



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume LI

FIRST SESSION

Number 30A

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

Monday

May 25, 2026
(Night Sitting)

The House resumed at 6:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, the Concurrence Motion on the report of the Resource Committee.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise here on behalf of being a Chair for the Resource Committee. I would like to thank many people. Being a new MHA, it's been an eye-opening, learning experience being Chair. I've never got to experience an Estimates Committee before. I pride myself on learning as much as I can, because they can't take away your education.

In saying that, I'd like to thank the ministers, the government officials, the Official Opposition and their staff, the Members of the Third Party and their staff and especially the Clerk for guiding me through this journey.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: It's been an absolute eye opener, hearing from the different departments: the Department of Energy and Mines; the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change; the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture; the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands; the Department of Jobs, Growth and Rural Development; and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation. I got

to see the inner workings and how the departments actually tick, which is great insight. Some of the questions were very insightful, very thought-provoking and, I must say, I enjoyed every minute of it. It was truly an experience.

A couple of the departments that I happened to Chair really hit home in my district in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation. Tourism is huge in my district, especially in my hometown of Twillingate. Hearing some of the questions related to tourism was an absolutely amazing event I enjoyed fully. I got more insight in tourism.

In Jobs, Growth and Rural Development I got to hear some of the great work that's going to be provided in the upcoming years to develop rural Newfoundland. I'm looking forward to that.

Fisheries, with Twillingate being a fishing community, I got to hear some insight on that. I even got to learn a bit more about the southern fishery on the Southern Shore, about the salmon fishery. I didn't really realize what it involved, but it was great to hear the questions and the answers from the minister. It was great.

Speaker, overall, it was just a wonderful experience. It's a great learning tool and I hope to take it on to further my political career.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

Somebody said there's a hockey game tonight, so I've been told to hustle this two-minute period.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak, not just on behalf of the residents of Conception Bay East - Bell Island, of course, who chose me to be here this evening and throughout this session and beyond, but in relation to the Resource Committee and as the critic for Energy and Mines. Like the Member opposite who just spoke, the Chair of our Committee, I've got about two years in terms of experience on him but it is a learning experience throughout this whole process. Every time you sit in this Chamber you learn more about the province, you learn more about the industries that support the activities that we embark on and the services that we provide.

One – if not one of the biggest – is the Mines and Energy portfolio and the industries associated with it and the revenues that come from Energy and Mines – offshore oil, mining. One of the first things I took on in this role was I met with the folks at Mining Industry NL and when you hear about the numbers associated with that industry, and I discussed it with the head of Mining NL and others who were there, they don't get the same media attention or media play, if you will, that oil does often or the fishery, yet it's an industry that brings in billions and billions of dollars.

The amount of exploration expenditures over a five-year period from 2021 up to 2025 was \$1.2 billion, that's a lot of money, and \$6.1 billion gross value of mineral shipments for 2025. When you think about that, those numbers are huge – a huge part of our GDP.

When you think about oil and the amount of money we get just from royalties – just the royalties from the oil alone in 2024 was \$1.6 billion in revenue for the Treasury to spend on upgrading or building hospitals or paying doctors and nurses and police officers and teachers, hiring new Sheriff's officers, all the services that are needed, paving roads, everything that's needed. That is a revenue-generating department. Not a huge budget

by comparison to say Health or Education but the amount of money that it brings in makes up for it big time.

I heard the Finance Minister say earlier today that there's optimism, there's reason for optimism in this province. Regardless of what side I'm sitting on at any point in my career, I will feel that way, as well. There are challenges, you can't deny that, but there are also many reasons to be optimistic, otherwise, I don't think any of us would be here.

We want what's best for Newfoundland and Labrador, the people who are here and the people who will be here beyond us, not only in these seats, but in the entire province, and make the best decisions we have based on those. There is going to be GDP growth; there is going to be income growth in this province as well.

There are many challenges, though. Sometimes it's hard to outpace the inflation that people are facing, not because of anything that's done in here by any government, but just by geopolitical events that are taking place and causing the prices of things to increase beyond any government's control, no matter what political stripe they are.

A number of the reasons to be optimistic, of course, the MOU and the amount of money that that could potentially bring to Newfoundland and Labrador and the revenue stream, perhaps, to help pay down some debt. We wouldn't have to pay \$1.2 billion in interest on our debt every year, which is about \$3 million a day. I know there are other numbers that you could work out and say it's a different number, but it's about that. If you divide \$1.2 billion by 365 days of the year, that's what we're paying every day: \$3 million.

That number always astounds me and how we need to address that. I would agree with the Finance Minister, our philosophies on how to achieve that might be a little bit

different, but, ultimately, I think everybody in here would think that that would be a really good step to take that. The MOU would provide or could potentially provide a great amount of revenue.

I have said this before and I will say it again, if the Members opposite are able to reach an agreement on a new MOU, or some sort of agreement with Hydro-Québec that would be equal to or better than the one that we had reached back in December of 2024, I would support it. How could you not? How could you not support something that would bring in that much revenue and employ that many people, the projects, and change things for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

We've talked a lot about that over the last little while, the MOU. There will always be he said, he said, she said, she said and you can get caught up in the political rhetoric of it, but, ultimately, we do need reach an agreement at some point in time. That resource is there and, yes, we're losing revenue now, but at some point in time, we need to tap into it and tap into that revenue. Whatever way it looks at the end, as long as it's a good deal for Newfoundland and Labrador, I would support it.

Wind projects are also another big potential. I know that a couple of years ago there was a lot more hype about it than there is right now, for various reasons, some of it geopolitical, and the fact that European countries came here and talked about the need for being able to store the hydrogen and bring it over there.

Everybody is looking for reasons to get green energy. If you have 50 of the biggest companies in the world coming to Stephenville, obviously they are hungry for that type of thing. If we could provide it, you know, obviously we have a lot of wind in Newfoundland and Labrador. How do you harness it; how do you store it; how do you ship it?

Those are the challenges that need to be faced, and it's not something that this government alone can overcome. It would take a lot of co-operation from not only our federal government, but foreign countries as well. That is something that that potential is always there for us to tap into it, and it is what the Department of Energy and Mines will continue to focus on, I would hope.

I know that the Members opposite have said that they will have a 10-year energy plan at some point. I look forward to seeing that and scrutinizing it and yes, asking questions about it as well. That is our role. That is our role here. But all of our roles, ultimately, is to get the best deals for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, whatever it is, be it the fishery, be it mining and energy, be it tourism, whatever, and provide great services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, who pay a lot of taxes by the way, in order to deserve those good services.

The main thing I want to talk about tonight, though, is the Bay du Nord agreement. Again, there can be no doubt, there can be no debate over the fact that we, as a former government, wanted to get a good deal for Newfoundland and Labrador. We had fought very hard for it. Fortunately now, in Ottawa, there is a different prime minister and there are different Natural Resources ministers, or have been over the last little while, and there was a better appetite to move this forward quickly with the federal government perhaps being a partner in some sort of way.

But I can tell you that between 2021 and 2024, that same reception was not being felt and we had to fight very hard to get the environmental assessment approved by Ottawa. They did not want to do it. There was a Natural Resources minister there who was dead set against it. But at the time, a former premier and former Cabinet ministers fought very hard to make sure that we'd get to that point.

An agreement has been reached between the current Conservative government and the two proponents, which are BP and Equinor. Some of the things that still concern me related to this – and forget about the political aspect of it, that the topsides are not going to be done here, as was potentially promised, and we will see benefits from subsea activity, so that things that underwater, obviously, will be designed and built here. There will be employment.

The question mark here is whether or not this project as going to go ahead. You can see how quickly things can change, geopolitically. I see the price of oil dropped about \$7 or \$7.5 dollars today. A couple of weeks ago we were in this Chamber and it was around \$120 and it was tipping – maybe a little bit further back than that.

Six months ago, it was at \$69 and it's a very volatile commodity, definitely influenced by political activities south of the border here, obviously, right now and wars that are going on that are far beyond the control of the current Finance Minister or any Finance minister at any time. These things are beyond our control and forecasting what those prices could potentially be, at any point in time, is always difficult.

There are a couple of things in this agreement that – I should point out that in the agreement, which I have here, and has already been tabled, so everybody has access to the same document I'm looking at. On page 13 it says: "The entering into of this Agreement does not obligate the Proponents to sanction or continue the Project, which shall be in the sole discretion of the Proponents."

The proponent, of course, being Equinor and BP. Those are the companies that have signed the agreement with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to either proceed or not. The final investment decision by Equinor, ultimately, will be made in about a year from now, minus two months

if you will because that's when the agreement was announced.

We're still not sure this is going to happen. I certainly hope it does and, obviously, folks who work in the trades industry who are desperate for work, they want it to happen. People all over Newfoundland and Labrador would like to see this. I can remember when Hibernia first got on the go and there were thousands of people working at Bull Arm. When they were building Muskrat Falls, albeit it went off the rails in terms of the costing, there was a lot of employment. People were making a lot of money.

The same for what happened down in Long Harbour and when West White Rose was being constructed and when Hebron was being constructed, we see these big construction booms in Newfoundland and Labrador historically and there are many others. I'm not leaving any out intentionally. Those are the ones that come to top of mind right now. They create a lot of employment and optimism.

People will go and buy a new truck, or people will buy the camper, or they'll buy quads and Ski-Doo's and they'll vacation around Newfoundland and Labrador; they'll spend money. People don't take all that money and tuck it away, they like to spend it and enjoy the fruits of their labour, if you will, to be able to get stuff for their kids or put a new extension on a house, build a new garage, a new shed where they can watch the Stanley Cup or the World Series or whatever. They want to improve their own lot in life and these projects haven't had the potential to do that for people in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's very exciting to watch it happen.

I can remember in downtown St. John's, I knew a couple of people who had restaurants at the time when Hibernia was happening, less so for some of the others, but it was on wheels down there in terms of the amount of spending and the engineering

work that was being done here and the offices.

We talked about North Atlantic expanding their workforce in the last few years, not just in this province but in Atlantic Canada, from 150 to 500 people over the last three or four years – save the 1,500 who are in France, obviously, that won't have a huge impact here but I'm sure there will be some spill over. But when you see that kind of investment in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is exciting. It does create optimism and it shows that there is a reason to do business here.

When you think about some of the small towns in our province who have lost industries, perhaps a paper mill or some other kind of job or when the fishery closed down, the despair that is felt when smaller communities lose industries, it is hard. So when you see this kind of thing on the horizon, it's exciting. But, again, to go back to the concern about some of what's in the agreement with respect to Bay du Nord, one of my bigger issues is the drydock which is associated with it.

Now, prior to this agreement, there had been discussions, albeit not to a formal point like this where there's an actual agreement, where perhaps private industry would do this separate from the Bay du Nord agreement. Some were between whenever we started doing this and where we are now – and we know that this is the case because the company has said it and the officials on the government side have said it, as well – that in lieu of the topside work being guaranteed for here, although local companies can bid on it, but industry experts will tell you that it is unlikely they will ever be built here or would have ever been built here, in lieu of that, a \$200-million equity investment would be made and given to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for whatever form it will take to build this drydock, presumably at Bull Arm.

There's a lot of talk about defence spending right now and the ability to get the work that will be required there. I think by the time this drydock is built, if we get final investment decision and the thumbs up from Equinor on this, that political movement towards defence spending may have moved, but there will always be a demand for shipbuilding, ship repair, defence spending. To this extent, perhaps not. But in this agreement with Equinor and BP, the \$200 million from the company Equinor that just reported almost \$10 billion in operating income for the first quarter of 2026, we don't get all that money until almost 2032 – not almost, until 2032.

So the payment schedule for the \$200 million is the latter of June 30, 2028; and 180 days after project sanction, we get \$20 million; 12 months after payment one, we get \$40 million; 12 months after payment two, we get \$60 million; 12 months after payment three, we get \$60 million; and 12 months after payment four, which is in 2032, we would get the other \$20 million.

My question would be who is financing all the money that would be spent on this drydock? We don't know how much it costs. We don't know how much it's going to cost to build it. Speaker, \$200 million is going to be a fraction of what that will cost. I've had people tell me in the industry that I've chatted with that it may be as much as \$500 million or \$600 million to build it. The government estimates around \$450 million. There was a similar one built a couple of years ago in the United States which cost a certain amount of US dollars and it averages out to about \$450 million Canadian.

So if we're going to move this ahead another couple of years, I've had one person tell me it might cost a billion dollars. I'm not an expert in this, so I can't say, but I'm just going on what I've been told. So even if you're conservative about it and say it's going to cost \$500 million, my question

is where is the other \$300 million coming from? Who is paying that amount of money?

The Minister of Energy and Mines has mentioned a couple of times that there may be some private equity that could come forward, the federal government might come forward, and that's great, but we don't know the answer right now. So are we going to be on the hook for another \$300 million? In terms of the \$200 million that we're getting in terms of equity from Equinor to build our portion of it, which would be whatever portion that is of ownership, who's funding the building of this?

So if in one year's time they say, yes, we're going to do it and we start building it, we're going to need more than \$20 million in the first year of our share would be my guess. We don't know how long it's going to take to build but, obviously, if they're projecting that the payments will go out to 2032, which is in six years' time from now, who's paying the interest on whatever money we have to spend to pay these people who are building it and the costs associated with materials and labour? These are the questions that I have.

That concerns me and I know that Trades NL just recently put a news release out. I saw a story, I think it was on vocm.com, talking about how they're looking to have this done sooner. I know that Equinor and BP are not going to jump up and announce tomorrow, okay, we'll do the final investment decision now, today, and we'll do it because Trades NL is saying this. Obviously, they're concerned, for some reason, by looking at if it's going to be 2032, their members need employment before then. That's a long time out. Who is going to be covering the cost of this from the provincial aspect? That's just one main question that I would have related to this.

I am concerned about that, but I am optimistic. I want to end on an optimistic note because I know that there is a lot of potential in the province with our natural

resources that are here and with the potential for another oil field, another installation to continue on with what has been a huge boost to the provincial economy over the last 30-odd years since the first oil in November of 1997 at Hibernia.

Mr. Speaker, I am optimistic as well, but as these things unfold, we will continue to ask questions about how it impacts Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you for your time, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise here to speak on the concurrence debate for the Resource Committee. As the Chair had alluded to earlier, it was my first time participating in the Estimates process as an MHA, as well. I certainly enjoyed that process. The policy side of things, also, is quite interesting to me. I was so into it, I participated in five altogether. It was quite interesting to hear from different departments and join my colleagues in asking important questions, line by line, through the Estimates process. I'm sure a lot of people at home don't realize that part of the process is usually later in the evening or first thing in the morning, but an important part of the budget process.

Speaker, I'm speaking today on the part of my critic role. I'm the critic for Environment, Conservation and Climate Change, and also Rural Development, two portfolios that really do go hand in hand together. We've seen a number of challenges in our province over the years with Hurricane Fiona, with the wildfires across our province, things heating up more intensely. We're seeing our fire indexes going up higher, now, earlier.

So climate change is a significant, significant issue, not only that we're facing in this province or the country but across the globe, we're seeing the massive effects of that, bigger storms, more intense storms happening quicker than usual, it's having significant impacts on our communities so, of course, during the Estimates process we're looking to the department to be a leader here in our province, to invest in those areas and to see that money go towards supporting our communities.

I just want to take a little bit of time this evening and talk about the Estimates process for those departments and this Committee. I want to say kudos, of course, and a big thank you to the public service of Newfoundland and Labrador here and the government for the work that they do, they participate and are part of this process as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: Sitting here with their ministers and answering questions, very insightful, very informative. They certainly know the role that they're in and the information that we received and the questions was excellent, I have to say, Speaker. I certainly appreciate the work that they do.

When talking about Environment, Conservation and Climate Change specifically, we did hear about some vacant positions – about 17 vacant positions throughout the department in different areas, policy and planning in natural areas, pollution prevention, water resources, water quality, environmental assessments.

I'm really hoping the minister and his team certainly address those vacancies and put those people in those positions because it's certainly important to help our communities, especially here in the province, prepare for those climate impacts. When we're talking about our water systems and reviewing environmental assessments, we want to make sure there isn't any gaps there, long

timelines being indicated. So I am certainly hope that the department will address that as well.

No surprise, probably, to many, me and the minister especially had a great, respectful conversation about the national marine conservation area and about the decision that they made. We got into some in-depth about the process and the decision-making. I said this to the minister when we finished as well, and I appreciated his answers and appreciate the background information provided by the staff, but we were hearing a lot of folks saying that they didn't agree with the conservation area, but I didn't hear a lot of answers to why the feasibility so they couldn't continue.

So I think that was something that was a take-away from the Estimates period, and certainly something that I hope the minister will still reflect on going forward and talking about different opportunities for conservation in this province.

I did bring up waste management as well. I know that the minister and I both agreed it wasn't a part of that portfolio, but as the Minister of Municipal Affairs, it certainly goes together as well. There are a lot of issues with tipping fees and transportation challenges and aging infrastructures throughout rural communities in the province with limited tax bases, and that's part of the discussions that we had, so I certainly appreciate the minister indulging in that conversation as well.

We talked about the MMSB that the minister is responsible for, talking about the minister's meeting with that corporation, the work that they're doing including a pilot project for glass recycling. So looking for those practical approaches that can help communities with some of the challenges they're facing and ways to reduce waste, support innovation to keep materials out of our landfills. We had some great discussions around that.

Speaker, we also talked about climate change adaption, investing in flood mapping and emergency preparedness, drinking water improvements, really, really important issues as I've mentioned and it goes hand-in-hand with Rural Development because it's so important to rural communities to provide those water improvements. We see the boil-order advisories that have been in place for a long period of time. We see the challenges with climate change adaption and flood mapping, as I mentioned Fiona and wildfires. Coastal erosion is another big issue that a lot of us are dealing with. Storm surges – so we had some great conversations around that.

I also just want to talk about – I did participate in the Rural Development Estimates as well – another important critic role for me and it's extremely important as a rural MHA representing many different rural communities here in the province. You know, talking about maintaining the aging infrastructure that we're seeing some difficulties with.

One of the big things we also talked about was cellular coverage. It is an extreme issue across this province as many drive to different parts of the province – I normally drive home and drive back during the House of Assembly and a lot of areas where you can't even take a call at this time. The call will come on but you can't even answer the phone and have a chat. It was interesting to hear the minister's perspective on that.

In my previous role, I worked in part of his department, I guess, now on that issue and it's a significant gap with the providers. A lot of times, trying to make a business case for putting up cell towers. They're looking at that from their perspective. So how is the province convincing those companies to participate in that? We did hear the minister speak that maybe the province would take a more hands-on role. Whether that's putting up towers themselves or through RFPs. Definitely looking forward to hearing more about their plan going forward in the future.

We talked about a great pilot project that's on the Burgeo Highway with Wi-Fi spots where you can connect to the Wi-Fi to make the call. Significantly important on routes like that where you have a long stretch of road, 150 kilometres, with no cellphone service to be able to pull over and get access in case you have an accident, an emergency or just need to touch base with someone and let them know where you are.

Like I said, Rural Development, goes across a broad, broad spectrum of issues and departments and I really look forward to seeing what the minister plans to do to assist rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador and all of our different departments whether it be Education, whether it be health care, Transportation, especially. Those are some of the important issues that we want to see addressed.

I just want to take a little bit of time there as the critic for both those departments to speak. It was very insightful in Estimates period. I really enjoyed the process, hearing from the department, hearing about their plans for the future, especially for us, so that we can definitely hold them accountable to their promises and their actions, and to make sure they're taking that important action for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So I thank you for your time for that, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

I just wanted to take this opportunity to offer some commentary around the Estimates session for Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation. As has been reflected by a couple of Members here this evening, the process was new for me as well.

I also would like to thank all of the departmental staff and the minister for that process. In fact, it reminded me very much of my time with municipal government. Taking a budget, Speaker, and I see a fellow municipal experienced individual taking time to go through a budget line by line and exploring what each of those lines might mean for programming.

I first wanted to start with I'm really pleased on behalf of the district to see financial support for *Come From Away*. I know the department has worked really closely with that production and that is much appreciated. I'm also really pleased to hear that the department is working with Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, the tourism industry association, on issues related to workforce and labour shortages. I've heard from many people in the industry that the biggest challenge they face isn't in fact access, but instead it's the availability of employees. So working with industry is a great approach there.

I wasn't surprised to hear that Celebrate NL is being folded into the department, primarily because it was one of the budget lines that I was looking for. I was surprised, Speaker, though, with the lack of funding that was following that piece of work into the department. I believe Celebrate NL typically had a \$5-million budget. That \$5 million didn't follow through to folding that into the department.

Of course, Members who were here previously would know that Celebrate NL was created as a Crown corporation to help attract large-scale events, especially those that might require or that would benefit from corporate sponsorship. As a Crown corporation, the corporation had the flexibility to negotiate contracts and contract in ways that it is much more cumbersome for government to manage and negotiate.

I'm also disappointed to hear about plans that the department has for more reliance on QR codes when it comes to printed

materials to aid with visitors and in their experience. It's interesting that my colleague just spoke about the lack of cellular connectivity across Newfoundland and Labrador. Just speaking last week with representatives who run the tourist chalet in Gander, the Chamber of Commerce, they commented to me that one of the things they're requested the most is printed material because as the Members across know, as you're heading down to Fogo Island, if you're heading out to Twillingate, other areas of that district in particular, and individuals who stop at the tourist chalet in Gander, a QR code does little for them when they can't get the cell service, and just remembering that some of the most stunning areas of Newfoundland and Labrador are stunning because of their remote and more rural location, yet without cell service as a navigation tool.

Speaking of rural, I also would be remiss if I didn't express disappointment around the Active NL fund. I do respect the department staffs desire to review the program for alignment and to develop the required action plan. However, I do know that in rural communities across our province many organizations, primarily non-profits guided by volunteers, rely heavily on that funding to advance recreation infrastructure. It could be things around playgrounds, for example, rink work. It also supports recreation and sporting equipment.

I know in Estimates that the minister said, well, there's still snow on the ground and this is not necessarily a summer program, however, the commitment is that the fund should be announced and opened up within a couple of months. Of course, that takes us into the middle of July and then there's the period of an announcement, an application process, approval and notification process which, reasonably, I think would take us well into the fall.

There are currently small community organizations across our province who are checking the site daily for the Active NL

fund to be opened up because it would have been opened up by this time. It's disappointing that, to my knowledge, there hasn't yet been any notice provided to the public to say that this program – again, respecting that it's being reviewed – is going to be delayed this year. At least that can provide people a measure of comfort that they're not missing it, seeing as communities are checking this so regularly. So public notice alerting organizations as to the time in changing and if there are going to be any changes to the criteria or the parameters for the program knowing that people typically rely on it in the summertime.

Lastly, I just wanted to say I look forward to hearing more about the new vision, goals and plans for tourism. I did expect to see a budget line allocated for tourism planning, specifically, because it has been talked about significantly in the past six months. But from Estimates, we learned that instead of a specific budget line allocation, there isn't any money specifically allocated but money for the tourism planning will be taken from other budget lines as needed to develop the plan to make Newfoundland and Labrador the tourism capital of Canada.

We are now seeing the results, Speaker, of tourism investment by the former administration in positive numbers and outlook for the coming season. Well, really, I guess the season we're into it here now. I'm hopeful that in years to come, this current government's budget allocation and priorities will show equally favourable results. Only time will tell.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll take a note out of your book and say I'm only going to take a couple of minutes.

SPEAKER: Oh no.

B. DAVIS: But truly, I am only going to take a few minutes. I used to laugh on the other side when the Member would get up and say I'm going to take a few minutes.

I do want to say a big thank you to the staff, the top-notch staff that we had the opportunity to have a conversation with because I consider this a conversation, when we go to Estimates, and I'll get to speak for a second I think on post-secondary in one of the other subsequent concurrences. I do want to say an opportunity, we tend to learn an awful lot, I'm not going to say we don't learn from the minister because we do, when the questions are asked, we do. But I think, and I'm sure the minister would agree, in every case we learn a significant amount from the staff who are boots on the ground all the time.

I do want to say a big thank you to them because they give up so much of their family life to come here and do that work, because it's not just what you see in Estimates. It's the prep for Estimates, as being a minister before, it's significant days and weekends and evenings that they do to try to make us, and now you, look at good as they possibly can. In some cases, that's a lot of work. In other cases, it's really easy. I'm not going to say which is which.

It was a good experience and I'm excited whenever I hear my colleagues who have done it for their first time. It is an experience. In Estimates, you learn an awful lot about the inner workings of government through Estimates.

So I'm just going to talk a little bit about Jobs, Growth and Rural Development and a couple of sections of that I was responsible for before in different iterations throughout the time. Industry and innovation, when it

was with Tourism, was a lot of fun. There were a lot of technological investments that made paying off dividends now, as we see years later, those companies that we invested in, whether it be Mysa or CoLab or others, BreatheSuite, that have gone on to be very successful companies in their own right, hiring in some cases hundreds and even in some other cases maybe a thousand or more. There have been successful programs that have come out of there.

Within Jobs, Growth and Rural Development, I'm not going to talk about what my colleague from Burgeo - La Poile talked about with cell phone coverage, I don't want to waste the House's time by talking about something that someone else had already talked about, but it has been a significant opportunity for him to ask questions on those things and coverage that most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians would want as they drive across our highways and byways in the province.

There is not one thing in the province that happens that Jobs, Growth and Rural Development does not touch. If there's an employment opportunity, it will be in this area, right? So every single day these programs are applied for or utilized by businesses, which, in turn, get the opportunity to help the people in their regions that are going on about these kinds of investments that are happening.

A few divisions have moved around. There were some vacancies we talked about. I think there were some 400 employees in the department and I think at one point there were close to a hundred, if not a little more, vacancies, which is high in some areas, which the minister is working on as well as his staff. These shifting in responsibilities creates new structures and we just ask about clarity and expectations about where we go.

There didn't seem to be a clear plan with respect to that at this point, but that's

understandable considering the new department was created out of the last election. Ours fingers are crossed that that will straighten out and those positions will be filled because, at the end of the day, those workers are going to help find other workers for the businesses that we all hear across our province say they need workers.

This is also the department that has Immigration in it. We've seen significant growth in immigration in this province. We've had a little bit of hiccup in that with the federal government recently cutting the allotment, which I'll talk a little bit about in post-secondary when I get the opportunity to have another minute or two with respect to that, but every section of the province, whether it's nurses, tradespeople, childhood educators, engineers, people working the hospitality, mining, tech sectors, health care, all come through this department or have the ability to come through this department.

It's important that we have a forward-looking strategy for labour development and training and workforce development to satisfy the employers needs that we need in this province and to ensure those targets exist and they are easier to meet when they have those targets.

This is not about politics; it's more about preparation, making sure that we're prepared for what's coming, whether that be a dry dock that's being built; shipbuilding that I keep talking with the MHA for Fogo Island - Cape Freels on; hydro development. Those are all important things that we definitely need employees for and this department is going to play a key role in in that. We asked a number of questions on that, which was good. The answers were good, as well.

I will continue to ask those questions and hold account to what was said in those Estimates but also what announcements are coming. We wish them the greatest success in ensuring that we have the

workers that we need for all of the industries that we want to see successful in this province.

With that, Speaker, I'm not going to go on too long. I said I would emulate you with this speech; I think I've done a good job of making sure I followed suit with what you always used to say – I'll take a few minutes to say a few words – and I look forward to other concurrences that are coming tonight. Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are the Members ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Report of the Resource Estimates Committee, carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

J. WALL: I move, seconded by the Member for Labrador West, the Concurrence Motion on the report of the Social Services Committee.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: Speaker, you have to excuse my voice, again. It's getting a little bit shaky here again this evening, but here we go.

It was actually an honour to be Chair of the Social Services Committee and also to serve on the Resource Committee. After participating in 14 Estimates, I learned an awful lot. It was a great experience. You get

to learn about every different department that's here and I've got to say this, sitting over on that side last week and this week and looking at all the staff and department members that were behind the ministers, we've got some smart and very informative people –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: – very knowledgeable people working for the government.

AN HON. MEMBER: Smarter than us.

J. POWER: I wouldn't say that.

I'd like to thank both parties opposite for their participation as well. Some great questions, some great conversations during the past two weeks. I'd also like to thank the Clerks for their guidance as well.

I'd like to thank the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Health and Community Services, the Department of Justice and Public Safety, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, the Department of Seniors and the Department of Social Services and Well-Being.

I learned this morning something that I wasn't aware of in the Estimates with Seniors. It didn't surprise me, though, that the Minister for Seniors stated that he had a very close relationship with the Minister of Finance. I thought that was great to know that those two fellows really get along good together. I think so.

Actually, the two of them guys are probably my favourite ministers because I'm going to throw this out there – the seniors in Lab West have been waiting a long time for seniors' housing and the announcement with the \$10.5 million in the budget, to go along with the federal funding, everybody will be quite happy in a year's time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: I just want to thank the MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue. I had a sore throat and couldn't talk for a week and the MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue had to fill in a couple of times for me, so thank you.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a privilege to stand in this House to represent the people of Burin - Grand Bank. Before I begin, I'd just like to say that, today, I was in the beautiful District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave to a funeral for Johnny Pauls. It was a beautiful funeral.

Now, the reason I was in attendance, of course, as many of you don't know, Johnny Pauls – Uncle Johnny as he's known in the area – is truly my uncle. He is my grandfather's brother. I must say that the town did a great job in they had a parade and so on. The church was blocked. It was a good send-off.

RIP, Johnny.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: I'd like to take the opportunity, and being on Social Services Committee, I had two shots at Estimates, which was great – one with Seniors and one with Education. I have to report that both went extremely well. The ministers were very well briefed and we had, I must say, real great sessions. I thank you for that and I also thank your officials as well. We rely on them. When I went through those at one point, you know, I was nudging my deputy all the time.

Speaker, tonight, I get an opportunity to talk about education and to speak about the

Newfoundland and Labrador provincial budget, but as well, more importantly for me, education, since I'm the critic for Education. We can't look at education as just being another government expense. It has to be the foundation of our communities, our economy, our health system and our future. Every skilled worker, every nurse, every doctor, every trades person, every entrepreneur, every community leader, this all begins in the classroom. Education is who we are and who we will be in the future.

Despite government claims that this budget invests in education, there are people that will argue, especially educators, parents, students and the communities. They still are deeply concerned, and rightly so. While there are positives in the budget, no doubt, related to education, I'll attempt to highlight some of the concerns. Because, that's what we do in Opposition, but we also throw bouquets when we need to.

There is concern around whether or not education funding is truly keeping pace with reality. There is some disparity around the government's message and the reality that exists in the classroom. The provincial government has highlighted several investments in *Budget 2026*: nearly \$625 million for educators and teaching assistants, funding 94 additional teachers and 20 teaching and learning assistants. Now, that's great, because we learned in Estimates that these were in addition to the 400 that were put in last year. That was the only concern that I had with that particular part of the budget.

Expanded school mental health supports – now, I questioned that a little, because I'm not quite sure where that's going to go. I think there was a million dollars allotted for that.

P. DINN: The Doorways announcement.

P. PIKE: Okay, so we have to make sure that we certainly use that money very wisely.

A continued \$10-a-day child care – probably the best thing that governments have done in years, basically, was do that. People can go to work – a man and a wife can go to work and be able to afford child care. I think I indicated to you all before, I was talking to someone a while ago and they said they're working seasonal, but their seasonal work, because there is no daycare centres in the area, what they make, they pay in child care so they can collect EI during the rest of the year.

That's not good enough. We need to get out in rural Newfoundland with our daycare centres and our \$10-a-day child care as soon as we can. All of us from rural Newfoundland, we are experiencing that. Anytime I bring up \$10 daycare in my district, what I get back is: It's all right for the townies. But we need to get out there more. I'm sure the minister indicated that we'll be looking at that and that's part of what he would be doing.

The tuition freeze for Memorial University, great stuff. It's wonderful. I like it; it's good. What you have to realize, in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, when our kids leave, they are 18 years old, if they are going to university or CNA or any of the institutions that are in the urban centre, they've got to leave home. The cost of apartment rentals or residence at the sites is astronomical. It's just through the roof and it's a big expense – it's a big expense.

I will tomorrow, if I get an opportunity, I'm going to tie that back to the fact that some communities in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador did not get students – I'm not talking about just students, like, recreational associations or whatever, I'm talking about communities. We have to take another look at that; we have to.

On paper the announcements are encouraging, but the question is – and I'm going back to the budget announcements – are these investments enough to address the actual crisis educators and students are experiencing? Are they enough? For many teachers, the answer is no.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association has publicly stated that stronger action is still needed and has launched campaigns urging government to invest more substantially in public education. Why? Because schools are facing increasing complexity. More students are requiring behavioural supports, and we talked about that in Estimates as well; greater mental health challenges, again reporting more and more and more and more; and increased inclusion needs. In classrooms now you have students of varying abilities, you have students with varying challenges and so on. Those inclusion needs are so important in classroom learning.

Teacher burnout, I learned as well in Estimates – I knew the figure, but I was afraid to say it in Estimates, but I asked the minister and his deputy told me, on an average day here, during the school year in Newfoundland and Labrador, we call in 600 substitute teachers – 600. That's a lot of subs. The simple math on that would be about \$180,000 a day, probably more. There are larger classroom demands, rising operational costs due to inflation and, of course, one of the things we talked about as well was violence in schools and the impact that's having.

Adding staff is so important, but if needs are growing faster than supports, schools are going to fail. But I know this government is looking at it. I know you are, and you'll do your best to combat any issues that we're going to have in the near future when it comes to classroom management. The budget appears designed to sound ambitious while still operating with a broader fiscal restraint.

Another concern is the growing pressure on K-to-12 classrooms increasing faster than funding. This is the concern. Now, teachers across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are reporting classrooms are more difficult to manage than ever before. Many classrooms now include students with highly diverse learning needs, behavioural challenges, trauma-related difficulties and mental health concerns, often without enough specialist support.

I dealt with a parent last year and the child in question went to school for a month and came out, went back in after Christmas and came out; missed six months of school because of behavioural issues in the classroom.

So these are the things that are going on, but, you know, unless we're made aware of them – and we all have to work together on this by the way. This is not something that I'm saying you have to do. We all have to do these things. We have to bring these issues to the forefront. Teachers are expected to act as educators, counsellors, behaviour specialists, social workers and crisis managers, all at the same time.

Speaker, I have so much more to say, but my time is up, and I'm going to hopefully get some more time tomorrow to finish this up.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, would like to send my heartfelt condolences to the family of World War II veteran Mr. Johnny Pauls, who actually just recently celebrated his 102nd birthday. He certainly was a sweetheart of a man. He was my constituent so I had spent a lot of time with him through different events through the Legion and of course Memorial

Day and Canada Day. So our thoughts and prayers are with his loved ones. I did visit with him over this past weekend, so our sincere condolences.

Thank you to him and to his family for his service to the merchant navy. A World War II veteran, imagine that at 102, and let me tell you, he was as cute as a button. He was a sweetheart of a man and he certainly will be missed, but that said, Godspeed, and I hope he rests in heavenly peace.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: Also, Speaker, I'm standing today, of course, to speak on behalf of the Social Services Committee and, in particular, in Estimates, what we heard in Justice and Public Safety. I want to thank the staff and, of course, all the stakeholders, the RNC, the RCMP and everybody who was present, certainly the minister and congratulate her on her very first Estimates.

After listen closely to ministers and the officials, one thing that became very clear is that government, obviously, as we know, talks a great deal about safer communities, but when it actually comes to delivering the results, the gaps can't be ignored in this first budget.

First of all, there are good investments in the budget that we support and we've also invested in just previous to the election, we applaud the additional Crown attorneys, additional judges, additional police officers, all measures that we also took while we were in office, investing over \$40 million over several years and the latest announcement just last fall of \$24 million. They are certainly important measures. We all agree on that, but the problem, Speaker, is that the government continues to announce these positions without addressing the very reasons why these positions remain difficult to fill in the first place.

Because the reality today is that our justice system is under strain at nearly every level and the people working within it, police officers, Sheriff's officers, correctional staff, prosecutors are telling us that clearly, every day. We also hear it in the media.

During Estimates, we heard government Members repeatedly pointing to the headline numbers, but Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are not judging the system based on headlines. They are judging it based on whether they can access justice in a timely manner and whether communities feel safe. We know that there are major concerns. Look no further than a recent event when a young man was badly beaten by a mob of people waiting for him outside a restaurant, I think in Mount Pearl or close to Mount Pearl.

So whether the courts are functioning and whether commitments that were made on the election campaign are actually being delivered, and right now, Speaker, people are seeing delays, shortages and broken promises.

One of the clearest examples is in our court system. Even now we continue to hear concerns about courts not operating at full capacity and cases being delayed because of staffing shortages, particularly among sheriff's officers.

This government can stand in the House and announce judges and Crown attorneys all day long, but if there are not enough sheriff's officers to physically move people through the system, transport inmates, provide courtroom security and keep proceedings operating, then the system bottlenecks in every way.

Who pays the price for that? Victims waiting for justice, families waiting for closure and communities watching serious cases being delayed again and again, and we know that recently happened with a very high-profile case before our courts.

Justice delayed, as we know, is justice denied, and what was particularly striking during Estimates was the absence of any real urgency from government on this issue. No significant recruitment strategy, no retention initiatives, no comprehensive workforce plan. At a time when other provinces are aggressively competing in front-line justice workers, the government appears content to simply hope vacancies will fill themselves.

We're also seeing major pressures within our correctional system, and I'm going to talk about a story that was told to me just recently about a correctional officer in one of the province's facilities who had worked there 20 years-plus and who was recently let go without cause and was not given any reason. There's concern where the decision was made. This person, like I said, had invested years and years into a career. I know it was definitely 20, it could be closer to 30, but that's a concern. Walked out without cause and not given any reasons as to why, and I do know that that individual is doing some ATIPPING and researching.

Front-line workers in corrections have raised concerns repeatedly about staffing levels, burnout, overtime, pressures and workplace safety. I spoke with a sheriff's officer just recently at a business in my district about the concerns and about the people. When new corrections officers are hired, they're recruited by other entities in other provinces and they're gone. They don't last. So we do have to address these issues and these real concerns.

Despite all the rhetoric around the public safety, this budget contains no meaningful new strategy to stabilize the workforce, no new retention framework, no targeted recruitment efforts, no acknowledgement of the operational pressures staff are under each and every day. This matters, Speaker, because when correctional facilities are short-staffed, the impacts ripple throughout the entire justice system. It affects inmate movement; it affects court appearances; it

affects safety for workers and inmates alike. This is not theatrical. They are real operational failures with real-world consequences.

We also raised concerns during Estimates about policing in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. We do know that there was a promise made on the campaign trail to reopen the RCMP detachment at Grand Bank. That was a promise made. That's on record. That's in the election book. That's in the platform promises, but we do know that now apparently they don't have the authority to make it happen, but it was promised. It didn't fall short of being a promise.

Communities were promised action. Communities were promised improved access to policing services. Communities were promised safer communities and, increasingly, they're hearing excuses instead.

Another deepening concern raised during the Estimates was the future of the Policing Transformation Working Group. This work was established to examine long-term sustainability, accountability and modernization within policing services. This is exactly the kind of work government should be doubling down on right now, but instead, there are growing concerns that this effort is being scaled back or deprioritized.

In fact, it's the case; it would represent a major mistake. Policing challenges are not getting simpler. Recruitment pressures are increasing. Costs are increasing. Mental health calls are increasing, and rural service demands are increasing. This requires long-term planning and serious reform work, not political retreat because the work becomes difficult.

Another issue we discussed was the staggering amount of outstanding fines here in this province. There are approximately \$55 million in uncollected fines. That is an extraordinary figure, and again, what we

heard from government was very little in the way of a concrete plan to address it. It's not simply about revenue collection; this is about confidence in the justice system itself. Because when fines go unpaid year after year, with little consequence, the public starts questioning whether accountability actually exists. The message it sends is that enforcement is optional, and that undermines confidence in the entire system.

No government can fix the justice system overnight. We certainly know that. Many of the challenges that we're discussing today did not emerge in a single year. They will not be solved in a single budget. When we were in government, we recognized that reality, and we made significant investments begin addressing longstanding pressures within the system.

We invested in additional police resources. We expanded mental health supports connected to public safety. We moved forward with the Police Transformation Working Group to modernize and strengthen policing services for the long term. We advanced recruitment initiatives and took steps to improve capacity within the courts and the prosecution services.

Those investments mattered, and clearly, they worked since many of the measures this government is announcing through the budget are, in fact, the continuations of the work that was already under way. Acknowledging that systemic reform takes time cannot become an excuse for a lack of urgency.

What Newfoundlanders and Labradorians expect now is a government willing to build on the work with a clear and long-term plan, particularly when it comes to staffing shortages, court delays and access to justice in rural communities. Because despite the announcements, we continue to hear people are still seeing cases delayed, front-line workers stretched thin and communities struggling to access timely services. This is why accountability matters.

This is why implementation matters, and this is why this House must continue pressing government for measurable results.

Speaker, I would like to thank the staff in Justice and Public Safety, and again, we do know that many promises were made, and it is our job to hold government to account to see that. I can't emphasize enough on sheriff's officers and, still, the abrupt announcement back in November of the closures of the courts. We still haven't gotten a real good, concrete answer as to why that's happening or when there's an update to when that will change or when that will reopen.

Again, we're all here to work together, and that said, thank you again to the officials and to our law enforcement. We know the policing, RCMP, RNC and all those organizations are certainly doing everything that they can, and a heartfelt thank you to them. They're on the front lines when there's an emergency, when people are seeking shelter, it's these first responders that attend to these circumstances. We need our courts back open, and we need to support our Justice and Public Safety all around.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

It is my pleasure to rise on behalf of the residents of the District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. This budget Estimates process has been a very new and wonderful experience for me. I want to say thank you, certainly, to the Clerk's office, all the staff, the ministers who showed up and of course, the Committee Members who really ensure that it was a great learning curve for us all.

For me, this was my first opportunity in budget Estimates as a newly elected MHA to really understand the process about the many layers that we go through in order to be able to ask the questions. Of course, it's where the rubber really hits the road because it's where you're going to get the answers that you're actually seeking. So it is really important to the process of understanding the details of the budget, the staffing, the priorities of the government and it's very important, obviously, not only understanding but to be able to be a critic because our roles as elected officials is to make sure to hold to account.

Under the Social Service Committee, to me, if I had to put an umbrella around it, it would be affordability and respect. That may seem like a broad term but, of course, the affordability aspect, we're trying to ensure that people's lives are becoming more and more affordable all the time. However, as I've mentioned before, there are many missed opportunities in this budget and I'll certainly speak to some of those.

Respect is something that is an all-encompassing concept that we're respecting our constituents and the needs of our constituents and that leads into so many different areas within the Social Services Committee itself. This truly is one of my personal favourite areas, as a long-time social justice advocate. We have Justice; Social Services; Housing; Municipal Affairs, which I've had 14 years of experience of as former deputy mayor for the City of St. John's, a great privilege to have that experience; Health; Education; ECEs; and last but definitely not least, Seniors. I'll touch on a few of those throughout my next couple of minutes here.

I'd like to start with the Minister of Justice and Public Safety. Certainly, that was an area that I've spoken about a lot in Question Period and otherwise. There is certainly a great opportunity to dig into some issues that we're hearing from constituents about that they have great concerns about. Of

course, in amongst all of that is the intimate partner violence, implementing GPS ankle monitoring for IPV offenders and, of course, a long-time push for foot patrols.

I really appreciate the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, the conversations that we had in the budget Estimates process, and the chief, as well, who was in attendance, to talk about how people really, truly want to see more foot patrols. More police officers actually engaging directly with community members, getting out of the cars and actually meeting those neighbours in the community. It can't happen in all areas, obviously. We know that realistically. But it really does help build public trust with the RNC and the RCMP officers of our community who work certainly very, very hard.

On that note, too, I would also like to just give another shout-out and congratulations to the newly appointed deputy chief, David White. In my former role as a municipal leader, I had a very, very strong working relationship with the former deputy chief, and certainly in my new role as MHA, I certainly hope to continue that collaborative relationship. It's really important that you have people that you can call on and count on and ask questions of throughout the process.

So, Speaker, in the budget Estimates, there was a number of different questions and answers being provided and one of the things that we never got a really clear answer on, but one that I think is extremely important and I'm sure it's forthcoming, is about the need for more mental health crisis units. So I know that some of the staff were going to get back to us on that. That is something where we've seen great success, but we need more because we know that mental health and addictions is a huge growing issue in our communities and public safety is something that concerns us all. That is, again, not just coming down with the heavy hammer of justice or punitive issues, it also involves taking care of people

who require wraparound supports with mental health issues and addictions. As well, the implementation of restorative justice methodologies.

I've spoken at length about that, about how we hosted a panel, our caucus, the NDP caucus had set up a panel. It was a really interesting discussion that talked about ways that we can be preventative on crime, how we can ensure that schools don't become a pipeline to prison and so forth, so preventative, and also how we rehabilitate people who are not major offenders, people who just need a new direction and so can avail of those supports.

So these are a couple of things that I certainly wanted to mention in regard to Justice and Public Safety. I know that the minister is working very hard in that portfolio and that there are changes that are yet to come, and I appreciate those efforts. I do. I know that she is very, very intent on working with her colleague on gender equity issues as well. I look forward to the things that are going to unfold, hopefully coming forward in the next coming months and into the fall on those issues.

The next thing I just wanted to mention, of course, is Municipal Affairs. Municipal Affairs is like a fantastic opportunity for collaboration, to listen. As we talk in restorative justice: We have two ears for listening and one mouth for speaking. That means we take twice the amount of time to listen to our community leaders, listen to our mayors and councillors of the small towns and communities right across this beautiful province of ours, and they have concerns with this budget.

We heard about the conversations and the missed opportunities that came with the Multi-Year Capital Works program. It caught a lot of the communities off guard. There's an opportunity for more discussion, more collaboration and, certainly, as I mentioned before, Speaker, respect, respect for the people that are leading these communities.

We have to depend upon those leaders. Many of us were those leaders in our community before we became elected into the provincial Legislature. We know how hard those municipal leaders work. They need the supports in order for the communities to thrive and then we can do a little bit higher-level policy making that can impact their lives greatly.

Really, out of all of the issues that we have been dealing with in the social component in the Social Services Committee, I have to say, we know we've been talking a lot about early childhood educators and about all of the needs that have been brought forward in that regard, more certainty, pensions and, of course, we need numbers. That's huge. We've touched on some of those things. And education, I will always, always proclaim, again, that we need to resource education appropriately.

Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador and, of course, the College of the North Atlantic, they provide great opportunities for education, as well as the trade schools, and other trade schools as well. It is crucial that we support and increase the funding to the university. We have not seen the kind of investment that we need in that particular area.

But I will finally come around to the topic that we were discussing today, which was in the Social Services Committee regarding seniors. If we're all lucky, we're going to be there. Seniors truly, when we talk about affordability and respect –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm finding it difficult to hear the hon. Member. I'll ask you to take your conversations outside.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

So what I was saying was that affordability and respect basically is the all-encompassing thing that we need to deal with care for our seniors. They are our elders; they are the ones that really have built our communities. Though we have seen, and I certainly would give credit to the Minister of Finance regarding the sum of the funds that have gone into seniors care, unfortunately it only reaches a minimal amount of seniors and we need to see more support because we know that we have an aging demographic and it's going to continue to grow exponentially.

Seniors are an area that I really have been passionate about since I was quite young because my mother, of course, was a well-respected nurse in a seniors' facility. I learned really early on in an urban setting how important it is to support our seniors in community. As I mentioned earlier in our budget Estimates discussion, the times have changed. We don't have all the big families with family members around to help support each other in the same kind of way. So we have to rely on alternate kind of models in order to make sure that our seniors are cared for.

Some of the considerations that we have to deal with, and of course the one thing I haven't mentioned is housing. Housing, of course, my colleague, our leader, Jim Dinn, very passionate about housing, as are many, many of us in the House of Assembly. There are so many housing unknowns at this stage of the game. We haven't seen the significant investment that we need for the housing crisis that we're living in, and that intersects heavily with the seniors of our community.

One of the things is about how we need to look at new models. I certainly discussed this with the Minister of Seniors today, our Minister of Finance, about the number of different models, co-operative modelling, co-operative housing models, how they're a

huge success in many areas. We've talked about dementia villages, about how when people fall into dementia, how they can be supported in the best possible fashion without getting locked up in an institution and treated like a criminal when, really, they are in need of supports where you can have a safety net around them.

There are great models, and again, I'm going to give a shout-out to Connections for Seniors NL. Seniors NL itself obviously do fantastic work in the community, but Connections for Seniors are doing some extremely progressive outreach. They're doing jurisdictional scans internationally to find out where the best models are and what can possibly happen to support our seniors.

We need clear targets and public reporting, a provincial strategy for seniors' housing and homelessness prevention, and a structured engagement process around it. All of these things are really crucial to us building and improving the lives for seniors in our community. Like I said, fastest aging population in the country and, of course, heavily weighted on institutional care right now rather than preventative housing solutions. Those are things, I think, that are really important.

Again, some of the final comments that I will make around the connection between seniors and housing and that crossover, Speaker, is the overreliance on emergency housing. That is something that is important, that we need to support right now, but it is a band-aid solution, not unlike food banks. These are the things that we really, truly need to tackle and, unfortunately, we haven't seen that in the budget as it stands just yet.

Again, I do know that the Minister of Housing and Social Supports is very intent on making those changes happen. I hope that they come in sooner than later because there are a lot of people in need, and with the closure of Horizons there is a lot of

uncertainty and unknowns in the community right now.

So insufficient investment in affordable and supportive housing and gaps in the seniors' housing continuum, these are the things that really and truly have captivated my attention, especially when we talk about the line items in the budget Estimates. It was a great opportunity for me to learn. I will continue to learn and to serve the people of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, but certainly the province on the large, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, it's such a beautiful space. There's no reason in the world why we all can't be safe and well supported with the resources that we have in our province.

I do thank everybody for the opportunity, all the ministers who sat, their fantastic staff members and executive teams, and I look forward to further discussions.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you very much.

Yes, I would agree with everyone so far that the Estimates process is a very informative process. I really got a lot out of it. I only wish I had more time to ask the ministers and bureaucrats questions, because you do find out a lot more about the work that's being done.

I participated in two different sessions; one was in Municipal Affairs and community engagement. We talked about a number of issues, of course. One thing that came up was the Municipal Operating Grants. They are priced by population and a remote index, which I thought was interesting – how much each municipality receives – but we haven't had a raise in quite a while. With the rising cost of services and everything from

water chemicals to asphalt, it does become difficult.

The planning process, we've heard of throughout the municipal sectors of delays in getting plans through the Urban and Rural Planning Act process. Recruitment and retention of planners is a problem. I was very pleased to hear the deputy, especially, and others describe that they are trying new, innovative ways to recruit planners, but remember last year I think they said there were 67 planning amendments done? There are 36 outstanding this year, but there are 46 new municipal plans in the cue. That's a substantial amount.

The timelines for a municipal plan, depending on the complexity, we are hearing over two years.

AN HON. MEMBER: Forty-six?

J. PARSONS: Forty-six. That's a significant number of plans to redo.

The big issue of course, and my colleague from St. John's East - Quidi Vidi mentioned this as well, among municipalities is multi-year capital works. Multi-year capital works, we've talked about a number of times, and I will tell you more. I will tell you more, but I'll be very conscious of the time. The pre game is going to start in two minutes, so I'll keep it brief.

In Municipal Affairs, of course, they defer to TI when talking about this program. I expressed that it's very important that Municipal Affairs informs Municipal Infrastructure in Transportation and Infrastructure on this program, because Municipal Affairs know, or should know, what municipalities want and need, not necessarily what Transportation and Infrastructure thinks about how the program should be designed.

This has been the biggest issue. There have a lot of concerns that they haven't

been properly consulted, of course, but what we seen was no consultation and 15 communities were taken out of multi-year capital works, and seven that were left in got significantly less money. The minister said there are too many small communities in the program and it ballooned from the original 7-11. I can totally agree to that to a certain extent.

The program, as it's currently constructed, is not a good fit for everyone. The minister said some \$40 million was left unspent associated with this fund. Some communities do have trouble getting consultants. They have trouble getting projects tendered and funding spent. I don't dispute that, but that is the bathwater for the 22 municipalities. Many of them, this program is very useful, a multi-year planning tool. Sure there were some warts but, for most, it was their bread and butter when it comes to sewer, water, bridges, storm sewers and road rebuilds. This is the baby. We're throwing the baby out with the bathwater on this one, I think.

The change we're doing here is a disservice to the seven municipalities left in the program who will get less money –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. PARSONS: – and it will be a disservice to the communities who did make effective use of the program and won't get any more multi-year funding.

So I think the government should go back on this, have a look and see if there's a way that we can take a fine-toothed comb approach and fix the program, because it can be a much more effective program, absolutely.

I was also very pleased to participate in the Health and Community Services Estimates as well. Again, very informative. I wish we had more time. It's such a big department,

with so many services, but there are a few things that I would like to highlight that we had in the conversation with the minister and the senior staff.

We talked about the Medavie contract, and of course we've heard a lot about that in the House. There has been a lot of rhetoric about this contract being flawed. There had not been any changes to the contract and many services that are outlined in the contract have yet to be realized because it takes a while to implement the contract, allow different obligations by government, staffing levels, the contractors to get it done.

Outside of the desire to change how some air access is provided to Labrador, the staff seem to think that this contract will provide market improvements to ambulance and air ambulance services in the province.

The Health Accord: It was really great to hear a confirmation that the department does have a continued commitment to the Health Accord and to focus on the social determinants of health. That was really great to hear.

Nursing, education and staffing levels: There are no new nursing school seats. A commitment of course to fill existing satellite seats, but there is a 50-seat promise in the campaign. Some paid work terms, not all work terms will be paid but there is \$5 million allotted. They have not determined exactly how those work terms will be allotted yet.

Nurse practitioners, the nurse practitioner pilot, has continued with 48 nurse practitioners participating and I understand 25 interested. We have one year to comply with the *Canada Health Act* on that, so I'm looking forward to hearing more information about how that pilot will proceed.

In terms of nurse staffing, we still have almost 300 nurse vacancies in the province. There was, of course, a new travel nurse unit announced during budget. We know

that it's supposed to contain 25 nurses but the design has not been completed yet. There is \$6.5 million associated with that initiative, that has yet to be defined, but it doesn't include any incentives that may have to be included in that program. There are still \$38 million in for continued private agency nurses and there is no timeline for drawing down on that service.

Family care teams: There is still currently progression toward more family care teams, but more information is needed and the currently announced family care teams are at different levels of planning and will take a while to be realized. Again, we don't have timelines.

Long-term care beds: The budget included 45 new long-term care beds for the old Corner Brook hospital. There's no timeline for those. Now, based on the comments from my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands today, it sounds like that announcement may have been somewhat premature.

The last item we covered in Estimates – again, it was a bit of contentious issue but we tried to approach it in a very serious and, again, a non-confrontational way, talking about physician advisors paid for by MCP. The minister made a point at the beginning of the session that health care is not about politics, which I thought was reassuring. We found out there are four physicians paid through MCP for administrative work; three are in the department and one in the Premier's office. The physician employed as the Premier's advisor is paid out of the Health and Community Services budget item.

This advisor has given advice, occasionally, to the minister and to the deputy minister. The deputy minister made it very clear, though, that she only took technical, non-political advice from this individual. He has provided the deputy minister advice on the NLMA negotiations and medical school issues.

The minister said she didn't understand my line of questioning and how there could be any difference between the political and technical health care advice. I thought that was a bit puzzling, and we did have a little conversation on how there is a difference and how something could be politically expedient for the party or for the Premier or the brand that may be in conflict with technical advice the department should get and how they use resources or staff or employ strategies.

I'm not sure that I was able to convince the minister that there is a difference between a political and technical advice from a health care perspective, but she did say to me – and I will quote – being in Opposition, if you see something that may seem political, just ask us. That's what we'll continue to do every day in the House shortly after Member statements.

So thank you very much. It was a very informative thing. I would like to thank the staff and thank the ministers for their participation in this, and I look forward to doing it again next year.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a wonderful opportunity to speak to this Committee and, I guess, a chance to reiterate some of the points that I made before, certainly in Housing and Education. I'll start with Housing. I wasn't able to be here for the first few hours. I was at the Froud Avenue Community Centre annual general meeting. One of many great organizations.

Apart from the usual, I guess the typical business speech or address by the executive director, Enid Pendergast, our neighbourhood centres coordinator, Nikita

Ryall, we had the opportunity to listen to three guest speakers: Emily, Tariq and Gerald. They were three young people who came through the neighbourhood community centre or the community centre programs that they offer. If you look at the back of the room, there are the recipients of the Fry Family Foundation scholarships and I would say their story very much matches the story of these three people in that they owe their success to community centres.

Emily started out as getting, I guess, the services of the community centre, became a camp counsellor, personal care attendant and has moved on to a job within government. Tariq, another person who's gone on to university, but for me, I guess, one of the most touching stories was this young fellow Gerald, who's working driving heavy equipment in the mines up in Labrador. He talks about the fact that he would not be where he is today were it not for the Froude Avenue Community Centre or Bob Dawson or Enid Pendergast and the many people there who helped him along the way.

He couldn't be there tonight but he wanted to give that video address from where he was. He took that time out of his day to speak to the people who attended.

One of the lines I was trying to copy down he talked about was it's because of the work of community centres, of a neighborhood association, neighborhood centres that contribute to a safer, more high-quality living in our community.

Now, how do you put a value on that in terms of where would these young people be if they did not have the supports? Now we can argue well, they probably would have achieved the same success – maybe, maybe not – but they all went on to lead, not only productive lives in terms of what they're giving back to the community – and they are giving back to the community – but in terms of fulfilling their own possibilities and their

own quality of life and the fact that they feel successful, that they feel valued.

If you look at the Fry Family scholarship that partnered with the community centres, you look at the number of people who have gone on there to become doctors, to advance their education, to move on to other fields – all success stories. That's a wall of success, a wall of young people who had the opportunity to live to their fullest potential.

I speak as a teacher I guess in many ways, what we strive for is to see our students succeed. As a parent, we want to see our children succeed. As a grandparent, I want to see my own grandchildren succeed. I want all children to have, basically, the benefits and the privileges and the hopes and aspirations that my children would have. You cannot underestimate them.

Neighbourhood centres operate, I guess, in conjunction with the community centres and I look at – before I get into that, one of the reasons I fought so hard for a community centre down on Livingstone Street – I just happened to be one person along the way. There are many people in the community who have been fighting for that long before I got there and there are ministers, many ministers leading up to the current minister who were fighting for this as well, who found the money because I know it has that transformative power of bringing the community together and giving hope and agency and a voice.

However, the fact is, we cannot have status quo funding for them. Now, I'm looking at the three neighbourhood centres. They had, basically, I think nine years ago, an increase in their budget for the three from \$80,000 to \$89,000. So a \$9,000 increase. It roughly works out to be, Speaker, \$30,000 per neighbourhood centre. You think about it, it's enough to pay for one salary and a bit more but it's not enough to run programming.

I was talking to one of the long-term people with the community centres and it's interesting, he said that when they first started, they were at about eight hours per week roughly. You had to alternate the opening times for the community centres. It increased, almost to just about several days a week and now funding is such that they're back down to alternating the openings of these neighbourhood centres because it's on a shoestring budget.

That's the same for the community centres, as well, in that the funding has not kept pace with inflation. They are told you cannot rely solely on your core funding, you really have to supplement it with fundraising. The question I would ask is where? Where do you get these sources because it's a limited pool and everyone is chasing after the same dollars? Schools, any organization, they're chasing after the same dollars. There's only so much of that to go around.

I know that Froud Avenue lost many of their good employees to other organizations who pay a lot better. They can't hold them back. Again, I'm thinking in terms of what could be done to make it more attractive. I talked to multiple employees, they find their own health plan. They're putting money away in a RRSP, not a defined benefit pension plan.

I often thought, you know, I've talked to several of the union members, in terms of the public pension plan, what if you had these conversations about enrolling people in these community centres or any one of these agencies into the public pension plan and you fund them accordingly so that the premium could be paid? What about enrolling them into the public service pension plan? Is that possible? Have those talks occurred?

Again, Speaker, part of that funding would be pay the premium, but think about the benefits then and the encouragement that you would have to keep people there.

So for the most part, I guess, to me, it's an investment. These centres are an investment. As a teacher, I know that it means that the child in front of me has a fighting chance if they're getting the supports they need. I know that the Boys and Girls Club in Buckmaster's Circle, they have the Warm Bellies program, a number of after-school programs, that also provide food and make sure that people are fed.

I can't push these organizations hard enough because I think they do go back to what Gerald said – they make safer, more high-quality living in our communities. But I would argue that this young fellow, he's living his best life right now. They're all living their best lives, and it's because of the community centre.

So if we're looking to address the issues – and part of the promise, the slogan for the campaign was better health care, lower taxes, safer communities. I would argue that if you want better health care, better health outcomes, if you want safer communities, then you start investing in groups like this, in these organizations that actually lift people up and send them on their way, that give families a level playing field.

I know again talking to one of the long-term members there who retired, talked about how you could see over his length of time with community centres, you could see the difference. At one time, the staffing levels were such that work was done, that there was enough, that you had people there, that complaints were dealt with promptly. So you could see the decline.

Now I have a lot of hope then, at least here, with the budget, at least that there's a promise here to start hiring on. But I have a funny feeling we're going to need a lot more with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to get us back to where we were. But it's a start for now.

So if I could speak to one thing here in terms of this is find a way to support

community centres and to find a way to grow them, to make sure that they can retain their employees. Because it's through education and these supports that you're going to have a much healthier and a much safer Newfoundland and Labrador.

Related to this, and I guess one of the things I'll talk a little bit about when I get to speak – I have one more time to speak on the budget itself – has to do with some of the rules and regulations and it's interesting. I'll give you what I'm talking about. I was speaking to one lady over there who is currently living in a REIT and the rent is \$1,250 a month. Now, she would like to get back into Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Sounds like a simple process.

However, for her to do that, she would have to give up her Canada Housing Benefit for a year and pay the full \$1,250 to get on the list, basically, so that she would have to be in desperate time or the fear of being unhoused. I'm thinking, I've talked about the rules and the policies and somehow there's something terribly wrong with this. For her to get on the list and others, we've got to make sure that they're desperate first. But that's policy and policy can be changed.

I'll talk a little bit more about that, Speaker, when I have a chance to talk about health care and some of the other issues that we're dealing with here and related, but I think we can start improving the lives of people when we start looking at some of the policies, instead of putting policies up in the way, making sure that policy are working for people.

Again, I go back to Hugh Segal. He was a Canadian Senator, a Progressive Conservative Senator who fought for a guaranteed basic income. I remember the comments in his book, that we have a social safety net that's strong enough to entangle but too weak to lift up and it's these policies – Maggie Helwig, in her book *Encampment* documents the same traps in Ontario.

My colleagues talked a little bit about housing but let's take a look at the housing, because we need more non-market, community-based housing. I was speaking to the group, the Co-operative Housing Association of Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

J. DINN: – and it's interesting. They had a proposal to put up a co-operative housing development in a neighborhood in Mount Pearl and it was turned down. It was not quite right for the neighborhood. These are middle-class families, the co-operative model works, yet we find we're putting barriers in the way of organizations like this, that create affordable housing.

I've talked about here the elimination of the three-month, no-fault eviction, especially for large landlords whether that's Newfoundland Housing, St. John's Housing, REITs, any of the large landlords so that people can't just be booted out for no reason at all. There has to be a reason so that we can work on it. We've seen that. I've dealt with no-fault evictions with the city, with the Newfoundland Housing one time, not so much now, and with some large REITs and some large financial slumlords around here as well.

Rent and vacancy control: Until we can get the 10,000 home built or more – and I hope they are affordable – then you've got to find a way to keep people from being unhoused, of being driven into homelessness because they cannot afford the rent. Speaker, \$1,250 for a small apartment is a pretty steep price but that's what this lady is paying in a REIT.

Setting up land lease communities, land trusts so that government wouldn't be selling land but they could lease it to not-for-

profits at a nominal fee so that not-for-profits could indeed build more of their homes. I do believe that is the answer.

There's a place for the private market but not in deeply affordable housing. It's going to have to be more non-market, community-based housing and I know there was a report, I think, done by Annex Consulting that said that Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's were well under the national average of affordable housing, of non-market, community-based housing.

Speaker, in this last minute and a half or so, if I were to look at an investment, and not look upon it as a budget line but as an investment in a healthier community, an investment in a safer community – because that's what we're truly about – if we want to see fewer needles on the street, if we want to see less violence, then we start finding ways to support the organizations that are lifting people up such as our neighbourhood association, our neighbourhood centres and our community centres and to find ways to make sure that people have a decent place in which to live that's affordable and that they can also afford to put food on the table.

This government is going to be in place for four years – well, another 3½ for sure, but the fact is there's a chance we'll see what happens. But, in that time, we've got to make some move towards increasing the money that we give to the community centres and neighbourhood centres that keeps pace with inflation, makes sure the workers are well paid and have the best benefits possible and make sure that we have affordable housing as well.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When the hon. Member was just speaking on and he said 3½ or four years left, I

wasn't sure if the Minister of Forestry was happy or sad by that because I couldn't tell by his face. He looked a bit happy and then he looked a bit sad for a second, so I found it pretty funny.

It's getting to the silly hour of the evening, as we know, so I won't take very long, but I did want to take a couple of minutes just to highlight some post-secondary discussions that we did have. We would have loved to have a little bit more time when we were going through Estimates. It was a little bit long through a couple of sections, so post-secondary, I think we got about 30 – I'm not going to say why, Minister. There was a bit of a long section there, but I do want to say thank you to the fantastic staff in the Education department. They were excellent.

The minister was okay as well. He did a very good job making sure that the questions were answered and if we wanted some more detail. He found the appropriate staff person to provide that detail and it was just a great conversation.

As I said before, that's what these Estimates should be, a conversation, not a back-and-forth or an inquisition. It's more about a conversation, trying to delve into a little bit more of that information.

There were some questions that MUNFA had brought forward, that I asked, that I'd just like to highlight again. They talked about the time frame and some questions on the seats at the Board of Regents, how that's going to work, how they could get that process. I did ask the minister that. He mentioned that he would be working on that portion of that. I think, through meetings with MUNFA, it's an important piece from an openness and transparency standpoint with the university.

It'll allow them a little bit more clarity on the Board of Regents and allow the Faculty Association to have a little bit more say, which is an important piece from their

perspective, for sure. I think it's an important piece for the university.

The university stands as a memorial to those that paid the supreme sacrifice for our freedoms. That building is an important institution for the people of this province and it has been since its inception. I think it's important that anything we can do to support that institution but post-secondary is much, much more than Memorial University, which is a big piece. Some \$400-million-plus invested for the university.

I think MUNSU and students' unions across the province were pleased by the tuition freeze until there was an evaluation done. We did ask some questions about when the evaluation will be complete. We didn't get a clear answer to define that, but I know the minister is working on it; he did say that.

We did talk about the Auditor General very briefly and the work that she's done on the university. We called her in to look at the university's operations because we did realize that there was some incongruence in what the government was funding and what the university was delivering. It's about autonomy for sure, and education.

We don't want to sit in this House of Assembly or as government and tell the university what they should be teaching or what way they should be teaching it. It is taxpayer money that's going in there, so it does have to be looked at and evaluated and ensured that it's in the best interest of all involved. So that's an important piece.

MUNFA also did mention that they didn't want the students to be impacted by any budgetary cuts, for lack of a better term, based on the fact that the university and the changes made from an international standpoint, for international students coming in.

It crossed both departments that I was sitting in the Estimates for, so I did bring it up in Education, about the fact that we

should be lobbying our federal government to increase the immigration numbers for Newfoundland and Labrador for students as well, in particular, because a lion's share of those individuals that get educated here, create lives here and it's what we want to be looking at.

So, in both Estimates, they did talk about that and give us some indications. We understand that Memorial University faces a structural deficit, which is something that they're working through, and making sure that we had expectations. What are the expectations for the next generation of students in nursing, engineering, skilled workers? Clarity matters on these types of things.

Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic, as well as our trade institutions, are so important for the future of the economy of this province and transcends right across. If they're successful and we have individuals moving into the trades area from a trades perspective, also through College of the North Atlantic and Memorial, those are going to be good news for the industry that requires those individuals.

I could go on and on. I do know that my colleague who spoke before me from Burin - Grand Bank did a very good job of talking a little bit about that, but I think it's important for us all to understand the role that post-secondary plays in the province. If I didn't get an opportunity to stand up today, to say the good work that's happening at the university, there's a significant, positive things that are happening at the university, but there is also things that we need to improve.

So I look forward to seeing where the minister moves on some of those things over the next coming weeks, months and years to see those improvements for the students that we all represent and I look forward to seeing those changes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, are we ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

On motion, Report of the Social Services Estimates Committee, carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for the historic District of Placentia West - Bellevue, the Concurrence Motion on the report of the Government Services Committee.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Thank you.

As they say, Speaker, they save the best for last.

The whole Estimates process was very interesting actually. I first want to thank my colleagues here on the government side because it's hard to come into Estimates and not be able to ask questions and stuff like that. I think, in the first couple of Estimates, I did ask a few questions. It went over well with our own caucus and all that kind of stuff, but it wasn't something that we were used to.

The Member for Lake Melville, the Member for St. George's - Humber, the Member for

Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels and my two co-chairs as well, the Member for Lab West and the Member for Lewisporte-Twillingate, it can be a daunting process, but I think the thing is the Table Officers keep everything straight for us and stuff like that, so I definitely want to thank them as well and our Pages. We can't do very much around here without our Pages and especially the Members on the opposite who were asking the questions. I thought that your questions were very thought-provoking.

When you look at the Government Services Committee, it's about running the government. It's about running the operations, I guess, of the government. We talked about Consolidated Fund Services, Executive Council, Department of Government Services, the Public Procurement Agency, Public Service Commission. These ones here are very important to the operations and the running of the government.

In the Government Services Committee, we also had Labrador Affairs, the Department of Finance and the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. I found the Department of Labrador Affairs very interesting actually, and very eye-opening, I guess. Not only because my colleague from the great District of Torngat Mountains was so knowledgeable, but it was a lived knowledge, and you could feel it. It wasn't like a lot of stuff had to be looked up or anything like that. I will commend the minister that her staff was very much on point as well.

It's always good to go into Estimates with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and their staff because this is how we're going to spend our money or this is how it's going to be done. Ironically enough, he sat by the guy that accrues the money and this guy spends the money. And my colleague from Health, we can't leave

her out, being a very large expenditure as well.

Speaker this brings me to the Department of Finance. The people that came in from the Department of Finance, I got to concur with my colleague that these are some brilliant people – these are some brilliant people. I was amazed. I have a business degree and I was learning constantly from those Estimates. With the Department of Finance, you have a few different subheads and heads, and it was so neat to see how we're raising money and spending money.

But what encapsulated me was the minister's knowledge in such a short amount of time being the Minister of Finance. It's obviously a very important role and, like I said, it was very eye-opening and it was a great experience. But I commend everybody in the House for making it a worthwhile exercise. To come out with no amendments, I think that was well in itself.

The last person that I would like to commend is the Premier himself for presenting his first budget as the Premier. He's told us all we're doing things over on this side, I guess, in this government, in our mandate from the purview of what's best for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I couldn't be prouder to stand by our Premier and do that for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the people of Placentia West - Bellevue. Because, if we're going to turn a corner, then we have to make some big decisions.

As I've said in this House before, there's a big difference between the word "risk" and "risky." Just adding the Y to that name automatically makes you kind of trepidatious, I guess, that you're not going to fall into the wrong information. So like I said, it's good to go through the process. Again, I commend Cabinet on presenting this budget, and the Premier for directing his Cabinet to present the budget that was presented.

With that being said, I will take my place. Again, it's an honour and a privilege to be here in this House representing the people of Placentia West - Bellevue, and it's always going to be an honour to be in this House.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a privilege, of course, as my colleague said, to always rise and stand and represent the people who put us here. I'm happy and proud to represent the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

I'm standing tonight to speak to the Government Services Committee. As the Member just outlined, there are so many subheads and departments that are under this particular Committee, the Government Services Committee, but I'm going to talk, in particular, now about Women and Gender Equality.

I had the privilege of being the minister of that portfolio. I was proud, actually, our premier made it a stand-alone portfolio. At the same time, it was also a stand-alone portfolio in Ottawa. Many would agree, especially stakeholders, that there are a lot of very important topics that come under that portfolio that deserve – it's unfortunate that the supports and the resources are needed because it often deals with a lot of topics that are very heavy: intimate partner violence, gender-based violence, pay equity and equality all around.

It certainly was an honour. I would like to thank, actually, the deputies that I had under that time in that portfolio, and I will list them: Judith Hearn and Candice Ennis-Williams. We did great work while we were there.

I will start off now by talking about the pay equity. As we know, pay equity didn't happen, didn't exist until we brought that in for the public sector, the public service, as well as pay transparency. Now, that said too, we were one of the only jurisdictions to not have any legislation, but it was our government that actually brought it forward.

That said, it was met with criticism, of course, from the Opposition at the time. As a matter of fact the current Minister of Health when she was over here on this side, as well as the Minister of Justice, actually called for us to scrap that legislation, that we brought forward and to start over.

Not seeing anything in this Estimates, that's not happening. I would put that question to the minister who is now the current Minister of Women and Gender Equality, where is she to on that process of scrapping that legislation and starting it from scratch all over again?

Hopefully we'll see or we'll get some updates, perhaps before this session ends. As we know, the session has been extended until June and that's something that hasn't been talked about. We do know that we also brought forward a component of pay transparency. We do know that also works in conjunction with the Department of Labour. I also was appointed to the minister of Labour, prior to the election. It was funny because the legislation that was then in Women and Gender Equality, that work was done and then it had moved on to the next stage to develop the regulations, which is now in Labour.

So it would be good to hear something from those ministers on exactly where that is. Again, I will state for the record, we all know the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, for a very, very short time he was also appointed Women and Gender Equality but then wasn't the Minister of Women and Gender Equality, it was given to the Minister of Health, the Minister of Labrador Affairs and the Minister of Reconciliation. So it's a

lot of portfolios jammed into one portfolio and there was concern, of course, from stakeholders that it wouldn't get the attention that it deserved.

From stakeholders, we're still hearing because they're a lot of things that were promised and that were said that we didn't see in Estimates, in Justice and Public Safety or in Government Services about certain things like ankle monitoring for intimate partner violence. My colleague stood up here earlier today and asked about making gender-based violence an epidemic and labelling it an epidemic.

That was something that those Members stood for loud and clear and bold when they were on this side of the House but now they're in positions of power and authority to make it happen and we haven't seen it yet. Hopefully, we will see it in their term, while they're ministers. Hopefully we'll see that. They know that they have our support –

SPEAKER: I would ask the Member to address the Chair.

P. PARSONS: The Member knows that she has my support in working and, of course, another former minister next to me, my colleague here from Placentia - St. Mary's, done good work in the portfolio. That was something that they were calling for, so I'd like to see where that process is with regard to scrapping the legislation and starting it from the beginning to see where that pay equity legislation is, as well as the pay transparency.

Also, something that I was proud to bring in, with my team in Women and Gender Equality, was the call for a reconciliation council for Indigenous women across Newfoundland and Labrador. They actually presented a report called *Hear Our Voices* document that came on the heels of the federal inquiry, the National inquiry into Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The Indigenous women and girls and gender-diverse people here in our great province took the time to develop a report, *Hear Our Voices*. They presented it to government at the time, myself, the then minister for Justice, as well as the premier. One of the big recommendations was to create this reconciliation council.

I was proud to say, it was actually at the gathering in North West River, when we were there and the premier at the time was there with me and we, with the women's group, at the gathering, announced that we would be honouring that commitment to give them a reconciliation council. That was done and there was some wonderful work that had gone on,

Again, I certainly would like to give a kudos and a hats off to the then deputy minister, Candice Ennis-Williams. She put a lot into that, along with our team in Women and Gender Equality at the time, really good work. What was important is they were shoulder to shoulder with the Indigenous women and girls from across Newfoundland and Labrador.

The two co-chairs who I would like to thank as well and pay recognition to are Odelle Pike and Charlotte Wolfrey. Great work that's been done on that very, very active committee. Again, I would like to question the Minister of Women and Gender Equality, what's the status of that now? Is that something that's going to be funded?

I also was fortunate to sign the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, to sign that bilateral agreement with the federal minister, Marci Ien, at the time and we saw significant multi-million dollars come to Newfoundland and Labrador for stakeholders. There is actually still about a year of funding left in that national bilateral agreement,

Of course, I'd like to know where that funding is going. Will the gathering that the Indigenous women and girls and gender-

diverse people do annually here in this province – it was a big funder that we funded. I'd like to know if that's going to continue; if that's still a priority; if the minister has met with this reconciliation council because we were actually leaders in the country to have to create such a Reconciliation Council working shoulder to shoulder with government officials and Indigenous women from across Newfoundland and Labrador. That was a great first that we're proud of.

Also, another stakeholder group that is very deserving of funding and resources and for the first time in history to receive government funding when we were in office, when I was minister, is Quadrangle. Now, Quadrangle is an organization that supports the 2SLGBTQIA+ here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We know that they're never received government funding or resources. This organization hasn't. We funded that organization with some significant dollars.

Again, there's no mention of this. I would like to hear some updates from the ministers. Is this still a priority? We do know, again, that the portfolio has been swallowed up in a larger portfolio. We are hearing from stakeholders. My colleague mentioned earlier that she hears from stakeholders about the continued call for a committee on intimate partner violence – a committee to be formed to report to the minister and to report to the minister's team. That's something that we know – I mean, the minister gets up and says they're experts, they're on the front lines, we need to fund them and we need to work with them. So let's see that. Let's put the money where the mouth is; let's see that commitment.

We do know that these people are experts on the front line. They're literally dealing with life and death situations, as we know. Because when women, in particular, and gender-diverse individuals are reaching out to these organizations, it's often when their life is on the line. Look no further than what we're seeing in our courts currently. We just

had a delivery from a jury recently involving intimate partner violence.

We know as well that in Labrador alone, the average of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls that have resulted in death are higher than the national average here in Labrador. That's not a farce; that's not a title that we want to own. But it's a very serious one.

These Members when they were on this side of the House were very, very vocal. Saying we can do this. It takes political will for ankle monitoring. It takes political will to label it an epidemic for resources to go there. They're in the positions of power now, so I really would like to see that happen and like to see them honour their promises and their election calls because they made these promises, again, while they were on the campaign trail.

Intimate partner violence, again, we hear from stakeholders. We do know it's a growing problem. It is certainly an epidemic.

Again, the pay equity, I would like to go back to that. It was met with much criticism. With that said, we are actually the government who brought it in. Pay equity did not exist prior here in our province. But we brought that in. We always say in this House that no legislation is permanent. It can always be built upon. It can always be brought back to the Legislature for debate and for changes, where necessary, so let's see it.

The minister actually called for it. It was actually the Member for Torngat Mountains that actually called and said scrap the legislation and start from scratch. So let's see it, if she's actually going to do that. She's in a position now to do that.

I want to know where that funding is going. We still have the bilateral agreement. That's money from the federal government to support stakeholders and this very important work. I'm concerned that we're

hearing from stakeholders that this part of the portfolio is simply on the corner of a desk and it's not getting the right fully deserved attention which it needs.

Again, calling on that Committee for intimate partner violence, have these people, have these professionals from the front-line services to have this committee and to report back to the minister and to government on how we can best build upon the improvements that have been made.

So we'll look forward to seeing the changes in the pay transparency. The Minister of Labour is involved with that one, as it's in regulations now, because that's where we know where the regulations labour code goes and so we look forward to those updates.

For now, I think that's it for me for this one and we look forward to seeing this information. It's something that we'll certainly be calling for.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

What a beautiful day outside today; let's talk about snow clearing. The Progressive Conservatives did a good job on snow clearing today, yes.

But as we know, nothing changed from last season, until this past season. There are still the same 14 routes being done, 24 hours a day. The minister and I disagree on that, but sobeit, that's what we're here to do.

The minister did say during Estimates, though, that staffing and operators were at 27 or 28 out of 50, so we're short some 20 to 25 and they are looking at adding more routes, which is a good thing, but that's going to require obviously more staff. Concerning that we're short a couple dozen

now and we're going to need to add more, that's something we hope that they can get some people hired there.

I just want to touch on multi-year capital works; that's something that I've heard a lot. I was at the Northeast Avalon Joint Council meeting in Mount Pearl a couple of weeks ago and that was a hot topic there.

Municipalities and MNL have said they don't feel like they're meaningfully consulted. The announced changes were made without this consulting and a last-minute technical briefing, to them, they don't feel was sufficient. They request – they being Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador – improvements but not these changes. The revised program does not adequately address the long-standing concerns that they've had.

The biggest thing for them, Speaker, is the shift from a three-year to a four-year cycle. Some serious concerns around that. By extending this cycle, without providing increased funding, it actually reduces your per year allocation.

One of the other things that I heard specifically, I know from the mayor of Torbay who wasn't very happy was that it was only the big seven, we'll call it, the other 50 municipalities are now out of the multi-year capital works, which means it's hard for them to plan for the future and they're kind of, for lack of better words, fighting hunger games with the other municipalities for funding.

MNL is asking government to recommit the partnership. Municipalities need transparent, collaborative relationships with the province. They don't feel they have that right now. MNL wants immediate review of the announced changes. Now, I know the minister has since had meetings, which is a good thing. They said, basically in summary, municipalities asked for improvements to multi-year capital works

and what was announced does not reflect these recommendations.

One of the reasons the minister gave in Estimates for these big changes was that municipalities were carrying over money that wasn't spent. So I say, address that. Address that part, put some parameters around carrying over money, but don't give them less money. When you change the program from three years to four years and you're giving them that same amount of money, they're not getting the same amount of money, they're actually getting less money, as I've said.

I asked the minister during Estimates if the municipalities were going to get the same amount of money, and he did nod, yes. We know now, that's not the case. Not saying there was anything disingenuous when he did it, but as we know now, as it has come out, what MNL said, that is not the case.

Lastly, I just wanted to touch on the hospital, the badly needed new hospital. I touched on this before. Instead of building a new hospital, we're now going to renovate a hospital that has parts that are over 100 years old.

One of the things with St. Clare's Mercy Hospital is that we know it's an aging hospital, it's old, but they did the facilities condition index. That's the FCI; that's what governments use to evaluate and determine is it more cost effective to renovate a hospital or replace it. The number they use, anything above 30 per cent, you should replace it. St. Clare's came in at 53 per cent. To me, we're throwing good money over bad here on this.

At that 53 per cent, that actually put the hospital in a critical category. Typical industry standard, I like said, is 30 per cent. We're at the 53 per cent now and we're going to update and renovate with no costing done on it. We don't know what it's going to cost. That's something for me, Speaker, that really stood out.

Lastly, we talked – as was in all Newfoundland and Labrador today, the RFP for the swing vessel wasn't awarded, which is concerning if you live on Bell Island or the Change Islands area. The blue book promised to have one RFP out for a swing vessel, and they were going to build three ferries. As we know, in the budget there was a little bit of money, I think, for some planning, so no new ferries in the works. If we are going to build them here, which is going to be very challenging – you know, that's not something you can put your order in and get a ferry next year.

With that, Speaker, the Estimates was a good program. It was a good exercise. We did get a lot from it, but a lot of concerns in the TI Department on where money is being spent, specifically in the roads. As said by the Member behind me from Burgeo - La Poile, rightsizing a budget is a cut. Call it what it is; it's a cut to the budget. Now he's offended, but he'll be okay when he gets home to watch the Habs game.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, are we ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion has been carried.

On motion, Report of the Government Services Estimates Committee, carried.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

After a very productive day here in the House, I move, seconded by the Member for St. George's - Humber, that we do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Before I adjourn the House, I just want to say to all Members that this started out as a bit of a heavy day at the beginning, but I want to commend all Members of the House of Assembly. I think that we still carried on regular business, we had some pointed questions during Question Period, as we often do, challenging questions, but guess what? We went through it without chirping, without any disrespect and we're here until 9 tonight, and we had a really good day. I think we've show that we can do it.

So thank you, everybody, for your co-operation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Certainly, thank you to the Deputy Government House Leader on short notice and stepping in. I really appreciate it.

This House do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, May 26, at 1:30 p.m.

Thank you.

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