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*Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA*

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The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Admit strangers.

**Government Business**

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

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

**SPEAKER:** We will now be debating the subamendment to Motion 1.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

**J. WALL:** Good morning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that.

It's always a privilege to stand in this hon. House and represent the fine people of the District of Cape St. Francis. I'm happy this morning to speak to the subamendment to the main motion.

Speaker, the last time I had the opportunity to stand and speak, I discussed early childhood education and I touched on Education. This morning, I'd like to go back to that to speak to Education. I do know that the Estimates were last night and it was a very productive evening, no doubt, but I want to speak to Education this morning, Mr. Speaker, with respect to *Budget 2024*.

First of all, I want to go back to when the current Premier and this government came into office in 2021. I'm going to quote from the red book. At that time, Mr. Speaker, the red book promised "restorative justice practice as part of a holistic student and faculty approach to improving the school climate, developing meaningful relationships and enhancing the learning environment of the school."

It went on, Mr. Speaker, to say that it promised to "work to further implement these principles into all of our Province's schools to nurture healthy relationships build on foundational respect for all members of the school community and support the development of the policies and practices that reinforce inclusive behaviours."

Speaker, that is from the red book; that is what the Premier promised in 2021 before the last election.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say from my district and from my colleagues I've heard in this hon. House with respect to education, and it's been said here over the last number of days, that we have many schools that are unsafe, that feel unsafe: the teachers, the faculty, the staff, the students. I've witnessed that in my own district. I've had the opportunity to discuss it with the Minister of Education and that's the reality.

The reality is that many schools have become increasingly unsafe, teachers and students feel vulnerable to the various forms of violence and it's impacting on how teachers deliver the model of education in 2024 and how the students learn. It is impacting how our teachers teach and how our students learn. Teachers feel they're not being supported. I'm not sure if government realizes the realistic violence prevention strategy that works in many of the schools.

So we have many issues going on in the school, Mr. Speaker, the lack of mental health supports, colleagues here from the hon. House have mentioned that as well from different parts of the province and the lack of mental health supports are compounding the issue; of course, the general lack of options and the treatment options that are there; and, of course, the addictions that some young students, young people have, all plays a part of the lack of mental health supports.

The chronic absenteeism that's in our schools on a regular basis – that is alarming. The Child and Youth Advocate expressed concerns about the chronic absenteeism under this government, which is caused by many factors, multiple factors and one of them, Mr. Speaker, is violence in our schools. Schools must be safe and supportive spaces but, unfortunately, all too often that it not happening across our province. The teachers and the students here in Newfoundland and Labrador deserve better than what is going on currently, right now.

I feel that this budget was a missed opportunity for K-to-12 education in our province. It was missing key elements that the teachers have been saying that they desperately need. They need them to deliver the education to our youth. I know that the Minister of Education is aware of this, but teachers are upset and they're feeling that they're being disrespected and ignored by the decisions that are being made.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at *Budget 2024* – and I stand to be corrected – I don't think violence was mentioned in that. But violence in our classrooms and around the schools is getting out of control. I've witnessed this in my district with the schools in my district. I've listened to the parents whose children are being bullied and impacted on a regular basis.

We wonder going forward, teachers and students are often at a grave risk of physical injury and, of course, cyberbullying, which is rampant, so I'll ask: Why was it not even mentioned in this year's budget as a measure for the government to address the issue? Again, Mr. Speaker, in my district, I've heard from parents, who, one mother had to quit her job because her child could not go to school because of issues of bullying, harassment and violence – physical threats of violence where the RNC have been called in our schools.

For a mother to have to quit her job to stay at home to look after her son, to provide at-home teaching to her son because of what's going on in the schools, Mr. Speaker, I can't fathom it – I can't. It's more than concerning when we have instances like this going on. I'll ask: What does this budget do for that? How is this budget going to curb what's going on in our schools with respect to violence?

Mr. Speaker, we all know the Think Tank that the minister spoke about many times here in the House that took place. On December 14, the Education Minister announced that the government and the NLTA would be hosting the Teachers Think Tank, saying: "Teachers are facing recruitment and retention challenges that need to be addressed in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Teachers Think Tank will provide a dedicated forum to hear directly from teachers and determine opportunities to address those challenges head on."

Well, Speaker, in February, the government heard that loud and clear, no doubt, but what has been done going forward with this budget to address that? Teacher retention is one thing, but when you listen to the NLTA, well, the NLTA feels abandoned. I'll quote the post-budget news release from the president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, he says: "Our association has long been shining a light on the hidden reality in our schools, a reality that is making teaching and learning in this province exceptionally difficult. To say I am disappointed in this budget and with this government is an understatement."

These are not my words, Mr. Speaker, not the words of His Majesty's Official Opposition, these are the words from the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, the men and women who are in the classrooms every day providing education to our students and this is how they feel. It's a heavy statement.

When I think back on the years I spent in school, and I can go back to my kindergarten teacher, Ms. Shea, who is still alive and well in the Town of Pouch Cove, I can think up through the years with respect to the teachers I had, Ms. Maynard, Ms. Kehoe, Ms. Connors, Ms. Slaney, and going through the years in school and the drive as a student to do your best. I still remember it. I am 50 years old now, but I still remember it. That has carried forward with me all my life to do my best, not just to get a passing grade, but to strive for an A. I've always had that with everything that I do.

Mr. Speaker, I'll go back to the NLTA again. They graded this budget and gave it an F. The NLTA issued the report card on this year's budget grading it an F for no plan of action; an F for no vision in education; an F for no improvements in teaching conditions – we have all heard about the teaching conditions here in this hon. House from around the districts – an F for no improvement in learning conditions. A failing grade from the teachers, whose boots are on the ground in the classrooms day after day, giving an F to this government on *Budget 2024*.

How does government expect to retain our teachers in this difficult time when they feel that they're not being supported going forward?

It causes me to reflect back on my personal life and what you wanted to do and how you wanted to do it and you strive to do better. Well, obviously, I'll go back to my question that I've said in the first two times I spoke and I'll go back to the question I asked two years ago: Will the budget meet the collective needs of the people of our province? I always go back to that question when I'm thinking about and discussing and debating the budget.

The constituents in my district are first and foremost with respect to the collective needs and here, with education, it's a missed opportunity. It is a missed

opportunity. Again, the NLTA president said: "Government has once again missed an opportunity with Budget 2024 to focus on the current challenges in our education system ..." – a missed opportunity.

"The working conditions for our teachers ARE the learning conditions for our students ..." How do we expect our students to get a first-rate education from teachers who say that they're being ignored or left out?

Speaker, the questionnaire that over 2,200 teachers and administrators took a little while back with respect to the Think Tank gives great insight to what these professionals are doing on a daily basis – a great insight. Many of the questionnaire issues were not addressed. So when we look at what was discussed in that questionnaire and how teachers and administrators are feeling in the education system, they're stressed and they're anxious.

The question I ask is: Why hasn't government used this budget process to address the survey findings? One is: 26 per cent say the morale in schools is low and they're more stressed and more anxious – 26 per cent. Of course, we have a Member from across the way who always quotes that facts matter and these are the facts.

I'm going to go down through some of the survey findings, Mr. Speaker. Almost 66 per cent of substitute teachers are not seeking permanent employment – 66 per cent of substitute teachers in our school system here in Newfoundland and Labrador are not seeking permanent employment because of reasons like dissatisfaction with the hiring process, stress, burnout and the lack of full-time support in their roles – almost 66 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, that has an impact on the mental health and well-being of teachers in our province. So I'll ask: What is this government doing in this year's budget to address the survey finding that 78 per cent

of teachers indicated their demands of the workplace are negatively impacting their own mental health and well-being – 78 per cent? That number is astounding.

At the end of the day, when these teachers are going home to their families, their mental health and well-being is being affected.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that everyone has difficult jobs to do at times. In my former role, before I came to this House of Assembly, I had 28 years as a group home councillor with mentally delayed and autistic adults – I know stress. I know how it impacts your mental health and well-being and you do the best to mitigate that, but when we have this going day after day, with respect to their mental health and well-being, it's astounding.

Another percentage from that survey is on teacher burnout. Almost 87 per cent of teachers have experienced teacher burnout.

Speaker, the government opposite might not want to hear this today, but this is reality. This is what's coming from the teachers with respect to education. We all want a positive working environment, we all want that, it's stressed here many times, about a positive working environment, but 60 per cent of teachers indicated that their work environment has worsened over the last year – 60 per cent. Speaker, 17.5 per cent of teachers indicate that they are considering leaving the profession. Speaker, these numbers are troubling.

Of course, the workplace violence in schools, what's this budget doing to curb that when 37 per cent of teachers indicate they've experienced workplace violence; 15 per cent, emotional abuse; 22 per cent experience physical violence, threats of physical violence, verbal abuse. It's going on daily.

It's something that we need to be aware of. It's something that government needs to

address. I understand and appreciate the stress that's on the minister with respect to the schools in the province and what teachers are going through, but this is what we're hearing from the NLTA. There are many faults identified by the teachers that are still not addressed when you're looking at the class composition, when you're looking at adequate resources. I know full well what teachers bring to the table on a daily basis with respect to providing resources for their students, I know.

This is spoke about many times in this House: class size. Large class sizes impact the quality of education, workload, preparation times. Of course, as I said, the impact on the mental health and violence and aggression in the workplace, Mr. Speaker, all very important, all needs to be addressed. I'll go back: Is it meeting the collective needs, what is in this budget for the education system from K-to-12? I don't think so. I don't think so.

Speaker, I'd like to continue on about Education, but after speaking to some residents in my district since I spoke last and listening to the debate here in the House of Assembly, I do want to touch on IVF.

I do know that my colleague from Topsail - Paradise, that I've heard over the last three years, has brought this forward many times, when he was in that role. Again, I'll go back to the red book from 2021 with respect to what was promised for in vitro fertilization here in the province.

It says, "The Furey Government will support people who want to have children and help reduce current obstacles. **The Furey Government will increase access to fertility treatments in the Province, working with stakeholders to enable IVF services in Newfoundland and Labrador**" – enable services.

Now, I'm fully aware, with respect to what has been given out with respect to the

\$5,000 subsidy provided per cycle, I'm aware of that. That came out in a news release in March 16, 2022, from this government, \$5,000 per IVF cycle available to applicants who meet the criteria up to a maximum of three cycles throughout their lifetime.

Mr. Speaker, I have constituents in my district who are faced with the cost of \$30,000 per cycle; a family from my district travelling to Calgary who are dealing with the added costs of what comes with IVF and, of course, it's not covered by provincial health insurance and you have additional costs of travel, of lodging, of meals, of medications, whatever comes across that needs to be incurred when this family is trying to have a child.

When I go back to what was promised in 2021 by this government with respect to IVF services and what is not here for the people of this province, and it's not in this budget either, I go back to the question: Is it meeting the collective needs? No, it's not.

Newfoundland and Labrador is only one of two provinces that doesn't offer IVF – one of two in the country. Yet, families are struggling with the failed promises that were put there by this government. Speaker, it's simply not good enough. Yes, the \$5,000 per cycle is welcomed, but that \$15,000 over the course of three cycles doesn't come near to the \$100,000-plus that's going to be required for a family who wants to have a child.

When I look at this, Mr. Speaker, it bothers me and I urge the government to look at this once again. It's not satisfactory to the people of the province when it comes to IVF.

Speaker, I have a minute and change left. The last time I spoke I said I wanted to speak on transportation and, of course, the paving in my district. I'll briefly touch on that with respect to Route 20.

Many areas throughout the district are deplorable. To the minister's credit, we've had many conversations with respect to the work that needs to be done in my district. I'm very hopeful that he will look at that, as he said he would. I thank his staff who have come to my district, the engineers and different officials have come to view the areas that are dangerous driving. We're at a point now where we have vehicles coming in different lanes to try to avoid the bad places in the road. Three times in two hours I had phone calls from near accidents in my district from people who are just trying to get to and from, especially from the Town of Flatrock into the Town of Pouch Cove.

I appreciate what he has done so far, but I ask the minister that he would give fair consideration when it comes to that in my district.

Mr. Speaker, I'll always end as I always do, I thank you for your attention, for the attention of the Members opposite and it's always a pleasure to represent the District of Cape St. Francis.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I want to take again an opportunity to stand up and speak today and, as always, start off by talking about what an honour and a privilege it is to represent the District of Stephenville - Port au Port.

As my colleague just finished talking about, roads and transportation issues are part of the ongoing concerns in my district, just like they are in, I suspect, districts of everybody on this side of the House. There seems to be a need for a significant amount of investment, whether you live in the Town of Port au Port West or Kippens or on the Port

au Port Peninsula, even a small little road, Wheelers Road, the kilometre of road that hasn't had any resurfacing on it for years and years and years and needs to be touched up. Again, I've presented petitions in the House on that and will continue to do so in the hope that at some point these type of road repairs will be made.

This subamendment talks to many different failures of the Liberal government when it comes to issues in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I'm going to touch on a couple of them this morning.

The subamendment that my colleague introduced yesterday talked about its failure, the Liberal government's failure in all its years to introduce a comprehensive poverty reduction plan like the one they cancelled. It is knowledge, it is proven, it is fact that this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, prior to the Liberal government taking over, had a Poverty Reduction Strategy that was recognized as one of the best in the country. When the Liberal government came to power, for whatever reason, they decided to scrap it. When they scrapped it, they have, almost 10 years later, not been able to come up with a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy to replace it.

That matters. Why does it matter? Let me tell you a little story that someone sent me in an email. It starts by saying: Hi Tony, I wanted to share a little story about what's happening in our community when it comes to seniors. We went to one senior's house where a single woman was living on a worn-out bed in the middle of her living room. She was hooked up to wires for what seemed to be COPD. Her home was in very bad shape, she was all alone. For us visiting her like this, it was absolutely heart wrenching.

Another senior living alone is very scared, terrified, thinking about how she's going to keep her home on her fixed income. Another couple who are both experiencing health issues are scared for one another,

thinking about how one will be able to survive without the other. It's so sad. Seniors are really scared about the cost of living and barely making it.

These are real people, real people in Newfoundland and Labrador who are hurting and this Liberal government has failed to introduce a poverty reduction strategy. Even yesterday, we heard the minister talk about the fact that we're still working on it. We've heard announcement after announcement after announcement, but, again, that's all we're hearing is announcements, we're not seeing any plans. There has been no plan for the last years. There is currently no plan and, quite frankly, that's just not good enough. That's not good enough for the people who are mentioned in this letter; not good enough for seniors all over Newfoundland and Labrador who are continuing to struggle. That's one of the failures that I've identified here.

We've also talked about the idea of failing to retain health care professionals, such as nurses and doctors, while wasting a fortune to replace those they have driven away. Again, we've all talked about the challenges with nursing and nurse recruitment and the shortage of nurses in our hospitals, in our long-term care facilities and the fact that we have continuously relied on all of these people for so long to do this.

So, again, let me tell you a little story. Let me read out another story that I've gotten. It says: As an RN for many years, I wonder have you considered that health care facilities are not meeting any kind of budget requirements. When you think about the fact that there's a \$600 million line of credit that has been maxed out by the health authorities, you can see where they might be coming from.

The government is funding all the agency nurses; therefore, even new grads are not being hired. Here, everyone just goes along as if this is normal. I have worked casually in my retirement, only for the past 1½ years.

There is less and less work available for me and other casual nurses. How is that even possible in a time when we have such a significant shortage and are using agency nurses?

She goes on to say more and more agency nurses are coming. Management shows no accountability for their budgets or for the staff retention. I know of full-time RNs taking six weeks leave from here in Newfoundland and Labrador to go to Nova Scotia where they will make substantial money for that time. A bit of a circus if you ask me, she says. What does the minister say about this?

Same happens the other way, an RN from Nova Scotia comes here for six weeks from her job over there. We are not solving anything.

The agency nurses are not bad people, but there is not the same sense of accountability since they are not here for long. They are not part of the community, nor are they here long enough to evaluate their performance. In my last place of employment, three months was the orientation period for an RN. These people have come and gone in that period of time. Where does that leave our standard of care? Not sure why, but lack of attention to detail here seems to be a pattern.

She says, I did get some work, I have shifts next week, but nothing booked for the summer yet.

Casual RN willing to go to work, lives in Newfoundland and Labrador, but has not been offered any work. Amazing to hear this.

I would love to see all graduating nurses have full-time positions with proper training and mentoring. Not sure there is any will to do this while government provides a blank cheque.

So, again, that's from a nurse who retired 1½ years ago, who is willing to go back and do casual shifts and work in our health care system, lives here in Newfoundland and Labrador, pays taxes here in Newfoundland and Labrador but, at the end of the day, is not getting the work that she's willing to do. But she sees a significant challenge in our health care system about how we're running things. That's just one example of that particular thing I just talked about.

There is another one here that I want to talk about briefly and that is a subject I brought up a little while ago in the House when it comes to the discrepancy in wages between the nurses that provide chemotherapy service in urban versus rural settings. This is a letter she sent me that she had sent to the Premier. I'll just take some quotes from it.

It said: Mr. Premier I submitted a PDQ for a JES job reclassification in June of 2020 – June of 2020 she submitted this reclassification – and today received a decision that my request was denied. This letter was written April 21, 2023, three years after submitting the request, the application came back and said it was denied. But this was written to the Premier in 2023.

Registered nurses throughout this province administering care for cancer patients in the same manner, requiring the same knowledge, skills and competency to do the same job, either in St. John's, Corner Brook, Gander or any other satellite site around the province, yet government has decided that RNs in rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve less pay than the RNs in St. John's.

In addition, we may have less patients in a day but no other supports are provided and there are only two RNs staffing a unit that administers chemotherapy, does video conferences with the oncologist, provides emotional support to the patients, as there is no social worker, no clerical staff to answer the phone, administers IV

medications and IV fluids to outpatients from ER, do blood transfusions and run clinic, providing wound care debridement, suture and staple removal, all while providing chemotherapy administration in the oncology unit, just as RNs do elsewhere in larger centres with multiple supports.

I am appalled with almost 40 years of service as a registered nurse in this province that you feel – you being the Premier – the lowest salary scale is acceptable for us in rural Newfoundland. It's no wonder we all want to leave this profession. It is ridiculous that rural RNs administering chemo in this province are made to feel less worthy than their counterparts in the city.

Again, she goes on to say: Premier, I am calling on you to change this and explain the rationale why it's felt RNs in small communities, doing multiple RN and support staff duties, deserve less.

Again, that letter was written in April of 2023. I raised this matter in the House in this budget sitting and talked about the discrepancy and it still exists, so it's time that this discrepancy be eliminated.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** I am sure we'll get an update, hopefully – or better still, let's make sure that the people delivering the service, those RNs who are providing that chemotherapy service, that they get that update. Let's make sure that they get equal pay for equal work, which is what we've always talked about.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Another thing that we talked about in this House, and we brought up in our subamendment, was the failure of this government to guarantee people access to a primary care provider.

We know whether you agree with the statistics or not statistics or we can argue back and forth about whether it's \$100,000 or whether it's \$150,000 or whether it's \$125,000, the bottom line is, there are a significant number of people in Newfoundland and Labrador who do not have access to a primary care provider. That is a fact.

It was a little bit discouraging yesterday to hear the minister talk about nurse practitioners in the sense that he doesn't want to fund a private system and have nurse practitioners practice in their private clinics. I don't disagree with him that billing MCP is the solution, but I also don't agree that having seniors and others having to pay to see a nurse practitioner is the right thing either.

What government ought to be doing is finding a way. If you can't figure out a way to reimburse the nurse practitioners who are willing to provide this service, then figure out a way to reimburse the patients.

I also would disagree, I don't think nurse practitioners are part of the problem, I think they're part of the solution.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** I believe that they deserve to be looked at. When we talk about trying to recruit, the minister mentioned the fact that they're short of nurse practitioners in their Family Care Teams. Don't blame that on the nurse practitioners and say you must go to work for a Family Care Team. That's the fault of your failure to plan.

You've made an announcement of all these Family Care Teams and continue to make announcements. Yet, if we go and ask: What is the complement of staff in the Family Care Teams? How many are actually fully staffed? What does the skill mix look like? Are they full? How many vacancies do we have? That's not the fault of the nurse practitioners; that's the fault of

government. That's where that one lies. But, yesterday, it seemed like nurse practitioners were being told: If you want a job in Newfoundland and Labrador, then you've got to go work in the public system; you've got to go work in our family care clinics. Yet, we have students, right now, enrolled in our nurse practitioner program who I have spoken with who have not been offered jobs.

Well, let's think about it. Are they really working in the private sector? When a physician bills MCP, is that not a private practice, billing MCP? Are the monies that we're paying out to US doctors to provide virtual care, not a private practice? When a doctor goes and works in an emergency department and he's paid an hourly rate to work in that emergency department, is that not a private practice? Isn't that a private individual with a corporation set up to bill. As a matter of fact, I've been told that in some cases they continue to negotiate the rate because we have had situations where, even in our regional health centres, not just the small ones that are continuously being closed, but in major regional centres where they've struggled to find emergency room physicians and have been offered up to \$500 an hour to provide that service.

Again, I go back to the point, let's not start looking and saying, this is private versus public. It's nothing like that. What we're talking about is people in Newfoundland and Labrador who deserve to be able to access a primary care provider and the nurse practitioner can fill that role. They fill it now. We have nurse practitioners who work in intensive care. We have nurse practitioners who work in cardiac care. We have nurse practitioners who work in the family care clinics. We have nurse practitioners who work in long-term care. We have nurse practitioners who would like to set-up their own practice and provide service in their communities, where they are desperately needed. We should not be penalizing them for wanting to do that.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** We should be working with them to find a way to make that happen because, ultimately, that is what government ought to be doing. It's about providing access to primary care providers and nurse practitioners are part of the solution.

Not every nurse practitioner will want to set-up private practice. Not every nurse practitioner wants to work for a Family Care Team, but that doesn't mean we should clump them in and say, no, your options are limited; that we're not going to give you any more options. That's the problem I've got. That's the problem I see here is that we're boxing them in. We ought not to be doing that. We ought to be going in and meeting with nurse practitioners and saying: How would you like to practice in Newfoundland and Labrador? Where would you like to work? How can we help accommodate that?

Let's do that as opposed to turning around and putting up roadblocks because that's exactly what we're doing right now. And it's not just a roadblock for that nurse practitioner, it's a roadblock for that senior citizen who can't afford to spend \$35 to go see a nurse practitioner and then is forced to go to into emergency rooms and sit for 15 or 16 or 18 or 24 hours when they could have been seen by a nurse practitioner. That is a problem.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** What's our solution to blocked emergency rooms here in the City of St. John's? Build larger emergency departments. That's not the solution. The solution is not making more space available for people to go to, it's how do we keep people out of emergency departments. That's what we ought to be doing.

We recently heard an announcement about urgent care centres, a welcome announcement. How are we going to staff

those? What's the staffing model look like? I believe nurse practitioners can play a critical role there. They could play a critical role but find different ways of compensating. It doesn't mean you have to be always in one box.

I could work as a nurse practitioner in the public system. That doesn't mean I wouldn't want to probably go out and do some shifts in emerg and be compensated in a different manner. That doesn't mean, if I work in a community, in an environment where I have set up my private practice, that I won't go back and work in emerg and do other shifts in emerg, just like our doctors do all the time.

But, again, let's not get caught up in the fact that we're saying it's MCP. It doesn't have to be MCP. It could be another way that we find compensation to be able to do this, but the key to all of this discussion is simply: How do we turn around and ensure that people of Newfoundland and Labrador have access to that primary care provider?

What nurse practitioners do in their communities, along with physicians, is provide that continuity of care, because that is so, so important. People like to be able to go in and have that continuity of care; that familiarity with someone. It's not always possible, but I think that when we talk about the nurse practitioners and the role they can play, I think there is something that can be done.

I also believe that primary care paramedics – I've talked about this before – have a role to play. I'm not sure what our new ambulance system is going to look like when it comes around or what's going to happen, we're going to have central dispatch and stuff, but imagine the fact that maybe someone like primary care paramedics can go to people's homes when they're called and maybe they can do things right there on the spot, that don't require that individual to have to be transported. They're services that they can provide with

a skill set, with a set up that links them back to emergency departments, that the person may or may not have to be transported.

How do I know that? I know it from my own experience with my father when he was in his later years and my sister – I think I've told this story before – had no knowledge of health care so when dad coughed the wrong way at times, I think she'd called the ambulance, and I had the bills to prove it. But at the end of the day, many times these paramedics came to the house here in the city and evaluated dad, calmed him down and they left without him. That was a good thing, because he didn't have to go and sit on a bed or in a chair in the emergency department for umpteen hours instead of being able to be treated and left. I think there's a real opportunity there for those type of services to be enhanced and keep people in their homes.

That's why we ought to be looking at all the options. We shouldn't be talking about a casual nurse who's retired who's talking about the fact that there are no shifts available. I shouldn't be talking and hearing about students who are currently enrolled in our nursing programs who haven't been offered full-time jobs.

I kept saying this and I keep repeating it and I'll keep repeating it, that when somebody gets accepted into our nursing programs or any of the other programs, LPNs or areas of health care where we have an immediate need, we ought to be offering them full-time jobs on their way in, not on their way out.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** That's something I will continue to say.

People can argue about numbers and argue about this and say what happens if we get too many? I keep saying wouldn't that be a great problem to have.

Now it's not only about health care; it's about education. As I have said before, how many schools are closed, not because of storms or teacher workdays, but because of no staff here in Newfoundland and Labrador? That's not good enough. We ought to be doing the same thing now in the education system with the students who are enrolled in our education program. How do we turn around and make sure that the people who are in the programs want to stay and work here in Newfoundland and Labrador?

That's where recruitment starts. It doesn't start when they graduate, it starts when they go in the program. That's how you recruit, that's how you retain and that's what we ought to be doing all along and continue to do that.

Again, those are just some of the subamendments that we talked about when we talked about all of this stuff. These strategies about failing to retain health professionals, failing to guarantee people access to a primary care provider, failure to have a poverty reduction strategy.

I don't know how we cannot have a poverty reduction strategy after eight, nine years in government, even after a promise last year that we were going to have one all ready and we still don't have it. We're seeing the results of that. We are seeing the result of that by these stories, and every single colleague here on this side of the House and I'm sure on that side of the House, have the same stories to tell and we will be telling them, people deserve it.

It's not about whether we bring it up or somebody else brings it up, it's the fact that these are real people in Newfoundland and Labrador who are looking to their government to help. That's the challenge we have. We have to find ways to do this. I don't want to stand up here and say what we ought to have done.

We ought to have done, but let's forget that; let's talk about what we're going to do. We need to be able to turn around and be able to offer comfort to people. We need to be able to offer solutions to people and that's exactly what we're going to do here in the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** As I keep saying, we want this place to be a place where people can afford to live, where they can access health care, and we're going to continue to do that, where education is inclusive and is available. That's the type of Newfoundland and Labrador people want to afford to live.

I've said before and I'll say it again, it's not about where you come from, we want it to be a place where people come to. We want it to be a place, not where people leave, but actually where people live.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

It's, once again, a pleasure to get up. I think it's my third round on this budget and speaking on the subamendment.

I want to thank our leader, actually just then, for setting the bar to what we stand for as the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador and very important issues that mean a lot to everyone in this province, regardless of what political stripe you are. I want to commend him for bringing those issues out because that's what we all stand for and that's what the people of this province expect, nothing less, so I thank him for that.

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, when you start off, I guess we're speaking on the subamendment, now maybe I'll speak a few minutes on that. It was his motion, I seconded it, of course, my colleague from Terra Nova introduced it, but I counted up there are 25 – we have a list of 25 failings of this government.

We probably lowballed that number because we could have had a lot more. I mean, yesterday when he started speaking, he stopped at five minutes to introduce the amendment, and I didn't know why he was starting so early and he almost ran out of time. It just goes to show the issues that are out there.

Every one of those failings means something to – we talk about it here in the House every day, we hear it as MHAs in our offices with our constituents – it's failing to guarantee people access to primary care providers. It's for failing, in all its years, to introduce a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Plans, something we were known in 2015, the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador was considered to be the best poverty reduction plan in the country and actually it was even outside the country.

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

**B. PETTEN:** But they cancelled the poverty reduction plan because it wasn't a Liberal plan, it was a PC plan and they would never want to attach themselves. But that's something that I think is an inherent problem here in the province is not doing things for the right reasons. It's doing things for political reasons.

I've said this many times in the House, I stand by it and I'll follow this through the rest of my political career, you'll never go wrong by doing the right thing. You may look sometimes, you're doing it and you might say well, the Liberals came up with that or the NDP came up with that or whoever came up with it, but if you take that idea and you think that's a good idea and

it's going to help someone, you'll never be faulted for taking someone else's idea, if it means the betterment of life of someone in this province and the people of this province, you'll never go wrong, ever.

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

**B. PETTEN:** When I look through – and I'll keep going: failure to ensure women are paid equitable for work they do. Something my colleague from Harbour Main and the shadow minister for Women and Gender Equality is bringing up and it's something that we've made an issue. We brought that up in the last year or two, this government never hardly referenced it. It was on the paper for years and years and years and we revived that issue.

But why do we have to do things like that? We have a department now for Women and Gender Equality, why isn't that department speaking up? Why did we have to get our side of the House to make that an issue, to bring that up as an issue? And we're still not there. Government tends to say the right things, the nice things that they want to do, that they agree, but you don't do it. Again, it comes back to doing it for the right reason.

I've spoke about it in this House many times, when I look at making decisions for the right reasons, it's courageous. Sometimes you got to do courageous things and being courageous is not always the most popular thing. Again, I go back to doing the right things because that's somewhere where my theme, kind of, was thinking today and my last time speaking on this year's budget, which happens to be, I think, the ninth budget I've done now in the House and spoke on, but I talked about this previous times and when you go back through the years, it's being courageous.

Again, that's not always the easiest thing to do, it's not always the coolest thing to do and sometimes you're out in the wilderness when you do those things, but if you do those things, being courageous is doing it

for the right reasons, doing it for the people that live in your province, doing it for the bigger picture, not for the small stuff.

I see now the carbon tax battle: the letters, the theatrics, Ottawa is a bad place to be, Justin Trudeau is a bad person, carbon tax is terrible, it's not the right tool for right now, we want it paused – all the key words – fighting with Ottawa, Ottawa is the bad person now, you never go wrong in this province – I've said this before and I said this last week, you can never go wrong fighting with Ottawa in Newfoundland. It's always a great card to play.

I'll say this now and I've said it before, three years ago – and it bears repeating and I keep repeating it – we stood in this House and this side of the House pleaded with government late into the night to stand up and oppose the implementation of the carbon tax, regardless of if the people could say it was a federal measure or whatever. Regardless, have the courage to stand your place and oppose the federal government on that issue, it would bode well for this government and the people of this province. That's what they want and that's called leadership.

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

**B. PETTEN:** When instead, minister after minister got up in their place and they spewed the virtues of carbon tax: How wonderful it was. We couldn't even mention the word climate change and we were climate deniers. You mention the word carbon tax, it was outrageous where we're gone to, but we have a job to do and we have courage.

It comes back to the courage and leadership. We don't mind showing leadership on issues and when you speak up you get criticism from it. As recently as this past week and weekend, I think, people accused me of not caring about climate change because I think the people got bigger things on their mind.

Do we believe in climate change? Sure, we do. But do we think that the people here now, that's the number one issue you hear? You don't. I do not hear that from my constituents. I don't know if any of us hear that in this House from our constituents on a regular basis.

Do I not think that what happened in Port aux Basques wasn't a serious incident? Absolutely. Did it have something to do with climate change? Maybe. Maybe it was just a massive storm that would have hit regardless; we don't know that. People can make their own judgments.

We're not saying that, and I've never said that. Are we disbelievers in climate change? Absolutely not. But we're doing what we're put here to do and that's represent the people that put us here.

Now, the popular thing three years ago was everything was associated with climate change and we have to do something to combat it. But now their saying climate change is still important, but we have to find a better way. All we're saying is climate change is no less important, but our residents, the people of this province, have bigger issues in the forefront, here and now, facing them today – concerns, I should say, climate change will always be an issue – concerns facing them today. That's the issues that I'm going to speak on and issues we're going to fight for.

That doesn't mean that I'm a climate denier or I'm against the climate change. Absolutely not, but that's the world we live in. It's somewhat of a cancel culture that if you speak up on those issues, you're going to get drowned out by the voices of social media and people are going to try to intimidate you into talking their language.

That's not the book I subscribe to, Speaker, and I don't know if that's the book that most of my colleagues subscribe to. The book we subscribe to is – what we're elected to do here – represent the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador to the best of our abilities and deal with their issues that are affecting them here and now, right now, today and that's what we bring to this House of Assembly, day in, day out.

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

**B. PETTEN:** It's fine, I'll go back and reiterate a bit more about the courage piece of the leadership. Our Premier – there was a time he used to go around with his shirt collar undone, the sleeves rolled up, him and the prime minister, when the prime minister was popular, crowds used to follow him around for photos and what not.

Believe it or not, the man is so unpopular now, but there was a time that he would come here and people were lined up to get selfies with him – people were lined up to get selfies with the prime minister, it was a ritual. They were having parties on the hill. All the Newfoundland expats were up on the hill. There were celebrations galore. Anywhere you could get with the prime minister was good.

My colleague for Mount Pearl - Southlands brought it up, I think it was a few years back here, about that infamous picture on the red sofa up in the prime minister's office. It was a full house; you couldn't jam on it. The prime minister almost had to sit on the floor, everyone wanted to get on the sofa with the prime minister. It was the place to be and there are photos around. There are actually photos of this. I've said it before and when my colleague for Mount Pearl - Southlands brought it up, I laughed because I said I remember talking about that.

It reminded me that that's where things were, it was Trudeaumania phase 102, because his father was 101 and now we have 102. Everyone was emulating; he was the king of the hill, there's no doubt about it. Our Premier was following him around and it was: My good friend, Justin; my good friend, the prime minister; my good friend, Justin Trudeau; my friend, my friend, my friend.

Now, it's him – now, it's him. It's that prime minister. And we're fear mongering. It's unbelievable.

But the problem is, Speaker, people see through this. That's a common thing. People laugh about this now, they go, why, what happened? Again, I'll go back to my original commentary, it's about courage.

So when the prime minister is going around lining up for selfies and they were lined down the streets, it was really humorous: sleeves used to be rolled up the same and they'd have the top button undone and the tie would be twisted. It was like you had to look and only you knew who they both were. You didn't know who was who; it was the best of times; it was like, snap, snap, snap, flashcube bulbs flashing. What a time they were having.

That's when you should've shown the courage. That's when we look for courage from a Premier to say to the prime minister: Do you know what? I agree, the carbon tax will never help the people of the province. It's not cool because he was so popular and you have to ride the coattails of popularity. Everyone was hung on; everyone was holding on to Trudeau; he was bringing everyone around; he had the big cape.

The only one left on that cape now – but he just jumped off for political reasons – was our Premier. There's no one else around the country hung on to the cape. Because if I'm not mistaken – correct me if I'm wrong – is there any one Liberal government in the country, provincial government, that are Liberal? Isn't that the one that's here and they're not Liberal anymore now. No, they're not Liberal anymore now, they've changed. No, no, no, that's right, there's no Liberal government here anymore, no. We're not sure, it's a bit of an identity crisis. I spoke about this last week and it really bothers me.

Speaker, one of my biggest fears last week – and I said after – was I'm not much of a

singer, but I almost broke out in song. I was fearful that my colleague from Cape St. Francis, who is by far the best singer we have here. The Member for Ferryland, he's not so bad, but the guy from Cape St. Francis, he's a good singer.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** He is good.

**B. PETTEN:** He's a great singer.

I was wondering with the new signage and everything, where they're not attached to the prime minister anymore, I said, where have all the Liberals gone? In the back of my mind the music was starting to clue in and I said, now, stop, get that one of your shoulder. Because I can be distracted and go down different paths that I don't want to go down. I was fearful at the time. When I left the House, I said to my colleague from Cape St. Francis, I was fearful that I was going to start singing. That would not do anyone any good.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** No.

**B. PETTEN:** Me, or no one in this House of Assembly or anyone watching, Speaker, but just to that point.

That's what you're dealing with. That's what we deal with. That's our current leadership in this province. Is that in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? Anywhere there's a camera, anywhere there's a flash, anywhere there's an opportunity for a photo op, anywhere where you're always on the right side of the argument.

I'm going to mention a couple of things here now. We all talk about it so why not say it? I'll say it, which I tend to do, we had an issue going on with Hockey NL. It was the handshake incident. I'm a big hockey person, a big hockey fan, I didn't agree with it. I don't think any of us agreed with it. I think it was a very unpopular decision.

Yet, we had the health care providers ready to go on strike. We had people, protesters, we had everything going on in the province, there were lots of bad issues and the Premier was avoiding all those issues. The Association of Allied Health Professionals, I think was the group that were near on strike. They were crying out for the Premier's ear – no response.

Then on Twitter, he condemned Hockey NL's move about the handshakes. That's fine, but he played it into: he was taking a leadership role, speaking out as Premier of the province that that was wrong.

That's fine, but everyone seen through that. People were laughing – that was laughable. So what direction do you get? He should have been to the table with the Allied Health Professionals trying to get them to negotiate a deal and get them back providing health to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**B. PETTEN:** Let Hockey NL, let the parents, let the user groups complain. They did and they won the battle, but it was a bit of dismay because we can't find the Premier, yet he's out on Twitter calling about the handshakes.

People see through this stuff. That's not leadership, Speaker, that's not courage. That's the easy way out. That's picking the most popular thing you can hang your hat on. That's populist politics is what it is. I've said that term before, my colleagues have heard me say it many times, populist politics.

Populist politics is not always making the right decision. That's making the most popular decision. It's not the hard decision. It's the easy decision. It's the lazy decision. It's not where people want you to be as leader of this province. It's not what we look for, not what our seniors look for when they're looking for dental care, when they're

crying out for home care or just trying to get into long-term care or the affordability issues. They don't care about the Premier speaking about handshakes.

They want his ear on those issues. They don't care about seeing a snap of him down at the Uber announcement yesterday, which I find that a bit odd actually because that's direct competition. I'm not against Uber. I've used Uber outside of the province, but the big hullabaloo over Uber. We have other businesses here that there are some mixed views on it. People can have their own opinion on that. I can share some views on that, too, but is that where we need to be? Is that the most important thing that's happening to us?

You are travelling around the world on your speaking tour while the House of Assembly is open. I don't really know if that matters much to the people that are struggling in Newfoundland and Labrador. I would think not. We had the steps full of fishermen there a while ago and I've seen pictures served down around Boston, down at photo shoots with the processors while the harvesters are on the steps. It's just tone deaf. It's all about photo ops, but it's all about no courage. That's what this comes down to: no courage, no leadership.

The Premier can differ and people can differ and argue with me but when you really pull back the layers, that's what this is. That's not leadership. It's not. It's one of the biggest facades out there. Unfortunately, whether they like to hear it or not, the reality is we're living through this last number of years – almost five years – and that's what it's been.

It's more of a facade than anything. It's so thin. It's no depth there. We see through it and more and more and more people see through this, and this goes back to the carbon tax debate. Are you really serious about your debate? Again, if you were serious, you would have stood up long ago? When it wasn't popular and cool to go

against the prime minister, that's when you should have stood up. That's where you missed the political point. That's where they don't get the point. That's where the public have tuned out a bit there, Speaker, because people see through that stuff. Too little, too late. People are frustrated. It's pure and simple.

I can take great humour and great poking fun but sometimes it's fair game and it should be highlighted and I think it needs to be spoken.

The last few minutes – roads. We've got the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure who he stood up the other day and he proudly talked about the paving of the Witless Bay Line to my colleague from Ferryland and they've got paving up in Trepassey. Nothing on Route 60 that I was quoted here a couple of years ago that you need the helmet on to drive the road. You couldn't drink a coffee. Nothing has changed. That's still as it is.

That bump up by Hickey's Building Supplies in Upper Gullies, you can take the front end out of your vehicle, that's still there. You got Witless Bay Line – he's looking after the Witless Bay Line. He's doing a bit of Trepassey, because he's good. He's spreading it out to all the PC and Liberal districts, but it's one point that we're missing there, Speaker. That's where he lives.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** What? No.

**B. PETTEN:** That's where he lives. Now, I don't think he votes for my colleague from Ferryland.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** He might.

**B. PETTEN:** You never know.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** He should.

**B. PETTEN:** He should. That's right. He speaks up for the right issues, but that's where the man lives. He's getting up in the

House and he's telling – the general public don't get that. He's getting up in the House and he's talking about, b'y, I've been fair. I have Witless Bay Line, we're doing Trepassey, but that's where he lives.

My colleague from Harbour Main stood up in this House many times – I actually done a petition one time, too, and that's the one with the helmet and the coffee came into play. The Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation was the minister of the day, we're trying to get that section of road paved from Kelligrews right up through Upper Gullies, Seal Cove and Holyrood. Years later, how many ministers have we had since then? It's still not done.

Why? Because there was a government that brought in a Roads Plan; they were taking the politics out of paving. But if anything, they've put more politics in paving than ever before and, ironically and sadly, there's more money into paving than ever before. So what does that amount to? More happy Liberal districts. That's all it is.

The only one gets black gold, as was referred to many times with asphalt, you got to be a Liberal. Don't matter if you're a resident of Newfoundland and Labrador. Don't matter if you pay taxes, because there are people in all our districts that pay taxes, too. Actually, there are a few Liberals around our districts and that's the reality.

But all you have to do, in my closing seconds, Speaker – I have realized we missed the boat for years, and I'll be there for years arguing this point. I come down to it. All you have to do is get the newly appointed Minister of Housing to call the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, tell him what roads you need paved. So get the Minister of Housing to call the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and your road will be done.

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

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

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

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

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

Getting up after my colleague from Conception Bay South is certainly a challenge, no doubt about it, the points that he's brought up there. Anyway, it's always nice to get up and represent the people who put me here, the District of Exploits and they've got challenges as well. Like some of the issues that the Member just brought up, they carry right into my district, and I will start with the roads. It seems to be a big topic. We got to be fair.

There are amounts of roads and paving in different districts that we're not getting in our district. I've seen it. We've all been there. We've all witnessed it. In the five years that I've been there – apparently there's a five-year plan. There is a five-year road plan, apparently.

I think it was last week I got up on a petition about roads. The minister got up behind me, answered the question and I thank him for that; but if I don't get anything this year, I can wait for year one, year two, year three. Now if there was a five-year road plan back five years ago, I'm not included in it yet. Now we're pushed down the road to eight years, nine years. What is it, a five-year road plan, one-year road plan or eight- or nine-year road plan? Because that's where I'm to.

I don't understand this five-year road plan. I really don't. I've got challenges with that, because I'm being told by four different ministers of a five-year road plan that every time I go to them well, it's going to be in the five-year road plan. But then again – and it was just said the other day – I've been here five years now, I have to wait another five years. Now I'm in a 10-year road plan. Then

there's other districts that seems like they can get it done right away.

You have to be fair when it comes to the roadwork in the districts. You really do. I don't mind a five-year road plan. I don't mind waiting my turn. I really don't. There are 40 districts. There's only so much to go around. But you have to be fair.

Pushing a five-year road plan down to a 10-year road plan, I don't believe that's fair. I really don't. I don't believe that's fair and I think we should be getting more of our roads done in different districts than probably in some of the Liberal districts that are down there now. Because that's where it's going.

An example on roadwork: The former minister last year told me I was getting \$4 million worth of roadwork in the Exploits District. Now, Route 360 comes off the highway in my district, which leads to his district. Now, part of my district goes about 30 kilometres down Route 360 to his area, so he gave me \$4 million worth of roadwork, but guess what direction it went in? Route 360, down in his district.

Those are the kind of things you have to contend with. That's on the highway. Really, my main routes in my district, Route 350, that is the main route, but I have 351, 351A, 352 – those are the other off-routes there, but they're all important. Those are the main routes in my district and the attention that's given to those routes is deplorable. I've asked the minister for different routes to be looked at, some fairness put into those areas, some attention put into those troublesome areas that I need work with.

It wouldn't take a lot. It really wouldn't. It wouldn't take a lot of pavement or a lot of roadwork. I'm not looking for a 20-kilometre stretch by no means, but a couple of kilometres here, a couple of kilometres somewhere else just to keep the main traffic flowing good so you don't end up with those

big damages and issues that are created by deplorable roads.

When it comes to roads, yeah, we got them, everybody got them, but if there's a five-year road plan, I'd like to have a five-year road plan. I'd certainly like to be included in the five-year road plan, not a 10-year road plan.

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

**P. FORSEY:** The cost of living is something that's brought up time and time again. I hear it more and more every day in my district and I hear it more and more across the province.

If you stop to any restaurant, you stop to any gas station and you're talking to the next person, you're using separate pumps but you're talking to them, and each one is saying: B'y, how far is this going to go? When does this stop? I can't afford to go to St. John's. I can't afford to travel from here to there. Regardless of what the government across the way do think, carbon tax has a big influence on the cost of living, it really does.

I know the Premier is out: B'y, I don't agree with it. I don't like it. I don't want it. Yet, when it was introduced to come into Newfoundland and Labrador, every one of them across the way got up and voted for it. They got up and voted for the carbon tax. Now, we're paying the price of carbon tax, each individual in this province is paying the price of carbon tax in the cost of living when technology should be introduced for carbon tax, especially in the bigger industries.

The bigger industries can be more streamlined to address carbon tax and to address the carbon issues that we have, not to tax each individual person, each individual that got to go feed their families. They got to go to work and to even try to get to work today to feed those families is an issue.

Maybe the big businesses say they can't afford the carbon taxes, but they got to come up with technology. When it comes to technology, I remember years ago, automation became a big thing. They found ways to go into automation to streamline their businesses. It probably cut jobs at the time, but automation was a big thing for them. They found ways to do that. They got the cost to go into the automation. So those businesses need to be finding more technologies to streamline the carbon issues that they have, not a tax from the Liberal government in Ottawa and the Liberal government, right now, in Newfoundland and Labrador who introduced the carbon tax to us and we now have to pay.

It's too late when it's done because it's done now so we have to pay and those people with the cost of living today, it's very, very stressful. Like I said, they're trying to get to work. They're trying to feed their families. There are lots of things that they can't afford to do.

When I look at a single mom, you know, she calls me and says: Mr. Forsey, is there anything out there to help me because I need some things for my two children? I need some food, some groceries, probably toiletries, anything to help along the way. That's heartbreaking when you've got to hear those stories, it really, really is.

I know you fellows are hearing it, too, across the way, but the carbon tax is a big part of that issue. Carbon tax is applied to fuels and gases that comes into our Island.

Food security is another thing. Every piece of food, every time we go buy food, the food at the grocery stores right now are maxed – they're maxed all right but I'm afraid they're going to go further. People every day go to the grocery stores to buy those groceries and they tell me: I went to the grocery store and \$500 in half a cart. They come out with 2 bags of groceries, probably \$200 or \$300 in those two bags of groceries. It's amazing

what's happening with regard to the cost of living and carbon tax is a big cost of that.

Again, our food security: when we're trying to increase our food security for farmers, the farmers got to buy equipment. They've got to buy fuels. They got to buy fertilizers. I know diesel is different for them, but they've still got to buy the parts. They've still got to buy the equipment. They've still got to buy the fertilizers to work that farm to increase our food security for what we need to be doing in this province.

Now, I know the government touted a year or so ago that we were up to 20 per cent on food security or what we're using, but with the lack of farmland that we have and the efficiency to use that farmland, I don't know if we're really at that point at this moment. Because to be able to utilize that farmland and what they've allocated for it and the red tape to get the farmland actually serviced and get it going, by the time the new farmers, the new applicants get into those farms and by the time they go through all the red tape, by the time they go through all the requirements and cost, next thing they're up to something that they never even thought they were going to be involved in. So what do you see? I'm gone. I'm done, I'll walk away, I'll take my losses right now and I'm gone.

So if that's the way of increasing food security, then we have to look at other ways. Right now, the farmers are even having trouble to get their fields ready for this year, basically because of the cost of living, which what's part of the cost of living? The carbon tax which is a big part of their problem.

If we're going to increase our food security here on this Island, we're going to have to look at other ways and means of being able to support our farmers to be able to grow our crops so that we can have the crops grown in our province and shared to the stores and every Newfoundlander and Labradorian can have access to some food

on their tables that we can supply here in Newfoundland and Labrador, rather than depending on other parts of Canada.

Right now, in other parts of Canada we're hearing it all the time with climate change, they're into droughts already in the western part of Canada, they're into droughts already and the dry climate conditions. So that is going to put pressure on the amount of food that's distributed across Canada, even to our province.

We have got to find better ways, we have to be able to treat our farmers more fair, we got to be able to come up with a more land plans to be able to address those problems of food security in our own province so that we can supply food to our seniors, to ourselves, to our young people, to all families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. That's something we certainly need to address. That is all a part of the cost of living.

Another part of the cost of living right now is the sugar tax, another great tax they brought in. Let's do it, let's bring in the sugar tax now to make people be healthier. The healthy choices they're making are not healthy choices because of food security. They can't afford to buy the bananas. They can't afford to buy the oranges. They can't afford to buy those fruits and healthy foods that need to be. Why? Because of the cost it takes to get here.

Our sugar tax, all it is, is going back in towards government, because they can't afford to buy the milks, they can't afford to buy the fruits, they're not living healthier and they're still buying the cheaper drinks that's out there. That's the healthy choice they're making. That's where they're to; that's the choices that they're making, is buy those drinks because they're – of course, we all know it, we see it in the stores and we see those sugar drinks are on the shelves and price is there. The cheap prices and that kind of stuff for the drinks and they just pick it up and they have it there. You put a litre of

Pepsi compared to a two-litre milk, what's cheaper to take off the shelf? The litre of Pepsi. They're not going to take the milk and they can't afford to buy the fruits and vegetables.

So we certainly have to look at ways – and the taxes are government grabs. They're not a help to the individuals. It stalls the buying process of the province. So the cost of living right now are those two taxes that are being a great burden on Newfoundland and Labrador. It's the carbon tax and the sugar tax, so we need to certainly address those issues.

Housing is another issue that I've heard throughout the Central area. I've heard it across the province. We've seen it. We saw the tent cities and we saw the issues that are there now. But even in my own district, housing, in Central Newfoundland there is about 350 on a list for housing. That's a lot in Central Newfoundland. It really is. I got it in my district because they can't afford – again, it goes down the line. You take a single parent. They can't afford to go out and rent a place because the rents are even high. So you buy the food – everything is high on the cost of living. So that parent that I talked about earlier, with two children, trying to get a place to rent, she can't afford to do all that. She really can't afford to do all that.

Housing has become a big issue in our area. That single mom that needed housing to support her children to be a little bit more affordable, that she can be able to get in there and support her children, be able to go to work and give them a good education, give them a good home, give them a good day-to-day living, that's where we're to. That's what we need to be doing.

The housing in Central Newfoundland, I've talked to people and they've been living in sheds. It's sad but they're living in sheds. Going through all winter, living in sheds. Families calling me saying: Mr. Forsey, is there a way that we can get so-and-so into

a housing unit? Are there ways that we can get this done? He's cold. He can't get a place to rent, but the housing units are not there.

We did have some housing units in the Central area that needed to be refurbished and still needs to be refurbished. We certainly need to get those units up and running. That's the ones that's already there. They've been there a long time. Some of those have been there a long time in the district, but they can be refurbished and work done on them to at least get some families into those houses as soon as possible.

We have lots of relief. I just said there's about 350 on the list. So there are lots of people who we can certainly put in those houses. I know there are priorities for each one, but we certainly need the housing to go into it. That's one use and then we need some more affordable housing in there anyway, especially for those groups of individuals who are trying to find apartments for their families and to be able to have somewhere to live, to be comfortable and to be warm and all they want is just to live comfortable and have somewhere to live. That's something that we should be providing to the residents of Central Newfoundland and certainly throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Seniors again, I'll just touch on the seniors. A lot of the seniors, again, because of the cost of living, because of the sugar tax, because of the carbon tax, they can't heat their homes. I hear it. I get the calls every fall. I'm still getting them now. We can't afford to heat our homes. If they do heat their homes, they buy a tank of oil, then they can't buy the groceries. They can't buy that healthy choice for groceries. They certainly can't do that. Either you stay warm or even their heat bill, it could be electric heat, whatever the fuel is, they can't afford to have it and now they can't eat comfortably. The foods that they're buying are probably

not the healthy foods that needs to be bought.

Home supports for seniors: I've talked to some seniors and just to avail of some of the home supports that are there is a struggle. They fall through the caps of where they are for home supports. Then they say they'd like to see more for their workers, because they have some good workers, but the workers sometimes don't stick around because of the supports that they are getting.

All these things just go down the line from one piece to another and it's all part of the cost of living. Basically, the sugar tax and carbon tax right now, Speaker, is causing a lot of grief to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and we certainly need to have those addressed.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER (Trimper):** Thank you.

I now call on the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

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

It's always a pleasure to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the residents of Topsail - Paradise and the province as a whole. It's actually a job – this role, I must say, is a role I enjoy. It's always nice to be out speaking with the people, always nice trying to help people, but it can be wearing on you. It's not the 24-7 piece, it's not the physical being in places, but it's trying to help individuals and trying to find them the answers and the help they need. Many times, successful; other times, not. That's what wears on me, I can guarantee you that, when there are people out there that are in desperate need and there's no way to find a solution for them.

When we talk about this subamendment to the budget, it mentions failure a lot. The government side of the House, I know in the past have said, oh, because you're not voting for the budget, you're not voting for this and this and this. I used the analogy a while back of going in a produce store and picking up a bag of apples to purchase. You go in any store, people pick up that bag of apples and they roll it around and they look to make sure they see how many are ripe, how many are bruised and how many are rotten. If it doesn't fit them, they lay it down and go to the next bag.

That's a lot of what you look at, at a budget. It's not looking at what's not good in it. There are some good apples in there, but you have to look at the overall picture and look at what's not in it. When I look at the different things that are happening around us, some of the things, I look at what's happening in our schools.

The Member for Cape St. Francis mentioned about the violence in the schools and we spoke about this last night at a very long Estimates on Education. The Teachers' Union talked about the violence in the schools and gave some examples. This is what's heart wrenching when it comes to this. You can talk about statistics. Twenty-nine incidents a day are happening. In the first 38 days of the school year, almost 1,000 reported incidents of violence happened – and, again, that's reported. That doesn't talk to what's actually happening.

The president of the NLTA was in the media just recently and talked about what does violence in a school look like in Newfoundland and Labrador. He said it looks like the girl with a concussion who is missing class this week because an aggressive student hurt her at school. It looks like a teacher who ended up in an emergency room and now needs facial reconstruction surgery after an eight-year-old student assaulted her. Those are just two examples of what's happening in our

school system, an area where you expect to go and have a safe learning environment.

We also know what happened last March in front of PWC. A young student almost his life because of violence in our classrooms. The president of the NLTA spoke to the different issues around that. Spoke to the class sizes. We talked about this last night in Estimates. We have these hard and soft caps. I don't know why. There should be a hard cap and that cap should be adjusted downwards, depending on the complexities of the classroom. It's not rocket science. Something that needs to be done.

In this same article I look at, the minister responsible said – this is her quote – so the commitment is there to take our time and look at that and to review teacher allocations. To take our time and look at that – we've had so many – so many – reports for education. We had the Premier's report that was done a number of years ago and the last line in that report was that now is the time to act. That's years ago now, and we're still here taking our time when teachers are dealing with facial reconstruction surgery, when children do not want to go to school, when kids are almost murdered on the steps of the school. These are serious issues. There's a failure here to act. There has been plenty of opportunities to act, but we're still kicking that can down the road.

Now we're going to have an education accord that's going to come up with short-term, medium-term and long-term solutions. What I learned from last night, part of this accord will be to look at all these reports, bring them together and come up with some real actions – which makes me wonder, were any of those reports useful? I can guarantee you, I looked at a lot of them and I read through a lot of them and very, very good information in those reports and very good recommendations.

The one on absenteeism, the child advocate – that was in 2019 – talked about

absenteeism and the many factors that lead to that. When you have 10 per cent of your student population chronically absent, that's huge. When the child advocate says we have enough reports now, it's time to act. That was 2019, and we're still acting on it.

So, you know, that's one piece. Our school system, our education system, the place where our kids, our most valuable resource are trained up and educated so that they can be successful as adults and we have huge absenteeism numbers. We have increasing – 40 per cent, I believe, was the year-over-year increase in violent acts in the classroom. I mean, that's unheard of. That's amazing.

I don't know how else to talk to that other than something needs to be done yesterday on this. I mean, imagine, when my youngest, first child went to school we were just concerned whether she could make that first step on the school bus because the step was probably half the height of her but when you have kids going to school now and you're worrying about being bullied and that, and then you can switch that to mental health and mental health will tell you that 70 per cent of mental health challenges and issues begin in childhood, early adolescence, school-aged children. That's where it starts, and we need to make sure there's an environment that is conducive to a healthy growth, both physically and mentally, of our children, and that's not happening.

When I get the calls from a parent with three wonderful children – this particular instance, I think one was 12, 14 and 16 – and their 14-year-old was struggling at school dealing with mental illness and then addictions and in with the wrong crowd, so to speak, in with your much older wrong crowd and this parent cannot, for the life of her, get proper assistance because one department tells you, oh no, we can do this; the RNC tells you, we can do this but she doesn't seem to be in danger.

I won't call it passing the buck, but there's a juggling act here trying to find solutions that a parent has concern for their child, their 14-year-old child, and is in tears on the phone and cannot get any direction, cannot get any help to ensure their child is safe. This is what we deal with and it's on the other end of it, too, when you talk about seniors.

We're an aging population. Per capita, we're probably the oldest population, and I dealt with issues of seniors. We talked about there was one instance of two seniors married 73 years. Imagine, 73 years together. Seventy-three years and, in their final years, they're separated. In their final moments, they're separated, one in this home and one in that home.

Now, to me, that was a happy instance for me because in working with the proper departments and that we were able to get them together days before one of them passed. So that's one of the moments when you say I'm happy to be doing what I'm doing, but that doesn't happen all the time. There are many out there who die alone. Seniors, mothers and fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers of us who in their, what we call our golden years, but in our final years and our final moments, you're alone with no help.

We can build all the hospitals, all the long-term care facilities we want but we need the caring staff to look after them.

We talk about aging at home, my mother, God bless her, she's 92, she lives at home.

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

**P. DINN:** She lives at home and I'll visit her on as many days as I can and have a game of Chinese checkers. She renewed her licence the other day, she's doing well.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Who wins?

**P. DINN:** I don't. I haven't yet, I haven't won.

My mother-in-law is dealing with Parkinson's, early stages, she's doing well but requires some level of home care, but getting that care is so hard. We have some wonderful people now doing it but it's juggling schedules and that.

My point is, I've been lucky. My mother-in-law and my mother are lucky. I've been blessed with people who are being looked after. But there are so many of seniors out there who don't have those options available to them. They're out there and they don't know what the next day is going to be. They don't know. Worse than that is their children don't know. In many cases, the children are also retired and trying to find the resources, trying to find what's out there to help our seniors in their final years.

But one thing for sure, we should never be separating loved ones in their final years, it should never be happening. That is so cruel. It is so cruel. Speaking to different couples, it's just – I had another couple they're down at, I think, it's Agnes Pratt and the children, again, are retired as well, they would take this gentleman daily to visit his wife who is bedridden down there. They did it on a daily basis. The parent didn't have a car, didn't have his licence and we were able to – working with proper departments – get them together in the same room down there. I went and visited them and I tell you, so, so happy they were. That's what makes us able to do our jobs on a daily basis.

There are a lot of issues out there that sometimes they bring you up, sometimes they beat you down, but you continue to do it because it's those instances where you can truly help someone in need that recharges your battery, so to speak, to keep going. I know everyone in this House is driven by that as well and that's what makes this job so honourable and so pleasing to be doing it on a regular basis.

Yes, those are some real hardcore issues, but there is no issue out there that's too small. I always go by a quote and I use it a

lot. I read it somewhere, it said: The smallest act is greater than the grandest intention. The smallest act is greater than the grandest intention. We can all be out there saying, we're going to do this, I'll do this, I'll do this, I'll do that. Now, for whatever reason, you might not be able to, but it's the person that steps up and acts, no matter how big or small. That's where the value really is and that's what we try to do. We try to get government to act. We try to get people to respond to help individuals.

I can't sit down without talking about – it's important to the other people and it's for safety – our roads. I'll shift gears to that. I've met with, I'm going to say, I think, four ministers in five years, four different Ministers of Transportation and Infrastructure and all with similar responses. I met with the current minister and I've written in response to their request for information on roads. I actually have a document here that I sent with multiple pictures of the roads, this is Route 60 through Topsail.

I understand that there are some discussions between the town and government to look at what can happen with the road, who will take it over. I understand it from the town's perspective, having sat in municipal government, you can't just take it over, you've got to know what you're getting into. You got to know what that infrastructure is below that. So I have no issue with them taking the time, along with the minister, to work through this and try and come up with an agreement.

But my point currently is, at the moment, it is still a provincial road that is maintained by the province. I'm talking about – if anyone knows the area – going down Topsail Hill around the bend where Topsail Beach is, there are no sidewalks there, but there's a lot of erosion on the shoulders, lots of potholes. I had a woman there, a resident there about two or three years ago, broke her ankle walking along there. It's just not safe.

When you think about Route 60, it's the Conception Bay Highway. That's what Route 60 is, it's the Conception Bay Highway. It's a road that was a main thoroughfare, many years ago before my time, before the Trans-Canada was built. But it's still a main thoroughfare for many because you go as far on the Trans-Canada, then you pull down onto Route 60, the Conception Bay Highway. There are sections of that road that are in dire need.

Whenever we get a call on a pothole or something, we've reached out to the department and I will applaud them that as quick as – in fact, I'd say I don't hang up the phone and they're out there and they're getting that work done, which is fabulous. But at the end of the day, it's a temporary fix. It's a temporary fix because it's going to be a pothole again relatively soon, or another one somewhere else.

That has been an issue for a long time up in the district. It's a roadway that needs to have some attention, it needs to have some more permanent work done to it. I'm not talking a huge stretch; I'm talking under a two-kilometre stretch. It takes in a school zone; it takes in some crosswalks.

I had a brief little conversation with the minister in the House here last week or the week before, I'm confident – I hope he's listening – I'm confident – I'll say that again – that the minister and the department will come up with a more permanent solution in the very near future to ensure that that roadway is a safe roadway and people are not manoeuvring it to avoid the shoulder erosion, to avoid the potholes and to ensure that pedestrians and drivers alike can traverse that route knowing that it's safe and that they're not going to end up with damage to their car and on the shoulder.

Thank you for your time.

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

**SPEAKER:** I now call the Member for Bonavista.

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

I'd like to spend my 20 minutes this morning talking on education. I know many viewers now in Bonavista may not say, well, you could have picked probably a little different topic. That may not be, but for a long time I wanted to stand and talk on education. I'll do that this morning.

I met a previous dean of the Memorial University at the Health Sciences complex. She's a frequent viewer of the House of Assembly and we introduced each other. We chatted and I'd be most interested with the feedback, if she's watching today, on my discussion and what we talk about: education. So if she's watching then at least a little bit of feedback, I would welcome.

The District of Bonavista – for a little bit of trivia and I've said it in the House – had the first school in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, according to Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University and by a gentleman, a researcher by the name of Garfield Fizzard is in Bonavista.

So it gives me a little bit of credence to stand here, knowing that the richest history of all districts, the 40 that would be here, is the District of Bonavista. Back in 1727, the Church of England, a gentleman by the name of Henry Jones was sent over from England, landed in Bonavista and that was the start of the school.

Just one little piece of trivia to inform you that Henry Jones summoned a school mistress to come to Bonavista to hold school. Here is what she was paid: eight pounds. Eight pounds is what the school mistress at that time was paid. What does that equate to in Canadian dollars? Speaker, \$14.29 is what her pay was in 1727. If you look at back in 1727, that may not have been a very good wage at that time.

Before I get into the education piece, on Friday I attended the RISE awards. Most viewers watching now are going to say, what are the RISE awards? The RISE awards were held by the Department of IET; Industry, Energy and Technology at the Emera Centre up on the Battery between 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. on Friday. The minister of IET hosted it and what RISE stands for is Research Inspired Student Enrichment. You would take students who excel in math and science in the province and you give them placements in pretty prestigious universities in order to foster their path into science and math.

I just want to recognize two from my district who were recognized. Both of the students attend Discovery Collegiate, the same school that won the provincial female hockey that I spoke about yesterday, with some neighbouring schools that were assisting. Christopher Donovan from Melrose, parents Mike Donovan and Denise Mackey; Christopher wants to pursue computer science and Christopher is going to study for four weeks at the University of Toronto this summer.

We've got Noah Butt from Bonavista, who again, as stated, attends Discovery Collegiate. He is going to the Boston Leadership Institute for three weeks and his area, what he aspires to do, he's going to be a pediatrician. I thought that was very noble.

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

**C. PARDY:** So I do applaud those two from – and all the other recipients.

One thing I did notice was that many of the recipients came from the metro schools in St. John's. When they talked about these metro students and what was available to them, like robotics clubs, math clubs, those from my district didn't have that and it was a distinct difference between urban and rural in delivery, but that's for another time.

I want to mention Education spending. I did this once in the House before and I know a minister had questioned it and said if that's right, that's pretty amazing. But I just want to repeat that and update it to the current year.

I go back to 1978-79. For many of us, it doesn't seem that long ago. I was born before that. Here is the budget at the time for Health; it was \$218,490 for Health back in '78-'79. Education at that time was \$277,920; in fact, \$60,000 more than Health.

Well, that continued until 1989-90. That year saw Health at \$644,340; whereas Education at that year was \$653,000. For now, an ever-small margin in Education's favour of \$9,102. In 1991, it changed. Health became the top spender. I move from 1991, where that change occurred to today. Here are the figures today.

In Health today, this budget, \$4,361,712,300. Keep in mind in 1990-91, Education was the largest expenditure in Newfoundland and Labrador. Education, now, here this budget is \$1 billion – first time breaking \$1 billion – \$1,094,693,800 for now a difference, in advantage of Health, \$3,267,018,500. Now, look at the historical spending. I've said many times in this House that fishery is our main industry and I stood here and I stand to it until just recently.

Just recently, I would put Education as being our primary. I know Industry might not fit but that's a debate. I would look at Education, as far as looking at where we're going in the future as being optimal, being very, very important.

My colleague at Estimates last night, he talked about, as far as the safety in schools, much of what he mentioned talked about teachers and so on. Back three months ago, I wrote the Department of Education and I asked what the sick leave was for teachers, because I looked at data and said, well,

sometimes you can glean that if there's a big increase in sick leave for teachers, that's an indication that all is not well in schools. I don't know if people would agree with that, but it can be an indicator to say all is not well.

Let me give you the figures that I had, and I asked for them to be updated by the department and I'll get those, I'm sure, probably soon sometimes but I've been waiting for those. In 2014-15, teacher sick leave, the cost to the taxpayers in Newfoundland and Labrador was a little over \$15 million. In '15-'16, it was \$16.5 million. In '16-'17, it was \$17,800,000 plus. In '18-'19, over \$18 million.

So you can see I just wanted to know, through the pandemic and from '18-'19 on to current, what is the sick leave because it indicates that all may not be well in education? That's what the Member for Topsail - Paradise was talking last night and many of his questions asked, but that was one piece of data that I was interested in finding.

One other piece of information when I was back in the school system, and the hon. Member from Grand Bank I'm sure would be the same thing, we looked at, in the high school level, it was the PISA results. That's probably what a standard assessment now would be. The PISA is an assessment item and it stands for the Program for International Student Assessment.

It compares all the developed countries in the world and say: How do you fare in math? How do you fare in science? I know math and science, but I don't if technology is added; math and science, two big key areas, how do we fare? That's our benchmark. Well, let me show you some of the latest results from PISA in our system.

Keep in mind, a 20-point decline equates to one year. If you drop by 20 points in this PISA result in your math or your science,

that equates to one year's learning loss – 20 points.

In the 2022 results, which are last, Canada showed substantial declines in reading and math, we did as a country. Most viewers are going to say now, and the past dean of Memorial University is going to say, well, we had the pandemic at that time, and she would be absolutely right, we did. We did, but here is what our scores were. In Canada, the 2022 results compared to the 2018 results, the average scores dropped by 10 points in reading in Canada – 10 points in reading, half a year of schooling. In math, 15 points in Canada, almost a year.

Now people are wondering, what about Newfoundland and Labrador, where do we fit in that. Well, this province had the worst declines of anybody in the country – Newfoundland and Labrador, our education system, the worst declines. Our reading dropped by 34 points.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** A year and a half.

**C. PARDY:** The hon. Member for Ferryland, who's very quick with numbers, great with numbers. For all the viewers and those in Ferryland, he is the sharpest with numbers that I would put up there.

Math, a 29-point drop in this province. So I would say, looking at 15 year olds, which are the ones who write this PISA, what about the other grades that would be in our province, in our system? I didn't hear that last night. Is it something that our department, our schools are addressing because it is a significant decline? That is very significant.

I would say Lorne Wheeler who may be watching at home now who was deputy minister of Education, president of the NLTA, like the Member for St. John's Centre, he would say about now that that not ought to be our number one priority because the importance in education,

moving forward, that ought to be our number one priority.

That subamendment here talks about the Fs. I would say that is one that we need to address.

We talked about class size. The Member for Topsail - Paradise brought up about class size yesterday or last night, he did. Well, this government increased class size in 2016, new into their term, they increased class size. In fact, I think in the budget at the time said it was going to save \$8.8 million. Well, PISA results drop and add – increase our class sizes. This government, again, did in 2018, increased class sizes, when reports are saying they're too large now, we need to bring them down.

In my short time left, which is not enough time but I'm going to give it a try. When the Minister of Health and Community Services was Education Minister, he negotiated on behalf of the government with the NLTA a new collective agreement. I stand to be corrected, but maybe 2019, '18, '19, he negotiated it.

One thing the government brought to the NLTA table, not to say it wasn't, because they put the kitchen sink up there in negotiations, but one thing the government brought to the NLTA was province-wide seniority. That means that you've got one opening at Gonzaga, the teacher with the most seniority who has a science degree, if it's a science position, the one with the most seniority gets that position. No interview to see whether they're fit for the culture of that school or what else they're going to bring outside of that discipline are. Are they going to be the one that's going to start the math club or the robotics club? Not a conversation, because the minister, when he was in Education, brought to the NLTA negotiations that we're going to have province-wide seniority.

In the short time left, let me try to elaborate further. The minister stated last night – and I

hope I got it right – they had 97 per cent success in filling hard-to-fill areas in Newfoundland and Labrador, remote areas. Every one of us in this chamber are going say that if you compete for a job in St. John's, when you're competing, boy, the pool that you've got to pick from is huge. True? I think we all agree.

Before the minister brought this in and put it on the table for the NLTA, I would say to you, it was highly competitive. You picked who you thought to be best for your school population. The best who you thought was in Gonzaga. When you apply for these remote areas, which we still have 3 per cent that we had to get somebody, we couldn't fill them all, when they select, is the pool huge? No, the pool is not huge. The pool is not huge at all. In fact, there might be one; there might be two or three. The pool is small. But once they get in and get their seniority into that area, their clock starts in order to say: I can pick what job that comes open in whatever school in this province, if I've got the seniority. I would say to you that it doesn't do a justice and service to us.

When I was principal of Clarendville Middle School and I'm sure other principals, the Minister of CSSD would say the same thing, we picked the top eight qualifications. It may be the most senior, it didn't matter. We had the top eight candidates. Then we went through an interview process to find out who we thought to be the best fit for our schools. Guess who we hired. We hired the one who had the best fit for our school.

Instead of taking the Member for Bonavista's suggestion to this, here is a report that was done. The report was done in 2022, one of the latest reports that the Member for Topsail - Paradise mentioned, a report on Teacher Allocation Review Committee. Three esteemed educators: Marian Fushell, David Brown and Ross Elliott, here's what they say about it, from the report that they presented to government: Recently the staffing of schools has become more complex due to

the addition of seniority for teachers in the hiring process.

Most jurisdictions are hiring based on merit, not seniority. If we did a vote here in this House and say put your hand up, if you want the best person for a job, would it be on the merit-based or would it be on seniority? I think everyone in this House would agree, merit-based. Is seniority significant? Quite possibly.

Here is what they said: Hiring by seniority: (1) it can create questionable fits for our schools; (2) school principals have felt that they were thrown under the bus; (3) it removes any incentive for improvement amongst those who may not excel; and (4) many of the graduates, possibly some of our more promising ones, are leaving the province.

I would say we made a colossal mistake, government did, in 2019, by bringing that to the table. We would fight against that and that would not have been implemented on our watch. That I can assure you. Now, many people may disagree with that and that would be an interesting discussion going forward.

Thank you very much for your time.

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

**SPEAKER:** Thank you, I say to the Member.

I'm now calling on the MHA for the District of Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm pleased to say that the good people in Bonavista are in very good hands, there's no doubt about that, as my esteemed colleague speaks again very, very well.

We're speaking today about the subamendment that we put into the current budget in 2024. I look back when the

Minister of Finance stood in her place and delivered the budget, no doubt a lot of work goes into it by a lot of people. A lot of people don't see how much work goes into it. But when she stood and took her place, she boasted about this being one of the largest investments in Newfoundland and Labrador as a budget. They're very proud of that.

I asked myself, if you were making record investments and expenditures throughout this province and it is not getting any better than it's gotten the past year, two years, three years ago, because we're in tough, tough shape, that, to me, would signify an F grade, like we've talked about it so often here.

So to boast that we are spending more money than ever, we are seeing the worst results ever – if that was a company, the company wouldn't be successful. The company wouldn't call themselves successful. They would look to see where else they could spend money. I'm not saying the money doesn't need to be spent, but of course the people of Newfoundland and Labrador want to see a yield back for the money that is being spent and I don't believe they are seeing it as much as they could be.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you.

We talk about the crises here in Newfoundland and Labrador and there are so many crises. I have not heard the word "crisis" so much in my entire life than I have the past couple years. The problem with hearing the word "crisis" over and over and over again is it takes the validation away from the word. So a crisis today – what we would call a crisis – it seems to be normalized at this point. It is a normal way of doing things.

We listen to the government on the opposite side talk about reimagining and looking

down the road and stuff like that. I just think to myself, if this is our indicator of reimagining and where we are, my God – many of my own constituents have said to me in the past: Can we go back to the way it used to be? Because for some reason, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, it was better. It was a lot better.

I know a lot of factors come into that and government cannot be held responsible for everything, obviously, because not everything is their fault. We're not going to stand here and play politics and say that, but what they are responsible for is creating the environment within the province and having the guts to take those stands to ensure that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador can enjoy a successful, healthy lifestyle. If those needs are not being met through the environment, well, of course, then it has to come back to the government of the day and that's what we see.

I'll talk about a couple of the crises that we have in the province. Of course, our health care crisis, we see it every day. I see it more than most in Grand Falls-Windsor because we have the Central Newfoundland hospital in Grand Falls-Windsor, the regional health care and the diversions that we get – well, first of all, it's overrun anyway. It's absolutely overrun. I visit the hospital quite a bit. There are constantly beds in the hallway; there is constantly people waiting; there's no privacy. Then when you have a diversion or shutdown from Buchans or down the peninsula or wherever else, unfortunately, that influx gets bigger and bigger and we get more and more and more people without family doctors – more and more people.

I went to make an appointment for my son at the Killick health care clinic last week. This is the walk-in clinic, the last step before an emergency room. A walk-in clinic told us that if they haven't been seen in the past year or two – I am not sure which one it was – they're not taking any new patients. So

the walk-in clinic is not taking any new patients, that's it. Their roster is now full, so they told me to bring him down to emerg.

We have a nurse practitioner who's working out of a private practice in Grand Falls-Windsor. His name is Brandon. He is doing absolutely fantastic work, and I mean fantastic work. This young man takes on whatever he can. It's about a \$50 bill to visit him, for my son, but we want to make sure that everything is okay and thank God, and God willing, I'm healthy enough to work, my wife is healthy enough to work to afford that \$50.

A lot of people can't. So they end up down to emergency and whatnot, and they don't wait. After five, six hours, people can't be down there that long. Again, I've said it before, this is not a reflection on health care workers, especially the ones in Grand Falls-Windsor because I know the work that they do. I know how overrun they are. I talked to them quite often. I try to entrench myself within their lifestyle and I see what they go through. We're losing them. I just want to say, right now, to those health care workers who have been offered to go places but have decided to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador, by God, thank you so very much. Thank you so very much for staying right here in this province.

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

**C. TIBBS:** Despite having so many communication breakdowns, the services that you asked are not there, some of the equipment that you asked is not there, you're overrun, you're tired – I get it. But do you know what? You stayed and you are heroes in Grand Falls-Windsor and throughout Central Newfoundland and Labrador. I can't thank you enough for doing that.

IVF – one of the reasons why we sometimes don't vote yes on budgets and whatnot and they want to know, constantly, why we don't vote yes on their budget, and

there might be some good things in there, but to be quite honest after the two elections, and probably going to the third one here soon enough, it comes down to pretty simple – us, including my constituents – it's a trust issue. There are some things that we don't trust you all because we were told, in the last election, that IVF procedures would be much more plentiful within the province and the government would make it work for so many people out there that need this. So we talked about IVF quite often, but a lot of us in here – and I'm not sure about anybody's personal circumstances but a lot of us may not know exactly what it looks like on face value.

So with the permission of one of my constituents, I'd like to read a social media post that she put out there and she's an extremely brave woman for putting this out there and I want to thank her.

It goes like this: "Hi my name is Brittany.

"As a child I always knew I wanted a family, I've even had a name picked for my future daughter since I was 7. Infertility isn't new to me, it has been with me for most of my life. At a very young age I was diagnosed with something similar to MRKH, which ultimately means I am unable to carry or have biological children. I was told at the age of 12 by my parents, at the time I didn't think much of it, but as I got older it started affecting my mental health.

"Every pregnancy announcement and baby shower invite hurts my heart and it's not because I'm unhappy for them, because I am very happy for them, but I'm also sad for me. Infertility for me is when you're stuck between people telling you 'I can't wait for you to have kids' or 'Don't have kids.' Both are heartbreaking to me.

"We have been in this fertility journey for about 3 years and it is mentally exhausting. I grieve for two things; the child I'll never get to meet, who I dreamt of being created by my partner and I, and for another child that

might not come through for my adoption or IVF.

"As I am writing this down I am scared to tell my story because once it's out there people will know but at the same time I am relieved that I no longer have to hide this. It took me 3 years to be brave enough to tell my story. I hope this would inspire other people to tell their story too, as others who have shared their stories have inspired me.

"I am 1 in 6 ...."

Thank you.

That was from a very, very brave woman in Grand Falls-Windsor who decided to tell her story.

So when we hear things like, we're investing in IVF and whatnot, people vote on those. People hear that and that can change their decision to vote on certain things or certain Members or certain parties, but when they see, later on down the road, that commitment, that promise has not been fulfilled, well they get jaded and they get skeptical and you can't blame them. Unfortunately, like she said, she's one in six people here in Newfoundland and Labrador who have to deal with that. My heart goes out to her and all those other parents out there who are having trouble, but hopefully we do get some more IVF care here in the province.

The long-term care facility in Grand Falls-Windsor, I believe when it opened up, at the time, it was considered that eventually it was going to go to protective care. Protective care would mean that any people who need that protective care through dementia or Alzheimer's, they can be housed there next to their families. Right now, they're across the province, sort of thing, and they want to come home to Grand Falls-Windsor, to the brand new health care facility we have. So we're hoping that the minister does designate that protective care eventually.

The cost-of-living crisis: We see the cost-of-living crisis constantly, whether it be the carbon tax or whatnot, grocery store, trying to fix your vehicle, trying to fix your house, whatnot, it affects every single person in the province.

I would ask the government across the way, today, if you could vote on the carbon tax, whether it be –

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

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

The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

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

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I ask Members to take the conversation outside.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I ask Members from both sides if you can take your conversation outside, please.

The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

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

When we talk about the crisis throughout the province, we talk about ways of fixing it and some ideas to fix it and whatnot, there are other things that can be done.

We have a housing crisis throughout the province and there are people in tents, like I say, and they've been there all winter. There are people in Grand Falls-Windsor who have been in tents. There are people who are waiting to get housing. My hon.

Member from Exploits also said about 350 people in Central. It's astonishing to see.

A couple of weeks ago, I was out here and I went down to Howley Estates Sobeys just to get something for supper or whatever, and I ran into a gentleman by the name of Donnie. He was outside, a larger gentleman, he asked me for some change, of course, and I tell you what. I have a pretty good judge of character and when I met this man, you can tell that he worked his whole life and tried to make a good life for himself, but due to some unforeseen circumstances down the road, he found himself here. I shook the man's hand, we chatted for about a half an hour. It was absolutely heartbreaking to see that could happen to a hard-working man like that.

You know, nobody would think that they would find themselves homeless, but it does happen. It does happen. It happens to successful people, unsuccessful people; it knows no race or creed or sexual orientation. Homelessness can affect anybody with a few circumstances that they could find themselves in, that way to get the ball rolling and, unfortunately, we are dealing with that here.

I mean, growing up we never knew about any homeless people in Newfoundland, for the most part. Today, of course, we see it all over and contrary to what the Housing Minister said, it's not a protest. This is not a protest. There are other ways of protesting, but to sit out in a tent in -15 in the wintertime, my God, that's not a protest. That's a circumstance that these people never thought they'd find themselves in and they're hoping that we can get them out of it pretty quickly as well.

When we talk about the crisis, it all leads down to one main crisis that is absolutely, in my view, the worst crisis of them all and that's the mental health crisis. It affects everybody – it affects everybody. When you tick off all these crises through here, it all comes down to a mental health crisis

because if you have no place to live, if you have no money to do something, if you can't see a doctor and you're given a cancer diagnosis and you have to wait or you're waiting on a cancer diagnosis, all these things direct to mental health.

There's not one person in this province that is immune from any sort of mental health disorder. It can happen to anybody, at any given time. Unfortunately, we see more of it today than ever and that includes all of us in this House as well. Every one of us can go through something like this and, unfortunately, we see it. Unfortunately, we sit in silence with it or we bring it home to our family and a lot of people fall by the wayside.

One of those people that have fallen by the wayside is Michael Dalton. Michael Dalton was the son of Jim and Donna Dalton and last year, I believe, Michael committed suicide; a young man, handsome fellow, in his 20s; had a lot going for him; had amazing parents, absolutely fantastic parents. When I speak about this today, I speak about it from a dad's point of view, not as an MHA or a representative of the people. I speak from that point, as well, but in order for me to speak and give it the justice that it deserves, I truly need to speak from my own point of view as a dad.

I have two sons, they're 19 and 17. I think about one day they may go down this road of mental health supports that just are not there. They're not there. The first visit is fantastic. There's not one person in this province that can't reach out and can't get that first visit within an allotted time. But let's be honest about it, that first visit is for one reason only, to make sure that person in front of you is not going to kill themselves today. That's what that first visit is for. That's the main gesture of this first visit. The second visit, the third visit, all the follow-ups are far enough down the road, too far down the road.

How do I know they're too far down the road? Because I truly feel in my heart of hearts that if they were closer to where we are, Micheal would still be with us today. Unfortunately, he is not. My heart goes out to Jim and Donna. My heart goes out to anybody who has been touched by suicide.

I'll put it out there right now. I'm pretty entrenched within my own community, most people know where I live, it's not really any surprise, but I've said this before in the past and I'll say it again, anybody in this province, if you're thinking about committing suicide and you have nowhere to go, 10 Knight Street, Grand Falls-Windsor. Doesn't matter the time of day or night, you show up there and I'll take you in and I'll sit you down and we'll get you the help you need. If it's my office hours, it's my office hours.

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

**C. TIBBS:** If it's 3 in the morning, before you commit this deed that affects so many other people, you show up at my door, I don't care what time it is, and myself and my wife and my two sons will take you in and we'll talk to you. Unfortunately, that's where we are right now.

I get it. There's not a lot of money. We are seeing deficits. We are seeing, this budget today, our debt continues to rise. Where can we get more money? It's been asked before. Myself and the Member for Exploits have talked about it many times as well. We can get this money; it's there.

Right now, we have, still, a Premier's office open in the Grand Falls-Windsor that cost this term over a million dollars. I mean, where can that million dollars go? The Premier's office in Grand Falls-Windsor has been there now for a couple of years. I'm not sure what they're doing. It's right above my office. It's pretty much empty more often than not. There's no paving out our way. What's it doing? There's no paving. The cancer care clinic was in danger of the doctors walking away from it. It was – it

was. With the help of the minister, we have it there now.

My question is this: Why didn't the doctors feel comfortable enough to go to the Premier's office that's two streets away? Because they knew it would do nothing – absolutely nothing. I'll put something in context for you. Over the past couple of years since the Premier's office is there, with the staff and everything else that needs to go in with an office sort of thing, over those two years, we had a fundraising team for the Lionel Kelland Hospice literally across the road, day in and day out, working their guts out to ensure that the Lionel Kelland Hospice can open. To come up with that million dollars so that the Lionel Kelland Hospice could open. We had to rely on citizens to do that while there was a more-empty-often-than-not Premier's office right there in Grand Falls-Windsor that would cost the exact same money.

We talked about the SCBAs. Right now, we're in panic mode. We need SCBAs for Newfoundland and Labrador. They will all become obsolete within the next year. One million dollars can buy 100 SCBAs. That's a hundred SCBAs for firefighters across this province so they can do their job and keep the people safe.

When we talk about there's not a lot of money to go around and stuff like that, I would challenge the government. We stand here constantly and talk about, well, if you don't vote for the budget that means that you don't support this, this and this. Well, I say to the Members across the way, if you support the Premier's office in Grand Falls-Windsor, do you not support SCBAs for the province's firefighters? Do you not support the Lionel Kelland Hospice? There are so many other things, and that logic can be used back and forth two different ways.

I would argue that that million dollars can go a lot further to a lot of different organizations than the Premier –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How much?

**C. TIBBS:** One million dollars over a four-year period.

That \$1 million can go an awful lot of ways other than the Premier having his friends in that office, working, and again, it's more empty often than not.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

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

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

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

I move, seconded by the Minister for Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that this House do now recess.

**SPEAKER:** This House do stand recessed until 2 this afternoon.

### Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

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

Admit strangers.

Before we begin today, I would like to begin by welcoming His Excellency Margus Rava, the Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia to Canada.

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

**SPEAKER:** Also, His Excellency Kaspars Ozoliņš, Ambassador of the Republic of Latvia to Canada.

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

**SPEAKER:** And His Excellency Darius Skusevičius, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to Canada.

Welcome.

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

**SPEAKER:** In the public gallery, I'd like to welcome Emma and Katie Foss and their mom, Samantha Foss. Emma and Katie will be recognized this afternoon in a Member's statement.

Welcome.

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

**SPEAKER:** Also, in the public gallery with a tiara, welcome to Junior Miss Newfoundland and Labrador, Audrey Snow.

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

**SPEAKER:** And her mom, Maggie. Audrey will also be the subject of a Member's statement this afternoon.

Finally, Randy Murphy, President of the East Coast Trail Association, is also in the gallery today for a Member's statement.

**SPEAKER:** Welcome, everyone.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Jim McKenna.

**SPEAKER:** Oh, my apologies, Sir.

Also, in the Speaker's gallery today, our Member-Elect, Mr. McKenna.

Welcome.

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

### **Statements by Members**

**SPEAKER:** Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the District of Cape St. Francis, Ferryland, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, Conception Bay South and Harbour Main.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

I rise today to recognize the largest tourist attraction in my district, the East Coast Trail. A developed trail of over 336 kilometres, which began in 1994, links together 25 wilderness paths and passes more than 30 communities. Maintained by the members of the East Coast Trail Association, the trail follows along the coastline which provides the most breathtaking views.

The first meeting was held in the Town of Bauline with people who had a vision of building a trail network along the eastern edge of the Avalon. Last evening, once again in the Town of Bauline, the membership gathered to celebrate three decades of dedication to building a world-class trail and preserving the raw, natural beauty of our coastline.

Speaker, I ask all Members of this 50th General Assembly to join me in thanking President Randy Murphy and all association members for the continuous work and dedication on achieving this 30th anniversary milestone.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I rise in this House today to recognize the volunteers and coaches of the Southern Shore and Goulds Minor Hockey Associations. I want to take this opportunity to thank the entire group of volunteers who unselfishly devote their time to the youth. Being a hockey coach and a volunteer requires many hours of volunteering.

The youth in my district have been very successful in 2023-24. They have won many banners and medals over the past year. The youths' success in the sport is a

reflection of relentless hours of coaching. Without our coaches and volunteers, our hockey programs would not be a success.

I had the opportunity to experience this for myself when I attended the opening ceremonies in the Goulds arena for the U11 female provincials.

It would be amiss for me not to mention and thank the parents of all the kids for the time and dedication they put forth to their kids to participate in the wonderful sport of hockey.

I would also like to ask all Members of the House to join me in congratulating the coaches and volunteers of the Goulds and the Southern Shore Minor Hockey Associations for all their wonderful work.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you very much, Speaker.

I rise today to honour a very special group of people in my district who have big hearts and a mission to help.

The Central Newfoundland Regional Hospital Auxiliary was founded in 1966 and have donated \$1.5 million in equipment to our beloved hospital. Just in the past five years, their efforts have purchased wheelchairs, a birthing bed, an eye ultrasound machine, two baby bassinets, an ultrasound machine for the dialysis unit and a much-needed microscope for the operating room.

Since their inception 58 years ago, the Hospital Auxiliary have made an enormous impact in our community and continue to do so through operating the gift shop. In addition to the gift shop, they hold two fundraisers each year through bake sales.

These bake sales take place on St. Patrick's Day and Halloween.

The current 33 members are from Grand Falls-Windsor, Bishop's Falls and Badger, certainly, a community effort made possible with a small, but mighty, group. I ask anyone visiting our health care centre to consider supporting these amazing individuals, so they can continue to support our community.

Please join me as we pay tribute to the Central Newfoundland Regional Hospital Auxiliary and their outstanding support and contribution to my community.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

Speaker, it gives me great honour and privilege today to rise to acknowledge a young sister duo from Conception Bay South who launched their candy business in 2022. Emma Foss, now 11, and Katie Foss, eight, are business owners of Emma & Katie's Candy Shop.

They attended the Youth Ventures Business start-up session and learned a lot about how to run a business; the rest was history. With the support from their mom, Samantha, they applied for a food-selling licence and then opened an online store named Emma & Katie's Candy Shop.

In 2023, Emma and Katie were named recipients of the CBDC Outstanding Venture of the year award. They were the province's youngest entrepreneurs that were honoured.

Custom candy kabobs are their specialty, personalizing them with gift tags. They make candy cones, loot bags, candy

charcuterie boxes, candy gift boxes, birthday gable boxes and bar wrappers. These customized treats, based on theme or event, make the perfect treat for birthdays and special events. Check out Emma & Katie's Candy Shop Facebook page for ordering details.

I want to congratulate Emma & Katie's Candy Shop on receiving your well-deserved award. The future is bright and I wish you continued success in your business.

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

I'm honoured and proud today to recognize Audrey Snow, an exceptional young girl who is a resident of South River in the District of Harbour Main.

On September 24, 2023, she was crowned as Junior Miss Newfoundland and Labrador. Audrey is the youngest girl to win this prominent title and, at a mere nine years of age, she was the only contestant to ever win the title on the first time entering the pageant.

The pageant itself included competition in public speaking, talent and answering impromptu questions. Audrey's topic for the public speaking was the importance of kindness.

Over halfway through her reign, Audrey's high points so far have been the Downtown Santa Claus Parade and speaking at the International Women's Day Luncheon in North River. I was present to hear her speech, which was very thought provoking and inspiring.

Her remaining schedule is jammed packed this summer and she is very much looking forward to travelling throughout our beautiful province.

Apart from her Junior Miss Newfoundland and Labrador duties, Audrey is also a competitive gymnast and just recently won the title of provincial champion at the Newfoundland gymnastics provincials.

Please join me in congratulating Audrey on all her amazing accomplishments at such a young age. The best is yet to come.

Thank you.

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

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

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

**K. HOWELL:** Speaker, last week our government had the honour of recognizing 20 of the province's young leaders, recipients of this year's Research Inspired Student Enrichment Awards, better known as RISE Awards.

RISE Awards recognize some of the province's best and brightest Level II students who excel at the STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering and math.

RISE Award recipients receive tuition and support to attend one of three summer enrichment programs: the Research Science Institute at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Boston Leadership Institute in Massachusetts or the Da Vinci Engineering Enrichment Program at the University of Toronto.

We are pleased to report that the Department of Industry, Energy and Technology expanded the number of award recipients this year from 15 to 20. We're

also pleased to report that this year we saw the most applications ever. It is so impressive to see students from all over this province excelling academically. Since 2011, 183 students have attended one of these programs as a result of the RISE Awards.

Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating the 2024 recipients: Shalom Alemu, Jassem Almutawa, Noah Butt, Hannah Cameron, Frank Chen, Daniel Cheng, Christopher Donovan, Lauren Farrell, Adhira Ganesh, Nancy Hassan, Orpa Hawlader, Felisha Hutchings, Ella Ilijanic, Meaghan Lee, Madison Malone, Molly Malone, Natalie Mitchell, Winner Nwachukwu, Sarah Ryan and Tara Stuckless.

To all the recipients, congratulations! There is no limit on the potential of your growth and success.

Thank you to all who work hard to make this annual event a success.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

The Progressive Conservative caucus would like to congratulate these bright, young minds who are proof that Newfoundland and Labrador students are among the best and the brightest in the country. This momentous opportunity will allow these young people to grow their skills and learn from the best as they prepare for their post-secondary education and entry into our province's workforce where they will undoubtedly be amongst our future leaders.

I wish them all the best of luck over the course of their summer enrichment programs and into their bright futures. I

would, however, be remiss if I didn't highlight the Liberal government's failure to adequately prepare our province's young people for a bright future by providing adequate resources and a stable financial climate in which to begin and grow their careers.

Our province is witnessing unprecedented crisis in unaffordability, with young Newfoundlanders unable to afford even the most basic expenses, such as housing and transportation. The Liberal government's ill-conceived policies have made life unattainable for our next generation and stymieing innovation and population retention.

The Liberal government's continued attacks on industry and innovation in this province has left many young people looking for work elsewhere where opportunities are abundant and life is more affordable.

With many young people leaving the province in search of greener pastures, this Liberal government must do more to give our youngest and brightest a reason to stay in this wonderful place we call home.

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

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

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

We here in the New Democratic caucus also wish to congratulate these wonderful students on their achievement and wish them all the best, and a special shout-out to Meaghan Lee of Labrador West on her achievement.

However, we can't become the leader in industry of the future if our education system doesn't make the proper investments today. This begins with providing enough educational resources

and supports in the classroom, and also educators have to have the ability to spend more time with their students, helping them move forward through the system and help them achieve the goals, like these wonderful students are trying to find.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

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

We are now four months into a lucrative, sole-source, \$21-million contract with the Airport Inn and the number of residents that have actually moved into this inn has not gone up, it's actually gone down according to the information we were provided.

So, think about it, we're spending \$600,000 a month or \$48,000 a room. I ask the minister: Does he believe that this is good value for money?

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member opposite for the question and the House for the opportunity to address it.

We have been working very closely with our community partners on a daily basis, chatting with them, strategizing on how best to solve issues that are facing people in Newfoundland and Labrador, not just in St. John's, not in the metro region, but across the province.

With respect to 106 Airport Road, if you look at the advancements that have been made in that building, we had the media there about a week ago or a little over a week ago, hotel rooms have been turned into medical rooms similar to what you would see if you went into a doctor's office.

That, unfortunately, cannot happen overnight. It is going to be good value, Mr. Speaker, because we are going to help people when they get there.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, the minister said it right, when, because that's exactly what we have been talking about with a lot of things that this government has offered.

Four months into a 36-month deal, we've already spent almost \$2 million. There is very little progress to be seen and not only that, but this contract is a cost-plus contract. So security, for example, is not included in the \$21 million.

I ask the minister: How much are we paying for security on a monthly basis?

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, again, thanks for the question to the Member opposite.

I don't have the exact number in front of me. I am happy to get it and report back.

In our budget, we said that we were going to spend about \$13 million this year. That includes medical supports from NL Health Services. It includes addictions counsellors. It includes folks who are experienced in mental health. It includes the money that we will spend, not only for the hotel, but as well for End Homelessness St. John's, the experts in this area who have partners with

us and who identified the fact that transitional supportive housing was a gap in our housing continuum.

We have taken their advice on this, Mr. Speaker. That is why we're acting.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, again, a minister doesn't know how much money they're spending. That is not a very good answer from a minister. You can't tell me how much money you got in a contract for security operations?

I ask the minister: Can you tell me how much extra every month the restaurant tab is expected to be on top of the \$48,000 for every room?

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, my Estimates are going to be held on Friday and I'm happy to go line by line through the budget there.

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

**F. HUTTON:** But I will tell the Member opposite that, you know, I'm not sitting here with a \$13 million breakdown right in front of me. I can't give him the exact number; I said I would get it for him. The number will be readily available if he wants to wait a couple of hours or a couple of minutes, I'll just check with the staff to get it.

But the money that is spent on food, it is obviously built into it. When people go into the old hotel site, which is now called 106 Airport Road, that's the location of it, we will obviously be feeding them breakfast, lunch and supper. There is a cost associated with it, but, Mr. Speaker, it is what we've said all along, we're not just putting people in a

house and walking away and washing our hands of it. We're helping them. We're going to be providing the additional supports. It's in the title: transitional supportive living.

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

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

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, tell that to the 25 people that are living in Tent City. Where's the help? Four months, \$2 million, where's the help? Where's the wraparound services? Why isn't anybody using the facility?

There are lots of questions, but let me go back and ask this: This is another cost-plus contract, again, what additional expenses are there for operational costs?

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

**S. COADY:** Speaker, I'm listening to the line of questions today and I will say that it sounds like the Member opposite is not supportive of providing wraparound, quality services to those that need them the most.

106 Airport Road is going to be very important to the people that live in Tent City, for those that find themselves with addictions problems. As the minister has clearly pointed out to this Assembly, there are very complex needs that need all the support, including community partners. He has done an admirable job of ensuring that this facility is prepared and providing exactly the needs to the people that need it most.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, we're absolutely supportive of wraparound services and

looking after our homeless population and other people who need homes. What we're not supportive of is wasting taxpayers' money and failing to act.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Four months later and we still have nobody in this building.

Again, I will ask the minister, because the point was just made: Can they provide the cost-benefit analysis that was done when this sole-source Liberal contract was entered into with their Liberal fundraising partner?

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**F. HUTTON:** End Homelessness St. John's is a reputable organization. We are partnered with them because they have identified gaps that were in our system. We are working as quickly as we can. We are on site, at the tent encampment regularly offering alternatives to people who are in the tents there. We understand that is not the best option for people which is why we're offering other things.

Now, the Member opposite can say he wants to put a price on helping people, but End Homelessness St. John's has said this is transformative for people. What we are going to offer is going to be transformative. That is what we're going to continue to do.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, End Homelessness is a great organization. It

only shows that after four months of failing to do anything, failing to provide any supports, they actually called in End Homelessness to actually get someone to do something about it because the Liberal government wasn't capable of doing it.

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** So let's talk about what we have here. We have a sweetheart of a deal, a sole-source contract with the Furey Liberals. They have built in an annual escalation clause tied to the consumer price index.

Why do the Liberal owners get better treatment than low-income recipients and our seniors?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you very much for the question.

It certainly sounds like the Member opposite is not supportive of having these wraparound services for those who need them most.

Speaker, all I can say to you and to this Assembly and to the people of the province is, we are trying and working with community partners. We're working with Health Services. We're working with everyone in our community to try and provide the best level of service, wraparound services, to move people from their desperate situation that they find themselves in now to better opportunities for the future.

I am sure the Member opposite and his entire caucus is supportive in that.

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

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** We're completely supportive, Speaker, completely supportive. What we'd like to see though is the cost-benefit analysis that was done when they entered into this contract. How do they know that this was the best option available to them? Can you provide that information? That's all we're asking for, where's the cost-benefit analysis that was done when you entered into this sole-source contract?

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

**S. COADY:** Certainly, Speaker, there will be time allotted in Estimates, as the minister has indicated, to do a line-by-line, in-depth review of the budget. I encourage the Member opposite to ensure that he is there to ask every question, to get into every detail of the budgetary process for Housing.

I will point out to the Members opposite and to this Assembly and to the people of the province, this year we are providing a record amount of money in Housing, an overwhelming amount of money in Housing. We are there to support the people of the province. We are there to support those most vulnerable. We will be there for them.

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

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

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

Minister, all we're looking for is the cost-benefit analysis. We want a copy of that. We shouldn't have to wait until Estimates. It's a simple question asked in the House of Assembly, provide it. Because it was an emergency contract that was awarded. It never went to tender; it was an emergency. That's all we're looking for, Minister.

Speaker, since raising the issue of conditions in patient rooms in the Health Sciences Centre last week, our office has received a flood of emails and photos with residents raising serious concerns: mould,

dirt, dried urine on the floors and cracks in the walls.

I ask the minister: Is this a more widespread problem than we originally thought?

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

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

Mr. Speaker, we've had discussions with the provincial health authority. They have done a walk-through of the facility. We have to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, that this is an operating facility that is operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The facility is some 45 or 50 years old, but they continue to do upgrades on the facility as required. As issues become aware to the maintenance folks and the facilities managers at the Health Sciences complex, they deal with them.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, we have additional pictures, which speak for themselves. I guess the big question is has he reviewed all of our health facilities?

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

**B. PETTEN:** We should go to these health facilities to get better, not to get sick. That's the concern I have. These are sick people, they should be in healthier, cleaner environments.

Why is the Liberal government not adequately maintaining infrastructure at the Health Sciences complex to an acceptable standard?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, the facilities managers and the provincial health authority look to maintain buildings. One of the things they provided advice to us, for example, was that the condition of St. Clare's was well beyond its useful life. The cost of repairing and upgrading St. Clare's was more expensive than replacing it.

When the decision was made to replace that facility, the Opposition criticized us, Mr. Speaker, saying we didn't need a new facility. With the Health Sciences complex, which is in considerably better shape than St. Clare's, they're complaining that the facility is not in good enough shape.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, I'm talking about the Health Sciences Centre there on Prince Philip Parkway, not St. Clare's. So while you're planning to build a new St. Clare's, you're soon going to have to plan to build a new Health Sciences Centre if you soon don't get this one fixed up. That's what we're asking. You know what I'm asking, Minister.

Speaker, Frank Roberts Junior High was in the media for rats and dirt until the minister ordered – and I quote – a triple clean. Do we need to have patients and their families go public in order to shame this government into taking action in our health care system? Simple question.

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

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

As I'd indicated in my first answer, staff had done a walk-through of the facility. They are addressing issues as they come up. They continue to address issues, Mr. Speaker, but it is a facility that is operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. While there are

patients in the rooms and rooms are near capacity, most of the time, it is difficult to address issues while a room is full.

They do the very best they can to address issues in the rooms. I am told by the provincial health authority that the facility's management are addressing the issues.

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

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

**B. PETTEN:** Speaker, as long as there's water in the ocean or in the seas, out of the taps, there's no excuse for dirt. There's no excuse for dirt anywhere – anywhere – especially your hospitals.

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

**B. PETTEN:** You can do all the walk-throughs you want; cleanliness got to come first, especially when you're dealing with health care facilities. That's the crux of what we're asking.

Speaker, the Health Sciences complex, as the minister says, is almost 50 years old. When is the government going to start to do a redevelopment of the patient areas, including the rooms?

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

**T. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, with a fully operating facility – and we do have cleaning staff at the Health Sciences complex who do the best they can and to keep the facility clean. These staff work hard. They are public servants. I don't think that it is right to take aim at these public servants who clean the building and the facilities. They are public servants who work hard.

Mr. Speaker, there is redevelopment of the Health Sciences taking place. For example, the emergency department is undergoing a full redevelopment. We can't do that in

every room, in every division, in every wing of the hospital all at once. The emergency department is undergoing a full renovation and redevelopment, as we speak. The Health Sciences complex will address other areas of the hospital as they're able.

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

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

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

I don't appreciate low blows and the staff at the Health Sciences don't appreciate it either. I fully support the cleaning staff at the Health Sciences. They know that. I speak to them.

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

**B. PETTEN:** Maybe you should, Minister. Maybe you should do them a favour and the hospital a favour and hire enough of them on and provide them with the resources to keep the hospitals clean. Maybe you should come up with a redevelopment plan; get contracts in. There's more than dirt, Minister. There's stuff rotting out there that requires contractors and tradespeople. Don't go giving me that about we don't respect the workers. We do respect the workers. Maybe you should.

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

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

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

For a Member who doesn't appreciate low blows, he gives them every day.

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

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

Speaker, last week, the minister announced a proposed reconfiguration of PWC's school system to address the overcrowding at the feeder schools. One school, Leary's Brook Junior High, will actually end up with more children after the proposed changes.

Why does the minister believe this will help?

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

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to respond.

As the Member opposite referenced, last week, we sent out a notice that it is our intention to look at a reconfiguration for the school system involved in Leary's Brook, Larkhall Academy and PWC, as well as St. Andrew's. We do recognize that there is an increasing population of students in those schools and that there has to be a different method to allocate space and classroom space for these students, so that they have the best opportunity to get a solid education in a safe atmosphere.

As we're looking at the resources that we have at our disposal right now, the space that we have and how it can be better utilized, there is a consultation process that's happening with the school community. We'll get their feedback to see what that looks like when it's all said and done.

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

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

The minister talks about overcrowding and safety in the classroom. Putting more in a classroom is not helping, not helping for Leary's Brook.

Speaker, students have lost their library for instructional space and are eating in hallways. Over half the schools in the

province do not have a cafeteria, yet the proposed Grade 5-to-8 reconfiguration is going to make the situation worse.

Again, who is actually benefitting from this plan?

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

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

Again, the Member opposite is referencing exactly the reason why we have to do this reconfiguration. We do have limited space in some of our facilities right now. There are libraries that have been used as classrooms.

We want to ensure that the spaces that our students are utilizing give them the best opportunity to gain an educational – have a positive educational experience. That's why, as part of our plans for rebuilding and reinvesting in infrastructure here in the province, we want to utilize the space that we already have, as we continue to build into the future.

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

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

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

Limited space didn't just occur; it's been ongoing for a number of years. Half the schools don't have a cafeteria. That didn't just happen overnight.

Speaker, parents have expressed concern over Grade 9 children now being moved to PWC. We all know all too well the serious incident that happened last March in front of the school. Last week, the minister spoke of the ever-growing student population, less room in the classroom and saying changes need to be made for safety reasons.

Will the parents see an updated school safety plan for PWC before the end of the school year?

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

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

Again, as the Member opposite referenced, there is a particular indication that there may be room at PWC for an additional class. That's certainly something that we're interested in pursuing, while we build the school in Kenmount Terrace which will capture a lot of that student base and that population.

In reference to the incident that the Member is talking about at PWC, we know that that was certainly a serious incident and we have addressed that. We've taken the necessary steps to move that forward – even measures that came beyond the Department of Education, and that's what we'll continue to do. We'll continue to follow up on our student population to ensure that their safety is top priority, that teachers and classrooms are resourced appropriately and that they have a positive experience.

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

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

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

Parents have real concerns about safety with this reconfiguration. Parents have concerns over the lack of dedicated, separate classrooms for Grade 9s, as well as the mingling of Grade 9s with 12s during lunchtimes, before and after school.

Can the minister table the proposed operational plan for the Grade 9 students?

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

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

I think it's important to recognize that there are some school systems that have a K-to-12 classrooms and there are benefits associated with having children interact with their peers. When we look at that to simply say that we're putting a Grade 9 in interaction with a Grade 12, I think it's disingenuous to assume that that is a negative experience for many of these children.

So we'll continue to work with the school populations. As I said, the consultation is out there. We've asked the families and those who are directly involved in that school system to have an input, to see what that looks like and when it's available and when we finalize the details built on the consultations, I will absolutely present it to this House.

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

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

For the minister to say the parents' concerns are disingenuous is terrible. It's terrible. This is a serious, serious incident here that happened at PWC. Parents are concerned about their Grade 9 students moving to this environment.

I ask the Member opposite: Disingenuous or not, can she table a proposed operational plan for the Grade 9 students?

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

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

**K. HOWELL:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address the preamble to that question. I absolutely did not say that the parents were disingenuous. I said that the Member was.

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

**K. HOWELL:** When a plan is ready to present to this House, something that we've given consideration to, made sure that all our t's are crossed and our i's are dotted, then I will present it to this House.

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

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

**J. WALL:** Speaker, yesterday the minister corrected the record. In fact, there are only 12 people staying at the Airport Inn.

I ask the minister: Has he offered rooms to the individuals living at Tent City?

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question from the Member opposite; happy to address it.

There were 13 people living at 106 Airport Road prior to the agreement, which was reached with the provincial government and End Homelessness St. John's to offer our Transitional Supportive Living Initiative.

There have been consultations this week now that the hotel is actually ready. The Member opposite must know that we held a media briefing there last week. We brought the media through. We showed them what changes have been made internally and structurally. The staff working at the hotel are there. End Homelessness St. John's are hiring their staff and we are in the process of getting feedback from End Homelessness on the offers that are made to folks who are at the tent encampment.

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

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

**J. WALL:** Speaker, I take from that answer that they were not offered rooms at that hotel.

I ask the minister: What is the plan to house the individuals living at Tent City?

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, the plan is what we've been talking about all along, some of the individuals who are living at the tent encampment will be moving to the former hotel site at 106 Airport Road, some will move to other options.

On a daily basis, through the week, regularly, people are offered alternatives to staying in a tent. Through our community partners that they're connected with, be it Stella's Circle, The Gathering Place, Thrive, Safe Haven, Naomi house, other community partners who we're going to be meeting with this week to discuss further aspects of what could be offered.

There are also Newfoundland and Labrador Housing representatives who are on site this week as well offering alternatives.

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

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

**J. WALL:** Speaker, that's very frustrating, some individuals were not given any plan of when anyone is going to move into hotel Hutton.

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

**J. WALL:** I'll ask the minister: We have people from Tent City living there and they're being called protestors. They're desperate for a home. Why doesn't the minister offer them the rooms, all of them, not just some individuals, at the hotel?

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between the people who are actually living in the tents and the protestors, but make no mistake, there are protestors there who are using this as an avenue to protest and making a political statement in some cases.

The people who are living in the tents, that is a completely different situation. Those are the people we are trying to help and reach through End Homelessness St. John's, through the other community partners and we are doing so on a regular basis.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Speaker, yesterday in the House, the Minister of Housing, who still doesn't have a mandate, said that those who are living at Tent City are protestors – quite clearly.

While the organizers may call their involvement a protest, I ask the minister, and the Premier for that matter: Are you actually saying that you believe that the people who are living in the tents during some of the harshest weather are simply protesting? Because I can assure you they're not, despite what you just said.

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, it is not what I said. But let me be clear, there are two aspects to this. There are people who need help and we are offering the help on a regular basis.

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

**F. HUTTON:** We understand that. Nobody on this side of the House, that side of the

House, or outside of the House is disputing that. People need out help, which is why we are making a record investment in housing.

But what I will say, Mr. Speaker, is there are very clearly protest aspects to this. I will quote one of the organizers from the CBC yesterday: "This is still 100 per cent a protest."

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member opposite, the Leader of the Third Party, should know about the protest, he's been involved.

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

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

**J. DINN:** Yes, Speaker, I've been involved to make sure that this government is doing what it should have been doing and hasn't been. I will tell you this, you obviously haven't quoted the people who are living in tents that were interviewed as well, they tell a different story.

Speaker, they are in the media –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Address the Chair.

**J. DINN:** Speaker, if the Premier actually went down and spoke to the people living at Tent City, he would understand the reasons why the options that his government continuously offers are inadequate for every person experiencing homelessness.

Now we hear the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure saying that government will not put resources in at the Colonial Building to allow residents to access electricity.

So I ask the Premier: Will he admit that his key goal here is to clear out Tent City before the start of the tourism season?

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

**F. HUTTON:** Mr. Speaker, the key goal is to clear out Tent City so that the people living there are living somewhere safe.

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

**F. HUTTON:** That is what our goal is.

That is why this government is making a record investment in housing; that is why we have a transitional supportive initiative. We have partnered with our community partners who know what the needs are.

But I will tell you this as well, Mr. Speaker, sometimes – and I have heard from our community partners – the folks who are protesting are impeding our ability to convince people what options are available that might be better suited for them.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** In May 2023, Mr. David Conway, a review consultant, submitted a report to the Minister of Finance of his Statutory Review of the *Independent Appointments Commission Act*.

One of the recommendations contained within the report is that any positions that are filled outside the normal appointment process of the act, that being choosing from the candidate list of three names presented to the minister by the Independent Appointments Commission, would be immediately publicly disclosed by the minister with reasons being provided as to the urgent extenuating or other circumstances that justified the decision.

I ask the minister: Will she be bringing forth an amendment to the *Independent Appointments Commission Act* to reflect this

recommendation? If so, when? And if not, why not?

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

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

We do thank the Commissioner for providing us with the information and for doing a thorough review of the Independent Appointments Commission. We're very proud of the work that the Independent Appointments Commission has been doing. I think during Estimates when it was asked, I think it was some 900 appointments have been made by the Independent Appointments Commission.

Further to the question: We're implementing all of the recommendations of Mr. Conway in due course. We're working with the Public Service Commission. There will be some changes required in legislation. We're moving forward. There are provisions in the act for extenuating circumstances as the Member opposite did describe. I will say that on very few of occasions have we utilized that section of the act.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you.

I'm glad to hear and I guess the difference will be that at least people will know when those extenuating circumstances are used.

Mr. Speaker, section 3.1 of the *House of Assembly Act* currently allows the Premier to go to the Lieutenant Governor at any time and request the House of Assembly be dissolved and a general election be called. This clause totally undermines our province's fixed-date election legislation and allows the government to put politics before fair and transparent process.

I ask the minister: Would you be willing to amend this legislation to require the premier of the day to bring his or her intentions to dissolve the House of Assembly before the Legislature in the form of a motion for debate as a precondition to asking the Lieutenant Governor to dissolve the House of Assembly?

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

**S. COADY:** I thank you, Speaker, for the question.

I will say to the Member opposite that legislation came in under a former government that, I believe, he was a Member of at that point in time and if there were changes required at that time, I am sure he would have brought them forward for discussion within the party that he was involved in.

I will say that I don't know of any circumstance, at this point in time, as we move towards. I think if you look at the legislation – sorry, a lot of chatter today.

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

We are looking at the legislation, of course, because there are fixed-election dates as set out in that legislation. We'll be complying with those.

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

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

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To correct the record, I was not a Member of the Williams government and I was not

there when this legislation was brought forward.

Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** There's no point of order there.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

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

During Question Period today, when I was presenting the views and concerns of the people of the province in regard to PWC school, on two occasions the Minister of Education referred to me as being disingenuous. I find those remarks offensive. I believe she should apologize and retract those comments.

**SPEAKER:** I will take some time to review that point of order and report back to the House.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### **Tabling of Documents**

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

**B. PETTEN:** I have some more photos I think it would be worthy of tabling.

**SPEAKER:** Does the Member have leave to table documents?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Leave.

**SPEAKER:** Leave is granted.

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

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

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### **Petitions**

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

**P. FORSEY:** The list for the number of people in need of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing in Central Newfoundland has increased in the past couple of years. This leaves people in vulnerable situations and most out in the cold while waiting for placement.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to upgrade and increase the number of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units in the Central area.

Speaker, I spoke in the House this morning regarding the housing situation in Central Newfoundland. I know there are 350 people on wait-list for housing. They're not students but single parents with children and they're looking for housing. Other people are looking for housing. There's housing there that needs to be refurbished and done up so that people can be in those houses and adequately looked after in a meaningful manner in affordable conditions that they can afford.

So I ask the minister to certainly pay attention to those units and more units if we can in the Central area to address those problems.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

Prepandemic residents of the Bonavista Peninsula could walk into Bonavista hospital

and take a number to wait to be called for lab work. The system worked well and the population was understanding that the pandemic negatively affected many services. Today, residents call into the call centre to book appointments and experience long waits to connect with the attendant. There is much frustration in this process.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reinstate the walk-in service or the booking directly at Bonavista hospital as it is in other hospitals. This would increase the efficiency of the department and reduce the frustration experienced by the residents of the region.

Not a big ask, Mr. Speaker. There was a lot of issues that were raised in this House with the health care system that the answer was that it's operational. Well, this is an operational issue, of which no additional cost would be anchored to it but would better serve the residents of the District of Bonavista.

I want to read an email that was sent to the Minister of Health and Community Services and copied to myself which states the frustration that's out there and the experiences of the residents in the Bonavista Peninsula.

He calls the minister by name. My wife and I are both seniors in our late 60s. On Monday, April 15, we both had an appointment with the doctor. My wife was given a phone number to call for a test. She called Tuesday and waited well over an hour before finally giving up. She tried again on Wednesday; the same wait time occurred and eventually, after an hour or more, she handed the phone to him. I waited well into half an hour or more before a lady came on the phone.

For seniors or any other person in the province to go through this wait time for a simple blood test in Bonavista is absolutely

ridiculous. He suggested, in a very compassionate way, to the minister, maybe you should call yourselves some day if you don't believe us.

I've had many of those calls as Member for the district. There are many who call and express a lot of frustration. That is an operational issue and don't cost any more money, but it's one that'll serve the residents of the Bonavista Peninsula much better.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Long Run Road is a main access road from Goulds to Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove. This piece of infrastructure is in need of major repairs. This road is in a deplorable condition and is relied upon by both residents and visitors on a daily basis. Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove is a well-known tourist attraction in this area.

Therefore, we petition the House of Assembly as follows: We urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to complete necessary repairs to the Long Run Road in Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove to enhance and improve the flow of traffic to and from to allow safer travel on this important piece of road structure.

Mr. Speaker, I've done this petition on a number of occasions for sure and I still get calls from the residents in the Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove area regarding the condition of the Long Run Road which runs from Crocker's Bridge down to the main bridge just in front of fisherman's landing or where the fish store is there.

There are a lot of tourists – and I've said this before – that travel through Petty Harbour as a tourist attraction. They land in the St. John's airport, they stay in the hotels and they're looking to get somewhere that looks like a rural area in Newfoundland and Labrador, and there's nowhere closer than 15 minutes away from St. John's. They drive through it, historic, beautiful community.

They've got Chafe's Landing down there, Tinkers Ice Cream Shop, Petty Harbour Mini Aquarium, East Coast Trail, Fishing for Success, North Atlantic Ziplines. There are all kinds of tourist attractions in the area. The people of the area have been phoning me constantly on trying to get this road upgraded or done. It's about a kilometre and a half, two kilometres. I've spoken to the minister on it before. There was a promise that it was going to be done last year. Nothing has been done up to this point.

So hopefully the minister, I'm sure that he drove down there – and I give him credit, we went down and looked at an issue last year. But hopefully you can get down and have a look at this road and maybe get something done with it. Tourist season is upon us again and this road is still not done. So we'd love to see this being done.

Thank you.

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

**J. ABBOTT:** Speaker, just briefly, I'm certainly aware of the area the Member is referring to. I won't be moving there in the near future, but I will make sure that road does get addressed in the appropriate time with the appropriate funds in the appropriate year that we can do it.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

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

This petition is for timely and adequate access to health care for our Northern Labrador residents.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure our Northern Labrador residents are provided with access to timely and adequate health care.

Frequently, patients are prevented from getting to medical appointments at outside provincial health authority health centres in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, St. John's, St. Anthony, Corner Brook, et cetera.

Some delays are due to inclement weather, but often patients are prevented from getting on the medical flights to their appointments because there are no seats left on the flight. There are multiple reasons for this and we are calling on the government to work towards removing these barriers so patients can access their medical appointments for a diagnosis and treatment.

Now, Speaker, I've presented this petition multiple times – many times, actually, since I got elected. I've actually revised it to add additional things to this petition when it comes to access to health care. The signatures on this petition are from November of last year, less than a year ago. But, in actual fact, what we're seeing now is when you look at health care, we're also having to actually vocalize the need for access to adequate and timely mental-health health care.

In Northern Labrador we see a failure for our patients, our people to be able to access adequate mental health supports. One of the harms from that is overall wellness and quality of life, quality of health. For me, being able to actually have access

to diagnosis so people can begin to have proper treatment and the failure to deliver that to patients in Northern Labrador is creating serious harm on top of the already existing harm that's been done to people in my district.

There's a lot more awareness now about intergenerational trauma, but what about mental health issues that have nothing to do with trauma? That's not being addressed as well. I had a mother talk to me about her child, who's becoming a youth, not being able to access mental health supports, and the burden of stigma that's actually associated now, affiliated with the incident regarding her child. She said: Lela, my child has not undergone trauma, yet the doctor in St. John's will not listen to me. I can't get treatment for my child.

That's an overall failure of the health care system. So for us –

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

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

Speaker, approximately 100,000 people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador live with mental illness.

Only about 40 per cent of the people affected by mental illness and addictions seek help.

Seventy per cent of mental illness development occurs during childhood and adolescence, and most go undiagnosed.

Less than 20 per cent receive appropriate treatment.

Emergency and short-term care isn't enough, and it is essential that more long-term treatment and options are readily available.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide access to long-term mental health care that ensures continuity of care, beginning with psychiatric and neuropsychological assessments being more accessible to the public so they can access proper mental health treatment and supports on a regular and continuous basis.

Speaker, this week is 177 weeks now that Kristi Allan and her group have been advocating for better health care, in particular continuity of care and long-term care supports. I've gotten up here multiple times and spoken to this; I can almost memorize what I'm saying. I know the Canadian Mental Health Association of Newfoundland and Labrador put out a report, *Embracing Experiences*. That was done in May 2021. It actually talked to people with lived experiences. I said it before, their quote: They can't get the help because they're not the right kind of crazy.

That says a lot. Others have gone on and said they are lucky – lucky – to receive treatment. A Member earlier today talked about – and I know the wording, we say people committed suicide. But you don't commit suicide. No one goes out to commit suicide; it's a last resort. People die from suicide, because of their mental health and addictions issues that are not being addressed. There are lives in the balance here, and we hear it all the time. The Member also spoke about a friend who didn't get the help and died due to suicide.

What I want to say – and it's been said – mental health and addictions issues do not do well on wait-lists. And there's no truer words spoken. So we need to do much, much more to ensure that individuals in need get the continuity of care and the long-term supports they need.

Thank you.

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

Orders of the DayPrivate Members' Day

**SPEAKER:** This being Wednesday, I call upon the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands to bring forward his private Member's resolution.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by my colleague the Member for Humber-Bay of Islands, the following private Member's resolution:

WHEREAS the House of Assembly currently has an annual budget Estimates process, allowing Members to complete a line-by-line examination of the annual budgets of core government departments and ask questions to ministers and relevant senior departmental staff concerning estimated departmental revenues and expenditures; and

WHEREAS no such process currently applies to government agencies, boards, commissions and other government entities such as NL Health Services, Memorial University, College of the North Atlantic, Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, OilCo, the Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation and others; and

WHEREAS Members of the House of Assembly are elected by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to, among other things, be stewards to the public purse; and

WHEREAS a significant portion of the provincial government's annual budget flows through agencies, boards and commissions without examination by elected Members of the Legislature;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House direct the government to initiate a process and allocate the required time and resources to allow elected Members the opportunity to review budgets and question appropriate senior staff of government agencies, boards, commissions and other similar entities on an annual basis similar to the process utilized in budget Estimates.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I feel somewhat like a broken record, to be honest with you, as it relates to bringing this issue up. I've been raising this issue for several years, as a matter of fact. At one point in time, I think it was three budgets ago now, that the Minister of Finance when she was speaking on the budget after delivering her Budget Speech and she looked across the isle and said the Member from – I don't have the *Hansard* here. But something to the gist of the fact that the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands is going to be very happy to know that we're finally going to take him up on his suggestion and we're going to start examining agencies, boards and commissions. I thought that was wonderful. I was very appreciative of that and I thought it was the right thing to do.

Now, unfortunately, I don't know what happened between then and now but, for some reason, it fell off the radar, never happened, despite the fact that I brought it up time and time again. I've asked questions about it in the House of Assembly. I can never quite get an answer to understand why what was thought to be a good idea all of a sudden wasn't going to happen for some unknown reason.

So I felt that this would be the appropriate opportunity for me in the form of a private Member's motion, not just for me to stand up and make this suggestion, but to hear from other Members on both sides of the House as to how they feel about this suggestion. If they are against it, to let me know, let all Members know, and more importantly, let the people of Newfoundland and Labrador know why they would be

against allowing elected Members of this Legislature the ability to question the millions, or should I say the billions – not millions, billions – of dollars that are being expended of taxpayers' money in this province year over year over year.

I've used the analogy, Mr. Speaker, I've talked about the fact that in this House of Assembly, through the Estimates process by way of example, that Members of this House of Assembly will ask the Minister of Health – and I'll use that one as the go-to example once again, I know Members have heard this before, I'll say it again anyway – we will ask the Minister of Health: Why is it, Minister, in your office, that you said you were going to spend \$10,000 on photocopying expenses, but you end up spending \$15,000. Why the extra \$5,000 or why the extra \$5,000 on travel, or whatever the case might?

We're basically nickel-and-diming and counting paperclips in the Minister of Health's office. That's kind of what we're doing. That's not a bad thing, because as my mother always said, and I'm sure everyone's mother probably said: Look after the pennies, the dollars will take care of themselves. So it's not a bad thing.

But we will ask those questions about miniscule expenses and, at the same time that we're asking these questions to the Minister of Health, by way of example, I'm looking at this year's budget and in this year's budget, Grants and Subsidies to the Provincial Health Authority and Related Services: \$3,449,354,000.

I'm going to say this again now so it sinks in: \$3,449,354,000. That's the amount of money budgeted to be transferred to NL Health Services for the operation of our hospitals and our clinics and I guess ambulance services and all those things, all very important things. We're not going to ask any questions about that. We're not going to ask questions about that. We're

going to pass over that line in the budget Estimates process –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Operational.

**P. LANE:** It's operational, my colleague says, yeah.

So we're going to pass over \$3.5 billion and ask no questions, but then we're going to ask the minister: How much did you spend on photocopying in your office?

Am I the only one that sees how ridiculous, really, when you think about it, that is? It's crazy. It's not like there's nothing to ask about. It's not as if there was nothing for us to ask about when it comes to the health authority.

I can talk about the nurses' contract, for example, for the travel nurses. That's just one that comes to mind right now, that just jumps out at me, right now, entering into that contract for millions and millions and millions and millions of dollars, but we're going to ask the minister about photocopying expenses in his office instead of talking about those things – something wrong.

I look at Education and I'm looking here at College of the North Atlantic, Operating Grant, \$56 million; Tuition Offset Grant, \$14 million; Total: Operations, \$70,999,000; looking at Capital for College of the North Atlantic, \$1 million.

Looking at Grants and Subsidies to Memorial University, \$270 million, then the Offsetting Grant of \$27,360,000 for a total of \$297,627,000 gone to Memorial University under Operating and another Grants and Subsidies for the Capital of another \$14,351,000.

Now, we can also look at Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, we can look at OilCo, we can look at the Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation, as an example, and while the Liquor Corporation

is a money-maker and people would say that's a good thing, bringing some money in, could we be bringing more in? Could the profits be greater? Because on the expenditure side, just because we're taking money in doesn't mean that we're not wasting money on the other side and it doesn't mean that we couldn't be bringing more in, in theory.

But the point is – and the point has always been – the fact that the lion's share, I would suggest – the lion's share, certainly, when it comes to the health transfer alone is one-third of our budget: \$3.5 billion. Then you start adding on to that with all of the other government agencies, boards, commissions – and nothing against the people on the boards. This is not to take a shot at anyone on the boards or whatever, that's not what it's about, but the fact of the matter is that those are all people that are appointed to these positions, they are not elected by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The 40 people in this chamber, we are the people that were elected by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to look out for their best interest and to oversee the expenditures of their tax dollars. Ultimately, we are the ones who are responsible to the people for that. Therefore, in my view, all these expenditures should be scrutinized by Members of this House of Assembly to make sure that those dollars are being spent wisely on behalf of the people who we all represent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I'm very pleased to stand today and respond to the PMR. First of all, I want to put out a couple of thoughts that I think everyone who is listening here in the

Legislature and perhaps at home watching the broadcast is that the idea put forward today is not necessarily a new idea. It's not a bad idea, but it's certainly one that's been taken under consideration much in the past.

I'd like to just have people and Members reflect back for a few years where the previous Minister of Finance, actually several years ago, when we were faced with a rather difficult situation as we came into administrative responsibility back in 2015 and our government took over our responsibility for running this province faced with a massive deficit. This was not something that we signed up for in terms of the headache and the heartache that we had to face. But we had to make those tough decisions and, today, as we see our fiscal situation improving, we can be thankful that we did take that strong leadership, we did those tough decisions and move forward.

But part of it was getting a grip on where some of these expenditures were occurring, and as the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands says, there are often single line items with big dollars attached to it and one is left wondering: Well, what's going on?

So the previous Minister of Finance, actually, we found some quotes from him from a few years ago when he was very much frustrated and struggling with trying to get some co-operation. But he was reporting at the time that he has felt that the ABCs at least that were reporting to him and other line departments were indeed starting to co-operate and we felt much better about it in going forward with the transparent process.

So what I would say to the Member is that, we do have now – and I've just sat through several Estimates processes, I'm sure most of us have these last weeks or so. Each minister when they go before Estimates, they have several of these ABCs we call them – agencies, boards and commissions – that report to them. They are responsible

for answering questions, not only within their department, but also within the ABCs that they are, again, linked in with and are responsible for. So one can delve down.

The question, I think, becomes: Should we apply, allocate substantially more time and energy and resources to probing down through? I think I can say that we would all equally like to see that kind of transparency and accountability.

We can certainly take a look at it, but I did want to at least leave everyone with the understanding that there is already a lot happening. I just want to read a couple of quotes: Through the existing budget process, as they say, each line department is responsible for several ABCs. During Estimates, each minister must answer accordingly.

These include, by the way, some of the entities that the Member has just raised in his PMR regarding including NL Health Services, Memorial University, College of the North Atlantic, NL Hydro, OilCo, NL Liquor Corporation and many others. So it's already happening; again, the question is, do we need to be spending a great deal more effort and energy to looking in there?

I also would like the public and this Legislature to be aware of that there is a new accountability framework that has been developed, and this applies to all government departments, public bodies, community-based organizations, and any other organization that is in receipt of public funds. So that is also happening.

Of course, many of us are familiar with Public Accounts; I happen to sit on the Public Accounts Committee, and that is another very effective way to get at the financial operations of any entity of government, which would also include the agencies, boards and commissions.

These Public Accounts are audited financial statements and they look at the fiscal years.

They are prepared in accordance with the standards established for governments by the Public Sector Accounting Board. So a very detailed scrutiny of expenditures; I wouldn't want anyone to think that there's millions and billions being disbursed on behalf of the public with no accountability or ability to investigate. In fact, there's a great deal of opportunity.

One thing I would say, and this is in my role formerly as Speaker and in my current role supporting you, Speaker, is that we all have to realize if we are going to get into more of a Committee structure in this Legislature, we are going to need to allocate substantially new and more resources in the House of Assembly.

If we start, I can tell you the staff that we have, it's a small but mighty team, we always like to speak about them, but we need to support them. If we start getting into a Committee structure, we're really going to need to think about that.

I want to get into a particular phrasing that the Member used in the PMR. I must say, when I saw it, and then we started to confer with some of my other colleagues that are going to speak to this today, that we all need to understand that there's a key aspect of democracy, particularly within the Westminster system that we're all very, very proud of.

There are three pillars: One is this Legislature. Our responsibility here – we are politicians, we are elected officials, we are MHAs, but we are to pass bills, to make sure that they're being done appropriately. So the Speaker, with the support of the House and so on, we pass legislation.

The judiciary, led by the chief justices and so on, their responsibility is to ensure that an entity, an individual, is compliant with that legislation. We have to make sure that it was passed appropriately, but finally, it's the Executive, it's the Premier and the Cabinet, they come up with a policy of this

province, of this government for the term that they're in power. Those three are very important pillars.

You'll often hear so-and-so say something like, oh, that person should be arrested and I sometimes I'll have this kind of petition come to my office. I have to explain to them, I said, when an elected official starts deciding who needs to be arrested, I've crossed into another pillar that I should not be into.

Just thinking, we just had our three Baltic ambassadors here, the last couple of days, talking about the concerns and threats of dictators on their doorstep. That's the kind of situation you get into when you start to lose track of where these pillars are, where you stop and where somebody else's responsibility picks up. We cannot go there.

The Member used a particular phraseology in his PMR. I'd like to propose an amendment, which really addresses that. Certainly, as I said and as I said in my preamble, government, I feel, is always open to and looking at new ways to improve a process. I can tell from some of the reaction of my colleagues here that this is not something to be dismissed, so let's look at a new way.

But it's important that we understand that this House cannot direct the policy of the government. It can raise issues. This House can pass motions unanimously; for example, if we wanted to change our *Standing Orders*, if we want to do something within the Management Commission, there's another opportunity there. In terms of directing government to do something and so on, that is the purview of the Premier and the Cabinet.

So, to that end, I would like to move the following amendment and I'm going to have it seconded by my colleague for St. George's - Humber and what I'm wanting to do is just reword the THEREFORE clause.

I will read it into the record: THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the House support the government in initiating a process and recommend the allocation of the required time and resources to allow Members the opportunity to review budgets and question appropriate senior staff of government agencies, boards, commissions and other similar entities on an annual basis similar to the process utilized in budget Estimates.

Speaker, I'll table that and may I have the record show that in my role as Deputy Chair of Committees, I will not be joining you to confer as to whether or not this is in order.

Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** We're going to take a short recess now to review the proposed amendment and be back very shortly.

This House stands recessed.

### Recess

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Upon review of the proposed amendment, I do find that the amendment is in order.

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

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

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

I am very pleased to hear that conclusion.

I would like to add a couple of details. Again, just to reiterate, if this is successful today, the amendment and the PMR, we collectively support it, it would be asking that this House would support government in exploring these ideas to come up with a process that would look exactly as the Member is intending.

I had one little detail I do want to throw out onto the floor and that is that back in 2017, I

understand that agencies, boards and commissions, at that time, represented about 60 per cent of total government expenditures. Looking at this year's records, I can tell from another one, that we're now at about 44 per cent. So I believe there has been progress made, especially since we came into power in 2015 and faced that wonderful bit of news in December of that year as to the fiscal situation that this government had inherited and had to deal with.

But it is good to see and we're always welcome and pleased to see new ideas and new philosophies and approaches to getting this House in order and we're going to keep doing that.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, always an honour to stand and speak in the House of Assembly.

When it comes to this PMR, the Member for Lake Melville just talked about support for the PMR and the path forward. Far too many times we present PMRs in this House of Assembly and they just die here on the floor. They get 100 per cent unanimous support from the House and that's where they end.

This is not a situation where that is one of the things that should happen. This is actually a pretty important PMR and I commend the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands for bringing it forward. Far too much money goes unallocated – not unallocated or unattended to, I guess, but we don't have the ability to ask the questions. We need to be able to ask those questions, obviously, in this House because the people in this House are here to represent the people that elected them and put them here to do just that.

Over the last several weeks, we've actually listened to the Minister of Health on numerous occasions, I won't speculate how many, but I think that my hon. colleague from CBS mentioned at one time it was somewhere around 19 times the word operational was used. When that happens, we have no site as to where we can get the answers.

As a matter of fact, last week before we went into Health Estimates, we specifically asked for members of the health board to be here so we could ask those questions. Oddly enough, the Premier supported that notion, but, at the end of the day, they weren't here and those questions couldn't be asked to them.

I spent some time on Public Accounts and I found it a little odd that the Member for Lake Melville would bring the Public Accounts factor into the whole idea of ABCs. Nobody questions the authority of Public Accounts or the Auditor General and their ability to look into issues. The problem is, when it gets to that level, it's already too late – already too late.

As a matter of fact, look no further than what's going on with the travel nurses, we're bringing in the Auditor General and the answer is that we're going to get to these numbers. We're going to know exactly what's happening. We actually called in the Auditor General at your guys' request. Fair deal.

How long is it going to take, we asked the minister. Eighteen months. Eighteen months after \$80 million, partway into a year, when there's still lots of spending going on, there are toaster ovens and travel and Christmas dinners and all kinds of stuff being spent and we don't have the answers.

So we've got to find a way to get those answers quicker, and while Public Accounts is one of the most useful tools that this House of Assembly has, and as a Committee they do yeoman's work, they do

great work, the issue with it is that the things that go there at the request of Public Accounts, it's generally already an issue in the House of Assembly, the money has been spent and it's too late.

Interestingly, one of the quotes that just came up was we went from 60 per cent of our cost being with ABCs down to 44. There was no mention of some of these ABCs being absorbed back into government, and that has happened. So those expenses are probably gone from the ABCs, government has absorbed them, so the expense isn't gone. Obviously, if it was, then then budget would be less. If we saved that much money, we'd be able to reflect it in our budget and we'd see exactly what's going on.

The whole idea of what the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands has brought forward is about accountability. The reality is, that while we're accountable to our constituents and the people who elected us and brought us into this House of Assembly to represent them, the ABCs, agencies, boards and commissions, have to have a responsibility to core government where we can ask the questions.

Nobody is questioning the work they do, nobody is questioning the type of things that they carry out, but at the times when they're spending money or when they're making requests or the money has been spent or there's been claims put in that haven't been scrutinized, when we've got travel nurse contracts and the like, we need to be able to understand how that happens.

Recently, in my district and a couple of other districts here – and, listen, I've spoke to the minister and I've gotten really good answers, solid answers – it's process issues, but we just had a long-standing business in my district, that lost their liquor licence, through process. I'm not saying whether the process is right or wrong, but, I believe, personally, that the process is

tainted and we don't have the ability to ask those questions.

When you're looking at processes that maybe 15 or 20 years old and you're looking at a company that's been in business for 25 or 30 years and all of a sudden they're losing their ability to sell a product that they were selling on behalf of the Newfoundland and Labrador government, a well-established business in my district, after putting thousands and thousands of dollars into their business in order to deliver a product, out of the blue, they lost the contract. Now, no fault of anyone in this House and most likely no fault of anyone inside the agency, board and commission. It's a fault of a process that's become dated and the ability for us to scrutinize and question that process is not here.

So, hopefully, this PMR would give us those types of authority inside of this House. Because without putting a lens on some of the processes and the actions that agency, boards and commissions carry out, we have no ability to make the necessary change, suggest the necessary change or even explain what happened to the people we represent, more importantly, make sure that doesn't happen again because these types of things are harmful.

I'll give an example, when we look at these small liquor depots, at the end of the day they get certain points for being in a gas station versus being in a pharmacy or being in a different type of area. So an example, I'll say a stand-alone mall, a gas station or a pharmacy, there are different points allocated, it's just a part of the process. When I look at that and I say does that make a difference if I live in rural Newfoundland? You want to bet. If I live in an area of rural Newfoundland where there are five gas stations in a small community, then those gas stations should not get extra points because they're not going to see more foot traffic. The reality of it is, the

pharmacy, that's only one, may see more foot traffic.

The way I said it to the minister in our conversation – and, again, I'll circle back, the minister was very enlightening to me when I asked the question and the ABC actually circled back with answers to the questions and it was all above board, it was done the right way, but here's what I'll say, if you live in a community where there's one funeral home and somebody else comes in and opens up another funeral home, that doesn't mean more people are going to die. It means the business is going to be split.

So when you look at these liquor expresses and you take into consideration that there's a pharmacy and five gas stations, then a gas station shouldn't have an advantage because they're going to see more foot traffic, because they may not necessarily see more foot traffic.

Those are the types of things that these types of conversations may help change.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** I'm the gas station.

**L. PARROTT:** Yes, I know, you are a gas station.

When we look at, with regard to the ABCs and the accountability portion, we really have to understand that the accountability is not to the House of Assembly, but it's to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When they want a service, when they're talking about health care, the Liquor Corporation or The Rooms, all of these things cost money, and government invest in it – Memorial University. If you look at our expenditures, the bulk of our expenditures go to ABCs. When we're sitting here in an Estimates process going through line items, item by item and we can't ask direct questions as to where that money went, it's a big deal.

The Member talked about earlier things as trivial as photocopying. We get into these line items and one of the questions that you hear over and over is we'll say the pay last year was \$12,300 and this year it's \$13,600; where did the \$1,300 come from? The answer is: It was a 2 per cent increase in pay, based on CPI. And that same line item carries all the way down through pretty much the whole set of Estimates.

Is it good questioning? In some instances, it may be, but would our time be better spent asking questions where the money is spent, where the bulk of the money is spent, how it's spent, why it's spent. Again, it's just the whole accountability issue certainly when we're looking at agency, boards and commissions that generate revenue for the province. Because the reality of it is we spend money in some of these to keep them going, but some of them generate an enormous amount of money for the coffers of this province and we ought to have an understanding how we can do those things better. Because while I would argue we have a spending problem, sometimes we have a revenue problem, too, and we need to find a way to fix both of those things.

So I would support this. I think that there's no reason to not support this. If you're in government and you decide that you don't want to support this, then obviously you have something to hide or you think that there's something nefarious about asking questions to the people who we are here to, I guess, really – the Legislature is here to look after some of these agencies.

On that note, Speaker, I'll take my chair and I support this bill.

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

**SPEAKER (Gambin-Walsh):** The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

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

It's great to have an opportunity to get up and talk about this private Member's motion here today. Private Members' motions are a great opportunity for Members to bring issues that they feel strongly about to this House and have them debated for a day here in the House. It's a great opportunity to inject new issues from anyone on any side of the House into debate here and to have an opportunity to explore that and then have a vote at the end.

I want to thank the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands for bringing forward this motion here to the House for us today. It's an issue that's important to people in this province and it's great that he brought it forward.

It deals with Estimates Committees in this House. Now, some people watching may not be aware of Estimates Committees; they may be. Each year the budget is presented in the House and outside the sitting of the House, Estimates Committees sort of go through the budget line by line in the morning before the House is opened and in the evening after the House is closed.

I've had the opportunity to be sitting in the Estimates Committee in the Opposition and in government as a Chair of an Estimates Committee, and it has always struck me how different the Estimates Committees are, how collegial they are, how calm and serene they are, compared to the House itself, the House especially in Question Period. So it's Members asking questions, usually very politely, to the ministers and to the officials, getting good answers, getting the answers they want. Usually at the end, the minister hands over the briefing book he had for the Committees, and everything is so calm.

The Committees are everything that the House should be but is not. I understand the adversarial process, but I certainly notice the calm sort of nature of the Estimates Committee and the important role that they play, in particular, helping the Opposition Members get information from the

departments that they may want to explore later on and make public.

So it's an important part of the budget process in this province. I think the Member for Mount Pearl-Southlands raises a legitimate point here in terms of how do we extend that, how do we enhance that sort of process to include agencies, boards and commissions. I think that's something that's worth looking at and worth exploring, and it's good to have this debate on that here today.

I think the real question related to this motion is what is the best way to enhance the accountability that we have. In the second WHEREAS, the resolution notes that there are no such processes currently applicable to government for agencies, boards and commissions. You look at that strictly related to the way the Estimates Committee – that is true. There is no, sort of, process that's similar to that for agency, boards and commissions, but I wouldn't want anyone to believe that there is no accountability, that these agencies, boards and commissions aren't being scrutinized in some way.

For example, one way is the Auditor General has a possibility at going in, looking at these agencies, boards and commissions and doing reports that are made public, presented in this House that, sort of, outline what's happening in these agencies, boards and commissions.

Also, another measure that's in place is Public Accounts Committee. The Public Accounts Committee, I would argue, is more active now than it has ever been in the recent history, at least, of this Legislature, within the last 30 years. I think the Public Accounts Committee is more active now than we have been in the past. The Public Accounts Committee has the right to have public hearings and call boards, agencies and commissions, departmental officials in and ask them, directly, about some issues.

For example, a few years back, we had the school boards in to talk about their procurement processes and things that went wrong. A few years ago, we had the Department of Transportation come here to look at the expenditure on ferries that were built in Europe. We've had the Public Accounts Committee as a possibility of doing these things.

Now, I would agree that it's different from having it as an Estimates Committee, but I don't want people to believe that there's no accountability and no, sort of, scrutiny of these expenditures but I just want to make those points.

I guess one of the issues here is about time and resources, how do we do this? How do we figure out how further accountability can be accomplished?

In this province, I think, we don't have as robust a Committee process as some Legislatures do. We don't have as active a Committee structure in terms of examining new legislation coming forward or the departments that are doing things or agencies and boards. So that might be one possible sort of avenue, but it's difficult when you have a smaller Legislature to do that, then when you have a larger Legislature like the House of Commons or in some of the bigger provinces; less Members, it's harder to accomplish that sort of Committee structure that they have. There are some challenges, no doubt, around this.

In conclusion, I just want to thank the Member for bringing his resolution forward and us having this debate today and putting it on the public agenda in terms of accountability for agencies, boards and commissions.

Again, thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this motion.

Thank you.

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

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

It's good to get up and speak on this PMR. You know, the crux of this PMR ironically is – and maybe the Member who put it in, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, has witnessed what we've all witnessed here in this House of Assembly during this session and we've witnessed it during other sessions, but I'll reference probably my own personal experiences.

We stood here in the House and we question a lot of serious issues, costs and looking for answers, really a multitude of things and we were told it's operational. It's operational, we can't answer that, it's operational. I'll give you the CEO's number, it's operational. It's out of my hands. How can you expect me to answer that.

This is all in *Hansard* so it's all legitimate stuff, but these answers we're given repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly. As a matter of fact, we asked for some research and it was 65 pages with commentary on operational issues, deferring the question, we'll get back to you. Those deferrals and operational issues fall right into the crux of what this PMR is about. It goes into the boards and agencies of government. It goes into the NL Health Services. To list them off here it's: Pippy Park Commission, the Liquor Corp, the film development, Health Services, Labrador Housing, Legal Aid Commission, the Labrador Sports Centre, Oil and Gas Corporation and The Rooms. MUN is another one I spoke about to the current Minister of Health, when I was Education shadow minister, I pleaded with him to bring the AG in but to have him here for Estimates. That's well documented in *Hansard*.

I was astounded when I first got elected and I came in. I learned the ropes of the Estimates of government and how it all unfolded back in the first year; everyone

goes through the same process when they get first elected. You're amazed at the billions of dollars out of our budget that, really, ministers are not really answering the questions in any depth.

Respectfully – and the Minister of Health has proven it in this session repeatedly and he proved it in other sessions when it comes to MUN – they don't really know. Maybe they should and that's fine; I'm not getting into that debate now. But they don't really know the day in and day out business of how that money is spent, how the decisions are made. They probably should know but that's irrelevant, they don't know.

The CEOs know. The heads of those operations, all of them know. Why shouldn't they come into this Legislature and answer the questions being posed to them. Because you listen to Estimates – people go in Estimates and we've all been here for years – some say you don't get nothing out of Estimates or the process is whatever, some days it's like you're hit and miss.

Last week, we did Estimates on Health. You don't know who's listening because the press gallery, they listen to it online or whatever so you don't know who's listening. It was a very good exchange between myself and the minister and the Member for Torngat Mountains, three of us were kind of interchanging with questions.

*The Telegram* actually, on Saturday, to my surprise, posted a lot of the questions that were asked. Good back and forth, no question. I was impressed with the coverage because, again, we try to get our message outside. We all got the same issue in here because you're debate stuff, government are giving answers, we're asking questions. I'm sure they feel the same way sometimes, too. Their answers are not getting out to the public, our questions don't get out.

So all of those groups, you talk about the nurse practitioners, you talk about travel

nurses, IVF, people wanting to start families, those questions were brought in here during Estimates. The minister and his officials will provide the answers to you the best they can. That was printed in *The Telegram*. Ironically, I didn't even realize this was going to be the PMR. I said that's where it's at. That's really and truly what we should be trying to do. So it's not always about the budget line item, it's about having an open conversation about each department.

It all comes down to dollars and cents because when you look at IVF, there's a cost associated with it. When I'm talking about the Health Sciences Centre and the conditions of those rooms, that's all a cost figure. That's all a budget item. The Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier, she's well aware of the budget line item for Health, as we spoke about it the other day, it's pretty steep.

We should, as elected officials, as legislators in this House, be able to ask those questions to Mr. Diamond from NL Health Services. In my case, I asked the minister repeatedly, our leader asked repeatedly, I said to the media and I'm sure Mr. Diamond probably cringed at the thought of having to come over and face Estimates Committee and probably I would feel the same way. But it's a fair statement and it's a fair game, I think, if you're in those roles.

If the minister or department officials or the deputies cannot provide those answers, why not? Really and truly, when you look at it, and that's what brings me back to when I first got elected. I remember our House Leader at the time, I remember saying to him: How come they don't do that? That's a really honest question. I mean, we've got a new Member coming in next week. I'm sure when he gets acquainted with this, he's probably going to ask the same question because there's so much money involved. I think it's several billion dollars that NL Health Services are directly responsible for.

That's a lot of money. Out of a \$10 billion budget, that's a lot of money.

This is not a witch hunt. Anyone is welcome to go back through *Hansard* and the questions I asked the minister and his officials on Friday were in no way intended to be a witch hunt. It was a very frank conversation. It was respectful dialogue. It was back and forth. I think it was genuine questions. It was genuine responses, but, in fairness, the minister could not provide me the responses that really we were looking for.

If I get up tomorrow and my colleague from Topsail - Paradise decides he's going to ask questions on MUN, I don't expect the Minister of Education to get up and be briefed on everything that's happening over to MUN. It's a huge operation with a big budget, but if we had the president of MUN and probably a couple of their senior officials to be able to ask those questions. Again, this is not a witch hunt.

I spent a lot of time in this House and outside speaking on MUN. I met with the former president on many occasions. I met with the current president. I've done town halls. It was never a witch hunt. It was genuine questions. These town halls you go to – my colleague behind me from Bonavista, he went to one the past week and I've done it too. We've got a very active, intelligent student body and people have questions and, ironically, a lot of the questions come back down to the budget line items. The minister can't provide those answers. They can't get into the weeds of providing the answers to those questions without being here in this House.

So we request them to sit in Estimates Committee. I think it's beyond overdue. The required time is 75 hours and that's complicated to the general public to try to explain. In budget time, that's what's been around forever and a lot of things in this House have been that way for a long time. We never tamper with and we don't change

things. Maybe 75 hours is more than enough for everybody. Some days we think it's way too much but there are times you wonder is it enough.

If there is a requirement, and I know the way this is stated and I know the Member for Lake Melville put a friendly amendment that the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands accepted and it's basically to recommend allocation of required time resources to allow the Members the opportunity to review the budget. If we could add more time on, why not?

At the end of the day, you want to govern. Down life's road, we don't know where things go. We could very well be on that side and we could be faced with the same questions. I don't have a problem with it. I don't have a problem with that.

Do I think you need to turn it into an overall show? No, but I do believe it needs to be respectful. If I was on that side and I had any say, if we brought officials in at an Estimates Committee and they were treated with disrespect, I would be the first one on my feet shutting it down. That's not what it's about and I would expect government opposite to do the same thing if we did the same thing.

I do think Mr. Diamond could come in there, Mr. Bose, or any other head of our corporations or entities and sit there in a respectful manner. I see most times in Estimates it's fairly respectful. I know the Minister of Finance is smiling, maybe I missed something, but most of my Estimates Committees have been respectful. I have been on the receiving end and the giving end of respectful conversations. I know it's not always that way maybe, but to my experience it remains respectful. We can have our battles, but there's always a level of respect and you need to show that respect to those people.

I know sometimes in government you try to protect your officials, and no doubt that's

what has gone on over the years. There's been some heated debates in this House and times have changed; we've evolved a bit better. But I do believe in 2024, and as we move forward, in the world of transparency – and everything is about openness and transparency – I think it's a valid question, a valid issue, a valid motion to bring out and debate and vote on it, because I think maybe we've come to that point.

There have to be guidelines and parameters put in place; you have to protect people. I don't believe in people coming in here and being exposed, but to sit them down, come in here and ask them legitimate questions and keep it respectful, I'm all for it. I think our caucus supports it and I sure hope government – I think they may because they put in a friendly amendment. I think they should and maybe we've come to that point in time, Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

I'm encouraged by the debate and discussion here this afternoon. I thank the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands for bringing forward this resolution. I think it's a timely one; I think it's a well-thought-out initiative.

I am very supportive of the Estimates process. Everybody in this House knows that I like the Estimates process. I think it's very important, a part of the budgetary scrutiny and review and understanding line by line by line.

I know Members on all sides of the House have gone through a little bit of the process, but allow me the opportunity for a few quick moments to talk about some of the

processes that we have within government to ensure that the Members of this Assembly, that the people of the province, actually have the opportunity to discuss and review the budget line by line.

So there's basically, I'm going to call it, two processes that happen simultaneously. One is the budget debate itself and Members of this Assembly have been up and on their feet and talking about the budget and reviewing what their thoughts are about the budget and they do this on multiple occasions, Speaker, as they move through amendments and as they move through the budgetary process.

We take our time in this House of Assembly and allow that type of debate. In fact, most Members will take about an hour, in three different allotments, to be able to thoroughly discuss what they see in the budget and what they would like to see in the budget.

There's also a process of Estimates. That's basically where it's referred to a Committee, either a Committee of the House of Assembly or a Committee of the Whole, like we're going to have this evening to discuss certain aspects, certain things that are not referred to Committee, it's referred to the Committee of the Whole and Members will be asking very important questions this evening.

But if you look at the 75 hours that are allotted for the Estimates process, I think it's a very thorough process. Every minister comes into the House of Assembly, we have officials – and I want to thank the officials of the House of Assembly for their incredible hard work in making sure the Estimates process is well done. I want to thank the public employees. They do come to Committee; they do show up with their ministers.

I know in my particular Estimates, I think it was three hours long. I had members of the Public Service Commission with me. I had members of Treasury Board with me. I had

members of the Department of Finance with me to ensure that we answered the questions. I think it's a very important process that we delve into how much is being spent, where it's being spent and why it's being spent, so a very important process.

That's kind of the process of budget and what the Member opposite and what Members are saying is, as part of that process, we need to have agencies, boards and commissions and, quite frankly, I agree. I think it would be advantageous to have agencies, boards and commissions to come into the House, along with the minister, to answer questions. I think that's a good robust process.

To answer the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands question: What have we been doing? Well, I can tell you that we have gone across the country, and we have done a fair amount of work on how does it work in other legislatures, what happens in various legislatures, do officials from the agencies, boards and commissions come in and is there a different process.

So we have gone out and a lot of the work that's been done has been done through the House of Assembly and I want to thank them for that work and that effort in talking to various governments across the country and asking them about budget process. How do they engage agencies, boards and commissions? What do you do? Do you bring in representatives of those agencies, boards and commissions with the minister? Do you have a separate process? What's the process? How do you examine Estimates?

I can tell you, in a general sense, there are a number of jurisdictions across the country that do bring in the heads of the various agencies, boards and commissions as part of their Estimates process. So when the minister appears, the minister has, along with them, as well as their, I'll say, deputy minister of Finance and deputy minister of

Treasury Board, I would have with me Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation, for example, and what they are doing can be examined by Members opposite.

I am supportive of that process and glad that the Member opposite supported a friendly amendment, because I think this is all part of that robust and good debate and collegiality, quite frankly, that's required in order to ensure that the people of the province know that we're really delving into every figure within our budget, and I think that's so important. I think you cannot do anything better than making sure that how we're spending the money, what we're spending the money on, why we're spending the money, that we are spending the money, is scrutinized.

I can tell the Members opposite, many of them have heard me speak of this in the House of Assembly, that we've updated, in addition to the work that we have done going across the country asking for how people are doing it in other jurisdictions. Alberta, for example, invites their heads of the agencies, boards and commissions; I know that Nova Scotia doesn't. So we've been back and forth with many of the governments across the country just determining and finding out what's the best process we can have.

Far be it for us to say we're going to do it this way; we want to make sure it's the best process. Because not only do we have the Estimates process that I spoke about, the budget debate that I spoke about, as a Member earlier spoke about, we do have Public Accounts. That's another critical piece. I know, Speaker, you've been heavily involved in Public Accounts on occasion and it's a very good tool, as well, to scrutinize how spending is done.

But we also now have a new framework on transparency and accountability. That framework has been built with three main pillars: defining expectations; enhancing,

monitoring and reporting; and evaluating performance. We've now created this new framework to ensure that we are better setting the expectations and we have done things like – and this goes for agencies, boards and commissions, the core agencies, boards and commissions, not all of them because there are ones that spend more money than some others. We call them the core 10, the 10 key entities. We make sure that they have this framework and it's identified to the key agencies. We define the expectations of government. We define what they need to bring forward to us. There is clearly articulated expectations and accountability frameworks around that. There are requirement letters for these agencies, boards and commissions.

In addition to the scrutiny that we've been doing on Estimates, in addition to the Public Accounts, now we have this, what I'm going to call, better and stronger accountability framework. I think it's a very solid and strong and robust framework. I think the key principles are transparency and accountability, prudent and responsible financial management. It's evidence-based, evidence informed decision-making and performance monitoring and reporting.

Speaker, I think that's another good tool in our tool box. So I am supportive of this private Member's resolution. I'm supportive of bringing it forward and working to ensure that it works for this House of Assembly and for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

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

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

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you very much.

I'm just going to have a few words here and give a bit of a history of it. I just want to

thank my colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, for bringing this up on many occasions for a number of years about this and his frustration for it, can't ask the questions to the appropriate people at the time.

This idea that he's bringing up, this is definitely not trying to embarrass anybody or trying to say that here's what you should've done. This is a way to improve the system. I'll just give people just a few examples from my history of being in this Legislature.

I was great to hear the minister saying that they're already looking at some reviews around Canada to see what we can do for it. That's great news, actually, and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands is very pleased to hear that.

I'll just give you an example. Back in 2011-2012, we could not get Nalcor here to answer questions for us. Although, the government at the time were handing over billions of dollars to them, we could not get them into Estimates to ask questions. That's the kind of example that the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands was talking about. This is not anyway a critique of anybody, this was just the process at the time and how we evolved since then and how this is an opportunity to make it better for all of us.

The Minister of Finance – and I'll say this, I don't think you were there at the time – but can you remember the Newfoundland Liquor Corp. with the wine situation that you guys referred? We can never get the Liquor Corp. in because that was brought to our attention on several occasions about that, but we can never get the appropriate people in front of us to ask questions on it. But once it's found out, then give the government credit, they then took the immediate steps and action to do it.

**P. LANE:** That was Tom.

**E. JOYCE:** What?

**P. LANE:** Tom was minister then.

**E. JOYCE:** Yeah, that was the Minister of Health, who was the minister then, that did that, but that's the steps to be taken.

The intent of the motion here today and the friendly amendment made by the government is to say: How can we do things beforehand instead of having that situation evolve, that we could ask questions here with the people with the funding?

I'll give you a good example that is happening right now in Corner Brook and it's going to affect the whole Western region is the College of the North Atlantic. We cannot get the opportunity to ask the board or ask the CEO of the College of the North Atlantic, in Corner Brook, why the school, right now, is cutting positions? Why every person, every instructor for nurse practitioners in College of the North Atlantic in Corner Brook were laid off? They got laid off. They've got to reapply for the jobs. We can't ask that to anybody.

I don't expect the Minister of Education to know all those answers. I don't expect that. I've got numerous emails on that. That's why we expect, if we can, to get those people, the appropriate people involved, so that we can ask the questions. This is just three or four examples.

I made some more notes here: Muskrat Falls is one. I know, and the government also knows: Memorial University is another one. I understand that Memorial is big but when you hand over the funds from the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we should have some kind of accountability. We always say that we do but do we really?

We get the Auditor General now to go in and do a review, but if we're handing over the funds to Memorial, we should have some way, this Legislature, to ensure that the funds are being spent in a way that is going to best educate their students at Memorial University.

Also, if you look at some other situations, I'll just use one, for example, now the Costco building that was used. I can't remember the last Department of Health having the CEO of the health care in this Legislature saying why they would need it. That was just done before this budget and I'm sure last year we never approved that. That was not in it.

We couldn't ask questions on it and now we're saying, okay, here's what we did. Here's the money we're going to use. But if we're going through line by line, we should have the opportunity to sit down and go through the budget for this \$80 million. This is not being critical of it, I'm just critical of the process for it. I'm definitely not trying to be critical; I'm just saying the process for it.

That's the kind of process that the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands has been asking for, for years, that we should be able to sit down with the CEOs of the boards, agencies and commissions. I gave a number of examples of where this could have been used in the past. That is all governments, Liberal governments, PC governments, over the past, that's the way it worked. Then as time evolved and we seen situations that happened, we always try to make the process better, make the accountability better and make it more open to the general public.

This is what this bill and the amendment that was made by government, which was accepted by everybody here – the Speaker just had to ensure that it was in order. It's a good amendment that you need. We're always talking about the budget process. There are 75 hours for the budget process, we all understand that. We all understand that Estimates gets three hours. If we use the three hours, fine; if you don't, it still comes off the budget process.

But there has to be a way that we, as legislators, if there's a board, agency or commission under a department that they can come in for a couple of hours, another time which is not included in the budget, so

we can ask questions, either before the actual Estimates or after, but it's much better to have it done before so then we can ask the ministers on the appropriate line items when we go through the budget.

A lot of times when we go through the budget and we go through the line items, we see the bulk of money for Health and Education, but we can't say, okay, what is the funds for or how are we going to use it? With all due respect to every minister over there, mostly, not all, but some, the departments are so big – you take Health, Education and Transportation and Infrastructure, the departments are just so huge. It is huge departments, so it's pretty hard for the ministers themselves to have it broke down by agencies, boards and commissions of how it is being spent and the questions that we could ask that I'm sure would add some more extra.

It would actually show extra due diligence by the House of Assembly. Then, again, I use the big one that I remember and we tried on numerous occasions – I'm talking about numerous – to get Nalcor down in front of us and we couldn't do it. We weren't allowed to do it.

That is the prime example. I can give many, many examples where this happened. This is what we're trying to avoid so that instead of waiting for something to happen and send in the Auditor General, let's try to see how we can make it a better and a fairer process.

I'll take my seat, Madam Speaker, and I'm going to support the motion and support the amendment from the government. We all agree that we can streamline this process, make this process much better and be much more accountable to the people of the province.

I heard someone talking about Estimates that we were, in here, pretty cordial in through Estimates. We usually are, because in Estimates we get the answers when the

questions are asked; but when you ask questions here, that sometimes things happen in the House of Assembly, the atmosphere is different and it's not a line by line with an amount and you ask what's this for, that's for. But when you come up with something that's untendered, this is why the atmosphere is different here. It happened in both governments. This is definitely by no means any slight on any government, but that there is just the difference in it.

So I will take my seat and I will be voting for this motion, which I think now all Members in this House will be supporting. I think it's a great move that we do it. But the only thing I would say to the government, because I know the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands has been saying this for a while, I ask this question to the Minister of Finance, who I assume is going to – what's the next step to ensure that we do it?

I don't mean to be putting the burden on you, because I know this is bigger than this House. This is going to take time, but if we knew a process to go through, to finally get where we want to get, that would make this much easier for everybody. So that's just a suggestion from me.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I just want to speak on this. First of all, I do agree with the Member's PMR here. We've asked the same question. We see these line items and you see X amount of dollars goes off to an agency, board or commission but there's no details on what it is going to spent on. Is it going to them for their programming or their operations or whatnot? Then it leaves you with some questions on what are they doing? Especially if they're providing a public

service. You look at the health authority, you look at Hydro or you look at any other agency, board or commission that's out doing something that's for the general public.

I agree with the sense that we need to have some of these represented in the Estimates process. Then the question is, okay, we're going to do that, but what would that look like? I'm glad to hear that the Minister of Finance's team is doing a judicial scan on what would that look like in our system.

We agree with this, we agree with the amendment and we agree that this is something that we need to look at, the process. It also has to come down to our own Estimates process on making sure that there's time allocation, that there's the ability that we can actually integrate this into our already existing Estimates process for Members, so the time is there to ask the representatives from an agency, board or commission the questions on, you're receiving this funding through the budget, what are your plans, what are you spending this on, how are you moving forward with your planning, and the other general questions that we usually ask in the Estimates process.

We'd look at Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, NL Health Services, Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic. These are large line items in the budget, and these are very vital services to our province. So to make sure that when we do go forward and we actually – by the sounds of Members here, this will be agreed upon, this PMR. But the process is to make sure that we, as Members, also have time allocated, too, and also that the process is available for us to make sure that we do get the chance to ask these individual questions of these things and it's integrated into our Estimates system.

We look at, like I said, take NL Hydro for instance. There's a lot going on inside the department. There are a lot of questions

about that department. There are a lot of questions on when stuff is allocated to them from the provincial side of things. NL Health Services is a massive organization. Before it was four agencies and now it's one large agency. That's a massive operation within the province.

When we look at the allocation of how do we put that into the Estimates process, how do we have the adequate resources and time and everything to do a process with them and ask them questions, we need to make sure that it's fair to everybody, it's fair to NL Health Services, that we actually have the chance to question them meaningfully and give them an opportunity and give our Members an opportunity to do it.

We ask the House to support the government in initiating this process. We want to make sure that the House also has the ability and Members of the House have the ability to have the time allocation and to actually have the opportunity to do it in a fair and meaningful manner. That's one thing I want to reiterate is that the fairness of it and make sure that it's done in a way that we can actually get some meaningful questioning but also meaningful answers and the process is not rushed and the process is not unfair to any side.

So that's one of the things I want to take for consideration and take back is when we go forward with this, make sure that the process is able to cope with that. You look at Memorial University, same thing, a massive entity. In the provincial budget, it's one line item but once that money goes into Memorial University and disbursed, it's a massive endeavour in itself. So, you know, same thing there with all these larger entities.

When we talk about the smaller entities, there are 150 agencies, boards and commissions across the province. You look at all these smaller ones and how do we bring them in. Are we doing it by how much money they receive from the province, or

are we going to do it like that? Is every single one of them going to come in, or are we going to do it in a way based on their operation or what they're providing to the province? That's another question we have to have: Are we going to have 150 boards, agencies and commissions come to the House during budget time?

That's another question I think we would put out there is: How will we integrate so many different groups, so many different boards, agencies and commissions? How do we integrate that into the budget process and integrate it in a fair and meaningful way? Do we do it as a round-robin every year? Do we do so many one year and so many another year, or do we do all 150 every year? So that's something for consideration of the House and the Members and those who are going to take this back is: What are we going to do in the sense of so many different boards, agencies and commissions, or are we going to stick to the larger ones?

So for consideration of all and further discussion, I guess, is how do we go about that? The province is very diverse. We have a lot of things going on. There's a lot of these boards and agencies and stuff doing all kinds of different – there's a huge spectrum of things that they do across the province when it comes to services or when it comes to resources and other day-to-day things that some of us don't get to see very single day. Or it's a very niche thing for a various particular group or industry or problem that they are working towards.

It might be eye opening and interesting to actually talk to some of these board, agencies and commissions on some of their work that we never had an opportunity to talk to them about. It will probably be pretty eye opening to actually question these boards and agencies and commissions on their work and their day-to-day processes.

It's a very interesting thing and I'm glad to hear the Minister of Finance actually talk

about working towards this. I'm very glad the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands brought this up. This is, I think, a little bit of a passion project that he's been asking for a while and I'm glad that he's finally had his opportunity to bring this PMR to the floor. I'm actually very glad, as the Third Party caucus, we support his call in this and we look forward to what work comes out of this and what kind of processes that we come up with to actually do this.

Like I said, once again, with 150 boards, agencies and commissions, it is a big challenge. How do we bring this about in a fair way, a way that all Members have an opportunity, but also that these boards, agencies and commissions have an opportunity to provide feedback and information to the House about their budgetary part in this province and where the funding and stuff that is provided to them by the province? How does it get allocated? How does it work?

I think we'll all learn something from all these interesting little boards and commissions and stuff like that, because the services that they provide to the province, a lot of us don't get to see and I think a lot of the public don't get to see. So it might be actually a very interesting endeavour, at the end of the day, to say, this is some of the background and stuff that goes on in government and also some of the background of what these organizations do for the province.

With that, I take my seat and enjoy.

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

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Seeing no other speakers, if the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands speaks now he will close debate.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I just want to thank all of my colleagues for their participation in today's debate, the Member for Lake Melville, Member for Terra Nova, Member for St. George's - Humber, Member for Conception Bay South, the Minister of Finance, the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands and the Member for Labrador West.

It's sounding like we have support for this motion. I'm glad to see that. My colleague from Labrador West, in particular, raises some very good questions. While it wasn't about how do we decide which agency, board or commission we do? Do we do them all? Do we pick so many? Do we just look at the larger ones? I would say, Mr. Speaker, at this point in time, I don't have all those answers.

The intent of this resolution was to initiate the process. While it's not in my motion, I would say – I'll just put it out there – that I think whatever process is decided, it should be decided by this House of Assembly. So whether that means utilizing an existing Committee of the House or whether it means striking a Select Committee to look at how this would be done in the future. I would say to the government, please include Members on both sides of the House in terms of how this thing will look and how we will allocate the time and, as I say, whether we'll be able to do them all or we're just going to pick so many each year and how we determine who that would be and so on, because it is a very good point.

I would also say that, personally, I don't believe that we can do it in the 75 hours, it can't be part of the regular process. I look at, as an example, if we're going to do Estimates on the Department of Health and you have three hours currently for the Department of Health. I really don't think it is going to work to say we're going to throw Dave Diamond into the mix and we're going to do everything that was always done in Health and then add a review of the health authorities budget, all within that three-hour

allocation. Realistically, that is not going to work.

So while there may be some smaller boards with smaller budgets and so on, where you could sit that person beside the minister in the regular budgets Estimates allocation and you could legitimately do it. But when it comes to a larger one, like Health as an example, there is no way you're going to be able to do that, plus everything you were doing normally in three hours.

I would say that Mr. Diamond, as an example, he would need a session onto himself, him and his officials, and I wouldn't say you could even get through that in three hours, to be honest with you, if you're going to do it properly. Those are the kinds of things that have to be worked out, the details. But, again, please include Members on both sides of the House when we're developing those details.

I also just want to sort of respond to my colleague for St. George's - Humber and the Member Lake Melville, in particular. I just want to say that the intent here is in no way –

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

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The level of conversation is getting a little loud, I can't hear the speaker.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

They're all excited about the prospects of this new process.

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

**P. LANE:** But I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that there's no intent here to be critical of government and so on, on this and to take away from any of the work that's being done by the Auditor General. Everybody in this House of Assembly knows we have an Auditor General. We know the

important work that she does. We also recognize the fact that we have a Public Accounts Committee and they do great work as well.

But let's face it, because I know that the Member for St. George's - Humber, when he was giving an example, he said, well, I can remember it wasn't that long ago we questioned about procurement with the Department of Education. He's right, they did, but why did that happen? Why did that happen? It happened because the Auditor General had already gone in to find out that there were millions of dollars being squandered on wheelbarrows and extension cords and tires for personal cars. I mean, there was a scandal, basically.

I think someone went to jail, they were charged, I think, they were. I could be wrong on that, but I do believe the RCMP or the RNC were involved in investigating that particular incident. So, yes, it went to Public Accounts after the fact. That's after the fact.

So it's important to note that while we do have an Auditor General, while we do have Public Accounts, that, in itself, does not provide the proactive scrutiny that should be taking place by Members of this House of Assembly who were elected by the people.

There is a place for the Auditor General, a very important place. There's a very important place for Public Accounts. They both do good work but it's not getting at the proactive approach that needs to be taken by Members of this Legislature to examine the books of agencies, boards and commissions and so on.

We have seen where there are things going on that we ought to be concerned about, whether it be what happened with the school board, as an example, whether it be with the nursing contracts or whether it be – and this is a gentleman everybody is familiar with, I'm sure, Matt Barter, who's doing fantastic work as a citizen, basically,

putting in access to information and finding out what's going on at Memorial University.

We know the scathing report that came out of Memorial University. We also know that, for example, Mr. Barter had put in an access to information to the university. He wanted to know about the bonuses that were paid out to management and executives of C-CORE and the Genesis Centre, and he wanted to know about the vehicle allowances paid out to the Genesis Centre and the Centre for Fisheries Innovation. It was denied by the university because they said that those three entities are set up as corporations, so you're not getting it.

He went to Mr. Harvey, the Privacy Commissioner – or former Privacy Commissioner. I don't know, maybe he still is, I'm not sure. Anyway, soon to be former Privacy Commissioner, if he's not already. Mr. Harvey ruled on it and said you have to release that information. Now MUN are spending more money taking it to court. They don't want to release the information – they don't want to release the information.

Then Mr. Barter gives me some other examples. He said the AG didn't look at the \$338,000 that MUN spent on a campus master plan – \$338,000 on a campus master plan. He feels that should be looked at. They should look at \$103,000 spent on an economic impact assessment. We should look at \$184,000 spent on office renovations of senior administrators – and that's not the former president; that's other existing administrators. And the over \$836,000 spent on Perfect Day productions, even though MUN has its own internal video production.

These are some things that Mr. Barter has pointed out to me of expenditures that he's questioning. These are things he's questioning that we should be questioning. This is at MUN.

Whether it be MUN, whether it be the health authorities, whether it be the Liquor Corporation, as was referenced here by somebody earlier – I think it was the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands – about what happened with the Liquor Corporation with the big wine collection and so on, that came out after the fact when the AG got involved. Credit to the minister of Finance, he took the bull by the horns or whatever and dealt with it.

But this is an entity that we sort of cherish, to a great degree, in the sense of that's money coming in, not money going out. But what else is going on there? Maybe everything is perfect, I don't know. But could they be doing better? Are there unnecessary expenses happening over there? Could there be more revenues coming in? The decisions that are made around that.

We look at NL Hydro and we look at OilCo and the shroud of secrecy that they are afforded. These are things we need to look at.

So I thank the Members for hopefully what will be their support. I think it's a move forward and I thank all Members for their commentary and their support today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** We're first going to vote on the amendment.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

All those in favour of the amended motion?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** I move, seconded by the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, that this House do recess until 5:30 p.m.

**SPEAKER:** This House do stand recessed until 5:30 this afternoon.