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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA*

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**SPEAKER (Lane):** Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I will now rule on the point of privilege raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition on Wednesday, March 11, 2026.

In raising the point of privilege, the Member states that after I confirmed an advanced ruling of the amendment to the private Member's resolution being debated, a meeting took place between myself, as Speaker, and a Member of the government during the ensuing recess without Members from the Official Opposition or the Third Party. The Member states that this impaired the ability of other Members to do their jobs as parliamentarians.

Freedom from interference and obstruction is one of the parliamentary privileges enjoyed by individual Members. In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, fourth edition, at paragraph 3.72, it is noted that "Speakers have consistently upheld that the House must protect its right to benefit from the service of its members against any intimidation, obstruction or interference. In order to find a prima facie breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the member's claim that they have been impeded in the performance of their constitutional functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding in Parliament."

In the matter at hand, while there was some confusion in this hon. House as to the proper procedures regarding providing notice of the amendment, debate on the amendment and the private Member's resolution continued. I do not find that any Member was impeded in the performance of their parliamentary role or responsibility and find that a prima facie point of privilege has not been established.

However, I do acknowledge the Leader of the Official Opposition's point regarding the importance of ensuring that all Members have the ability to speak to procedural matters before the House. There was no intention on my part to exclude or obstruct any Member from the discussion. The purpose of the recess was to confer with Table Officers to ensure proper procedure had been followed. Taking on the role of Speaker, I fully understand it's my role to be fair and impartial. I intend to continue to do just that.

In the public gallery today, I would like to welcome Sheri Philpott, who is the subject of a Member's statement.

Welcome, Sheri.

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

### Statements by Members

**SPEAKER:** Today we'll hear Member's statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Humber - Bay of Islands, Labrador West, St. George's - Humber, Lewisporte - Twillingate and Mount Pearl North.

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

**E. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, on February 15, 2025, the MSC *Baltic III* went aground in Cedar Cove, thankfully with no life lost and, to date, no environmental issues.

The Coast Guard, Search and Rescue and many others have done a tremendous job on this potentially disastrous shipwreck. I want to recognize the unsung heroes who stepped up to help everyone involved. On that day, St. James ACW in Lark Harbour opened the church basement to keep people warm, serve refreshments and food.

Under the guidance of Rev. Effie Organ, the ladies, which include Bernice Sheppard, Donna Sheppard, Doreen Wheeler,

Georgina Park, Helen Joyce, Ellen Park, Sharon Parsons, Karen Darrigan, Lisa Childs, Marie Park, Marina Park, Marina Sheppard, Nicola Parker, Phyllis Mollon, Sheila Thorne, Susan Kendell, Valerie Park and Ruth Traverse, stepped forward. They provided shelter, daily hot meals – even on Christmas Day – hot drinks, helped with accommodations, advice and provided comfort to all who worked on this shipwreck since last February, every day, up to now. They stepped up and made them feel at home.

Thank you all for stepping up in this time of need and playing such a huge role to everyone involved.

I ask all Members to join me in thanking the St. James ACW for their dedicated contribution.

Thank you.

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

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

**J. POWER:** Speaker, I rise in this house today to honour all communities in Labrador and the people who live there. I was deeply honoured, along with three hon. Members for Labrador, to attend the closing ceremonies for the Labrador Winter Games this past weekend.

The Labrador Winter Games, also known as the Friendship Games, is a special event that brings Labradorians together like no other. These Games have become an incredible celebration of sports, culture and pride. These Games were not built by one person or one group alone; they were built by entire communities working together with a shared vision and passion.

This year's Games will surely add to the positive memories that have been experienced by athletes, community officials, supporters, volunteers and anyone

who supports the Games in any way. From frozen trails and packed arenas to roaring crowds, proud podium moments, broken records and athletes pushed their limits while communities came together in the true spirit of these games.

A special thank you to the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, the staff, volunteers, sponsors, board members and the athletes who made this event another great success for all of Labrador. I want to congratulate all the communities on successful Games, but I especially want to congratulate my hometown of Labrador City on winning the Labrador Cup.

The 2026 Labrador Games remind us of all of what makes Labrador special. Again, thank you to everyone who played a role in making these Games successful, and we hope to see them all in 2029.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

**H. CORMIER:** Speaker, I rise today to recognize the tremendous success of this year's Codroy Valley Winter Carnival, a celebration that once again brought communities across the Codroy Valley together in the true spirit of winter and friendship.

Each year, this carnival reminds us of the strong community pride that exists throughout the valley. From family activities and outdoor events to community gatherings and friendly competitions, there was something for everyone to enjoy. It was wonderful to see residents, volunteers and visitors come together to celebrate everything that makes the Codroy Valley such a special place to live.

Events like the Codroy Valley Winter Carnival would simply not happen without

the hard work and dedication of volunteers. The organizing committee, local groups, sponsors and community members who give their time and energy deserve our sincere thanks and recognition. Their commitment ensures that this tradition continues to grow and brings joy to families year after year.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating everyone involved in making this year's Codroy Valley Winter Carnival another outstanding success.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

**M. BUTT:** Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize a true living legend in my district, Michael Austin, known to so many as Mike.

As a dedicated Special Olympian, Mike has proudly represented his club, the Gander Wings Special Olympics, and competed nationally as a member of Team NL. In both 2010 and 2014, he travelled to London, Ontario, and Vancouver, BC, where he delivered outstanding performances and brought home medals for Newfoundland and Labrador. It was at these national games that Mike earned the nickname "Awesome Mike" for his team spirit and support for his fellow teammates.

Over the years, Mike has accumulated more than 200 medals, countless awards and certificates for his many achievements, but Mike's passion extends beyond the field of play.

A devoted Toronto Maple Leafs fan and an enthusiastic supporter of all things hockey in his community, his presence at the local stadium became so iconic that the Town of

Lewisporte renamed it the Mike Austin Arena in his honour.

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

**M. BUTT:** So, Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating Mike Austin of Lewisporte for his remarkable achievements and his enduring dedication to local sport.

Thank you.

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

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

**L. STOYLES:** Speaker, I rise to recognize another amazing community leader whose dedication and service has made a meaningful impact in our community, Ms. Sheri Philpott.

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

**L. STOYLES:** Mount Pearl was built on community leaders and Sheri represents the very best when it comes to her dedication to the groups and organizations that she serves.

As commanding officer of the 807 Mount Pearl Kinsmen Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron, she spent many years mentoring young cadets and contributing significantly to the cadet movement. Her commitment extends well beyond this role. She has been a long-time volunteer with the Mount Pearl Frosty Festival and worked closely with the staff to plan many community events. She also volunteers time to organizations such as Steps for Life, the Canada Summer Games and the U18 Women's National Hockey Championships. Recently, Sheri joined the Mount Pearl Kinettes, where she quickly stepped into leadership positions as club secretary, Zone D secretary and as a member of the national Kin Education working group.

This year, Sheri was chosen as Mount Pearl's Citizen of the Year, which was no surprise.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Sheri Philpott and thanking her for outstanding community service.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Speaker, dedicating over 30 years to supporting people at their most vulnerable moment takes a person with incredible empathy, compassion and dedication. This is exactly what Anita Stanley has done as she ends her career with the Victim Services program and starts her retirement tomorrow.

Starting her career in 1995 in Youth Corrections in Springdale, Anita moved into Victim Services in Clarenville in 1997 and hasn't looked back. She came to St. John's and has been manager of the program for the past 18 years. Overseeing 11 Victim Services offices across the province, Anita has supported an incredible staff who provide services to victims of crime in Newfoundland and Labrador. I would like to thank them for their hard work.

Speaker, the work done by Victim Services is often difficult and can take an emotional toll. Anita's strong leadership, as well as her kindness and calming approach, has benefited the program and the staff to be able to support their many complex files. We have been extremely lucky to have Anita serve the people of the province, and we thank her for her decades of work.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join

me in congratulating Anita and wish her all the best in this next chapter of her life.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

On behalf of our caucus, I am pleased to recognized Anita Stanley on her retirement after more than 30 years of public service.

Supporting victims of crime is among the most challenging and important work in our justice system. It requires not only professionalism but deep empathy, resilience and compassion, all qualities that Anita has demonstrated throughout her career. Victim Services supports individuals at their most vulnerable, which means staff must be at their very best every single day. At the heart of that work was Anita leading a team that faces the darkest realities in our province. Her leadership helped ensure that victims were not met with judgment but with support and, she has said, with the understanding that it is a process and it's a journey, but they will get there.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I thank Anita for her decades of service to this province. Her contributions have made a meaningful difference to individuals across our great province. We wish her the very best in her retirement and in the next chapter ahead.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

On behalf of the NDP, I want to congratulate Ms. Stanley for her care and deep devotion to her work and the people she serves.

We would also like to take this opportunity to ask this government to make a firm commitment to re-establish a centre that specifically helps children who have suffered violence. Child advocacy centres help our most vulnerable navigate what could be a difficult and complex process, and it would help demonstrate this government's commitment to making our communities safer.

All the best in your new adventures.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The Speaker wasn't made aware of the fact that Ms. Stanley is here. I think she is, from what I can tell. So, Ms. Stanley, welcome to our Chamber. I would have recognized you from the start, had I known you were here. But welcome and congratulations.

Thank you.

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

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

**A. BARBOUR:** Speaker, the 2025 tourism season is something to be celebrated!

With over \$1.4 billion in total revenue, tourism is a major industry in our province, supporting jobs, local businesses and important public sectors.

In 2025, there has been a 4 per cent increase in total of air and auto visitors to the province, compared to 2024.

We also had an exponential cruise season welcoming 100,000 passengers.

Additionally, visitations, revenue and occupancy of provincial parks reached all-time highs in 2025, continuing steady growth since 2022.

Spring and fall visitations continue to grow helping us further achieve the goal of extending the peak tourism season and becoming a year-round destination.

Speaker, none of this would be possible without the stakeholders and the operators. They celebrate our identity, preserve our culture and share our story with the world.

Together, we're building a province where people don't just come from, but they come to.

A strong visitor economy strengthens the province's reputation as a great place to live, work, visit and invest, while generating a solid tax base and supporting communities.

Our new government will make Newfoundland and Labrador the tourism capital of Canada, and we are well on our way!

Thank you.

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

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

**B. FORD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We join the minister in celebrating the heartbeat of our province, the tourism industry and the dedicated people who make it thrive. While the minister today highlights several favourable indicators regarding the growth in visitor numbers, it's important to note that these successes are the direct result of the strategic investments made by the previous administration.

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

**B. FORD:** Rather than coasting on these established results, it is now time for this government to deliver on its own. Industry associations and local operators continue to call for reliable air and ferry access. They're also calling on government for help with their labour market crisis. We expect these critical details to appear in the new tourism strategy promised in your Conservative Blue Book, and to see financial resources allocated in the upcoming budget.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, we wish all operators and tourism attractions across Newfoundland and Labrador a very successful 2026.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Speaker, I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement and, of course, the NDP, we recognize the vital role of our tourism sector as a powerful force in preserving and celebrating our incredible culture and heritage.

Therefore, we call once again on this government to take meaningful action to support the very people who bring our tourism sector and our culture to life. If they truly value our cultural sector, they need to prove it with a real funded plan to support working artists here at home.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

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

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

The Conservatives have brought forward legislation to this House to keep the 2020 Liberal tax cut, but we've brought forward an amendment to actually cut the tax.

Will the Premier support the Liberal motion to actually cut the tax and give Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the relief that they were promised?

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, let me start by saying we are actually cutting the tax. Why do I say that? Because while the former Liberal government talks about they were going to continue to have the tax cut in place, they didn't live up to that commitment. What they're saying is not what they had – they had no budget brought forward to continue with that tax cut. But as a Progressive Conservative government, in our Blue Book and in our legislation, we are going to make that tax cut permanent, not just for this year, for next year, the year after that and the year after that.

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

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

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

A 7.5-cent tax today is the same as a 7.5-cent tax on April 1. It is the exact same. There will be no relief – there will be no relief.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**J. HOGAN:** However, we've given them the opportunity, the levers that the Premier

spoke about before he was in government, that he wanted to pull. Well now, Speaker, he can pull those levers.

So will you vote for the amendment to give people real tax relief?

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, as I just said, there was no plan to continue with this tax cut. Zero dollars allocated for it, but what are we doing? We're going to put \$67 million in budget this year, next year, the year after and the year after to make sure that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador continue to have the lowest provincial sales tax on gasoline in the entire country.

When it comes to measures to put more money back in people's pockets, let's talk about what we all are going to do and continue to do, including the 20 per cent increase in the Seniors' Benefit and making what the people pay on their income tax, the first \$15,000 of income will be tax free.

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

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

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

Again, their plans were things they talked about before they were elected, like the tax break that they did not give people in 2025 because they were afraid to come to this House of Assembly.

I ask the Premier, his Minister of Finance told everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador the oil went down. Well, that lasted about 12 hours. Oil has gone up consistently since then, meaning more

revenue for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

So will the Premier do what he keeps talking about and give Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the tax cut that they promised in the election?

I remind them, Speaker, it's not about the Liberals. I know they're a little bit obsessed with us, but it's about them delivering for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** I can assure the Member opposite that we're not obsessed with Liberal policy.

What we are obsessed with, Speaker, is making sure that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have access to better health care, lower taxes and safer communities for all of us. That's what we're obsessed about.

Let me continue on, though, and talk about the other things they didn't put in their budget. What about the home heat rebate program? They forgot to tell everybody that they had no intention of putting that back in the budget. What about the tax fees on Motor Registration that they had nothing put in the budget for?

All of these measures that they talk about to reduce taxes, they had no plan to continue with that. We will.

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

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

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

When you continue to answer every single question with a non-answer about the Liberals, I would call that obsession.

Let's talk about some other good Liberal policies, like the \$10-a-day daycare that we created, the 11,000 spaces that we have today and a plan for 2,000 more spaces by the end of the current schoolyear. Not what I would call a mess by any stretch, Speaker.

Can the Conservative government commit to families that there will be increased funding for the provision of more needed, high-quality daycare spaces in the 2026 budget?

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, let me address the preamble quickly to say what we are talking about are things that they said they're going to do, which they never did, and had no intention of reducing the taxes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When it comes to child care and \$10-a-day daycare, absolutely we will make sure there are increased spaces for families to have access to daycare. We're also going to review the regulations that surround our daycare because right now that industry is overregulated. We need make sure we cut down on the red tape but still protect the interests of our children.

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

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

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

The mess that his minister talked about is saving families with one child \$13,000 a year.

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

**J. HOGAN:** Far from a mess, but again the Conservatives promised in their election platform that they would support early childhood educators with a pension plans and sick leave – again, their promise. Last week of course the minister admits that he is only going to look at it and said he would not deliver. Child Care Now NL says ECEs can't wait.

Will the Premier instruct his minister to follow his campaign commitment – the answer is probably going to be no – to give pensions and benefits to ECEs this year before it's too late and they all leave the system?

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

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

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

I will note that, in our commitments, in our plan, we speak to pensions and we speak to sick leave and wages. I will note that, in the Liberal plan, it's not even mentioned – not even mentioned. I will also say in the Liberal plan, they talk about creating 2,000 more spaces.

Now, we know they don't like the word mess but when you promise 2,000 more spaces and you have no money for them, I don't know where it's coming from. I don't know what to say about that. It's an empty promise, and this is too serious an issue for our families and our children. This is too serious an issue to make empty promises.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I would say to the minister, he's holding up his blue book. If he's calling that entire blue book empty promises, it's going to be a long four years

for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That promise was made in the blue book. He held up the blue book last week and said: It's there in black and white.

I ask a very simple question, will the promises for ECEs' pension and wage increases make it from the blue book to the budget or will people have to leave the system because they won't get the empty promises that this minister promised?

**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.

What I held up was empty; it's the Liberal plan. That is the Liberal plan.

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

**P. DINN:** What I can hold up is the blue book plan which actually says, in black and white, that we will look at pensions and sick leave for our early childhood educators. That's there in black and white – black and white.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It's a prop.

**P. DINN:** And I agree with the Member opposite, it is a prop. Thank you for that, but that's all I can say.

Early childhood educators, they're needed, and our early child care facilities are needed and our early child care –

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

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** The minister doesn't seem to understand the seriousness of what's happening here. Early childhood educators were promised pensions and wage increases, and he continues to focus on the blue book.

Minister, it is the budget where the money needs to go, so will you promise – stop talking about Liberals. In your three answers so far, you gave three answers about the Liberals. It is your blue book that is the mandate of this government. It is your blue book that your Premier has said is the policy of the Department of Education.

Will the promises in the blue book make it into the budget or will you not deliver on the promises that you've made?

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, I'm glad the Members opposite recognize that we are the government; we are the government because the people of Newfoundland and Labrador put their faith in us.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** While we talk about everything that we're going to do already, they have had 10 years, Speaker – 10 years – of not doing it.

But let me tell you, we will commit to the things that we've put in our blue book and we will get them done.

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

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

**B. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind the hon. Member that they're one-eighth of the way through their mandate now – right

now today – start to get to work and do things for the people of this province.

Parents around our province are still receiving letters from child care centres warning them that the new policy the Conservatives have put forward, and its shortcomings, many may result in closing centres or fewer spaces. Child care operators are asking for a 60-day extension.

Since the minister failed to live up to his commitment of a 45-day review period, will the Premier commit to the parents of this province that he will update this policy urgently, before the current agreement expires on March 31?

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

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

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

Again, our youth, our infants, our early child care operators, very, very valuable for this province, and we're going to continue to work with them.

Policies are policies; we have them out there for consultations. We've extended the consultation and we will continue to work with them throughout the year to amend and revise those policies so that we have the most effective program available for early childhood educators, operators and, most importantly, the families and the children.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

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

In the election platform, the Progressive Conservatives promised to – quote – fix the roads, fix the potholes and repair the pavement, but last week it was revealed

that the Conservatives are actually cutting – cutting – the roads budget by \$66 million.

Why is the Minister of Transportation now revising his promise and instead cutting the funding for our provincial highways?

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

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

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

I remind the Member opposite we're rightsizing a budget. You can put a budget up for a trillion dollars, but if you can only get \$250 million of the work done, it only looks good on paper.

Last year was the biggest budget ever and it was \$270 million worth of work done. This year, we're at \$250 million. Some of last year's work was blown up because of Team Gushue so, in actual fact, this is probably one of the largest roadwork programs ever issued by the province.

So I don't know what the complaints are.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

**J. KORAB:** Speaker, it's the Team Korab Highway, but we'll get to that later.

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

**J. KORAB:** I had to go there.

Rightsizing a budget, Speaker, is a fancy way to say cuts in the budget. The Minister of Transportation admitted the Conservatives were wrong about their estimates for 24-hour snow clearing because the prices went up.

Why does the minister now think he can get more pavement done for less money?

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

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, it's not about getting more paving done for less money, it's about rightsizing a budget and making sure it's sustainable for the out-years, which they never prepared for that.

There was a lot of money given for a short period of time, the work wasn't getting done so it all looked good on paper. We're doing the responsible thing and we're going to bring this out to out-years. There will be roadwork done for all of the province, for all of us, but we will also do roadwork in a more fair manner; that it doesn't matter what political stripe you are, roads do deteriorate.

So we're going to do them where the roads matter. Where roads are bad, we're going to give a concentrated effort to try to get the roads safe for all of us.

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

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

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

It's very rich to hear the Member say that it's not a political plan when hardly any Liberal districts got any roadwork in this plan that was just announced last week. It's no wonder they didn't open up the House last fall. We are into week three and no questions.

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

**P. PARSONS:** The chirping, Speaker, I can't even hear myself think over there. They're all excited.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**P. PARSONS:** As usual we're hearing excuses and blame. We now know the Tory times are hard times, tough times, but after so much talk about protecting rural communities, why has the minister decided that the roads and highways that connect them should be on the chopping block?

Shameful.

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

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

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

Speaker, I said this on the media, I think it was Friday, I went in the department with eyes wide open and I asked officials – the experts that know their stuff – can you list off the worst roads in the province by district?

Ironically, seven or eight of the top roads were in PC districts so, lo and behold, what did I have to do? For 10 years we watched the Liberal districts getting pork barrelled but, all of a sudden now, because I'm trying to play catch-up and find a balance, I'm getting really criticized. I'll never get criticized for doing what's right and doing what's fair for the people of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the minister just said a lot of money was given. That money was committed because the industry and heavy civil asked for it. We listened to them, and we delivered.

Last week's news conference, the minister stated \$250 million for roadwork this season, and I'm hearing from contractors – actual contractors – and from mayors alike who are very worried and concerned about this cut.

Can the minister tell me how much the twinning roadwork from Bishop's Falls to Grand Falls-Windsor, and Whitbourne to Chance Cove, will cost? How much will it cost, and is that cost in your \$250-million Roads Plan?

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

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

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

I remind the Member opposite – I don't know if everyone out there knows – but during the election he used to have signs up, pictures of roadwork – if you want more roadwork done, vote for this Member. That was his cliché, that was his election bid.

So you mean to tell me I'm going to go down there, that place needs a lot more roadwork, sure it do. But I think that the Member opposite, when he was in this seat, looked after his district quite well. So I don't think he needs to be getting on with criticizing us for our plan.

As for Bishop's Falls to Grand Falls, that would be the twinning, and we're not going to disclose the price to that today. We've got to wait for the bidders. Do you want me to tell the price to the bidders and lower the price, Member? I say to the Member opposite, you know the difference of that.

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

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

**E. LOVELESS:** That answer actually left me really confused, and to talk about the signs

and everything else, I don't apologize for paving good roads in a rural district that your Premier said we're going to build up rural Newfoundland and Labrador – well, you just cut rural Newfoundland and Labrador by not putting anything in my district.

**SPEAKER:** I ask the Member to address the Speaker.

**E. LOVELESS:** Was the cost of the twinning included in your \$250 million estimate? Can you tell the House here?

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, I think he should ask some of my colleagues here, while he was bragging about the roadwork in his district, how much roadwork they got done. Because I think it's very disingenuous, it's insulting to the people of this House when this Member stands up and gets in the soapbox every day at that. I think it's very disingenuous.

If he looked at the Roads Plan, you will see that Bishop's Falls to Grand Falls twinning is there. But I will also caution, this all depends on our prices we get back. We're very cognizant we've got a budget to manage and as our Minister of Finance says, we want to spend wisely; we want to see what the prices are of the roadwork.

I've made that clear to industry; I spoke publicly on it many times. They are well aware. We've got to manage the purse. It's a billion-dollar deficit we're facing, but we're going to try to do the best of ability to get what roads done, done.

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

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Mr. Speaker, it's a simple question.

Is the twinning work included in your \$250-million budget for this year's roadwork. Answer the question. It's a simple question, yes or no?

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, I think I've answered that question numerous times here. He gets thrown off whenever I throws a question about him, back in his own district, and how much he pork barrelled his own district, and other ministers over the years did on that side of the House.

I'm going to look after everyone in the province. I don't care what stripe you are –

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

**B. PETTEN:** – if your roads need to be done, they will be done.

They may not get done the year, but they'll done next year and the year after and the year after, because we believe in helping all of us.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** I think the answer was clear that they don't know. The Minister of Finance looked at the Minister of TI; the Minister of TI looked at the Minister of Finance.

It's a simple question: Is it in the \$250-million budget or not?

It's not how much you're going to spend, Minister; it's how much is in the budget.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**J. HOGAN:** I'll give you another opportunity.

Is the twinning in the \$250-million budget, yes or no?

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, my only response to the Leader of the Opposition and to that is read the document. It's there in the document. If he can read the document, it's clear to see. Otherwise, he'll have to stay tuned.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Four chances for yes or no, and we got a non-answer four times, Speaker.

Last week, the Minister of Energy lost control and accidentally blurted out what we've known all along, that the Conservatives believe their election gave them a mandate to walk away from \$225 billion in the Churchill Falls MOU; however, we know now that they don't have the courage to actually tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians what they believe. They are waiting for the biased review panel costing, three members, \$475 an hour to do their dirty work.

Why won't the minister tell everyone the truth and that they do not want to proceed and never have wanted to proceed with the Churchill Falls MOU?

**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.

We've been pretty clear on the importance of not only the Gull Island, but Churchill Falls expansion. We believe it's essential. We've heard, as a party and in our Blue Book, the electrification of Labrador is key for us.

We have not hid anything away. We were very open to the public when we said we will be appointing an independent review panel, unlike his former boss that he had working there, but he doesn't stand up and tell that to anyone. He put his former boss there and drove them away. We had a Member resign because they changed the outline mid-stream. They changed what the review panel was supposed to do in the middle of it, but he doesn't have the courage to stand up and tell the public that.

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

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

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

I believe he's talking about someone that was appointed through the Independent Appointments Commission, but we'll leave that for another day.

Last week, eight provinces and two territories signed an agreement to build new electricity infrastructure and create a national grid; however, who was left out of that? Newfoundland and Labrador.

Can the minister explain why he thinks we should be left out of a national energy grid strategy?

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

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

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unlike Pharmacare, where we're totally left out of it because of this group over here, we will not be left out of the national energy grid. Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador did not sign on because Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador are waiting to see the results of the independent review panel. We have had discussions with the federal government. They know our interest in a national energy corridor and a national energy grid. They know we're here for them and we know they're here for us.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, interesting to hear from the minister that he is in discussions with Quebec about a national energy grid. I'd like him to tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians what that means because we've heard that they're not negotiating on the Churchill Falls as we wait for the bias review panel to come back.

So please enlighten Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on the discussions with Quebec about the national energy grid and where Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador fit into that?

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

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

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just like their Facebook page, they've got comments turned off.

What I said was Quebec didn't sign on or we didn't sign on. We are talking with the federal government. The federal government understands that we have the ability to supply strategic oil reserves. They understand where we stand with our oil

capabilities, with our hydro capabilities, with our natural gas capabilities, all things that these guys failed to deliver.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** I would, again, suggest the minister get off Facebook and start doing some real work and tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians what the plan is because when he spoke, when he was on this side of the House, he talked about other proponents. He didn't want to deal with Hydro-Québec but now he's saying they're talking to Hydro-Québec and Quebec about a national energy strategy. Again, all over the place.

Minister, I would just ask Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and you to tell people why you won't answer my letter when I outlined all those questions right after the election, written to you and I will remind you that you sat here and you said you'd answer any question, anytime about anything. Before the election, very different minister than the one we see after the election, Speaker.

**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.

Much different Leader of the Opposition than we had before too. It's a big trade-off.

Our plan is quite simple. Our plan is extremely simple. Our plan is better health care. Our plan is lower taxes. Our plan is safer communities. Our plan –

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

**L. PARROTT:** – is that after 10 years of nothing, to put Newfoundlanders and Labradorians first. That is our plan and that is exactly what this Premier is going to deliver.

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

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, better health care, they cancelled a hospital; lower taxes, they won't go for our amendment; safer communities, they closed courthouses across Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**F. HUTTON:** How's it working out for Newfoundland and Labrador so far?

Mr. Speaker, last week, the federal Environment minister said that an agreement had not been worked out on the \$1-billion payment to the United Nations that is required for the Bay du Nord project to proceed in international waters. That is in direct contradiction of both the federal Fisheries minister and this provincial government.

Why is the Premier acting as if this is a deal that's already been done when we don't know who's paying that billion dollars? Will our taxpayers be on the hook for that?

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

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

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The simple answer is no. The federal government have committed to taking responsibility for the UNCLOS, and if you don't know what that is, that's the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. They are paying it in its entirety. It's not the proponent. It's not the provincial

government. It's the federal government. It is the federal government who will be paying for this fee.

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

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, that is a little bit different than what I heard the minister say in the news conference a couple of weeks ago when he talked about this, when he said he wasn't sure, but he doesn't think it's going to be us, or words to that effect.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Possibly.

**F. HUTTON:** Possibly – we hear the word “possibly” a lot.

So, again, I will ask the Premier or the minister: Are you just going to table this document for us once and for all, the agreement? Please, we know you've seen it, and you're the experts, but please let the rest of us have a look.

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

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

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

**L. PARROTT:** Always confused by Opposition, Mr. Speaker. Last week he wasn't allowed into the news conference; this week he's quoting things from it as if he was there. I don't understand whether he was there or whether he wasn't.

The other thing I will say is that this agreement is inside the benefits agreement, which this Premier has committed to tabling once it's reviewed. I will also say that this previous administration never once in 10 years tabled a benefits agreement for anyone in this province – never once.

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

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

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

Speaker, last week the Minister of Education said pensions, sick leave and other benefits for ECEs are part of his party's four-year plan. Many ECEs are already struggling and cannot wait four years. We did have a costed plan for this in our platform.

So I ask the Premier: Will there be anything in this budget for ECEs, and if not, when in the next four years can we expect to see the plan?

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

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you, and I thank the Member for his question.

ECEs, I've said it already in the House today, they're key and central to our early childhood education program, no doubt about it. We've had discussions with the various groups. I'll continue to have those discussions.

In fact, moving forward, we'll be establishing very soon a provincial advisory committee on child care, which will involve early child care educators and other stakeholders, and it's from that committee that we'll address issues that need to be addressed within the early child care and education system in this province, and we'll take that feedback and work towards making our system a much better system.

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

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

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

Discussions and feedback will not help anyone plan for retirement.

Speaker, meanwhile, this government is already planning to dole out millions of dollars of public money in this budget to subsidize Equinor.

I ask the Premier: Why is his government refusing to invest provincial funds in our child care workers but extending corporate welfare to highly profitable, multi-billion-dollar oil companies?

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, we had made a deal on Bay du Nord that will see Newfoundlanders and Labradorians benefit for years to come. We've created not just a project, we've created a new industry that will see a new industry started in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We are not simply providing a subsidy to Equinor, but let me tell you what we are doing. We are including in our budget, you will see more child care spaces; you will see more investment in daycare. We will turn around and make sure, as I said earlier, that we take a look at the regulations that are ruling our daycare industry right now and child care.

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

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Speaker, early childhood educators have told MHAs that many are struggling to use the portal and have limited time to learn.

So I ask the minister who recognized the need: Will you commit to not cut off operators who do not get this done by April 1 that would harm our already precarious child care system?

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

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you for the question.

Speaker, we are listening to our early child care educators in our sector. As a result of that, we have extended the process on the Early Learning Gateway program. We have extended it to at least six months to offer an opportunity to help those who are having troubles with it and to help them transition into it.

So we are listening and we have extended it.

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

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Speaker, the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival is a cornerstone of our culture, celebrating our music, our traditions and the strong sense of community that defines our province.

So in the spirit of St. Patrick's Day, I ask the minister, will this government commit to working with the interim board to ensure that the Folk Festival goes ahead this summer?

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

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

**A. BARBOUR:** Speaker, the Folk Festival is approaching its anniversary this year, 50th anniversary. We know that the Folk Festival is something that is like a true – just a really beautiful thing to have in our province because it really highlights our heritage and our culture. It's very important to us and we really hope to see the Folk Festival back again.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Speaker, we still have not a definitive answer on releasing the All-Party Committee report on basic income. Last week, the Minister of Finance cast doubt on its release, saying that doing so would be moot.

I ask the Premier: In the interest of transparency, will he release the report or will we have to do it for him?

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I referenced the word "moot" or not, just that the first recommendation, I would think, may have been an exercise in futility knowing that the federal government already has.

There is no debating the value of a basic income. Nobody in this House is going to debate or diminish what the value of a basic income would be. We stated on our Question Period last week that we will surely release that report. We'll release the report in short course. That would be the answer.

Again, because we do value any work that would be done to make sure to improve the affordability of the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### Tabling of Documents

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

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

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I am tabling four Orders-in-Council relating to funding precommitment for the fiscal years 2026-27 to 2059-60.

**SPEAKER:** Any further tabling of documents?

The hon. the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

Here today in this hon. House, I want to table four documents.

One, in accordance with section 6 of the *Embalmers and Funeral Directors Act, 2008*, I hereby table the 2024 annual activity report of the Embalmers and Funeral Directors Board of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Two, in accordance with section 10 of the *Engineers and Geoscientists Act, 2008*, I hereby table the 2024 annual report of the Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Three, in accordance with section 9 of the *Chartered Professional Accountants and Public Accountants Act, 2008*, I hereby table the 2024-25 annual report of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Four, in accordance with section 10 of the *Architects Act, 2008*, I hereby table the 2025 annual report of the Architects Licensing Board of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, once again, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Any further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

**Notices of Motion**

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

**B. DAVIS:** Speaker, I give notice of the following private Member’s motion, which will be seconded by the Leader of the Opposition.

WHEREAS public funds under the Medical Care Plan (MCP) are allocated exclusively to support the delivery of insured health service to residents of Newfoundland and Labrador;

WHEREAS serious concerns have arisen around the use of \$275,000 of MCP funds per year for political support staff salary within the Office of the Premier; and

WHEREAS political support staff are different than health care administrators;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge government to immediately stop using MCP funds to pay for political support staff.

Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 63(3), the private Member’s motion that I referenced will be debated tomorrow, Wednesday, March 18, 2026.

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

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

The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, I give notice that on tomorrow, I will introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act, Bill 11.

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

Answer to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

**Petitions**

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

**L. STOYLES:** Thank you, Speaker.

Petition – Permanent Daylight Savings Time. These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

WHEREAS the British Columbia government recently adopted a permanent, year-round daylight savings time; and

WHEREAS switching between standard and daylight savings time can lead to disrupted sleep schedules and impact school schedules and work routines; and

WHEREAS eliminating the clock change would reduce the need for system updates, scheduling adjustments across transportation and services; and

WHEREAS doing so would mean an extra hour of daylight later in the day during the winter season;

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to implement permanent daylight savings time.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change for a response.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the petition.

I have received quite a lot of correspondence about this recently, especially since BC has taken it on. We aren't having official conversations about it right now, but it is something that I will take up with department staff and get back to the hon. Member.

Thank you.

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

**S. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Thank you, Speaker.

The reason for this petition is as follows:

The original breakwater in St. Vincent's, which once protected Beach Road and surrounding infrastructure, has fallen into disrepair and no longer provides adequate protection from coastal erosion and storm surges. As a result, Beach Road has required extensive repairs at least three times over the past decade, costing taxpayers millions of dollars.

With increasingly unpredictable and severe weather patterns, the ocean frequently throws sand, rocks and debris on to the roadway, creating hazardous driving conditions and, at times, making the road impassable. This poses serious safety risks to residents, emergency services, local businesses and visitors while also disrupting transportation and community access.

Investing in a modern, resilient breakwater would provide long-term protection for critical transportation infrastructure, enhance public safety and reduce repeated repair costs.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

to conduct an immediate assessment and prioritize and commit funding for the construction of a new, properly engineered breakwater at St. Vincent's beach.

Mr. Speaker, more recently, the powerful storms and the surges have created havoc down in St. Vincent's. The lighting is extremely poor in that area. Often, people approach that area at night and there are rocks and debris on the road. A number of times I've already had to contact the minister about this.

The previous government, Speaker, invested in this road a number of times and repaired infrastructure, but, of course, the storm surges are getting worse, and the storms are getting worse. It's an evolution and it's climate change and it's the reality of what's happening today.

Also, St. Vincent's beach sees thousands of people in the summertime between June and the end of July. It's one of the most famous, land-based, whale-watching spaces in the world, Speaker. So it's a well-known area, it's well travelled, it's causing hazardous conditions, and sometimes we have difficulty reaching depot staff at nighttime when the debris comes up on the road or when the road washes out.

It cuts off the community, it isolates them from medical services, from the school, from postal services, and it's causing quite the havoc for the people in the area. So I certainly call upon the government to assess this.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

I'm proud to rise today to present this public safety petition on behalf of the people of St.

John's West. These are the reasons for and the background of this petition:

WHEREAS incidences of drug-related crime, violence and theft in the St. John's West District and across this province is rising and has grown to alarming rates; and

WHEREAS the Progressive Conservative government campaigned on making communities safer for all of us; and

WHEREAS the Progressive Conservative government committed to creating 21 more RNC and 25 more RCMP officers to help combat rising crime; and

WHEREAS residents of our province deserve to feel safe within their homes, streets and communities;

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to fulfill their promises and commitments of making our communities safer by working with the RNC and the RCMP to identify any additional supports they need and commit to providing those supports.

Speaker, prior to the general election and every day since, I've heard first-hand from constituents of St. John's West about their concerns for their safety, the significant amount of drug use in their community and the increasing level of crime in our community.

In recent months, I've had many meaningful meetings to address these issues, first with representatives of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, with the City of St. John's deputy mayor, Ron Ellsworth, and Ward 3 Councillor, Greg Noseworthy. Recently, I had a great meeting with the Minister of Government Services to discuss the Residential Tenancies Act and potential levers we can pull to address the growing trap house issue. Recently, I also had a meeting with representatives of the

Department of Justice and Public Safety. Unfortunately, the minister was unavailable to meet at the time and delegated staff to meet on her behalf.

Speaker, these issues are top of mind for the people of St. John's West and all of Newfoundland and Labrador. I look forward to continuing to work with my constituents, stakeholders, the Ministers of JPS and Government Services, and the government in general, to provide the RNC and the RCMP with additional supports to make our communities safer for all of us.

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

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

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

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to thank the Member for St. John's West for his petition, and I want to reassure the Member, as well as all of the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, that our government is committed to modernizing and to improving the justice system in Newfoundland and Labrador, in all parts of our province.

When we look at the various pieces to the criminal justice system, whether it's policing, whether it's courts, whether it's corrections, we are going to be making investments. We are going to be investing in law enforcement. We are going to be investing in the courts, as well as the Crown attorneys. We are committed to ensuring that our province is safe for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I've met, as well, with many of our community partners. I've met with many communities. I've met with MHAs on the opposite side, as well, about the escalating crime in our province.

This is something that is essential to us in terms of our priority, and we will honour all of the promises that we have made.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to table a petition for 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 clinical treatment toward a model of holistic healing and wraparound wellness.

Therefore, we petition the honourable 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, we certainly have had some discussions, I know, Members from all of the House, regarding the estimated 1,300 Indigenous residents that have unequal access to primary care due to long-standing health system inequities. This gap results in significant direct costs to the Newfoundland and Labrador health care system and additional indirect costs in areas such as

emergency services, mental health and addictions care and economic productivity.

So this note, and certainly the information being brought forward, basically estimates the annual direct health care cost impact between \$1.5 million and \$4.4 million, not counting a substantial unquantified cost associated with loss of productivity, suffering and systemic strain. These findings certainly underscore that there is an urgency of funding for sustainable, culturally safe, community-led primary care.

I so table.

Thank you.

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

Yes, we're aware of the petition that was presented in the House last week. We also met with First Light last week, and that was when they presented us with their plan.

We are really, I guess we could say, pleased with the amount of work that was put into their plan. We are looking at it now in terms of how something like that could be implemented. We're looking at access to health care, Speaker, for all Indigenous peoples across the province.

We know that in the St. John's area there are populations of Indigenous people that are especially vulnerable. A lot of Indigenous people come to urban regions looking for supports and access to support that they might not get in their home communities. It's very, very important to make sure that those vulnerable populations,0. – whether they are struggling with access to health care, access to mental health care, financial instability that they're struggling with, Speaker, that Indigenous people actually get those supports.

So we will be working with First Light to see how we can support increasing access to health care, but we're going to be doing it for all across the province. We're going to make sure Indigenous people have their needs met.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

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

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 11(1), I move that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 17, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on today, Tuesday, March 17.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 3.

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

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 7.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for

the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act.

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.

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

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Dwyer):** Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act.

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

**CLERK (Hawley George):** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Chair.

We certainly went through this a couple of days ago in terms of the, I guess, cleanup, if you would, of Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act. Without further comments, I'll have a few questions for the minister.

In terms of the consultation process, I know it began with the previous administration, but were there any additional consultations done between when you were sworn in as minister last fall to bringing it to the House now?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** There were consultations done, of course, yes.

The Indigenous consultations were held for October 25 to November 25, 2024, with Nunatsiavut Government, Innu Nations and the Indigenous governments. We did do an online participation in the *Endangered Species Act*, and everybody was in favour of the changes.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you for that answer.

I think the minister gave a breakdown of enforcement officers, and I think active vehicles and some other stats. Could he provide that breakdown, provide it to me?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Could you repeat that question, please?

**E. LOVELESS:** Absolutely.

Could the minister provide a list or a breakdown of the filled positions and vehicles that these enforcement officers use to do their daily work?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** We have 49 trucks; we have 49 ATVs, 70 snowmobiles, 54 boats and water vessels. We have strong health and safety training included: occupational health and safety, safe work practices and safety-related training, annual recertification; and a large suite of co-operational directives available to divisional intra-site – nearly 100 directives in total, so we're certainly working with the officers.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Chair.

So, Minister, in terms of the positions that you have in your department for enforcement officers, do you feel that the equipment that they have certainly equips them, I guess, for their daily duties in Newfoundland and Labrador?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Well, we just named out some of the particulars that we're doing with the wildlife officers in the field. I need to say we all realize that it can be dangerous work. We certainly want them to be equipped with all the aids that they need to do their daily work.

So we're corresponding with the officers all the time. We just provided the list of what we've provided to them and the training and the networking that we do on a daily basis.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** In the changes in Bill 7, it references, in 34.1, "Where a conservation officer believes on reasonable grounds..." can the minister speak to that? Are you concerned for this? Do you have any concerns about that, that the officer believes on reasonable grounds?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** The officer's discretion, such as deciding whether to issue tickets or lay a charge, is exercised based on the seriousness of the offence within the bounds of the legislation. Through that, then, it is determined through the courts.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** Okay, so these changes, in terms of a conservation officer entering a building, or whatever the case may be, you feel that they are equipped and ready for their job and right now you don't have any concerns?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Another option in this legislation, of course, is to enable the law enforcers to make way for a telewarrant, which they can get the warrant right away, so that they can pursue their obligations with regard to the offence or the charge that they're laying. We will be making sure that they are equipped with the tools that they need.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** In reference to telewarrant, it says in the act, "Where, in the opinion of a conservation officer, it would not be practical to appear before a Provincial Court judge" – which we know is possible in our geographically challenged province to apply for a warrant – "the conservation officer may make the application by telephone or other means of telecommunication."

What other means, Minister?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** The telewarrant is one of the things that they can issue. They can use the telewarrants for their observations. The officer's discretion comes into play based on the seriousness of the offence, and then that's bound in the legislation and then that will proceed to courts.

**CHAIR:** I will ask the Members to wait to be acknowledged before answers. It's just so that we can get it straight for Broadcast. I have to introduce you first.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** I say to the minister that equipping an officer can mean more than just a pistol.

This means of communication, I think, is very important and, in subsection (2) – and that's why I was trying to reference and trying to determine what other means are we talking about – facsimile and fax are referenced there, and fax is an outdated process as far as I'm concerned. So I don't know if we're equipping them with the right tools in terms of faxing a telewarrant or whatever the case may be, or a charge.

My question really is around, are you concerned about possible errors in a delivery of a message when we are talking about outdated, as far as I'm concerned, in terms of a facsimile.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Nothing has changed with regard to legislation of the act and in regard to updating the act. For the officers to issue the telewarrants, I mean to say, they have the regulations, they have the tools to do their jobs as efficiently as they can.

So nothing has really changed in this act other than the telewarrants and the updated legislation.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** Minister, part of the process is the Species Status Advisory Committee and, I guess, in terms of that committee and the actual existence of that committee, it's fair for me to say that it's valuable in your decision making; do you agree with that?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Could you repeat that question for me again, please?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to repeat it.

I will say the Species Status Advisory Committee is a part of the process and it's valuable to you in your decision making – correct.

My question to you is: Do you value that Committee in helping you make your decision?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Sure.

Through this act, I mean to say, we took some information from the Committees and all the stakeholders involved to go ahead with this Endangered Species Act.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Deputy Chair.

My question is, the species committee, how much do you value that committee in terms of you making your decision, or do you think you could make your decision without that level of, I guess, in the process, that species committee coming to you for you to make your decision, or do you feel that you have enough expertise within the department that you can make a decision as minister responsible?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** We recognize the importance and the knowledge of people in the department and other people, officials, biologists who carry out those

determinations of endangered species. So, yes, we take all that into consideration for when we make those decisions. It's very important.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**E. LOVELESS:** It's more of a statement, Deputy Chair, that I'm glad to hear that the minister values a committee reporting to him for him to make his final decisions.

I'll leave it at that.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just had a few questions. Can I hear from the minister a clarification on the language regarding search powers for conservation officers? What would be reasonable grounds to go in to someone's home or along those lines? I just want to get a feel for that from your standpoint.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** The officers have the means to carry out an arrest, to search or seize, obtain a warrant and resource enforcement officers must have reasonable grounds, supported by legislation, to believe the individual they stopped was engaged in illegal activity.

An officer must be able to explain their actions and decisions to a court, when required. For example, written warnings are sometimes more appropriate for less serious violations, but officers understand that mistakes happen and they may use the interaction as the opportunity to inform and educate. The officers discretion such as deciding whether to issue a ticket or a charge is exercised by the basis of the seriousness of the events.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair or Deputy Speaker, sorry.

I think it's great that we have moved along with those telewarrants. I think that's a good thing for this act. It will allow some flexibility and ability to get the conservation officers more speedy results, which is a good thing. I thank the minister for that.

You mentioned consultations that were done and groups that were consulted. Could we get a list of the groups that were consulted during the development of this piece of legislation and maybe even a *What We Heard* document if you've got that in your department, Minister?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** I can certainly get that information for the Member.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Minister; I appreciate that.

Would you be able to let me know about the clarification on some of the language with regard to seizures and forfeiture? I'm thinking more along the lines of, obviously, we've seen some organizations that have started up across this province for helping with some food security – one in my own district.

Just wanted to hear your thoughts on maybe when those things are forfeited or seized from those that are doing nefarious activities across our province, with respect to wildlife, is that something that we could see legislation on in the future to allow them use in food banks or for individuals that would require that food from all parts of our province?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** That was something that they used to do years ago, I do believe, but there became some legal challenges with regard to issuing some food, but it is still discussions that we're having – I guess you're talking about the meats that is obtained thorough those – with regard to the work that they do.

We're still having those discussions ongoing, yes.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Deputy Chair, and, Minister, for the answer.

I think it's currently still continuing. There's a gentleman, Barry Fordham, who lives in my district who does a significant amount of work with that, transferring food that's either caught via licence by somebody and then transferring it over.

I know there are other concerns and if you are seizing the food from others, that may be what you're speaking about, which is perfectly fine. I just wanted to know does the act actually talk about that, or is that something that we could see in the future as a future amendment to this, that will allow that forfeiture, if it's deemed safe or whatnot, to be able to be used in food security across the province?

I mean, we don't want to take any possible options off the table, I guess, when we're talking about food security for the province.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Actually, I've had those discussions with the same gentleman, and had a meeting with him. I'm aware of the discussion. Again, we'll go back to the legalities of it, how it stopped and why it

stopped because of the legal in regard to unsafe meats, I guess.

We're certainly having those discussions along the way, and we'll continue those discussions as we move forward.

**CHAIR:** The Chair acknowledges the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

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

I've just got a couple more questions.

**CHAIR:** One second.

**B. DAVIS:** One question that I –

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

I recognized the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

**B. DAVIS:** Oh, I'm so sorry.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you, Chair. No problem.

Minister, thank you, I just wanted to say, obviously, that we feel strongly about the protection of wildlife and strengthening fines. This is good and welcome.

The questions that I have are pertaining to clause 15 in particular. The first one, which I referenced previously, was about the hundreds of protected Iceland gulls were killed at the City of St. John's landfill the last two years.

So what action that the government could take to protect species when the federal and the provincial jurisdictions overlap? Because, of course, sometimes these are contracted out. Do they have a permit for the kill? How does that oversight happen, is basically the question here, to ensure that endangered species are not being taken as a result of private contract scenarios?

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister for Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you.

The government issues permits for species that may potentially threaten public safety or other wildlife species or endangered ecologically sensitive areas or infrastructure or business. So that's determined by Wildlife and they issue special permits.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you, Minister.

Also, in that clause, the Leach's Storm-Petrels are a threatened species and at risk of becoming endangered and mostly in relationship associated with offshore development. Speaking with a number of bird biologists, Dr. Ian Jones and many others and such that we've had consideration with, bird death mitigation factors in the offshore aren't working right now.

If government pushes through, of course, Bay du Nord, which is situated in critical habitat for the Leach's Storm-Petrel, how will the minister work to ensure this species is not put at further risk?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Our department officials, biologists, continue to work to determine the risk when a species is considered to be in danger.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for that.

I concur, certainly, with my colleague here regarding who we're engaged with, I guess, the parties, the conservation folks. Because I think that they have a clear and important voice in determining the rates as well too, in conjunction with the officials, certainly. If we know that there's something that, right now, is being negatively impacted, we want to ensure that if Bay du Nord is upscaled and continues to become what we are told is going to happen, that species would definitely be put at further risk.

So that consultation with stakeholders is extremely important, understanding that they can have a role to play as well.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** If it's a species under our act, a permit application and plan is required at the office, but migratory birds don't come under our jurisdiction.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Third Party.

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

I just want to go back with regard to enforcement requires good equipment as well. If I could, Minister, ask for the number of trucks, snowmobiles, ATVs and drones at the disposal of enforcement officers. I know you have mentioned it before but I just want –

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Forty-nine trucks, 48 ATVs, 70 snowmobiles and 54 boats and that's like rafts, that types of –

**J. DINN:** (Inaudible.)

**P. FORSEY:** Pardon?

**J. DINN:** Drones?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** It's not something we're using right now, no, not drones.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

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

What is the average age of the trucks?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** I'd have to get that information for the Member.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

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

Then I'll ask also, at this point, the average age for the trucks, snowmobiles, ATVs and, I guess, the oldest of those vehicles as well.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** I'd have to get those particular breakdowns for you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Also, how many of the vehicles that you've mentioned are not operational or in disrepair, not on the road?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Again, out of those 49 new trucks, there are upwards to 20 new trucks in the last few years and maintaining and they're all operational.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** So if I understood, there are 20 new trucks and I'm not sure if he meant that the 20 new trucks were operational or all 49 trucks were operational?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** They're all operational.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** How about snowmobiles and ATVs? I guess the same thing, the number of operational of both snowmobiles and ATVs.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Out of the snowmobiles, there were 14 new purchased March of last year, 2025. With regard to the other vehicles, I will certainly have to get those numbers for you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** And would that be the same then for ATVs? You have 70 of them, so I'm just trying to figure out how many of them would be newly purchased.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Actually, there are 48 ATVs, four new purchases, and there are 70 snowmobiles, with 14 new purchases.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** With that then, I guess I still would like to have the average age and the oldest vehicle that is there. My concern, I guess,

here is if we're going to send officers out to enforce, then it's important to send them out with reliable equipment that's not going to break down.

I guess part of that, depending on the age, is the number of times they've been serviced and the reliability. So you might have, as I understand it, 20 new trucks, which leaves 29 that are much older, I would assume.

We have heard from enforcement officers a deep concern about the reliability and the age of some of these vehicles. I guess it will be interesting to see what the maintenance schedule is.

How many enforcement officers are there again, Chair?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** As a note to your previous comments, all the ATVs and snowmobiles are operational. I will have to get the age for you.

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

**J. DINN:** And the number of enforcement officers currently employed.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** I just had that number in front of me. Now what did I do with it?

The number of officers, we have 92 field positions and 65 are active. But there are 100 positions within the division.

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

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

Have there been any offices or officers that are prevented from carrying out their duties because vehicles are not working or not operational?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** We have 20 more under recruitment, and the vehicles are operational, so I can't say that wouldn't – all the vehicles are operational.

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

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

That's good to know that they're operational, but I'm wondering if there's any record of officers who have not been able to carry out their work because vehicles were not operational in the past – certainly since you've taken office. I know, again, this is another issue we've heard from enforcement officers, that they have not been able to carry out the work because the vehicles were not repaired or in good condition.

I'm just curious, if I understand the minister correctly, that no one has been unable to carry out their duties because vehicles have not been operational? Would that be what I'm hearing?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** The vehicles are operational, but I'd certainly have to get back to you to get a determined number if there has or hasn't. I'd certainly have to get that for you. All the vehicles are operational, but I'll get that number for you.

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

**J. DINN:** Are helicopters currently used to assist enforcement officers in their duties?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** We use helicopters, certainly, to do our surveys and those things. We use helicopters where we need and, yes, they'll be used in the same way.

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

**J. DINN:** Carrying out these enforcement duties, is there any indication of the budget or the amount that's been spent using helicopters for enforcement purposes or for surveys along this line?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** I don't have that number in front of me, no, not right now.

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

**J. DINN:** To go back to my question, no drones – I've asked this in previous Estimates Committee meetings – like, the use of drones in terms of assisting wildlife officers with their duties, especially surveillance, I guess, remote areas might be an issue for safety and so on and so forth.

Have there been any discussions about the use of drone technology to assist enforcement officers in carrying out their duties?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** With regard to drones, they've done some use with drones. They're experimenting with drones, working on it, but we're looking at some training and that kind of stuff for drones.

So, no, drones are not used on a particular day, but we are looking at some training that they could use with drones.

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

This act contains an increase in fines for first, second and third, and corporations and so on and so forth. So, I guess, what I'm after here on this one is: Are there outstanding fines in this area; the total amount of these outstanding fines, if any?

It's one thing to impose fines, quite another to collect. I'm just wondering, in the fines that you have, are there outstanding amounts, and the number, I guess, of people who owe outstanding fines.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** In the *Wild Life Act*, there have been 347 tickets. The total amount of fines is \$34,551. How much has been collected is \$19,000; there is still \$15,000, roughly, to collect.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** So there have been 347 tickets, and you've given me the amounts, of those 347, how many are pending to be collected?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** That's still outstanding. There is still roughly \$15,000 outstanding in fines.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

I'm just wondering how many tickets does that \$15,000 represent; 347 tickets, does that mean there are 47 outstanding – 100?

While I'm asking here, you've increased the statute of limitations from two to three years,

I'm wondering how many go beyond that statute and are not collected at all?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Well that's depending on the size of the fine. I don't know if one ticket is for a bigger fine and a reduced fine, I'd have to get that number for you, if that's okay.

That would depend on the fine, but those are the numbers that are outstanding.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** I'd also like to know then, the number of violations that go beyond the statute of limitations.

In other words, I would presume that if they go beyond the statute of limitations they're not collected. So over the last few years, how many of the fines that we have, if I'm reading this correctly, go beyond that statute of limitations?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Again, the officers issue the charges; the fines and everything is issued by the courts. So I mean to say, that would be up to the court of how they get the money back with regard to the charges.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Of the \$15,000, I think, that the minister said was outstanding, is there a reason for this, in terms of whether the person is deceased or whether the person is unable to pay? I'm just trying to get an understanding, are they outstanding or are they in the process of collecting?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister for Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** That wouldn't come under this department, Chair. That would be another department that we're looking at totally with regard to fines. That would've come under another department.

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

**J. DINN:** I guess with regard to this, it's great to impose fines and increase the fines – and this is my point here. You can increase fines all you like, but if we don't collect them, then it's an empty act.

Again, I go back to when it came to traffic violations. I remember years ago, Speaker, with regard to when I paid an outstanding traffic fine, I think I had \$300, and I thought I was going to be pretty embarrassed by that. This was way back when. I was in the lineup, when you had to pay for them down at the Atlantic Place, and there were people in front of me – \$5,000, \$10,000. I'm thinking, how do you get to \$10,000 in traffic fines and still drive and that kind of thing.

So I guess what I'm saying here, part of this is the collection of it and also making sure the officers who are out there in isolated conditions at times are protected, and making sure that the work they do has meaning.

I do have one question for later on, but maybe I'll ask it now and be done with it. I know that the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville is anxious to finish up with his questions, and we got the better of him in this case.

**B. DAVIS:** Often.

**J. DINN:** We do our best.

I'm just looking in clause 3, is there a backlog of requests for designations on the LG and the minister's desk? According to the technical briefing, it was 90 days and it's being extended to 180 days, which is the actual turnaround for the request.

When it comes to the backlog, what's the reason for the request? Because we got a note that really there is no backlog. There was at one time, and now there isn't.

So I'm just wondering here, extending this deadline, what's the purpose of it, if there's no deadline – I can understand if there's a backlog, what's the purpose of doubling the time if there's no backlog?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** First, I can't determine about traffic fines. I don't have any number on traffic fines.

Back in your previous comments, I don't have any number on traffic fines, but that's due to the consultations, to get the consultations and everything done so that we could increase it from 90 days to 180 days, and the big thing with all this is deterrence and protecting the endangered species.

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

**J. DINN:** Sorry, and I apologize for the confusion. With regard to traffic fines, my point was that we've had issues here where traffic fines were outstanding. So it's not that I'm asking for information on traffic fines. I'm saying that we can see it all over. We failed to enforce. Enforcement is one thing, but if you're not collecting on the fines, then enforcement is pretty weak in some ways.

With regard to this, though, I'm trying to figure out that the timeline that the Lieutenant-Governor in Council has for responding to recommendations from the Species Status Advisory Committee to designate a species at some level of endangerment was 90 days, now it's been extended to 180 days. There's no backlog, and I'm just wondering, if there's no backlog, then why is there a need to extend it to 180 days?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** To do due diligence to the process from 90 days to 180 days to get all the consultations and that in. That takes time, and they need more time. So we're extending it from 90 days to 180 days.

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

They need more time, but from what I gather here, there's no backlog, so it looks like they're able to get it done. I'm trying to understand, and I guess if they need more time, what's the average time it takes? I'm trying to reconcile the need for more time with the fact that 90 days seems to have been working so far in that there's no backlog.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** It's the time to get the evaluations in, the consultations in, and it's time to complete all the analysis. So they need from 90 days to 180 days.

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

**J. DINN:** Are there enough people in the department to do this? Is this a human resource issue and is that why it's taking so long?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Yes, there are enough people in the department to do this.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

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

I'm just going to go into similar questioning as my colleague from St. John's Centre. If there was no backlog, and that's where we're to right now, there was no backlog, why are we increasing it? Is that a recommendation from the staff or a recommendation from the consultations that were done that the people that were bringing forward these concerns wanted more time to put their applications together to bring it to the department and feed it through?

That's one question. I'll ask the next one as a follow-up to that because I don't want to hit too many questions the one time.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** It was to get all the consultations and all the analysis of the act in place, so to give everybody lots of time to get it all done.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can you let me know the standard time it takes for LGIC approval? Once it goes through your department and through the consultation process that we just talked about, goes into the department to look at that and puts that document together, what's the LGIC timeline to get that to move on to one of the lists that we see in the legislation?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** I would have to get that information for you. I'll get back to you on that.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just out of more interest than anything else, I've got constituents that reach out from time to time that are very much involved in the conservation side. Even though I'm in a St. John's district, there are a lot of people that have strong beliefs, like many of our districts believe in that. They ask questions of have we made improvements? Like, if we're looking at Schedule A, where we have things like the piping plover, do we ever see endangered species come off of that list from endangered and move to threatened species and then improve over time? Have we seen some advancements in those areas?

Most notably would be if we moved someone from a threatened down to vulnerable, like, those things would be important – or even off the list altogether? Have we seen any success stories from the conservation efforts made by your department, Minister?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Yes, one that comes to mind would be the Pine Marten that rebounded.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you very much.

My colleague for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi asked a question about the stakeholders, the environmental and conservation organizations. Were they consulted in the development of the fines that we see that have been increased here?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** All this was in the discussions and consultations with all the stakeholders with regard to all that implemented, including fines.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** I ask the hon. minister if those fines – did the department do a jurisdictional scan to see where they stack up against other jurisdictions for similar activities and actions? I know from previous involvement in the department, we used to always live by jurisdictional scans and consultations to try to develop good pieces of legislation.

I know the hon. Members from the Third Party were asking questions along those lines, and I think it's incumbent upon us to make sure that we're in line or better, or at least in line with other jurisdictions across the country.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** The simple answer is yes, they were.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

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

We talked about officers having the ability to go and make a seizure and go into properties and things like that. Obviously, they're well-trained; I thank them for the great work they do in our communities. It's not easy work by no means. I'm just wondering, would they go in by themselves to a property in some part of our province to either make a seizure or would they go in with a group?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** The enforcement officers usually travel in pairs.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you.

Minister, has there been operations where they would work in consultation with the RCMP and RNC, as well, in certain jurisdictions, where they would feel that, for a safety aspect, it would be beneficial to have those officers with them, other peace officers or whatever they would deem necessary?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Yes, sometimes that would happen. I've noticed in the past that enforcement officers were also working with municipalities and officers to try to get them engage, and even some activity within the communities and that sort of stuff.

So, yes, they correspond with those type of officers.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Can I get you to repeat that, the thing didn't work for me.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

**P. FORSEY:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Chair, I think there was a longer answer there before. I think he's trying to be short with me there on this one. I did want to hear the answer; but, yes, is the answer, they do.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you very much.

I'm not sure if Hansard picked it up, but my colleague in the front row over there said check *Hansard*. I will do that.

I just wanted to say thank you to the minister for answering the questions, and thank you for the information that you're going to provide to us on this side, as well as to the people of the province.

Thank you for the opportunity to ask the questions here today.

**CHAIR:** Seeing no other speakers, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

**CLERK:** Clauses 2 through 19, inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall clauses 2 through 19 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 19 carried.

**CLERK:** Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

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

**CHAIR:** Shall the long title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report Bill 7 without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill without amendment, carried.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Government House Leader.

**L. PARROTT:** Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 7 without amendment.

**CHAIR:** The motion that we rise and report Bill 7 without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

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. Member for the District of Placentia West - Bellevue, Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

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

The Committee of the Whole reports that they have considered the matters to them referred and recommends Bill 7 without amendment.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and recommend Bill 7 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

**L. PARROTT:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

**L. PARROTT:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, reported received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time presently.

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

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Speaker.

I move the third reading of Bill 7, seconded by the Member for Exploits.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Motion carried.

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

**SPEAKER:** This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Endangered Species Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 7)

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

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Speaker.

I call, Order 2, Bill 5.

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

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

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to 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 (Dwyer):** Order, please!

We are now considering the amendment to 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. the Member for Mount Scio.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm very pleased that we're still discussing our amendment to lower the gas tax, so thank you very much. There are three or four issues I just wanted to talk about in terms of the gas price today.

The first is, I guess, the breakdown of the numbers. If we look at the different types of petroleum products in Newfoundland and Labrador and what types of consumption they get – if we look at gasoline, like we put in our cars, the annual consumption by Newfoundland and Labradorians, we're looking at 760 million litres a year. Diesel is 550 million litres; aviation fuel, 150 million litres; marine fuel is also about 150 million litres; and propane, we're looking at 75 million litres. So we're talking about the millions of litres, Chair.

When we look at the taxes paid by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for these different types of fuel and then what we're proposing in our changes, so in terms of the revised tax amounts for gasoline, the revised tax amount would be \$49,400,000. That would be the revised tax if the tax on

the price of gas was lowered as per our amendment. Diesel would be \$46,750,000. That would be the revised income the government would get as a result of taxes. Marine fuel, \$3.7 million in taxes; and propane, \$3 million in taxes. In total, that works out to just over \$16,850,000. On top of that then, you would add HST.

The way gas pricing works and, specifically taxation, when you go the gas station and you fill up your car, your truck, there's a federal excise tax on that. That's 10 cents per litre for gas and four cents a litre for diesel. That's a federal tax that's been for a while – a straight 10 cents for gas; it hasn't changed. And then the provincial, which is what we're talking about now, today is 7.5 cents per litre and we're proposing to lower that. Then when you add on all the other pieces of the price of gas, Chair, then HST is added on top of that so the government also gets, I believe it's 7 per cent or 6 per cent in terms of the HST on top of the tax.

When I was over on that side, I heard the people on this side always talk about the tax on top of the tax and so they do, the Treasury gets the tax on top of the tax, Chair. So that is not what we're talking about, we're talking about the original, the base tax that goes into the price of gasoline.

Then when we look at the benchmark price, today, gas has changed significantly since I've spoken on this three times. I spoke once in second reading, once in Committee and this is my second time speaking in Committee and gas prices changed significantly.

The first time I spoke about it, the benchmark price was 75.38 cents. The second time I spoke about it, it was 91.9 cents, and the third time, when I checked earlier today, it was 102.06 cents, the benchmark price on a price a litre.

We've had a significant increase since we've started debate on the second reading. Then the last time my colleague

and I were talking about how much of the Treasury that would bring in. When we did the math, it was half a billion. Now when I do the math today, if this gas price was maintained for a year, the impact to the Treasury would be over three-quarters of a billion dollars to the Treasury of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's really good for the government Treasury. It's really bad for taxpayers.

So those are the two conflicting things and government has a range of policy levers at its disposal that it can use to make the cost of living easier for taxpayers, Chair.

When we look at, today, what the maximum benchmark price is for a litre of gasoline, the maximum price on the Avalon was 178.10 cents. Of that, tax is 40.73. The retail markup is 14.28. The wholesale markup is 15.65. Then we have the carbon price adjustment, which I'm going to speak to in a few minutes, is 5.40. Then the benchmark price, today – so that is the New York Harbor price, what Irving, what North Atlantic, actually, how much they pay for a barrel of crude oil – the New York Harbor price is 102.06.

The PUB takes the benchmark price and applies it every week. If it goes up or below a certain percentage, they can use the interruption formula to increase or decrease gas prices for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Chair.

So Irving, North Atlantic, they take the gas, they ship it here and the cost of shipping, that's what goes into the wholesale markup. Every now and then when the Public Utilities Board does review gas prices, as we change the law to force them to do a review of gas prices, their wholesalers have to submit their costs to the Public Utilities Board.

The Public Utilities Board engages with a consultant. They use R Cube which is, I think, the only local gas pricing consultant that they use to review the inputs of the

wholesalers. So they review – did it actually cost this much? Did the trucking cost this much? They look at the cost to send it to Port aux Basques. They look at the cost to send it to Fogo and they take all those inputs and build it into what is the wholesale markup of the price of gas which, today, is 15.65.

Retail markup, that's how much the retailers get and the cost for them to have it in the pump for you to drive up, to have a pump that works and you go in and you use your credit card to pay or your debit card to pay. So the cost of running of that business and allowing you to come and get gas from the gas pump, today, they are getting 14.28 cents of that litre.

There's a lot that goes into the price of gas and the Public Utilities Board regulates this and, today, we're talking about the tax. I just want to talk a bit about the carbon price adjustment today – and the Public Utilities Board website, they have a really helpful graphic. There's a gas price visual and it breaks down how much of the price of gas is in each element, and I encourage anyone who is interested to go and review that. It changes, sometimes, daily.

The carbon price adjustment, that is the cost that the Public Utilities Board applies to the price of gas to meet the *Clean Fuel Regulations*. These are new federal government regulations that came in maybe two years ago that are ridiculous in my opinion.

I was minister of Digital Government and Service NL at the time the *Clean Fuel Regulations* came in. I personally, Chair, was on a call with the federal public servants and I heard them first-hand say that they did not consider the regulated gas model in Atlantic Canada when they came up with the *Clean Fuel Regulations*.

Essentially, the wholesalers have to meet certain carbon standards for all their businesses across Canada. So whether or

not they sell gas products in Ontario, in BC, in Newfoundland and Labrador, they have to meet a certain carbon threshold for all of Canada. They do not have to report on that on a provincial basis.

In Ontario, it's just up to the retailer because they do not have a regulated gas pricing market, a regulated market, so the retailer applies whatever price they want. This was a significant problem with the Public Utilities Board and all the Atlantic Canadian provinces in terms of how do they – because we have a different price model than the other provinces. Again, that goes to the question, do you regulate gas prices or not? That's a very serious discussion that I think is welcome in this province.

But we do have a regulated gas pricing, Deputy Chair. The federal government, they've already got rid of the Clean Electricity Regulations. They need to get rid of the *Clean Fuel Regulations* that would save, today, 5.4 cents per litre on every price of gasoline. The other Atlantic provinces have other amounts. The wholesalers, at any point, can apply to the Public Utilities Board to get more money, so it's kind of like to you add the carbon price adjustment to the wholesaler markup and that's what the wholesalers get.

I'm happy to chat about the *Clean Fuel Regulations* all day. I'd say there are very few people in Newfoundland and Labrador who understand the *Clean Fuel Regulations*, including the Public Utilities Board if they're watching. I'd be happy to chat about this further, and thank you for the opportunity to discuss this amendment. Thank you, Chair.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

**F. HUTTON:** Thank you, Chair, I appreciate it.

It's always a pleasure to get to stand in the House of Assembly to talk on behalf of the residents of Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

I want to start out by commending my colleague, the Member for Mount Scio, for putting forth this amendment. Regardless of what side of the House you're on in this Legislature, I think every person knows that people in Newfoundland and Labrador, many of them, are struggling now because of the increased cost of living; not just gasoline, but so many other products. We've seen things increase in price rapidly. Whether it's a two-by-four to try to build a deck or a bridge on the front of your house or if it's buying a vehicle or trying to put gas in it, or trying to put groceries in your fridge, it's expensive.

With respect to gas, I was just doing some searching around on the Internet over the last couple of days and I noticed that it was about six years ago today that the price of Brent crude – which is, essentially, what we talk about here – was at about \$33 a barrel. That was as we were just going into COVID. The price of oil actually went a lot lower than that.

As we know, petroleum products are very volatile and it is often difficult, no matter what government you are, to forecast what the cost is going to be two years out, three years out or whatever. You can forecast what you like, but then, all of a sudden, there's a war in Iran and the price goes up significantly and quite rapidly. As a result, as my colleague pointed out, a negative impact on folks who have to go and gas up – to put gas in their vehicle – so they can get to work or wherever they're going, to go about their daily lives, or on the other side of that, for the Finance Minister across the way, it can be a bit of a windfall.

In this case, if these prices stay very high, as my colleague has pointed out, it could be of great benefit to the government, and hopefully to the people of Newfoundland

and Labrador if we can get this amendment to pass, give some extra relief at the pumps and put money in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians right away.

I have heard a lot of talk about what was in previous budgets and what wasn't in budgets, and I'm going to avoid getting too political here, sometimes it's difficult. Speaking from experience, I know that, in my previous job when I worked at a local television station, we implemented a business report 30-odd years ago. It became a very popular segment of the news broadcast. It featured not just locally traded stocks, companies that we owned and operated or headquartered out of Newfoundland and Labrador, but it also included some precious commodities, and also the price of oil.

I interviewed a lot of Finance ministers over my lifetime in media and many of them said that one of the first things they did – I've said this before in the House – when they got up in the morning was look at that price of oil to see how they would map out their day, perhaps, if there was some revenue that they could look at. It was just an easy, quick way to gauge what was going on in the world and how it would impact our bottom line here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We saw, many years ago, people like Dennis O'Keefe, the former mayor of St. John's, talking about – he was the gas man for many years. It evolved into an actual office afterwards where people would predict the price of gasoline, and they did it so that they could advise motorists on whether or not they should gas up on a Tuesday night or a Wednesday night, or whenever the gas price would change, so that they could save \$5 or \$6, which is a lot of money to a lot of people if you can do it every week of the year or if you wanted to save it, on the other side, if the price was going to go down. It is important.

The one thing that has to be clarified, though, is that, when we were in media, we were not permitted to release that price to anyone, even though we would get an embargoed copy from the PUB the night before. You could do your story, but we would not reveal that. We weren't permitted to, as governments wouldn't be allowed to, but then you would get a person like the late George Murphy who took it upon himself to do that work to advise Newfoundlanders and Labradorians how they could potentially save some money.

Somebody else does it now; these are analysts who just look at a number of different models and they try to figure out where the price of gas is going to go. Sometimes they're fairly accurate; sometimes they're off by a bit, but they follow the trends and we see interviews on local TV and radio where we talk about what it's going to be and these predictions are done.

This gives people an opportunity to figure out whether or not they can save a few dollars – if they should go right away to avoid having to pay more afterwards, because when you're filling up a tank – I did it last week after we had numerous jumps in the price of oil and gas. I drive a fairly small car and it was about \$11 more to fill up the tank. I intentionally let it go till the light came on so that I would fill it up knowing that I paid in the range of \$84 or \$85, and the following week it was in the range of about \$96.

So you can see it; all you have to do is go and get gas and if you're driving a fair bit, if you have to do that, if you have children or if you've got to get to and back from work, if you live in some area outside of St. John's or you have to go from St. John's or somewhere in Portugal Cove, or wherever to get to your job and it requires a lot of driving, it's easy to burn through a tank of gas in a week, and it's expensive.

We've seen, though, this hyperfocus on the price of gas and oil, and people do tend to want to really know. On nights, to go back to my experience of working in television and having that business report on a nightly basis, if we didn't have it on for some reason, if there was a delay, the phone would ring; people really wanted to know. I'm talking about going back before Facebook was popular. The mainstream media were the main ways to get this information out, because people need to know, and this is one way. The reason I'm focusing on that is because this is one way that we could act now, together to help save people a little bit of money.

As my colleague mentioned, and I will commend her for doing the heavy lifting on some of the math behind all of this, if the price stayed the same throughout the year and the Finance department has an additional \$700 million-ish to deal with, that would pay for a lot of roads; that would pay for a lot of hospitals; that would pay for a lot of the necessities; salaries of doctors and nurses and teachers and firefighters and whomever needs to be paid from public coffers.

It's important that we take this opportunity, I think, and perhaps build it in so that if the price of oil plummets – as I mentioned, six years ago, it was basically valueless during COVID when nobody was flying. Hopefully we'll never go back to that again, but the price of oil is always volatile and when there's a war going on in a place like Iran, it's usually going to mean that oil prices will spike. If you're around long enough, you'll see this fluctuation and you try to find the middle ground somewhere.

Maybe if we put something in there that says: if the price plummets, well then we have to go back, but if it's going to continue to rise at 20 cents a time, or 19 cents or 13 cents or 12 cents or whatever, if the price of gasoline is going up 30-odd cents in a matter of a month, that hits the pocketbook pretty hard. If you couple that with the cost

that we've seen increasing on everything over the last five or six years since COVID – and we heard the excuses about supply chain and once COVID was over, the price of food didn't come down. The price of lumber came down a bit, but we've seen it – and I'm sure the TI Minister has seen it in his department if he is looking back at what costs were four or five years ago for paving contracts or for building contracts – everything has gone up dramatically.

This is an easy way for us to sit here and to automatically give people some relief so that when they get their cheque at the end of the week, a little bit less of it goes to gasoline. They can put some of it somewhere else. Saving somebody \$5 or \$8 a week is not going to change everything for them, but it will certainly allow them to make a choice. They're not going to save the money and put it in the bank, but they will spend it somewhere else. They'll use it on food or they'll buy something for their children or they'll buy something for themselves.

I think that this is an easy way to do it. We've got an opportunity to keep a tax that was lowered four years ago at that. Yes, that's one thing, but I think we really need to bring it lower for the benefit of all people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I mean, we live in a vast province. People all over this House represent people in all corners of the province and it's not easy to get anywhere. You have to drive. You have to use roads. We have mass transit in St. John's, but that's basically it.

So I think that, given the fact that everybody would benefit from this, this would be a good decision on behalf of the Members opposite if they would vote in favour of our amendment.

I thank you, Chair. My time is up.

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

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

We will support the amendment and, I guess part of this is, not only has the amendment been put forward, but as to how it's going to be paid. Often, when we propose anything on this side here, we get: Well, how are we going to pay for it? Well, this motion tells how it's going to be paid for.

I would assume it's a win for the government side since lowering taxes is, actually, their middle name. It's, in the middle of their slogan. I keep hearing it all the time: lower taxes, but we're also going to provide better health care and safer communities while doing it. I would assume that this is a no-brainer for the government side that, for years – it would be logical – has campaigned vigorously against the carbon tax and the gas tax, because they have talked about how it's driven up prices and it's how it's made life more affordable. I'll come back to them in a minute.

Now, here is a chance to make life even more affordable, and I'm sensing a hesitancy. In our own election platform, we put forward a costed platform and one that also didn't increase taxes.

I'll go back to the carbon tax; it's interesting how much with the carbon tax that – actually, the carbon rebate. I can think of numbers of people in my district who received the carbon rebate and, actually, they didn't drive. They didn't drive. They made more on the carbon rebate than I guess the inflation, the cost. A lot of people don't drive, but I had a lot of seniors who were not able to drive, and people who were actually benefiting from the carbon rebate tax, and that's gone.

The gas tax, the same thing. It's going to drive up food prices, and yet we know here – and this is from the food report – it talks about so many other factors that contribute to the price that have nothing to do with, necessarily, the tax increases; other things such as supply chain problems, low

inventories, climate change, you name it, that always were ignored.

So here's an opportunity I guess; because I haven't seen a plan yet come or heard about a plan to address the cost of climate change, here's a way if you want to help those who drive. Let's be fair about this, a lot of people who don't drive and who don't own a car, they're actually Gen Z – reports that they're not buying cars like we did.

So, they're no longer buying cars, they're not going to benefit from a lower gas tax, as such, but I will tell you this, I've heard a choice here about the lack of public transit, and I'm going to say, if you really want to help, public transit or lack of public transit, Chair, is a choice. It's a political choice. It didn't happen by accident that we don't have public transit. We invest in roads. We assume that we build more roads, we're going to reduce the traffic jams and so on and so forth, yet we ignore something called induced demand: the more roads you build, the more traffic you encourage. If nothing else, I would assume a gas tax might also help when it comes to establishing public transit.

So, if anything, it'll be interesting to see how this vote goes, because I would assume that the party who has promoted lower taxes will be jumping on board with this, all in; especially, with the rising oil prices and revenue, there shouldn't be any problem to pay for it.

I've heard here Members talk about, well, there's always ways to revisit it but something that we will support. It will help those that drive. It may not help those who are already struggling with food insecurity, but I would like to believe, using the PC logic, that it's going to help transportation costs and so on and so forth. We'll see.

Obviously, it's an amendment that was thought out, and it's something that we will give support to.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the –

**J. HOGAN:** Whatever you want to call me.

**CHAIR:** – Leader of the Official Opposition.

**J. HOGAN:** I have heard it all, Chair, but thank you for the opportunity to speak about this.

When I first got to the House of Assembly, a lot of people on the opposite side were already here. I spoke to some of them and I marvelled at their ability to get up and speak off the cuff. I spoke for a living in court, but it was never off the cuff; I always had prepared notes. I did, I spoke to a lot of them and said, you know, it was really impressive to see people get up for 10 or 20 minutes. I think, even the Leader of the Opposition, we had a couple in my time who would speak for an hour, and it was quite a skill to have.

I'm still not great at it; I'm getting a little better at it. I have no choice now but to speak for another 9 minutes, because it wasn't my turn to speak; but you know what, this is something that I think we all know about. I could certainly talk for more than 10 minutes when we talk about things like costs to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and tax cuts.

As the Member for St. John's Centre pointed out, the slogan that the government ran on back in October, one of the big parts of that slogan was lower taxes. We're now almost six months into a mandate, half a year. That's not nothing. So I understood, when we first started out here and we were just in Opposition – give us time; give us time – but, the honest truth now is that, time has passed and nothing has been done in terms of lowering taxes.

The one opportunity they certainly had was when the House was scheduled to sit right after the election – a huge opportunity to

come into the House of Assembly, certainly very early in their mandate, if they wanted to say the reason they didn't have a lot of work done was because it was new. We would have understood that. The excuse that they gave was that there were a couple of matters in court with regard to recounts, as you know about, Chair, but, of course, the quorum does not require all 40 Members to be sworn in. We, certainly, could have been in the House of Assembly to debate tax cuts that were promised.

The tax cut that was promised by the government was an income tax cut, which I think was mentioned today in Question Period. I was asked about that when I did some media following the election. We would have supported that tax cut to be honest with you, as I said to the media, and I meant it, because I thought it was important for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to have some relief.

We certainly had a different idea in terms of how to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We would have provided relief – along with the NDP, of course, would agree with this – to take the provincial portion of the tax on electricity bills. I think that would have went further, that would have helped people with lower incomes in this province who are struggling over the course of the winter and will struggle into the future as well, as the cost of electricity continues to go high. But that wasn't done, so that was a missed opportunity.

I know that as well, as we debated in the House of Assembly last week, the bill that we're talking about here now, we're making the tax cut permanent. Well, I think, as the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville has pointed out to me on numerous occasions, and I think he used the line when we were in the House last week, the House of Assembly is literally a time machine. We can go back and change things that were done in the past by former governments. Whatever side of the House they may have been on or whatever political stripe they

might have been, we can change those things and we can do things in the future. We can do tax cuts down the road, we can take tax cuts that were done in the past, we can raise them, we can lower them and we can do all sorts of things.

When the Minister of Finance says this tax cut is permanent, well, it's permanent until it's not. It's permanent until some future government – maybe this one – decides to make a change or decides to lower it or raise it in the future. So it's actually not permanent at all. What it is, is the exact same tax cut that was given in 2022, the exact same tax cut that we did in budget 2023, the exact same tax cut that the Liberal government did in 2024 and the exact same tax cut they did in 2025.

I hear people on the other side of the House talk about, well, you didn't allocate for it in the future. Well, we certainly did, and you can't do future budgets until you're actually in the budget year. So here we are in this budget year, now that the Conservatives are responsible for it in '26-'27, it is their budget. It is their time to make a decision about what they think is important to them and what they think is important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Despite, as the Member of St. John's Centre pointed out as a key component of their election campaign, which they were successful on – and I would say you're successful because you made promises that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians listened to and heard and relied on – you failed to provide the tax cut in the income tax year for 2025. So despite this being a time machine, we can't go back to 2025 and give people a tax break who have already filed their income tax returns. We hope that that will come forward in 2026, for this year, so people can get it.

But as we've heard certain ministers talk about we've got four years, don't worry about it; we'll get to it eventually. Why would we do everything right now when we have

four years? Why would we keep promises that we made when people can rely on it in two, three or four years' time? Well, that doesn't help with people planning, that doesn't help with people paying for groceries right now, and that doesn't prevent people from paying the increased cost of gasoline as we see it going up each and every day for the past three weeks.

Another opportunity they certainly talk about is getting rid of the sugar tax. Well, I have news for them; the sugar tax is gone. Again, it was pointed out here when we were debating this amendment, you speak about the sugar tax and the carbon tax and how insistent they were to get rid of these taxes. It was so important to get rid of taxes. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can't afford to pay the taxes. So what did we do? We got rid of the sugar tax. We got the carbon tax gone; the federal government decided to get rid of that.

They have an opportunity now to do something with taxes. It's still there. We don't know how they're going to vote on this, but we certainly hope they take into account the fact that they made promises that they're expected to deliver on. Any lowering of that gas tax will help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We spent a lot of time in Question Period today talking about child care. Now child care means a lot for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have kids. I can tell you, I went out and spoke to the media about child care after Question Period today. Having a child who I've spent a lot of money on for child care, and now I get the benefit of \$10-a-day daycare, it makes a world of difference for families.

I'm fortunate enough that I could afford it, either way, but having \$10-a-day daycare, I think, puts about \$13,000 back in the pockets of Newfoundland and Labrador families. So when we talk about cost of living, people who have children here and want to have children here in Newfoundland

and Labrador, the ability to pay for \$10-a-day child care goes a long way. It's \$13,000 they can use for other things in their lives that does cost a lot of money.

Is it a perfect system? Not yet. We still need to create more spaces. But the creation of the \$10 component made the ability for people in lower income brackets to access that child care. So it takes time. That's why we created 11,000 spaces; that's why we promised to deliver 2,000 more spaces.

I heard the minister talk, I think, on Thursday, well, the federal government needs to give money. Well, do you know what? It's great if the federal government can contribute more money to that system, and they have. But, at the end of the day, education is a provincial responsibility.

If they can't negotiate that deal with the federal government, that's on them, I still think – I know, and I stand by it, that they made a promise to deliver more child care spaces for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. To simply say we can't get a deal with the federal government so we're not going to do it, that's not acceptable. That's going to continue to cause people in this province to pay a lot of money for child care, which they, as I said, were promised – were promised – that they would get those spaces.

The ministers here – almost all of them – sat through the previous budget, so they knew what was in the budget, they knew what was given by the federal government and they knew what was given by the provincial government. So I think it's not totally being honest and upfront with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to lay the blame at the feet of the federal government when they very well knew what the situation was when they ran during the September-October election.

So we are here to talk about gas. As I said in Question Period today, the Minister of Finance stood up last week and very

proudly announced, I think, taking credit for the fact that oil went down one day. Well, excellent news. Unfortunately, he forgot to tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that it went up the day after that, and it went up the day after that, and went up the day after that.

I looked at the predictions this morning, and they're not good for oil prices in the world. The Minister of Finance will now know, of course, as the Member for Mount Scio pointed out, that means more revenue for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, that will help with your deficit, but it means Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are going to be spending more money in the pump.

So it only makes sense, when we benefit from something as bad as what's going on in the Middle East, if it comes to our coffers, that's Newfoundlanders and Labradorians' money. Why wouldn't we put it back in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians directly? We could have a direct link between the increasing cost of oil, the increasing cost of gas prices, and put it back in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I'd be remiss again if I didn't notice a lot of re-posts on Facebook. I'm not sure if the comments were on or not, but I did see on Facebook a lot of videos of the Premier now, before he was Premier, I think back in 2022: The premier – Premier Furey, at the time – has so many levers to pull to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. He could lower the gas tax – amazing; I couldn't agree with him more. Now he is sitting in the chair where he has his hand on that lever.

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

**J. HOGAN:** So you'd think when you made a commitment, when you made a statement not that long ago, in 2022, you would stand by that, you would pull that lever and say I said I was going to do it in 2022 if I was

premier, I think I should pull that lever in 2026 when I am Premier.

If you told Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that you were going to do something if you were premier, I would suggest you should do that thing when you're Premier because all you have in this life is your word and people rely on that word. I've got a little secret: People don't necessarily think politicians always tell the truth. Now I know for sure that we're giving the ammunition to make that statement true.

So I would say to all of the Members on the opposite side who are part of the Blue Book and stand up and wave it around as if it's some document that doesn't really mean anything, well, it got you elected. But it got you elected because you made promises, solemn promises to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The chirping and the chatter, it doesn't bother me. I don't listen to that and I don't read comments on Facebook. What matters to me is Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It matters that they're paying more for gas and they're paying more than they did six months ago, because this Conservative government won't stand up and deliver on the promises and the commitments that they made. That's not on us. That's not on the last 10 years of Liberal government. That's on this Conservative government.

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

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

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

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

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

It's an honour to stand up and discuss the amendment here from the viewpoint of

government side, our side of the House. Allow me in nine minutes and 45 seconds to try to give a little credence to where we stand with it.

I want to make a couple of comments first. When we introduced this bill in the House, the Member for Mount Scio had stated that we ought not to have been surprised in the fall fiscal update that there was no allowance to continue on with the gas tax exemption because you don't do that unless it's changed in legislation. I would say that is not correct.

You can put in your fiscal forecast to say we're going to put in \$67 million for this in '26-'27 if that was your plan. You don't have to change legislation to put it in, and let me state that. So it was a conscious decision of government to say that we're finished with that. We are finished with that and at the end of this month, it's going to increase. Fourteen days, it's going to increase because your fiscal forecast showed it to be true.

I would say the Member for Mount Scio also mentioned the seven cents and then talked about the HST gained on it. Keep in mind the reduction is 8.05 cents because the HST is taken off it as well, the seven cents. So, therefore, the permanent reduction will be 8.05 – seven cents plus the HST. That is off.

Now let me hearken back. The Leader of the Official Opposition stood a little while ago and talked about our word, what we had and when we (inaudible). I gave the fall fiscal update. It was back at the time in December, before Christmas, that we gave the fall fiscal update. The comment from the Official Opposition Leader, and as well as the Third Party, was that I ought to have known what the deficit was within the province. I ought to have known what was forecast, what wasn't.

I would say there are Members on the opposite side who were in government last

time that didn't know that you didn't have accounted for in your budget the \$67 million to keep the gas tax down. Surprise to you over on the other side who were government; well, at that point in time, it wasn't forecast. It wasn't.

So I end up giving on a question from a reporter, a grade of an F for the past government. I'm not sure if the Leader of the Official Opposition remembers that or not, but he remembers that F. There were two things of which the grade was provided on. Number one is that the anchors of which our tenets would be on running and operationalizing government is that we would spend smarter, which we've said several times, and the other thing was we would plan efficiently.

When the budget rolls out this spring, that we roll the budget out in the House, you will find that the Premier has, in the fiscal forecast, the money allocated to keep the gas tax the lowest in Canada. He has it the lowest in Canada.

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

**C. PARDY:** Now, the Leader of the Official Opposition is right; we will get a bump in the revenue, the royalties. Not from the gas tax, because 7.5 cents on gas is 7.5 cents on gas. That's what we take in. The Member for Mount Scio is correct, that the HST might be marginal, but that's what we have costed: 7.5 cents regardless of what the price of gas is.

Here comes the planning part, for all my hon. Members across the way. Do you know what your government has left us with, to know that we've got to pay off the credit card on the debt that we've got owing per year? Per year, of the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians' money, is to carry \$1.1 billion – is what we carry per year to pay off the interest on carrying the debt.

Now I would say, and the Premier has spoken several times about, we didn't see a

lot of planning in the budget of the one in 2025-26 for forecasting going ahead. This wasn't there. There are surprises in health care spending that I think, once that comes out, with the minister that will disclose – some she slipped out. No forecasting of what it is. And then the Leader of the Opposition would say we want to just build a new a hospital. We love a new hospital.

We would love a new hospital but you can't add \$12 billion to \$14 billion on the debt that we've got. You can't do it.

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

**C. PARDY:** The Leader of the Third Party just stated he's going to vote for the amendment. Chair, \$1.1 billion and we are 18 days in from the start of the Gulf War and, all of a sudden, we're realizing the province is going to have a bonanza of revenue come in. The Member for Mount Scio says – where I am the Minister of Finance currently. But the Member for Mount Scio says half a billion for a full year. The Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island said \$700 million the whole year.

I doubt very much that you know. Because looking at the planning that was in the budget 2025-26, I'm not sure you know, when we, as a government, don't know on the 18th day of the war – not the 90th day, not the 110th day, which we hope it don't go there. On the 18th day and, all of a sudden, you want to – what?

So planning efficiently \$1.1 billion in interest charges on the debt of the people and residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. When we talk about Progressive Conservatives, and I'll repeat it – when we talk about Progressive Conservatives, the Progressive is socially progressive; the Conservative is fiscally conservative. If we want to make sure we plan efficiently and go beyond 18 days to see what's going to happen – and, over here, we are hopeful that the war ends tomorrow.

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

**C. PARDY:** Not Conception Bay East - Bell Island for \$700 million, which would have the war go on for months upon months. No. All I would say is we want it to end now and I would think that everyone here, which I'm sure all 40 districts represented would want the war to end on the 19th day. I would hope that it ends tomorrow. If it ends tomorrow, I would think we'll see the price of oil come down. I would think how far it goes down – I'm not sure if the Opposition knows how far it's going to go down, but we don't know. We would hope that the war would end.

So the only thing I would say was planning efficiently when we make plans and said that, boy, we're going to hang our hat on 18 days on with the price of oil, I think some in the District of Bonavista, some in the province would say that may be a little bit reckless to make decisions based on 18 days in.

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

**C. PARDY:** All I would say to you, everyone on this side of the House have said affordability is going to be noticed in our budget. We ran on affordability, and we will bring affordability to the budget.

But I guarantee you the Leader of the Opposition says he hasn't seen anything since we came in. The only thing I'm saying is that we've got to make sure we plan and we've got the planning done, the fiscal forecast done to make sure it truly represents what we have on the revenues and what we would have on the expenditures. That would be planning efficiently.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you so much, Chair.

I want to just say to my colleagues here, nice shout-out, thank you very much to the Official Opposition for recognizing that the NDP's costed platform, how –

**J. HOGAN:** I said you agreed.

**S. O'LEARY:** Right? So there's a moment every now and then.

In any case, of course, this idea of planning, I'd certainly like to begin right there, about the idea of planning. The NDP went to great lengths to fill out and to research a costed platform, put it forward. Again, of course, here we are talking about planning and this whole conversation about the gas tax, really, the benefits of it were about certainty. But we're living in a completely uncertain time. There's no doubt about it.

If I had my druthers, the gas tax, we wouldn't be paying tax on it, period. So this is why when we have this conversation about the amendment, I certainly think that this is something that we have been clear on, that we're interested in supporting this amendment because it's a balancing act. It's a balancing act between eradicating it altogether, and what was already proposed, which is basically coasting, continuing to hold the fort on the gas tax, which doesn't really do anything for those vulnerable.

So this, in my mind, is a compromise, a balancing that we continue to talk about as Members in this House, about how important it is, the give and take. Any lowering of the gas tax is going to be a positive, so I think that this amendment is an excellent opportunity. The plan to have the lowest gas tax in the country, I mean that sounds good in theory. However, we know that there are so many variables at play, and when we talk about subsidizing oil companies, multi-billion-dollar oil companies, that doesn't feed into affordability. That's not a recipe for

affordability. That's a waste of public money.

When we're talking about affordable means for the citizens of our province who, many of them are truly struggling, the affordability factor I think is key. It's absolutely key that we look at how we don't continue to make the same kind of mistakes that have happened in successive governments where we're funding, taking public money and putting it into the pockets of the rich. It's unnecessary. It doesn't help anybody. They don't need it.

So that should be a strong point of negotiation that happens for our government here, our Progressive Conservative government. When we talk about being progressive and being smart fiscally, we presented a costed platform. We said, in advance, what we were going to do. But now there's so much uncertainty going on and I'm glad that the minister brought up the issue of the war – the illegal war that is happening that is raining down on vulnerable people right across the planet, let alone the impacts that is happening on our people in our own province. It's an illegal war that we should have nothing and no support in whatsoever.

But again, I'll pull it back to the conversation about benefits for the local people of our province and the local people of our city, our region. The people in the metropolitan area of St. John's have been begging for ages to have increased transportation, for having public transportation throughout the region. That has been an issue that's been on the table for a long time and it just doesn't seem to be able to manifest. I believe that the government should be involved in that process. That is something that can't be just on the backs of municipalities. That is a transportation issue, and it is a huge expense for people.

As my colleague has talked about, the younger generations now, oftentimes, many of them are not even going out to get cars.

It's not even a feasibility. We should be investing in public transportation infrastructure, and that would be a massive benefit to the City of St. John's, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, to all of the municipalities that's around, Paradise, Mount Pearl – we want it all to be combined. We want it to all be interconnected. That would be a fantastic plus right there.

So when we're talking about incentivizing regional growth, that is something I think that should be considered here. Supporting the amendment on the gas tax would actually help the region, the municipalities in the area greatly.

I think that's a really important thing. As a former deputy mayor for the City of St. John's and being on council for 14 years, this has been a real struggle about how we continue to advance in a partnership in the region. Certainly, as the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, that is something that I know very well.

Gas tax reduction, a further reduction in this amendment form would be a huge asset to many people, in the people's pockets, in the municipalities' pockets – this would be a huge asset. Would I want a full and outright gas tax exemption? Absolutely. That's where I'd like to go, but I'm happy to support this amendment here because it does more than just continue the coasting.

I'll end with that.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this amendment, and it's also great to be able to stand here to represent the

wonderful people of the Burin - Grand Bank District.

I think we've certainly done a lot of discussion around this bill and how we've impacted the cost of living in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador over the last few years. It was nice to hear the Minister of Finance talking today, but while he was talking, all I could think about was the Churchill Falls MOU and what that would have done for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**P. PIKE:** That would have put real money into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and hopefully some of the things that we're dealing with today, it would certainly help alleviate a lot of the issues.

I also thought about the number of seniors that we have in our province, 125,000-plus, and what they're going through. All of us are dealing with seniors each and every day – all of us. If we look at, for all of us, then our seniors are our most important. They have a lot of concerns when I'm speaking to them about the fact that they don't have any extra monies left over when they get paid after two weeks. They're just struggling to get by. When we talk about our children and the cost of having children and the cost of what we've done for the school food programs, this is what this is all about.

I remember when I first got elected, I couldn't think of how we would get through the pandemic, what that meant. We'd all watch the briefings every day and then after the pandemic was over, when we came to the House, it was so many things that needed fixing. There were so many things that happened during that pandemic that no one could explain.

It was during this time when we had a lot of talk about travel nurses and so on. But I remember the Opposition and the Third Party talking about travel nurses and getting

more nurses and keeping our hospitals open. It was so important, and we did it. I don't know how we did it, but we did it. It needed to be done. Everybody was asking for it, not only the 40 of us in this House, but every Newfoundlander and Labradorian was asking, how are we going to get through this? How are we going to get through these tough times?

These are the things that happened and these are the reasons why we had to act. I remember as minister of CSSD and the controversy and the comments from everybody on both sides about our homelessness problem. It was huge – it was huge. Every day in the House there were questions around that. Transitional housing, creating more beds in the shelters, but we did it. It's done. You don't have to worry about it. It's all done.

If you were facing those problems today, how would you deal with it? No different than us, I would argue. No different than us, because it's you and us that worked together to get most of these major items done, those major issues.

When I think about our plan to spend \$750 million for targeted short- and long-term plans to address the cost of living – \$750 million. During the last four years – since I was elected, anyways – Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have seen zero increase in taxes – zero. They've seen reduced taxes and they've seen very few tax increases. As a matter of fact, none – none.

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

**P. PIKE:** I don't mind the chirping; I like it, too.  
But not everybody, by the way, disagreed with that sugar tax. Not everybody, I can tell you that. We took criticism when we took it out. Now we're going to have an increase in diabetes in the province, and that's going to cause more stress on our health care system and everything else. So we took that.

We increased the Seniors' Benefit by 15 per cent. Not only that, indexed it – fantastic measures, great measures. We brought in supplements, which helped 150,000 families in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – earth-shattering, I'd say. There was a 300 per cent increase in the Child Benefit. Like, I remember standing up in the House and saying that and not believing it myself – 300 per cent increase. That's done. We've got that done. For you, now. You don't have to worry about that. We're happy.

The \$10 daycare – enough said about that, I guess. But look what that has done – look what that has done.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It's not a mess.

**P. PIKE:** It's not a mess. Yes, we heard that in the House last week. It was a mess. It's not a mess, and it won't be a mess, will it, Minister? It won't be a mess. Because we're going to continue it. We will continue it; we have to continue it.

We look at vehicle registration. What a wonderful thing we did there – 50 per cent reduction. Free medicals for people over 75 years old.

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

**P. PIKE:** But we got to leave something for you to do. We got to leave something for you to do.

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

**P. PIKE:** We have to.

I don't know what the people of the province would think if we didn't leave something. God, you got it all done, why did we need you? So we got to leave something for you.

The 15 per cent tax rebate on home insurance – people are always talking about home insurance and what it costs. It's going up every year. We've taken the 15 per cent

off. I'm sure the Minister of Finance is over there and he wants to run over and give me a hug because he doesn't have to do it.

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

**P. PIKE:** Yes, he does. I know he does.

But we did a lot for small businesses in this province. When I think about it, though, I still have to go back to the \$1 billion per year that we could be getting if we signed that MOU. I just can't help but think and when I speak to my fellow Newfoundland and Labradorians, they say, why is that gone for another study? Why don't we just take that and move with it?

In any event, I see my time is up, but thank you for your time and attention today. I felt it was important to remind you, as my colleagues will do as they speak, that we've done so much for this province and we've left very little for you to do.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

**M. KING:** Thank you, Chair.

I was going to say, Chair, to my colleagues in this House it's very hard to follow my hon. colleague for Burin - Grand Bank, I have to say. I can see why he had a great career as a teacher.

We're here now talking about an amendment to the bill, Bill 5. I seconded that amendment actually to the Member for Mount Scio, and I just wanted to reread the amendment, just so everyone listening at home and those following along to the broadcast can understand exactly what we're debating here.

This is the amendment that we're discussing. Section 51 would then read: A

person who acquires gasoline at a retail sale in the province shall pay to the Crown at the time of sale (a) on propane fuel grade of gasoline, a tax of \$0.04 per litre; (b) on gasoline for the operation of sea-going 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.

So that is the amendment that we're proposing to the bill that we are now debating here, Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak, especially on behalf of the constituents in my District of Burgeo - La Poile. As many people here in the House have known me to speak so far, it's a very coastal district, a lot of coastal communities, ferry-dependent communities. Obviously, there's a ferry that travels from Burgeo to Ramea to Grey River and a ferry that travels from Rose Blache to La Poile. Fuel costs, especially, are certainly something that's on the minds of many of the residents in my district.

As I've mentioned previously in this House before, I have communities – I'll take Route 470 for our first example. You know, you have the community in Rose Blanche at the end. That is where you get the ferry to La Poile. So the residents of Rose Blanche have to travel to, at least, Port aux Basques to get their groceries. So every day, most of the time – or whether it is groceries, whether it's medical appointments, whether it's a garage appointment, whether it's any kind of appointment they have, most of the services available to those residents are in Port aux Basques. Having to travel to Port aux Basques for a number of those services is a cost to those residents because they have to drive their vehicles every day. The stretch is, I think, about 30 kilometres back and forth.

I actually had a constituent reach out to me not long ago from Rose Blanche talking

about having to travel to Port aux Basques for their groceries, leave early in the morning to try to get there in the first place to get some of the groceries that are available. It's a cost to them. I think he told me on the phone, at that time, it was \$20 to go to Port aux Basques, \$20 back. It's very difficult, sometimes, when you get up there and the store and the items that you're looking for – a lot of these folks are seniors who are travelling early in the morning to get there first to get access to a lot of the groceries they're looking for and they're not there when they get there. I don't know if that's a demand matter or not, but it's very challenging for those people.

As I mentioned also, there's a store in Burnt Islands which serves as a gas station, as well, which is a bit of more, I would say, comfort to those residents down Route 470. One time, before, there was multiple stores along the way. I know there were multiple stores in Isle aux Morts and in Rose Blanche at the time, but now there's only the one convenience store, post office, gas station in Burnt Islands.

Yes, residents from down that way can certainly avail of that, if the supply is there, but as most people would know, they go to travel to Port aux Basques to the bigger gas stations to get their points going towards free gas or whatever they need to avail of, so those are some of the challenges that we face.

I think I've also mentioned before, Route 480 and the Burgeo Highway here in the House, Chair. That's about 150 kilometres of road; it's about a two-hour drive. It's more known as the Caribou Trail, so obviously you can certainly see a number of caribou, depending on the time of year when you travel. The sights on the road are unbelievable.

Many of the residents in Burgeo, Ramea and Grey River, to travel to the bigger centres to access the services that I've mentioned, have to travel over that highway.

So they're looking for a reliable road. They're looking for a lower cost to them to access those services that they need to avail of.

I know many people travel for medical appointments in either Stephenville, Corner Brook, have to travel to St. John's to access some services – and not only just the residents, as I've mentioned, but also the small businesses that are in those areas. They have significant costs that they face as well, whether that's getting the supplies that they need for their stores, especially. But I'm sure it takes the owners a lot of travel to get to those supplies. Depending on the availability, going back and forth from Burgeo especially, that would be causing issues for people as well.

When you think about gas, I know some people think first off at their home, their own home, and I know many of my colleagues here have children, they run back and forth with different activities and stuff like that.

So there are costs to everyone when it comes to fuel. I know electric vehicles are playing a part in our society now, but those are the costs that we're looking at. The original bill, as we've mentioned here a number of times, is maintaining the costs that we see on the taxation side for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. If the bill was to pass tomorrow, if it was changed tomorrow, there would be no change in the taxation side.

But with this amendment that we are proposing, they could actually use their slogan of lower taxes to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This amendment is actually lowering the tax that it currently is. So this is providing some of those options to the government, as they've mentioned a number of times.

Chair, I go back to a different part of my district again. Marine Atlantic, we all know how it is an essential service here to this province, and a number of commercial

vehicles use that service, as well as residents and visitors to the Island. Commercial vehicles especially that we see are truckers who do an incredible job in our province. We've seen a lot of conversations recently about access and being a reliable service, which I know the federal government is listening to. We're seeing significant changes to help there, and hoping to see more on an accessibility side as well. I certainly encourage the provincial government to join in that fight for accessibility in the ferry service.

It's a major employer in my area, and I know in Newfoundland and Labrador as well and other Atlantic provinces. So having that reliable service, trying to keep costs at a minimum for a number of people who use it, whether it is on the commercial side, those are businesses that are facing significant costs as well, so lowering the taxation for those folks as well will help

You know, obviously if the businesses see increase, they have to put up that cost somewhere else, so we see increase in groceries, we see increase in products that many people use. I know it's challenging, as I've mentioned previously about the grocery store in my district. Because when the commercial trucks usually come off the ferry, they tend to go to the Avalon first – that's just how it works – and then they make their way back to the other side of the Island and other different parts of the Island as well.

Accessing those good, solid products that people are looking for in the grocery stores or whether it's a pharmacy, that is very important to people as well. So lowering the taxes, lowering the costs for those businesses is important to many people.

Chair, I certainly enjoy listening to the Minister of Finance, as I've mentioned a number of times and I like to follow him because I know he listens very well. We hear a lot of the themes today about spending smarter and planning ahead and

planning what they do. I think the government is certainly figuring that out. When I think of spending smarter, I guess, they said, okay, we won't use the money in the political staff budget, but we'll go to MCP and find the money there to use to pay for our political staff. That's certainly smarter. That's what they were saying when they said spend smarter.

I can tell you, Chair, I was a political staffer back in the day. I worked more than 28 hours a week. I didn't make that much money and my salary was not from MCP. So I can put that in the *Hansard* here to put it on record for the folks in our province. Oh, and no bonus. I didn't get any bonuses either.

Planning ahead – they want to plan ahead for the future. So we're going to plan ahead for safer communities. We're going to cut the roads budget, so we cannot pave roads in our districts and provide safer roads for our communities, in rural Newfoundland especially. So, Sir, that's planning ahead.

Then they talk about planning in general. We're going to announce 24-hour snow clearing – oh, by the way, that's for some of us, not all of us. We're not going to have the staff to actually have 24-hour snow clearing, so that was what they meant by planning ahead.

I certainly see the theme that they're creating here. I know they've only been here 100-and-some-odd days, so they have a lot of work to do, I guess, but those are the themes that we're seeing: spending smarter, planning ahead. It's certainly showing and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are seeing that.

With that, Chair, I'll take my seat and I look forward to more discussion on the amendment ahead.

Thank you.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just stand and I'm going to have a few words on this. Of course, it's always nice to listen to other people speak, but I guess it's easy to throw things back and forth, what they were just talking about, the planning ahead, we're talking about the person they hired. Strange, they won't mention the \$11 million a year untendered contract for the airport inn. So it's easy to throw stuff back and forth. It's easy. It's very easy to do it.

I heard the Member talking about: You haven't got much to do. Well, I'll tell you a few things I'd like to see you do; I'd like to see now, the nurse practitioners, so you get thousands of people in Corner Brook and Western Newfoundland to be able to use it.

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

**E. JOYCE:** I'll tell you another thing I'd like to see done. I'd like to see the PET scanner in Corner Brook, so people don't have to travel into here. That's what I'd like to see. That was taken out by this government – it was taken out.

So when you want to start throwing stones across the way because of this here, have an idea of the past, because I've been part of the past.

I'll tell you another thing I'd like to see, and I'm going to keep pressing the Premier and the Minister of Health – who are very forthcoming on it – I'm going to try to get 45 new beds for long-term care patients to get the proper care so that we don't have a backlog in an emergency. That's something that, I say to the government opposite, you neglected when you built the new Western. You didn't make accommodations – which was in it – with the PET scanner, to take care of those seniors so the long-term care patients wouldn't go into the acute-care beds.

So there is a lot to do. There is a lot to do. It's easy to throw stones back and forth, trust me on that. Trust me, it's easy to do it.

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

**E. JOYCE:** So one of the Members just said: Well, speak about the bill. Okay, I will speak about the bill.

This is something, and I say again, I don't mean to be – I'm going to be voting against the amendment by the way, and I'll tell you why I'm going to be voting against the amendment.

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

**E. JOYCE:** Okay, start chirping again, saying I should join the caucus. Go ahead; stand up.

If you have something to say, stand up. The Member for Gander has something to say. You want to chirp, stand up and say it, have the courage.

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

**E. JOYCE:** Have the courage to stand up.

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

**E. JOYCE:** That's what I say. That's what I'm saying to people, if you got something to chirp, stand up. Don't go chirping at me.

Mr. Chair, I'll say it again, I'll sit down. If the Member for Gander wants to stand up to say something, say it. Stop chirping, you've got an opportunity.

So here it is, Mr. Chair, 18 days into the war. I heard the Minister of Finance say it, 18 days. The government, which I was part of it for a couple of years, had how many years, 10 years to increase this? They didn't do it in the last number of years when they brought it in every year. Now the government is making it permanent. Now they're saying, oh, you should go further.

I could tell you now, there are a lot of home care workers that may be looking that haven't got a raise in so many years – never got a raise. They might like a raise. I heard the Premier standing in this House and talking about there are a lot of things that were committed to that weren't in the fiscal forecast. So I don't know how much extra that would cost to get that done and to keep those commitments done –

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** \$110 million.

**E. JOYCE:** How much?

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** \$110 million.

**E. JOYCE:** Those were the things that were supposed to move forward that they already made the commitment that wasn't in the fiscal forecast. So, just knowing how the budget part works, the government of today has to find \$110 million extra just to keep those programs going ahead.

Here it is, a great opportunity to put this gas tax in permanent, unless another government comes in and says we're going to change it, and now the Opposition are saying, well, we should even go further now, which we had an opportunity to do because there's a war on the go for 18 days. The war has been on the go for 18 days and now we should go further? What if it drops below? What if it drops below even the current price before 18 days, do you decrease it again?

The other part is when do you increase it? Do you increase it now and just keep it going forward? What then about the budget? What then about the issues that you've got to raise; the issues I brought up, the PET scanner, seniors, home care workers who haven't got a raise in years and the people who go on their own? How many of us brought up student assistants in schools?

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

**E. JOYCE:** How many of us brought up student assistants in schools?

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

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

I can't hear the speaker.

**E. JOYCE:** That's another good one brought up. So it's this idea –

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**E. JOYCE:** Oh, I'm sorry.

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

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you.

Again, this is an opportunity now, that the government is saying, here's what we're going to put in the budget. I'm sure their budget process is completed, but now they have to go back and change the budget process because, when you're going to bring in something permanent like the gas tax, bring it in permanently, now you've got to go back and change the whole budget, try – try – to calculate what you're going to gain or lose if the price goes up and what if the price goes down, and then you've still got to pay these extra funds back to people? What happens to the budget then? What happens to the budget?

People would love to have that extra money, there's absolutely no doubt, but I can tell you one thing, there are a lot of seniors and a lot of people I know who would like to have their parents in a proper facility at the old Western Memorial Regional Hospital too. There are a lot of people who would like to have the PET scanner in Corner Brook so they don't have to come to St. John's for a 45 or 50 minute procedure, which was committed to.

There are a lot of people who can't now wait until the opportunity for the new part, Mr.

Chair, the new part of having nurse practitioners to bill MCP. I think that's going to make such a big difference for people in Western Newfoundland. That's going to make such a big difference.

The bigger part of all this here is should you change the budget now to decrease this here because of the war? Even since the war started, if people noticed the price of oil, the price of oil went up one day and the next day it was down again. How do you plan on the price of oil; because, from all the information that I ever received, you usually take the 10 or 12 different people who do the forecasting, you mix them all together and then you come up with, the experts always said, the price of oil that's going to be over the year. That's the way I always understood is the way it's done and, if I'm wrong, someone can stand up and say that.

My point on that is, now we're going to change this here, probably a week before the budget – 10 days before the budget, I would say – go back and do all your calculations over again. If the price of oil drops, you have to go back and recalculate again, so I would say that the prudent thing to do is wait until oil gets a certain level and then, if we got the opportunity to come to this House of Assembly, put in an amendment to change it. That can be done quite easily.

To do it now, all of a sudden – the government had 10 years to do it. All of a sudden, do it now because there's an opportunity now to make that gas tax relief permanent, now we should do more, which could have been done, and not with all the excitement going on – oh, the price of oil is up. Is that really the issue? Is that the issue or is the issue now we got a chance to put the government into a spot that says, okay, if you don't do it, there's going to be a big press release out tomorrow: The government wouldn't decrease the taxes on gas.

There's another issue with this, like how long would it stay up? Does it stay up permanently? Does it go up to a certain level and come back down?

That's the questions you've got to answer before you make this decision. We'll wait for the budget. We'll wait and see what's in the budget, to see how Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are going to respond. That's what I always said; give everybody an opportunity.

This idea here today that we're going to say, okay, we're going to go out now with a press release, whoever votes against this, as soon as this is done there's going to be a press release out – government wouldn't decrease the taxes. That's what's going to happen. I'm going to be standing here saying, we need nurse practitioners and we need other things.

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll only speak for a couple of minutes because I know there's a line of speakers that want to speak to this very important thing. I had to speak because I could not help – I've been here a while and I hear things coming across the House in Question Period and/or in debate like this that I think the public needs to understand that we're not going to sit down and listen to people say things and pass threats across the House of Assembly here.

First, it was our civil servants that if they voted Liberal in the past, they'll never get voted in. If –

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

**B. DAVIS:** No, no – we can threaten the civil service to say we haven't got them all yet. That is completely preposterous. It's wrong.

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

**CHAIR:** I call order.

**B. DAVIS:** The whole point that I wanted to get to is that we're talking about don't bite the hand that feeds you. This House of Assembly is about individuals that work for each –

**CHAIR:** The bill is on Bill 5 about gas tax. It's not a money bill.

I ask you to stick to the bill, please.

**B. DAVIS:** Perfect.

Well, I will get the opportunity to say that the people in the House of Assembly have the opportunity to work together. In this case, we've come forward with an amendment that makes insurmountable sense to the people of this province. Unlike the Member for Bay of Islands, I haven't been a part of the budget process this time. Unlike the Members on the opposite sides of the House, I haven't been part of the budget process. So I don't know what's going to be in the budget, now, this new budget.

What I can say is this is an opportunity for there to meaningful change right now. We know the gas prices are high. I think we're in the range of about \$16 million that we've had come into the coffers right now at this point. That will almost cover the entire aspect of what we're asking for –

**E. JOYCE:** Point of order, please, Mr. Chair.

**B. DAVIS:** – in this opportunity. There's absolutely –

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

A point of order has been called.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**E. JOYCE:** Chair, I'm going to stand on a point of order.

The Member just said that unlike the Member for the Bay of Islands, he wasn't included in the budgetary process. To make a statement that I was, in any way, involved in the budgetary process or any Member of Cabinet leaked stuff to me about what's being in the budget, it's an attack on my character and it's an attack on the Cabinet ministers' character also.

I ask the Member to withdraw that statement because at no time did I have any conversation of what's going to be in the budget. Anything I ever said, what I think should be there, what avenues, I said in this House publicly.

So I ask the Member to withdraw the statement because that is an attack on my character and an attack on each and every minister that's over there that would have gave me information that was in that budget.

**CHAIR:** We will take away the point of order and rule on it and come back to the Chair.

The Chair recognizes, again, the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

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

I am very happy to stand here and talk about lowering the gas tax. It's an important opportunity for us, as Members, to do the right thing. There was a quote that a gentleman that I grew up with in CLB years ago said: Good, better, best; never settle until your good is better than your best. I always thought that that was a very good quote. So there's an opportunity for us to be better.

We've heard from the Finance Minister on a regular basis so far this sitting that they're going to lower taxes. So this is a perfect opportunity for them to do that. It's already been paid for by the increase at the pumps right now, based on the increase in the oil prices that we see.

We understand that the Members – I realize the problems that you're facing, for sure. Heavy is the head that wears the crown, for sure. It's challenging to make those decisions. It's not easy. There are people who are impacted by every decision we make when we sit on that side. It's not lost on me that it's tough decisions you've got and every one of you have to make in Cabinet and on the other side to bring the budgetary process forward.

But what we're trying to do here is to do a little better. We never foreseen that oil prices were going to go up as much as they have, and it may still continue to go up. One thing that the MHA for Bonavista and the Finance Minister did say was that it was a challenge for us. When he came in, he didn't understand how the books were. I completely understand. We came in in 2015 and it was \$2.7 billion, so welcome to the club.

Clearly, there are no guarantees on what you're going to face with oil prices. The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island said it's like a dog's breakfast almost, you don't know what it's going to be or for how long it's going to be that way. We understand that. That's why we took a measured approach and why we came forward with the amendment. It wasn't taken off completely. We understood that was a challenge.

To be clear, the amount of money, if the budget was to stay or oil prices were to stay at this level – which we know it's going to fluctuate. We know that. But if it was to stay at this level, it could come to the tune of \$500 million to \$700 million extra to Treasury.

We don't want the war to continue on any longer than it has already. I hope it ends now. Every one of us in this House wants that to end and get back to normalcy, but this is an opportunity for us that the tax can be changed very easy by the House of Assembly here right now. It's one of the levers that the now Premier suggested that we should use a number of years ago. I've watched the videos on Facebook, like my colleague the Leader of the Opposition has said on a number of occasions, and it's one of those levers that can be pulled by the House of Assembly.

I'm not going to belabour it. I'll get an opportunity to come up again tonight I'm sure, but I will take my seat.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

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

It always is a privilege to speak here no matter what the legislation, of course, or what the bill, but in this case we know it's an amendment. I would like to commend my colleague, the Member for Mount Scio, because the work that she's put in and the numbers, I've got a lot of confidence in her intelligence and her number predictions that she's put forth, so thank you for that. She's probably one of the most talented Members here in the House.

But that said, too – and I'm also going to speak to my other hon. colleague across the House, who I have a lot of great respect for, the Minister of Finance – a great person, a great representative – but he did make a point to talk about the debt that was inherited for the past 10 years. I say to that Member, I only wish that he was here during the time prior to 2016 and he was a Member of that government, a voice of wisdom when we were flush with cash – and I quote – and when we had so much money during that

time and the debt that was carried then into the 2016 new administration.

Because when we first took government – that’s when I was first elected, 2015, November 30, I think, the date was and a number of my colleagues here in this House on both sides were elected that same time – we remember how hard that was.

I remember I was a new MHA at the time and, obviously, so excited, but let me tell you one thing, the shine came off very quickly when we had to make those tough decisions. I personally was not in Cabinet at the time. Not in the Cabinet but, of course, as a caucus and the decisions that we would even have to make, to support the Cabinet, they were startling. It was horrible, and we would all remember that we were in that time facing it because of the horrible restraints that we had.

Again, when we came off such a high – Members on that side, actually were quoted in saying, we’re flush with cash. We actually went from have-not status, to have status, at that time; but, unfortunately, there certainly wasn’t a Future Fund in place. Because if there was, perhaps it could have been a different scenario, as we know. That was a very hard time, to the point where the Finance minister of the day also cut the Cabinet positions by 10 per cent. Salaries that were once 50 are now down to 40, as the Members can now appreciate as well.

We also removed paid positions from the Deputy Chair of Committees. The Member for Lab West would appreciate that now, and also parliamentary secretaries. There were a number of cost measures that were put in place to help the people of the province because of the decisions that had to be made.

I remember when we came here – certainly the Speaker of the House would remember, because it was at that time when he actually left the caucus. He actually left the Liberal

caucus at that time because of decisions that had to be made.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** PC caucus.

**P. PARSONS:** At that time, he was in the Liberal caucus. But I digress. My point being, it was a hard time.

So we would only wish that we could have your wisdom and, obviously, it would contradict your words you said about what was inherited from just 10 years, but imagine what was inherited back in 2016. People say, you know, the bad word around here is Muskrat Falls. I’ve even heard other Members say that’s a dead issue. Well, unfortunately, the debt is not a dead issue.

The Member even went as far as to say the credit card still has to be paid off. Well, the credit card had to be paid off then; the credit card has still got a great, big debt on it.

We know what it’s like. Again, when you’re in government, you’ve got to be accountable; you’ve got to make those decisions. But what’s not lost on anyone in the public, in my district, what I hear on the Open-Line shows, is that things were said differently by a group that was here just not that long ago, than what we’re seeing now when they’re in the position, when they’re at the wheel. They’re the captain of the ship, if you will.

Some hefty promises were made. We know something that could have been done – the House of Assembly could have been opened in the fall sitting. I would say probably it was the most excited time I was ever looking forward to getting back in the House of Assembly, back in this fall. But, of course, we waited, we waited and we knew that wasn’t going to happen. But there were some quick measures that could have been put in place back then, such as some tax cut to businesses, as the Member for Mount Scio has also talked about. That would help small business owners here in our province significantly now, to do it before tax time.

We know power bills – we've heard people call in. I have to commend Dennis Browne, the Consumer Advocate, for the work that he has done and the credentials he brought to the position and how vocal he has been against Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, for what they could be doing, the measures they could be taking. But measures that we also know that the government has the power to do, is to remove the provincial tax off power bills.

How can we justify a spike from \$300 to \$600? I have a constituent who called me up, who has a number of homes, and he rents them out. Well, there was one home that stood vacant for months, and he managed to get a bill for \$700. There are no utilities. There is no running electricity. There is no consumer usage there in the home.

There are a number of levers. Again, it's just fact. I mean, it's all in *Hansard*. It's on record here in the House of Assembly about how passionate the Members were on that side. I know the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, how passionate he is. Every time he stood in that House, very passionate, represents his constituents and talked about how much can be done. Unfortunately, we're not seeing him up on his feet so often as we did. I look forward to hearing him speak whenever he does, but there's passion here to help, and now we're in a position to do just that. Yes, we have financial restraints we know that we have to work with, but it's not lost on the public about the promises that were made and they're now in the position how we're walking it back.

Another simple cost-saving measure that can be done – I think it was an election promise to actually cut for-pay parking at the Health Sciences Centre. Is that right? Am I right, colleagues, in saying that?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Yes.

**P. PARSONS:** That was a promise. Well, that's something that can be done immediately. We know people from all across Newfoundland and Labrador travel in from Labrador, from Stephenville, from my district, from every district in this hon. House. We have people coming in there who have to be there. Nobody wants to go to the Health Sciences Centre. Nobody wants to go there, but people have to go there. Something that we can do immediately, this government can cut the paid parking there. You can do that. That's a promise that was made; hopefully we'll see that happen.

We don't know what's going to happen yet. We're going to see the budget. We're all anticipating the budget, and we're going to see what's in there, but I'd also be remiss if I couldn't talk about the MOU. We perhaps should have talked more about the MOU, but what I will say and what I will commend is that we had international experts here for the first time in the history of this province that stood down here, they were seated down here, international experts, JPMorgan Chase. I know my colleague for Conception Bay East - Bell Island can name them. He's very passionate about it, very well up on it. They were here, and they took questions from each and every Member in the House.

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

**P. PARSONS:** My gosh, Chair, I'm hearing chirping. It's only fair that I have my focus. You can stand up and talk. The Member for Terra Nova can stand up and talk any time he wishes, so we'll wait until it's his turn. So they were here, international experts. They were also interviewed by the media. They gave briefings.

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

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**P. PARSONS:** Questions that were here, unprecedented debate. You don't get any more transparent than that on this MOU.

Premier Furey at the time, the Member for Deer Lake he was, actually opened the House after Christmas. Of course, no one wanted to come right back in on Old Christmas Day. I think we celebrated Old Christmas Day here in the House of Assembly.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** We did.

**P. PARSONS:** We got in here though, and right, you wanted it and you got it.

My point is it's transparent and we worked for it. We worked together on this to make sure that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians had the information and that every elected Member here on behalf of each of their districts had an opportunity to question those experts, and that's what happened.

I know the Finance Minister was very engaged at the time. Here we know this is a lifetime opportunity to make or break our province, if you will. We stood to gain \$1 billion that you would have to work with right now in this budget, just and alone, in good faith. We know that premiers of the past – Premier Williams, perhaps one of the most popular premiers in this province, tried to cut open that deal and break open that deal to rectify the wrongs of the Churchill deal from '69. We know Premier Grimes did the same thing. It didn't happen then; it couldn't be done, but in this point in time, Quebec is in a different position where they are in a desperate position for power. We have that resource. We don't see Saskatchewan coming knocking on our doors.

People, we can hold grudges of the past but we have to work with our geographical partners. The thing is, we have the proper measures in places to protect Newfoundlanders and Labradorians from the rates going up and down, an escalation clause, if you will, but we stood to gain a quarter of a trillion dollars. Imagine what can be done.

I see the Premier over there, he's – woo – he's all, you know, the expression on his face about the amount of money that I just here put on record about what we stand to gain. It's only fair that the Premier actually gives us an update on the definitive agreements, what's happening.

I mean, he talked about an independent panel. We know that the panel is not independent. The leader of the Emera in Nova Scotia, who gave us Muskrat Falls, is on that panel, right?

So this is the thing, I'm running out of time quickly, but my point is, what that can do for the people of this province for cost of living, whether it's child care, whether it's people wanting to pay their medications, people wanting to eat, people getting back and forth to work. It would make a world of difference.

Talk about the hospitals that we could have with that money. We wouldn't have to dip into an MCP budget, which is for surgeries, your surgeries, your family members' surgeries, your doctors' visits – that is not for that budget. So maybe that's a cost-saving measure that they're trying to dip into, but the people of the province know and they're not happy about this first move.

I call on the government –

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

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

**P. PARSONS:** I call on the Premier and the government to do the right thing. You have an opportunity, and to take this – this is a great tax that we introduced. We did this, so take it further and cut the tax, I say to the Premier, for the people of this province.

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

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

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

**L. PARROTT:** Chair, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

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 Placentia West - Bellevue, Chair of Committee of the Whole.

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

Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and 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 him 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 move, seconded by the Member for CBS, that this House do now adjourn.

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

Is it the wish 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.

This House do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, March 18, at 10 a.m.

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