitment under the national Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk.

The act applies to species, subspecies and populations that are native to our province but does not include marine fish, bacteria and viruses. Decisions about which species are protected are based on advice from expert committees. Currently, there are 75 species, subspecies and populations listed under the act; 31 of these species are listed as endangered, 20 are listed as threatened and 24 are listed as vulnerable. Our obligation under the act and as responsible stewards of our wildlife and natural world require us to ensure our legislation is strong. Activities that negatively impact our cherished wildlife species are unacceptable. That's why, today, I am pleased to speak to Bill 7, amendments to the *Endangered Species Act*.

Proposed amendments to the *Endangered Species Act* aim to ensure enforcement officers are better equipped to protect Newfoundland and Labrador's at-risk wildlife resources. We're striving to create modern legislation that is easier to interpret, enforce, follow and respect.

These proposed amendments would modernize legislation, update penalties and improve enforceability. They would ensure resource enforcement officers are better equipped to protect Newfoundland and Labrador's wildlife resources. We work to ensure the public understands and complies with laws that safeguard our natural

resources. We believe these amendments would strengthen legislation and enhance support of the conservation and protection of Newfoundland and Labrador's wildlife species.

The department sought feedback on proposed and draft amendments to enforcement-related provisions, fines and penalties, in *Wild Life Act*, *Endangered Species Act* and applicable regulations. Public consultation occurred December 2023 to January 2024 through an online questionnaire posted on EngageNL. The department received almost 260 responses from across the province with almost all participants noting they are involved in outdoor pursuits including hunting, berry picking, mountain biking, hiking, trapping or all-terrain operating vehicles.

In general, respondents supported the increase of the fines under the *Wild Life Act* and regulations and *Endangered Species Act*. Many respondents included the need for additional education and public outreach as part of their comments. Conservation concerns for big game populations and inland species, salmon and trout, were shared by many respondents. I thank everyone who provided helpful feedback during the public consultation process of this amendment.

Amending the *Endangered Species Act* would enhance public safety, deter illegal activities and further protect Newfoundland and Labrador's wildlife and endangered species. Amendments include allowing more time for the provincial government to respond to designation recommendations to ensure thorough publication consultation. This gives greater time for the due diligence required for staff to make effective recommendations to the minister and better aligns with the legislation timelines – it offers more time to ensure those are put in place. Enforcement of fines as a component of wildlife management is, unfortunately, necessary.

We are introducing amendments that will increase fines for offences that impact species protected under the *Endangered Species Act* to stronger deter illegal activities; these include, for first conviction, from fines not less than \$1,000 and not more than \$50,000, or imprisonment for a term of not more than three months, or both, to fines not less than \$3,000 and not more than \$50,000, or term of imprisonment maintained at not more than three months; the second conviction, from fines not less than \$2,000 and not more than \$100,000, or imprisonment for a term of not more than six months, to fines not less than \$6,000 and not more than \$100,000, or term of imprisonment maintained at not more than six months; and third and subsequent convictions, from fines not less than \$4,000 and not more than \$200,000, or imprisonment for a term of not more than 12 months, or both, to fines not less than \$12,000 and not more than \$250,000, or term of imprisonment maintained not more than 12 months.

A corporation convicted of an offence under the *Endangered Species Act* will face amended fines of not less than \$5,000 and not more than \$2 million. We believe the increased penalties will act as significant deterrents to illegal activities. Current financial penalties were set in the 1990s or earlier.

We are clarifying the enhancing legislation provisions related to the responsibility of resources enforcement to improving operational activities. The department expects clear interpretation and will make the legislation easier to follow and more enforceable thereby supporting natural resources enforcement activities and enhancing public safety. Improving resource enforcement officers' ability to do their jobs would help maintain or boost public respect for this challenging and often dangerous work.

Other amendments will focus on modernizing legislation for clarity and ease

of interpretation. A national jurisdictional scan on wildlife and endangered species legislation indicates that some fines applied in the province are lower than in other areas. The department used the information to suggest amendments to penalties to ensure that we are consistent with other areas. The department expects that implementing fair and effective fines that align with other Canadian provinces will deter illegal activity and signal that illegal activity is unacceptable in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, I look forward to other speakers on this amendment when it comes to Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Always a pleasure to stand in this hon. House and say a few words, even if it is about endangered species. I think we all minimize in terms of the importance of what's in front of us, called the endangered species. I say to the minister that I'd like to say, first and foremost, thank you to the staff that did brief us because they were my former staff as well, which I respect, and certainly always value what they did for me when I was in that department, and advising me. I say to the minister that he does have good staff that will be advising him.

Reflecting upon this bill, because there have been changes that have come forward and there are various ministers that have stood in this House and have brought forward these changes, and one former minister that certainly comes to mind is Derrick Bragg.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: We all know the comedy from Mr. Bragg. In terms of names within the *Endangered Species Act*, he said: Some that I can't even pronounce. That was certainly his nature, but it certainly brings to light work that has been done by former ministers and former government. There's been a lot done in the last 10 years for sure on many levels.

I'm certainly pleased to stand here in my critic role for Forestry, that includes, certainly, Bill 7, An Act to Amend the *Endangered Species Act*. It's important, I think, to state that protecting species at risk and preserving biodiversity in this province is something that we support on this side, and we supported when we were on that side.

For informative purposes, the *Endangered Species Act* certainly is a key piece of legislation. It's not something that we talk about every day, but we should realize that it is very important to the functioning of everyday life in Newfoundland and Labrador. So it's a key piece of legislation that ensures our province has a legal framework – very important – to identify species at risk and protect them as well as their habitats.

I think all of us certainly can appreciate Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and their involvement in nature and a lot of the species that are in this act that are part of their lives and they appreciate. Again, I guess we don't talk about it enough. I guess it's not lost, as I said, the importance of the act, and the minister had made some comments about the act, but also, again, the act plays an important role in identifying species at risk in the province, protecting listed species and their habitats, which is important – very important. Regulating activities that may harm those species is also very important because it speaks to the enforcement piece.

The act covers a wide range of species, inclusive of mammals, birds, fish and plants,

and we all know how integral that is to the existence of Newfoundland and Labrador. As part of the process, and I think it's important, species are assessed by a special status advisory committee, and they will make recommendations to government on how species should be classified. The classifications include endangered, threatened and vulnerable, just a few to mention.

I guess it's fair to ask the question why these amendments are needed – and, you know, to advise the minister that we'll certainly be supporting this on this side of the House, it's important, but why the amendments are needed. The act was initiated and enacted in 2001, which is 25 years ago. It's a long time and it's not been amended since that time. We certainly initiated the process when we were over there to start this and the minister is bringing it here today. The public appreciated that, and that means some parts of the legislation have been outdated, as has been referenced. In particular, the fines in the legislation need adjustments, as has been already said by the minister, and I'll refer to some of them.

Enforcement tools that have evolved; language and references in legislation require modernization, absolutely, so this is also cleanup of legislation. We recognize that updating these elements is reasonable, and it's certainly necessary.

In talking about some of the key changes in the bill that the minister alluded to, but I would like to refer to them as well, a lot of it is housekeeping, which a lot of the bills, especially if it was 20 or 25 years, we recognize that there is cleanup required, which is housekeeping. In this piece, it talks about adding definitions such as corporation and vehicle, and that's important to clarify in the legislation.

Updating language to be gender-neutral – very important; updating outdated court references to reflect the Supreme Court

rather than Trial Division. There are reasons for all of that and that's where, I guess, the feedback that comes back to the department determines what will be presented by the minister and the department.

In terms of the enforcement improvements as well – and that's very important, whether it's a police officer or a fish inspector or whomever it may be, there requires a balance for them to give them tools that they need to do their job. We'll certainly ask the minister some questions in Committee as well, because I think he referenced, and we asked as well, in terms of better equipped, and those enforcement officers and stuff. Again, I think the word "balance" is very important there, of ensuring that they have the proper tools to do their job and do the best that they can for the people in the province.

Also allowing conservation officers to obtain telewarrants; clarifying provisions around seizure and forfeiture; again, that speaks to once that enforcement officer leaves his home base and goes to work, that they want to feel that they're equipped, they're safe and they can do their job and do it properly.

The increased fines piece is necessary, I believe, and the minister referenced some of them. I guess for the public, it's kind of a warning that if you do wrong, then there's an offence for that. The act certainly was outdated, as I referenced earlier in my statement, about 25 years. It needs a cleanup. So in one particular place, for individuals, the minimum fine for a first offence increased from \$1,000 to \$3,000. That is significant, no doubt. But what is the intent of that increase is more important.

The second offence, from \$2,000 to \$6,000, and a third offence from \$4,000 to \$12,000, with a maximum fine increasing from \$200,000 to \$250,000. So those are significant numbers. We hope they will never be paid. If they do, then the intent of these changes will have proven successful.

But also, not just as an individual, corporations as well, which is very important in facing fines ranging from a minimum of \$5,000 to \$2 million, which is certainly significant. It talks about continuing offences, and that's important because if it's a continuing offence, we know there's a problem that needs to be adjusted in dealing with what's the solution for dealing with that problem.

These increases bring penalties more in line with the seriousness of harming protected species and habitats, and I believe that is the defining statement in all of this, in going after the seriousness – and I say it again, the seriousness of harming protecting species and habitats.

Species at risk in Newfoundland and Labrador, the act protects these species that we're referencing that. As I said before, many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are familiar with. Just as an example, the piping plover, which I didn't really know existed until a student did a course where he identified that the piping plover was, I guess, habituated on a certain beach in my home community. I remember the town council, I tried to educate them that this is a good thing. Yeah, but we're not going to have access to the beach. No, you do have access to the beach, but just think as protecting that endangered species is a benefits, and here are the benefits.

Because Parks Canada, federal government, they want to protect it as well. We want to protect it as well, but by protecting and designating that area of that beach as an area for piping plover is a good thing. I finally got them convinced that it is a good thing because that area is designated. I'm hoping more would come from it. I think Burgeo as well has an area and this plaque that displays about the educational proponent of piping plover and what it does and when they migrate and how they operate in their habitats garnered them federal money to have a display. There are lots of people in this world that are

interested in piping plovers. So getting them to come to the area, recognizing that down on the South Coast that an endangered species such as piping plover is here down on the beach down on the South Coast.

That's just an example, but I guess we look at the endangered species of the piping plover as an example, but there are probably tourism benefits of it because tourists travel to different parts of the world to even look and visualize. I've always said I think I could be a birdwatcher because I'm always interested in the blue jay or all kinds, but there are lots of benefits to protecting these endangered species, one such as the piping plover.

There are others. A lot of us can certainly appreciate woodland caribou, American eel, the common nighthawk, and in terms of caribou, down on the Bay d'Espoir Highway, there's no trouble to go down there and see lots of them, which is good. I know, being in the department, that the department takes that very seriously in terms of numbers of animals, where they migrate, where they are and trying to make sure that these animals are fair numbers throughout the province, woodland caribou being one of them.

Overall, Speaker, the amendments that are before us, they are largely administrative and modernization measures, which is a good thing. As I said, and I'll repeat it again, 25 years old; it's time for it to be cleaned up as such. So I'm glad that the minister has brought in his broom to clean it up.

They update fines, clarifying enforcement powers and, certainly, modernizing the language of the act. I think it's fair to say that these would have been done no matter who is on the governing side. These are things that are going to happen for sure.

The Minister of Finance is shaking his hands over there, but I can guarantee you it would – but he's been listening. I'm glad I've been able to educate him about endangered

species today, right? So I'm glad of that. The Minister of Fisheries doing the same thing, nodding his head. I feel like a teacher here today, right? Even though the former teacher is listening, he's a student today. That's good. That's good.

It is important and we can have these exchanges, but I think it's important that all of us look at endangered species with a serious lens, because it is serious, and I'm certainly doing that today and appreciate that we have the opportunity, or I have the opportunity, to be involved in the discussion. For that reason, as I said, the Official Opposition will support this legislation at second reading. We'll continue to ask constructive questions as it proceeds through Committee.

So I thank you, Speaker, for the time, and the minister for bringing this forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as always, a real honour and a privilege to rise in this hon. House and talk on any topic. From time to time, what you'll see is, I'm going to get up there and I'm going to put a Labrador spin on things, as I always do.

These particular proposed amendments to Bill 7, the *Endangered Species Act*, I just want to get up here again and just talk about Labrador and the way of life in Labrador and put a little bit of a cautionary tale to the House floor. We may get, I guess, accused of sitting here and maybe debating some pretty boring stuff sometimes and, I'll come right out and say it, some legislation that perhaps it might be

minor amendments here and there and it takes a lot of time to get through it and all that, but when something like this hits the floor, Mr. Speaker, I want to relay this to Labrador.

I want to talk about my life growing up in Labrador and my father, Frank Russell, who taught me just about everything I know. In saying that, we once had the George River Caribou Herd in Labrador that was the largest migratory herd on the planet. That was, I believe, up around 900,000 – close to 1 million – in its peak. As of the latest census, we're probably at around 8,600 in numbers. So 8,600 caribou from a million.

This migratory herd went through Quebec and went all through Labrador and Northern Labrador – all over. It changed its migratory path, I guess you would say, over the years, but the decimation of this herd affected every single Labradorian and our way of life.

When the hon. Member for Torngat Mountains gets up and talks about her district, we talk about things like food security, high prices and all of that, the realities families face every day in this province and one of our staples in Labrador, I'll say from one end of her to the other – from the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair right to Labrador West, all through – was the ability to subsidize the household by hunting the caribou and, again, engaging in a traditional Indigenous activity with your family. This was shared by Inuit and Innu alike, and it was also shared by everybody who came to find and make Labrador their home.

So I just want to say, when we talk about protecting species and subspecies – and, again, I appreciate the commentary from the Members across – when you talk about increasing fines, this stuff, it might not be flashy and it might not be that pretty and, in the words of my colleague from Torngat Mountains, it might not be the sexiest piece of legislation you're ever going to see, but in terms of that, Mr. Speaker, it is real. If

you've met anybody, go to any district, go to any town in this beautiful province, you'll see people so proud, proud of everything, proud of the wildlife in their district, proud of the people, the heritage and the culture. We've been blessed, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, to be able to live and thrive and interact with our environment in such a way.

Truly the harmony with which we live has to be maintained, and we've got to make sure that we hold the line, we draw that line in the sand that says if you're going to engage in activities that are going to put these species at risk and change our province, then you're going to be met. You're going to be met with force. You're going to be met with fines. You're going to be met with conviction. God help you if you're a corporation that's going to do the same in this province as well and jeopardize our ecosystem here, we're going to take you to task.

So I just want to say that and I wanted to talk about the Innu and the Inuit and that way of life and the caribou hunt. If I could have a little leeway, Mr. Speaker, I would say that I'm so lucky. Just before the moratorium was put in place in Labrador, my dad and I got to take my son out and he got to experience his first caribou hunt. You just don't know until you've had that experience. Literally when the ground is rumbling; tens of thousands of numbers of this herd, the ground rumbling and shaking, and the adrenaline it's just amazing.

To see that picture at the end of the day, where my dad and my son, the passing on of traditional knowledge, those two just around that caribou with the beaming smiles, the pride of my dad and his grandson with his first caribou, it was something to behold, and you'll see that on the Island. Maybe a little more moose hunting, I'll say, on the Island.

But in terms of what legislation like this does, it protects our ecosystem. It protects

our way of life. It protects our interaction with these species, maintains healthy populations and, what it does is, I'll say, it further enhances and reinforces our ability to sustain our culture and our way of life here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When we talk about being stewards of the environment and stewards of these species, I'll have to say that the majority in this province are just that. Now there's always going to be that bad apple out there too, and that's a reason for this legislation. There's always going to be somebody who doesn't see it our way, doesn't see the beauty and the value of these resources and what they mean to us and they just see whether it's personal gain or they don't care about the rules or whatever that happens to be, but they have to be met with the provisions outlined in legislation like this which says no more; we're not going to let people have free reign.

It's as simple as that, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you one thing, if I can just talk another second about the caribou hunt and why legislation like this is meaningful and why we all have to pay attention to this in the province and make sure that you're – I said to one of my friends who was feeling a little blue back home today: Make sure you stay your brother's keeper. We have to look out for each other in this province but, I tell you what, look out for your resources in your communities too.

Be – here I am, Mr. Speaker – vigilant – my favourite word – you have to be vigilant in taking control and taking care of your communities. That means not only just the people and the kids in your community; that means your heritage, your culture and everything you're proud of in your community too, which includes our heavy interaction with all the species, everything out of the woods and everything out of the sea, because that's our way of life right here.

If I may, I'd just like to say that this piece of legislation also goes a little further than just saying you're going to be met with fines, you're going to be met with incarceration and all of that stuff, it also puts a little bit more power back into the hands of the resource enforcement officers. These are the people on the ground, Mr. Speaker. We on this side of the House, you're going to hear this theme that runs through our government, which says we work with people on the front lines always. We go down into the ditch to talk to people digging that ditch, to make sure that we know everything about how ditches are dug. That might be a lot of d's but, hey, that's it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to say we've got, I think, 260 responses to his proposed amendment from people out there in various interest groups, various stakeholders. We've listened to them. We heard them. We took those suggestions into consideration, as we always do on this side of the House, and it gives this piece of legislation a little more meat, a little more oomph. All it says is it sends a message out to everybody that's going to mess with the Newfoundlander and Labradorian way of life when we interact with these species, is that you will be met fiercely, harshly, and you will be met appropriately if you're going to attempt to unbalance this ecosystem here.

With that, I'll take my seat. But I'll say I'm very, very proud to be able to speak to this and to be able to share just a little bit about my history in Labrador, a little bit about the great man I know, Frank Russell, who taught me everything I know.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to let people know that when we are tasked as legislators to consider things like this, we have to take it seriously; we've got to do our due diligence; we've got to come together; rise above the partisan

politics and take care of business in this House.

We have to because if I could leave one thing with you, Mr. Speaker, it's that the decline of the George River herd home and the change to the way of life of every Labradorian and every Newfoundlander that calls the Big Land home as well, the way that we've been compromised, the way that our lessons that could be taught to the next generation, we're going to have to wait for that herd to rebound before we can bring that activity back into our culture and into our lifestyle.

I just want to say that anytime I'm going to get a chance to get up and share a little bit about Labrador with this House and for all the people out there watching on TV land, you'll see it in this House, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we're fiercely proud. We're fiercely proud of everything that makes up Newfoundland and Labrador. That's the fishing, that's the hunting, that's the berry picking and that's sharing those resources within your communities and truly, truly being happy in this beautiful place that we call home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, when a Labradorian gets up and follows another Labradorian in the provincial Legislature, I believe that's a sign of progress that we have come a long way because I can tell you –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: – the district that I represent, in Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair as a little girl growing up, every now and then, before I knew very much about politics, my family home was kind of the go-to home.

Every doctor going through, every nurse going through, the pilots, if the planes couldn't get out for a few days because the weather was bad, they all stayed at a home that I was raised in, which had seven boys; I made the third girl and two parents, so it was already 12 of us there.

Every now and then we'd hear, the Member is coming. Almost the red carpet would be rolled out because that was a really big day, because the Member was coming.

You wouldn't hear or see him for months and months and months, but I grew up when the Member was never somebody born and raised in Labrador. Some of them were really good people, they really were, but they could not quite understand that part of the province, the unique geography, the unique culture, the history. So it is nice that right now in the House, I believe we've got – someone was telling me the other day, we have about six people with a history and connection and time lived in Labrador currently serving, out of the 40 Members.

I'm just going to speak for a few minutes to Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act. The Member, the speaker before me, talked a little bit about his history and connection with endangered species, with animals, with trapping. Well, I was actually raised by a trapper. My grandfather was a trapper; I was the oldest grandchild. I don't think I had a full appreciation for that lifestyle until I came to St. John's, went to university. When I would get home at Eastertime – and it wasn't very easy to get back and forth back then, when our community was isolated, but that was always a high point for me then, to get to go on the trapline with my grandfather in the springtime.

An incredible man; a Grade 2 education; left Carbonear in 1936 when, what he referred to, 85,000 Newfies were on able-bodied welfare, and he was looking in search of a better life, as just a young teenager. Came and made a home; very successful in

business; received the Order of NL; wrote and published 19 books, Speaker; and certainly left a tremendous legacy that I am incredibly proud of.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: I kind of was immersed through the different businesses, conservation officers, the role they play. It is not easy. Small population, very large land mass; I do tip my hat to those women and men who work as conservation officers all over this province. I know from my time down in fishery, forestry – I think I was there just four months, but I know that some of the people who work there, they don't have easy jobs – going out in really rough terrain, having to do investigative measures.

I also know that sometimes things can be contentious, Speaker, and those are some of the questions that maybe I'll have in Committee around where maybe the language is a little bit, I believe, open to interpretation.

We actually had a sports salmon fishing lodge for many years in my family. It started in one location with trout and then my grandfather moved to Gilberts where, for years and years and years, we had tourists come from Germany, from the US, from all over. Usually, at the end of the week, when they left, I was kind of there as a little girl, seven, eight or nine and I'd get in on the tips they passed out as well.

But, Speaker, it's absolutely essential that we have laws, that we have protocol in place that if people do the crime, they have to do the time. We have a number of Indigenous groups in Labrador, that I have tremendous respect for. I am about to speak about a group that, on record, I will say is not from Newfoundland and Labrador.

But one of the things that I deal with as the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, one of the most difficult things that I have ever dealt with, to date, aside from human

loss and things like that, is because we border with a neighbouring province, we have a group that have come down a number of times – and Members may be familiar – and they just do a tremendous slaughter – a tremendous slaughter. It's not taking food because you're hungry. It's not food for ceremonial purposes. We see the videos; they are so disturbing.

I remember right around the time that COVID hit, these videos would be circulating of, like, all of these caribou, an endangered species. The federal government determines section 35 rights. We all know that, but an endangered species trumps section 35 rights. I know that's hard for people.

I can tell you, I have been in Ottawa and I've had meetings – I'll use an example, with members of Nunatsiavut. I had a member say to me, we are sacrificing. You know we love caribou, we love the taste of caribou, but we're making this sacrifice because it's an endangered species. But when we see other groups go out and have a big slaughter, that's very, very difficult for us.

That's one of the most beautiful memories in my very large home growing up, is if there was a caribou killed, it would be shared around the community. Everybody got a piece of the caribou. My grandmother had this really large, oval-shaped roaster, it was like, I don't know, how old and then she would make a paste of flour and water and stretch that over the caribou. She would spend hours and hours pasting that, pasting it so it would end up in a nice kind of crisp – I'm going to make you hungry now, Speaker and it's getting close to suppertime, but that's a beautiful memory of the caribou and the paste and the gravy and the things like that in my home.

I just share that in line to say that is why we have to have laws and things to protect endangered species. This Bill 7 talks a little bit about the search powers of conservation officers. I know that that's important as well.

Sometimes out in remote areas when those conservation officers go in, I think there is a fine line. They have to respect the rights of the hunter. I think they have to have some reasonable grounds, and we can talk about that, about what a reasonable ground is before they go in, but also, we have to know that those conservation officers that are out doing work on behalf of the people of the province, that they can return home at the end of the day safe for their family members too, Speaker.

I am very happy to see that we are making amendments to move toward, "Where, in the opinion of a conservation officer, it would not be practical to appear before a Provincial Court judge to apply for a warrant, the conservation officer may make the application by telephone or other means of telecommunication." When it comes to any type of law, one of the things that we have been really challenged with in Labrador and our small communities across is the cost of courts getting in. Weather prohibits sometimes folks from getting in on planes and there are all kinds of delays and things like that. I don't think we always need to be in a formal setting to have folks appear before a court judge. I think if we're able to do that by telephone, then that's a positive measure.

I won't talk about it today, but I have some questions for the minister. In section 34, where a conservation officer believes on reasonable grounds that a person has contravened this Act or the regulations, the officer may, with a warrant issued under subsection (2), enter the building or may confiscate things, and I would just like the minister, when he speaks again – just to give him some notice – if he may speak about some examples of what would be considered as reasonable grounds. You know, can you give some examples for our people that might be concerned?

I'm really speaking of things of which I've had experience; they're not easy. You may represent a constituent who calls you up

and says: Dad's 85 years old, and he was out hunting, and they took his gun and he done this and this. It's very difficult to get between a constituent and the law, but one thing that is important for us is to make sure that fairness was done, to make sure that the whole thing was carried out in a reasonable manner, Speaker.

I'm not going to speak for the sake of speaking, I'll just look forward to the minister later on who can give us some examples of that. I am happy to see this Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act before us here now. I believe we have a responsibility to protect – sometimes you're unsure. I will say, when I was driving in this morning, the commute was very, very slow, as we know, with the road conditions, and there was a story about the cormorants, and some people must know about them.

There's a lit bit of a difference of opinion. Some people say they're a nuisance bird, shoot them all. I think their harvesters can get a permit to, maybe, shoot some of the double-crested cormorants, but I can tell you, they're a real challenge in a lot of the communities I represent. They're around in crazy big numbers. Now, I'm not going to speak about whether we should be able to destroy all the cormorants. It seems like every living thing that comes along has some purpose to it.

I want to thank you, Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak for a few minutes to Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I say to the hon. Member, my mother used to make a similar pastry, but it was over turrs.

Anyway, the hon. the Member for St. John's East.

J. DINN: Centre.

SPEAKER: Sorry.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: You're close – a little further west.

SPEAKER: I've got pastry on my mind.

Go ahead.

J. DINN: Now you've got pastry on my mind, too, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Certainly, these amendments we will support. I know myself, I had the pleasure – while I go up to Labrador each year to fish on the Pinware River –

AN HON. MEMBER: God's country.

J. DINN: That's right, and you need to be part billy goat there to walk that river but, nevertheless, it's always a pleasure to go up there. It's beautiful country and, when you go there, you know why it's called the Big Land, really – big time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: I've had the opportunity to drive across it too, Speaker. You even know then for sure why it's called the Big Land.

I think my involvement with the pine marten hair snag program was about, more or less, seeing how far that endangered species was recovering in Newfoundland and Labrador. So I'm committed to anything with regard to conservation, and I'll get into that in a minute.

I'm looking at this, and we would support this. I really hope, and I think one Member said, hopefully, we won't need to collect any fines, but one of the issues that comes up

with this, the fines and penalties, it's great to have them and to put them out there for those that don't follow the law, but the question always comes down as to how do you collect on them as well. We've known in the past, certainly when it comes to traffic violations and so on, it can be extremely difficult.

I think, for the most part, any of the people I know, hunters, anglers, trappers, are ethical individuals. They make sure that they're hunting ethically, that they harvest what they need, that they are not violating the rules, but we all know that there are a few that will not follow those rules. All you've got to do is walk in the woods sometimes and see the number of Tim Horton's coffee cups that are left there, or empty pop cans. I always figure it's harder to bring it in than to bring it out, but yet the empty can is left there.

The other part of this has to do with enforcement. Collecting fines is one thing, it's great to have that, but it's the follow-up that comes with it. One of the things we had, as teachers: if you're making a rule, you better make sure you enforce it or don't make the rule, as simple as that.

Over the last number of years, certainly since I've been in this role, I don't know how many enforcement officers I've spoken to, but one of the perennial complaints has to do with the condition of the equipment, the age of snowmobiles, ATVs, the vehicles that they need, the trucks that they need to actually go and carry out the work. It's out of date. It's probably not even roadworthy sometimes. It can be potentially dangerous if you're coming up to someone who's also armed. Tempers can flare and situations can rapidly descend into chaos in many ways, but I know it certainly was a safety issue for many of them.

We'll probably have a few questions around that, because it's great to have. Like, you've got the availability of telewarrants that makes their job easier but I think, for the

most part, anyone going into a situation where you could be on your own, it's important to have that equipment.

I heard the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune talk about the importance too of endangered species and how it actually helps the areas as well. I've listened to the Member for Lake Melville, too. He's right, not all legislation in this House is flashy, but it's important. Sometimes it can seem pretty dry, but it's not. It's not flashy, but it's important. It's real.

I've listened to him talk about the benefits of protecting the ecosystem and what it means, not just the protection of the ecosystems, but the impact it can have on the way of life of the people who live there if they don't – if that ecosystem is not protected.

I never lived in Labrador but I've heard of the caribou herds and the sheer numbers, and I remember, at one time, friends of mine who lived up there, you could basically tag two caribou at a time. That was the licence; it wasn't just one, if I remember correctly. But it's really sad to see that herd diminished to where it is right now.

I think, also, we do have opportunities missed at times and we probably need to go further than this. I'm not going to speak much longer, but I do want to point out, like, we had the WERAC, which was the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council. I can remember when they brought forward about protected areas that, really, there were ministers in this House – no longer here – who threw them under the bus in many ways because of that work. But there was an opportunity there to actually protect areas and that would allow people to carry out their traditional way of life, but create protected areas that would also allow for the creation of other industries.

I heard the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels this morning talk about, I think,

Shorefast and the \$1.3 million that's brought into Fogo Island itself. I've had the opportunity to visit there and to actually go into the hotel up there. After 9, I think, that's when all the locals are welcome to go up there. At that time, you look at the business opportunity, you look after the cod moratorium, the number of boat tours.

Now when I taugth up the shore at first, I don't think there were any boat tours around much but it was only after the cod moratorium that they really took off, and people were willing to pay to go out on a boat, risk sea sickness and even to go jigging cod. I had people from England there a few years ago, they wanted to go deep-sea fishing and I was trying to figure out where am I going to get that for them until I realized what they were talking about was cod jigging. Great, 15 minutes out in a boat, 15 minutes later they had their fish and 15 minutes later they were back in. That was a bucket list. So there's an opportunity here.

But WERAC, there was a way of protecting species, of striking that balance. Most recently, I look at the South Coast Fjords, National Marine Conservation Area. I think government was shortsighted in cancelling the feasibility study, which is about collecting data. They've been at this for 20 years – a steering committee made up of grassroots local individuals and communities there to put this forward. Twenty years they've been at that. The map has changed, they've made compromises and they figure that this feasibility study, which still had data to collect and it probably would take another 10 years before anything, any final decision was made.

But there was a missed opportunity here, as the people in the area would assent – and I've written the Premier on this. The communities are advocating for the NMCA for precisely the opposite reasons. They're not about killing jobs or anything else – to protect ecosystems while sustaining livelihoods. Proponents have not been opposed to industry development. In a

recent interview, the Chief of the Miawpukek First Nation, and a signatory to the MOU noted the importance of industry and conservation working together.

So there's an opportunity here to actually protect, set up a marine conservation area. There was an opportunity to bring in federal funding, Speaker, that would actually diversify the area as well and still allow for the other industries to proceed.

Unfortunately, that feasibility was stopped dead in its tracks. It can't complete its work. I guess we'll never have the data to know just what could have been done, but at least another 10 years talking to the people down there that would have required. So there was an opportunity here to do this.

I think let's firm up, do what we can to amend the *Endangered Species Act*, but let's not be shy and afraid of looking at other measures a little bit more globally and are broader in scope that would allow the various industries to thrive and, at the same time, conserve the very thing that we promote on our provincial advertising about why we need to come here. It's what we sell, so I think, if anything else, if we want to convince people, then let's make sure we're doing our best to protect it, not only in the amendments here, but in a broader approach.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

I just want to say a few words. First of all, it's a very important bill for the amendment of the *Endangered Species Act*. It's very important. It's another part of our resources

that brings in dollars to the coffers of the province.

I would just go back to my grandfather's day, how good I used to feel when I'd get aboard the boat with my grandfather. He had an old five Johnson, green Johnson on the back of her. You could walk faster, but anyhow, I used to go out to his salmon nets with him, and the feeling when he was pulling in those nets, and here you could see the salmon glistening as it came in over the boat, maybe six, seven or eight salmon.

I remember going out helping him pull his lobster traps. It was the greatest experience I guess, one of the greatest experiences you ever have in life. Again, I know all about casting capelin. We'd go up along a place called Long Beach, and I can see Grandfather holding onto the lid in his mouth and throwing the cast out and pulling it in. It's all great memories.

Going back to conservation, which is a great thing, which is a wonderful thing, to preserve our culture, our way of life and everything else and think about our children's children, we want to keep this revolving, keep this going. In 1963, they brought seven caribou to Fogo Island, to see how the herd could grow. They knew there was good feed on the island. That herd grew to a number of 500. We had 500 caribou on Fogo Island. Then they started issuing licences every year. I know the first year was, like, 25 licences, and the herd was healthy, so they increased it to 50.

I know it went back to 25 again; the herd is depleted. A lot of poaching went on over the years, especially from other parts of the province; not only Fogo Islanders, but they used to come in, in their boats, at a place called the Cape, go ashore, and most of the caribou hung out on the eastern part of the island. We lost a lot of caribou through poaching. But then for some reason or another, the coyotes got into the island. I guess probably on the ice in the winter back then. But that herd right now is very, very

small. I'd be surprised if they even get a hunt this year. That's how much it's after being depleted.

If you go to Joe Batt's Arm, Ethridge Point, there's a trail – this is another little story I want to tell you. You go down that trail and there's a statue of the Great Auk. The Great Auk, it's about that size, the statue – that's extinct. There are two statues. One is on Fogo Island and there is another one in some other part of the world. When you look at that statue and think about conservation and everything like that, then you realize how important it is.

This generates money through tourism, as well. The puffins – we got a tour boat right now on Fogo Island, and that's a big thing. There are islands off Fogo Island, called Little Fogo Islands, and that's where all the puffins hang out, in that area, and that's a big attraction for tourism.

So preserving and conservation of our resources like that is very important to the province because it turns in coppers to the economy of this province, and it protects our way of life.

Going back to the caribou herd, I ended up with a licence one year myself, and what a feeling – what a feeling. Right on your own island, you know? You go down and you didn't have to wait to see a caribou, you could pick which ever one you wanted, there was that many of them on the go then. I also had the experience of having a few moose licenses. It's important because it's just like going in the woods and tail a few slips and getting a few rabbits, or going out and killing a few turs or a few ducks, it's our way of life, and I think it's very important that we protect that.

Therefore, I'm not going to say anything anymore. You won't be caught here supertime, now, not going to be home to get something to eat or anything like that, but I'm going to clue up right now and say,

yes, I hope that everybody supports this bill, and I know they will.

So I'll leave it that and I'll sit down, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

What a treat it is to hear all about all of the wonders of the Big Land, from folks in terms of hunting, and Fogo Island, which I've had the great pleasure of visiting many occasions – blueberries the size of your head, just love it.

I'm a perfect combination of a conservationist and somebody who really believes strongly in tourism. So, as my Leader here was speaking about, it's exactly what we are pitching to the world, but it's also for our own sustainability and enjoyment, to be able to live off the land and be conservationists. It's extremely important.

Ecotourism is the reason why our tourism truly exists, let's be honest, so it is something that we absolutely have to be guardians and stewards of. It is so incredibly important because it is the reason why we're here. It's the reason why people come to visit. I mean, I know that certainly in my district it's all those beautiful Jellybean Row houses and the historic District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi; however, it is the proximity to nature that truly drives people to our province and, of course, the government which promotes that heavily.

It really is something important. Again, from my own family background who are West Coasters, who grew up farming, and my mother's family who were all hunters – avid, avid hunters – and continue to hunt, this is something that is extremely important, that we continue to sustain conservation in a way that the animals, in particular, the

environment – it's all tangled in together in terms of our way of life, and I look forward to opportunities to go to the Big Land down the road. I've only gone a few times but, do you know what, every corner of our province is truly incredible.

I just wanted to speak a little bit more to the local, my district in particular, in terms of conservation and the importance of having that. Obviously, this is something that we really want to support. We want to support tightening up the language around this particular bill, but the one thing that I do want to mention is that it doesn't specifically mention birds and, of course, we know that there's been a lot of conversation right now about seagulls and migratory birds. It's been in the news a lot, especially within the City of St. John's, because, of course, we are the guardians and custodians of our landfill. That is something that, hypothetically, we're going to time out – maybe 2060 is the latest figures on when that landfill will have to get moved to another area.

Organizations like the East Coast Trail Association are doing phenomenal work in the ecotourism industry. They basically volunteer run, do all the fundraising themselves, and they provide these incredible trails that bring us to all kinds of animals, all kinds of areas on the coastline of the Avalon, the Northeast and the Southern Shore of the Avalon. It's just absolutely spectacular.

One of the issues, of course, was that we had all of this incredible landfill garbage dumped right on top of the coastline on the East Coast Trail. That kind of got me going; I got involved in the issue. I used to go out and do the cleanups on a regular basis, and it really was – they called it the plastic bag forest. So that helped, kind of, spur myself to get involved with all of these incredible community agencies to go out and clean up plastic bags off of the trail, the East Coast Trail, and also to advocate for a ban on single-use plastic bags, which of course Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador

championed and I was certainly a big voice in – as well as cosmetic pesticide use; all of those things that are unnecessary, that go into the environment, that impact not only human health but the animals that we are also trying to care for.

There's a myriad of different things that we can do, but specifically to the landfill and the issue that is happening in the landfill right now and the concerns that have come from a constituent of mine, who is a bird biologist, questioning about endangered species and wildlife that might be impacted by the cull that has to happen as a result of Transport Canada regulations for the City of St. John's. They have to. I mean, we're talking about flights that go into an area; however, how that happens and the process that happens is crucial; and to make sure that if there are outside contractors, that they are properly permitted and there's accountability and transparency in how this happens so that we don't have wildlife that is endangered getting killed in the mix while we're controlling populations for human safety.

This is a conversation that will continue to happen. I'm certainly having dialogue with the City of St. John's. They get dictated from Transport Canada about that, but the provincial government, in terms of our regulations, obviously intersects with that as well.

We'll continue to have those conversations but I think it's extremely important that we tighten up the language and that we make sure that we are being conservationists, that we are making sure to protect the area that is our sustenance.

So the bill is largely cleaning up the language, modernizing the act to address the new technology and increasing fines and other penalties for offences. Go for it; I'm all over it. I think that we really, truly need accountability. This idea of dumping stuff or poaching and stuff like that, these kinds of things are not acceptable in this

day and age. Endangering our wildlife, as per the act, defences are good and welcome, so all over that.

I'll close off my comments here about, again, any of these changes to protect our wildlife and strengthen the fines, they're good. We want to see those happen.

The only thing that we would've liked to have seen, and of course my leader here certainly referenced some of it, was a bit more focus on the protected areas. As outlined by the federal government, 25 per cent of our land should be protected areas, but we're not there yet. So let's keep pushing towards that. We're going to keep pushing towards that, certainly, with the NDP, because it's not just Labrador and it's not just Fogo Island, it's St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, it's St. John's Centre, it's all of the areas around the coastline. We all, every corner of this province, really, truly benefit from conservation efforts.

So I thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to bring that forward for my residents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act. After a lot of conversations here in the House from Members across the way, and on our side as well, it definitely is easy to get distracted this afternoon – all the talk about pastries and caribou and moose. I think I'm also getting hungry, Mr. Speaker, as we go later into the day.

I'm pleased to rise to talk about this bill. We all know, and myself, representing rural communities, how important wildlife and nature are to many of our coastal communities, especially in Newfoundland

and Labrador. The Big Land was mentioned from a number of my colleagues here in our House and how important it is to the community and the people that visit our community, because we always talk about tourism in this province and how important it is, and a lot of people visit our province for the nature and for the wildlife and what we have to offer and the sights and the sounds here that you can't really get anywhere else. You can't pay good enough money to see that, Mr. Speaker, so I was always pleased to see those people come to our province and visit and see what we have to offer.

Just to talk about this bill a little bit, obviously it's more, as my colleague from Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune mentioned earlier, administrative modernization of the bill. It's over 20 years since the bill has been brought here for changes so we're pleased to see those changes come here to the House, and we'll certainly join our colleagues in supporting those changes.

Seeing increased fines to deter activity around our endangered species is certainly important; giving more enforcement powers to our conservation officers who do a tremendous job throughout our province and the work they do to protect those species and make sure everyone is following the law. I know they certainly do work hard all across the province; and one of the key changes in the bill is the telewarrants, which gives them the opportunity to use phone or telecommunication to ensure an enforcement is not delayed when it's certainly critical to enforce those acts.

I certainly hope the Minister of Rural Development is listening to help improve cell coverage across the province, because, of course, it gives them the opportunity to use their phone to make those changes happen, but they definitely need the cellphone service to be able to access that service indeed. So I hope the Minister of Rural Development will work with the

Minister of Forestry to make sure that we can get those improvements as well.

Speaker, my hon. colleague from Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune also mentioned the piping plover, which is certainly something that is very distinguished in my district in different areas. I actually brought up some facts here today just to talk about the piping plover a little bit. It's an endangered species here in the province as outlined in the legislation.

In 2020, there were only 12 breeding pairs of piping plover in Newfoundland and Labrador, and fewer than 160 pairs in Eastern Canada. That's certainly highlighting the importance of protecting this endangered species. As I said, many visitors come to our parks where a lot of these nesting grounds are. I note that there are nesting piping plovers located in J.T. Cheeseman Provincial Park, Codroy Valley Provincial Park, Sandbanks Provincial Park and Big Barasway Wildlife Reserve.

A lot of those areas are in my district, as I mentioned, and we see many visitors coming to the Cheeseman park over the summer, along the beach, and we know how important it is to also enact decent fines because ATV usage along our beaches is a lot of the cause of concerns for the piping plover. They get destroyed when they go along the beaches on their ATV. We know we have to manage both the recreational use that most of Newfoundland and Labrador use, but also how we protect our endangered species and the piping plover.

Hunting is such an important way of life, as highlighted, but with Sandbanks Provincial Park and I think of Cheeseman's Provincial Park, what amazing opportunities for tourism in our province. I hear the Members opposite, especially the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, talk about conservation and how important it is to the province. I think about – I'll use Sandbanks Provincial Park, for example, with the piping

plover endangered species around there – what could happen with a national park? How much investment that could bring to the area to see funding dollars go into that area to make improvements to the park, increase tourism, as mentioned by the minister, she's looking to see to make it the capital of the world.

Those are things to help in that case, Mr. Speaker, but it's very unfortunate that we don't have a feasibility study to see what kind of options we could have on conservation. That would have been a great idea, to see the government to finish something that we started long ago. That was mentioned by my hon. colleague here in the House as well, a feasibility study that we could actually look at and see what a conservation area looks like, what improvements we can make to our parks, creating more national parks – we always think of Gros Morne and what value that brings to the province.

So if only there was a feasibility study that we could finish to see exactly what everything would look like, that would be so great for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and certainly my area in Burgeo - La Poile.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'll certainly take my seat. I just wanted to get up and make a couple of points on this bill. Of course, we know, to reiterate, it's modernizing language, strengthening the enforcement and reinforcing our responsibility to safeguard the species that define our province's natural landscape. We certainly support that motion here on this side of the House and look forward to more debate on this bill.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, if the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands speaks now, he will close the debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Thanks again, Speaker.

I do appreciate all the comments, all the conversation regarding this bill. A lot of the Members spoke passionately about our province and a willingness to protect our endangered species, and that is certainly appreciated. I certainly appreciate all the support that all the Members portrayed in this bill. I do commend them for those efforts.

The Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune complimented the staff, and thank you very much for that because our staff do work hard, especially our people in our enforcement officers. It's dangerous work. It's long work. They work very, very hard in our department, and we certainly appreciate all the work that each and every one does.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: He mentions that the reasons why for this legislation, and it is certainly just to bring the legislation up to date, some of it is back a long while, and to clean up some of the language that is in the bill and change the time periods to get some of this done from 90 days to 100 days, which gives the department a lot more time to look at those species and move those acts through.

He also mentioned the endangered species certainly, and the reasons that we need to protect them, because they are the future and we need to find a balance within our ecosystems to provide a balance in the protected species. He also mentioned our wildlife officers, again, and he mentioned the safety provisions for keeping them safe while they do their important jobs and, of course, the telewarrant is going to be one of the big reasons for that. For the telewarrant, they can do their jobs effectively and have the provisions there for those officers to be

able to do that job, because we do appreciate everything they do, and all the work within all our departments, especially in this department.

The Member for Lake Melville, I certainly appreciate his comments regarding the way of life in Labrador. He spoke very eloquently about the life in Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. FORSEY: – and he stressed the need of protecting our endangered species and gave many reasons why; so that we can have those species around for a long, long time and so that our generations can certainly take part in the next era –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. FORSEY: – of hunting and fishing.

SPEAKER: The only person I want to hear right now is the minister who is speaking.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Take your conversations outside. You're disrupting the House.

The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: I can tell, certainly, that he's a very proud Labradorian and a very proud steward of our protected species in this province, and I appreciate it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Especially mentioning that we all need to be stewards of our resources, and good points – excellent points – with regard to bringing this bill forward. I really appreciate those comments.

The Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair also contributed to the debate and related to the hunting and trapping that she's used to do. It's good to hear that those stories are portrayed and passed down, and her knowledge of the hunting and trapping in that area, certainly, and I also appreciated the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

P. FORSEY: Again, Speaker, she mentioned those areas and the appreciation for our endangered species and the reasons why. That's the kind of things we want to hear.

She also was concerned, I know she was also part of this department a few months back, and she had reasonable ground for the officers, for search warrants. The officers know illegal activity and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. FORSEY: – and they know when to be looking for those types of activities and what to do. So the telewarrant and the other protections for them, that will help them along the way and help them certainly do their jobs.

The Member for St. John's Centre, I appreciate your hunting and fishing – especially fishing – part of it. I love the fishing myself, especially on the Exploits River, so I know exactly what you're saying. I hope we have years and years to come to do that.

In his interest in protecting our enforcement officers and the provisions that we provide to the enforcement officers to have the equipment that they need, right now, we

have the wildlife officers and we have 92 field positions, we have 65 active with recruitment underway and we have approximately 100 positions in the division. We have currently 49 active trucks and we have the *Wild Life Act* inspections. The number of inspections, 10,267; investigations, 531. So they are continuing with their provisions to the wildlife officers.

Again, he did mention protected areas. I heard that from a couple of people. In this bill, of course, we wouldn't be looking at protected areas; we're looking at protected species. Protected areas certainly would come under another department, so it certainly wouldn't be mentioned in this bill. That's why we wouldn't touch the protected areas in this bill. We had no reasons, it's for protected species.

The Member for Fogo - Cape Freels –

AN HON. MEMBER: Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

P. FORSEY: Fogo Island - Cape Freels, okay.

The reason I got stumped on Fogo Island - Cape Freels is because you mentioned the Cape off Joe Batt's Arm. My wife's ancestors came from the Cape, so I do know what he's talking about sometimes.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's a shoutout to them.

P. FORSEY: Yes, it's a shoutout, yes.

J. MCKENNA: Cape Cove.

P. FORSEY: Cape Cove.

Anyway, we heard of his hunting and fishing stories and the need to protect the endangered species so that we could pass along those stories for years to come. It's nice to hear those stories and the way he told them and appreciated being able to

protect our species so that it's there for years to come.

Again, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi mentioned the need for our protected species, the need to bring this bill into force and upgrade our standards and upgrade our languages and the need to bring everything up to standard. I appreciate you talked about protecting our ecosystem, which is good, and it was great for tourism. Sure it is; it's great for tourism that people know that we have the different types of species here and they're protected, and they can come and see some of those species. Those are species that have been there for a long time, for not only us to enjoy, but people from away can come and enjoy the species with them. We'll be glad to share them with them.

The Member for Burgeo - La Poile, he talked about endangered species, of course, and how important it is to all rural areas. The endangered species is important to our rural areas. It's our way of life. It's what the people grew up with that we need to protect now. We certainly appreciate the comments on the protected areas.

That's what this bill is all about, it's to, again, bring the legislation up to standards, bring the act up to standards and having the equipment and the enforcement. Everybody agreed with the fines, because we know how important it is to protect our areas, and part of that is to make sure that it's not done. Hopefully by increasing some of those fines, it will cut down on some of the illegal activity that's done to those endangered species so that the fines certainly deter them from not taking part in endangering our species.

Hopefully that will play a big part. I know it would certainly be a big part in my mind when I see some of those fines, but it's a need there and it also helps the enforcement officers. The more we can increase the fines and deter that activity, it certainly decreases the danger of the

enforcement officers for doing their work. If people are deterred from it, then they're not endangering our species and, with regard to the fines, just don't endanger our species. That's the thing with that.

I'm glad that people have commented on the fines and approved that, so most everything in this bill, I think, we've got approval – great, massed approval – from whoever spoke on this bill. With that, Speaker, I'll take my seat, and I'll look forward to questions in Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 7 be now read a second 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 is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act. (Bill 7)

SPEAKER: The bill has now been read a second time.

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act," read a second

time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 7)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Burgeo - La Poile, that this House now be adjourned.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

This House do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, being Tuesday, March 17, at 1:30 p.m.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, at 1:30 p.m.