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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA*

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The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Admit strangers.

**Government Business**

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

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

Speaker, Order 6, second reading of Bill 6.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

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

**M. GOOSNEY:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Labrador West, that Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997, be now read a second time.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997." (Bill 6)

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** The *Pension Benefits Act, 1997*, sets minimum rules to protect workers' pension benefits to make sure pension plans are properly managed.

Speaker, many pension plans today operate across our provincial-federal boundaries, depending on where people live and where companies operate. Newfoundland and Labrador participates in an agreement on multi-jurisdictional pension plans with all provinces and territories and the federal government.

Before I go further, I just want to speak about being signed up here to represent people and how it is a true honour to present a bill, as such, to protect the employment that people have put in for years and years and years, and the whole goal in this bill is to allow participating in federal-provincial-territorial agreements.

Pension assets are allowed to move between provinces and territories when plans are merged or consolidated. National companies often want to combine small provincial plans into one national plan; this lowers administration costs for them and can improve investment returns for pension members, which is the goal here. If assets can't be transferred, however, companies may be forced to terminate local pension plans instead. That would be detrimental, Speaker.

When a plan is terminated, workers receive the value of their pension at that point in time only; no future pension growth occurs, workers must manage it themselves and take on the risk of investment. Those funds are then placed into a locked-in retirement account and many people need professional advice to manage them, many times at the senior age. While individuals can choose to move those funds into another pension plan, each person has to do this on their own, which is complicated and can be burdensome.

Allowing direct transfers between pension plans across provinces and territories avoids this problem and lets workers, one, stay in a pension plan secured, two, continue earning benefits and, three, avoid unnecessary disruption and risk. Current legislation, however, does not allow these kinds of transfers, which creates real challenges for workers. That is why we are proposing this change here today and looking to update the *Pension Benefits Act, 1997*.

These changes would allow out-of-province transfers and ensure protection for workers,

including the requirements that the receiving plan must meet standards similar to Newfoundland and Labrador and the plan must be well funded; by that we mean, at least 85 per cent funded or better than the original plan of transfer.

The goal here, truly, is simple. It's to protect workers' pensions, reduce the risk and reflect how today's workforce and businesses operate.

Speaker, as a youth growing up in this province – I first grew up in Churchill Falls in Labrador and moved on to Deer Lake when my father got transferred and went to Roddickton – I can still remember my parents on a Saturday night or a Friday night, watching a hockey game or watching *Dallas*, all I heard was pensions, pensions, pensions, pensions. At that age, I was very inquisitive but I still didn't understand what a pension was – what is a pension?

Every employer, every place I went throughout life, the first thing you'd talk to people and they'd say: Set your pension; make sure you're in a good fund. Back to this bill and when I go around the province, you talk to people at their doors, the fact people are struggling, not everybody's up to speed. Sometimes I look back at that inquisitive kid. I was seven or eight years old and think about Mary in Rocky Harbour or John in St. Judes, and not everybody is up to speed on where they should be in a pension plan.

This bill, ultimately conducted by staff in my department – you're going to hear me speak about them a lot, Mr. Speaker, because I'll be first to come here to say that I'll never proclaim to know it all or have all the answers, but I know what they are doing with myself and the department. It's an honour to be here and to be able to impact people's lives in a prosperous way that they can be protected. This truly is a bill about protecting seniors. The goal is to retire with pensions.

Maybe this is not pertinent to the bill – correct me if I'm wrong – but I think it's something that needs to be said here, I've often heard and you'll hear about every politician that sits here in this room – we only all signed up for a pension.

Well, that's not a fact, in my case. If I had stayed in the trades, this pension wouldn't even be close. I know there's been adjustments, but our ultimate goal when you work through life in any profession, whether you're a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer or a plumber, like myself, it's how do you benefit for when you finally get to retire?

That's a whole other word because, when I look at my mother, she's like Michael Jordan; she keeps coming back out of retirement. She just doesn't want to accept the fact that she's a pensioner, but that's where it is and that's where it needs to be. The reality is this is a very important bill as much as it may be a simple one to get through, and that we all agree on. I'm open for questions; that's what I'm here for.

You go to grocery stores, especially in my district, and you see a lot of seniors on grocery day. It wasn't that long ago, maybe 30-plus years ago, when I used to stock shelves and push grocery carts out to the parking lot and, oftentimes, you'd hear the seniors talking about: I got my pension cheque. That rolls into a whole other thing now where you're seeing banks starting to get away from the bricks and mortar, which I think is another conversation that's within this bill. If a senior can't get their pension cheque as they're used to, delivered by hand to cash it for the goods that they need, then that's something else that we'll further have to adapt to.

Coming in here, I watched this place as long as it has been online, and I think CPAC was on since the '90s, and the word continues, continues, continues, pensions, pensions, pensions, and here I am standing up to talk about it.

When you get into the crux of what some questions may be, ultimately all this comes down to there's a layer of protection. When I ask my staff, so why is this bill here now, what is it we need to do and why is it we're doing it, the reality is to protect pensioners.

But that can only be done with justification of the Superintendent of Pensions, which is solid for me to know and for all Members to know that may not be aware – as I said, I'd never stand here to say I know it all, but I'm having a great learning. It all comes back to the Superintendent of Pensions. It's a really good backstop. It's a very professional individual in our department, and I'd like to thank him for his service.

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

**M. GOOSNEY:** To remain in a professional managed pension plan that holds larger assets, gives me greater comfort to support and present this bill, and that ultimately is what the goal is here. The fact that I get to stand here – and I'll say this, Speaker, I'll make your job a lot easier. If I go off par, someone doesn't have to call relevance because I can stand here and talk all day, but I want to stick in particular to this bill.

There are a multitude of pensions, fixed pensions, and I do believe, back to me speaking about being a child and being inquisitive, I think in our education portfolios, I think in our public education, I think we could protect people and do a better job. It's not always about the politics of who voted in favour, who didn't vote in favour. You'll hear me say it numerous times about the people outside these four walls, is what we are all here for. Whether we have our differences and our disagreements, that's all the blessing of democracy. But this here also is a blessing of democracy, that allows us to pass law that protects people.

You've heard me say it numerous times that I still feel that to be here is an honour that feels surreal. When I wake up in the morning or when I go to bed at night reading

a bill like this and I know I get to stand here, this still and will always be an honour.

Back to going to bed, when someone can go to sleep at night and know they have a predictable income – although we hear struggles of pensions, seniors say how they're capped and that's the other side of what we're trying to do to make life affordable for everybody is to lessen taxes, to lessen burdens. But, boy, could I get into this crux. So everyone might want to sit back here for a little bit.

I keep referring back to my late father, and you'll probably hear me often because he was a very intelligent, very strict individual. When I told him I was going to sign up into politics and, being a military veteran, he didn't have a whole lot of love for government programs. A lot of times he felt left behind.

When I look at this and I think of some seniors, still vets – and I'm very well involved and I try to stay close to the Legion in my hometown and other places. Any time, if there are questions on this bill, if there's debate, I'm not trying to sell it and say hey, this is how you should vote, but this is a very crucial part to citizens, to seniors, to vets.

I can almost feel like my dad would be saying he's pretty proud to see us standing here to do the right things in what we were elected to do.

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

**M. GOOSNEY:** It was interesting. It was just last week I was in the hallway here and I met a gentleman that's had a case file with government for maybe two decades. It's a struggle for me to understand how they couldn't get an answer. It's his late mother. They had talked about how she was two years where they had thought she was 65 and basically the Crown was telling her she was 63.

It really, truly struck me because this is as true as it can get – it happened to my grandmother. It wasn't until we were at her birthday party, being younger, kids love candles, and I said, Mom, I want to put 65 candles on Nan's cake. Everybody said, no, Nan's 63. I said, no, Nan is 65, and I'll tell you why. So when I visited her house often, basically became part of her couch watching *The Young and the Restless* at lunch –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Victor Newman.

**M. GOOSNEY:** And Nikki, and God love – Nan used to say I used to look like Nicholas, which I still don't get.

It was only because of her photo albums, and I know we live in a digital era, but I saw a birth certificate for my late grandfather and they were both the same age. I said: How can Nan be two years younger than Pop when they got married at the same age? So then they went back and they found all the documents, and it took quite a while, but when she was actually two years past her pension, she got two years of retro pay because the government had messed up.

I met a gentleman out here with the Commissionaires, and I have his file. I'm hoping to be able to clarify that, but it's just something so, so important. Can you picture being a senior for two years, husband passed, very little income, and trying to make your way through?

I can remember going to the grocery store and it was much, much a time before Interac or any plastic banking cards, and I go grocery shopping. It was okay if you went up to the register – everybody knew it in my home town specifically – if you had \$107 worth of groceries and you only had \$100, you put \$7 back.

I still see seniors struggle. Whether this pension plan, this bill, which I say is extremely important, as much as it might seem like a minute move in government,

can protect people when I'm not here, when many of us won't be here, I think that's the importance and the whole goal of this bill.

When I think about all the doors that I knocked on, and talking to seniors and the cost of living and everything that goes on and the expectation of conduct and the business that happens in this House, it all comes back to money. Some can say it's the root of all evil; some can say it's the blessing, but how we best work together to secure the future for seniors that are current and for youth that we hope – at least I hope myself, too – will become a senior. To be able to maybe look back on a computer one day, and many of us will hopefully be off in our greater later years, to be able to look back and say that we presented this bill and we worked together to do something to protect the future that will be our present.

It will be an honour if this bill were to pass, and I would kindly ask all to feel free at the point of when it comes to question in Committee, to don't not ask a question that you think might be silly or might be off track, because I'm here for any question, and I'm also the type that will ask any question.

I feel within this bill, my colleague across the way, my critic, I think we're both eager – and they've met and it's great when you see, again, the learning curve, that Opposition wants to come to be briefed so we can all understand what it is we're here to present to improve the lives of others. So I just want to say thank you for that.

The conduct that's went on – correct me if I'm wrong here. I'm not one to break the rules, but if I do, I'd want to be told and sit first. The conduct and the passion that goes on in this House – and I know it might seem like games to folks, and I can hear this Member chirping and this Member chirping and eventually I'm feeling I'm probably going to chirp at some point too, but I'm going to try my darndest to just be me. We're all individuals and we all do this differently, but it can be intense.

But I think it's intense for the right reasons, even when sometimes we can feel we lose ourselves. I was looking at the Grade 5 classes up here a couple of weeks ago and was thinking, shoot, if they were down here and we were up there, what would they think? But it's real, because nobody here would have knocked on all the doors or went and made all the calls and got all the volunteers and all the friends behind them and supporters to get here.

I just want to talk just a little bit longer on the fact that I – and I hope other Members – remind ourselves as we knocked on a door, as we had – for us new MHAs – our training, that everything we do here now has a continuity to pensions and the fact that we're here to improve the future. Long goals, present solutions, they're never easy. Not even at a municipal level. You go in, you're gung-ho, I'm going to fix 100 different things, and you hit roadblocks and you realize you can't fix it all. But sometimes in legislation and policy and regulations, back to – not to quote the Member opposite, but it was said similar, we're here for evolving, in evolution to continue to improve things.

In 50 years' time, look around the room, some of us may still be here – there are a couple. They'll still be amending things because we learn from how things weren't the best, and that's what we're here, to make it the best.

Bear with me, Speaker, because I could go on here for quite sometime.

I'm not going to chew up the whole clock but, again, I ask everybody if you do get the time – I understand everybody's portfolios are extremely full, emails, texts, messages, the modern world we work in and the modern – when I see a lot of the pictures around this – I call this place the building. When talking to my partner, she's like, are you in the House today? I just call this whole place the building because there's a lot of history in this building.

To be here, to be a part of this history – again, I am going talk about forever – it's something that will be honorable and I think there's a reason for it. It's because we get to stand to speak, to debate, to battle, to improve the lives of others, and the Opposition and everyone hears it all the time and it is truly –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I would ask the minister if he could try to bring it back to the actual bill.

Thank you.

**M. GOOSNEY:** Yes, sorry.

I appreciate that, Speaker, because like I said, this is new to me and try to throw too much passion out, but you don't want to turn a bill into politics. I mean, the opposite had their platform and some key messaging. Ours is, we're here for all of us, to improve for all of us, and this what this Pensions Act is about.

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

**M. GOOSNEY:** I once was an employer, not just an employee, and I thought at that time, now where do I go with pensions or how am I going to protect myself? I think this also includes employers in improving how they feel that their employees are protected. When morale is up in places of employment, things are more productive, which is better for society; it's a benefit for all of us.

The reality is this bill that is presented – and I look forward to the debate and the discussion – is an important one. I just ask that everybody read through the fine lines of each part. Again, if there are any questions, I'm here. I'm here to serve in the best interest of all of us, progressively and conservatively.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**K. WHITE:** Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Pensions Benefits Act, 1997.

While this is a technical piece of legislation, I'm happy to say our caucus will be supporting it, as pension protection and security is very important. Pensions represent years of hard work and stability for individuals, and security in retirement. This bill modernizes and clarifies Newfoundland and Labrador's pension solvency framework, aligning our legislation with other jurisdictions in Canada and further protecting workers.

First, it formally defines two key actuarial terms: solvency assets and solvency ratios. These are standard pension concepts used across Canada. Putting them clearly in statute improves transparency and reduces ambiguity in how funding levels are measured. Second, the bill repeals and replaces section 58 of the act, to establish clearer rules around pension asset transfers.

Under this framework, pension assets cannot be transferred unless certain conditions are met. If the receiving plan is registered in Newfoundland and Labrador, it must be properly filed and reviewed. If the receiving plan is registered in another jurisdiction, it must be part of a recognized multilateral agreement and meet minimum solvency standards.

Importantly, the plan must have a solvency ratio of at least 0.85 or higher than the transferring plan. A solvency ratio measures whether a pension plan has enough money to meet its obligations if it were to wind up. A 0.85 ratio means the plan is funded at 85 per cent of its liabilities on a termination basis.

This 0.85 threshold is consistent with other Canadian pension regulatory practices, such as in the Province of Ontario. It represents a reasonable and balanced standard, one that protects plan members while allowing practical flexibility in cases of corporate restructuring or multi-jurisdictional consolidation.

This bill also requires written approval from the Superintendent of Pensions before any transfer occurs. It strengthens oversight and ensures that pension assets cannot simply be moved without regulatory review. The accompanying regulatory amendments further clarify how transfer values are calculated when a plan is underfunded. The formula now explicitly states that transfer values will be calculated by multiplying the committed value by the lesser of one and most recently determined solvency ratio.

This means if the plan is fully funded, members receive 100 per cent of their value, and if the plan is underfunded at transfer, the value reflects the actual funded status of the plan. This standard actuarial practice ensures fairness and consistency and prevents payouts that exceed the assets available in the plan.

These amendments do not fundamentally change how pensions operate, rather they clarify definitions, codify standard practice and strengthen oversight mechanisms. The Liberal Opposition supports responsible modernization of our pension framework. We support clear standards and appropriate regulatory oversight and, most importantly, we support retirement security for workers and retirees in Newfoundland and Labrador. We believe this legislation strikes a reasonable balance between protecting plan members and ensuring that our pension regulatory system remains aligned with contemporary Canadian standards.

For those reasons, we will be voting in favour of Bill 6.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

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

**K. RUSSELL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always an honour and privilege to rise in this wonderful House and talk a little bit about Bill 6 here and the Pension Benefits Act.

Now I'm going to take you back to Goose Bay for a little while, if you don't mind. I want to talk about my grandparents. I wanted to talk about Maude Russell, and I wanted to talk about Eliza Edmunds.

If you're wondering how this is going to fit, we had two very big families. We had a Labrador family and a Newfoundland family, if you would. In talking about that family, both of the men, so both my pop and my gramps, happened to pass on before my nan and my gram. So there were many years – I'll use Nan when it comes to talking about a pensioner for the simple fact that she was 40 years without Pop; Pop dying somewhere around '81, I believe, and Nan worked up on the base, and you know 5 Wing Goose Bay in Lake Melville, Mr. Speaker, a big military presence.

As a pensioner, as a widower, Nan had 40-plus years working without Pop. She worked up at the mess hall on base, and when she ran into military personnel in there serving chow, she was known for her extra hamburgers. My good friend, Udo Mollers, up the road, who was part of the German Airforce, basically said whenever you saw Nan and her beautiful smile, you knew you were getting an extra bit of hamburger – maybe an extra patty or two if you wanted, Mr. Speaker.

In saying that, that's what this piece of legislation is all about. It's about protecting

pensions, pensioners and the rules outlined therein.

Again, we said, it's about, firstly, protecting workers and that's what that's about. We talked about my gram and we talked about my nan. They were, like I said, many years without Pop and Gramps there.

My grandfather on the Edmunds side, Mr. Speaker, he came down, settled in Goose Bay from Northern Labrador and ended up becoming a fully-accredited engineer with the American government, which was, I'd say, a beautiful story, if you will, for a young Inuk from Northern Labrador.

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

**K. RUSSELL:** Thank you very much.

In saying that of course, then you think about Gramps passing away before Gram, and then you have Gram and the pensions. That's what happens in these situations, those pensions will be transferred over so they'll be able to claim that as they get up in age too.

Unfortunately, I got cut off in the House there last time, Mr. Speaker, when I was talking about my grandmothers. As it relates to government and the purse strings that we hold, and how we are duty bound and it is an honour and a privilege for us to take care of our elders in this province, but I'll say that I did want to remind people of that, that I did get cut off last time when I was here speaking in this hon. House, and I wanted to talk about that in terms of, I had watched one grandmother go through Alzheimer's and everything, and one where her body deteriorated.

It was interesting to see that as they aged, and these were both pensioners, Mr. Speaker, again, but that's what happens. That's how we have to be in this province when we take care of those people who have shown us the way, because it's those pensions and those calculations that have

to be made on behalf of our seniors as they go into personal care and long-term care here, and we cover the cost of those as best we can too. So when it comes to talking about that, from a financial perspective, to make sure that our seniors can be well cared for as they get up in age is a very important thing.

So anything we can do from a legislation point of view and as Legislators as part of our work in this hon. House and to protect them, I say it's well warranted and it's good work in and of itself, just for what it means.

In saying that, as we have to take our old folks and put them in the homes sometimes and make sure that they're safe and, in some cases, even being protected from themselves as they get up later in years; that we have progressive legislation, Mr. Speaker, that can make sure that we protect.

If it's only the finances of people in this case, that's great, but, like I you said, that's what it takes in order to have them financed in those twilight years, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to say that it's trying times out there and everybody is seeing this across the province. I mean, it's tough times in terms of economies, what's going on across the world. We're seeing that but we're also feeling the pinch here at home. As gas prices rise, as food prices rise, we feel the pinch right here. So everything we can do to make sure that the financial assets of our seniors are protected in the long run, is meaningful work. It's as simple as that.

If you talk about the way things are changing, we have to be progressive in the sense that we shift with the times. If we look at the way businesses operate, the way people operate within companies, there's much more fluidity to it in these times, I can say, than in past where, perhaps if you had a shop, you had bricks and mortar. You had a building and that building was located at such-and-such location within town and

then you did your physical advertising where you put a piece of paper in a newspaper or in a mailbox. People could see that and then come out to that business, support that business and all that, but what I'm saying is businesses now employ people differently. They work differently. They behave differently. They exist differently.

In saying that, they have to have ideas behind pensions and the remittances of all kinds of remuneration to their staff that is progressive and that is with the times, which this does.

The Member across the way talked about liquidity ratios and all that stuff and how we're bringing this in as a minimum of 0.85 in terms of that, and that's great. If your pensions are doing better, well, so be it. I mean, what if you're up over 100 per cent? You're doing great.

This says that no matter where you are, we're going to perform at least this good; we're going to make sure that, if we bring in pensions from outside or we consolidate pensions, whether that's crossing jurisdictions or whether we're talking about provincial, inter-provincial or, even in some cases, where we're talking about people coming from countries and companies abroad as well.

So what I'll say, Mr. Speaker, is that we have to behave differently. We have to make sure the legislation reflects that the changing times are there. We have to make sure that we take into consideration how people are doing today, how they are going to be doing as they get into their twilight years, as pensioners, and to make sure that the legislation can be brought, time and time again, into this House and we see the democratic process at work, by which we see changes needed, whether that's industry driven, whether that's driven by markets, whether it's driven by individuals, companies, pensions out there, the success and failures of certain pensions. We'll see,

but we have to be flexible so that we can take those ideas back into the House.

This comes from all sides of the House and, I say, from every party, again, Mr. Speaker. We've heard the minister in his opening remarks, he's saying he's ready – just not only on this bill, but on everything that we do on this side of the House, we're ready to work. We're ready to work with Members across the way. We're ready to work with people out there in the public, in their districts, and we're ready to say that when the time comes and we need that change – and it could be brought upon by anybody from across the way. It could be a member of the public. It could be a pensioner out there with a great idea that it leads to bringing that to our bureaucrats.

They'll propose the amendments, the change to the legislation. The hon. minister then brings that towards this House. We get up from all sides and we talk about gram and gramps. We talk about nan and pop. We talk about our pensioners, the people who mean something in our lives, the ones that mean the most to us and the reason, hopefully, that we're all here in this House is to support not only our friends in our districts and all that, but those family members and those elders that have shown us the way.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, whether that's a change, what we've seen here is a few changes in there. We've seen some of the other people have already – I won't bother you with that, Mr. Speaker, but when you're talking about the individual changes there, we said basically if you've got a solitude ratio and you want your pension to be consolidated and moved from one province to another, no problem, we'll make sure you're at least at 0.85.

It's about making sure that these fund holders are protected, too. So we talk about people that are holding on to this pension; they own that pension. That's their fixed pension. They can budget their month, their

year, based on what they're going to be getting from their pensions. They know what that is. We want to make sure that those things are protected for our people.

We want to make sure that people know that no matter who holds your pension, that when your pension is in Newfoundland and Labrador, your pension is going to be safe. You know that you have a government that is responsive to your needs as a pensioner. So if things change in your life and you want to talk to your MHA, about maybe what can be done or changes could be incorporated into this hon. House, we're open for that as well.

I think, as the minister said and he alluded to, it's not so much just simply dotting a few i's and crossing a few t's here, Mr. Speaker, but it's about a Progressive Conservative government that is doing just that, that's being progressive to the point that we're trying to get ready for any pitfalls that might be out there from our pensioner's perspective and from those seniors who have built this beautiful, wonderful province that we're all so proud of. We want to make sure we do whatever we can.

Again, like I said before in the House, it's not the biggest changes we're amending here or making. There's nothing really contentious here. I think we can expect to have a lot of support across the House for this.

Everybody has that in their family. We're all pensioners, to some degree. Some more than others, I say to the ones with a little more snow on the mountain. You know who you are around this House, Mr. Speaker, in terms of some of us – you also have younger fellows here, got a ways to go, maybe. Even in terms of some of the newer people in the House, before you can say you're a pensioner, you've got to serve your time. You've got to pay your dues.

What we are saying as a government is simply this – when it comes to our elders, it

comes to those people that built this place, when it comes to your nest eggs, if you will, and what it takes to get your family by in these trying times with the prices what it is, the gas what it is and all the other volatility across the world we can't control at home, we tell you this. At least when it comes to your pension, we want to make sure that you and your pension are protected, that this government is responsive in the sense that we'll be here to make moves to our legislation and to our regulations as need be, as per the needs of the people of the province and that we are just that – a Progressive Conservative government that cares for our people, that makes sure that this House engages in respecting our elders and the ones that built this beautiful province.

So with that, I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill. Thank you to the minister. Congratulations to him for putting it forward and I look forward to further debate in this House.

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

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

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

This, again, is a multilateral agreement across provinces. It allows for the transfer of assets, corporations represented in the province allows for individuals to move to larger plans and it benefits members at no risk to the plan.

Now, as one of these Members here with more snow on the mountaintop, I will echo the minister's comments about the importance of pensions and the need to protect worker pensions and to limit risk. I'm glad to see that there is a focus on pensions and this is something certainly that we will support.

I will say this, that if anything else in my former career as a teacher, that pensions and benefits were often more important than salary, or equally as important, because you can have a salary but if you don't have anything to retire to, then it makes it very difficult. So planning for that retirement because there may come a point when you may want to work longer or you may want to move to another province. Whatever it is, the fact is that if you don't have that ability, you're really limited in your options, especially if you're not up to working at that time.

Now, I'll be the first to admit when I first started teaching, I think I was more happy with regard to having a salary. I was making more money than I had made before. I would say, like most new teachers, I didn't really know if a pension was fit to eat, but we had a lot of senior teachers there, a lot of senior people who very clearly made sure that young colleagues were laser focused on looking to the future. That's really what a pension is.

Because, in the end, it allows for options. I can only think of the Teachers' Pension Plan because I look at what we struggled with over the years, Speaker, is the unfunded liability that was there. We did have, as long as I was a teacher, it was a perennial problem.

I know back in 2006, at that time, there was a PC government that attempted to fix that. It was under Premier Williams at the time. They put \$1.95 billion, Atlantic Accord money, into the Teachers' Pension Plan. Now, we surrendered, made significant concessions on sick leave and I'll be one of the first to say that I opposed it, because of the fact that the sacrifice was way too great.

However, here was the problem. The plan was run by government. They didn't derisk. They didn't change the asset mix and two years later, that \$1.95 billion was gone and the plan was back into an unfunded liability status, and here we were facing the

prospect of it going bankrupt, and we also gave up sick leave.

While we're talking about this pension plan here, about this move, I'm a firm believer in defined benefit plans as opposed to defined contribution plans, because defined contribution plans put all the risk on the worker. If I understand it with this bill here, this amendment is about also taking the risk from workers. But a defined contribution plan really puts all the risk totally on the individual.

A defined benefit plan, I guess, regardless of what it's doing, you're guaranteed a certain benefit when you retire. I think, for most people, especially if they don't have an index plan, that offers some modicum of protection.

When I became president of the NLTA in 2013, guess what was one of the main issues? The pension plan again. We entered into discussions with the then PC government to enter into a joint sponsorship. It was a significant challenge. It meant that teachers and government or the employer, they were sharing that risk.

Now, a lot of good discussion. There was some fear at the time that the Liberals were coming in, and there was a threat that they would turn all pension plans into defined contribution plans. So we did sign the deal, but it worked out; if I'm reading the results correctly, it's at 125 per cent funded ratio. It's doing better than it's ever done, but it's a joint sponsorship.

We also made sure, in setting up the board of directors, when we chose our members that there would be no political influence on this. We made sure that the people we chose to sit on that board basically had one thing in mind, the health of the plan. It didn't matter – like, they could come to the association and we couldn't just say, no, we don't want that, there had to be a fiscally viable option there that would make the plan work with the option of maybe creating and

having an index clause in it. Which is why we were surprised then, in 2021, with the Moya Greene report, and the Minister of Finance at the time, that our plan was underfunded when everything said otherwise.

That riled a number of people, me included, but the fact is that the plan has been doing well and, guess what, that means generations of teachers, young people, at least they know when they enter the profession that at some point in the future they've got that flexibility to either keep teaching, retire and take a pension, maybe enter into some other work if they wish, but the fact is they have that option. That's because of the hard work and the sacrifice of the generations of teachers that went before and the fact that we realized if you're going to protect people now, you have to protect their future.

I'll go a bit further because this plan allows flexibility. I know for us, for many years, it was hard to transfer from – let's say, if a teacher here wanted to go up to Ontario to teach. It was very difficult to transfer their pension benefits from here when it was underfunded. At least now that it is funded, the ratios very well allow that for people to transfer that pension into another jurisdiction, especially if, because of family situations, they have to move.

I'll end with this, pensions are good but I will say that it's not just good enough to say pensions. It has to be defined benefit plans, it must be; because, if anything else, that protects the workers who are – really, their income is their income. They're not making the profits or anything else, but defined benefit plans are definitely the way. If we're going to invest in plans, let's focus on defined benefit plans and making them work.

By the way, the TPP and the Public Service Pension Plan are examples of how we can make defined benefit plans work and keep them funded.

The other thing is indexing, because I think it's been raised by a few people here already, with regard to our mom and dads and that who are on pensions, if they're not indexed, it doesn't take long. If you live 10, 20, 30 years, you start to realize that the real purchasing power of those dollars is going down significantly, which is why we have so many seniors struggling right now.

So I think if you're looking at future amendments and future ways, let's find ways to also make it so that people who do retire are able to live comfortably and are not finding themselves struggling.

The joke, I guess, I used to make whenever I attended an actuarial meeting when they talk with the health plan, my question was: When do you want me to die to make the plan work, because that's what it comes down to. Actuaries are looking at how many people are going to live long, how many people are going to die early and so on and so forth. Those are going to calculations, but I think the defined benefits plans and indexed plans, we have to look at that if we're going to have a healthy and aging senior population.

I'll end with this, while we're making the changes to the pension plan here, and these amendments – which we will support – we will continue to fight; and why we demand that you cannot just have a four-year plan to talk about pensions and have advisory committees on pension plans for our early childhood educators, that will not put food on the table and allow them to retire. It comes down to having a pension plan that they can actually depend on and it starts today.

So while we're making these amendments, Speaker, and we'll support them, we also demand action from this government to provide the benefits to our early childhood educators so that they too can look forward to a retirement and one that provides them a comfortable retirement at that.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

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

It's a privilege to stand and talk about pensions. I got to be very familiar with pensions when I was minister of Digital Government and Service NL, when we brought forward legislation in 2020 to allow unlocking of pensions, which I'll talk about after.

I do think pensions are very complicated. The average person doesn't really understand their pension. Very few people understand what's allowed, what's not allowed and all the nuances around pensions. This act, I would say the average person may or may not know, we're not talking about anything to do with teachers' pensions, for example, they have their own legislation. We're not talking about public service pensions; they have their own legislation.

This legislation only deals with pensions that are registered in Newfoundland and Labrador. When you look at someone's employer, to find out if their pension is registered in Newfoundland and Labrador versus another province, you could look like where the headquarters of the pension is. If I worked at Dominion or Loblaws, for example, and I had a pension – if I was fortunate enough to have a pension with a company like that – their pension is unlikely to be registered in Newfoundland and Labrador because the headquarters for Dominion or Loblaws, as an example, would be in Ontario.

Their headquarters are in Ontario and that's usually where the pension is registered so the laws of Ontario, in terms of their pensions, would apply. So the *Pension Act*, what we're talking about today, would not

apply for those workers. The province in which the pension is registered applies for those pensions and oversees those pensions.

So we're only talking about pensions registered in Newfoundland and Labrador. So those are primarily Newfoundland and Labrador companies; companies where, in terms of their Canadian presence, they have the most individuals living in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what we're talking about in terms of pensions registered under this pension plan. The MHA pension, for example, is not – this does not apply to the MHA pension plan; that has its own legislation.

I have a lot of questions in Committee that we'll get to, but I do want to talk about the concern, I guess, about the 85 per cent solvency. I think it's really a question of flexibility versus solvency.

I can appreciate how the government wants to allow people to have more choice about what happens with their pension, to change it to another plan, but I do think it's important, and I haven't heard this in discussion yet, moving your pension from a pension plan registered in Newfoundland and Labrador to one registered somewhere else with the threshold in the act is 85 per cent, that carries risk, Speaker. I think that it's important that we don't understate that risk.

We look at other provinces across the country, Ontario requires your pension to be topped up if the pension plan is less than 100 per cent solvency. So the superintendent in Ontario will not allow a pension transfer unless they top it up if the solvency is less than 100 per cent. BC also requires deficiencies to be topped up before a pension is transferred. So I do think this is an important area of risk that we have not yet discussed in terms of this bill, Speaker.

I just want to talk about what that looks like. Let's say we have a pension of someone in

Newfoundland and Labrador and it's registered here and it's at 100 per cent, or maybe 125 per cent if a pension plan is so fortunate, and someone wants to transfer it to a pension plan in Quebec, let's say, that is 85 per cent funded. That means that if the pension plan were to go under, there's 15 per cent of their pension that's just gone. We've seen this, Speaker.

The example that comes to mind is Wabush Mines. We had a pension here for Wabush Mines – and this is very important for workers in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Wabush Mines company went under and the pension kind of wound up. So those workers had not done anything wrong. Those workers had paid into their pension. They lived their whole life expecting that they would get a certain defined benefit pension. Then when Wabush Mines went under – I'm not exactly sure about the situation about the company but I do know, in terms of the pension, people lost a significant value of their pensions.

If we look at the Wabush Mines example – and that was only in 2015, so not that long ago – that pension plan was 70 to 80 per cent solvent when the company went under. So that means if you had a million-dollar pension, let's say – that sounds like a lot, but it's not really in terms of a pension. After that, you would have just lost \$200,000 to \$300,000 off the value of your pension. So a significant impact for, let's say with the Wabush Mines example, it was only 70 to 80 per cent solvent. In that example, retirees experienced benefit reduction of 15 to 25 per cent.

You might be doing your family budgeting for your retirement and you work with your family and say I'm expecting a defined benefit pension of XYZ. Maybe I need so much a month to cover my mortgage and my light bill and my power bill and my property tax. So you know how much you're expecting your pension to be to give your family in terms of your income. Then, all of a sudden, let's say I'm going to take that

pension, I'm going to move it to a pension in Quebec that's only 85 per cent funded – now, it's unlikely that pension would go under, but it's certainly a possibility as we've seen.

We've see, for example, the Nortel pension went under and those pension members lost 25 per cent of the value of their pension overnight. Sears pension – anyone who was a member of the Sears pension –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**S. STOODLEY:** They lost 30 per cent of their pension when the Sears pension wound up. So if you had a million dollars in your pension, Sears pension wound up, theirs was only 70 per cent funded and they lost 30 per cent, all of a sudden, as someone who anticipated you were going to get maybe \$2,000 a month, \$1,000 a month; now you're only getting \$700 a month of your defined benefit pension.

I don't want to underestimate – I don't want this House to pass this legislation without fully understanding the risk that the 85 per cent solvency carries, because you're essentially allowing someone to move their pension to a pension that is 85 per cent or more solvent, which means that in the unlikely situation that that pension winds up, those members would absolutely be financially disadvantaged if they're moving from a 98 per cent solvent pension to an 86 per cent solvent pension.

So, for example, if they had \$1 million – that is a nice, round number – in a pension and it was currently 100 per cent solvent – because I know the Superintendent of Pensions here in Newfoundland and Labrador is very strict and works very closely with pensions. So let's say they move it to a pension plan in Quebec and that pension plan is 86 per cent funded and then that pension plan goes under or winds up, then all of a sudden those pension

members lose \$140,000 on their pension, so they lose 14 per cent. If you were estimating that you were going to get \$1,000 a month of your pension to live on, now you have 14 per cent less of your pension, Speaker.

I think that's a very important consideration, that is flexibility versus solvency. We do have questions about this for the minister in Committee. Why did they choose 85 per cent? Whereas when we look across the country, that's one of the lower solvency ratios allowed when you're talking about transferring pensions, Speaker.

I do think the Wabush Mines; it probably didn't come top of mind, but when I was in the department, the team would always talk about the Wabush Mines example and how important pensions were and how important solvency was. Because, for example, Wabush Mines – and I know Members here probably know people impacted. I know staff in this building have family members who are impacted by the Wabush Mines example, Speaker, where they were part of a pension and the Wabush Mines went under. After that, the pension plan was found to be an unsecured creditor.

So the government, I believe, and there were many – the pension plan had to go to court; they had a very long court battle. Those pensions were found to be unsecured creditors. Secured creditors got paid before the pension holder, Speaker. The Wabush Mines pension members had reduced health benefits, they got reduced survivor benefits and they lost indexing on their pensions. Those pension members did nothing wrong, the pension was registered here, and that pension was at 70 per cent to 80 per cent solvent when the company went under.

Now we're talking about allowing people to transfer a pension somewhere that's, at minimum, 85 per cent solvent, I believe. I don't know if it's minimum or if that's the lower ceiling, but there is a risk that comes

with that. In the unlikely situation that a company goes under, there is a significant risk to people's pensions and the amount of money they can get on a monthly basis could significantly change.

So, again, Sears and Nortel were other examples of that. I think it's important for the government to understand and make sure that they're okay with that risk. It is flexibility versus solvency. So there is a risk associated with transferring your pension from a pension that is managed by the Superintendent of Pensions under this act and moving it to a pension, transferring to another province.

Once that pension is moved to another province, this government has no control. You can call your MHA but there's nothing they can do about it. You'll have to call the MHAs in Quebec or the MHAs in Alberta. This is kind of a ridiculous example, but what happens if a province leaves Canada? It's a huge risk, Speaker, taking your pension if you live in Newfoundland and Labrador and you are moving it to another province, that carries risk, especially if the solvency is 85 per cent. I just want to make sure that that risk is understood by this House, Speaker.

I've talked about that; I've talked about Ontario and BC. We have other questions in Committee. I do also want to highlight the changes that we did make. In December 2020, when I was minister – I was minister for a few months then. I remember it just because I was in here with my little baby, and it was a very traumatic experience, I would say. But that's okay, we got through it and we changed the legislation for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I'm finding it difficult to hear the hon. Member.

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

I was just looking at a news release that went out December 14, 2020: Proposed amendments would allow the unlocking of retirement savings. That was the first, I guess, significant controversial bill that I did as minister, that I can recall. The changes we made allowed someone – so if they had a pension in a locked-in retirement account, we allowed them to unlock some of that value for four specific reasons.

The first one was if the person had a shortened life expectancy. If someone got a medical diagnosis and they only had a few years to live, Speaker, they could certainly unlock their locked-in retirement savings for that reason. If they had a small balance; so sometimes – for example, I used to work for an insurance company and I have a small pension – I don't know if it would be considered small, but not that big, so it might not make sense if you have \$1,000 or \$500 to turn that locked-in retirement account into a LIRA. There are different ways you can transfer your locked-in retirement account upon retirement, in terms of a life annuity or something like that.

So if there is a small balance, you can withdraw your locked-in pension. If you are a non-resident of Canada for two years – so let's say someone is in Canada and moves out of the country, and they've been out of the country for two years, then they're allowed to withdraw their locked-in pension, Speaker.

The fourth is for financial hardship. So if someone loses their job; they're behind on their mortgage payments; their house is in foreclosure; they have medical bills; if they have to pay costs related to equipment or treatment of a disability; they can use it to make their first month's rent or security deposit when trying to rent; the threat of eviction due to inability to pay rent.

Then if they have a job and they unexpectedly have a lower income, let's say

they lose their job or their EI runs out and they're on income support, for example, there is a formula that allows them to withdraw a locked-in pension. It's a bit complicated. It is based on 66 per cent of the yearly maximum pensionable earnings, which in 2021 at the time was \$41,000.

If their income went below \$41,000 in 2021 – it's probably about that now, but there is a specific federal government trigger, the yearly maximum pensionable earnings and it's 66 per cent of that. Then you could use that to withdraw a portion of your locked-in retirement account. You can withdraw from your locked-in retirement account once a year, I believe, Speaker.

So if you were behind on your mortgage and you were on EI, for example, you could withdraw some to pay any mortgage payments and you could do that once a year, Speaker. Some people do have large locked-in retirement accounts and this gives them more flexibility.

I was very pleased to make that change in December of 2020. I know that it is controversial, you're giving more people control of their money, but on the other hand there's less money for them when they retire. It's not a perfect answer but we made that change. I don't know if it was unanimous, but I believe at the time both major parties supported that bill. We've seen a lot of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians take advantage of that, since it was passed then.

As I wind up today, I just want to reiterate, I guess, the risk that allowing somebody to transfer their pension to another pension plan that has 85 per cent solvency, the risk that that carries and to make sure that this House understands that, Speaker.

I do want to reiterate the Wabush Mines, like, it is such an important part of Newfoundland and Labrador's history. When I was in the department, they were almost traumatized still, five years later,

from the Wabush Mines. I believe the government went to court on behalf of the pension holders and the pension association. It was a very long court battle about the Wabush Mines and everyone who worked there – and that, at the end, their pension was 70 per cent to 80 per cent solvent.

So again, if you worked at the Wabush Mines and let's say you had a million-dollar pension and after the 70 per cent, 80 per cent, you would lose \$200,000 to \$300,000 out of your pension. So you would lose 20 to 30 per cent of what you thought you were getting as a monthly income or a bi-weekly income moving forward, when you are withdrawing your pension.

It was a significant change to people. If you plan your life and your expenses around your pension and how much you're going to save, and then you end up with 30 per cent less from your pension, that is a significant amount. That impacts people's lifestyle, it impacts when they retire and it impacts how long they work. It might impact their leisure activities – I would imagine it certainly would.

I use that example to show this House what happens, and that solvency ratios are extremely important. That example, Wabush Mines, was 70 to 80 per cent solvent when it wound up. So now, with this change, we're allowing people to take their money from a pension registered in Newfoundland and Labrador and move it into a pension in another province – and the pension they are moving it to only has to be 85 per cent solvent.

I think that's important to understand. It is unlikely the pensions will go under, but there is a chance that these people, if those pensions wind up, that they will lose 15 per cent off their pension, and I think it's important that people understand that. I hope that when a pensioner is looking at moving their pension, they do understand that risk. I would say that most probably

would not. The average person I don't think understands very much to do with pensions, but I do think it's a risk that this House should consider when approving this.

It is about flexibility, and I understand the argument of giving people more flexibility with their money, and who is government to say what you should do with your money, but we have laws and regulations for a reason. I do think it is just important that we recognize that moving your pension to one that has a lower solvency ratio carries significant financial risk. Also, when we look across the country, this is one of the lowest in terms of solvency risks allowed.

Like I said, Ontario often requires a top-up if the solvency ratio you are moving your pension to is less than 100 per cent; BC requires a deficiency payment, so if you're moving your pension to one that is less solvent, it requires a deficiency payment. This is one of the lower ones across the country. Flexibility is important, yes, but also the Members opposite talked about how important pensions are and knocking on people's doors and having that conversation.

I think that's incredibly important and I'm sure a lot of them do want more flexibility with their money and with their pensions. But I guess I would also challenge then, what about if someone transfers their pension, that then goes under? Then they are directly at financial risk because of the change that we're making today, Speaker.

So I do think that's incredibly important, that the Members opposite understand. It's very unlikely, I'm not going to lie, it's not probably going to happen, it's unlikely, but that is a direct potential consequence and I'm sure the workers at Wabush Mines didn't think that their pension was going to go under. I'm sure the workers at Sears and Nortel, just as some major Canadian examples, didn't think their pensions would go under.

Again, in the Wabush Mines example, pensions were found to be – they were treated as unsecured creditors. So all the other creditors, the bank, BDC, I'm sure, the government, they all got paid before the pension members got their pension at the end of the day. I think it is incredibly important that this House understands the risk of allowing people to transfer their pensions to one that is only 80 per cent solvent.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

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

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

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

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

I'm not sure what bill that the previous Member was reading, but this doesn't allow an individual to transfer their pension anywhere. I don't know where that thought came from. This is about companies, such as Wabush Mines – and I will say that both of my parents were affected by that. So I lived through the Labrador closure of the then Scully Mine, now reopened as Tacora. I watched people lose their pensions, watched people lose their health care. I had friends, and I'm sure Joe – sorry, the Member for Labrador West will tell you people killed themselves over it. People died because of this.

I'll speak from fact here. So I served as a fiduciary for a pension plan for a number of years. This allows companies, be it their trustees or however they managed their pension funds, to take a pension fund and reinvest into another province or territory in order to grow and make it better. It's not about an individual. When an individual leaves a job or wants the pension fund – we know; we passed legislation years ago – this goes into a LIRA or some other type of

form where they can't draw it out until they're later in life.

This is specifically about the ability for a company to port, no different than someone does with a mortgage or something else, from one pension jurisdiction into another, making it a larger pension plan, making it more profitable, hopefully. The whole idea that the 85 per cent is a risk, 85 per cent is a pretty prudent rule when it comes to fiduciaries with pensions.

At the end of the day, a lot of pension plans are not overfunded unfortunately. We would hope they all were, but unfortunately, as the Leader of the Third Party has said, they're not. That should be the goal, that it is the fiduciary responsibility of the trustees that are involved with these pension plans. The whole idea that we can take a company, as an example, and we can go to Wabush Mines or whatever, that goes into insolvency, and they could have ported that pension plan into something else in order to keep those people whole, that's the goal of this. This is a way to make things better, not to assume more risk.

So they went through their court battles and they did it. A lovely lady by the name of Rita Pynn, who was a staff member up there, she took this upon herself – she was management – and she fought hand-in-glove with the union and, between the union, Jim Skinner and Rita Pynn, they got so much back.

I can tell you right now, my mom sits at home. She worked 36 years in Wabush Mines, one of the very first women hired in Wabush Mines in 1973. Both, her and my dad, who worked there for 38 years, had their pensions reduced. There's no question about that. Had this legislation been in place, there is a stronger possibility that that may not have happened.

So the ability to take a pension fund and put it into something else – so, for example, Scully Mine, Wabush Mines, at the time,

they could have gone to a subsidiary company that they owned, combined the pensions and kept people whole. That's what the legislation is about, and I'm sure that the minister will get up and talk about that after, when he gets his few minutes, but I just needed to track that for the record.

It's not about an individual having the ability to take their pension out of a pension fund. Every pension fund that we know in this province would be at risk if individuals had the ability to do what they wanted with their pension funds. That's just not how it works. So I just wanted to clear the air on that.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. Georges - Humber.

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

**H. CORMIER:** Thank you, Speaker.

It's an honour to rise in this House again and talk about pensions.

Pensions are very dear, I guess, to myself. For 35 years I worked at Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, but also, I grew up in a union family where my mom and my dad both paid into a pension plan. The conversation of pensions always occurs when I see former retirees down at the mill, and even my union brothers and sisters that are down there now. We talk about pensions, because the act of 1997 exists to protect workers' pensions and ensure pension plans are responsibly managed.

Speaker, that's so important. We work all our lives for the golden years to retire, to enjoy our time. Whether it's on a river fishing or at the cabin or in the springtime making maple syrup, we enjoy it and that's what we worked for. This amendment will help strengthen the pensions that are in Newfoundland and Labrador if by chance a

corporation from outside the province wants to take over a company in this province.

The pension plan will only be passed over if it is to the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. At the end of the day, that's what it's all about. It's about protecting the people in this province and that's exactly what this government has planned to do.

So congrats to the minister on bringing this bill forward.

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

**H. CORMIER:** I'd like to speak about my mom and dad. My mom was a teacher at the trades school in Corner Brook, paid into the pension plan – and, yes, she happened to teach the Member from Humber - Bay of Islands many, many moons ago.

**E. JOYCE:** That's true.

**H. CORMIER:** It's very important.

My dad worked at the mill, I said that in my maiden speech, and our pensions were so important but I can't imagine if you were to work all your life and a company take over your pension plan that was less solvent than your own and put your plan at a detriment or even a decreased value when you go to retire. It doesn't make sense.

So, I mean, growing up I spent time on the pension committee at the mill in Corner Brook and I learned from some great retirees about how our pension plan, a defined benefit plan, is the gold standard of pension plans.

There are three main types of pension plans. There is the pooled, which is deferred profit sharing, stock options. You've got your defined contribution plan, which a lot of our transient workers have. They're able to port their own pension. It's more of an RRSP program from one company to another. They just travel with it, so it's protected by them; but a defined benefit

plan that's stationed here and that's registered here in the province needs protection. We need to protect the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and that's exactly what we're trying to do.

We have interprovincial regulations now that allow companies to transfer it from one province to the other, and if we don't protect our people, then why are we even here? This legislation will help strengthen that protection to allow our people that worked 20, 30, 40 or sometimes 50 years and pay into a plan to enjoy their golden years, enjoy their time fishing or at the cabin or whatever they want to do – travel. It's so important.

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

**H. CORMIER:** Yes, thank you.

But can you imagine working all those years and there was an opportunity to strengthen your pension plan and we didn't do it and all of a sudden something happened to your company, your corporation? We were at the mill in Corner Brook for a number of years and a former premier, Tom Marshall, done a deal with Kruger that tied Deer Lake power plant to the pension plan. The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands was also involved with that.

**E. JOYCE:** In 2017 it was done –

**H. CORMIER:** Twenty –?

**E. JOYCE:** – 2017.

**H. CORMIER:** That was important to do; to tie that together to protect the pensions at the mill.

Fortunately, the power plant could be tied to the mill and it could protect it. There was an asset there that could protect people; but if that asset wasn't there, then the pensions could be at risk, and all those people paying all those years, all those retirees – because the mill had a large number of employees.

Back when I first went to work there, there was like 1,300 of us inside that plant. They forced it down to about 400 now, but it was 1,300. A lot of those guys have passed on, but there are still a lot of those guys still kicking around, still alive. I run into them every day down at the grocery store, at the mall, at the gas station, at the coffee shops and the first question they ask you is: How is the pension plan doing? How are we doing?

Well, we're protected. A lot of these companies aren't protected and if we allow a corporation to come in and take over their pension plan, it's important that we protect those people. I can't stress it enough.

I worked 35 years paying into a pension plan; that was so important. My dad worked 40 years at the mill; he lost over half his pension when Bowater decided to pull out of Corner Brook before Kruger took over. He lost half of his pension. My mom, who worked less years at the trades school, her pension was higher than my dad's – a defined benefit plan. It's important that we're able to move these around across jurisdictions and protect the people that elected us to protect them.

This is so important. This is important to me. It's important to the pensioners. It's important to people's quality of life, so they're not worried about if they can buy their grandson or granddaughter a birthday gift; they're not worried if they can go down and get that tank of fuel or go get some groceries. That pension is protected and they know what they're getting month after month so they can budget. That's so important – so important to everybody.

This amendment will allow people to remain in a pension plan if a company is going to take over. It'll only be signed by the Superintendent of Pensions. If it's in the best interest of the pensioners in this province, it's up to the decision to be made by the Superintendent of Pensions. He has the final say and, if it's in the best interest of

the people of the province, he'll do it. If it's not in the best interest of the people of the province for their pensions to be taken over, then it won't be signed over. It's not a free will – here, take it all. Ultimately, it comes down to that department who will make sure that pensioners in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are protected.

I can't stress it enough. I can't stress it enough. We've got people in this building here – in this room right now – that are pensioners; I'm one of them. Can you imagine; can you imagine if there was an opportunity to protect your pension and it didn't happen and you ended up losing it? How would you feel? How would you feel if this government let you down? We wouldn't feel very good.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** If they'd be letting themselves down if (inaudible) pensions.

**H. CORMIER:** Right. I wasn't going to go there.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Well (inaudible).

**H. CORMIER:** I wasn't going to go there. I'm a kind, fun-loving individual.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** I'm not, Sir.

**H. CORMIER:** Well, you do cheer for the Cataracts.

Allowing companies to take over pensions that will increase the pension benefits will allow the pensioners to continue to earn benefits while they're working, rather than lose their pension, and avoid unnecessary risk to those pensions and the complexities – I mean, the idea of this amendment is to strengthen the pension laws to protect the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that are paying into a pension plan. I can't stress it enough. It's so important to me.

All you worked at the mill, all you acquired, you didn't want to call in sick, you went to work on days you weren't feeling the best,

because you were going to lose those pensionable hours on your pension at the end of the day. We didn't have that option of sick time at the mill, or call in sick for a day here or a day there. We lost pensionable time, and it was so important for us to go to work, because we realized how important it was to put that pensionable time in a pension.

I can't imagine putting that at risk. This government's not going to put it at risk. We want to strengthen the pension plans in this province if, by chance, a company or corporation from outside the province wants to buy in to our province. We can't stop that. We can't stop progress; it doesn't make sense. But we have to protect the pensions.

I'll say pensions and pensions and pensions over and over again, because it's what I worked for. It's what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians worked for, to work their hardest, to enjoy those golden years.

I can't stress enough the defined benefit plan that some of us are fortunate enough to be in. That's the gold standard. Defined benefit is the gold standard of pensions. Defined contributions – next level down, we'll call it, where you take your pension and travel from corporation to corporation. You see a lot of that with managers and corporations, they stay at one spot for two or three years and move to the next, move to the next. They can take it; they're protected. It's up to them and their financial planners to see what they are going to do with their money from one step to the next.

But defined benefit plans are controlled by the companies, invested by the companies, and it's important that employees understand, take the initiative to understand their pension plan, but when a corporation tries to take it over, it's also important that we protect it. This legislation will do just that.

The Superintendent of Pensions has the final say and if it is not in the benefit of the

pensioners or the corporation and another company tries to take over in this province, then the pension doesn't get signed over. We're not here to float some other company on the Mainland. We're here to take care of the people in this province, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

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

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

**P. PIKE:** Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 6, An Act to Amend Pension Benefits Act, 1997.

While this piece of legislation is somewhat technical in nature, it has real implications for workers and retirees across this great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In my District of Burin - Grand Bank, we have people who have spent decades working in industries such as the fishery, mining, processing plants, in the trades, transportation and small local business industries. I think about the mines in St. Lawrence. Go back to the '30s and, first, it was owned by the St. Lawrence Corporation, a company that existed in the United States, in Detroit, as a matter of fact. From then on, owned by companies outside the province.

Ultimately, these mines provided employment – and it came at a good time because it came after the tsunami, which wiped out the fishery on the Burin Peninsula but, still, it was something that put our men to work. We all know the history of the St. Lawrence mines and what happened there.

I'm coming from a family who worked in these mines. Once these mines would close, the pensions would be gone. My father worked his whole lifetime in the mines and, at the end of the day, he had zero pension – zero – because of the closures of these mines.

These were hard-working men who went underground every day and were trying to build up a pension for their families and to be able to retire in comfort, of course. Fish plant workers in my area, as well, a lot of them retired, no pension. So we are looking at degrees of income when we look at pensions.

A lot of people in my district that I deal with now when they come for government assistance, whether it's for home repair or whatever, the first thing we ask them is, what is your income? Well, I'm getting a bit of Canada Pension, I'm getting the old age pension and the wife is getting her old age pension. It's not a lot to live on, so pensions are so important.

It allows people to stay in their communities as well. It allows people to stay in their homes. That's what pensions do, and that's important. We all want to be able to remain in our own homes, have our children visit and so on. The part of that, that's so important, is that people keep their dignity. That's the key.

When we talk about this pension legislation, we are talking about protecting something that people have actually earned. The bill focuses on strengthening the rules around pension asset transfers, and that matters. Because when pensions are moved between plans, there's a real risk that some of these plans are not financially stable. Simply put, it measures whether a pension plan has enough money to meet its obligations. That's where we bring in the solvency ratio.

This bill sets a clear expectation that receiving plans must be 85 per cent funded – very important – or stronger than the plan, the assets are coming from. That's very important because it ensures pension assets are not transferred into weaker or underfunded plans. It protects workers from losing value through the decisions that happen far away from their communities.

We have industries that see restructuring and mergers and operations that span multiple jurisdictions and, in those situations, plans can be moved or consolidated without strong rules. Workers could be exposed to an unnecessary risk, and we don't want that happening.

This bill closes that gap. This bill makes it clear that payouts will reflect the actual funding level of the plan. Meaning, if a plan is fully funded, workers receive full value. If it's underfunded, payouts are adjusted proportionately. This is not about reducing benefits unfairly. It's about transparency, it's about fairness and ensuring the system remains stable for everyone.

The bill strengthens oversight by requiring approval before any pension plans can be transferred. This adds an important layer of accountability. In any plan that we have – any plan – accountability is key. It ensures that all decisions are reviewed and that there's a safeguard in place to protect plan members.

For those people that are on pension plans, that's a lifeline, really, for them. It enables them to live in a way that they can socialize, that they can eat well, that they can drive cars, they can do things that they worked their whole lifetimes to achieve. They've raised families. They've educated their families. Now they're going to sit on their pension.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It's their money.

**P. PIKE:** It's their money. That's correct. It's their money.

Overall, this bill will give us confidence in the pension system. It provides clearer rules, stronger oversight and better protection for workers.

I was talking to a family a while ago and we were talking about income and how much that they were getting and so on for various government programs, of course. I said,

well, you always worked. I watched you go to work my whole lifetime. Yeah, but, see, at that time, we were given a choice whether to buy into a pension or not. I couldn't afford it at the time. I had a family that needed to be fed. There were things happening. We needed to work on the old house, so I didn't opt for it – so sad.

What this plan does as well, it puts us in a way that we can align with other pension standards right across Canada. We believe workers deserve to know their pensions are secure and the system that protects them is transparent and they have control over what happens to their pensions.

At the end of the day, this is a plan about people we all know in our communities who have worked hard, very hard, who have paid in their pensions and expect security when they need it. I remember when I was in the workforce, during breaks, a lot of people said five years left to go and I'm out, because then I can enjoy my pension and enjoy life.

When I saw my neighbour get up this morning and get on his quad and head off trouting or berry picking, that's me; I'm going to do that. We have to protect those people. We have to protect our pension plans. This bill ensures that and, for those reasons, I plan to vote in favour of Bill 6.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**S. O'LEARY:** Thank you, Speaker, and thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on behalf of this bill amending the pension benefits.

The reality is that we know that not all folks have the benefit of pensions. But, of course, everybody has a lifetime of labour and people should be provided with this,

especially in their elderly years. As a social democrat, pensions are crucially important to the well-being of workers and their families and the economic health of our families and our communities.

For most workers with a pension, they have a union to thank for that. It enables dignity in the workplace, fair compensation, as unions do, on behalf of the workers; and, of course, with clear, decisive action, many workers and, tomorrow, seniors won't find themselves in their final years in absolute poverty.

Of course, affordability is a huge issue for all of us here in this House right now, tackling the present financial situation of many of our residents. Certainly, I can speak for those in St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. As I've mentioned, it's very diverse. We have a population where we have some of the wealthiest people and we have some of the poorest people. It begs the conversation about why pension income is so important.

So I can give you some stats. In the East End, the A1A area district of St. John's, in 2021, the pension income was \$83 million; RRIF withdrawals were \$63 million; entrepreneurs' income, \$78 million; and EI and social assistance was at \$60 million. So, remember, pension incomes \$83 million in the East End area in '21.

In my colleague's district here, the A1E area, which would fall under the St. John's Centre District, the pension income was \$65 million; RRIF withdrawals were \$50 million; entrepreneurs' income, \$29 million; and EI and social assistance, \$83 million. Again, \$65 million, so we can see the discrepancy.

In the A1C area district, which is the St. John's East - Quidi Vidi District, primarily the downtown, the area in the Battery, the Quidi Vidi and all of that, which basically is the highest percentage right across the country, the A1C district of artists per capita across the country, the pension income was

\$22 million in '21; RRIF withdrawals were \$17 million; entrepreneurs' income was \$27 million; EI and social assistance was \$42 million.

We see a discrepancy from \$83 million, \$65 million to \$22 million in the A1C district where we have the bulk of our arts and cultural producers. There's discrepancy for you there and there's poverty. So we're seeing many of those people, those cultural producers and, of course, many of the other fine folks who are living in that district as well, who are not receiving pensions. What does that mean? Very likely, it leads to poverty in your senior years, if not poverty throughout your life.

So I think it's a really important thing to mention, and that's why previously I certainly brought that issue forward about Ireland and on the heels of St. Paddy's Day and how wonderful it is to see the GBI enacted for artists in Ireland because they are the cultural producers, they value their artists and their cultural communities and then these people can actually, possibly, attain pensions. They won't be in poverty when they're in their senior years.

Again, that's a broad scope. I just thought it was really an important bit of statistics to bring into the fold here, and on the importance of making sure that we don't allow people to fall into poverty. Pensions are a part of that, and that's where, certainly, we see the unions playing a huge role.

The transfer of benefits, which is obviously what we're dealing with, specifically here, is something my colleagues already mentioned. We will be supporting this amendment because we want to ensure that people can transition their benefits and not at their loss. I have family members who found themselves in similar positions and, certainly, it is a benefit to see this kind of stuff tightened up.

I reflect upon my former role in municipalities. Of course, as we know, many of the municipal leaders right across our province work diligently for no pay.

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

**S. O'LEARY:** In the City of St. John's and other cities there is some remuneration; however, in the City of St. John's, there is no pension. There is no pension received for municipal –

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

**S. O'LEARY:** No, it was phased out years –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** I didn't know that.

**S. O'LEARY:** It was phased out; my former colleague here certainly can attest to that. There is no pension plan for people in municipal government at the City of St. John's right now.

So people have all these illusions and understandings that people may be in the certain fields for pension benefits and all that kind of stuff, there are a lot of people who are very, very vulnerable, who do not have the privilege of accessing a pension. I think it's very important that we all understand that in this House; that we are representing a lot of people who will not have that security – that economic security – as they enter into their senior years. That's assuming, of course, the life of affordability will not create health issues and things like that that will shorten their lives. These things are all interconnected. How we live. How we continue to be able to live healthy lives impacts how long we're going to be kicking around.

So this economic security is not something that everybody has the benefit of, but I do want to say, emphatically, that I'm so supportive of the unions that, really, are the staple that have been ensuring that we see workers supported with pension benefits in

their retirement years, whenever that should come.

The issues that I would certainly like to reiterate, again, that my colleague has mentioned, is early childhood educators. They are looking for this economic security. We can't leave them in poverty. We can't leave them in a situation where they don't know whether or not they're going to be able to continue. They're looking for security; they're looking for sustainability so that they can take care of our children, the most precious commodity, the most precious resource that we have.

They're going to be there; they're going to be the future for us. We are tasked to take care of them. Early childhood educators are tasked to take care of them. So support for child care, the families, the workers – these benefits, these are crucial. These are things that we need to keep on the front burner. This is something that definitely is necessary, so we will continue to advocate on behalf of the early childhood educators, because we know, as social democrats, how important it is to achieving affordability, security in your life and making sure that we're supporting families, all of them, from the youngest to the oldest.

That was kind of an overview there, certainly, on pension benefits. Some who are fortunate enough to avail, others who do not, but we know that people deserve to have economic security in their retirement times and their senior years.

So, with that, I will say thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the residents of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and to give some statistics and some perspective on the differential between different areas. I know I'm talking about within the City of St. John's; of course, throughout our province we'll see these massive differentials as well. So whatever we can do to ensure that people can protect those pension benefits in transition, we're there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

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

**R. BALSOM:** It's a great honour to get on my feet here today representing the great people of the District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, and it's a true honour to speak to Bill 6. I'd like to thank the Minister of Government Services for bringing forth this bill.

The Pension Benefits Act is there; it exists to protect the workers and their pensions, and to ensure that they are responsibly managed. With today's workforce operating across provincial and federal boundaries, pension legislation needs to reflect that reality.

Having the province as part of a federal-provincial-territorial agreement on multi-jurisdictional pension plans, and participation in this agreement allows the transfer of pension assets between jurisdictions when plans are merged or consolidated. That's something that national employers increasingly seek to do.

Like my colleague from St. George's - Humber said, it is always going to be done to the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and through the pensioners themselves, and it won't be done without the direct approval of the Superintendent of Pensions. Making sure that he has his stamp of approval on it is something that's very important. With his expertise and his advice it ensures that the best decisions are being made in respect to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, in my previous life, I had the opportunity to participate in a DPSP, a deferred profit sharing plan. While it's not exactly like a pension, it's something similar

to a defined contribution pension plan but it's something that only the employer contributes based off a percentage of the profits. I'm a little bit familiar with that side of things, but I was fortunate enough to have my mother. She worked for 30 years in the banking industry in a financial institution, so I learned a lot of my knowledge on the financial side of things from her. She always told me one of the biggest things is to plan for the future. You need to plan for your future.

Now, I might be the youngest Member of this House, but I never think that it's too early to plan for your future.

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

**R. BALSOM:** That's something that I've always taken to heart. You know, I look at things for, when do I want to retire? When will I be able to look, to be able to see and say, you know, what now is the time for me to enjoy doing the things that I enjoy, take a trip, go hunting, go fishing, go camping. These are the things that, with the proposed changes to this legislation, it's going to provide a little bit more security, some confidence to pensioners and to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador that they're going to ensure that they have this continued guarantee into their pension.

Speaker, it ensures that people are going to be able to retire with comfort. You know, you work all your life, you shouldn't have to be worried. You shouldn't have to be stressing over: Where's the money going to come from? Is something going to happen to my pension? These changes are going to ensure that. They're going to make sure that people have the ability to retire with comfort.

You know, when asset transfers aren't permitted like they are now, employers may be forced to terminate local pension plans, and that's going to have a very negative impact on the workers. This often means that funds are moved into locked-in retirement accounts which would require

professional advice and placing a significant burden on the individuals.

By enabling direct pension transfers across provinces and territories, it's going to avoid these disruptions and allow workers to remain in a pension plan, continue earning benefits and avoid unnecessary risks and complexity. That's something that I would think about.

When I get older and when I go to retire, I don't want to be worried about my pension. I don't want to have to deal with the stress of not knowing if something is going to happen, if there's uncertainty or how things are going to go forward. It's about enjoying your retirement. You worked all these years, you get your pension and then ensuring that seniors will be able age with dignity.

While the current legislation does not allow for this, this is why the proposed changes to the *Pension Benefits Act, 1997*, and its regulations. The goal is simple: protecting workers' pensions, reducing risk and modernizing our legislation to reflect how people live and work today.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Any further speakers?

If the Minister of Government Services speaks now, he will end the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Government Services.

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

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

As a current minister, I'd like to thank everyone for their input on this very important bill and this amendment. I just want to reiterate the importance of this bill, backstopped by the Superintendent, which gives me full assurance that pensions

indeed will be protected. Ultimately, he's the gatekeeper.

I'll say that again, the Superintendent is the backstop which gives me full assurance that pensions indeed will be protected.

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

**M. GOOSNEY:** Speaker, I listened to each Member and I wrote some notes.

I want to thank the Leader of the Third Party. He spoke about pensions fit to eat. This is a secure move, and I think we all agree, so that people can eat and be protected in these hard economic times. This is to solidify that the protection is there for the people that we represent.

It's ironic that I would say, taking risk – which we know governments are known; that's how the public see us – but that is the point, to take away risk. The Superintendent would never allow a transfer – to note some of the comments made – with lower solvency – never. This bill doesn't allow any pensions to move unless they're moving to a plan that is better for the members.

I just also wanted to note that this change applies – just so the public, if anyone is watching, they're not confused – to a plan sponsor for employers' and members' registered pension plan. This isn't about individual plans. This is something that we're proposing to protect everyone outside these four walls in the best interest of all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 6 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

**CLERK (Hawley George):** A bill, An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997. (Bill 6)

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

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

**L. PARROTT:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently. (Bill 6)

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

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Humber - Gros Morne, that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 6.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair and this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 6.

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!

Before I begin, I would like to rule on a point of order raised by the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands yesterday.

I reviewed *Hansard* and rule that the matter was a disagreement between two hon. Members. There is no point of order.

We are now debating Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997.

A bill, "Act to Amend the Pension Benefits Act, 1997." (Bill 6)

**CLERK:** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Scio.

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

I also thank the Members for correcting my interpretation. I know the Members have a lot of experts texting them answers while they're sitting there. I used to have that privilege; I don't anymore, but I'm very happy the ministers across the way do that.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Okay.

So I accept that, but I think my points are still valid in terms of the solvency ratio. I accept and appreciate the clarification that members are not allowed to transfer out of the pension fund. This is just, I guess, in terms of the plan administrator. We do have

some questions for the minister in terms of that.

I guess, my first question – I'm not sure if I should stand up or sit down? I don't know if in Committee we only sit down now – anyway, it doesn't matter. I'm wondering if the minister could walk us through exactly what is allowed today in terms of being transferred, please.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** Chair, can I ask for clarification? It seemed like a broad question, if the Member opposite wouldn't mind repeating, sorry.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Scio.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you very much.

I was wondering if the minister could walk us through what exactly is allowed, today, in terms of what is being transferred to where, please.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** I'll answer the question to the best of my ability. Transfers are not allowed, today, outside the province.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

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

I am wondering in terms of the amendment, the bill that we're in Committee on today – assuming we're at a point where, after Royal Assent, the minister could walk us through what is allowed, what will be allowed in terms of what is being transferred and to what and where, please?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** I don't know if I'm having a hard time hearing the Members – yes, I got it.

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

**M. GOOSNEY:** No, mine is not working so well.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Turn it up.

**M. GOOSNEY:** Yes, I have.

The question proposed was, where you can transfer to? Sorry, Member, I'm not trying to ignore you. I totally respect –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Plug into the Member next to you.

**M. GOOSNEY:** No, I can hear. It's just it's very mumbled.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Try this one. That better?

**M. GOOSNEY:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** We'll just pause for one second until we get the minister's earpiece.

Minister, we're going to test your earpiece. Is it coming?

**M. GOOSNEY:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** The Chair acknowledges the Member for Mount Scio.

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

I was wondering if the minister could clarify for this House, in terms of the bill and the amendment that he's making today, after it receives Royal Assent, what will and will not be allowed to be transferred and where and how can and should it be transferred to, please.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** I'm very procedural. I noticed everybody yesterday was raising your hand and the Member opposite – is that part of the parcel?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Wait for your light.

**M. GOOSNEY:** Okay.

If I heard the question correctly, it's asked to where it can be transferred, so it's anywhere in Canada and it's only allowed in Canada, assets to be transferred. Ultimately, you have to be above the threshold and only when approved by the superintendent, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Scio.

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

Wondering if the minister could clarify, because I obviously misunderstood, in my reading of the amendment, who can make the transfers and who can't make the transfers, please?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** Question, who can make the transfer – pension benefit plan holders only, not the individuals.

Does that answer your question?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Scio.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

I wonder if the minister can walk us through, I guess, plans being transferred into Newfoundland and Labrador and how that works, please.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** To that question, the answer is plan sponsors are by request of employers and plan holders. Then it gets – bear with me – from the Superintendent at that point.

Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

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

Sorry, I didn't catch all that. My mic is working but wondering if the minister can repeat that. What are the rules in terms of pensions being transferred into pension plans under the minister's Pension Benefits Act?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** First of all, company pension plans will be allowed to be transferred but only with the approval of the superintendent.

Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you.

Is there a solvency percentage required when a pension is being transferred into Newfoundland and Labrador?

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services, and Labour.

**M. GOOSNEY:** The question was the minimum – I apologize, Speaker, I'm really having a hard time. Maybe I can just ask for the (inaudible), seeing how it's quiet here?

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

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

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

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

All those in favour?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against?

Carried.

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

**SPEAKER (Lane):** The hon. the Member for Placentia West- Bellevue; Chair of Committee of the Whole.

**J. DWYER:** Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report progress and ask for 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 Deputy Premier, that this House do now recess.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

The House is in recess until 2 p.m.

### Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

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

Admit strangers.

Today in the public gallery, I would like to welcome Felicia Rosemary Power who is the subject of a Member's statement. Felicia is accompanied by her parents Donna and David Power.

Welcome.

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

**SPEAKER:** As well, I would like to welcome Rod Forward, Margaret Forward and Robert Forward from The Big R Restaurant, who are also the subject of a Member's statement.

Welcome to you, as well.

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

### Statements by Members

**SPEAKER:** Today we will hear statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of Lake Melville, Placentia - St. Mary's, Placentia West - Bellevue and St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

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

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

I rise in this hon. House to pay tribute to Hank Penashue who was raised in Sheshatshiu, deeply rooted in traditions and strength of his Innu people. The vast homeland of Nitassinan shaped his spirit from childhood.

Nutshimit was where he felt most at peace – and that is out on the land, surrounded by the quiet power of nature, connected to his ancestors and to himself. Hank faced struggles in his life, including a battle with alcoholism. It was a difficult journey – one that many of us carry quietly. Yet, even through hardship, Hank remained a man of heart.

His challenges were only one part of his history, and they never erased the kindness that he carried with him. In Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Hank was known for his gentle spirit and he showed kindness to everyone who encountered him. Whether through a warm greeting, a simple conversation, a helping hand, he made people feel seen and respected. His presence carried humility and compassion. Hank was the proud father of his son, Robin and his three daughters, Mary Georgette, Monique and Louisa Penashue. They carry forward his memory, his roots and his deep love to Nutshimit.

Hank's life was woven with both hardship and love, strength and gentleness, and he will be remembered for not only for the struggles he endured, but for the kindness

he gave so freely and for the deep love he held for Nitassinan – a love that lives on in his children and in the land itself.

Speaker, I ask all in the hon. House to stand with me in acknowledging the life of Hank Penashue, an Elder of Sheshatshiu and forever a gentleman of Labrador.

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

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

**S. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Speaker, I rise today to recognize an inspiring woman from Mount Carmel-Mitchell's Brook-St. Catherine's, Miss Felicia Power.

Felicia is the eldest daughter of Donna and David Power. Born with Down syndrome, she faced significant health challenges early in life, yet she has never allowed this to define her. She completed her high school equivalency after attending school in Paradise and CBS, went on to the College of the North Atlantic and earned her entry-level early childhood education certification, working in daycare for several years.

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

**S. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Felicia is a dedicated volunteer, known for serving tea, preparing food, decorating, speaking publicly and brightening age-friendly socials.

She participates in Special Olympics bowling and supports fundraising efforts for Special Olympics and the Newfoundland and Labrador Down Syndrome Society. She is also a model whose photos have appeared in *Pie Magazine*.

Most recently, Felicia fulfilled a lifelong dream by competing in the Miss Newfoundland and Labrador pageant in Carbonear, where she proudly represented her community and received both the People's Choice and Miss Friendship Award.

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

**S. GAMBIN-WALSH:** As Felicia says: "I have never let the fact that I have Down syndrome stop me from reaching my goals. I am not only a model. I am a role model."

Thank you.

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

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

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

Today I rise in this hon. House to recognize the Arnold's Cove Lions Club that makes up a huge part of the second-largest community within the beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

The Arnold's Cove Lions Club is an important volunteer organization in the small community of Arnold's Cove. The club focuses on community support and bringing residents together. Members organize a variety of local events and fundraisers throughout the year, helping raise money for community projects, charities and individuals in need.

They support youth activities, seniors' programs and community celebrations – just over the weekend, they had a nice Irish stew for our seniors – events such as community dinners, charity draws and holiday activities. They are also known for responding when local families face emergencies and financial hardship.

Beyond fundraising, the club provides a place for people to volunteer, build friendships and contribute to the well-being of their town. Today it remains a proud symbol of local service and community spirit for residents and visitors.

From helping individuals in need, supporting other non-profit organizations and being strong community leaders, I stand here with

pride to know we have such a great organization in our communities for people to turn to and look up to.

Speaker, I am calling on all communities to support them for the plethora of support they provide to our communities.

Thank you.

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

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

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

The Big R Restaurant has been serving delicious food to St. John's residents and visitors alike for over 70 years. From its opening as Max's Restaurant in 1952 to Rice's Take Out to The Big R in 1980, this locally owned restaurant is a labour of love of the Rice, McDonald and Forward families.

Rod Forward and his family are a testament to resiliency and entrepreneurial spirit.

The restaurant was originally located on Harvey Road until the fire of December 1992 destroyed it and other businesses. Undaunted, the Forwards rebuilt, reopened in March 1993, and opened their Blackmarsh Road location two months later. The Harvey Road location closed in 2019, but the Blackmarsh location still thrives.

Rod's mother, Margaret, still bakes the delicious bread and desserts found at the restaurant.

Rod established a separate catering company with a different menu, serving sit-down dinners for weddings and functions and, recently, added a food truck to their services.

Owning a restaurant was Rod's dream and his desire to serve and interact with people

is reflected in the restaurant's homey atmosphere.

Please join me in recognizing Rod, his family and parents, Margaret and Robert, for creating a restaurant that has become a city landmark.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** I concur.

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

**SPEAKER:** I've got fish and chips on my brain there now.

Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

**SPEAKER:** I've got fish and chips on my brain there now.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

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

Speaker, I rise today to recognize the compassion, expertise and essential role that pharmacy professionals play in Newfoundland and Labrador's health care system.

Pharmacy professionals, including pharmacists, technicians, assistants and interns are trusted, accessible health professionals and vital pillars of care in communities throughout the province. They support patients every day and make a meaningful contribution to public health.

Our new government is committed to listening to health care workers, including pharmacy professionals, to better understand the challenges they face and

the solutions they recommend. We are already making concrete action; all 40 pharmacy students graduating from Memorial University in 2026 will be eligible for an enhanced \$50,000 bursary through a return-in-service agreement to work in our public health system. This builds on existing recruitment and retention incentives, competitive benefits and access to the public service pension plan.

We are also rebalancing our system to strengthen team-based care and looking at ways to support expanded scope of practice for pharmacists. At the same time, we are calling on the federal government to resume negotiations with our province to implement a national pharmacare agreement that improves access to prescription drugs and diabetic supplies for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Speaker, on behalf of the provincial government, I thank all pharmacy professionals for their dedication and proudly proclaim March as Pharmacy Appreciation Month.

Thank you.

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for recognizing the vital contributions of pharmacy professionals across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Pharmacists, technicians, assistants and interns are often the first point of contact in our health care system. They provide, not only medications, but trusted advice, continuity of care and reassurance, especially in parts of our province that do not have consistent access to a family doctor.

This is why our Liberal government worked hard to expand the scope of practice for

pharmacists in this province. Giving pharmacists the ability to practice to their full scope is a win-win for residents of this province. It increases access to primary care for patients while reducing the strain on the province's emergency rooms.

We also echo the call for meaningful progress on a national pharmacare agreement. This would improve access to medications, lowering out-of-pocket costs and creating a more equitable health system.

We wish pharmacists all the best in Pharmacy Appreciation Month.

Thank you.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

We, too, would like to express our deep gratitude and appreciation for the pharmacists who keep us well. It is unfortunate, through, that many in our communities can't afford the products that they dispense. Now, if government had put half the enthusiasm into pharmacare that they did for the Bay du Nord, we would have a deal by now.

That's why we, once again, call on this government – demand this government – to work with Ottawa and force Ottawa to sign a deal for the pharmacare program in Newfoundland and Labrador. Get this deal done.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

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

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Speaker, this past weekend, Premier Wakeham and I had the privilege of attending Seafood Expo North America in Boston.

This annual event is the largest seafood exhibition in North America, bringing together thousands of buyers and suppliers from around the globe. For more than 40 years, Seafood Expo North America has been the premier event for the seafood industry leaders to exchange knowledge and foster business opportunities.

Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador's seafood is renowned for its freshness, sustainability and taste. The Seafood Expo is an ideal opportunity to showcase the world-class quality of our province's seafood products. Seafood exports are vital to the livelihood of our province, supporting countless families and communities while generating over a billion dollars for the Newfoundland and Labrador's economy. Our province's participation at the expo, not only helps to strengthen valuable business relationships, but also reinforces Newfoundland and Labrador's prominent reputation in the international seafood market.

The Seafood Expo North America provides an important platform to highlight our commitment to the fishing and aquaculture industries and ensure that Newfoundland and Labrador remains at the forefront of the global sector. I am confident that our efforts at the expo will help open new doors, drive economic growth and enhance prosperity for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, for all of us.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** I remind the hon. minister and all Members that we don't refer to anyone in

this house by their actual name, just their title.

Thank you.

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

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Mr. Speaker, as former minister, I can appreciate the Boston seafood show being one of the most influential global events in the seafood industry, bringing together buyers, suppliers and industry leaders from around the world. It is a venue for trade, innovation and expanding Newfoundland and Labrador's presence in international markets. It's very important.

Newfoundland and Labrador is one of Canada's largest seafood exporters, with world-class products like snow crab, shrimp, cod and mussels and more. Events like this help us maintain that visibility in the global seafood market because, if we aren't, competitors will fill the space immediately.

As the minister noted, this expo is also about demonstrating our commitment to the fishing and aquaculture industry. My time as minister in our government made it clear that workers in these sectors deserve stability, predictability and respect. That principle still matters today. The harvesters, processors, aquaculture workers and plant workers in rural communities who power this industry need a government that stands firmly behind them every single day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement.

We do have a great array of products that come from our waters and, rightfully so, they are in high demand around the world. It's just too bad that they're not always readily available or affordable in supermarkets here at home.

We, therefore, ask this government to double its efforts to improve access to local foods and ensure that people of our province are able to feed themselves with quality products grown and harvested here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

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

Last week in this House, and in the media, the Premier stood by his claim that the staffer in his office is only being paid by MCP to advise on health care issues; however, we presented documents that prove that wasn't the case, but the Premier has doubled down.

So I will give the Premier another opportunity today; will he admit that Dr. Whalen gives him political advice on things other than just health care?

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, I make no apologies for hiring good people.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** I make no apologies for taking policy advice from someone who works in our health care system; particularly, someone who is on the front lines of our health care system, working daily in emergency departments in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

We are also going to make sure that we get lots of policy advice when it comes to the social determinants of health, something that this government forgot about.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Again, Speaker, they're very specific questions, and I would appreciate an answer, as would Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The Premier said – and from *Hansard*, I quote – for providing policy advice to the Premier's office on health care matters, and that is the only thing that he's providing advice on.

As I said, we know, and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know, that is not the case, because Dr. Whalen has been involved in other briefings that have absolutely nothing to do with health care.

Why does the Premier think it's okay for MCP to pay for political advice that does nothing for health care in this province?

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, I'll reiterate my comments about hiring good people and not afraid to take advice from people that work in the health care system on the front line.

That's exactly what we have done and, perhaps, if the previous government had done a better job with that, we wouldn't find ourselves in the mess we are in with our health care system right now.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** When we talk about health care, one of the things we ought to be talking about, as the former minister of Health should know, is the social determinants of health, which impact a lot of different areas. We'll continue to seek advice from somebody who works on the front lines of the health care system.

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

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

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

What the Premier is missing, either intentionally or unintentionally, it's not about the person; it's about where the money is coming from and what the money is being used for. Those are the questions that we're asking.

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

**J. HOGAN:** I've given the Premier two opportunities today and we've given him two weeks to come clean; however, we do have more evidence that we've gotten through access to information requests. We have a copy of Dr. Whalen's calendar and, big surprise, what does it show? More meetings and briefings that have absolutely nothing to do with health care.

Why is the Premier saying one thing when the evidence continues to mount and the documents show that what the Premier is saying is not true?

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, when I talk about the social determinants of health, let's talk about what that actually means. Let's talk about how affordable housing impacts people's health. Let's talk about how having a job impacts people's health. Let's talk about how the cost of living impacts people's health.

There are lots of subjects and lots of topics of conversation that impact people's health, and I will continue to take advice from people who work directly in the system.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you.

I've been through the calendar, and I'm not sure there was one meeting that's about the social determinants of health, but what is in there is a meeting about fisheries and aquaculture.

So, Premier, please tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians what fisheries and aquaculture has to do with getting advice on health care in this province?

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, clearly the cost of food is a big issue in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Clearly, the cost of eating healthy and being able to afford to eat healthy –

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** – is a part of health care in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We just heard the Leader of the Third Party talk about the importance of affordability of seafood in our own province, the ability that we fought for with Ottawa to try to allow fishing seven days a week for our recreational food fishery.

That's what we're talking about, health care in Newfoundland and Labrador and food that will help keep people healthier.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I think that's a stretch, but we'll try something else that I don't think he can stretch into the truth.

Why was Dr. Whalen meeting, and in his calendar, about a bird dog firefighting aircraft? What does that have to do with health care, and why is MCP paying for advice on that?

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, as I have said previously, I make no apologies for taking advice from people that are involved in our health care system in our province, and I will continue to do it.

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

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

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

I want to be very clear, regardless of the advice that is being given, it is totally inappropriate and wrong for MCP to pay for political advice, regardless of what that advice is.

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

**J. HOGAN:** And not only is that wrong, what has gotten worse is that this has become a cover-up and the Premier of this province is telling Newfoundlanders and Labradorians things which, factually, are incorrect.

I would ask the Premier: Why does he think it's okay to use MCP money for things other than health care, and why is he not being honest with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

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

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

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, the fact of the matter is that health care involves a lot of different issues. We've taken advice – it's not about location; it's about getting results. That's what we're focused on, getting results for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

You know, when we think about results, let's talk about the fact of the cost of living that we've heard so much about in discussions these days. Let's talk about the fact that people are paying to see a nurse practitioner. Think about the cost of that to the people of our province, seniors of our province. Think about the cost of medical transportation when they have to pay to travel for medical transportation. Think about the 165,000 people who don't have a medical doctor.

Yeah, we've got a lot of work to do, and I'll continue to take advice on it.

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, MCP stands for Medical Care Program, not money for Conservative politicians.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Dr. Whalen's calendar was released today for the months of December, January and February. While he took plenty of meetings that had nothing to do with health care, glaringly, it does not show any meetings with the Minister of Health.

Has the minister been ignored by the Premier's health advisor or is there important information missing from Dr. Whalen's calendar?

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

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, the Premier talked about some of the issues that we're running into. He's talked about that a lot when addressing the questions about Dr. Des Whalen.

Speaker, we've been left with a serious, serious mess when it comes to health care, and we are taking advice from Dr. Des Whalen, including myself. He is actually out there providing us his sound voice so that we don't fall into the pitfalls.

We look at the social determinants of health, Family Care Teams \$20 million over budget, basically no planning for these travel nurses, Speaker, \$80 million not accounted for –

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

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I ask the Minister of Health has she ever asked Dr. Whalen for partisan political advice, given that is his job as a political staffer – reading from the contract?

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

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, Dr. Whalen has provided sound health advice.

When I'm looking at the mess that was created, because the social determinants of health are so important to the Health Accord, one of those factors that was going to play into that was the Family Care Teams. When we looked at the Family Care Teams, 21 had been announced; we've got empty buildings because they haven't been properly staffed.

We're looking at, now, some of them almost having to close because they weren't properly staffed. That's the Family Care Teams. The social determinants of health were a key factor in the Health Accord, Speaker.

This is the mess we're left with; basically, no planning for the travel nurses, yet they billed us 80 million. We're stuck with that and nothing in the budget for that, Speaker.

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

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I don't know why his contract stipulated that he was a political advisor and being paid from MCP.

Speaker, we still haven't heard any firm numbers on medical travel and I've asked multiple times in this House, so I'll give the minister some.

If a round trip for a doctor's appointment from St. John's to Goose Bay costs \$1,000, the Conservatives could cover 275 trips if they stopped paying a political staffer from MCP.

Is the minister going to transfer money out of MCP? If she is going to do that, can she at least spend some of it on helping Labradorians get to their appointments, because they're struggling every day?

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

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, we are now planning to roll out the MTAP program so the MTAP coverage is 100 per cent –

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

**L. EVANS:** – something that the Member, when she was minister, failed to do. The government failed to do it when they were a Liberal government, Speaker.

A PC government is going to deliver on that practice, but we're going to plan it. We're going to roll it out in a few months, and then Labradorians and people on the Island who use MTAP will actually have 100 per cent coverage of the MTAP programs.

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

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, the now Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs was very vocal about supporting physicians in Grand Falls-Windsor stating, in 2024, "...

we're talking about we're doing everything to retain doctors. By God, we're not. We are 100 per cent not, because if we were, we would have had a phone call sometime this week."

Speaker, I ask the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs: Why didn't you pick up the phone, and what is your plan for your 2,000 constituents who are losing their family doctor?

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

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, I've actually engaged with the Member that she referenced; he is actually engaged with that doctor, Speaker.

At the end of the day, we have to ensure that the policies outlined ensure that patient care is safe and effective. That's what we're doing, but also, we are now looking at those patients that may be stranded because of this.

It wasn't because Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services failed to engage with the doctor, Speaker. Everything was done to try to accommodate this but, at the end of the day, when a new physician has a provisional licence, they have to be supervised. That's the underlying thing they have (inaudible).

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

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

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

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

The \$275,000 that the Conservatives are using from MCP for political advice could equate to two registered nurses and a

licenced practical nurse at Pleasant View Towers in my district.

So I'm asking the Minister of Health: Why did you let the Premier take the money from MCP that could have been used to support seniors in long-term care and open more beds?

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

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, I remind the Member that the travel nurses cost \$400,000 for one travel nurse. How many of our own nurses could we have provided for that?

They continued to use these expensive travel nurses, Speaker, where businesses actually got the profit. The poor nurses that were travel nurses did not get it.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, at the end of the day, I also will note that, really, there was \$80 million not accounted for in the budget because they didn't plan for the travel nurses, but they used them. They didn't put it in the budget. That's poor fiscal planning.

We, on this side, are going –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

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

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

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

As we've heard from the Auditor General, of course, we managed to decrease reliance on travel nurses by 40 per cent.

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

**J. HOGAN:** It was certainly moving in the right direction.

Sadly, what I saw over the weekend was multiple –

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

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, sadly, what I saw over the weekend on Facebook – I am sure the Minister of Energy saw it as well – was numerous advertisements from recruiters looking for travel nurses in this province.

Can the Minister of Health answer why numerous recruiters are actively recruiting travel nurses throughout the province, despite her commitment that that would not happen anymore?

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

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

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

**L. EVANS:** I will address the former minister of Health and the former premier on his question. I will address that, Speaker.

In actual fact, if they want to pay \$400,000 for a travel nurse, fill your boots. Here, we are going to get unionized nurses to do that work in the province (inaudible) –

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

**L. EVANS:** At the end of the day, we are going to use unionized nurses. We are not going to give profits to businesses. We are going to make sure our health care system is fixed. We are going to clean up their mess –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. EVANS:** We're going to clean up their mess, because that's what they left us, a mess

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

**J. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, that sounds like advertising right now.

As a new MHA, I am disgusted and embarrassed by the use of MCP funds for political, partisan advice. What's worse is government's attempt to blur the line between political staff and our independent public service by drawing false comparisons between the likes of Dr. Fitzgerald, Dr. Parfrey and Dr. Browne.

Public servants are prohibited from giving partisan advice, unlike the Premier's new advisor. Why is government disparaging our public service to protect one of their own?

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

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

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

**L. PARROTT:** Pretty rich – pretty rich coming from the same group we had a premier who denied knowing about the \$35,000 bonuses that they gave themselves. Now, either the staffer didn't tell them and he kept him working for his, or he knew.

Does that embarrass or disgust you, I wonder?

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. PARROTT:** What about the land deal that the former minister made with H3, does that disgust you.

Millions of dollars –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I'm going to start naming Members.

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

What about Snow's Lane, I wonder does that disgust the Member?

One other thing, what about the apartments that were rented out? No repercussions, nobody in there, they knew all about it and they never did a thing. They talk about being disgusted, look in the mirror –

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

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

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

**E. LOVELESS:** I'll say to that Member, if you want to talk about land, you want to talk about a previous Progressive Conservative premier who did a lot for his land and benefited from it. If you want to start talking about that, well absolutely.

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

**E. LOVELESS:** Absolutely.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**E. LOVELESS:** Absolutely, you know what I'm talking about too; that's why your temperature is up

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**E. LOVELESS:** Mr. Speaker, we couldn't get answers out of the Premier, so I'm going

to ask the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

On February 15, Dr. Whalen attended a meeting about fisheries and aquaculture. Was the minister present at that meeting and, if so, can he please tell us the connection of fishery and health care?

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

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

**L. PARROTT:** I'll speak to the preamble and I'll remind the Member about the vote that happened inside Cabinet that they wouldn't answer to when they voted to give themselves a bonus, a pay raise, on the way out the door, pre-election, just in case they didn't win and, guess what, they didn't win.

We're here and we're doing what has to be done. We've hired the people to advise us in the proper way, so we can fix the mess that was left behind after 10 years of neglect, misappropriation of funds and everything that they've done.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. PARROTT:** So here we are. Now they sit here and their time machine doesn't work anymore. It worked very well when they were in government, but it doesn't work anymore. Get back in your hot tub.

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

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

**E. LOVELESS:** There's a social media that'll tell us all about the Member that was just on his feet, about what he said over here and what he's doing over there. The people of the province know it, and I'll say that to the Member.

I'll ask the question again, and hopefully he will allow this time, instead of putting his hand up to keep the minister down. Let the minister stand on his feet.

The Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, if he was present at that meeting, can he please tell us the connection of fishery and health care?

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

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

**L. PARROTT:** I'll address the preamble. My social media didn't have campaign signs up saying if you want pavement vote for me.

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

**L. PARROTT:** My social media didn't say anything about voting for secret bonuses and not disclosing to the public. My social media doesn't say anything about the land deal with Snow's Lane; didn't say anything about the mental health facility –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. PARROTT:** – awarded to their buddy for \$42 million more than the next lowest bidder; didn't say anything about sole sourcing a penitentiary because nobody would bid anything through them because of the previous practices.

They want to talk about corruption and all of those other things, I'll say what I said earlier, look in the mirror.

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

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

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

It would be helpful if the government knew the election was over and we could get down to the people's work here in Question – and answer – Period.

Speaker, on Wednesday, January 28, from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., Dr. Des Whalen's calendar indicated a prep meeting with the Minister of Infrastructure.

Did Des Whalen advise the Minister of Infrastructure to cancel the new provincial hospital?

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, I'll remind the Member that we know the election is over because we're over here and we're doing things (inaudible) –

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, a big thing with having a good advisor is you're going to get good advice. But, at the end of the day, we're not going to be building hospitals when we need long-term care beds. We're not going to be wasting our money. We're not going to be out there wasting our money and not accounting for a lot of things.

I remind the Member that \$80 million –

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

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

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

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

Well, you're not going to build a hospital – a badly needed hospital at Kenmount Crossing. We're going to patch up a hundred-odd-year-old hospital.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

Speaker, I ask –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**J. KORAB:** The Minister of Health said they're going to build long-term care beds. When and where are we building those long-term beds? When and where?

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

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, 23 per cent of beds in hospitals, acute-care beds, are being taken up by people that need long-term care beds. We got elected; we were sworn in in October; we are planning to build long-term care beds so our seniors can be treated with respect – the seniors that built this province first, Speaker.

The difference between the Liberals and the PCs is we care about people, and we care about our elders, Speaker. We're going to actually address that. In actual fact, Speaker, that's the truth.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. EVANS:** We're not going to be building flashy buildings at a huge cost of \$10 billion to \$14 billion when our seniors are struggling.

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

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

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

**J. KORAB:** Speaker, a simple question: When and where are the long-term beds going? When and where? Simple, no preamble, no blah blah blah – when and where?

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, we are coming up with a plan to actually make long-term care beds available across the province. We're going to be putting long-term care beds in regions –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** So there's no plan.

**L. EVANS:** We do have a plan, that's the difference between you – \$80 million, you had basically paid out for travel nurses, nothing in the budget, Speaker – nothing in the budget. That's a lack of planning. Family Care Teams not staffed, yet going \$20 million over budget. How did that happen when some of them are actually empty with no staff, Speaker?

At the end of the day, on this side, we plan – plan efficiently, the Minister of Finance said, and that's what we're doing, Speaker.

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

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

**B. FORD:** Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic Wildfire Centre, established in my District of Gander, is extremely important. On January 5, Dr. Des Whalen was invited to a meeting to talk about the acquisition of a new Bird Dog aircraft to help with forest fire fighting operations.

Does this Premier really expect anyone to believe that a forest fire fighting aircraft has anything to do with health care?

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

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

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

I am certainly glad to get up here and talk about our forest fire protection – I really am. I'm glad the Member brought up the forest fire protection centre in Gander, a very important part of the system.

We train people in Gander, we utilize people in Gander, all of our equipment is in Gander, our station is in Gander, our aircrafts are in Gander, and we keep working to enhance our forest fire protection, as well as bringing back the fifth water bomber for this year's fire season.

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

**P. FORSEY:** So I'm glad that the Member for Gander brought up the forest fire protection.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

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

While the blame game happens, last night an elderly Inuk man was refused care multiple times at the emergency room at St. Clare's and the Health Sciences Centre. His first language is Inuktitut. He was dismissed as being drunk and was ejected by security more than once. Only after First Light

intervened with senior NLHS officials was the man able to obtain the immediate care that he deserved.

So I ask the minister: Will you acknowledge that culturally informed care is not a duplication of existing services, as the minister has suggested in the past, and will we see funding for the First Light clinic in this upcoming budget – yes or no?

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, I take great offence to the Member taking my words and twisting them. In actual fact, I didn't say it was a duplication; I said one of the things we would look at is, because of the region and the supports that are actually in the region, we want to make sure if there is actually a clinic for Indigenous people that there's no duplication of services, Speaker. That's what you call good planning.

I take great offence at the Member taking my words and twisting them. I did not say that, Speaker, and if she wants to actually play on words, I will say again: We respect Indigenous people. We respect all different groups that live in the province –

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

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

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

**J. DINN:** Speaker, timely access to mental health care is key to a person's well-being. A person called our office who has been waiting three years to see a psychiatrist since being referred. Another person received a call that her daughter had an appointment to see a psychiatrist six years after being referred and five years after her daughter died by suicide.

Will the Minister of Health table, in this House, the number of people on the wait-list to see a psychiatrist, as well as the length of time they have been on the wait-list?

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

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, I certainly hope the Member forwarded the patient's information who's been waiting for so long.

At the end of the day, we provide services to people. We don't play political games over here, Speaker. We don't. At the end of the day, if there's an issue with mental health wait times, access to mental health care, then we need to know about it.

I do know, after being in Opposition for seven years, coming into government now in October that there's been a real disservice done to people who are seeking mental health supports, with 10 years of a past Liberal government.

We are going to address mental health. We're going to increase the supports for people seeking care. At the end of the day, we're going to do government differently on this side.

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

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

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

**E. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, health care is a major pillar in the government's platform. One very important and crucial part of health care is home support workers. Some health care workers, who do not work with agencies, have not received a pay increase for many years. Your government has committed to retain these workers.

I ask the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board: Will your government review this request to help the residents in need to keep these very valuable home care support workers in work?

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

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

**C. PARDY:** Mr. Speaker, yes, indeed we will – answer to the question.

We value everyone who provides care and home support for our seniors in our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We value them. I think we've got 6,000 agency support workers. We've got about 2,100 that are self-managed and hired by the clients. They provide a valuable source of help and assistance to keep people aging in their community and aging at home, which is their preferred place.

We value them. The Premier and the platforms stated about improving health care. That's a good start.

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

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

**E. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, agencies pay their workers at a higher wage. Self-management private workers do the same, but they get paid less. Many private workers work in the rural settings where agencies do not even operate. The workers are crucial in these settings.

Will the minister offer any assistance available to keep these crucial workers on the job in their rural settings?

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

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

**C. PARDY:** The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands asks great questions – good questions.

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

**C. PARDY:** When we were on the Opposition side of the House, and I think we can recall, we presented a petition about pay equity and the discrepancy between the members that were in the self-employed versus the agency. We thought that was an injustice.

In fact, we presented it and I think we all rallied amongst each other in support of it. I would say we are aware of that, to the MHA. We are aware of it, and I think we are committed to make sure that we make adjustments to make it fair because we do value their work and it is so, so important.

Thank you, Speaker.

**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:** In accordance with the *Auditor General Act, 2021*, I hereby table the performance audit report on supply management by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

**Petitions**

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

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

This petition is calling for more provincial wildfire firefighting resources.

WHEREAS our province has experienced unprecedented wildfire devastation that places significant strain on existing firefighting resources, including: greater volunteer firefighting time commitments from local members; increased call volumes, particularly associated with wildfire response; gaps in funding for equipment associated with wildfire response; and the growing need for enhanced training for firefighters for wildfire response;

THEREFORE we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to increase funding for wildfire equipment, including additional wildland coveralls, to meet the current and projected needs of our community; enhance training opportunities; support in the hiring of 50 additional wildland firefighters; and to formalize a policy to provide compensation for volunteer firefighters that respond to the wildfires.

Also, Speaker, I do want to acknowledge, it was good and welcomed news to see GlobalMedics step in yesterday and make significant donations –

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

**P. PARSONS:** That's right – to 32 departments across the province received these fire skids and they were covered very well in the news media.

I did listen to an interview by the current minister, today, who talked about how his department had involvement; however, it was under the first minister, Ottenheimer,

who helped select where the department had gone.

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

**P. PARSONS:** I acknowledge, yes –

**SPEAKER:** I remind the Member not to use names.

**P. PARSONS:** Absolutely. Right.

So my point being, I would like to ask the Member to table how the selection process went and what departments actually received these free donations. From the information I have gathered – it's not available anywhere officially but what I have heard, it's been told to me, so far the districts that have received were Heart's Content, Deer Lake, Pouch Cove, Port aux Choix, Marystown, Clarendville, St. George's, Holyrood and Lewisporte, just to name a few.

That looks like a bit of a pattern to me, and I'm wondering what the selection process will be. I'm calling on the minister and all ministers to distribute these resources and funding fairly.

So if the minister could table that information on how the selection process went, that'd be greatly appreciated for this House and for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador calling on fairness for all of us here, Speaker, in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands for a response.

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

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

I appreciate the petition and I'm glad the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave is following our Blue Book because we're

putting in – actually, we started training today with our forest fire training.

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

**P. FORSEY:** Started that today, right here in town. Actually, she mentioned GlobalMedics. Yes, a fine initiative that the GlobalMedics contributed to our volunteer fire departments yesterday. I certainly would like to thank GlobalMedics for that.

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

**P. FORSEY:** (Inaudible) through an application process. All the fire departments had a chance with the application process to send in to the fire commissioner's office.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**P. FORSEY:** We received over 130 applications and there were 32 units brought in. I was glad to see that many applications. Actually, it warrants for another draw probably in the very near future.

As far as where they went, that was chosen by the fire commissioner's office. I'm pleased to say that Burgeo - La Poile, in the Liberal District, received two; Placentia - St. Mary's, in a Liberal District, received three.

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

**P. FORSEY:** I don't know if the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave would agree with that or not.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

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

My petition is the site clean-up at Fortune Head Ecological Reserve.

These are the reasons for the petition:

WHEREAS the Fortune Head Ecological Reserve is a major tourist attraction located 1.6 kilometres from Fortune in the District of Burin - Grand Bank; and

WHEREAS the Fortune Head Ecological Reserve displays the Cambrian explosion from 540 million years ago when organisms began to rapidly develop; and

WHEREAS in the cliffs of Fortune Head, you are able to view the fossils, which are a geological record left behind by ancient life; and

WHEREAS there are only two other locations on the planet of this Precambrian-Cambrian boundary stratotype which are located in Siberia, Russia and Meishucun, China; and

WHEREAS the Fortune Head Ecological Reserve is next to a former dump and over time, despite remediation, since 2003, garbage is falling into the ocean in Fortune Bay, a rich fish habitat;

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 provide the necessary funding in this year's budget to remediate the environmental disaster occurring at Fortune Head; and direct the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change to review the site engineering assessment, as approved in April of 2025, and to meet with the Fortune Head Ecological Reserve committee to present a plan to promote and preserve this unique area.

This is, indeed, a very unique area. It's a real tourist attraction for the Burin Peninsula. We have visitors, archaeologists

and other interested people from all over the world coming to go to that site. If you ever went out there, you would actually see the Precambrian-Cambrian fossils which are imbedded in the rocks out there. You can just look along the side of the cliff and see them. It's absolutely stunning – one of three in the world.

The other thing is that right next door, as you're viewing the site, there are bags of garbage falling into the ocean, bags upon bags of garbage.

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

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs for a response.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This is not a new issue, by no means. From what I see, this has been going on for a couple of decades now. Make no mistake, my department is going to come up with some practical, economical solutions and that's what this government does and that's what this Premier does.

We're going tackle this, in time, but whether it be fish sauce in St. Mary's, we're not going to let it go for 20 years. We're going to tackle this. We're going to come up with solutions for the Member opposite. I've had this conversation with him before.

But, make no mistake, this is not a new issue. This was brought to this former government several times and nothing was done about it. This is the government that will take care of it. Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

WHEREAS affordable, accessible child care is essential to supporting families, strengthening the workforce and enabling parents to participate fully in the economy; and

WHEREAS the \$10-per-day child care program has significantly reduced costs for families across the province; and

WHEREAS the shortage of affordable child care spaces in the Corner Brook area is creating challenges for parents – and particularly women – seeking to work, pursue education or contribute fully to the local economy;

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 work with the federal government to fund more \$10-per-day child care spaces. If more federal support is not forthcoming, we call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to fund more spaces themselves.

Speaker, the introduction of \$10 daycare was a meaningful difference for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The issue is no longer just about affordability, though; it's about accessibility and availability. There are simply not enough spaces.

The previous government, with the help of the federal government, was able to make a significant dent in the lack of spaces, but there is still substantial work to do. The new government recognizes this challenge as well.

Lack of accessible child care keeps parents, particularly women as I mentioned, out of

the workforce and leads people to have fewer children and have them later in life.

Speaker, I know we are serious about economic growth, labour force participation and supporting young families, then we must be equally serious about expanding access to child care.

I think both sides of the House agree on this issue, so I urge government to take action in the upcoming budget.

Thank you.

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

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Day

**SPEAKER:** This being Private Members' Day and given the time of the day, I'm going to call now upon the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville to introduce the private Member's motion, and I will add that with leave of the House, after he introduces it, the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair is going to speak to it.

Does the Member have leave to do that?

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

**SPEAKER:** It is my understanding there was an agreement that the Member would present it, just read it and then the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair would use that 10 minutes.

Do we have leave by all Members to do it? We need unanimous consent.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Yes.

**SPEAKER:** Okay.

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

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

Thank you for the leave.

I move, seconded by the Leader of the Opposition, the following private Member's resolution –

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

**B. DAVIS:** Seconded by the Deputy Opposition House Leader, the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

**SPEAKER:** That's the Government House Leader. You're the Deputy Government House Leader.

**B. DAVIS:** No, Opposition House Leader.

**SPEAKER:** The Opposition House Leader, yes.

**B. DAVIS:** We were both wrong on that one, Speaker.

Is that okay with the Speaker for me to continue?

**SPEAKER:** Go ahead.

**B. DAVIS:** WHEREAS public funds under the Medical Care Plan (MCP) are allotted exclusively to support the delivery of insured health services to residents of Newfoundland and Labrador; and

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 of Assembly urge the government to immediately stop using MCP funds to pay for political support staff.

I do thank the House for the leave for me to sit down and for the hon. Member for

Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair to continue on with the PMR.

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

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

Speaker, I'm happy to stand in support of this motion, because it does raise a fundamental question – what are health care dollars for? It's something that I have been asked a lot as I've travelled around the province, even over the last number of weeks.

I actually had someone track me down where I was staying in Central Labrador last week and say, is this really true? Do we have a political staffer being paid through our medical care fund? I said: Yes, it's true. We have ATIPP. We have the contract.

Then the next question was, well, they say you did that too; is that true? I said: No, to my knowledge I can't find anywhere that the Liberal administration, while they were in power, ever did that. Do we have doctors working within the government? Yes, we do.

We had folks like Dr. Fitzgerald, well known in this province; folks like Dr. Browne, they work full-time within the system. They do not provide political advice. So there is a substantive difference there.

I go back to the fundamental question of, what are our health care dollars for, not in theory, but in practice? Because how a government answers that question defines, I believe, what the priorities will be over the next four years.

The Medical Care Plan exists for a specific purpose. Many in this province who may not know the nuances, the inner workings of government, they're quite familiar with the medical care program. It funds insured physician services. It's there to ensure access to medically necessary care. It is not a general funding envelope, Speaker. Let's

be very clear on that. It is not discretionary funding, and it is certainly not designed to absorb political staffing costs.

We know that the budget for political hires in the Premier's office is \$1.8 million. I believe there are 16 people through our ATIPP. This doctor, hired for political support through the medical care fund, the salary equates to \$275,000. The \$300,000 he billed MCP for last year, that's legit – that's legit. He's a doctor working, this is not personal about that doctor. I hear he is an incredible individual.

Above the \$300,000, the \$275,000 that this doctor is being paid for political advice for the 28 hours a week – and I'm not sure what constitutes the bonus. Maybe if the Minister of Health speaks, she can tell us at the end of this year, at the end of the contract, who decides if he gets that \$13,000 bonus. I actually represent a lot of people who probably only make \$13,000. So I'm not sure; I wasn't clear on that, Speaker.

Yet, the issue before us today, in this PMR, isn't whether physicians are paid appropriately. It's not that, let's be clear. The issue is whether MCP funds can be used to pay political advisors, because the money is for medical. It is intended for medical and not for political.

We heard the Premier, many times on his feet trying to offer a justification, and then there's a lot of different information. In *Hansard* I was reading about when he actually started. We know the contract didn't begin until December 22, yet we know that he was receiving documents, this staffer in question, this political advisor, as early as a month and a half before that – November 6, Speaker. Then we were told he was a part of the transition team. He wasn't a part of the transition team.

So, I do understand, I'm getting emails, messages, phone calls from people that are really unhappy about this. I had the Medical

Transportation Assistance Program under me in Budget '23, '24 and '25, and there were a lot of sad stories. There were many people with really serious issues that had to be turned away. We were told the MCP funding was a limited pot and it was not intended for that. Those people are the ones that are now reaching out to me.

We know that the Premier pointed to the NLMA agreement but, notably, Speaker, he has not identified a section, a clause, a program or a payment mechanism that justifies or permits this practice. In fact, my review of the agreement, it states that the NLMA doesn't negotiate on behalf of doctors working in the Department of Health.

I don't know if the Premier is speaking today but, I would ask, which is it, Premier?

He tried to justify it as listening to the people on the ground. Speaker, I think about the Health Accord that had engaged about 150 people on the ground, people at the grassroots, people in the know that we were listening to that knew the challenges. That Health Accord, right now, designed by those folks on the ground, seems to be on the chopping block by this current government. I'm also getting a lot of emails and concerns about that – people that really respected Dr. Pat Parfrey. It wasn't political advice, a 45-year reputable physician that really wanted to give back and leave the province a little better than he found it, Speaker.

There are legitimate cases where physicians working are paid similar salaries to that of Dr. Whalen, but let's be clear, those arrangements are structured. They're transparent. They're clearly tied to health system delivery, not meetings with ambassadors, meetings with fisheries, meetings in Transportation, meetings in everything but health. They are not political. They are not undefined. They are not outside established classifications.

So we are left with a basic question today, Speaker, on the floor of this hon. House: Under what classification is this individual being paid?

As critic for both Labrador Affairs and Indigenous Relations, I need to highlight what this money could mean if spent appropriately for medically necessary services: an additional doctor in the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair; we currently don't have one right now. It could mean five LPNs. It could mean three RNs.

In Labrador, we consistently hear stories about barriers to access, inequities in service delivery and about the need for culturally appropriate care. These additional resources would make a significant difference in the daily lives of Labradorians.

Speaker, every day we ask questions about this in the House, and they just go unanswered as to who authorized this arrangement, under what authority. We also need to consider the precedent. If this is acceptable, down the road in the future, what prevents similar arrangements? Is this the road that we are on at the front end of a four-year term? What limits, what parameters exist around this?

Yes, there is the financial dimension, Speaker, I have to say, because \$275,000 is a lot of money. If you take an MHA like the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, it's more than triple what that man makes. If you think about a Cabinet minister's salary, it's more than five Cabinet ministers' salaries. So, yes, there is a financial dimension, particularly in a system that is already very much under pressure.

Speaker, this motion is not complicated. It asks that MCP funds be used for their intended purpose, in a transparent manner and in a way that maintains public trust. It is a reasonable expectation. It is a necessary standard, and it is one that I really hope this whole House of Assembly will support today.

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

I rise today to speak to this motion and to set the record straight, because what we are hearing from the Opposition is not fact. It is not substance. It is not even a –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The time is not set.

Okay. Sorry about that, Premier, go ahead.

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** No problem.

It is not even a serious policy argument. What we are hearing is political theatre and, Speaker, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have had enough of it. So let's begin with the facts, because facts matter.

There has been a deliberate attempt by the Opposition to confuse how our health care funding works, specifically how MCP works. So let me very clear, there is a distinction within the MCP system; there are clinical payments, which are uncapped and driven by patient need. In other words, Speaker, if people need access to MCP, they will get it. There are administrative allocations which support the functioning and improvement of the system.

These two things are not the same, and not one dollar – not a single dollar – is being taken away from patient care as a result of the decisions we have made – not one dollar. Clinical services remain fully funded. Doctors are paid. Patients are treated. Care continues. So when the Opposition stands and suggests otherwise, they are not just

wrong, they are deliberately misleading the people of the province.

Speaker, if this debate were really about principle, we might be having a different conversation, but it's not; because, the same Opposition that is expressing outrage today, practiced this exact approach for years. Now let's talk about their record.

Under the previous Liberal government, special advisors were used across departments and positions were funded through administrative envelopes, including within health; names like Greg Browne, Pat Parfrey and there are others, but this was not unusual. This was not controversial. This was standard practice. They relied on advice when it suited them. They welcomed expertise when it benefited them, but now that we are in government, now that we are doing the work, they have suddenly discovered a problem.

Speaker, this is not principle. This is hypocrisy, and here's the bigger issue. This debate exposes a fundamental difference between the two sides of the House. The Opposition is focused on politics and we are focused on policy.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** They are focused on who they can attack. We are focused on what we can fix. Because let's be honest about where we are today. After 10 years under the previous government, wait-lists grew longer, emergency rooms closed, especially in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

We saw a travel nurse scandal that cost millions. We saw patients without access to primary care today grow to more than 165,000 people without a family doctor. We saw aging facilities with no real plan for renewal. We saw patients occupying hospital beds because long-term care capacity was not addressed.

What did they focus on? Announcements, legacy projects, buildings that made for good headlines but didn't fix the system. Speaker, they built announcements. They did not build solutions.

So yes, when we came into government, we made a choice. We made choices to do things differently. We made a choice to focus on outcomes, not optics. We made a choice to bring in the best people available to help us fix what has been broken far too long.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Here is something the Opposition does not seem to understand. You do not fix a health care system with political talking points. You fix it with expertise. You fix it with people who have treated patients, managed systems and made real decisions in real environments. This is how you build policy. This is how you deliver better health care.

Speaker, I will say this clearly. We will take advice from qualified experts over political insiders every single time, because we are not here to protect the past. We are here to build a better future. We are elected with a mandate to fix health care. This is not a small task. This is not something that happens overnight, but it is something that requires serious people, real expertise and a willingness to act.

That is exactly what we are doing. That is why, when assembling my team, I have surrounded myself with individuals with diverse backgrounds from experts in health care and law enforcement to finance and accounting and many more areas of expertise and experience.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** You can't build a stronger Newfoundland and Labrador without surrounding yourself with the people who've worked on the front lines. Speaker,

we have a team that shares one common goal: to deliver better health care, lower taxes and safer communities for all of us.

So while the Opposition continues to focus on personal attacks, distractions and theatrics, we will stay focused on the people of this province. We will stay focused on improving access. We will stay focused on strengthening the system and we will stay focused on delivering results.

Speaker, we are going to govern, we are going to do the work and if the Opposition cannot keep up, we are certainly not going to wait for them.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Speaker, as a government, we've been here about six months and we've been criticized – what have we done – what have we done? Well, let me tell you the difference between a Liberal government and a PC government.

A Liberal government makes an announcement and then goes about doing the work. Well, I could tell you that this PC government is focused on getting the work done and then we'll make the announcements.

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

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** We will continue and if anybody wants to understand where this government is going and exactly what the PC government is going to deliver to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, then I suggest they pick up our Blue Book and read it because that is a road map that we are going to follow, it's a road map we've committed to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and it's a road map that we're going to deliver.

We will continue to do that every single day that we occupy this government and we'll continue to say it not for just 100 days, but

1,000 days, and you just watch what we deliver.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

**J. PARSONS:** Speaker, on a daily basis, Members of this House talk about health care, the needs of their constituents. Clearly, we have limited resources. We need more facilities, more health care professionals, more nurses, more doctors. It's the single biggest issue we deal with. It's the single biggest budget item of our government. We utilize 40 per cent of our budget and, still, there isn't enough to meet the needs of our citizens.

For decades, physicians were the most educated people in many communities in our province, so they were elevated to a place of great admiration, particularly in smaller communities. People trusted them with looking out for their personal interests and, still, today physicians in our society bear that responsibility. Physicians not only take their technical duties very seriously, they know their ethical duties and they know they're equally important.

The Hippocratic Oath, do no harm, it comes from Greece, 400 B.C. It swears the high standards of patient confidentiality and acting only for the good of the patient. Likewise, Mr. Speaker, civil servants have a duty to give unbiased advice. They work within policies set by government for the public interests. As I mentioned many times, they are the backbone of government. They are the ones who do the hard work every day to keep our complex world running. Most importantly, they are not partisan.

Treasury Board policy states it is in the best interests of the public that government services and programs be implemented and advice provided in a politically neutral manner. Participation in political activities should not compromise or be perceived as

compromising employees' performance of their duties in an impartial manner.

Now, Speaker, there are specific budgets set aside for political support staff. Some are in policy; some are set in budget. There is a specific budget set aside for political staff in the Premier's office and established Treasury Board pay scales. I've heard a number of things with regard to our public servants that concern me, in the short time we've been in this session.

The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure made a comment about finding all the civil servants that have been poked away by the previous government. I've seen this at a municipal level; it has a chilling effect. Comments like that have a chilling effect on our civil service. It leads to a great deal of inefficiency and stress, and it seems to indicate the government's failure to understand the modern expectation of government and the civil service.

Many in the House may see this point of view as naive, but I sincerely believe that we should use evidence and fairness in how we provide services to the public. The colour of your Member's poster shouldn't affect that.

The Conservatives have kept talking about "all of us." Well, all of us starts with controlling that rhetoric. In the case at hand, we're talking about a doctor working as a political staffer in the Premier's office. Now being trained as a physician certainly doesn't preclude anyone from doing other things not related to medicine. I was looking at some examples of doctors that are notable for other things. James Naismith, the inventor of basketball, was a doctor. Arthur Conan Doyle, the inventor of Sherlock Holmes, was a doctor as well. He had nothing to do with medicine. Graham Chapman of Monty Python was a doctor.

The doctor the Premier hired sounds like an excellent physician, and with his experience in the PC party, he also sounds like a

valuable political advisor. This issue arises because we are paying this individual a salary out of line with policy, with money earmarked for health care.

Now, I've heard a number of rebuttals to this criticism, mostly just attempts to muddy the water, as we just heard. One thing we keep hearing is: It's okay because he's a doctor giving health care advice. Well, it didn't take much research to find out this is not the case. From the fishery to the ambassador of Portugal, documents show he is not a health care advisor.

We also heard: It's okay because previous governments appointed political staff all the time. Yes, they did. Yes, they can. I don't argue that the Premier's office can employ political staff. It seems pretty common that party organizers get employed in the Premier's office or a caucus office. That allowance is baked into the system. However, they weren't paid out of precious dollars for health care.

We also hear: It's okay because previous governments paid doctors out of MCP for administrative duties. Yes, they did and, yes, they do. Clearly, we have doctors managing other health professionals at NLHS, providing advice on policy, tackling public health emergencies, but these professionals are not giving political advice. They are like most public servants, they are working hard without a political motivation.

Speaker, as I mentioned before, I'm a new MHA, but I'm not new to politics. When I see politicians doing unsavoury or embarrassing things, it hurts me. How many times have I heard the flippant remark: You're all alike? I think politics is an honourable vocation and politicians have honourable intent. However, actions like this sadden me.

Paying a political staffer with money that should be going to save lives, may or may not be technically wrong, but it definitely diminishes public trust, not only in government, but in all of us in this House.

The Premier can hire this doctor, if he wishes, I see no problem with that. He can seek his advice, I see no problem with that. Just don't do it with MCP dollars.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

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

I have risen today to respond to the private Member's motion regarding the salary of Dr. Whalen in his role as special advisor. The Opposition have raised concerns, not only here to this PMR, but in media, regarding the compensation of a physician. They talk about the qualifications and how much they respect that physician.

He's a good doctor; he's a good advisor, and he was appointed as special advisor to the Premier.

Speaker, our government and the Premier here has clarified that Dr. Whalen's compensation is not drawn from funding that covers patient care; that's misleading. They get up and talk about MCP dollars as if it's just the funds for patient care and it creates the illusion that, by paying Dr. Whalen's salary as special advisor, it's taking away from patient care.

The Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair talked about, oh, how many LPNs we could hire out of his salary. How many doctors. How many nurses. Well, Speaker, I'm the Minister of Health and we're struggling with recruitment because 10 years of Liberal government has really, really impacted recruitment and retention. It's not done right. We have problems now where, in actual fact, there are a lot of doctors who have been calling in, trying to actually get a job and got no reply. Speaker, that's what I

have to deal with as Minister of Health. So when we want to talk about MCP, I know about MCP.

There are suggestions that it's impacting access to care and the money that we have to spend on patient care, doctors, physicians, equipment and all the things that go with our health care is simply not accurate and has been shamefully politicized by the Opposition. You want to talk about shameful? The Member was over there talking about shameful behaviour. Well, I'll tell you, 10 years of Liberal government is really showing what shameful behaviour will look like.

Our new provincial government – we just got elected, just sworn in October – we're focused on increasing access to health care. We plan to build a stronger health care system that works for all of us but, at the end of the day, it can't be these flashy announcements to take the pressure off us.

Speaker, I'm Minister of Health, I know all about pressure. On social media, they're saying our surgeries have been cancelled, and they're blaming me for it. Well, one of the problems about the surgeries being cancelled is because there's no bed for that patient to recover in; there's no bed because the 10 years of Liberal government has not addressed long-term care needs.

We're going to do that. We're going to look after everybody. We're going to treat our Elders with respect. We're going to make sure that they're provided with proper care, but I can't snap my fingers like this and solve the 10 years of neglect from the Liberal government, and that's very important.

It's really hard to talk about health care and the mess that I've been left with without getting upset, so we do need advice to clean up the mess that was left for us. If I get a chance, I'll start talking about the mess that I'm facing. Families and, more importantly, patients out there need to be

reassured. Families should never feel uncertain about access to care and we, over here, the PC government, is working with front-line professionals. They're surprised at our engagement. Sometimes ministers here will say: Really, they're surprised when we're talking to them? What were the Liberals doing?

Every minister over here will tell you the same thing when they engage with stakeholders, with advocacy groups, with groups out there that actually need to engage government to actually improve the qualities of services in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the front-line professionals. We're working on improving coordination across the health care system and making changes to ensure people can access care where and when they need it. That's what we're about and that's what we're going to do. It's very, very important.

For me, I need to be clear at the outset. Dr. Whalen's salary is an advisory role and it does not negatively impact patient care services, access to health care services; it has no impact on MCP coverage for people in the province – none.

Do you know what? Over there, the 10 years of Liberal government, they're worried about what we're going to uncover. They're worried about what we're going to talk about. This is a deflection, Speaker.

The MCP budget is not a fixed amount. It's not a fixed amount. If we're paying a physician as advisor, his salary is not impacting access to patient care. It's driven by need in the province, a need that the Liberals, for 10 years, neglected. I can say that no one will be turned away from receiving services. When people need medically necessary health care services, MCP coverage is there for them, and it'll be there for them.

One of the things we have to do is, and I talked to the Minister of Finance, we've got to change the way government has been

dealing with services in the past – big, flashy announcements to deflect, to detract from the inaction of a government. We're not going to need as many big, flashy announcements. When we have a big flashy announcement, like Bay du Nord, it's going to be on something that we've done and that we've accomplished. We actually got a deal; that's action. We don't mind having a flashy one for that, but we're not going to be having these flashy 21 announcements for Family Care Teams that are not staffed. That's going to impact, actually, the access to the Health Accord. They're ruling out the Health Accord, Speaker – a disservice.

No one will be denied eligible medical coverage because this position is in the compensation, Speaker. It's misleading. Our provincial government, we're focused on three clear priorities: improving access to health care, safer communities and improving affordability for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

If we are serious about improving health care, we must listen to the people who work in the system every day. The Premier said that; he said it over and over again. You want solutions, talk to the people who are on the front lines providing the service. They're the ones who have solutions and, also, the people who are using the service. They know the problems that they're encountering, Speaker.

That's what we're going to do. The PC government is going to be a better government and, you want to know something, the bar is not that high.

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

**L. EVANS:** Speaker, this means listening to health care professionals who provide care, who respond to emergencies and show up for the patients when they need help the most.

One of the biggest problems we see in health care – one of the biggest problems –

is the people on the front lines, the health care providers, they're the ones greatest impacted. They're the ones that have to deal with the patients who are struggling, and that impacts them. It impacts them. When we improve the health care system, we're going to improve the lives of the health care providers as well.

Our government is committed to making decisions based on evidence, real-world experience and always in the best interest of people in the province; not big flashy announcements, not the appearance of doing something, right?

There's no better source of insight than those working on the front lines, especially in the emergency rooms, the clinics, the primary care settings. That's who we need to hear from. The best advice any government can receive on health care comes from health care professionals and patients themselves.

Also very, very important to say, Dr. Des Whalen has been praised over on this side as a good doctor. They have nothing against him, but they want to mislead the public by trying to make it seem like he's being paid out of health care funds from MCP.

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

**L. EVANS:** That's the difference; they don't know the difference. It's out of MCP administrative funds, which is totally different.

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

**L. EVANS:** Do you want to know something, Speaker? The thing that really bothers me is, I think they know the difference but they just would prefer not to actually talk about it. They would rather mislead the public. This is a distraction. They're ashamed. There is a lot of shame.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. EVANS:** Dr. Whalen has held senior leadership roles in Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, including senior medical director reporting to the vice-president of medical services. He is a good doctor and, also, he knows rural Newfoundland and Labrador health care. He brings a lot of expertise to this government. He brings deep experience and strong qualifications to his advisory role. He is an active emergency room physician. His real-time experience helps us with our discussions and make us have better informed decisions.

Speaker, I only have 41 seconds. I am rushing because I really want to make sure that people understand that, at the end of the day, we're facing serious challenges.

I have to say, the advice that Dr. Des Whalen brings to us is legitimate and credible, but also, it's very intelligent and it's based on experience that he has. He has, as a physician, lived experience with the health care system. He's basically been in the health care system under the Liberal administration, so he knows the problems. He knows the pitfalls. He basically has been telling us really good, efficient solutions and giving us advice and we say, well, why didn't they do that?

They didn't do it because they didn't –

**SPEAKER:** I remind the minister her time is up.

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

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

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

Governments must be accountable and transparent. That is an absolute. Certainly, in the NDP, in our campaign, that was one of the resounding messages that we

continued to hammer, it was about transparency and accountability. Some of the things that we, if we were in government, would basically enact: publication of all MHA conflict of interest reports, and NL NDP government would end decades of insider politics by banning all corporate and union donations.

How much would all of this be to implement? Absolutely nothing. It could have been done decades ago – and, of course, the potential to also overhaul the provincial Conflict of Interest Act and the *Lobbyist Registration Act*, while extending the current 12-month cooling-off period for former Executive Council members to four years, equivalent to one election cycle.

Obviously, transparency and accountability has been on our mind for a long time. That is something that the NDP has been working towards for some time.

On that issue, of course, and speaking to the private Member's motion that's on the Table right now, and regarding fiscal responsibility, I will quote from the minister: One of the things that we have looked at is that we're going to compete with other resources? Is there going to be a duplication of services? We have to be fiscally responsible in terms of health care dollars, but also we have to make sure that we're meeting the needs of the people.

That's not twisting words, Deputy Speaker. That is not twisting words. Those are the words of the Minister of Health.

Right now, the present Health Minister is in government and has an incredible opportunity to spend health money and dollars on patients, like that poor individual that I mentioned previously in Question Period; the Inuk man who was discriminated against and denied adequate medical care last night – a broken knee, pneumonia and his first language Inuktitut. He deserves to be treated with dignity and a type of care that is culturally sensitive with the necessary

wraparound supports that won't waste valuable tax dollars on political appointments.

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

**L. O'LEARY:** Our growing urban Indigenous community is offering a wonderful collaborative health care model that embraces cultural knowledge, wraparound supports, that implements restorative justice and all of the wonderful holistic things that are needed for this kind of urban Indigenous community. What a sound way to spend health dollars.

We still can't get an answer as to whether or not that particular project, which is all set up and ready to go with federal funding – the building is soon going to be launched and there's incredible energy going around this about how we can help support a growing urban Indigenous community. One of the highest growing communities is the urban Indigenous community in this city, and certainly something that needs extra care and attention.

Two weeks back, we had the privilege of meeting with bright, young medical students on MUN med Lobby Day. It was wonderful to how enthusiastic, how encouraging it was to see their dedication to medical care. They were really, really quite excited. They told me and my colleague how they spoke enthusiastically about this model and how they would love to work in a wraparound care environment where they actually could take a little bit of time to be with their patient to give adequate care.

So let's invest in health care, not political appointed salaries from the same pot. Let's invest in health care practitioners who can provide invaluable service.

So, Deputy Speaker, I just want to basically finish off what I'm saying here. We have a lot of people suffering in our health care system. Honestly, as a new MHA, I don't care if it was this person's fault or that

person's fault, we have an opportunity on the table right now for this government to incorporate newer models of health care. I certainly hope that the minister and this government will invest in this growing urban Indigenous community.

Regarding the motion that's on the table here – the inappropriate allotment of money for a doctor, when there is so much need in the community right now.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

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

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

It always is a privilege to stand and represent your district, the people who voted to put you here, but I will say it's with a heavy heart that we're standing here even talking about such legislation in a private Member's resolution here today.

I will say this, it's not about the individual – and I will also state for the record that we were approached, asked not to use the individual's name, but it's been used here ongoing by the Minister of Health herself. Out of respect, we have not been using the individual's name, the political staffer, who we all know is a doctor and who is getting paid through the MCP.

**L. PARROTT:** (Inaudible.)

**P. PARSONS:** Now, Speaker, I'm not going to stand here and compete with that Member for Terra Nova, who's the House Leader.

I'm going to leave it to you to rule. I'm not going to compete for time or with the noise level here in the House of Assembly. It's my time to speak. Everyone here has listened to everything that those Members have had to say, including my colleague for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. I'm asking for the same

respect. Are we clear? Are we good? Can I continue?

What we're saying here, again, we haven't used the individual's name. I just want to state that for the record. We've respectfully agreed not to do that, but they have been. The Minister of Health has been naming the individual here on record.

I don't think it's lost on anybody, we all know there are political budgets, that's it's allocated for political staff. Every government in Canada, every government in the Westminster system uses this, but the scandalous thing is that it's being used from MCP. That's what we are trying to point out.

There's no misleading; these are facts. Day after day after day, the Leader of the Opposition has stood in his place and has asked the Premier of our province – the highest position, the highest office – to be clear with the people here of Newfoundland and Labrador and to answer questions.

We've also known through ATIPP, access to information, that we have discovered that it was Mr. Steve Outhouse who advised the hiring of this against the public servant's advice. The bureaucracy advised not to pay this individual through the MCP, but that staffer at the time, Pierre Pollievre's staff – who is a Member of the Conservative Party of Canada, not a PC government, a Conservative right-wing reformist government – advised this move.

Unfortunately, this is what we're seeing. We're seeing these movements. We saw, in the election, the tactics that were used. I want to state for the record; it's the CPC way. This is not Progressive Conservative. This is not what we've seen from the Williams government, even.

I will state for the record that this is disheartening to be standing in this Legislature debating this, knowing these Members all stood here passionately representing their districts and the state of

our health care. We know there are people who don't have family doctors. There are people in here, I'm sure, who probably don't have a family doctor and their family members.

They preached and they preached and they preached, day after day after day, and when they get the opportunity to be voted in as government, they're still acting like an Opposition. They're still using attack ads on social media. They're still acting and attacking here. They should be ashamed of themselves, about how they're acting here in the House of Assembly. They're government. Please, start acting like the government and show an example. I don't recall any government that has acted the way that we're seeing this Conservative government act.

**SPEAKER:** Address the Chair.

**P. PARSONS:** Address the Chair, I will.

That said, Speaker, again, it's deeply saddening that we're even talking about this in the House of Assembly in a private Member's resolution. Who would have thought? I hear from my constituents. I hear from their constituents about how MCP is used for emergency room visits. It's used surgeries. It's for health care. We know it comes from the federal government; there's an agreement. I've even stood and asked the question if it's a violation of the federal health act and they haven't been able to answer that. But you can do better.

We're here to support you. Everybody here in this House of Assembly is elected by the people to support the people of this province. I think we can all agree that health care is not political and it should not be political. Shame on the Minister of Health for saying how political this is, when she herself has bounced around from party to party. No one is more political than that Member, I will say.

People are deeply concerned about the access to care that many rely on, rural clinics, ER access at the Carbonear General Hospital. I'm an MHA in that region; I hear the concerns about Carbonear. Imagine what that money can do, \$275,000 for 28 hours of week, with a \$13,000 bonus – think of what that can do for the poor grandmother or the child that my colleague from Gander has raised with cleft conditions and what that can do.

We know this is not a good use of MCP dollars. This is not what it's designed to do. I ask, is MCP used in any other jurisdiction in this country to pay for political advice? Again, unfortunately, this is the tone that you've set. I will mention, the Members can all turn their seats and look in a certain way. They can turn their backs on us here in the House of Assembly, but I say they cannot turn their backs on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**P. PARSONS:** We expect better. We're here to support you. You are government now. We are the Official Opposition. We are here to support you but, please, reconsider the decisions you're making on MCP. Stop this immediately.

Reconsider the plans for a new hospital, which we know is desperately needed. It's not just the people in one particular area in our province that utilize that Health Sciences Centre or the Janeway or St. Clare's. People come from all over our province. People come from Labrador. We can all relate to that to that but, again, this is just wrong.

Again, MCP –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**P. PARSONS:** Anyway, Speaker –

**SPEAKER:** I ask the minister –

**P. PARSONS:** I don't want to compete with the Minister of Health. She had her time and she has all the time because she won't let anybody answer her questions. She's up on her feet all the time. So let me have my time, please?

Again, this is very disheartening. It is shameful.

**SPEAKER:** Address the Chair, please.

**P. PARSONS:** No one is questioning the integrity of the professional who is a doctor. I don't know the individual personally but I have heard about his credentials and he is a good doctor, and that's what we need. Our former premier is a good doctor who still maintained a practice, who still maintained surgeries on his Christmas holidays; but, again, it's the scandal of MCP paying this individual. That's the point.

No one is talking about who the person is or political advice. We all know there's a political budget. That's a fact but to take from MCP for \$275,000 – I haven't heard from one person in any district who I've talked to that thinks that's a good idea – not one.

You know, you choose. That's the decisions. We all have free will. Everybody can decide on how they want to conduct themselves, what they want to say here in this hon. House. We've all been elected by our people. Just remember that when you stand up, it's not just about your personality; it's about the thousands of people who elected you on their behalf. This is what the question here is today.

I have a number of notes, but I won't get to them, because it is just – I want to point out the obvious – again, day after day after day, the questions about the MCP and the Premier can't even answer it. The ATIPPs are all in place had it proved, and he hasn't gotten up and faced the people and faced,

even, the Official Opposition to answer the question.

It is wrong. We are asking you to reconsider taking money for political advice out of MCP. You have a political budget, use it. Spend the entire budget on that one staff, that's up to you, but do not take it from the people of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador for our health care.

They stood on health care. They campaigned. They were going to fix health care. Well, by cancelling a hospital and taking money from MCP to pay for political advice on bird dogs, on the fishery – all very important topics, but we know it's political advice. To be taking from the children, the men and the women, the seniors from this province to pay for that is shameful and it's disheartening and, I've got to say, this is probably the lowest I've ever felt in this House of Assembly since being elected in 2015, to debate this particular topic.

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

**P. PARSONS:** Yes, stop chirping there, the member for CBS. He's always chirping.

Again, we ask for reconsideration. Stop using MCP to pay for political advice.

I will take my seat, Speaker. Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs; Community Engagement; and Environment, Conservation and Climate Change.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Speaker.

Speaker, we just listened to the Member stand up and say how much she's advocated and stood for Newfoundland and Labrador. I wonder did she stand for Newfoundland and Labrador when she tried

to take these secret bonuses; when those sticky fingers reached into the cookie jar and got caught?

I would say not.

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

**C. TIBBS:** I would say not. I would say not, and there are seven more on the other side that did it, but we're going to address that a different time.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**C. TIBBS:** I'd like my time please.

What we're here today to talk about is health care – Health care, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely paramount to everybody in this House and everybody outside this House.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I need to hear the speaker.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you. Speaker.

Enough from the sticky-fingered crowd from across the way.

Speaker, no matter who you are or where you live in this province, at some point you're going to rely on health care right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and when that moment comes, nothing else matters more.

Over the past number of years, we've all seen the pressures on our health care system. We've seen it in wait times. We've seen it in access to primary care. We've seen it in the strain placed on the incredible

people who work in the system every single day, but we are at a moment and an opportunity right here in time now, a moment there is clear focus on improving health care; not just talking about it and making announcements but actually doing the work and fixing it. The work requires more than announcements.

It requires leadership, which we have from our Premier. It requires coordination, which we have from our minister. It requires the right expertise guiding decisions, which we have from Dr. Des Whalen.

**SPEAKER:** I'll ask the Speaker, not to use the name of the person in question. He's not in the House to defend himself; therefore, you can't use the name of the doctor.

**C. TIBBS:** My apologies, Speaker, if that's a blanket so be it.

**B. PETTEN:** They used his name all day long?

**SPEAKER:** They're not allowed; they should've called him doctor.

**C. TIBBS:** Speaker, it's one issue; it's not one solution. It's a system with many moving parts that all have to work together. One thing I've come to understand is this: if you want to improve a system, you need people to understand how that system actually works, not just in theory but in practice.

That's why having a strong, informed voice involved in shaping health care decisions is so important; people who understand patient flow, people who understand workforce pressures – they're out there – people who understand how policy decisions are played out on the front lines. That's where individuals like the doctor in question play an important role.

Let me take a moment to talk about the impact that this doctor has on improving health care lives across this province. For

18 months, I've met with the previous government about the Lionel Kelland Hospice and how they needed their adequate operational funding to get through from one year to another. Also with the Lionel Kelland Hospice, there was no model for doctor pay. Unfortunately, physician pay was not modelled in when this government forced it open too quickly.

Speaker, 18 months I met with the previous government and the previous Health minister, who is the Leader of the Opposition today, and nothing was done on that file. This only community hospice in Newfoundland and Labrador almost closed their doors. They could have almost closed their doors if the operational funding didn't come through and the physicians didn't have a model for payment.

Do you know how the fill-in physicians were paid underneath this previous administration, everybody? Speaker, do you know how they were paid? Through community-raised funds – paid doctors at the Lionel Kelland Hospice, the fill-in doctors – because the previous government could not get together and get their funding available and could not get a physician-modelled pay.

Under this Premier, under this minister and though the guidance of the doctor we are talking about here, today, I am happy to announce that their operational funding will be met this year and a model will be met for the physicians this year for the first time since they're opened, and that's under this administration.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Speaker, 18 months trying to get an answer. I'm not kidding; I must have had 15 meetings with the Opposition Leader of today, who was the Health minister at the time, and nothing was done.

So if you want to talk about an investment, that's an investment that we made in this

doctor and it's paying off already for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who use this Lionel Kelland Hospice, our only community hospice from all over the province. Everybody should be thankful for that. It's going to remain because of this government, this Premier, this minister and the advice from the doctor.

It's about figuring out how to solve them, how to improve access to health care, how to support health care workers and how to build a system that is sustainable for the long term. Those are not easy questions. They require evidence. They require expertise, experience and they require thoughtful informed advice.

The current approach of our Premier and government is focused on exactly that, bringing the right people to the table, which is what we've done looking at the system as a whole and making decisions that are grounded in real-world understanding, and that matters because when decisions are informed, outcomes improve. When planning is coordinated, systems work better. When leadership is supported by expertise, progress happens faster.

We have already seen focus on key priorities, improving access to primary care, expanding team-based approaches, addressing workforce challenges and making sure the system is better organized and easier to navigate. Those are the right priorities. They are the kind of priorities that require strong guidance behind the scenes and, by God do we have them. Real change in health care doesn't happen overnight; it happens step by step by step with the right advice, with the right planning and with the clear understanding of what success truly looks like.

I want to be clear about something, this work is not about any one individual. Health care is a team effort, it always has been, but having the right people contributing to that team makes a difference. It strengthens decision-making. It brings clarity to complex

issues and helps ensure that efforts are focused where they matter most. At the end of the day, that's what this is all about people and health care. Better care for patients, better support for health care workers and a system that people can rely on, because that's what people expect and that's what they deserve.

So as I continue this work and as we look ahead, I think it's important to recognize the value of strong leadership, informed advice and a team approach to solving the challenges in health care. There is no single solution, Mr. Speaker, but there is a path forward. With the right focus and the right people involved, that progress is not only possible, it's already under way with this government.

Mr. Speaker, the couple of minutes left, I'd like to tell another story. We have a wonderful, skilled doctor in Grand Falls-Windsor. Her name is Dr. Wendy House. For years – years – that doctor has reached out to the former government – nothing. Not even a call back. Not even an acknowledgement that you exist.

Speaker, shortly after we took government, the doctor that we're speaking about here today, took me aside and the first thing he said was, please, tell Dr. Wendy House, whenever, wherever she's ready, I will have a team to meet with her and I will have a team that will address her needs and her wants moving forward, because it's about the respect of these doctors that's been lacking for so long. That's what this doctor in question today has given us, has given this party – not only this party, this government, but this whole Newfoundland and Labrador, this whole province and, fortunately, we have him.

I only would wonder if the Opposition across the way had such a great person that could give them the advice, maybe the Lionel Kelland Hospice wouldn't have to wait a year and a half. Maybe Dr. Wendy House wouldn't have to wait three years to get an

acknowledgement, a call back, an email, a pigeon flying over with a dropped note, something to let her know that she matters.

We have this doctor on the front lines. He's a young, great doctor. We are going to take his advice and we are going to move health care in the right direction. Don't judge us on the past six months; judge us on the next four years because I can guarantee you that health care will improve underneath this Premier, this minister and that doctor.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

**F. HUTTON:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

I appreciate that. Always a pleasure to get to rise in the House to speak on any matter and, of course, on this one today.

I will take a slightly different approach, which I'll get to in a second, but I want to address a couple of the comments that have been made over the last little while. One of them is the confusion. The Premier said earlier that there's confusion caused by this. Yes, there is confusion. There is confusion because the answers we're hearing, when we actually do get some from the Premier, are different each time on when Dr. Whalen actually was part of a transition team or wasn't. So there is confusion.

At the crux of this is really whether or not MCP should be paying somebody who has a political contract. That's the crux of this PMR.

**B. PETTEN:** Point of order.

**SPEAKER:** We have a point of order.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** It has come to our attention – and I want everyone to hear this – that you're not allowed to say this man's name in the House; you ruled. I just counted 11 times in Question Period, the Opposition used it. For three weeks, today, this man's name has been dragged through the mud and all of a sudden, when my colleague, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, decides to defend him, he's being shut down and he can't say his name.

When it comes to time to defend him, you can't say his name but when you stand up and bash him, you can. Something radically wrong, Speaker. Someone needs to fix this. This is outrageous.

**SPEAKER:** Going forward, we won't use the person's name. We can refer to the person as hired by government, but we will not use the gentleman's name.

Thank you.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I'm most appalled today at how the Opposition have disrupted the Speakers on this side, on a very important PMR, on a number of times. I would ask the Minister for Transportation and Infrastructure, when he goes home tonight, to read *Hansard* and see how many times the Health Minister today said Dr. Des Whalen.

Where were you when the Health Minister was on her feet? She used it 40 times today – 40 times she used it. So I'm –

**B. PETTEN:** You read *Hansard*.

**L. DEMPSTER:** My turn now. I listened to you.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. DEMPSTER:** It's not right either, Speaker, when there's no decorum in this

House and we can't stand. Your minister used it today over and over and over. The precedent has been set for this day.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I can't hear the speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I'm going to start calling out people. I'll take away privileges.

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

Thank you.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I will attempt a third time to finish and when any Member in this House is on their feet, I will respectfully listen.

When the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor was just on his feet, he talked about what this doctor brings to the PC Party. We didn't disrupt. He used his name. When the Health Minister was up – there she is, she can tell me, get on her feet and tell me if I'm wrong – she used his name –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. DEMPSTER:** – over and over and over, Speaker. So, once again, it's a double standard from this government who still thinks they're in Opposition and people tell me that every single day.

So I just wanted to make that for the record in *Hansard*, Speaker, that they used his

name all day and now I'd like for my hon. colleague to have the time that he's got left.

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

**F. HUTTON:** Deputy Speaker, because the Health Minister had used the name so many times, we assumed that it was fair game to use the name. She referenced Dr. Whalen numerous times – eight or nine.

**SPEAKER:** When I made the ruling that we're not going to use the person's name, I'll ask you to refrain from using his name, please.

That's for every Member in this House.

**F. HUTTON:** Thank you for the clarity.

Mr. Speaker, the confusion that I referenced was because of the answers and the different answers we're getting from the Premier. I will say something as well, about something the Health Minister said during an earlier conversation and when she was talking about how we don't care and how their party cares about people and we don't. Mr. Speaker, that is not only unfair to say that, but it is insulting. She knows the difference. She knows that we actually care, and I think every person in this House cares about people. I certainly do. She said that and I know in the heat of debate and in Question Period, but we actually do care.

As I mentioned, I'm going to take a bit of a different tact here and talk a little bit about the context of health care in Newfoundland and Labrador and the demograph that the health care has to serve. We, last year, were told that people who are 65 years of age and older, there's 25 per cent of our population. Of a population of 540,000, that's about 135,000 people. If you look at the number of people who are 75 years of age and older, the number has gone from 22,000, 20 years ago, to 55,000 now. We're the oldest population in Canada.

We've got a couple of other distinctions that are problematic when it comes to health care in Newfoundland and Labrador. We've got the highest mortality rate, which means that we die younger in Newfoundland and Labrador than the average across Canada. We die younger. We have the highest rate of premature deaths among people in this province because of health issues in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Some of it is genetic and, obviously, people are living longer now, our health care costs have increased exponentially over the last few decades because we have a large province with people spread out and we're trying to provide health care service, as the current government is now, to a lot of people in a large area.

We're four times bigger than the three Atlantic provinces put together and a quarter of the population. We've got the highest mortality rate, as I mentioned. We've got the highest rate of diabetes. We've got the highest rate of cardiovascular and heart issues and we've got the highest rate of obesity. We've got the highest rate of smoking. We've got the highest median age in this province, of all Canada – like, five years older than the rest of Canada, the average age.

I'm saying this to lay some context for why we need to change the way we do health care in Newfoundland and Labrador. Thankfully, as we were going through COVID, the former premier, who was a medical practitioner as well, in the height of COVID, struck a committee to get the Health Accord in place so that we could take a health care system that was designed in the 1970s into 2020, and now we're at 2026.

Unfortunately, one of the architects of the Health Accord, Dr. Pat Parfrey, was shown the door when the current government came on, although they are still using the Health Accord as a road map for the future, because it's a good road map. It's one that

was designed during COVID when a lot of people within NL Health Services and MCP and others, including Dr. Fitzgerald, had spent a lot of time trying to make sure that we were kept safe, everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I will say this and I sat in on many meetings with Dr. Fitzgerald, not once – not once – did she ever give any political advice to Dr. Furey – Premier Furey or to anyone in that office. In fact, some of the things that she did were detrimental politically, because it was for the betterment of Newfoundland and Labrador, the people who were there.

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

**F. HUTTON:** To keep people safe, we went and we obviously took that advice.

Dr. Browne – let's talk about Dr. Browne who was brought in. He works as a vascular surgeon. He was paid to give advice on what a new hospital would look like, and knowing that we need a new hospital, knowing the number of people who were over 75 and the number of people who are over 65 is continuing to grow as we age, we are going to need a better health care facility.

It's also for recruitment and retention of current doctors. Ask anyone who works at St. Clare's what they think of that facility. Can you imagine somebody from Toronto or somebody from Vancouver scouting out where they're going to go to work, and they go online and they see that, back in 2022, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure in a facilities index says do not put any more money into this hospital, you need to go somewhere else. You need to put your money somewhere else.

We've got a situation where we're going to now, according to the Transportation Minister, spend hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to renovate St. Clare's; not a great idea. I'm saying all this, Speaker, because I want a context there as

to why some of these decisions were made over the last five or six years.

There was never an intention to fix this. The Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans just said there is no single answer to health care, and there isn't. Health care is one of those things that will never be completely fixed. It's something that evolves, and you have to continue to try to do it to make things better for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and serve them the way the knew, telecare.

It's an easier way and quicker way, rather than have someone fly down. If they can do something on an iPad and have a doctor tell them what they need to do in order to fix their problem, great. Save them a trip; it's a lot cheaper. It's not exactly the same as before, but health care is evolving. The people who practise health care and how they want to do this is evolving.

We do have a pot of money for MCP, and it states clearly on the webpage of MCP that how it works is, essentially, if you're a doctor and you provide a service to somebody, or you're a health care practitioner, you bill MCP if they come to see you or you go to see them, and then they get paid for it, whatever service it is they provide, and there's a scale and a grid.

Nowhere in the MCP budget does it say that it can be somebody who works on the eighth floor of the Confederation Building. Nobody else at NL Health Services, nobody at MCP has a political contract similar to the one that I had when I worked on the eighth floor of the Confederation Building offering whatever meetings that were on the go I would go to, but not specific to health care. Nobody else in NL Health Services or MCP is paid the same way.

In order to pay this person the extra amount of money for 28 hours a week, they had to get creative on this and look outside, and thought that they could get away with getting this money from MCP and,

ultimately, it's wrong. They can pay him up to \$200,000-ish – I don't know the exact number – from the \$1.84 million that is available for political staff. At the crux of this is the difference between political staff and bureaucrats.

Dr. Fitzgerald would be considered a bureaucrat; Dr. Browne would be considered a bureaucrat. When Dr. Parfrey was a deputy minister in the Department of Health, he was a bureaucrat. When they were hired and when they were put in those positions, they were told, and we were all told by way of news releases or emails that they were hired.

The Premier doesn't have to do that when he hires political staff. He can hire whoever he wants but, at the crux of this, just don't take the money from MCP. It is wrong. If you want to pay him the \$200,000 and let him work 20 hours a week – great. Then he can continue to practice medicine in the er or as a family doctor, and I commend him for doing both, but do not take the paycheque from MCP. It is wrong.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

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

It's good that the previous Member grouped NLHS pay, the pay that we utilize for health care in the province, and MCP in the same pot when he was just speaking. I'll remind him that, on April 22, 2025, Premier Furey was given an office and staff at the hospital to be paid for by NLHS in perpetuity, but that doesn't matter.

See this is where they always say facts matter. It's only their facts that matter.

He then went on to say never has their government ever had a political appointment that would get paid through NLHS or any of that stuff. Well, imagine what I have here.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.) He said MCP.

**L. PARROTT:** Read *Hansard* – I suggest the Members read *Hansard*, he definitely said NLHS.

Anyhow, I actually have an agreement here between Dr. Greg Browne – oh, imagine. Dr. Greg Browne is appointed as a special advisor to the Premier and –

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

**L. PARROTT:** Hang on, let me finish here.

And, as the Member stated, he was involved in infrastructure too, but that was an add-on to special advisor.

Now, payment and benefits: during the appointment, in accordance with clause 1.1, the special advisor salary, benefits and all those entitlements shall remain the sole responsibility of the provincial health authority as established pursuant to – a special advisor getting paid by the health authority?

You guys just said that would never happen under your watch. He just said it would never happen under your watch, read *Hansard*. I suggest the Members take the time to do what they say, read *Hansard*.

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

**L. PARROTT:** A little protection here, Speaker, a little protection.

Then I'll read something else: In all fairness, having a solid position of leadership at the table is very important. As a primary care physician working on the ground, it often feels like there's a lack of knowledge at the

decision-making tables of the true reality that patients and health care workers face. Doctor – I'm not allowed to say his name – has a vast knowledge of issues on the ground. He has worked in rural communities, primary care and the ER. It's reassuring to see the Premier surrounding himself with people who have knowledge and understanding of the system and the leadership experience needed at this critical time: Lynette Powell, former Liberal candidate.

Now, Speaker, the next thing. I heard the Member for Harbour Grace stand up and talk about money – what we could do with this money. Well, I'll tell you now, imagine what we could have done with \$171,000 that we gave to the soccer team. Imagine if they never got caught with their secret bonuses, how much that would have been paid out, what we could have done with that money.

Imagine, the Premier's office – so they talked about 28 hours? I can tell you right now, the Premier's office that was in Grand Falls, it wasn't occupied for 28 hours, let alone someone working there all week.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** A million dollar, then.

**L. PARROTT:** A million dollars out the door.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Point of order, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I'll ask the Member to hang on. There's a point of order to the floor.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, I'm just seeking clarification.

We had a discussion and you ruled earlier, and we respected the ruling. We couldn't say the political doctor's name was being paid from MCP, but then the Government

House Leader is up referencing a doctor who is also not here to defend herself in this House.

So is it another double standard or what's – ?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It was a Liberal candidate.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Right. I think, it's inappropriate.

**SPEAKER:** I will take away the point of order and bring back a ruling.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**L. PARROTT:** It's not a point of order, Speaker, so we know.

If I'm standing here talking about someone, and they're over there yelling out that name – chirping it – I should have ever right in the world to say it, because you guys were saying the name as I was talking.

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

**L. PARROTT:** You can't make it up.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. PARROTT:** Then we can keep talking about money; we can talk about the giveaway on Kenmount Crossing to H3 Development. We can talk about the Airport Inn Hotel and the deal to their Liberal friends. We can talk about the penitentiary being sole sourced. We can talk about the mental health facility going to their buddy for \$42 million; the next lowest bidder was \$42 million under but they forgot all of that. That's all gone.

Instead, they decide to come in here and bash someone for the sake of politics, and stand here and say they don't care. Politics isn't what this is about – absolute ludicrous.

Speaker, I welcomed the opportunity to stand in this House today and set the record straight, because over the past number of days, we've heard a lot from Opposition; a lot of noise, a lot of accusations and, quite frankly, a lot of revisionist history.

So let's deal in facts: 10 years the Members opposite had the responsibility of governing this province; 10 years to strengthen health care, 10 years to improve access, 10 years to support the very people they now claim that they defend, and what was the result? Well, we have a system under strain, thousands of people without access to a doctor, wait times are longer, not shorter, and health care workers who were left exhausted and unsupported. That is their record. That will not be our record. No amount of rhetoric in this House will change it.

Now today they stand in here and they're criticizing. They question and they attempt to undermine the very work that is now under way to fix the system that they chose to leave behind. It would almost be surprising, if it wasn't predictable. Instead of offering solutions, instead of acknowledging the work that needs to be done, the Opposition Leader has chosen a different path, theatrics, deflection and political games.

Let me say it clearly, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador did not elect this government to engage in games. They elected us to fix what was broken, and that is exactly what we are going to do.

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

**L. PARROTT:** We're focused on fixing health care. We're focused on supporting our health care workforce. We're focused on building a system that people can actually rely upon. Yes, Speaker, that means bringing up experienced, knowledgeable individuals to help guide that work, because fixing health care is not about slogans, it's not about headlines and it's certainly not

about scoring points in the House. It's about making informed decisions. It's about doing hard work. It's about delivering results.

Now, Opposition probably doesn't like to hear that. They'll probably prefer a different approach; the same one we've seen over the last 10 years, more spending, less accountability and no meaningful improvement in outcomes.

That is not the approach of this government. We will not repeat the mistakes of the past. We will not accept the status quo. We will not be distracted by political noise; because, while Opposition focuses on words, we're focused on action. While they look backwards, we are focused on moving this province forward. Let me say something very clear about that, we will govern, and we're going to make hard decisions. We're going to take action, and we're going to deliver results for the people of this province.

If the Opposition wants to be a part of that work, they should step up. If they have ideas, bring them forward; but if they can't keep up – if they can't keep up – we're going to leave them behind, just like the Premier said, because we do not have time to waste anymore. We just wasted 10 years. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador, they don't want inaction or delays. They don't want more missed opportunities. They don't want more wasted time. We're not going to do that. We're moving forward and we're doing the work that should have been done years ago.

Speaker, the people of the province are not interested in political theatre. They're not interested in who can deliver the best line in Question Period. They're interested in results. They want to know if can they get a doctor? Can they access care? Can they trust the system when they're in need of it? Those are the questions that matter, and those are the questions this government is focused on answering.

So, to the Opposition Leader, I say this: if you want to have a serious conversation about improving health care, we welcome it. If you want to bring forward constructive ideas, we will listen; but if the approach is to continue with theatrics, deflection and political games, then I would suggest that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have already seen that approach, and they've already rejected it.

We were elected to deliver change. We were elected to fix what was broken and we're getting to work, not with noise, not with excuses but with focus, determination and a clear path. Over the next four years, that is exactly what we are going to do.

I'll go back to some of the comments earlier, in my last two minutes, about never would they do this. Clearly, the Member said, NLHS and MCP. Now, NLHS is health care. When we talk about a doctor getting paid through MCP, he's not getting paid as if a doctor bills; it's coming from the administrative portion of it. NLHS is no different.

They clearly had a special advisor working directly for the premier, paying rent in an office in TI through NLHS and paying his salary through NLHS, but when they spent health care money to hire a special advisor, it was the best thing in the world. He's the best guy. Such a good guy, he really is. Renowned cardiovascular surgeon, he was needed. Size 13 shoes; don't take my word, I seen them, they were size 13.

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

**L. PARROTT:** Yeah.

So here we go, once again we hear them say, no, you can't do that but we can – typical. Then – just imagine now – the Premier is sitting in the hospital there with a big posh office and a secretary for life that they gave him – for life.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** No.

**L. PARROTT:** In perpetuity. It says right on the letter.

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

**L. PARROTT:** “Perpetuity” on the letter.

**PREMIER WAKEHAM:** Table the letter.

**L. PARROTT:** These resources should remain in place in perpetuity – right on the letter.

The Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune says it's not true, but I don't have any issues with my ability to read, and that is the letter that was sent directly from the then clerk to Health Care, so either she's lying or he can't read. I don't know which it is but it's there in black and white.

Anyhow, Speaker, I have 21 seconds left. I'll let them get up and spew some more of their falsities.

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

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

**E. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, I know that there was comments made there about a doctor in Transportation and Infrastructure, can I get a copy of that? Can I get a copy of that; where the doctor working in Transportation and Infrastructure but paid by Newfoundland – because if it does, it shows that there's already a pattern there.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Yes.

**E. JOYCE:** If I could get a copy of it?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** You can, yes.

**E. JOYCE:** Okay.

**SPEAKER (Lane):** The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

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

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

It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to this PMR. It's quite the conversation here today. I wanted to just get up for a couple of minutes actually, I may not use my full-time, just to speak from the position of a political staffer.

I spent over 10 years as a political staffer in many different roles. I started back in, I think, government Members' office at the time, on the front desk answering the phone and getting the mail. I did manage to work my way up to at least the premier's office, at some point in my life, as a special advisor.

I just wanted to say to all the political staff out there, obviously I thank them for the work that they do. I know how important the work they do in assisting the ministers here and the MHAs in the House is.

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

**M. KING:** A lot of times when the House is sitting late, we've seen that over the years, the staff are here also doing the work. So I know how important the work they do is, because I've been there myself, but this is not about an individual. I know that's what's trying to be made here. This is not about an individual. This is about a choice, and that choice is the Premier's office choosing to take money from MCP to pay for a political staffer in the Premier's office. That is the point that we're trying to make here, how wrong that that is, and it's not just us saying that.

We are here to represent many people, many districts across Newfoundland and Labrador and that's what I'm hearing from my constituents. I know many other Members are also hearing that from their constituents. This is the point we're trying to make, it's that process itself. We talk about referring to other doctors in other administrative roles, but it's the role. Once again, it's about what the work they were doing.

I'm sure if I was paid at \$275,000 out of MCP as a special advisor, I know we would hear from the other crowd very, very loudly about personal attacks again. Talking about personal – actually, I'm going to speak for a minute on that when we talk about personal attacks. This side of the House doesn't make memes of people on social media, making them distorted. That is not what we do on this side of the House, personal attacks – misquoting a premier. Making a fake quote of the premier that, I might add, is still on the account probably, from the PC Party. I can pretty much guarantee it's still there; that was completely false.

That is not what we're trying to do on this side of the House. We are not making this personal. We are making this about a process, and like I want to reiterate to the people of this province, the process was the Premier's office chose to take \$275,000 from MCP for 28 hours a week for a staffer to give political advice in the Premier's office. That is not right. That is wrong, and they should reverse that decision.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

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

I've been in this House for a fairly long time. There's a few of us here that have been around. There's a few longer but, for the most part, for the vast majority, I've been around a long time. I've been part of a lot of debates. I've had lots of back-and-forth, and I've never shied away from a good debate.

What I've experienced, I guess in this three-week sitting of the House of Assembly, and what I've learned along the way is the depth sometimes you'll go to trying to get your political jab in to try to make your political

point to try to cause some political damage to a party, because I get it. The Opposition is picking away. You pick away, you pick away, you pick away, and you try to get stuff that's going to stick. You try to get stuff that's going to be effective. You try to get stuff the public are going to grasp onto. I spent 10 years there; I understand the Opposition side of the House very, very well, but there are levels you should go and there are levels you shouldn't go.

In my opinion, we've crossed that line. When I say that, if you're an elected official, sometimes that comes with the territory. Anyone that has been elected, put their name on the ballot. It's a courageous thing to do, but it's very challenging. The job is not easy. Your name will be taken out of context. Your name will be beat around social media. Your name will be beat around the House of Assembly, on the media – you name it. That comes with the territory. I think when you sign up to do that, you accept that responsibility.

It's not easy on your family; I've been there. I've wore it. I got T-shirts. It's never easy on your family. I have two daughters who I love dearly, and every time they read one word on social media about me, they get upset. My wife says less about it, even though she tries to pretend it don't bother her, but actually it bothers everybody. It bothers everyone out there. It would bother your parents if you're fortunate enough to have them living; your friends. It bothers every one of us, but we sign up. When we sign up, we sign up for that job. We take that; that comes with the territory.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Why'd you do it?

**B. PETTEN:** I say to the Members opposite who are chirping: Why did I do it? I done it because I wanted to improve the lives of people in my district and in this province.

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

**B. PETTEN:** I done it because I worked with a former MHA. I've seen first hand what's involved to be an MHA. Also, when I was doing it, I used to be always watching and I'd say, I would like to do this different; I would like to do that different.

I always supported the person I worked for. I had a lot of respect for him and I'm still really good friends with him, but I always felt maybe I have something to offer, because I never always felt I'd be an elected official. When I did do it, I done it eyes wide open, to a degree, but I took it on, and a challenge that I've never back away from.

At times have I wavered? Absolutely. Many years, over the years in here, I've wavered and wondered how much more can I do, because it's not easy and I will always say this: No matter what political stripe you are, if I think you're getting done wrong, if I think there's something not right – my colleagues can answer it; I wouldn't ask the crowd opposite because they may not agree today – I don't mind standing up for people. It's who I am. I do it against all advice sometimes. I'm very passionate, and you see that in this House. You'll see that anywhere I go. That's who I am.

I will never turn my back on people if they want my support. If they want somebody to stand up for them, I will always do that, and I'll do that with pride.

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

**B. PETTEN:** This person – who you're not allowed, after three weeks, to mention their name – whose had their name dragged through the mud, in my opinion, is a good person. I have known this man for a long time. I think he's a great person. I think he's a great doctor. I think he offers great advice to us.

I truly, truly believe he loves Newfoundland and Labrador like every single one of us in this House love it. He wants to make a difference. He has lots of good ideas. He

wants to provide his thoughts and help government and help us make health care better. It's one of our main pillars, better health care. This man has put himself out there.

Now, on a personal note, if I were to get my name beat the way that his has been beat, I'd have to second guess, is it worth it? You know, he's sticking around, because he does believe in what he's doing. He does believe in helping us, and we believe in him.

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

**B. PETTEN:** We're standing here today, and you watched it day after day after day. Well there are depths, and they'd down into this, across the line, if you ask me. They're in the gutter politics or whatever you want to call it. They're constantly flying it back, like they're appalled with all this, how we could do this.

I say to the Members opposite, all they have to do is look in the mirror. There are mirrors everywhere in this building. There are mirrors everywhere in your house. Look in the mirror and ask yourself, truly and truly, are you really appalled or are you trying to score political points; because, I beg to differ. I don't think they're that appalled. They found something – this can stick. This can get legs. This can get traction.

Fair enough, and maybe it has to a degree, but we're committed. When we put our names on a ballot; when we campaigned and knocked doors this past fall, on October 14, we were given the privilege to run this government and look after this province and the people that are in this province. It's a commitment that I know I take, and everyone on this side, the 21 of us, take equally as serious. We are committed.

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

**B. PETTEN:** But to do that job, Speaker, we need to get the best people around us to get

the best advice available, and that's what we're doing.

The Opposition, in the previous administration, they had people – like, I said it a couple of weeks ago and I've been accused of threatening the public service. I don't know how anyone figures that out. I said any of these Liberal appointees that were had poked away – and there are lots of them. They're not people who we hired through the public service, that's not my point. There are lots of them. There are contracts that were drawn up and there are people everywhere. Like I said, there was one in my department.

It was all over government. They were everywhere, and they have all these titles. We haven't gone over – we have lots of people we know there. We haven't made that a public fiasco.

That happens in all administrations, to a degree. That happens over time. Every government has it. The former government wasn't any different. The problem is their short-term memory is after getting foggy, because they can't remember they did it. All of a sudden, they're appalled because they think, in their world, they're living in this glass house. They never did that so they're going to look across the way and say, shame on you; but I say, Speaker, shame on them. Shame on every one of them for doing what they're trying to do to this man; this good man that's here in this province.

He's trained as a doctor, and what do we say every day? What did the Members opposite say today? We're short of family doctors. We need family doctors. He's a good doctor. We need good doctors. Why would you stay and practise medicine in a province that you've got the so-called Official Opposition of the province bashing you and bashing you and bashing you day in day out, because of what? You don't like how he's being paid? Isn't that the ultimate disrespect? Is that the ultimate disrespect you could show an individual?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** That's exactly the problem.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It's about how he's being paid.

**B. PETTEN:** Isn't that the most disrespectful thing you can do, Speaker? This man never signed up for this. He wants to help.

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

**SPEAKER:** I said order, please!

**P. PARSONS:** He should have ran.

**B. PETTEN:** The Member from Harbour Grace - Port de Grave said he should have ran.

Do you know what I say to the Member from Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, stay tuned. That may very well happen.

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

**B. PETTEN:** There will come a day that man may very well be in a position to make a very important decision –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**B. PETTEN:** – for the people of this province. I'd have no problem, Speaker – I'd have no problem, whatsoever – if he were to sit in any chair in this House and speak his mind because people like him are people we need in this province, to be down in the gutter, to be down playing gutter politics every day in this House.

Well, I've watched in this House day in, day out, day in, day out – it's like we're living in euphoria. Everything is wonderful. Everyone doesn't need a job. The bills are paid. We're living in this Utopia. It's a Utopia. It's what this crowd have always lived in, this Utopia,

with no issues, so we can spend day after day after day after day trying to destroy a good man's reputation.

What is the end game here? We're 130-odd days or 140 days in; what's your end of game? It's not an election next week. There's not an election next month. There's not an election next year. What is your end game? Are you going to continue on in the fall and the spring of next year, and the fall of next year, while all of these important issues are around us?

We've got health care as a pillar, we've got lower taxes as our pillar and we've got safer communities as a pillar, and we will deliver on every single promise and then some.

Thank you.

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

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

**E. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, I'll just go short so the member for St. John's Centre can get some time –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** I wasn't in the Chair.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, have you already spoken?

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, yes, I'll go ahead.

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

**SPEAKER:** No.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** He was up.

**SPEAKER:** I wasn't in the Chair at the time. I didn't realize you had spoken.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

**E. JOYCE:** I haven't?

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

**SPEAKER:** I don't know, I wasn't here.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It was point of order for 40 seconds.

**P. PARSONS:** He spoke.

**SPEAKER:** On a point of order?

**E. JOYCE:** It wasn't a point of order.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Speaker. I'll keep it short, as much as I can.

Certainly, as my colleague from St. John's East - Quidi Vidi has pointed out, we have been promoting the whole notion of transparency as key to – I guess when it comes to good decision-making – during the election, before the election and can be continued to do so. We will support the motion, but the irony of the PMR is not lost on us. I'll come back to that in a minute.

It does talk about that we urge government to immediately stop using MCP funds to pay for political support staff. I think that's something that we can support because of what MCP is used for. I'll come back to some of the issues on that as well, but as I said, the irony of the PMR is not lost on me because I would remind the Official Opposition that when you're pointing the finger in one direction, at least three are pointing back.

They've already been mentioned; whether it's the hotel, the Horizons at Airport Road – no issue with that but the fact that it went to political supporters when it could have been bought much more cheaply and had a long-term arrangement. When I look at the 'Cospital' down on Stavanger, I look at the land deal on Kenmount Road, the bonuses

that were paid, the fact that there are managers within the department who were renting to travel nurse agencies at more than the market value and I look at the whole push for electoral reform, when we tried to get that on the go and the barriers that were put up in the way.

There are plenty of examples, I guess, on both sides here where the lack of transparency or the accusation of political patronage and so on and so forth caused significant problems. I will say that the accusations, certainly – because I'm not seeing the difference. I know I've heard here the accusation that the government side has not learned to be government yet. Well, I think they have, because they certainly captured the whole ability to address the preamble and not the question. They've definitely learned to be evasive. They've definitely learned to blame their predecessors. They've become masters at the art of deflection so far.

So let's call a spade, a spade. I can close my eyes here and it's the same things that went on beforehand, except sides are different.

We made it clear in our election platform that we would ban corporate and union donations. Even though union donations would have hurt us, we said let's keep them out. We wanted to make sure that that was in the interest of transparency. Those were some issues that we had that we put forward – cooling-off period, posting disclosure statements, the whole bit. So we've been a party that has put that as key.

When it comes to MCP, MTAP, the whole bit, the justification for the hiring of this person, and I guess what is MCP funding used for. We have a problem, in many ways, with MCP in certainly attracting doctors into family practice or any practice for that matter. I've heard it from young doctors who do not want to go into family practice because of the bureaucracy that's involved. We've had our own issues here in

doctors seeking payment for their services, being nicked and dimed by the bureaucracy, and then to find, I guess, that we have here that MCP funding can be used then for what would be essentially a political advisor.

I have no issue with a person being sought after or paid for that advice anymore than I did with the previous premier continuing his practice as a surgeon, but I do have an issue, at a time when we're trying to attract doctors into family care, this perception that this money is being used for political advice.

If I understand it correctly, the key argument against is that the MCP fund allows for this. Well, if I'm looking at the MCP administration fund it talks about insured service coverage, administering free equal access to medically necessary services, managing the direction or the registration of residents for processing new applicants and issuing MCP cards, processing and paying claims submitted by physicians and dentists for insured services rendered, using the auditing claims integrity division to ensure funds are distributed appropriately, verify claims to combat potential fraud, working with the NLMA to determine fee schedules and payments for physicians, and developing policies related to the medical and dental insurance plans in compliance with the *Canada Health Act*.

To me that would be, if I understand it, what that fund could be used for legitimately. Nowhere does it say that special advisor, but to me that's the administration. That seems pretty clear to me. This is a stretch, but I support the notion of the Premier of government having good advice.

So here's my thought: For a lot less money, maybe, you could have had an advisory committee made up of not just one person from the health care system, but all people who work on the front lines: doctors, nurses, licensed practical nurses, anyone, people who work at all levels of it. That would have given you the advice that you need if this is

about advice on the health care system. It's probably the single biggest issue facing many of the people in this province.

I understand the Premier's comments about we need to fix it with expertise. I will agree with that, but the expertise are found in the workers who are in the health care system, not just one person. The Health Accord provides a roadmap – by the way, I would even go a bit further. An advisory committee, not just with people working the system, but with the people who avail of the services of the system, okay?

If you want that, I think that's where we go. As I can see here, the main reason for me then comes down to I've heard the distinction between the funding for patient care and administration, but if I'm reading it correctly, Speaker, the administration fund does not deal with these kinds of political appointments. It deals with the day-to-day administrative services of the MCP plan.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture for a couple of minutes.

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

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

Certainly, I can't say it's a pleasure to get up and speak on this, because it's not. I said six years ago, when I was in here, during the debate – it was three months or six months – on Interim Supply and how embarrassing it got. We're at the same stage we were six years ago. We should be embarrassed of what we're doing here. It's embarrassing. It's totally embarrassing for the people to get in here and take people down, degrade them.

I've been in here for six years, and everybody knows how passionate I was

when I was on the other side. I brought stuff that I brought in absolutely for the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We asked questions, and I can certainly say I did it with integrity in every stage, in every facet, never once did I go at people directly – never.

If I had to ask a question, I had trouble to ask it if it was going to be personal. and here we are in here now for 2½ or three hours, it's totally, totally embarrassing. We wonder where we get a bad name. We wonder where politicians get the bad name. We're in here, elected to take care of the province, try to get things in order and we have a big job to do. We know what's in front of us. We should be here as 40 people trying to make this better for everybody in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and we continue on with this garbage every time we get in here. It's unbelievable that we do it.

Like I said, I've been in here and I've been passionate. I've been here now, we're 140 days in government, we're in the House three weeks, I'm sitting here and there was a Member across the way that says to me: They must have a muzzle on you.

Do you know what? We're government. We have to act like we're government. We have to behave.

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

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** We have a job to do.

When the time comes, I can certainly be passionate, no doubt about that, but we have a job to do in here. That's what we're put here to do and we're going to do it.

It's unbelievable that we can get down this road – it's unbelievable. Again, the embarrassment that we put ourselves under and we wonder why we get a bad name. We come in here; we have a job to do. We have a job to do. We have to represent – there are 40 MHAs in here to represent

every district in this province, and we're in here to try to iron things out. We know they have to ask tough questions, there's no doubt; but 20 tough questions or 25 tough questions on the same topic for two or three days, that's not acceptable.

They made their point. They should get on and do the business of the province and not be getting on with this rhetoric that they're getting on with. It's totally embarrassing for everybody in the House; not only me, everybody. For us to be in here going through this is totally unacceptable. We should get on with doing the issues of the province. Ask the questions the way they're supposed to be asked. No doubt about it, we're not telling you how to ask them, but you can certainly ask questions the way they're supposed to be asked. If they're tough questions and you're going to ask them, I'll certainly appreciate that you do, but for us to get on with this, it's total nonsense.

It's absolutely embarrassing and we should perform a lot better if we're going to represent the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** I'll now recognize the hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair to close the debate.

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

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

I want to thank the Members that spoke this afternoon. I think we heard many, many things about buildings and people, and they tried to really stretch, stretch, stretch and make a comparison to this, but let the record show that it was not correct.

I also want, for the record, to say we have never – never – used MCP money to pay a

doctor to provide political advice, and I go one step further, I don't believe that ever in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador that there has been money taken from the Medical Care Fund from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to pay for political advice.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** We have never used it. I think one of the things that really concerned me here today is there are sitting ministers in this current government that don't seem to know the difference between bureaucrats and political advisors.

Political advisors of the PC are who's in the gallery today, it's full. We thank them for their work. They're being paid by the political \$1.8 million, I would assume. They've spent the afternoon with us. Bureaucrats are the doctors that are working very hard that are being paid within departments. They are bureaucrats. They are not political support. Dr. Browne, when you make a stretch, being paid by NLHS, it is not the same, Speaker.

I also want to say, for this doctor in question, not once by this Opposition has that doctor's reputation been in question, but the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, his reputation is in question –

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** – for doing what he did; not once have we questioned that good doctor. It's actually shameful that they are dragging him through this, that they a listed political staffer and then put it over under MCP. Why couldn't he have been paid from the budget that's \$1.8 million? Show us on Dr. Browne's contract where it said political staff. Show us; table a document tomorrow when we're back in the House, Speaker.

It's not only us that are here being a voice today for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador – I mean, they try to tell us what to

say but, going back to ancient times, Opposition has a right to be heard, to be a voice for the people that elected us – it's not only us that are unhappy. NAPE is outraged by the appointment of this doctor as a special advisor.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** They're outraged.

NAPE said: at a time when our health care system is under so much strain and front-line workers are burning out, this is where this government have chosen to place their priorities. While front-line workers are constantly told to tighten their belts, this government is opening the cheque book for appointments outside of the political budget.

You can try to relate to this; you can try to relate it to that. You can try to say that we're dragging the reputation of a young professional in our province into this, but the bottom line is, what they did was wrong. It is black and white wrong, Speaker.

"As we approach a provincial budget and head into Public Sector Bargaining, our members are rightfully angered," is what NAPE said, "Budgets and contracts are about priorities, and this decision sends a clear message about what this government values."

NAPE also went further, Speaker. We know that the health care system is strained; we know that it is challenged. "NAPE has repeatedly offered the government access to our frontline health care experts" – guess what – "at absolutely no cost to the taxpayers." At no cost, NAPE was wanting to offer the experts. We hear the people on the other side repeatedly saying we're going to talk to the people. We want to do what's right. We're going to talk to the people. They were offered, but it's simply not all the people, not for all of us.

I want to say that, as we move forward and the government moves into budget process,

NAPE is watching. Their members are watching. On behalf of the people who elected us, we are watching. "When this government says there's 'no money' at the bargaining table," NAPE said, "we will remember exactly where they chose to spend it."

I would add to that, Speaker, that I believe the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will remember that as well.

I want to just go to a comment, Speaker, a couple of things I said to former colleagues that were here. I can take almost anything in this House, I've been here for 13 years, but when somebody gets up and acts like they have a monopoly on caring, I have a big exception to that.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** I represent a rural district. I travel nine hours on a short day to go home on a Friday and come back on a Sunday. The family sacrifice is very great, and I don't believe if I wasn't working hard and doing my job, I wouldn't have just got elected for the fifth time. It's because I care.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** Speaker, the other thing we've heard a number of times: oh, the bureaucracy now in the executive of the minister is saying: We're shocked that you want to meet with people because the other ministers never met with people. Well in eight different departments in this government, I can tell you that I never once turned away a meeting with someone, Speaker. The House would close in the evening, and we would go down and we would start meetings.

What I saw yesterday was the House closed and people dancing down at the Paddy's Day party after. Disability Advocate bill is here on the table. That was public.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** I'm sorry. It was public, Speaker.

You closed the House and advocates are writing us, we hope the bill is going through, but don't come in and tell us what we did or didn't do because I take big exception to it, Speaker. Stay in the House and do the work.

Speaker, as I clue up in my last three or four minutes here, today's PMR has been about \$275,000 per year, 28 hours a week –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. DEMPSTER:** – with the compensation drawn from MCP. That's what this is about. It's about somebody being paid from the Medical Care Fund. It's not a political spin on an issue; it is undisputed facts. Let the record show.

I know that they tried to deflect but it is very hard to deflect. I will tell you, Speaker, at the end of the day, you know, a minister said it's time to let this go and move on. I don't believe the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are going to let this go and move on based on the messages that I am getting. People are struggling every single day and it isn't going to go away.

Recently, I had a very sad case in my district where a young man spent four days in the clinic in my hometown waiting for a flight to get out. He got to St. Anthony. The neurologist in here didn't know why he winded up in St. Anthony. I was so desperate that man was going to lose his life, I reached out to the Premier. I reached out to his chief of staff. I reached out to the Clerk. Do you know what that man's wife ended up doing? Taking him out of ICU, putting him in a wheelchair, putting her parka around him, flying him in on a commercial flight where the neurologist was in here waiting.

Never seen the like in my entire time in this area, Speaker. So I hope that they do move health care into a better direction and, as my colleague from Harbour Grace - Port de Grave said –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. DEMPSTER:** – we will certainly support them in that.

Speaker, just to clue up, I would urge this hon. House and I would ask the hon. House to join me in urging this government to immediately stop using MCP funds to pay for political support staff. The need in the province is very great and the people who need the money need access. If you feel that you need advice from young doctors, pay them from your political fund. Follow the rules.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** That's what it's there for.

I can't sit down without mentioning Dr. Pat Parfrey. I have so much respect for that man – so much.

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

**L. DEMPSTER:** The day that he stood and said everything he ever did in his long career, 4 ½ decades, was about altruism, it made my eyes leak. A selfless man who wanted to leave this place better than he found it, and when they talk about challenges, I want to tell you under Dr. Pat's time with the Health Accord –

**SPEAKER:** I would ask the hon. Member not to be using the name.

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

**SPEAKER:** If we're not using it for one doctor, we're not using it for another.

**L. DEMPSTER:** So under the architect of the Health Accord, the one they fired, the one they sent out the door and brought in a long-time PC Party insider –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**L. DEMPSTER:** – Speaker, registered nurse vacancies declined. Nurse practitioner vacancies declined. Licenced practical nurse vacancies declined. Personal care attendant vacancies declined. A 7 per cent increase in physicians licensed in Newfoundland and Labrador, and diversion hours decreased from 1,432 hours per month in '22 right down to only 34 hours per month in 2025. A tremendous record that man left as his legacy, and we appreciate everything he did for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Are the House Leaders ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Nay.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Division, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Division has been called.

Call in the Members.

### **Division**

**SPEAKER:** Are the House Leaders ready?

All those in favour of the motion, please stand.

**TABLE OFFICER (Hammond):** John Hogan, Lisa Dempster, Bernard Davis, Sarah Stoodley, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Pam Parsons, Keith White, Paul Pike, Elvis Loveless, Fred Hutton, Jamie Korab, Lucy Stoyles, Jim Parsons, Bettina Ford, Michael King, James Dinn, Sheilagh O'Leary.

**SPEAKER:** All those against the motion, please stand.

**TABLE OFFICER:** Tony Wakeham, Lloyd Parrott, Joedy Wall, Lela Evans, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Paul Dinn, Craig Pardy, Barry Petten, Jeff Dwyer, Loyola O'Driscoll, Andrea Barbour, Chris Tibbs, Lin Paddock, Pleaman Forsey, Mike Goosney, Keith Russell, Riley Balsom, Hal Cormier, Mark Butt, Jim McKenna, Joesph Power, Eddy Joyce.

**CLERK:** Speaker, the ayes: 17; the nays: 22.

**SPEAKER:** The motion has been defeated.

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

**SPEAKER:** Given the time of the day, the House does now adjourn until tomorrow, March 19, at 1:30 p.m.

Before we leave, I just want to remind all Members of the reception that's taking place at Government House with Their Honours. I certainly encourage all Members to attend, if you're able.