



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume L

SECOND SESSION

Number 70

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

Tuesday

April 30, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Before we begin, in the public gallery I'd like to welcome students from Gander Collegiate Concert Band and their teacher, Stephen Ash. They're visiting today to perform at the Rotary Music Festival.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also in the public gallery, I'd like to welcome Miss Newfoundland and Labrador Megan Coles. Megan's here this afternoon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Megan's being recognized in a Member's statement.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Terra Nova, Topsail - Paradise, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, Ferryland and Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stand to congratulate a group from the Glovertown area that contributed to an enjoyable multicultural social back in March. This event featured eight countries, each with a table for their cultural items, food, clothing, costumes, traditional dance and informative facts. Other volunteer groups and local businesses also attended. There was a decorative bag that was sewn by the Women's Institute and the 50-plus club, and other displays featured a mug rug,

a colouring book made by three local artists and various other items.

The laughs and the smiles were a great indication of the event's success, along with songs, food and games. It was enjoyed by all.

While the event was intended for new immigrants to the area, it ended up being a very informative social community event, developing awareness for all of those who were in attendance.

Please join me in thanking the organizing committee, co-chaired by Denise Feltham, Linda Churchill and Janet Hounsell, for making this event happen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and congratulate this year's recipient of Miss Newfoundland and Labrador, Megan Coles.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Megan hails from the beautiful District of Topsail - Paradise and since winning her title has been very busy at many activities and events.

Outside of her role as Miss Newfoundland and Labrador, Megan works as a pediatric and neonatal nurse at the Janeway hospital. She is a medical first responder with St. John Ambulance, she volunteers as a camp counsellor with Candlelighters and has plans to complete her master's degree to become a nurse practitioner.

Megan is an inspiration to many young girls and women as she believes that with hard work and dedication you can achieve what you think is out of reach.

Competing in pageants was new for Megan, but since she was 12 years old it was something she wanted to do. Her then dance instructor was Miss Newfoundland and Labrador 2012 and Megan was inspired by everything that she had accomplished.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in extending congratulations to Megan as she continues to inspire others with her positivity as she wears her crown with pride.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Danielle Mills from Grand Falls-Windsor is a high school teacher and an outdoor enthusiast. She has made an enormous impact throughout her community as a member of Cantus Silva Women's Choir, a broomball player with the Exploits Rush and the HNL female coordinator of officials.

Miss Mills started playing minor hockey at the age of 10 when someone suggested she try officiating and so began a path that would change history forever. Entering her 24th year of officiating, she has travelled to national championships, as well as the Canada Games.

On January 28 of this year, Danielle Mills made history at Joe Byrne arena as the first female official to referee a senior hockey game in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: With overwhelming support from her family, friends and community, Danielle laced up her skates and donned the stripes as the Cataracts took on the Jets.

This historical event took place just nine weeks after giving birth to her beautiful daughter Claire. Danielle hopes all females, including little Claire, look upon the

accomplishment as an opportunity to sort of break the ice for female officials.

Please join me as I honour Danielle Mills, a role model for many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for years to come.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I stand today to congratulate Michael Tobin, a student of St. Bernard's Elementary school in Witless Bay.

In November of 2023, Michael submitted a drawing, along with over 300 other students from Grades 4 to 6 schools across the Island, for a chance for their illustration to be chosen as the official mascot of the 2025 Canada Games.

It was suggested that the design should reflect the province's identity, culture and heritage. Michael's drawing did just that, a vibrant green coloured codfish called Gusty, with playful demeanor, a bright yellow jacket and colourful stripes and a sou'wester. Gusty captures the hearts of people of all ages.

As the official mascot of the 2025 Canada Games, Gusty will inspire participants and spectators alike, fostering a sense of unity, pride and excitement. Gusty's presence will leave a lasting legacy, inspiring future generations to embrace their heritage and pursue excellence with courage and determination.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all my colleagues in this House to join me in congratulating Michael Tobin on having his submission chosen for the mascot for the 2025 Canada Games.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize an outstanding community volunteer Mrs. Peggy Roche.

Peggy proudly served the residents of Torbay for 24 years on Torbay town council, serving one term as deputy mayor and five terms as councillor. During that time, Peggy served on finance, human resources, planning and heritage committees and chaired the town Come Home Year celebrations in 2005.

Peggy continued to share her time and commitment to others as she chaired the Northeast Avalon Joint Council, was a founding member of the Killick Coast Chamber of Commerce and the Killick Coast Tourism Committee, metro area representative on the Eastern Regional Service Board and served as urban municipality representative with the Municipal Assessment Agency.

In her personal life, Peggy has spent a lifetime caring for her family and for her church, where she is a lifetime member of the Catholic Women's League.

Speaker, I ask my colleagues of this 50th General Assembly to join me in congratulating Peggy Roche, and thank her for the many years of service to the residents of her community and to the province. Your dedication and commitment is truly appreciated.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

E. LOVELESS: Speaker, governments, communities and residents all have a role to play in protecting against wildfires. With the 2024 forest fire season set to begin May 1 on the Island and May 15 in Labrador, I would like to highlight our preparedness efforts and encourage the public to be vigilant in preventing forest fires. With the assistance of funds from *Budget 2024*, \$1.5 million has been invested in new wildland firefighting equipment, and a further \$1 million has been allocated to match a shared federal funding program to train and equip wildland firefighters.

Forestry personnel were busy throughout the winter conducting training, testing equipment and planning logistics. Currently, we have fire suppression teams, waterbombers, helicopters and equipment strategically located throughout the province – ready to respond whenever and wherever they are needed.

Every one of us has a role to play in wildfire prevention. For instance, we can proactively protect our properties by removing leaves and other flammable debris and relocating it to a safe distance from dwellings. When planning an outdoor fire, check the online provincial forest fire hazard index maps on the Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture website; familiarize yourself with burning regulations and obtain a permit to burn when it is required.

Before concluding, I would like to thank everyone who puts their life at risk in this province to fight a wildfire. Your contribution to public safety is immeasurable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, while the minister speaks of preparedness, our province faces a stark reality: The readiness of our firefighting fleet is compromised by inaction as a vital waterbomber has been grounded for nearly half a decade. We acknowledge the efforts made, but the government's hesitancy to repair this critical asset has left us vulnerable.

Last year's wildfires were a grim lesson in the need for increased preparedness. We cannot overlook our resources at our disposals, nor can we afford delays when our forest communities are at risk. Repairing the fifth waterbomber is not optional. It's essential. We need all hands on deck and all equipment operational.

The hard-working people who protect our province deserve more than gratitude; they deserve full support of a government that's proactive in its duty. Actions speak louder than words. Now is the time for that action.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

We want to take this time to thank all personnel who work hard and put their lives at risk to make sure others stay safe. The least they could do is repay the favours by giving them the tools and supports necessary to do their job.

We ask that government hire full-time fire prevention officers and strategically place

them throughout the province. We ask that they expedite the repairs to the water bomber that is damaged. And we ask for the return of the water bomber stationed in Western Labrador so that firefighters can do their best to protect us.

It's going to be a dry season this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements?

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I am proud to announce that on June 1, 2024, public safety radio will be in effect province wide.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: This system improves response times in crucial moments and enables all four Atlantic provinces to communicate immediately during an emergency.

Our government committed to this project four years ago. We recognized how this could bolster public safety in all regions and committed \$181 million over 12 years to implement this and the associated communications infrastructure.

I commend officials for working together to ensure all facets of this emergency response system are ready to go live on June 1. This endeavour to implement a new system incorporates thousands of radio users, from police, to firefighters, to paramedics. This also includes radios for ground search and rescue teams, as well as volunteer fire departments across our province.

As we sit on the eve of Emergency Preparedness Week, I would be remiss not to acknowledge our first responders, whose

compassion and selflessness to help others deserves our recognition and gratitude.

This is a significant day for public safety in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I would like to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

I rise today to recognize and extend my congratulations on the implementation of the province-wide public safety radio system. This marks an important moment in enhancing emergency response capabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador and across the Atlantic provinces.

After making the commitment four years ago, it is encouraging to see progress finally being made in enhancing our emergency response capabilities. Thank you to all of the officials who worked together to make this project possible.

As we approach Emergency Preparedness Week, I would also like to express our deepest gratitude to our first responders and to thank them for their unwavering dedication and selflessness. Police, firefighters, search and rescue teams, paramedics, EMTs, all of our first responders go above and beyond to serve our province and we cannot thank them enough.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

We, too, welcome this news and thank our first responders for their selfless dedication. It is vital to have proper communication supports in place so they can do their work quickly, effectively and safely.

As a first responder, myself, I know that every second counts and clear communication is critical to obtaining the best possible outcome. We also ask more to be invested into mental health supports so our responders are kept safe and healthy. We owe them that.

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.

Speaker, April is Cancer Awareness Month in Canada. The current length of job-protected leave in Newfoundland and Labrador is not adequate to cover the average length of treatment for many people with cancer. That's according to the Canadian Cancer Society. Today, unpaid job protection is just seven days. Yes, seven days.

So I ask the Premier: Will you extend unpaid job protection to those with serious illnesses from the current seven days to 26 weeks?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and Labour.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

It's something that we've been working with stakeholders on; look forward to continuing to work with those stakeholders. We understand that we have seven protected sick days in this province. We're looking at expanding that further. Stay tuned for something that will be coming, hopefully, in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

The average length of treatment and recovery is up to 36 weeks for breast cancer and 37 weeks for colon cancer but, in this province, patients who extend their leave, risk losing their jobs – 87 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians overwhelmingly support the extension of job protection to 26 weeks.

Again, I ask the Premier: Will you accept the recommendation of the Canadian Cancer Society and implement this job protection for anyone suffering from a serious illness, and when?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and Labour.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said previously, we look forward to working with the stakeholders. We've had several meetings with the Canadian Cancer Society, the Diabetes Association of Canada, as well as others, Heart and Stroke, to name a couple. We're very excited about what we're trying to achieve here with them.

Obviously, there are other jurisdictions across the country that are doing better than

we are and there are others that are not doing as much as we are, so we're trying to find that balance. We are looking at that with the stakeholders. We're working with them, and we are going to continue to work with them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, again, I didn't see any timeline. I didn't see any commitment other than say: We're continuing to work, or stay tuned.

I think what we're looking for is some kind of commitment, will this legislation be introduced? If not now, will it be introduced in the fall? When? That's the question we're asking.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, a study on lung cancer in Canada projects that, this year alone, 590 people from Newfoundland and Labrador will be diagnosed with lung cancer, and of those, 410 will not survive. We all know early detection has a tremendous impact on survival rates.

I ask the Premier: Will you accept the Canadian Cancer Society's recommendation by implementing a lung cancer screening program for high-risk populations?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We certainly work with the provincial health authority and with stakeholders, such as the Canadian Cancer Society, and any suggestions or recommendations made by

the Canadian Cancer Society are taken seriously.

They are reviewed, examined by the department officials and by the provincial health authority. Certainly, if this can be done, it will be done, but this is something that certainly warrants review.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I understand that this is actually being done in other provinces, so I look forward to seeing when it will actually start in this province.

Speaker, the financial burden that a cancer diagnosis impacts upon an individual is massive. The Medical Transportation Assistance Program is a lifeline for rural cancer patients who must travel far and wide to get the care they need. Patients often discuss the stress of accessing the program as cumbersome and inefficient for patients to deal with at a vulnerable time.

I believe that the Medical Transportation Assistance Program should be funded 100 per cent and covered for the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask the Premier: Do you agree?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation, and Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

We do certainly agree on this side that the Medical Transportation Assistance Program is a very, very important program in this province, one that has been in existence since 1998. It allows people who have to travel to access specialized services assistance to help them get there.

In *Budget 2023*, the program came under the purview of Labrador Affairs, an extra million dollars. Since that time, we've made a number of enhancements, including when people have to travel now, in particular from far away like Labrador, 100 per cent of the first \$1,000 is paid for upfront so that the individuals travelling don't have to put that on the credit card. We've recently made more enhancements eliminating the \$400 deductible for the Island portion of the province, increasing the meals, the travel for in and out of the province –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, thank you.

Again, I did not hear an answer that they would cover it 100 per cent. Then we don't have to worry about all these deductibles and all this. Let's look after the people of Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: – who need our help when they really need our help in case of medical emergencies.

Speaker, a family doctor in Grand Falls-Windsor has sounded the alarm bells over long waiting lists for cervical cancer screening. In March, almost 300 women were on the wait-list for cancer screening which can have – quote – dire consequences, according to Dr. Lynette Powell.

Speaker, why has the Liberal government allowed women's health to suffer so badly in Central Newfoundland?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation, and Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I just want an opportunity to address the preamble and I didn't get a chance to talk about all of the enhancements that we've made to the program, the extra million dollars that came in *Budget 2023* and because of the usage, it was up by 20 per cent, 30 per cent; 670 vouchers, I believe, we issued since last September. So there was another \$700,000 that was added to the program. I think it's around \$10 million, \$11 million now in this province that we are providing to support people to access medical services.

That said, we are constantly reviewing the program and looking at where the needs are and how we can do more all of the time, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I'll ask my question again. A family doctor in Grand Falls-Windsor has sounded the alarm bells over long waiting lists for cervical cancer screening. In March, almost 300 women were on the wait-list for cancer screening which can have – quote – dire consequences, according to Dr. Lynette Powell.

I ask the Premier: Why has the Liberal government allowed women's health to suffer so badly in Central Newfoundland?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are clinics for screening that, I guess, pop up, if you want to call it that, that are

arranged by providers when there is a demand in areas. These happen in areas throughout the province. Women are able to self-refer for screening, as well, Mr. Speaker.

There is a wait-list. We are concerned about that wait-list. We've had some discussion as well with the provincial health authority to address Dr. Powell's concerns directly, Mr. Speaker, to determine what the wait-list is in Central and the facts as they were presented by Dr. Powell.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: That's 300 women, as of March, Speaker.

Speaker, many of these women have been waiting years without a key early detection screening for cancer – years. Dr. Powell has described routinely being approached in public by women wondering how to get a Pap smear or a mammogram.

Again, there is no one monitoring these women for continuity of care. Dr. Powell compares the situation – again, I quote – to a canary in a coal mine.

My question is this: Premier, is anyone paying attention?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, women should not be waiting more than a year or two for cervical screening. If that is the case, there is a concern. Again, we've asked the provincial health authority to look at the facts as presented by Dr. Powell.

One thing that it does raise, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that more education and more public relation needs to be put forward to inform women of the ability to get screening,

where they can get screening and how they can get it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, again, we have also been told that it can take three to four months to actually get the results back once you get in for the screening. So, again, women are waiting years trying to get a Pap smear and then waiting months to get the results back.

I ask the Premier: Is he worried that he is jeopardizing the health of women in Central Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, in the last three or four years, the budget by this government for health care in this province increased from \$3.1 billion to \$4.1 billion. We are putting an additional \$1 billion each and every year into health care over the past four years, Mr. Speaker.

We have a focus on improving health care in this province. There is nothing being ignored by this government, Mr. Speaker. We need to see the results for that additional \$1 billion a year, each and every year, additional investment by this government. The results and the outputs and the health of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians need to be reflected in that additional investment, and that is what the Health Accord is for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm not sure what the minister was saying that time; we're all a bit confused, but the budget and the results don't add up. You can put all the money you want, but we're still not getting the results.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: That's what is an important point there, Speaker.

Speaker, another nurse in rural Newfoundland has left the health care system. Fed up with being unsupported and overworked. Stacey Button lived and worked in Springdale at a local hospital but left to become a travel nurse. Ms. Button described stress, forced overtime and poor quality of life.

Does any of these sound familiar to you, Minister?

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

T. OSBORNE: Yes, they do sound familiar, Mr. Speaker. That is the reason the health authority put in place travel agency nurses to deal with some of these issues, because there is a shortage of health care professionals in this province. One day the Opposition are saying we shouldn't have travel nurses; the next day they're wondering why these situations are occurring.

Mr. Speaker, the health authority put the agency nurses in place to deal with these specific issues to help lift the load that our valuable health care professionals in this province are carrying. Recruitment and retention is an issue across Canada, not just in this province.

The Member would like to have the general public believe that it's only in this province. That's not the case.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

We're the Official Opposition of Newfoundland and Labrador and we want people in this province to be treated with respect, unlike what the minister and his government are doing. Simple answer to that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, it's an all too familiar story. A hard-working health professional in rural Newfoundland, living and raising family, has to walk away due to stress, frustration and no work-life balance.

When is the minister finally going to recognize that recruitment is no good unless you retain?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I believe the agreement reached by the RNU and the Minister of Finance recognizes retention. Significant items in that agreement. Same thing with NAPE and CUPE with those agreements. We also had the Nursing Think Tank where we are looking at systemic issues in the health care system, looking to address those. We have retention bonuses for individuals based on the length of time that they're serving in the health care system in this province.

Yes, we are focused on retention.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: This is a question that goes back to yesterday. The minister said he had to wait for the budget to be approved before they could hire anyone. I guess we're still

waiting. I guess we might get the budget passed soon and we'll get an answer then.

Speaker, it's no wonder we have thousands of vacancies in our health care system when hard-working professionals in rural Newfoundland are treated with such disrespect. Is anyone surprised the Green Bay Health Centre has been on diversions in the past?

Why is it the Liberals can't show these LPNs respect, yet can pay travel nurses \$300 an hour?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I am probably the loudest advocate for reducing the reliance on agency nursing in this province. When I became minister, that is one of the things that I told the provincial health authority. When agencies had contacted me, I told them that we want out of agency nursing, not more agency nursing.

We are focused on retention. We put a retention office at the provincial health authority, one in the department, that are totally 100 per cent focused on recruitment and retention, as opposed to somebody doing it in addition to their many other duties.

We have people 100 per cent, day in and day out, focused on recruitment and retention, Mr. Speaker, so we can reduce our reliance on agency nursing. But agency nursing was absolutely needed to provide the time off to the health care professionals that we have in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: I'm not sure if the minister has been listening or not. In Estimates, he acknowledged there's well over \$100 million

spent on travel nurses under his watch. So I guess he's not doing that good of a job getting it under control, Speaker, and it keeps growing every day.

Speaker, the government will pay Ms. Button half as much as an RN – half as much – expected to do the same duties and then replace her with a travel nurse making nine times the amount. Just think about that.

Does that make any sense to anyone in this House, Minister, especially yourself?

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

T. OSBORNE: No.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, a nurse practitioner has been removed from the clinic in Ferryland, leaving just one nurse practitioner to service the town and surrounding communities.

Minister, why are you leaving the people of Ferryland, Trepassey regions with just one nurse practitioner in their clinic?

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

T. OSBORNE: I find the question a little bit puzzling, Mr. Speaker. The Member knows I've had a number of conversations over the last couple of days with him about this; in fact, I had a conversation with him today saying that I am working with him to try and resolve this issue.

We have a meeting with the CEO, myself and that Member, at 3:30 today to talk about this very issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. OSBORNE: So I'm not sure that I'm actually ignoring the Member.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

I think I asked you last Thursday if the question had come out and you responded today. So when it's in dire need, when there's neither nurse practitioner in Ferryland today and they're up there – and I'm getting emails. So where was the answer last week when I needed it? Now I need it today and now you're going to jump on it when you forgot about it.

Speaker, the clinic already has patients waiting weeks, yet you are now taking another health practitioner away. Now we learn this week that the facility is – quote – left with another one to steer the ship all week – left alone.

Minister, how can you justify the reduction in health services on the Southern Shore?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I do the best I can to try and not be political in this Legislature because there are 40 of us and we all advocate for our constituents. But when something is blatantly untrue, I have to deal with it because that is political.

The Member knows that I had discussions with him last week on this issue. I showed him an email that I had received from the provincial health authority, which had different information than the Member was providing me. I had asked him to go back and get some additional details and based on that, Mr. Speaker – so he wasn't ignored until just today. That is blatantly untrue.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I said I am going to help you get to the bottom of this and set up a meeting with the CEO. What more does he want me to do?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, what I'd like him to do is put the doctor back that he took last year –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: – replace the ambulance that he took the year before, and all while hearing about it on social media. That's what we'd like to have in our district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, the minister and his Liberal friends have consistently let the people of the Southern Shore down. Two years ago, the Liberal government failed to successfully negotiate to keep a family doctor. You talk about retention bonus; you didn't do your job on that one.

Trepassey – they are now taking away a nurse practitioner in a health care system that is already stretched beyond the breaking point.

Minister, after eight years of Liberal neglect, why are you continuing to abandon the health care on the Southern Shore?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, again, very political. I don't remember driving up –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I heard the question and now the response.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I don't remember driving up to the Member's district and packing the nurse practitioner's suitcase in my trunk and driving her away.

What I did offer the Member was to find out what was happening to work on the issue –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Are you ready now?

We will move on with the response. You have 20 more seconds, Minister.

T. OSBORNE: What I do remember doing is last week trying to address the Member's concerns and contacting the provincial health authority to find out what was happening. There was conflicting information between the Member and the health authority, and I told him that we would work together on getting to the bottom of it.

Mr. Speaker, tell me those questions are non-political.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Speaker, there are obviously issues in our health care system that need to be addressed, and recruitment and retention are at the top of the list.

There is a real epidemic on the Burin Peninsula and there just doesn't seem to be enough mental health and addictions supports to help people.

When can the people of the Burin Peninsula be offered wraparound supports so they don't end up in tents?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I will say in the Legislature that over the last five years we have come light years in providing additional supports to the people of the province throughout the province, in all regions of the province.

There is much more that needs to be done, and I will acknowledge that. We have an all-party Committee put in place to help with further recommendations, to build on the recommendations of *Towards Recovery*, and I look forward to that work.

But we're not just simply waiting on that, Mr. Speaker, we have money in this year's budget for mobile crisis units. We have money in this year's budget for opioid treatment. We have money in this year's budget to expand on other services that have been put in place in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: The minister mentioned about the mobile crisis unit.

When can the Burin Peninsula expect to have theirs on the ground running?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to add, each and every year, to the mobile crisis units throughout the province, Mr. Speaker, we continue to expand on those. What I can say is that we will be looking province wide at providing mobile crisis units where they're required throughout the province as we continue to move forward, adding services in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Speaker, illicit drug use is continually on the rise, not only in my district but across the province. I receive many calls to my office regarding the influx of drugs and the impact it is having on crime in our communities. Seniors who have felt safe for years, no longer feel safe.

When can the people of rural Newfoundland and Labrador expect real action to combat crime and illicit drug use in our communities in rural Newfoundland?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

These are similar questions that were asked yesterday and I'll give the same answer. I have a lot of faith in the RNC and the RCMP in this province. We continue to fund both those police agencies here. In fact, in the budget that we're going to vote on very soon, there's an additional \$10 million for the RNC to provide new members, front-line members to police parts of this province and, of course, we funded the RCMP several years ago to the tune of \$17 million.

Unfortunately, the RCMP is going through some recruitment issues throughout Canada and we've advocated – I've advocated – very strongly that Newfoundland and Labrador deserves its fair share of members. I'll continue to advocate with the RCMP, directly with the commissioner, when he comes here to Newfoundland and Labrador next month.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, last week, I asked the Minister of CSSD when seniors in our province will see a targeted poverty reduction strategy, but I did not get an

answer at that time. November 8, it was launched with much fanfare, knowing that in a couple of months it would be received.

I'd like to ask the minister, again: When will the targeted seniors' Poverty Reduction Plan be released?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

P. PIKE: Mr. Speaker, our province is home to an aging population, as we all know, that requires targeted intervention to ensure seniors age well with dignity and are able to live in their own communities. *Budget 2024* did provide \$10 million for a comprehensive Social Well-Being Plan, which will look at prioritizing home repair, home modifications, will support caregivers of individuals who have high-care needs and will provide grants for low-income seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, the media coverage said my question wasn't answered and again this week it's not answered.

Just let me ask the question again succinctly: When will the targeted senior's Poverty Reduction Plan be released?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

P. PIKE: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we certainly are working on a targeted plan for seniors. We're hoping that we can release that within the next few weeks.

There is some work being done now, we're just in the process of finalizing it, but we are thinking within the next couple of weeks, before the House closes for sure.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, there are thousands of seniors out in our province between the ages of 60 to 64 years of age.

How many will benefit from the targeted poverty reduction strategy that will be launched in a couple of weeks?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

P. PIKE: Mr. Speaker, our Poverty Reduction Plan does include a targeted basic income for people aged 60 to 64, who are both in receipt of income support and supports from Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services. The enrolment in that particular program, Mr. Speaker, is now open and our officials are doing that as we speak.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, I ask: How many seniors will avail of the Poverty Reduction Plan, the targeted basic income that will be launched in two weeks' time?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

P. PIKE: We already have that program launched and, as I said, we are now doing the enrolment, so we will know our numbers really soon and we'll be able to provide them at that point in time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, last year, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change refused to enforce pollution laws after Tacora's dust exceeded legal threshold for nine days straight. Dust from the mine site has been an issue that spans decades. Labrador West thinks enough is enough.

I ask the minister: Will he start enforcing pollution laws and holding companies accountable for their inactions this year?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and Labour.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd first like to say a big thank you to the hon. Member for asking the question. It's an important issue in Labrador West. It's an important issue that the community is facing each and every year, he says for a number of decades. We're continuing to work with the company and the community through a community liaison group that's been started.

The hon. Member brings this concern forward to me. I reach out to the proponents and the industries to ensure that they're working as hard as they can to mitigate those problems as they exist.

We know that this year is a little bit drier of a year than the previous years, so there may be a little bit more dust. We're going to double down on the industry to ensure that we're working very hard to ensure that they can mitigate as much of those concerns as possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, during an event for the National Day of Mourning, I saw a list of miners that died from lung disease and silicosis in Labrador West. I knew many of them.

Residents of Labrador West are tired of government inaction on the dust that blankets our community every summer.

I ask the minister: Will his department investigate the continued failure of Tacora to control their tailings dust and hold them accountable for their inaction?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and Labour.

B. DAVIS: As I said, Mr. Speaker, yes, it's very challenging. To have one life lost is one too many in any industry. We don't want to see that happen. That's part of the reason why we put in place a community liaison group that works with the proponent to try to mitigate those concerns that happen within those.

There are monitoring stations that exist in Labrador West and they will continue to be monitored. We're going to work with the proponent to ensure that they mitigate those concerns as quick as they possibly can for the community's benefit, for all of us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you.

Speaker, signs prohibiting tents, essentially eviction notices, have gone up at the Colonial Building. Obviously, the next step in the province's housing strategy.

Despite what the minister says, there are no viable housing options and no guarantee that calling the emergency shelter line will result in a place to stay.

I ask the Minister of Housing: What neighbourhood, underpass, bridge, abandoned building or open space does he plan to relocate the tents?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, as I've said in this House numerous times – and I thank the Member opposite for the question – our staff, in conjunction with our community partners, are on site at the encampment near the Colonial Building on a daily basis offering options.

Over the last week – I've been in this position for about two months, I've also been touring some of the shelter areas to get a better look at what options are being offered. We're continually looking at new options, Mr. Speaker, including our initiative for transitional supportive living at 106 Airport Road.

There are options which are constantly being offered to people who find themselves either homeless or facing homelessness.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Shelters, emergency shelters, are not the option people are looking for.

Speaker, the federal housing advocate, Marie-Josée Houle, says that homeless is a systemic issue and people are homeless because governments of all levels have failed them.

Will the minister admit that his government's unwillingness or failure to take a human rights-based approach to housing has forced people to live in tents or shelters and failed those unable to find an affordable place in which to live?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Housing.

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that this year, in *Budget 2024*, this government has almost doubled its budget and its focus on housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: We understand that there is an issue; there is no disputing that. As I have said before, this side, that side, outside the House, there is no disputing that there is a housing crunch in Newfoundland and Labrador and, for that matter, across Canada and around the world. A lot of jurisdictions are facing this.

We are, with concerted efforts and a dedicated staff, putting extra resources into providing safe and affordable housing for people in this province, Sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Speaker, a travel nurse in Central Newfoundland accuses government of trying to have it both ways and blaming nurses for the nursing crisis. The Minister of Housing blames volunteers, advocates and those experiencing homelessness for people continuing to live in tents.

I ask the Premier: Is blaming others his government's new communication strategy to deflect from his government's failure to address problems before they become crises?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, because somebody says something on the radio – I don't remember anybody on this side blaming nurses for a shortage of nurses. I don't remember anybody on this side

blaming nurses for travel agency nurses, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what we did say is agency nurses were absolutely required to lighten the load for the valuable, dedicated health care professionals that are in the system.

So I am not sure where the Member is getting that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Cancer patients served by Bonavista hospital have not had access to chemo treatments locally for approximately two years. These patients have to travel to the next closest site, over 1½ hours away. Travel becomes arduous and costly.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reinstate the chemotherapy service at Bonavista hospital immediately to better serve the residents of the Bonavista Peninsula.

We're all wearing the daffodil in our lapel in the House this week and that signifies Cancer Awareness Month. I think we're all

in tune with the impact of cancer on many of the lives in Newfoundland and Labrador. Prior to the pandemic, anybody with treatment or requiring treatment in the Bonavista Peninsula would go to the local hospital and receive their chemo treatment locally.

Now, because of an operational situation, what they've got to do is they've got to travel to the next closest facility, which would be at G. B. Cross in Clarenville. For those people who've experienced cancer in the House, I would think that they would be well aware that the travel is arduous and it's tough. If it can be supplied in their local community to serve the people in the Bonavista area, that's the way it ought to be; whereas now they've got to travel a significant distance, not feeling well and added to that would be the cost of the travel.

We have many operational issues within the system and it's not for the Member of Bonavista to say that the health care has operational issues. The minister himself said it and mentioned it no less than six or seven times here in the House that they do have operational issues.

This is one that, if given attention, we can remedy to make sure that those people don't have to travel that distance to get their treatment. They can travel 15 minutes or less to the hospital in Bonavista, receive their treatment and then be in the comforts of their own home to recover and not being on Route 230, travelling back and forth from Clarenville.

I would ask the minister to give it some attention, look into this operational issue that affects the people on the Bonavista Peninsula and let's reinstate chemotherapy at the hospital.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any further petitions?

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Speaker, a petition to amend the *Citizens' Representative Act* to include municipalities province wide in Newfoundland and Labrador in the *Citizens' Representative Act* Schedule.

WHEREAS municipalities province wide are self-governing and need to be more transparent and accountable to the general public – residents; and

WHEREAS including municipalities province wide to the *Citizens Representative Act* Schedule will ensure that any wrongdoing by a municipality in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that may be harmful, dangerous to the public or injurious to the public's interest will be investigated to prevent misuse of power and resources;

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, petition the hon. House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to amend the *Citizens' Representative Act* to include all municipalities in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in the current Schedule.

Speaker, we have heard complaints from residents from several communities of town councils acting in conflicts on interest. Municipalities are self-governing organizations, with no mechanism for oversight. The Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, according to some, seems to be unwilling or unable to engage with the issues.

The *Municipal Conduct Act* is not functioning – again, to the people that have contacted us – as an adequate system to resolve legitimate issues of conduct. Also, it can be used as a mechanism to level vexatious claims against council or to attempt to formalize personal disputes, resulting in needless legal costs.

Residents and councils are looking for an impartial ombudsman or ombudsperson or ombuds office or other third party to mediate and investigate claims of conflicts of interest. So there is an opportunity here, what they're seeking for is some independent body to look into the claims and avoid potentially vexatious, expensive legal costs and also to make sure that, indeed, concerns are addressed in an objective manner.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is for improved inclusion for Northern Labrador communities to participate in the Newfoundland and Labrador incentive rebate programs.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure that the residents in Northern Labrador communities are given due consideration when the provincial government develops or develops in collaboration with others, incentive programs such as the Oil to Electric Incentive Program and the Residential Construction Rebate Program.

Northern Labrador residents are excluded from qualifying for the provincial and federal governments oil to electric incentives, all because Northern Labrador communities are supplied with electricity from diesel generating power stations.

So, Speaker, I have presented this petition and, in actual fact, I have been presenting this petition since the rebate program has been issued to transition people off oil to electricity. When I raised the petition first, I know that the province was giving up to \$17,000 to transition people from oil to electricity.

Now, the problem is, in my district, our diesel generating stations are the only way that our communities get electricity, so we can't qualify. People in my district who need to go to electricity because they can't afford the expensive oil, or they can't haul wood, so what they're doing is they're actually investing the money themselves, when the rest of the province gets this rebate.

I did ask the minister in budget Estimates, the Minister of Labrador Affairs, she did say that they have a voucher program in this budget for seniors so that they can use it for oil or for food. But the problem with that, Speaker, is what about the rest of the people in my district on low income or people who are struggling to meet their family budget demands. So for us, that's one of the problems.

Now, I'm not going to say no to the voucher program and our seniors, our elders, are going to be very grateful to get that money, but, in actual fact, this goes to the negative stereotyping that we've been experiencing. I said that in Estimates.

Unfortunately, if we get a voucher for our seniors and the rest of the province don't get a voucher, a lot of people are going to look and say, oh, they're getting a handout. That's another handout for Northern Labrador. That's another handout for Southern Labrador. The truth of the matter is, we're not getting any handouts at all. This voucher program pales in comparison to all the federal dollars and all the provincial dollars that the rest of the province can get.

In actual fact, this is a clear example of negative stereotyping for my district. Oh, give us a voucher, just for our seniors. The rest of our people in our province needs to realize that we need to be included.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time has expired.

Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 5.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, May 13.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 14.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 4.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that notwithstanding Standing Order 9, this House shall not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 15, but shall continue to sit to conduct Government Business and, if not earlier adjourned, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 7.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 16.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 2, Concurrence Motion, Report of the Resource Committee.

SPEAKER: The motion is that the House concur to the Report of the Resource Committee.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, it's a great opportunity here to stand up for the constituents in my district and speak of some of the issues, especially around the Resource Committee. There is some forestry there, I noticed, there was some Crown lands, some wildlife, all parts of my district and it's always great to get up and speak about parts of my district that make concerns and those resource issues were certainly part of it.

I think there's a constituent of mine in the gallery today and I would just like to say hello to one of the constituents that's here today from my district. So it's nice to see her here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: In the Resource Committee, Speaker, we did some work on forestry. One of the big industries, we're known as the fiber basket in Central Newfoundland, but we have no secondary processing. There's some logging in there, we do have some logging permits. But we don't have any secondary processing.

We have multiple lots of fibre in there. We know that the permits are all taken up by the three bigger units in the province, which leaves no opportunity for secondary processing right now in Central

Newfoundland. We see it every day. We see all the fibre being taken out of Central Newfoundland, gone outside of Central Newfoundland. We need government to put more access into forestry limits, especially permits, into Central Newfoundland.

There was 280,000 cubic metres unlocked by the old Abitibi permits back in 2018. All of those were issued and gone. There was allotment there for some sort of industry after the former Abitibi closed down. There was allotment of fibre there for some sort of industry, secondary processing to be taking place in the Central region. Access to that now is not there.

So we certainly need government to be paying attention to our forestry in the Central area and we need some secondary processing in there, especially today, jobs are sparse. We need industry in there and forestry can take place in there. We have lots of it and to see the logging going outside, that there's no secondary industry and people seeing they can't get no permits. Even domestic permits right now, just for even firewood, is getting depleted. So we certainly need the government to pay more attention to the forestry industry in the Central area.

When it comes to the forest industry, forest fires, we mentioned that earlier. We have all seen the devastation two years ago in the Central area. The forest fires in there were close to towns, close to properties, the emergencies taking place. So the volunteer fire departments, lots of groups and organizations stood up and took the place of some of the actions that were going on during the forest fires with regard to some mediations with regard to protecting the people of our province.

When we have a water bomber, they should be equipped and in the air and ready to go to protect our forests. To have the fleet down to four, to have the bombers as to hire wherever they're needed highest, that's where the bombers go. Sometimes they go

out of the province and have to come back, so we certainly need that fifth. We had six one time and now we're down to four. Then we went down to five and one got damaged. So we certainly need that fifth water bomber in the air to protect the forest industry. If we're going to have a forest industry, we need to protect it.

So that's some things that government has to pay attention to, the fire protection in the area. So we need the government to step up and have more ground crews, of course, too. We certainly need ground crews to be coming in to protect our forest fires, so we need ground crews to have there.

We know that the staff in the area are doing a great job. They do a great job for forest fire protection. They do a great job for our forest fires and managing it, but they can only do what government provides to them and if government don't provide them with the tools to protect our forests, to do the work that they need, then they'll be fighting a losing battle. We certainly need government to step up, putting ground crews on the ground, give them their supports that they need so that they can do the work that they professionally do and do it proudly. We are proud of those people.

Crown lands is another big issue in the district, all across the province, certainly, we've heard of the frustrations of Crown lands. We need legislation brought to the House of Assembly to address some of those issues with Crown lands. We've heard the stories – every one of us has got them. People can't sell their property because they don't own their land, they don't have clear title to the land. They've got deeds, they've got documentations that they do own their land or their land has been transferred or they bought land but government won't accept that as a clear title.

They have to go back years to get proof of people who lived there at that time. Some of those people now are elderly. Some are not

even there. They're deceased, some of them. Some of them can't recall what happened in those days, who owned the land or what happened to the land.

Government certainly got to bring in some legislation to cut back on the frustrations that people are finding in their Crown land situation right now. All they want to do, a lot of the elderly people especially, out around smaller communities, they want to move in further. They want to move closer to hospitals. They want to move closer to family. They probably just want to get into seniors' units so they need to sell their homes, but in order to do that, they have to prove, after living in that home for 50 years, that they own their home, own their land.

So we need government to bring in legislation that we can sort out some of those issues, to be able to make some documentations better and supports for those individuals that want to say that they own their land so that they can sell their land, sell their homes and just move on in a life that they want to.

We'd certainly like to see, Minister, to bring forth some legislation into that. They've done a review. There was a review done on Crown lands 2015. The PC government did a review in 2015. It's almost 10 years later. That review was never adopted. So they decided to go do their own review. Last January, they picked out a couple of points that can be brought to the House of Assembly for discussion – we certainly can. It might not solve everything, but we can certainly bring those points to the House of Assembly. We can sit here and have legislative discussion on that and maybe make things easier for the people in this province who want to sell their homes.

They have a couple of points that can be brought forward, bring forward the legislation, let's discuss it and let's make life easier for the people of the province, especially in the Crown lands sections.

Wildlife: Moose management is another thing that I hear in the district, the amount of moose and the licences that are being issued. Government, in the moose management areas, need to do a physical count of the moose that are there so we can have that industry – and there's a big industry in the moose, actually. The outfitters and the people who bring in those hunters, they want to make an industry out of the moose management areas. Moose management needs to be a little bit more active, a little bit more acted upon and those discussions.

I've had some emails along the way of some beaver licences, trap licences. People have concerns. The older trappers have concerns now of losing their licences. There've been some discussions that, next fall, it may go to an open draw for their beaver licence; whereas they had those held on, their beaver trapping licences, for years.

We need government to pay attention to that. There are already rules and regulations in place for the beaver trapping licence. If they're not paying their fees, if they're not trapping beavers on those licences, if they're not reporting their activities, then someone else can take their place on the trapline or give it to somebody that's already using the trapline until somebody else comes into place. That certainly needs to be addressed. We all know beavers can do some devastation to the properties. We've seen it on our roadways. Just by driving along the highway, we have dams sometimes on our highways that can probably flood some of the areas there.

So yes, we need beavers controlled, no doubt we do. But we have to do it responsibly. We have to do it in a way that's manageable, in a way that can be taken care of. So we need government to look at those beaver management areas, those beaver licences and the traplines so that they can get back to what they want to do

on their traplines. They can work with government and the traplines to be able to minimize the beaver population.

Agriculture is another big part of – we spoke about it in the Resource Committee. We have a big part of agriculture in our province. In Central Newfoundland, we have a big industry of agriculture in our area. Agriculture certainly is a big part of food security in our province. We need to increase food security in our province. That's one thing we need to do.

In a study, 26 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are living in food insecurity. We need to decrease that food insecurity. We can't keep relying on transportation, especially the boats and the planes or whichever way the food is getting here – mostly on Marine Atlantic at the time. When you look at the expense it costs to bring the food across Marine Atlantic, the freshness of it, the cost of it by the time it gets to the shelves, we're looking at expensive grocery bills. We're looking at food that's probably sometimes not fit to eat because it takes that long to get here, especially on fresh foods.

We certainly need to put more into the farming. I know government can attest to say that we've doubled our farmland. They've doubled the farmland, all right, but we're not getting no yield from that farmland. So we don't know where we're to with regard to food security. If we're not getting yields from those farms by the time – and they can also cut the red tape because, by the time somebody acquires farmland, by the time they get to have yields in that farm, in that agriculture section, it costs so much. The cost is up that high and they get tired. They say they get frustrated and they're out of here. Then they're out of here. No food being farmed, no yields coming out of that farmland.

They can say that they doubled our farmland, but we're not getting double production. It's not happening. So we

certainly need government to reduce the red tape on that so we can have less than 26 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians living in food insecurity.

Also in the Resource Committee, we talked about the environment. We did the waters, and it was discouraging to hear that there are still a lot of communities throughout the province that are still on boil orders, still don't have water that's fit to drink, that they can make access to clear drinking water in those communities. I know government has some programs, some ways of doing it, but a lot of the smaller communities just don't have the funding. They do not have the opportunity to avail of some of the programs that's there.

Government needs to step up more to make sure that individuals, that people in those LSDs, smaller communities certainly have the necessity that they need of clean drinking water, instead of having boil orders in those communities. We need that addressed. We need government to do something with the water situations and not being on boil order.

We spoke about some industry in our province in the Resource Committee. We talked about the wind energy coming to Central Newfoundland. There's one on the West Coast, one in Central Newfoundland and one down in Burin. While we're introducing those wind projects, while they're all new energy, people got a lot of questions. There are questions that need to be answered.

As the Opposition, we encourage new industry, new development. But at the same time, we need to make sure that we protect our environment. We have to make sure that we are the beneficiaries of our resources, that we get the maximum benefits from our own resources, that we protect our environment and at the end of those projects, we have to make sure that we are not responsible for cleanup.

We have seen this in the past, we can look no further than Abitibi. Abitibi built some of the communities. So we have the Abitibi one there. ASARCO mines in Buchans was another one. By the time we went in there to clean up the tailings at ASARCO mines, it cost us millions. It cost us millions to clean up what Abitibi left behind.

Some of the land, right now, we can't even use because it's contaminated. The environment is not fit; the land is not fit. The environment is contaminated; we can't use the land. You look at the devastation that is around some of the forest areas, some of the wood's roads. We all see it. It is left there today. There are pieces, there are containers, there are drums, there are different vehicle parts. There are all kinds of stuff left throughout the forest part of it. It is even in our rivers in Central Newfoundland.

While we encourage the new industries, we have to make sure we have a detailed environmental assessment and we protect our properties. At the end, we have a good decommissioning fee in there so that we don't have to go back in there to clean up those industries.

We've seen it in the past. We shouldn't let the past haunt our future. We have to make sure all this is in place, like I say.

So that's one industry. It seems to be a new industry with a lot of questions and people are looking for answers. But we have to do it right. We just have to do it right. People welcome it sort of thing. I know there has been some response of people that don't want it, of course. But at the end of the day, we have to make sure that those projects are done right and that the environmental assessment is done to our own benefit. That we are the beneficiaries. That we are protecting our own properties.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: With that, Speaker, I'll leave the concurrence on the Resource and I'll

have a chance to speak about my district on another day.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and Labour.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

I would be remiss if I didn't say thank you to the MHA for Exploits for attending Estimates with the Department of Environment and Climate Change, along with some of his colleagues. I think the MHA for Bonavista was there. I think the MHA for Torngat Mountains was there. I think the MHA for St. John's Centre was at those Estimates as well and I do believe the MHA for Mount Pearl - Southlands was there as well, for a few fleeting moments.

But I do want to take the opportunity to mention important investments that we're going to be making in *Budget 2024* in the Department of Environment and Climate Change. I would like to point out a few highlights that we're going to be doing but also some things that, I think, need some clarification. I'll explain a little bit about that as I go through.

I do have a significant amount of material to go through but I'm not going to try to go through all of that material here today. I know that I may get other opportunities from time to time to get up and talk to my colleagues about what we're doing and what we're trying to accomplish. I think the long and short of it is most of us in this House of Assembly want to try to accomplish everything we possibly can, in all the different departments that we all represent.

I think, from my standpoint, I'd just like to highlight some of the *Budget 2024* investments, just on a high level and I'll go through a little bit more detail as I go

through the opportunity over the next number of minutes that I do have.

In the Department of Environment and Climate Change, we've made investments of some \$81.9 million to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while addressing energy affordability as well. This funding includes the transition of people's homes from oil to electric, which is a much better opportunity for them, from a cost savings perspective. Also, it gives them the option in many cases for cooling options that could go along with that as well. An additional \$1.5 million for flood-risk mapping; \$1.1 million to support electric vehicle infrastructure; \$508,000 to enhance drinking water improvement initiatives, which I'll highlight that the MHA for Exploits talked about the fact that there are some boil-water advisories. I do agree with him, there are. It has been significantly reduced over the years. We're going to continue to double down and reduce that even further this year and into the next couple of years. We're focused on that, but it does take a partnership between the communities that we all represent.

I encourage every MHA in this House of Assembly to encourage their constituency to look at those options before they do – what I always say – the shiny arena or the shiny recreation complex. I think clean drinking water should be a priority for every community. I know that former municipal leaders have put significant investments into drinking water at the political expense of other things that the constituency would like to see.

I understand that takes leadership and I encourage every MHA in this House of Assembly to encourage their constituencies to look at that, their municipalities, their LSDs to look at that because it's not easy decisions to make, but they're very, very important decisions. I think every time those decisions are made, the constituency makes out better in the longer run than they could ever make out from a recreation complex or anything like that. Not saying

they shouldn't have a recreation complex as well, I think they should, but I think the first and foremost priority for any municipal or any leadership in the community level would be to provide the basic services that the constituents need and require. That \$508,000 is going to help and I'll explain a little bit why that's going to help.

Also we have \$654,000 to establish a permanent program through wastewater surveillance. You may say, well, why is that? You'll hear a little bit later in the opportunity about why we're doing that and the benefits of that from a government-wide perspective. It's not just from Environment and Climate Change perspective or community-based, but from a health care perspective, as well.

Speaker, protecting our environment and providing quality services to residents are key priorities for our government and we continue to implement these programs as we transition to a low-carbon global economy. We have a shared responsibility. We all have a shared responsibility to protect the environment for future generations and make the greener choices each and every day. The health and well-being of young people, our young families in our province, our country and, in turn, the global community, depends on the choices we make today.

One of the things I was a little disappointed in with our Estimates discussion that we had there last week was the biggest existential crisis that the world is facing, the global community is facing, climate change, never received one question – not one. It's our biggest line item in our budget, of the three divisions that we have, that's our biggest line item that we spend money on, not one single question.

I do understand that we were pressed for time. My officials and myself were willing to stay as long as it took to go through every bit of questioning that the Opposition parties would like to have. So I was a little

disappointed in that because I think there are a lot of good news stories within that point. I think there's a lot of opportunity for us to be questioned and provide insight to the Opposition groups to understand what we're doing.

I think that was a little bit of a disappointment for myself as well as some of my staff that were very well prepared to answer questions on an issue that we're facing, not just in this province. We see it on our doorsteps, whether it be the Southwest Coast, whether it be coastal communities with erosion, we see it every day. Those are discussions that I wanted to have on, not just the budget, but the policy decisions around those budget decisions. So, hopefully, we will get the opportunity to have those questions, whether it be in the House of Assembly through Question Period or on the side.

My door is always open, as my critics know. They can reach out to me any time. I'm willing to sit down with them and walk through anything they have with questions to improve the back-and-forth nature of what this House of Assembly is. We all have that collective responsibility and I think as MHAs, the 40 of us – or 38 of us right now – all have that ability to work together, across the aisle, it's important.

One of the good things that I wanted to highlight in the Estimates was that we've taken action on all 45 of the items that were recommended in the Climate Change Action Plan that previous Environment Ministers brought forward and I had the pleasure of trying to move forward as well. That plan is now nearing completion and we're looking at having a new plan. We finished public consultations on the new plan. We look to hopefully have it in the fall of the year, releasing the new plan for 2025 and onwards for the Climate Change Action Plan.

But we're doing something a little different this year. This year we're actually adding

another plan, which will be the adaptation plan. So it's going to show communities and give some insight into a report card, for a lack of a better term, of recommendations that we can be held accountable to, to ensure that we're working as hard as we can with the communities and what communities can do to improve their ability to, not just turn back the clock a little bit on climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also how we're going to adapt to what's already going to be on our doorsteps that we're seeing every day. So I am happy that those climate change adaptation plans and mitigation plans are going to be coming out this year.

I would be remiss if I didn't say a big thank you to the Climate Change Division in our department for the great work that they do each and every day to try to make a meaningful difference. As I've said before, *Budget 2024* includes some \$81.9 million to reduce greenhouse gas emissions plus another \$2 million or so to support electric vehicles while addressing those funding. It is a really, really important thing.

With the time I do have left, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about the partnership between the Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund, which is one of the many programs that we do have in the department that has made a significantly positive impact on the environment and to the people that we all represent.

We're going to be delivering some 830,000 cumulative greenhouse gas emission reductions over that time frame by 2030 and 650 direct person-years of employment. That's going to meet our targets for 2030. A large part is because of the investments that we've been making over the last number of years and the Climate Change Action Plan and the people that are working really hard and diligently to do that.

Obviously, 2050 is the net zero we want to get. We have to do a significant amount of work across departments on this side of the

House, but it's across all government, to make sure we hit our targets for 2050.

Over the 2018-2024 Low Carbon Economy Leadership, we spent some \$89.4 million of federal and provincial cost-shared money to successfully do projects that were reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but also giving the options to make more energy efficient but more cost-effective structures for whether it be municipalities, individual homeowners or community groups.

In June 2023, we announced a further \$157 million for greenhouse gas reduction initiatives for 2023-2027, that included \$102 million for the residential Oil to Electric Incentive Program and an additional \$55 million that we're yet to announce – we're working on that with our federal partners for \$55 million – for the non-residential, which would be our churches, our community groups, our municipalities. Those are things that we're all going to be trying to move out the door as quick as we can, as soon as we get that agreement signed with our federal colleagues.

The Electric Vehicle Rebate Program is another thing that we've been moving forward because transportation accounts for some 41 per cent of our greenhouse gas emissions as a province, more than any other area in the province, more than industry, more than homes, all those things. So it is a significant driver of the greenhouse gas emissions in our province. We understand that. That's why we're moving as fast as we can to try to have people make those choices for our electric vehicles. We know the supply chain is getting stronger. We've seen increases seven or eightfold over what we've done year over year for electric vehicles. Those are things that we're very excited about in our department and I think the general public are excited about as well.

An additional program was the oil to electric switch program for homes, which was an additional project that we started a couple of

years ago. The first year we started I think it was 160 or so homes that were done. The next year was 1,700. This past year, as of April 1, we're at somewhere between 2,600 and 2,700 homes that applications have been received and approved and moving through that process. So we're very excited about that and as people staff up the industry, we're going to see that go a little further each and every day.

In *Budget 2024*, we announced \$1.975 million for electric vehicle charging infrastructure and incentives, that's \$875,000 to support Electric Vehicle Rebate program, but I think the real important piece is – and all jurisdictions across the country are starting to move in this direction – making sure that we have the infrastructure in place to handle the vehicles as people buy them.

The supply chain is starting to sure up. There are more electric vehicles being made and available in Newfoundland and Labrador. We can see that from the numbers. We approved some 745 applications this past year versus, I think, 500 that was done last year. The year before, I think it was in the 100 to 150 range. So we've seen a significant increase in adoption of electric vehicles and we realize that the technology is getting better each and every day about battery life, the longevity of that. Range anxiety is becoming less and less because people are getting more used to seeing charging infrastructure and understanding that about 95 per cent or more of your charging and your charging for electric vehicles is going to be done in your own home. So there's a significant amount of that.

In comparison, we're now averaging about two electric vehicles on the road every day, which is an impressive feat for a small province like ours. We've also established a Net-Zero Advisory Council in December of 2021. They've done some significant work on near term and foundational goals for the government to reduce greenhouse gas

emissions, looking at other jurisdictions across the globe and in Canada: New Brunswick, British Columbia; USA: Maine; UK: Scotland; as well as Australia. We're looking at all those options. I look forward to their reports coming in as they start looking at different areas of this.

One of the key pieces that, I think, is really, really important in our department is managing of water. I think the MHA for Exploits highlighted that in his talk that he wants to see investments in that. So we're happy to say we're doing some investments in that area. We're investing some \$654,000 to expand the provincial Wastewater Surveillance program, which, as I said before, this is a partnership. This is done with the Department of Health and Community Services. It started out as testing the waste water to see where COVID was prevalent in the communities. Now, it can be looked at in a variety of different health tools and it's an invaluable health and public policy monitoring tool that will allow health resources to be, I hope, deployed to areas that would require them, based on what they're seeing in the waste water.

It sounds an interesting way of doing it. It's probably not something that people would get excited about, but I know from a statistics standpoint and an information standpoint, I know the Department of Health and Community Services are fairly excited about it. Right now, we've expanded the number of communities from 20 communities with 24 sampling locations representing about 46 per cent of the total provincial population. So we're seeing growth in there. We're looking at expanding that even further over the next little bit.

One of my favourite things to talk about is flood risk mapping. I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs is very excited about flood risk mapping as well and we're very excited about the mandate that we have to expand that further, and I'd like to highlight some of the work that's already been done.

Flood risk mapping is an important planning tool. It gives government and communities opportunity in terms of land use development, where to build infrastructure investments, emergency management, climate change adaptation; all those things are very, very important. We're putting \$1.5 million into that this year.

In the past number of years, we have developed flood risk mapping for over 40 communities in the province, which is important, but we have significantly more communities to do. The province does this with federal cost-shared funding and we're looking at expanding those every year as we move forward to conduct those flood risk maps to ensure the communities are well aware of what's going on.

In 2021-2022, flood risk mapping was undertaken in communities like Placentia, Carbonear, Victoria and Salmon Cove; and in 2023, were areas in communities like Ferryland, Brigus, Heart's Delight, Winterton, Hants Harbour.

This past year, 2023 and 2024, moving into this year, we're looking at areas in St. John's, Codroy Valley area, Channel-Port aux Basques, Burnt Islands, Isle aux Morts, Rose Blanche-Harbour le Cou, Burgeo, Stephenville, Kippens, Cox's Cove, Trout River and Parson's Pond.

Those are the areas that we're looking at putting flood risk mapping in and expanding even further, so phase two of this process will run from 2024 to 2028, and the province is currently planning those flood risk studies for the province. In 2024, we are looking at areas on the Northeast Avalon, Southwest Coast and various areas on the Eastern part of the Island, which is important.

All of that is based on where the need is, where it is required and where the data needs to be done for the communities because it's outdated or its changes in the climate or its coastal communities that we really need to do some work on. Having a

reliable flood risk mapping allows municipalities to plan both for current and future climate conditions. It minimizes damage of property and infrastructure which is expected to result in cost savings over time.

As is part of the public safety against potential floods, the departments operate real-time flood forecasting systems on areas in Humber River, Exploits River, lower Churchill River – which is important – using state-of-the-art technology modelling that results in sharing with emergency services when it is appropriate.

These are just a few of the highlights of *Budget 2024* for the investment in my department. I am happy that I had the opportunity to go through the Estimates process. I always liked that time of the year where we get the opportunity to have a good dialogue with Opposition Members about what's happening, hopefully educate them on some of the issues that we see from a policy perspective. Hopefully they give us an opportunity to answer the questions and listen to our answers and use that when they're actually communicating with their constituents or all of our constituents.

Because it's really, really important that the information is fact-based, which is what we try to do with our department. I would remiss if I didn't say a big thank you to the Department of Environment and Climate Change, whether it be from a labour standpoint, environmental assessment.

I would highlight, in the last minute or so that I've got left, I will say that the MHA for Exploits did talk about the hydrogen and wind projects that we have on the go. There is a fulsome, legislatively governed environmental assessment process that each of these programs will go through. The most recent one required some 60-plus release conditions; one of which of those conditions was a decommissioning plan that has to be approved prior to any shovels

going in the ground, which is what was talked about.

I think it's really, really important that those things are put in place. We want to have an environment that's sustainable for our generations to come, our kids, our grandkids, hopefully, that will be doing significant amount of work in the area that we all live, love and want to be a part of.

All I can say is that that's our primary focus, as the Environment Minister and my department, is to make sure that we make the best environmental decisions for the province on the way we go forward. That's why I'm happy about the environmental assessment process which is legislatively governed and it's very fulsome in its coverage. Every industry has to go through it. I would like to just thank that division as well as Climate Change for their great work.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you very much. Speaker.

It's on a rare occasion that I may say hello to a constituent in my district – on the rare occasion, I may, but this time I want to say a special hello to a viewer in Lake Melville District.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

C. PARDY: Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, okay. That's right. Rosalie Belbin is one who reaches out quite often –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: – and I'd like to say hello to Rosalie because she doesn't miss a session of the House of Assembly and she likes to

keep connected with all of the MHAs and the staff within the House of Assembly.

AN HON. MEMBER: She writes three letters a day.

C. PARDY: Yes, she writes three letters a day. That's awesome.

Rosalie is from Red Bay, Labrador. Sometimes Rosalie will post on my Facebook post and the residents and constituents in the District of Bonavista may not know about Rosalie or where she's from Red Bay.

If we go back to the 16th century, Red Bay was a bustling community which had the Basque whaling and it was a massive operation back in the 16th century – not whaling, but the fishing industry is one that I think we need to focus a little more on. I would hope in my short time remaining that I can at least throw out a few more suggestions to the government and in those suggestions then maybe it would stimulate some debate and some action. Allow me to start.

Glen Blackwood, who is quite knowledgeable about the fishery, had spoke at the sealing summit held in St. John's at the Convention Centre. He had stated a phrase which our leader from Stephenville - Port au Port has used several times in stating that the fishery is our only renewable megaproject.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Think about it. It brings in between \$1.2 billion and \$1.4 billion. A spike in the snow crab, which we are heavily dependent on, it might hit \$1.6 billion, but generally \$1.2 billion, \$1.4 billion. Just slightly less than what we pay to service our provincial debt. Think about it. We believe that the fishery ought to be producing more and let me throw out a few things, items to you, that will hopefully inspire some decision-makers or the

department to say here's some plausible action.

I would like to think, maybe after the next general election, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, maybe on this side, asking questions to whoever runs Fisheries over there saying, well, how did you grow the fishery? Because we believe it should be worth a lot more than \$1.2 billion, \$1.4 billion.

We ought to be held accountable when we're saying we're going to do something, then we ought to be accountable for our actions towards growing the fishery. So the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure when on this side, after the next election, would ask: What actions have you done in the fishery to grow it from \$1.2 billion to \$2.5 billion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Do you know what? Whoever stands up on the government side is going to say a very good question, but I would hope they're going to say here are the actions that we've taken and these actions will hopefully grow the fishery. The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure now is going to sit down and say, well, that was a pretty good answer because we presented actions to grow the fishery. That is the direction.

Mr. Speaker, my time is running out. We've got 1,000 less people in the fishing industry according to the Budget Speech from last year to this year – 1,000 less people. At Estimates, I had asked a question. We didn't know where those 1,000 people are or what they did. There was no answer to that at that point in time. So that's an unknown.

But what I would state to you is the fact that when I asked in Estimates, the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, is his department tracking the loss of population in rural Newfoundland, the

department official said no, they're not. There is no tracking. Every one of us in rural Newfoundland can say we're losing population in rural Newfoundland. Thus, we would say: What action is being taken to try to prevent the erosion of rural Newfoundland? That's a fair question. All the constituents in the Bonavista district now watching this program are saying good question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: But there was no answer. There was no answer in Estimates.

Let me go into that. There was an article in the paper and it was an opinion article in CBC, and it was written by Derek Butler. Derek Butler is a common name that people well known in the fishery. But in that opinion article, here is what he had stated. He had said: "If the goal of Canadian fisheries policy is sustaining rural communities, and the fishery had produced some very strong economic returns in recent years, including in the COVID-19 era, we should be seeing change." We ought to be seeing change.

I had asked at the Estimates: Can we have or can he inform us of what the policy is to sustain rural Newfoundland? What is the policy in the Fisheries Department that will sustain rural Newfoundland that we're acting towards? What is the policy? That's a fair question. Because without a policy or an action, we're left to try and say it's going to happen by chance. And we don't leave things to happen by chance. But the answer in the Estimates in Fisheries, there was no policy that they could state at that time. There was no policy on the rural sustainability or in fisheries policy that they could provide to stop the erosion or to grow the fishery. That wasn't the case.

I read there was a standing committee on Fisheries and Oceans and they had a fisheries expert there. I just wanted to read an excerpt from the fisheries expert. He states – and this is very significant: "I have

looked at the official DFO data and, for a period of about 10 years" And remember, he was called to the committee because he was a fisheries expert out of Quebec and they called him in as an expert witness on the committee. He said: "I have looked at the official DFO data and, for a period of about 10 years, between 2012 and 2021, there have been 465 fewer fishing licences in Quebec, representing a decrease of 8%, while the number of fishers has increased by 34, or 3%."

He had stated that: "The concentration of fishing licences, which has been under way for a number of years, is creating two major challenges for coastal communities with regard to the redistribution of wealth and the establishment of the new generation of fishers."

Our department didn't have that data. They didn't know about fishing licences or any concentration of fishing licences. I would say, in your district, Mr. Speaker, there's a fisherman that I think a lot of us would be aware of, Mr. David Boyd and David Boyd has been corresponding for years on fishing licences. He's talking about the erosion of rural Newfoundland and the regulatory behaviours of our province in preventions that he would see is anti-rural Newfoundland, anti-sustainability.

The man recently was diagnosed with cancer. He wanted to be able to pass his licence down to his son who is a master mariner; his grandson who has been on the water since he'd been two years of age. But can he pass his licence down to his children? No, it's a regulatory procedure that he's got a lot of problem with it and he can't do it. The easiest thing to do is to sell it off to somebody else, and the fishing licences out there are being reduced and concentrated even smaller. That is what's happening. So the regulations from the department, sometimes, are counterproductive to maintaining rural Newfoundland.

Recently, there was a study that was released on mackerel and the predators who predate on mackerel. In the short time I've got, I just want to release a couple of points from the article. Elisabeth Van Beveren was the lead author. There were three others listed. Who is Elisabeth Van Beveren? Well, she is a DFO research scientist operating out of Quebec. She was the lead author. She authored other ones.

A couple of notable things I want to mention in that, there was no mention of harp seals. They focused on grey seals. Now we've got quite a few grey seals as well, but we've got lots of harp seals. Here are some things she found out about DFO science – a couple of things. During the last 10 years, mackerel consumption by predators became, likely, at least twice as high as the reported Canadian landings. That means what we catch in Canada, she is saying that the predation by predators out there is certainly at least twice as much – twice as much.

I'm going to skip ahead because I want to get to another one. She also mentions that when they look at the natural mortality, DFO had the natural mortality as a constant. They had a number in the computer that was a constant, it didn't change. She was saying there were so many variables, that is inaccurate. It didn't change, it didn't reflect the nine-million-plus harp seals out there. The formula doesn't take that into account. So she was saying that DFO needs to do a lot of work on natural morbidity or mortality and we need to work on that.

Seals: Not in this past Estimates but last year's Estimates, I remember that the minister at that time had made quite a comment, which I agree with, he says, in relation to seals, we have big problems and we are nowhere close to an answer – imagine. Because you ought to be able to ask government: What actions are you taking to control the predation and the predators that would be out there in the ocean?

Let me throw out some statistics and some figures for you when we come to seals. We have approximately, in our waters, 11.5 million seals, that's all types. That's DFO. That's not the Member for Bonavista's numbers. That is DFO's numbers: 11.5 million seals. When we look at our commercial fishery, we look at Iceland, Norway and those areas. Let me give you a comparison. Remember, we have 11.5 million in our waters. Norway will have less than 50,000. Iceland, less than 25,000.

Norway's fishery scientists refer to two fishery crashes, one in the mid-1980s and one in the 1990s, what they call fishery crashes. Both were attributed to a harp seal invasion. What did they do? They addressed it. They addressed the situation and if we look at what the commercial catch is from Norway to Iceland to Newfoundland and Labrador – huge, a huge difference in the commercial catch.

Is predation significant? The author of the latest study on mackerel would say it sure is. It is. It is very significant. But we ask government: What actions have you taken? We haven't taken any actions. It is to the point where we have a big problem and we are nowhere close to an answer. That's not the current minister, that's previously, and that's fine because that minister was right in that we have a big problem and we've got to address it.

The annual consumption, according to DFO, of our 11.5 million seals is in excess of 13 million metric tons – 13 million metric tons. To put that in perspective, all of the Canadian East Coast fishery, we harvest 586,000 metric tons. Newfoundland and Labrador, our commercial fishery harvests 180,000 metric tons. The Canadian fishery, 586,000 metric tons; Newfoundland fishery, 180,000 metric tons; and predation by seals alone according to DFO data, 13.5 million metric tons.

Everyone on this side of the House would say when we cross over in the next election,

we're going to have our own stand-alone department of fisheries and aquaculture.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Well, the Liberals had long enough to do it. It was a Liberal idea.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

C. PARDY: We are going to do that because it's so significant. If we look at that data alone and compare the quotas that we would have for Norway, Iceland and us, as Newfoundland and Labrador, we are nowhere close to what we ought to be doing.

In my closing 30, to Rosalie Belbin, thank you very much for watching. The constituents in the District of Bonavista, I would hope you seen some merit in what that is. You've got to be accountable for action or inaction.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Government has got to be accountable for inaction and our job is to call out the inaction.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm going to perhaps speak a little lower than the Member opposite. I was thinking as I was writing some notes that this is my 13th budget, and when I heard the Member on the other side I got, sort of, déjà vu. I thought it was Vaughn Granter back here in the building, in the way that what he was saying could be heard out there in the Department of Fisheries, down the road, but I digress.

This is my first chance to speak to budget and speak to Concurrence.

E. JOYCE: (Inaudible.)

A. PARSONS: I say to the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, I'll get my chance to thank you for all your support over the last year now in a second.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

A. PARSONS: I'll get my chance now in a second.

So it's a chance to speak to the Concurrence to the Resource Committee and it's, sort of, still fresh because we just had our Estimates the other day. A couple of Members across the way were a part of that Estimates Committee and we talked about the Department of Industry, Energy and Technology, so I'm going to go through a few different points of that and a few small comments that have been made throughout the last number of weeks in the House of Assembly.

With all the challenges we face when we hear the questions in Question Period every day and when we read news stories, there is no doubt that we face challenges, whether it be in housing, health care, you name it, a couple things that I would point out is, number one, that absolutely it is real. There is no doubt that we face these challenges, but as a person who does get to travel to other jurisdictions to have meetings with investors and when we talk about people within the various industries, one thing I like to do on every one of these trips is I like to look at a local newspaper, something that is being redundant in these times, looking at newspapers.

I can tell you, the front page in most other provinces or states or countries is the same as we're facing here. We're talking about health care recruitment, we talk about homelessness, things like that, it is being felt on a global basis. Now, again, we all

have to find our way to address those challenges and that brings me to the next point.

While we do have those challenges, we do have a lot of positive things going on within this province and within this particular department. As I like to point out, these are some of the things that the revenues, the job creation and the economic spinoff is what's creating the ability to pay for some of the services that we provide in the social security network and web that we have that we provide people, this net that we've always provided that's what we're proud of in Canada and in Newfoundland and Labrador. A lot of that comes from the resources that are being developed here and the jobs that are created here.

So I'm just going to touch on a few different ones. Mining – again, mining continues to be that backbone throughout this province. It doesn't matter where you are. Being at the Lab West Summit, meeting with the Rio Tintos and we look at Tacoras and we look at what the MHA for the Third Party's background is and what he has experience with, the fact is there is a lot going on up there.

Again, no doubt, there are challenges that are faced in that area that come from employment, that come from increased development. It is same thing when I am down in Massachusetts, I met with the governor there, the same challenges: finding workers; finding housing; finding health care for these people that are there to build the developments that we want.

So we face that. That is what I call a good challenge that we need to face. When I mention that about Labrador, the fact is that there is a huge, massive opportunities for expansion in Labrador, for job creation, for power development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. BROWN: (Inaudible.)

A. PARSONS: What's that?

J. BROWN: Give me the power and I'll do the rest.

A. PARSONS: Give him the power and he'll do the rest.

And that's the thing though, that's the crux. The crux of this is power development. Now, the good news, compared to some other jurisdictions where their concern is greening their grid, their concern is getting off coal, we don't have those concerns. We have the resource; it is just the cost of development. It is about getting that power from point A to point B.

We're very lucky, whether we talk about Churchill expansion or whether we talk about Gull Island, which is a massive conversation everywhere you go – no doubt, that is one that is brought up everywhere you go. It is the most discussed – probably the largest undeveloped hydro resource in North America. It is talked about by everybody and that is, again, global. So that's a big deal and we're going to continue to talk about that.

Now, don't get me wrong; with that, comes conversations that have to happen with our Indigenous partners, that have to happen with Labradorians. But we would be remiss if we didn't discuss the options and possibilities.

When we look at the Upper Churchill and, again, we look at 2041 and what's going on there. You know, part of that is explaining to people outside our shores, explaining the history behind that, how we got from where we were to where we are and pointing out that 2041 sounds like a long time away but, in power development years, it is nothing. We need to realize that there are power needs and we are going to have to start developing that now. That's a conversation that Quebec is also having.

Part of our conversations that we have with people, especially along the Eastern Seaboard, as they talk about the electrons that they're getting from Quebec and we make them realize do you know where you're actually getting that from. That's a conversation that we are going to be a part of, making sure they know where that comes from. Again, the conversation of power demand is real and we have a resource here we're so fortunate to have.

Wind and hydrogen – a Member across brought it up today. The good news is he didn't say anything that I haven't heard or wasn't expecting, and it was good points. I'm saying that in a positive way. Decommissioning – absolutely, and the promise I can give there is that decommissioning is a part of the first release of the environmental assessment and it's probably going to be a part of the rest and it's a part of our plan. It was a part of the whole structure all along.

Like anything, we have a history of resource development in this province where, after it was done, the companies packed up, they take off, leave the mess for us to clean up. We are still doing it now. We are cleaning up messes from decades ago. No more – no more.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: That's been changed. These changes were brought by ministers of Natural Resources long before me and ministers of Environment who said no, if you want to come in, you're going to have to pay that bond. You're going to have to make sure that you have got the money there for the cleanup. This will be no different. We don't want to see that.

There are going to be lots of conversations as we go into this new, nascent industry for which there's huge opportunity but, at the same time, we have to realize that there are best practices we can look at. Again, the conversation that sometimes does not

happen is people say, well, why are we doing it here – why are we shipping? There are reasons.

The rest of the world wishes they had what we had. They wish they had the available Crown land; the deep ice-free ports of which we have multiple; the workforce that we have here; the fresh water; the post-secondary institutions; and one thing I talk about that sometimes we forget about: stable government.

When I say stable government I don't mean, there's a Liberal government or a PC government. What they don't realize is that in other jurisdictions when I talk about – and, again, without putting any particular country out there but when there's a change in regime, we talk about massive changes in what happens to resources or businesses.

Here, the fact is that 40 Members in this House are of fairly like-mind. Yes, we share differences, but we all believe in the possibility of resource development and we all share in that we have to make sure that environmental concern is a part of that –

AN HON. MEMBER: Democracy.

A. PARSONS: Democracy.

Again, there's a lot of talk these days and it frustrates me to no end when we compare the loss of democracy and I hear comparisons tossed into what went on back in the '40s in Germany. That bugs me to no end because you only have to visit one site of atrocities to realize we are nothing, in this country, compared to what went on over there in World War II. We are nothing like that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: We are nothing like them.

It's amazing how many stupid memes get shared on social media and it's getting away from the real questions that we can ask and

we should ask of our democracy, but I digress. That's not the point of my talk here today. It's to get back to the fact that Newfoundland and Labrador has a heck of a lot of positive things that are here, and the benefit of it, we're all asking the same question: We have it; how do we make sure that that benefit goes to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, goes to our kids and goes to our grandkids?

I think I have the right ideas. My colleagues across the way, they think they have the right ideas. That's the whole point of it. That is the whole point of it, is that you get in and get to do what you can, hopefully make the right decisions, listen to the people that are around you, whether it's in departments, people, Opposition. I have no problem stealing good information from other jurisdictions as well. I've said that a million times going to FPT meetings, taking a great idea and moulding it to what we have.

I've talked to my colleagues across the way. I get their opinions and I think a lot of those have helped me in figuring out where we need to go. That's not just in wind and hydrogen; that's in anything. It goes right into oil and gas. Now, again, there's a bit more of a shift on this one. There are some people who believe we need to move out of it right away. Get out of it, you shouldn't be at it or you shouldn't be touching it. There are some people who believe we need to double down.

The fact is, what I continue to stick with, is that we still need the product for some time. We still have a large workforce that is doing amazing work. It was built from nothing and they're now being used on projects around the world because that expertise has been built. We need to find a way to help support them going further into the future because it's still needed. At the same time, recognizing that we also have the ability to have – if there is a transition – is supporting those workers as they move forward.

But either way, as a government, I think over the last three to four years, we've shown, whether it's convincing the federal government to provide \$320 million on OGIRA funding, which we just expended, just finished that, the offshore oil initiative, when we talk about the Green Transition Fund, when we talk about West White Rose, all these different things we are still supportive.

I think the biggest challenge that I think we're – not afraid of, but recognize again, not a Newfoundland and Labrador challenge, is finding the people for all the jobs that we will have in this province across numerous sectors. Whether that is in construction, whether that's in health care, whether that's in the tech sector. That's a challenge everywhere. There's a global competition for staff, for people, for intelligence.

I'd like to think we're doing a good job here of trying to convince people to come home. We're doing a good job of convincing those who are not originally from Newfoundland and Labrador to make this their home and to bring their intelligence, to bring their skillsets to us. Memorial University, CNA, our other post-secondary institutions, Keyin, they do a great job of that, getting people here, taking advantage of the amazing education that we have, but then we have to make sure we have the jobs there for them and everything else that comes with that, that I named.

Moving forward: One thing we just announced in the budget actually, which is budget related, is Business Navigators. One thing which is amazing, and as someone who's been here in this department, even me, sometimes I don't quite grasp the number of business support programs that we have across the economic development side of the department. We have an amazing staff, amazing team, economic development officers throughout the province.

But one thing we want to do – and again because we need to help small business – the minister has taken steps to make positive change in business of the last number of years, the Minister of Finance, but this is one where we're trying to get people who directly work for business, small business, throughout our province, when they come in the door, how can we help them? Whether it's funding opportunities, whether it's permitting, whether it's dealing with the opportunity for lands, skills, workers, you name it, we're trying to provide someone directly to be that point of contact. You're going to see more on that coming forward, but we think it's going to be positive for businesses throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, especially, small businesses.

One of the big things that I do every time I get a chance is say: Reach out to us, give us a call, email us. I'm proud to say – and if anyone wants to point out the difference I'd be happy – if someone emails me, it comes to me directly and they get a response and they get action.

Now, do we fund everybody. No, because it's taxpayers' money. We're not going to give it away. People have to have skin in the game when it comes to these things. Sometimes you get the people who, they like the idea of support and we want to be there to support, but we're not going to prop something up that doesn't have the ability to be sustainable and to survive on their own, but we do have a lot of funding. We are constantly supporting people because the biggest target for the talent we have here and the skills that are being created here and the products that are being created here is outside. We can't compete with the market.

If you're looking at health tech, if you're looking at Swiftsure Innovations that are over on the West Coast. Their market is not Newfoundland and Labrador. Their market is not Atlantic Canada. They're down doing work in the States and that market, the Phoenix market alone, trumps most of what

we have here, just on one side of the entire country, just that market. When we look at Philadelphia or places like that. That's where we need to take our skills and go out. But they're keeping their offices here, they're keeping their staff here. I like to think that it's a Newfoundland and Labrador idea that's being spread out throughout the world, great ideas, and we have to support them in doing that and we're going to continue to do that.

I want to toss out just a couple of other things. Again, I've already mentioned hydroelectricity. We have massive, massive opportunities there when it comes to this. We are looked at with envy by most other jurisdictions when they talk about renewable energy. They want renewable energy because they need to green their own grid. Here we are, we're already extremely close. Is Holyrood done yet? No. I don't need to get into that point and belabour why Holyrood's still in operation, but we do see a future without it, and we do see other opportunities to build on. We look at other renewable energy.

Again, the partners that we're bringing in, private investors, we're bringing in Indigenous partners, we're bringing in local companies. They're taking them elsewhere. I'll give a shout-out to Growler Energy, Newfoundland and Labrador company based downtown; projects up in Nunavut, projects up in Labrador, projects over in Iceland. Again, they bring all that expertise back here. They maintain that company here.

I'm getting down in time. I mentioned this yesterday in the House, I don't think – not this House, but I think people outside do not realize the extent of what went on out at Come By Chance. I don't think for a second they recognize the fact that when we came in here – so I came into this role in August 2020, came in the House, I barely had a question this session. Because most of the things, again, it's ebb and flow, high and low. Well, that was a low. That was a low.

Most of those questions were coming for me.

Again, I don't blame that because that's where we were. We had thousands out of work. The rigs weren't in operation, projects were delayed, Come By Chance was shut down. It was like where are we going to go? What are going to do? There were a lot of difficult nights. I spoke about this, the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue was out there in attendance, he heard me, a lot of sleepless nights, difficult times. Oil refinery capacity throughout the world was shut down. It's not like we were building more refineries. It was about keeping the ones we had open, and this one was shut.

So, again, government's investment of \$16.6 million to keep it in warm idle. It doesn't sound like a tremendous amount, but it was a lot, it was the right move. That is what kept it warm to allow for investors to come in. Again, a lot of tire-kickers, a lot of people wondering – I spoke about this a million times – people want a government asset, or a private, they want it for nothing. In this case, they thought that maybe we're going to help fund them to do this.

But what we had was we had a consortium of Silverpeak already out there, you have Braya energy, Cresta, an amazing number of investors. When it's all said and done with the refurbishment, it's \$1.6 billion Canadian spent in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: Now, I point this out because, do you know what? We got through that process the right way: Questions asked, debates held. That's necessary. That's not a bad thing. It wasn't a no-brainer by any means. I think it took a lot of thinking about it, a lot of analysis to get to that point, but it certainly was the right decision.

When I'm talking to Glenn Nolan out there with the union, and Glenn's happy. Glenn wasn't very happy with me at the beginning of this because his membership was out of work. But at the end of it, we couldn't find enough workers.

It's hard for me to talk about Come By Chance without mentioning the fact that we did have stumbles along the way. There was a life lost out there, which comes back to some of the points that we've had along this way, which is development is great, opportunity is great, but safety, the environment and the future have to be hand in hand with that. That was a tragedy, one we're not going to get back. But I hope that it serves as a lesson to anybody else that comes here that we want safety regimes that are second to none.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: Personally, not only is it the right thing to do, but I do a little bit of reading and research, it's the business-smart thing to do. It's better business. You save more money; you make more money by being safe. I can't put that out there enough.

So, again, that was a success story. Now, again, you put it out there and people complaining: Oh, how come they're shipping it out to California? How come they're doing this?

What it comes down to is we are one of the biggest facilities in North America, 18,000 barrels a day, that's going to scale up. It's an open refinery with hundreds of jobs. I know it matters to Members over on the other side, their people.

AN HON. MEMBER: One of three in the world.

A. PARSONS: One of three in the world and they're shipping that product to California. Again, because California is

ahead of the game in terms of what they're willing to do, what they're willing to pay.

Aviation fuel is next. One of the challenges we had is what are people willing to pay for the renewable product? That's one of the issues with renewables, is what are people willing to pay?

Does that mean we don't have challenges left, Speaker? Look, we've got lots left. But I'm very proud that we've taken some steps here that have led to positive outcomes.

What I say to everybody is, look, every day I know there are challenges. We see them every day, we hear about them. My job is to continue working with that, working with my colleagues, working with Members on the other side, realizing that there are positives there.

I'd like to think that with the steps taken by the Minister of Finance and with my colleagues and with the Premier, that we've helped some of these companies and we continue to entice industry and business to come here and the positive spinoff throughout all of our province will be evident. We're going to continue to do that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always an honour to stand in the House of Assembly and represent the constituents of the District of Terra Nova.

I'd be remiss if I didn't thank the minister for Estimates and his whole crew. When he said that he responds to his emails, he does. When we email him for anything, there's always a response. It might not always be the response we're looking for, but I can guarantee you the line of

communication is open and we get a response from him at every turn.

It's interesting that he brought up California and Braya, shipping their product there, \$3.2 trillion – and that number don't mean a lot to many people – versus \$1.6 trillion. People are looking now saying, what are those numbers? Well, those numbers are the GDP in California versus the GDP in Canada. Just think about that. California's GDP is double of what the country of Canada is. Here we are a little province, in my opinion – and I'll say I've heard it from the previous minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, I think it was a different title at that time, and from the current one, we are a province that can –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: – and we have things here to do it, there's no question.

I just think that sometimes we miss opportunities or opportunities elude us for other reasons. It's a tough place to do work, from a climate standpoint and look no further than Muskrat Falls. Muskrat Falls was probably one of the toughest projects that's been executed on the face of the planet, when you talk about weather and challenges that they faced, doing that facility in the middle of winter, going through some of the most rugged territory in the world, digging down through 18 feet of snow in order to put up power lines and stuff. So while we have the ability to do that stuff, we understand that sometimes it costs a little bit more to do it.

But do you know what else it shows? It shows how good Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are at doing this type of work, how prepared we are to go into difficult situations and how capable we are. So when we talk about staffing projects going forward, listen, I think one of the most important things we can do – and I will talk about it – is a community benefits program. To me, a community benefits program isn't

about the communities where the work is happening; it's about the community of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's about utilizing the workforce that's here in Newfoundland and Labrador first and ensuring that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are the primary beneficiaries of all of these projects.

One of the examples that comes to mind from my days in the industry is Voisey's Bay, and it's a thorn in my side. Voisey's Bay, as a project right now, very successful project, great for Labrador, great for Newfoundland. I mean, we have the Long Harbour facility, but here's what doesn't work in Voisey's Bay. We're operating on a thermal generation plant; that's the first thing. So from an environmental standpoint, there could have been a different approach to that.

The second thing, we have a ship that goes to Voisey's Bay, picks up the ore, brings it around to Long Harbour, drops it off, then it goes to Quebec City where it fills up with supplies. I say this, not a slight against the people from Quebec, but Voisey's Bay is supplied by Quebec. This is a facility that's housed in Newfoundland and Labrador and, I'd say, almost 100 per cent of the supplies come from Quebec. Just think of the impact that would have on this province, small business, retailers, vendors if we were supplying those products from here. It would be astronomical.

Next to that is the fuel that powers the turbines. My understanding is that all that fuel comes from Quebec. I'd be curious to know what revenue we get from that if any, if we charge taxes on any of that. I don't know. I don't know that answer, but I'd be curious to understand how that works because if the fuel is coming from Quebec and we're not getting a portion of the tax on that, I would say the amount of fuel that's burned up there, in order to power that place, is huge and it's a question that should be asked.

I don't know how many Members here have ever had the opportunity to visit Voisey's Bay but when you go in there, the first thing you'll notice is that every vehicle up there has a Quebec licence plate. Now, think about that. In my time in the military, when we got posted somewhere, when we moved around, we had 10 days to change our plates. We had 10 days to change the plates on the vehicle and insure it in that province, no matter what it was.

We have been operating Voisey's Bay up there for a number of years and if you go up, the contractors are still operating vehicles out of Quebec – I guarantee you, insured out of Quebec and Newfoundland is not the primary beneficiary.

Now, I'm not suggesting when I talk about community benefits that companies from outside of this province can't come in here and do work, but they need to do the work here in Newfoundland. They need to be held accountable to keep Newfoundlanders and Labradorians working.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Another great example is Calibre mine, out around Grand Falls. When we're talking about the mine, we know for certain that the benefits package that's in place, I believe it's 90 or 95 per cent – and I'm not arguing that, no question, but it's 90 or 95 per cent for the overall project.

If I were executing the project and I was looking for a way to save money, what would I do? I tell you what I'd do. I would hire the cheapest labour to make sure every one of them came from Newfoundland and Labrador. I would make sure every one of them came from here. Why? Because I'm going to save money on my build. Then, when I've got contracts coming from outside – mechanical outfitting is a good one because that's one of the ones that went to a company from British Columbia, and what was their plan when they came here? Their plan was to bring staff from British Columbia

to execute that work. They can do it because there's 95 per cent overall project.

Simple solution – so government often says, you guys complained but you don't offer solutions. I'll give you a solution. When we are doing these builds and we're doing these benefits packages, instead of breaking them down for the entire project – and this isn't hard to manage – you do it by tender package. So you tell them that it's going to be 95 per cent of Newfoundlanders working there, if they're available – we know how it works. They've got to be available. We've got to be able to get it. It can't be specialized work. It's got to be able to be executed here by people who are skilled and capable of doing it.

But if you took the overall scheme of it and you put it into each individual tender package that went out, guess what? Mr. Speaker, 95 per cent of the work that was carried out on that project would be done by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and we ought to be looking at that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: When we start talking about community benefits, we need to understand what it means. We talk about the employment rate here in Newfoundland on a regular basis and it has gone down. I will say to the Liberal government who boasts every now and then that this is one of the lowest times that unemployment has been in this province; I can't argue that. But here is what I can argue: It is still over 10 per cent, which is way too high. But secondarily to that, just imagine what our unemployment rate would be if we didn't have rotational workers. Because this unemployment rate isn't about people working in Newfoundland and Labrador; it is about people that are working.

So imagine if all of our rotational workers didn't go away to work. Well, guess what? We had decent communities benefits plan and we were going and building windmills

and gold mines and oil rigs and all of the things that we have planned for the future, the people that are going away would work right here in this province. They would be here instead of half the year, the full year. They would spend all of their cheque here instead of half of it. If you start thinking that way and you look at the local businesses, think about rural Newfoundland, where there was a corner store on every corner. Let's be realistic, there were two or three corner stores in a community with 300 people. Do you know how many are there now? Zero – zero.

Do you know why? Because either the husband or the wife drives the husband or the wife to the airport in Gander, St. John's or Deer Lake to get on a plane to go away and when they're in there, they get their groceries, they get the goods and supplies they need and then they go back to their rural community and the stores are no longer able to carry on. It's the simplest equation in the world. When we start doing things local, when we start buying things local, everyone benefits and it is not just the individuals.

The companies that are hiring the local people will benefit because of work continuity, safe practices, all of the things that we talk about in here on a regular basis, but the province will benefit. I believe that it is long overdue for us to have a realistic community benefits program based on our natural resources and anything that government is putting money into. If government is invested into it, whether it is P3, whether it is roads works, whatever, we ought to have program in place that stipulates procurement and hiring has to be done local first where it can, 100 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: I had the opportunity to go to Labrador back in February. I've said it here many times, it's where I grew up. I haven't been back for a few years since before COVID. I have to tell you, I was shocked.

So the leader was with me, the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, and our chief of staff. As we were walking from the hotel over to a restaurant, the chief of staff looked at me and said: You don't seem yourself this morning. I said: I'm sad. She said: You're sad? I said: I'm sad. She said: What do you mean? I said: This isn't the Labrador West, the Wabush-Labrador City that I left. I said: Things have changed. That was a grocery store, that was a bar, that was a family restaurant. There was another store over there, a gas station there. This is in a short period of time that all of that stuff has disappeared.

I don't blame it all on the rotational workers, because there is an astronomical amount of work going up there and there's no housing. But we talk about the power issues. The next day, I got aboard the vehicle and I drove up to Fermont. So to put that in perspective, I believe it's – and the Member for Labrador West can correct me if he wants – 26 kilometres from Wabush to Fermont. Think about this now: 26 kilometres.

As you drive into the town, everywhere you look at it's new: new mines, new fire hall, new apartment buildings, new rec plex and not this small, geeky stuff, I mean this is unbelievable, state-of-the-art, multi-million dollar buildings. And it's being built for one reason and one reason only. We sit here and we talk about Muskrat Falls, how it's hurt us. Well, the only reason that Fermont is thriving is because of Churchill Falls and that mistake.

Because they have access to all of that power and it would blow your mind to see what's happening 26 kilometres away from Labrador West. Everything they want, they can do because they have the power. They're building houses and buildings. It's unbelievable. And mines, and they're getting ahead of us. Again, they're winning, we're losing, because we made mistakes.

Labrador West has a massive expansion planned. You've got expansions of both mines – hopefully Tacora works out; they're going through some trouble right now. All kinds of probability of extra mines being built. But they don't have the electricity to do it. So we have to find a way to make that happen. I mean, the reality of it is that green steel is the wave of the future. There's no question what the produce in Labrador West means to the world. If people in the world can get access to the iron ore that comes out of the ground in Labrador West, they're going to jump all over it, because it is the best product in the world, bar none. The cleanest, greenest steel that can happen.

We talk about this morning there was a question from the Member for Labrador West about the wind and obviously the contamination in the air from an environmental standpoint. My dad used to be the head of safety for Wabush Mines. My dad retired in 2008, so we're going back a long way. It was a huge problem then. It was a big enough problem that the province changed its legislation for WorkplaceNL for silicosis. It was changed because of Labrador West.

We knew this problem existed for a long time, but we're still having these conversations. We're not holding these companies to account. There are solutions out there, but a yearly solution to go in and spray something to say it's going to grow next spring – and when next spring comes and it don't grow because you get 16 feet of snow and when the snow melts it all runs away, there has to be a solution that's year-round, and those solutions are there.

Wind: It's really funny that the conversation on wind, how polarizing it is for some people. I believe wholeheartedly that the government has good intentions when it comes to these windmills, decommissioning and other things. That doesn't mean we shouldn't have a conversation in the House about how this is going to be handled. You know, the decommissioning portion of it is

what seems to be one of the bigger problems around the world and we need to make sure that we have a plan for that.

I guess, for me, I asked some questions in Estimates and I'll go through a bit of it right here. The one thing that concerns me is the utilization of fresh water. Water is a commodity; it should be a human right and we have an abundance of it. But does that mean that we should utilize it specifically for this reason? I'm not 100 per cent sure. If you go to other jurisdictions around the world, they're using salt water. They've got a desalinization process and the salt is a secondary product that can be utilized for other things. Do we need salt here in Newfoundland? Absolutely. We import it on a regular basis for roads and other things.

We've got, I believe, 70 abandoned mines in the province. Now, I don't know how many of them would be open-pit or quarry mines, but there are other jurisdictions where they're utilizing the abandoned mine sites to create hydrogen power. They're filling up the existing pits and shafts and they're pumping the water out and they're pumping it through a hydroelectric facility and they're recycling that water on a regular basis and they're utilizing that to make hydrogen.

So there are other solutions out there. But when I think about what we're doing with hydrogen, the one thing I would caution is we have to do it right – we have to do it right.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: When I say that we have to do it right, we know right now that communications in the province is an issue and there are studies around the world that clearly say that these wind towers have an adverse effect on cellular service. It's out there. It's a known fact. But is there a way we can utilize the wind towers to expand our cellular service? Can we put repeaters on

top of these towers? These will be the highest points across the Island.

I would suspect that the government is looking at those things, or I would hope. There are different ways that we can utilize these wind towers to our benefit.

I got an interesting phone call and the phone call is no different than the minister highlighted, the whole idea of us exporting hydrogen, it's okay. It's okay for us to export hydrogen because we're going to help the world. And I totally believe that but, as we do that, the next thing we have to do is try to find a way to utilize hydrogen here in the province.

So if we have mine sites that are currently on thermal generation plants, you look at the South Coast of Labrador, they need a new electricity source. What are they doing? It doesn't fall into the Liberal's green plan. They're putting in thermal generation plants in 2024 when we're paying carbon tax and we should be talking about alternative power or putting the power line down, solar, hydrogen, wind, other things that are out there, but we're not having that conversation. We need to have that conversation.

But if we're going to be the battery that powers North America the way that we profess that we're going to be, we also should be utilizing that electricity. Biomass – you go around now and you look at the Member for Exploits, he's got a real love affair with Stuckless. If we look at the biomass that they have, how can we utilize that biomass? We could be powering Memorial University. We could be powering other things with the biomass. We should be burning it. There's no reason why we're not utilizing the biomass that's here.

At the end of the day, we need to be smarter how we approach these things. All of these approaches –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: Yeah, exactly.

Anyhow, we should be utilizing the biomass to power things. It's out there. We should be doing it. We have so many resources at our fingertips that we overlook. The one that bothers me more than anything is LNG. Here we are with trillions of cubic feet of LNG offshore and we're very silent on it. I suspect we're silent because our big brothers up in Ottawa don't want us talking about it.

Is that a natural progression? Is that a smart step? I believe it is, and I know that there are arguments that go against it but there has to be logic in how we get to our green future. Part of that logic means that we should be benefiting and being smart about how we do things.

As long as the product is required, perhaps we should be looking for a way to produce the cleanest, greenest opportunities for the province and for the world –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: – and in order to get there, some of that includes our oil and gas sector. We cannot simply turn off our oil and gas sector. When we look at what we have off our shores, we know that we have some of the cleanest oil in the world and sadly when we talk about oil and gas, here's what people think about.

The moment we say oil and gas, people think about combustible engines, cars, airplanes, absolutely, huge emitters, but nobody talks about the petrochemical industry. Nobody talks about the requirement for oil and gas in health care. Nobody talks about the requirement for oil and gas in communications, to build windmills, to transport people, do all of those things that we are going to have to do for a very long time.

So should we be doing oil and gas production here in this province? I would argue 1 million per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Power is a huge issue and unfortunately people in the province don't understand that we have a power issue here. Now, does that mean we don't have an abundance of power? We do. Does that not mean we need more? We absolutely need more. We should be looking at Bay d'Espoir. Bay d'Espoir should be one of the first projects that we take on. The expansion of Bay d'Espoir can happen swiftly, immediately, and it's ready to go. We should be looking at an expansion in Churchill Falls. Churchill Falls is another project that can be expanded relatively easy and produce an astronomical amount of power compared to other projects. We should be looking for a way to harvest our wind.

The one thing I haven't heard, and nobody is having this conversation, is that as these wind projects stand up, there's going to be a requirement for them to draw from our power line. There's no question that there's going to be ebbs and flows to the way wind blows.

But here's the other side of it, they're going to have an abundance of power from time to time and they need to have the ability to put that back into our grid. While the legislation and the moratorium on wind energy has been lifted, I haven't heard anyone talk about legislation to allow wind energy to go back into our grid. I haven't heard any legislation to talk about how we're going to put hydrogen energy back into our grid, because if we're going to be building and making these new sources of energy, we ought to be looking for a way to utilize them and maximize the benefits for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: I believe that our future is great. We've got a bright future here in the province. We just need to make sure that we maximize the benefits for all people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Trimper): I now call on the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to stand here and have a few words, I guess, about Committee and about the budget. I'll just take some time, first off, to thank the department for our presentation here in Estimates back a couple of weeks ago. I thank the Member for Burin - Placentia West for his contribution, the Member for Bonavista, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands and the Member for Labrador West for their contributions to our Estimates Committee about 10 days ago. Again, thank you to the staff of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation for the preparation.

Everybody knows when a department starts to develop a budget, it's usually October and it's a long process that we get to today or tomorrow, May 1 or probably May 2, when we actually conclude the budget this year. So, quite honestly, and to the Minister of Finance and her team, the work that goes into a budget is immense and takes a lot of time. So, again, thank you to everyone in the department and everybody in the Committee for their participation, which I think was a good meeting and we were able to answer a lot of questions for Members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, 2024, will be a very busy year for the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, here after referred to as TCAR. When you think about some of the

activities that we will undertake in the next nine to 12 months – and it's fitting the Member for Terra Nova spoke last – one of the things that we will be doing this May is, as a part of the 100 anniversary of the War Memorial here in St. John's, the second national War Memorial in Canada, not only will we refurbish and have refurbished the War Memorial, but we're also going to repatriate the remains of a Newfoundland soldier who passed in World War I. That is a very important piece of our history, something that certainly was never overlooked but something that took a lot of work, Mr. Speaker, and you would realize who somebody, yourself, put a lot of work into World War I commemorations in Europe.

So that will happen this July, the remains will be repatriated towards the end of May. The Member for Terra Nova, being the only veteran here in the House of Assembly who served, will be joining the delegation to Beaumont-Hamel for the repatriation of those remains in just –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: – what is now just a few short days. I think it's quite fitting we honour our soldier in that way. We'll be the first sub-national government in the Commonwealth to actually have a tomb of an unknown soldier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: I think that's very fitting.

As well, another activity that we'll undertake this year in the department is the reflection of the 75th year, the anniversary of Confederation, which is a very important commemoration in the regard that we reflect on our relationship with Canada. I believe we are an important part of Canada and Canada is an important part of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Has it been a rosy 75 years? No, it's not. It's like any relationship. But we will take this opportunity in the next few months to celebrate the 75th anniversary, to remember the 75th anniversary of Confederation and think about our relationship with Canada as we go forward.

As well, this year, we're presenting Year of the Arts in Newfoundland and Labrador. We've committed to an investment; I think the Premier announced Year of the Arts back a little over a year ago. This is really about recognizing the contribution of arts and artists in our communities to our province. They're a very important part of our social fabric, as well as our economic fabric as a jurisdiction. So very much look forward to that.

I can assure everybody here, throughout the entire province this summer, there will be an opportunity in every portion, in every part of our province, to celebrate artists and that's something we should be doing.

To continue, Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure this morning to join the City of St. John's, Destination St. John's, here in the city to announce that in 2025, Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's will host the East Coast Music Awards.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: Which again is a tremendous economic boost for the city, a tremendous economic opportunity actually for the entire province as we will showcase our artists. Again, our artists bring so much to our economy and so much again to our social fabric.

Mr. Speaker, 2025, won't stop there, because come August 2025, we will host the Canada Summer Games for the first time since 1977.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: I'm very much looking forward to that opportunity, as well, of hosting over 4,500 athletes and coaches from across Canada right here in St. John's just 14, 15 months from now.

Tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, we'll also mark another achievement of this administration, of the hard work that the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation has been doing and my colleague in the Industry Department, as well, around air access. Tomorrow night at midnight, WestJet will land and take off for the first Trans-Atlantic flight, direct flight to London, Heathrow –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: – since 2018. I know the Minister of Industry is telling me the great job I did, but it could not have been done it without his department as well and the hard work that went into that file. So tomorrow night we'll mark that flight. It's a three-year commitment between us and WestJet. I very much look forward to –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

S. CROCKER: The Member for Terra Nova just offered to buy tickets for himself and the Industry Minister to send us – unfortunately, I believe those tickets may be one way.

It's a great opportunity for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and people in the UK to get to Newfoundland and Labrador this summer.

The summer tourism season is shaping up very strong here in the province. St. John's International Airport is telling us, right now, that they should see an increase of almost 25 per cent over 2019 numbers. In the Department of Tourism, we still benchmark 2019 but right now the numbers that we're seeing this coming peak season, we will no longer benchmark 2019. I think we're all happy to put that period of time behind us so we will achieve new benchmarks this year.

I think Deer Lake Airport will be up over 30 per cent this year in peak season. We're seeing new airlines, we're seeing investment and it's extremely important for our tourism and hospitality. Not only tourism and hospitality, it's so important for economic development. When we talk about wind, we talk about oil and gas, business in general, the idea of having direct access to Europe and more direct access and stronger connectivity even to Central Canada is so extremely important.

Also in the budget this year, our government committed \$1 million a year for five years for capital investment into The Rooms. The Rooms will be 20 years old next year. This is a very important investment into that cultural facility. It will make sure that that facility doesn't fall into a state of disrepair or deferred maintenance. It's foresight. I thank the Minister of Finance, again, because this was one that was, quite frankly, a very easy conversation, understanding the value of that investment over the next five years and the Minister of Transportation, as well, he's responsible for that building. How important that investment is over the next five years to make sure that The Rooms stays in pristine conditions that it is today.

I'm trying to touch on as many points as I can. Our film industry, Mr. Speaker, we've peaked at \$100 million in investment over the last two years. This year, we will see what will likely be a double-digit increase in our film industry in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: We invested in a film school that is now full. We are training below-the-line film workers, which is extremely important, because one of the challenges that the film industry has faced over the last number of years has certainly been the availability of workers –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

S. CROCKER: The Members opposite have 20 minutes each, all afternoon and please – I realize the Member for CBS is excited and he clapped at last year's budget. He clapped frantically at the budget last year.

SPEAKER: Let me know if you need protection. I am here for you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I can handle it.

But again, the film industry brings tremendous value to this province. It is not only the 1,200 people that work directly in that industry. It brings tremendously to our tourism industry. It was an ad – if you go back two years ago, when we filmed the location work for *Peter Pan & Wendy*, which was a Disney production, how many times have we said to people in marketing Newfoundland and Labrador that this is Bonavista; you can come to Neverland.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, you can measure film and, yearly, we do measure the value of film through ACOA and other agencies. But there is also this piece of film industry that is extremely difficult to measure and that's the residual value of tourism. *Republic of Doyle* finished many years ago now, as a series, but there are still people every single year come to St. John's looking for The Duke of Duckworth. So. Mr. Speaker, film has longevity and it is very important for our tourism industry.

I'm going to wrap it up there I think. I'm going to get some time to speak again a little bit later this afternoon when we go into second reading of the *Tourist Accommodations Act*, which is also a very important piece of legislation that we've listened to operators, we've listened to Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador that this was needed. It brings us on par with other jurisdictions in Atlantic Canada and

throughout Canada. I'll have an opportunity a little later this afternoon, Speaker, to talk about the *Tourist Accommodations Act*.

Thank you very much for the opportunity this afternoon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an honour to stand in this House and represent the people of – I'll repeat again for all the people that are listening – Placentia West - Bellevue is the district that I represent. Now, I was just from the Burin - Placentia West that time and I'm after being Bellevue - West Placentia and everything like that. But anyway, I represent the people of Placentia West - Bellevue. So I think we'll be okay on that.

It was interesting, actually, because I'm the shadow Cabinet minister for the Official Opposition in tourism and to speak after the minister is very poignant, I think, because he made a lot of points about how our Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation Department are helping our economy and helping bring people to our shores. It is \$1 billion added value to our economy and I think that the direction that we're going in, it's going to increase and probably even double within the next few years. But again, it's about having those direct flights to Europe, being able to attract the film industry from Europe, being able to attract the film industry from North America and being a world leader in that light.

To hear today that the East Coast Music Awards are going to be hosted here in Newfoundland and Labrador is a tremendous accomplishment. We've hosted before, been very successful, but a lot of the people, even after they go back from the

ECMAs, they come back to Newfoundland to do their own private tour so that they get to understand Newfoundland and Labrador a little bit more, Mr. Speaker.

Then, of course, being the Year of the Arts, it's always nice to support our artists, because that's a labour of love. A lot of times, we have some people in the House that are artists in their own right,

With that being said, when we see somebody become successful – I was just talking to one of our great artists here in Newfoundland, Justin Fancy, not long ago, who is an ECMA award winner and things. When he became a little bit more of a household name around here everybody said oh my God, you're an overnight success. Well, Justin, if you look in on his website, you'll see that there was nothing overnight about his success. It came from hard work, determination and a labour of love. So I give a shout-out to all our artists and artisans, because we know how hard you work to get where you're to and to keep going where you want to be.

I do want to talk about the resource sector for a little bit, but I would be very remiss if I didn't speak again about Marine Atlantic being really our Trans-Canada Highway. Because that's where I left off in my last speech when we talked about the budget. And now that we're in Concurrence, I just want to reiterate the fact that I think that we're being sold short when it comes to Marine Atlantic. I think if we're going to go over and we're going to negotiate direct flights with Europe and they're going to be willing participants and willing listeners, then maybe our friends – quote, unquote – that are there currently – I don't think they'll be there much longer – but let's make sure that they realize the significance and the importance of Marine Atlantic when it comes to travelling to and from Newfoundland and Labrador.

As I already stated in this hon. House, the last time I checked it didn't cost anything to

go from Saskatchewan to Manitoba or Manitoba to Ontario, Ontario to Quebec, any of those. But it costs almost \$600 if you want to come here and bring your vehicle with you. To me, I don't think that's fair; we're not on the same playing field. For what we've added to the country of Canada in our 75 years, I think we're batting well above our weight and we've certainly made our contribution per capita, more probably than anybody else in Canada.

So with that being said, I would like to transition into talking about our resource sector because the minister that spoke prior, the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, to be at the celebration for Braya becoming a renewable fuel refinery, it's significant on very many different levels: (a) it's one of three in the world; (b) because we were going into this new green economy and all of a sudden there was no plan really in place, but we were going to listen to the feds and stuff like that, it looked like the refinery was not going to get any legs to be reopened or repurposed.

So, like I said, here in the Official Opposition, I will give a lot of credit to my colleague from Terra Nova who understands Industry, Energy and Technology. In many meetings with him, he was able to bring me up to speed and educate me on a lot of things.

But one of the things that we did was, we were invited for an interview on the CTV morning news with Ben Mulroney and one of the things that came out of that, I think, was that, at that time, it was all devastation. We were losing our refinery; the investors didn't want to touch it with a 10-foot pole. But with that being said, once we called it the heartbeat of the province and our province would not look the same tomorrow if we lose our refinery, that was something that we wanted to make sure the rest of Canada knew. Once they knew that, I think that's when we start getting some legs.

The other side of that is that, at the time, 20 per cent of all refineries on the Eastern Seaboard of North America were up for sale. So these investors could've went anywhere. But we all came together, we did what we could, we even put new pavement down across the front of the gates and stuff like that, which I will remind the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, we need another little patch now by the unloading area.

But like I said, it was nice to be part of that celebration. I know that the people with Braya, I know that the people that are with NARL Logistics and the people with ABO that are getting ready to partner up on the wind with Braya, all these significant relationships would not have been put together if they weren't aware that doing business in Newfoundland and Labrador is one of the best places in the world to, not only come to work, but to come to visit as well. But like I said, we have to always look at things from a Newfoundland-first lens.

I am very proud to say that during the peak of the \$1.6-billion investment into the refinery, there was about 800 people inside the gates at one point that were all working, whether it be contractors or working for Braya directly. There were also about 1,300 to 1,500 spinoff jobs, and just for the people watching to understand what the spinoff jobs do, they sell houses and they sell chips. I can't say it any better than that because it sells everything in between.

These are what we call economic drivers. Right now, I'm proud to say that there are currently no houses for sale in Arnold's Cove. I'm hoping I can stand here this time next year and say that there are none available in Come By Chance, Sunnyside or Southern Harbour either.

This takes time and we are going in the right direction, but that's what we need. We need these partnerships to make sure that when we take that direction, it's going to be a benefit to the people in Newfoundland and

Labrador because, at the end of the day, all 40 Members that sit in this hon. House are here to make sure that we look after Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and we do the right thing because it's the right thing to do, not because there are eyes on us.

To move into our resource sector, the Minister of Environment got up and spoke about clean drinking water and, to me, that is essential for the simple fact that it's an economic driver. Some people don't realize, I guess, but it is an economic driver when young new families are moving into town, they want to know that they got potable water and they're able to drink water at any given time right out of their tap or whatever what have you. That is really an economic driver that would sustain people, sustain communities.

I agree with the minister in saying that while we need our trails and recreation centres and all that kind of stuff, the first essential thing that every community should be thinking about is water. That's one of the things that I took on with Placentia West - Bellevue and I'm very proud to say out of our 36 communities, we have been quite successful with over half now receiving, in some way, some form, improvement to their water system.

That's one thing that I'm very proud of and we've done it right from the largest town in our district, in Marystown, right to Little Harbour East. That's probably one of the smaller communities in our town, but in having those meetings with the stakeholders of those small communities, it was my impetus, I guess, to let them know that we can't kick this can down the road any further for the simple fact that it is essential.

It is what sustains us in life. There's nothing more that I could add to say that it is probably the greatest need of the world. Right now, we talk about electricity, we talk about oil and gas, we talk about all these other things, commodities that can improve

our economy, but at the end of the day, the most essential product that we have – and we have an abundance here in Newfoundland that we can't squander, but I think within the next 10 to 15 years, that's probably going to be one of the biggest industries that Newfoundland and Labrador is going to benefit from – is fresh, potable drinking water.

Again, it's important that our government does have the impetus to make sure that every community has that. The real problem with it right now is that some communities are larger than others. There's a different kind of way of looking at things when it comes to an incorporated community as opposed to an LSD. But in the meantime, there are ways for us to work with these communities and make sure that we get them some potable drinking water that they haven't got to experience for a long time.

A lot of these water systems and infrastructure systems went in upwards of 30 to 50 years ago. They're crumbling, they're having troubles between collapsed culverts and just the flow of water. The thing is that once we get water done in the communities, then what comes with that is that usually it's underground and you're getting new roads as well. So it's always important that the communities understand what comes with doing a water job.

AN HON. MEMBER: Talking about water makes me thirsty.

J. DWYER: Just talking about water makes me thirsty, that's right.

But I also listened to the Minister of Environment talk about flood risk management that he was quite proud of and nowhere in there did I hear any communities from Placentia West - Bellevue that were on the list. But I want to assure the minister that we were probably – outside of Port aux Basques with Fiona – we've been hit hardest on the Burin Peninsula and the isthmus area with both Hurricane Igor,

which was a significant one. It cut off the Burin Peninsula in several different sections.

Then we got hit by Hurricane Larry, that hit directly right onto Arnold's Cove, Southern Harbour. Unfortunately, I don't think there was much money paid out for relief at that time, although there were multiple entities, whether they be communities, service organizations or individuals that were impacted by these hurricanes but didn't receive any economic benefit to help them out.

So, like I said, when we want to work together, we have to talk about the entire province. But we can't talk about the entire province under one umbrella because what happens in the metro area and what we have on the Northeast Avalon is very unique compared to the rest of the province. The rest of the province is so spread out geographically and we have an aging demographic as well. People that want to age in place, they want to age in their own home, and these are some of the things that were the social determinants of health that we want to accomplish and establish, not only for our seniors, but for every citizen in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Like I said, to make sure that we go about things the right way, we have to do things that – it's about working together for the greater good of the province and everybody in the province, not just one sector or another.

When we talk about the refinery and the investment and stuff like that, the \$1.6 billion was a very significant investment. We heard my colleague from Terra Nova talk about the GDP of Canada compared to California being double. That's where the money is being returned to us is from California because they have certain subsidies on clean fuel and stuff like that. So I guess the business model is not for us to worry about. We've just got to make sure that that refinery keeps going and is done in

a safe and ethical manner, for the simple fact that it's our name that's on the line, too, but it's also our people's jobs and we want to make sure that we're doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do.

When we talk 1,300 spin-off jobs, that's from the attendants at the gas station to the people working in the grocery store. It affects the fish plant workers. It affects just about every other industry around. Like I said, to have the investment is one thing, but now we have to sustain it. We have to be a working partner with the operations at the refinery to make sure it does stay open and stays open in a safe and ethical manner.

I want to talk about the wind energy because there's a big implement for both in my district. We have EverWind that's secured land on the Burin Peninsula and we have ABO energy which is up on the isthmus area working with the communities up on that end. Like I said, to see one company that was announced with the chancellor and the prime minister and all this kind of stuff and, now all of a sudden, their environmental assessment is done. It's not really fair to the industry that one would be done and released and the rest are still waiting to find out where they stand and where the industry stands for that matter.

So, for me, I think that we need a little bit more transparency when it comes to the environmental assessments to know that we're going in the right direction. I totally agree with the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology in the fact that the decommissioning plan was something that we discussed. We recognized, I guess, that that's been kind of an albatross around our neck for many industries, for many years, is that we're left holding the bag, after the resource has been exploited and removed from our province, but that kind of cuts into any economic benefit that would have come during the project.

But to have to clean it up after and make sure the environment is not impacted and stuff, then that's our responsibility but it's also the responsibility of the companies. That's the reason why we have to have those ethical discussions and make sure that it's part of the contract so that they understand the guise of what they're under and not the fact that they can just come here and make their own rules and go willy-nilly about an industry.

This is our resource, so I've always said that we don't anymore want to be a stakeholder because we own the resource. We want to be a shareholder because we own the resource. It's ours; it belongs to the people. The wind has been blowing across here for billions of years, but if it's not going to be harnessed to the benefit of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, then it can blow across for another 20 billion years if it likes.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's blowing now.

J. DWYER: Yeah, you got that.

Like I said, when we look at the wind, there's still a lot to be asked. I mean, we're waiting for the environmental assessment to come back to see what that says. Because while there are some people that are not in agreement with the new industry of harnessing the wind, there are a lot that are in favour of it and see it as a good way to economically develop our province.

But it's incumbent on us in this House of Assembly to make sure we get it right so that it is a benefit to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, not just the companies. We don't want the companies to come here and lose money or break even, because that's not going to be a benefit to the longevity of the industry. We want them to profit, but we don't want them to profit at our expense.

So, with that being said, I would like to make sure that the people of Newfoundland

and Labrador know that if we are getting into this industry, it's not going to be blindly supported. It's going to be supported because the facts are on the table, this is the plan, this is how it's going to be carried out, this is (a), (b), (c) and (d) of what's going to happen in this industry and then we may have an industry that we can call our own and know that we are world leaders because we put this in at the start and we didn't try to curtail any kind of contracts because we didn't think about it at the beginning.

We need to think about all of this now at the beginning and the biggest jumping off starting point is the decommissioning of any of these because a lot of investment comes from investors and if an investor doesn't see a return on their investment at the level that they wanted, then they might want to get out of the industry.

If they want to get out of the industry and there's already a glut in the market, then how do we sell these assets. If we can't sell the assets, then we want it decommissioned and brought back to the way they found it.

So, like I said, there's still a lot to be understood, I guess, when it comes to wind energy, but we expect that the department and the companies are going to be open to being transparent and honest about our deliberations of how we move forward with this new industry to make sure that it is a benefit to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

At the end of the day, while it's going to happen in my district – well, I can't say that for sure yet because we don't have the environmental assessment back yet, but with that being said, it's incumbent on us in this House of Assembly to make sure that we get it right because it is on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that we even get the opportunity to sit in this House; therefore, we should make sure that they are our priority in everything we deliberate here in this House.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

I now call on the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to participate.

I'm going to start by just reflecting back on Thursday, March 21 at 2 p.m., when the Minister of Finance rose to deliver *Budget 2024*. The question is: Who and what was missing from this House?

I would see nobody on the other side that day: the Opposition was missing, the Third Party was missing, the two unaffiliated Members were missing. So why were they missing from this House?

I see it definitely as a misguided allegiance to those who threaten this House and our ability to attend. It was a direct assault on our parliamentary democracy and it was aided and abetted by the other side.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

J. ABBOTT: I don't need to be told –

E. JOYCE: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands on a point of order.

E. JOYCE: Speaker, the Member just stated that we went against the Parliamentary Calendar. That is absolutely incorrect. This House was open that day.

The two days it was shut down, this government shut it down because of protestors. They are the ones who stopped the Parliamentary Calendar.

So I ask the minister to withdraw your statement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: This budget was done in this House. The Parliamentary Calendar was followed. You were in this House. When you weren't in this House, it was because the Government House Leader shut down the House for two days.

I ask him to withdraw his statement or apologize.

SPEAKER: I'm not sure there's a point of order, but we'll review *Hansard* and get back to you.

Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to continue, please.

J. ABBOTT: So just following on from the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands. The House is its own distinct entity. We have the Parliamentary Precinct. In that respect, this is not the government. This is the House of Assembly and it needs to be protected. We need to be here when the business is called.

So I just ask those Members across the way to consider your Oath of Allegiance and consider your Code of Conduct as a Member of the House of Assembly. So I ask you to reflect on that.

Speaker, what did the Members miss on March 21?

The Minister of Finance –

E. JOYCE: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands on a point of order.

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, if we're going to go down that road, it's parliamentary tradition that you never speak of someone in the House or out of the House. That's parliamentary tradition.

So if you, as the Speaker, is going to allow him to say who's in or out of the House, we're open game for everybody. If we're going to follow that parliamentary procedure not to talk about who's in the House and who's not in the House –

SPEAKER: I appreciate the –

E. JOYCE: – I'll say you can go down the road, because we can start today who's not in the House, but it's always the parliamentary procedure, and it has been a practice by the House of Commons, that you do not mention if someone is in or out of the House.

I ask the Member to be careful because that can go both ways and it's not the way to do it.

SPEAKER: Thank you to the Member.

As I said, we'll review *Hansard*. This is an interesting point. We'll check on it.

The Minister for Transportation and Infrastructure, you can please continue on with your remarks.

P. LANE: Point of order, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Oh my goodness.

Okay, the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands on a point of order.

P. LANE: Mr. Speaker, as you consider that matter, I would say to you that we also have a policy that was established in this House of Assembly that relates to attending and watching meetings virtually. I would say for the record, because of what was going on, I did listen to the budget intently, virtually.

I watched the Member pounding on the desk like a trained seal and over there hugging the minister, shaking hands and saying what a wonderful job you've done on the budget, so I never missed a thing.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: That's just great.

Okay, let's just get on with the Estimates for the Resource Committee, please.

Thank you, Minister.

Let's stay on the resources. We'll look at this matter later.

J. ABBOTT: I would have liked to have seen the camera reverse so that I could see him watching this House. I'd be curious to that, for sure.

So what did we miss –

P. LANE: Speaker, point of order.

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

P. LANE: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I think the hon. minister is inferring that I was lying about watching the meeting. Well, I can assure you that I certainly was not.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Minister, let's just stick with the Resource Committee (inaudible).

J. ABBOTT: Okay.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

J. ABBOTT: Well, in my book it's all relevant –

SPEAKER: We'll come back to you on it.

J. ABBOTT: – but so be it, Speaker.

In terms then of what was delivered on March 21, for those who were here and were glad to be here to support our very

competent, hard-working, diligent Minister of Finance, who does listen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: She listens to caucus, she listens to the public, she listens to the various interests and through that process is able, each year – what's this, number four or five?

AN HON. MEMBER: Five.

J. ABBOTT: Five – present very comprehensive budgets that are well received by the House and by the public.

What did she present that day? She presented an economic forecast that has our economy definitely on the run. It is improving year after year after year. Part of that is because there is confidence in the economy, there is confidence in the government to manage and support the economy and there is management in the budgets that we deliver year after year after year.

So for those who are listening, if you think of the overall provincial economy, we're looking at real gross domestic product of over \$31 billion. What a significant number and if you look back where we were five years ago, 10 years ago, a significant increase.

Household income, which is helping drive the economy, helping to drive spending, is over \$30 billion. That will grow another 5 per cent in 2024. Retail sales: over \$11 billion and it will grow by close to 3 per cent in 2024. For anybody that's listening, it shows the resilience of this economy post-COVID and the significant investments made by both the private and public sectors to help support the economy going forward.

We're seeing housing starts increase. We're seeing capital investment approaching now close to \$10 billion on an annual basis. The population is growing and through the work

of the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, we will continue to see growth in our population – and a diverse population at that; something I certainly welcome.

Our employment numbers are increasing. The corollary to that is our unemployment rate is decreasing and stabilizing at 10 per cent. It will reduce over the next number of years. Oil production is up and it will continue to grow as well.

Speaker, when we look at our financial overview, just again, what the minister presented on that day for those who may not have heard it or only heard it virtually, we will let you know that the projected deficit this year is \$152 million. Which represents only 1.5 per cent of revenues, which is, in some respects, a rounding error. We will strive to make sure we balance that budget, if not this year, definitely going into next.

We're seeing revenues are going to be over \$10 billion this year – highest in our history. If Joey Smallwood were here, he would reiterate that number a hundred times, times a hundred times, times a hundred times. So keep going. Our expenses are under control at just over \$10 billion. Our projected borrowing is around \$2.8 billion, of which we'll see some debt retirement in that number.

What's important and impressive, and which the credit-rating agencies look at, is our strong responsible financial and debt management. The Minister of Finance, no matter what she does here in this House, also has to sell this to the public, but also she has to sell it to the credit-rating agencies. She has done that continuously and we have seen an improvement in our credit rating as a result. Consequently, we're able to borrow money easier and cheaper.

We are on track over the next year to two years to three years to make sure that our

budget is going to be balanced. That is something that's important for future generations and that we not accumulate more debt on our operating budgets.

So what are some of the investment highlights in our budget this year? There is a strong emphasis on economic development and supporting our economic development departments. The minister spoke on that here this afternoon, the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, the Minister of TCAR and others.

One of the things that we want to encourage is, obviously, small business growth. One of the things that the Minister of Finance focused on for this budget is how we can take some of the financial pressures off them by reducing the small business corporate tax. We will be reducing that from 3 per cent to 2.5 per cent. That will result in savings for approximately 6,200 small businesses here in this province.

That, again, is something that we should encourage and to see happen in future budgets. We will continue the manufacturing and processing and the All-Spend Film and Video Production tax credits. The Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation talked about the growth of our film industry. We are talking \$100 million in film production value this year and that will grow.

The other evening, I represented the minister at a Youth Film Festival here in the province. We had high school and just older students presenting their films which, if nothing else, it said to me that our industry is going to continue to grow, because we are growing and nurturing young filmmakers here in this province.

It was an incredible evening with lots of energy, lots of talent. That means that industry is going to grow and be stalwart for our economy going forward. What's important is that the provincial government

of the day supports it in a responsible and fair fashion, which we are currently doing.

The minister of skills development here, he will be allocating \$170 million for workforce development initiatives. We know growing our workforce is important. Enhancing the skills of our workers is going to be important for the new technologies and new industries. We are committing \$170 million to do just that.

We've allocated \$2.6 million to advance the Critical Minerals Strategy, which will help both the Island and Labrador in growing that sector, which will help other sectors, certainly, when it comes to sustainable industries locally, nationally and internationally.

We are, again, putting money into the Year of the Arts and our Confederation 75 initiatives of \$10 million. We've got \$2 million allocated for a new Cultural Facility Infrastructure Fund. Again, putting money where it is needed to help grow those sectors.

As the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology mentioned, we are moving forward with putting in place Business Navigators to help business firms work through government and government regulatory processes, so that we won't slow down their growth and their business opportunities.

When it comes to infrastructure, which is obviously my responsibility directly, we are going to be spending roughly \$1.4 billion in infrastructure development. That will contribute approximately \$600 million in direct economic activity here in the province. So the fact that we're building buildings, paving roads, putting out culverts makes a difference to the communities, but it also contributes to economic development.

One of the questions that gets asked is around how we allocate monies for road

paving projects in the province. One of the key factors for me, for sure, is if this particular project is supportive of economic activity in a community or in a region. Does the road go to a fish plant? Does the road support tourism? Does the road support mineral development? Those kinds of things are important when we look at allocating funds for road improvements in the province. So that's one of the key factors that we consider.

The other thing that we're doing, working with the Minister of Education, is, obviously, making sure we have school facilities that are safe and are designed to facilitate learning for our students. So we have a significant school construction infrastructure program. This year we are spending – excuse me, over the next three years we will be spending \$146 million for schools in Cartwright, Kenmount Terrace, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and Pilley's Island and also planning money for a school in Paradise. That says that we are focused on supporting our children and youth so that they will stay in school, look at their career opportunities and skill development as they move on into the post-secondary stream.

We're also investing in health care in a significant way. That's important both, again, for the capital infrastructure, making sure we have modern hospitals, modern facilities to attract and keep our skilled workforce here. The Premier has spoken on that at length.

We're also expanding our school bus system. We eliminated the 1.6-kilometre rule. As a result, come this September, all children can take a school bus, no matter where they live in relation to the school. But that required a significant capital investment and operating investment by the provincial government. That, I think, equates to between \$18 million and \$20 million – \$18 million in my department and \$2 million in the Department of Education itself.

We're looking at sports and recreation, making sure that we have a healthy population, a healthy society. As such, we're investing in a new multiplex recreational facility here in St. John's. We've also looked at a new domed turf facility, an indoor facility, that we've already allocated funds for. As you can see, the budget covers a broad spectrum of sectors and programs and services to support the social and economic development of the province.

One of the things that I think is on top of mind for all of us here in this House of Assembly is the impact cost of living is having on all segments of our society, whether it's seniors or the low-income families. We've been very mindful of that, as a government, to support that. Part of that, in terms of a direct policy decision, was to have no new taxes, no tax increases or fee increases in the budget this year.

We've also retained the reduction in the gas tax by 8.05 cents, including HST. That's a significant amount of funds. I think it's over \$60 million as a cost to the Treasury but, again, recognizing as a cost-of-living factor, we are doing what we can to mitigate that component.

We're also reducing other fees when it comes to Motor Registration. We have free driver medicals for people 75 and older. We're maintaining the Home Heating Supplement. We've taking the 15 per cent sales tax off home insurance. Again, all very positive things that are supporting individuals in the province.

We have \$70 million that we have allocated for the Seniors' Benefit and we've maintained the 15 per cent increase over the last two years. We've allocated \$85 million for the Low Income Supplement and maintaining last year's 5 per cent increase. We have \$40 million invested in our new Poverty Reduction Plan; the Minister of CSSD referenced all that yesterday. So that helps people on low incomes and who are experiencing low income.

As a government, we are looking across all sectors and all facets of our life here in the province to make sure we are supportive of what we can do as a government to ensure individuals, communities and the province as a whole prospers through this particular period in our history.

Speaker, the future, when it comes to economic development is very positive. The Minister of Industry spoke quite eloquently on that earlier this afternoon. We are the envy of our sister provinces in terms of the natural resources we have, the skills we have here and the fact that we have a government that is quite clearly aligned with our key sectors. That's something that doesn't happen in many other jurisdictions. So we are fostering that.

Obviously, our relationship with the federal government is crucial to make sure that we are able to avail of many of these opportunities, whether it's on hydrogen, whether it's in hydro, whether it's on mineral development. So we continue to work closely with the federal government on those things.

There's a new federal infrastructure program that was announced in the federal budget. We'll be working with the federal government to make sure we leverage the maximum amount of funds to support infrastructure development in this province.

Speaker, I'm going to end there but, again, I'm just going back to my initial opening. I will ask and implore my colleagues across the way that they reflect on their primary and fiduciary responsibility to the citizens of this province to be in this House when the House is in session, when the Minister of Finance delivers her budget.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

I now call on the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

E. JOYCE: Point of order, again.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands on a point of order.

E. JOYCE: I know you were busy there but the Member also, once again, said that he wished the people were in this House. This is serious because all across the Parliament, you never speak who's in the House, if someone leaves the House. He did it again, on purpose.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you I'm going to start naming who's not in this House, if this is allowed. It's easy to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: We don't do it. It's not (inaudible).

SPEAKER: I thank the Member. I've already started some deliberations on it with staff, so we'll be back to the House. So he'll either have three strikes on this or not, but we'll come back to you on the point.

I'd ask Members we'll just get on with the Resource Committee.

E. JOYCE: (Inaudible) again.

SPEAKER: I understand. So that would be three references.

E. JOYCE: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: We'll come back to you on it. It's an interesting point. We'll come back to you.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I really appreciate the opportunity to get up and speak once again today. I really

appreciate all the work that the Minister of Finance and her department has done on this budget.

With all due respect, when it came to Budget Day, we chose to stand with the people of the province instead of sitting with the government of the day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: That's what we did. You've got to understand, Minister, you're not my boss; the people in the parking lot are our bosses. Not you, Sir.

This is the people's House right here. We were not going to cross anybody who were fighting to keep their houses, their boats, their livelihoods. We'll stand with them all day long, my friend, I guarantee you – all day long.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: I make no apologies for that. If you had any guts, you would have done it yourself.

Thank you very much, Speaker, I'll move along, because it's really not relevant. I didn't want to go there today but I tell you what, those are our bosses out in the parking lot, the fishermen of the province. They've had a hard enough time, so we're going to stand with them every time, all my colleagues will.

Speaker, I'll move on to a few things in my district here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: A little order, please. Let's have a little order. Let's focus on Resource Committee.

Thank you.

C. TIBBS: We have a bridge in my district, Rocky Brook Bridge, that was condemned

by the government of the day. Unfortunately, many people own cabin lots up there –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the Member for Terra Nova to please respect –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Gentlemen, I asked for order and decorum.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Final warning.

Thank you.

Let's carry on with the Resource Committee.

I had a good history of recognizing Members that wouldn't speak for the rest of the day, so don't test me.

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

Thank you.

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker, I much appreciate that.

I got a couple of minutes left. We'll talk about a bridge in my district, Rocky Brook Bridge, and many cabin owners, many homeowners live up there. They bought the land and they bought the lots, a lot of it was Crown land, in an understanding that there would be adequate access to their lot and to their cabin and whatnot.

The minister has already agreed to meet with them and talk to them and we're very happy with that, but unfortunately it's a bridge right now that can't be used. We had a medical emergency there a little while ago. We don't want to see another one again. So we hope that the minister can meet with the folks up there and maybe come up with a solution that works for everyone. It's pretty important.

I think that the government does have some sort of responsibility to the people up there to ensure that they can have safe access to the land that they did buy from the government to ensure that they can put up their cottage or home or whatnot, and we believe the government definitely holds responsibility there, of some sort, to work with them at least. At least work with them.

For the tourism part here today, we're happy it's the Year of the Arts and whatnot, and lots of tourist stuff in Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans District and we're happy to see it. You know, the zipline out there, the accommodations, the food, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans District has come a long way, and now with the mining and whatnot, it's going to go a lot further.

When it comes to the arts, we talk about the music and we talk about the acting and stuff like that, but the dance that we have here in the province is absolutely phenomenal.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: We're going to head down to the Delta again next weekend for another dance competition, but if nobody has ever taken in a dance competition here in the province, the next one is at the Convention Centre, they're doing off up to 700 and 800 professional dances in one weekend. It's absolutely unreal to see. The calibre of these kids and young adults, it's great to see. As they push their way forward and out into the world dance community, we couldn't be happier and more proud to have them here from Newfoundland and Labrador. I

know I'm very proud as a dance dad and I'll continue to be proud.

You know, again, the music is great. We have so much music coming from the province and the acting and whatnot, but I just really wanted to put a shout-out to the dance. Those kids give it their all, and it certainly seems that it has taken Newfoundland and Labrador by storm here the past few years because to see it now, it's unbelievable the foothold it has here in the province now.

The mining, of course we talk about it. Marathon Gold now has changed to Calibre Mining but they're doing phenomenal work up there. I believe in the first or second quarter of 2025 they're going to actually start their mining process. The hiring up there is phenomenal, just day after day after day they're putting out calls for employment up there.

There are lots of people getting hired on. I know tons of people throughout my community that are getting hired on, so we're happy to see that. I mean, over the course of this 13-year mine we're going to watch them pull over three million ounces of gold out of the dirt.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: We're so happy about that and it's going to be great for my district and moving on and moving forward, the people up there. But I would really like to see some roadwork get done up. The minister just talked about the roadwork sometimes depends on economic development. Well, we have tons of economic development. Between the logging and the mining up there, there are tons of it on the road. There are tons of it up there. The roads are getting beaten up and we hope to get some work done up there so they can continue their economic development.

I mean, if we want people to come to the province and start projects, we need to

ensure that the infrastructure is there for them and we're going to continue to do that.

The last thing I'd like to touch on – I'm only going to take another moment – is the oil and gas. The Member for Terra Nova touched on it earlier on. The largest reserves on the planet: Venezuela would be number one – the most on the planet – followed by Saudi Arabia and then the third one, on the whole planet, Canada. We have the third largest oil reserves on the planet. It's absolutely phenomenal and we should be tapping more into this.

When people talk about combustible engines, whatnot, that's understandable. We want to protect the environment, but the technological advances that we've had over the past 20, 30, 50, 100 years wouldn't have happened without oil and gas. It would not have happened without oil and gas, and it makes everything. You can look around this Chamber here today and you can pick out just about everything that is touching in this Chamber has to do with oil and gas, the seats, the clothes, the cellphones, everything. It's absolutely phenomenal.

It's not something that we have to give up on and move ahead. We have to be leaders and we can prove to this world that we are leaders in the oil and gas sector, and we can. The transition can be great, but we have to be leaders and ensure that we protect our economic development when it comes to oil and gas. We are an oil and gas province –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: – and we have to stop shying away from that. We need to ensure that we embrace that, we nurture that and we let Ottawa know that we will be the heroes of our own stories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills – I forgot your title for a second.

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This has been an interesting afternoon. I really appreciated all the debate, the sort of high emotions spirit to the place. I'm going to talk a little bit about something today that it's been on my mind. It's been on my mind for a while and I think it would be shared of equal value and equal passion by both sides of the House and that is Marine Atlantic, our expressway to the rest of the country.

The relevance to this, Mr. Speaker, is obvious within the Resource Committee. Our constitutionally obligated transportation link to the Mainland is essential to all heavy industry, to light industry, to our tourism industry, to the very economy of our province, and has a direct impact on jobs and employment in our province. So, from that point of view, from that vantage point, I will speak a little bit about how I see a new beginning for Marine Atlantic and for the Department of Transport to properly engage our province and to provide a better service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: I think it is absolutely important to note that Marine Atlantic here is a player, but it's not a decision-maker. Often, we focus our attention on Marine Atlantic and the great people who are at Marine Atlantic as if they were the decision-makers, and sometimes we express our frustration not at the Government of Canada, not at Transport Canada, but at Marine Atlantic. This is ill-founded, in my opinion. While we can always engage Marine Atlantic to improve services at an operational level, the core decision-making capacity is held in Ottawa by Canada.

So, with that said, we have often been frustrated and antagonized by the fact that

we have a link that was constitutionally obligated, one of only three constitutionally obligated ferry linkages in all of Canada under the Constitution. In the Terms of Union that occurred between British Columbia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador, they were found. Some have been amended to date; some stand as if it were the date of drafting.

But with that said, Mr. Speaker, what we know to be true is that the unique terms of Newfoundland and Labrador under Term 32 are very, very, very unique within the context of the three constitutional obligations Canada did sign to. Term 32 has three subclauses: (1) is that Canada shall offer in accordance with the traffic offering a freight passenger service and with the completion of the highway to Port aux Basques, a ferry service. Then subclause (2) talks about how there's a direct linkage to railway rate regulation. Subclause (3) refers to all that legislation, which is passed by the Parliament of Canada, applicable to traffic moving in, out of and within the Maritime region shall apply to the Island of Newfoundland.

Now, this is very, very important because term 32(2) speaks directly to railway rate regulation. It says that all railway rate regulation applicable in the Maritime region shall apply to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Term 32(3), however, is very different. It says that all legislation affecting rates, and implies any kind of transportation mode, shall be applicable to the Newfoundland region.

So, Mr. Speaker, 32(1) speaks directly of a freight and a passenger ferry service. It speaks directly to automobiles and 32(3) speaks to all special rate regulation of presumably to automobiles and to trucks as well. The two are very linked, the correlation is obvious.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, we have often been concerned or annoyed by the fact that

Prince Edward Island – and we begrudge Prince Edward Island nothing – but they have a guaranteed rate structure for the Confederation Bridge, which says that the operator of the Confederation Bridge, Straits Crossing Bridge Limited is only allowed by the law to charge, beginning in 1997, the day that the Confederation Bridge opened, from each year forward from that point, they were only allowed to charge 1992 PEI ferry rates in 1997, and from that year forward, they were only allowed to charge 75 per cent of the consumer price index of Prince Edward Island.

That's very relevant, because, first off, they started out with the strategic advantage of having ferry rates, 1992 rates, imposed in 1997. Then on a go-forward basis for the next 35 years, the Straits Crossing Bridge Limited, Northumberland Strait incorporated, were only allowed to charge 75 per cent of the CPI. So in terms of the real dollar value, the time value of money with only 75 per cent of CPI eligible to be charged as a rate increase, the rate on the Confederation Bridge, each and every year since 1997, has been going down in price to users. It has not even kept up with inflationary costs.

So in real time value of money, the Confederation Bridge, to its users, has actually been lowering in cost. The Newfoundland ferry service, however, has been progressively increasing in cost and at a pace well above inflation.

Here's the nexus, here's where the two issues fuse. We have a constitutional guarantee that says that Canada must offer a freight and passenger service with the completion of a motor highway, a ferry service between Port aux Basques and North Sydney – it actually says the two communities. It cannot be Corner Brook to North Sydney; cannot be Stephenville to North Sydney. It can't even be Argentia to North Sydney. The constitutional obligation is between Port aux Basques and North Sydney. So we have a right to an

automobile ferry service, but, secondly, – and this is the important point – the constitution specifically says that any rate regulation applicable to the Maritime region, for traffic moving, in, out of and within the Maritimes, must apply to the Newfoundland region.

The *Northumberland Straits Crossing Act* enables Canada to enter into an agreement to guarantee to maintain a contractual basis for a rate regulation of the Confederation Bridge. So with a guaranteed contractual basis scripted in law, passed by the Parliament of Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador, I say, should benefit from exactly the provision in the constitution which the drafters intended.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: We should be held, we should benefit, we should take obligation and responsibility to the North Sydney to Port aux Basques, Port aux Basque to North Sydney ferry service, should be based on 1992 ferry rates that begin in 1997 and from that moment forward for the next 35 years cannot be allowed to progress anymore than 75 per cent, three-quarters of the cost of inflation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

G. BYRNE: If that were to be the case and I've done the scribbled math, the cost of using the Marine Atlantic ferry service on a one-way ticket would not be – I'll for the purposes of clarity of my mind – \$400 for a motor vehicle and four passengers, it would be about \$180. It would be less than half the price it is today. That is what we should be doing.

Mr. Speaker, I throw this out for the collective benefit of all Members of the House. We should all be joining a common cause to say, let's take a fresh look at the Marine Atlantic ferry service from the context of what is our constitutional obligations, what are our constitutional

rights and are they being looked at in a modern light. I say to you, the answer to Marine Atlantic is a question that has been hiding in plain sight.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I won't take all my time here but given the conversation and we were talking about resources and stuff, I decided I had to get up and talk about Labrador West and the massive amount of mining that goes on up there.

First, I would be remiss, I said it before in budget debate, but I'll say it again, this year is 70 years of continuous mining in Labrador West. We have not stopped mining iron ore in Labrador West for 70 consecutive years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. BROWN: The interesting thing about it is, it is a massive project that has continued on and on and on and you talk about putting a railway up through Labrador, you talk about putting multiple mines in very remote locations.

I had the privilege of both my grandfathers going up and working on the project. My grandfather Ricketts went there in 1952 as part of what they called in Ore by '54. He worked on the railway line then. My grandfather Brown went up in 1958. He slept in a tent and he helped put together the Carol project with Dr. Moss. So this is a thing that is generational for me. My family has been at this industry since the '50s so we can't be remiss when I say I talk about the mining industry and how important it is.

But now we have a golden opportunity now to actually increase the GDP of this

province significantly. We have the golden opportunity now to actually expand on our mining knowledge, expand our project and we have a product, we have iron ore, that countries that even mine iron ore are coming to buy ours because they would rather smelt ours than their own that their mining in there.

So this is something that is a commodity. Not that many years ago, we had mining companies talk about selling off mines and trying to get out of Labrador. Now they're turning around and going: That was a huge mistake, how do I get back into there? So this is what we wanted to do.

I want to thank the minister for bringing it up and talking about trying to get power to Labrador West and trying to do that. But, you know, time is of the essence. It's a traded commodity so if we don't provide this product to the world, someone else will find a way to do it.

So time is of the essence. We have asked for electricity for a while. So we have to find a way to start the process of getting more power into Labrador West, to actually increase the activity because we're a leader already in low-carbon iron ore production and it was all by happenstance.

We just happened to put a mine next to a massive power resource and it paid off in dividends down the road because that means most of the mining equipment that was out there was electrified already since the '70s. We were already ahead of the game thankfully, and now, because we were ahead of the game, we're positioned very well into the fact that we can actually keep going and actually be one of largest suppliers of iron ore that can meet the standards for new global emissions before most people can actually get into the market.

Obviously, we're not at the scale that the world is already demanding, so in order to corner the market, we do need to expand,

it's (inaudible). Thankfully, you know, both mining companies in Labrador West want to do that.

Another happenstance that actually worked out was that a by-product for mining in Wabush was manganese, and it was thrown out as a by-product that, you know, was not wanted, it was a problem and it was a nuisance in the mining in Labrador West.

Now, the manganese is worth more than iron ore, so we have a thing where we have huge stockpiles of manganese just sitting there. They need to get to the global market, but we can't process it without, obviously, more power.

We have a massive pile of a mineral that is actually on the province's critical mineral list that we can't get to market because we need more electricity. At the same time, we're also thankful that the province added high-grade iron ore, which is produced in Labrador West, to the critical minerals list. So we have these products that need to get to market but we need that.

I know the Member for Terra Nova mentioned Fermont, and thankfully we have one thing over Fermont. They are a fly-in, fly-out community and their mayor actually said to me, that's the worse thing that ever happened was they allowed the fly-in, fly-out. Those new apartment buildings that the Member mentioned, they actually bunkhouses, brand new bunkhouses.

That community is, unfortunately, begging to actually have people move up there now. They're in an unfortunate situation and they're asking, actually, help from Lab West on how they can bring people to move into the region to work in their mining industry and not rely on fly-in and fly-out people.

It is a complex issue up there but, thankfully, Lab West is a community and we're not a fly-in, fly-out mining camp like our neighbour Fermont. We are a full-fledged community, and we want to keep it

that way. We want our community to grow. We want people to move to Labrador West and work and benefit from the resource we have.

We understand there were decisions made down the road that we can't change but, at the same time, it's time to make some changes and partner up and actually help us grow our community and actually move forward.

We don't want a fly-in, fly-out mining camp, we want a community and we want to help the province increase its GDP, be a productive part of this province and continue to put billions of dollars into the province's coffers. You know, if you worked it out with the royalties and everything like that, over 70 years of mining, we were probably one of the largest, significant economic contributors to the provincial budget year in, year out until the oil came on line.

We were the largest product shipped out of this province for decades and it all happened quietly in the corner of Lab West where, you know, a lot of people in this province actually stop and think about. For most people here, it's a two-day drive to leave here and go to Labrador West. It's two days of travel from the capital of this province to the most western point in this province. A lot of people think, that's Labrador, that's up in the corner.

Quietly, for the last 70 years, we've put billions of dollars into the coffers of this province. For 70 years, we continued to mine. For 70 years more, we will continue to mine, but it needs to be a partnership. It means that we have to make sure that we get the assets that we need, make sure that we have the resources that we need and make sure that we have the services that we need to continue to do it. It can't be done on the back of, you know, maybes or hopefuls or anything like that. It needs to be concrete plans and concrete steps made to actually bring the services that we've been asking for, make sure that you bring the

assets that we ask for up to us. Like I said to the minister before, you get us the power in Labrador West, we'll do the rest.

Get us the resources that we need and, like I said, teachers, doctors, other things – get that for us and don't worry about it; we'll take care of the mining. Get us everything else – housing and resources for our municipalities – and, as I said, we'll take care of the mining. We will do that part, but we also need something in return. It has to be a partnership.

I don't want that we give up and turn it into a fly-in, fly-out camp or anything. I do not want that to happen and I'll put my foot down that I will not accept any form of fly-in, fly-out when it comes to operations in mining. It's a community – we have a community and we want to keep it that way, but we need to be a partnership in the sense that we want to make sure that we are thriving, so that we are the leader in the green transition when it comes to smelting and minerals.

Right now, one of the largest global contributors that outweigh a lot of most everything else that we would think about when it comes to climate change, the largest one is iron ore and steel-making is one of the largest single contributors to GH gases, globally.

The more pure iron that you put into your smelter, the more pure iron that you smelt, it reduces it down significantly. Thankfully by happenstance, by just some decisions that were made in the '50s and '60s, Labrador West was lucky enough to be one of the highest-purity iron ore on the face of the earth and it just out of happenstance that we got there. Out of another happenstance, the mine was put next to one of the largest hydroelectric projects in North America.

Out of all that, out of happenstance, we got lucky on this one, but we're not going to get lucky on the next thing. We need actual dedication, help and partnership from the government and from other groups to make

sure that we can actually continue to have another 70 years of iron ore mining in Labrador West.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for debate has expired; three hours have been expired.

The motion is that the House will concur on the Report of the Resource Committee.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 17.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, that An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act, Bill 75, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 75, An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act, now be read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act." (Bill 75)

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just take a few minutes to introduce the bill into second reading.

Mr. Speaker, this was a bill that was originally passed in 2020 and proclaimed into force in early 2023. The act enabled a mandatory registration system for short-term rentals here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and an ability to share information between bodies such as the department of municipal affairs and ourselves, and other bodies such as Destination Management Organizations to make sure that we have a healthy and safe legislation and municipal bylaw policy throughout the province.

Since that time, the department has consulted with the tourism industry, municipalities and other government departments to assess the success of the act and we have concluded, after four years, there are some revisions required. Gaps were identified in the act, Mr. Speaker. One of the primary gaps that was identified – and as much as being a gap, it's also as time has passed. This has been an evolving industry. This has been an evolving part of the industry over the last number of years and we've seen many other provinces throughout Canada bring in acts and have to bring in amendments. I would predict that as this type of technology progresses and progresses rapidly, this is the type of bill that you will see back in this House on a fairly regular basis.

The proposed amendments are as follows: Include definitions of terms such as platform operator, platform, platform service,

registration number and short-term rental offer under the act. This act will require a platform operator, such as Airbnb, Expedia, Booking.com and others to register with the province; require short-term rental listings to include a provincial registration number; require platform operators to remove any listing that does not display a provincial registration number; require platform operators to maintain rental information as detailed in the regulations; and require short-term rental platforms to prepare and submit reports to the minister in accordance with the regulations.

These amendments will ensure and enhance data gathering and provide the provincial government with timely and fulsome information to determine both the strengths and needs of our tourism sector.

We have engaged with the platforms such as Expedia, Vrbo, Airbnb and others so that all booking platforms have a mechanism which they can support that brings us to the achievements that we're looking for here. These parts of the act really line up very well with Vision 2026 and our need to further ensure that when a tourist comes to Newfoundland and Labrador, they're getting the experience that we are marketing.

TCAR further engaged industry stakeholders, Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, who also have expressed support for these amendments. Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, British Columbia, all regulate short-term rentals. The *Tourism Accommodations Act* and the proposed amendments were modelled largely after recent changes in Nova Scotia who also eliminated their primary resident exemption.

These amendments will ensure greater harmonization in our jurisdiction and with other jurisdictions in Atlantic Canada. It is anticipated that amending the act will harmonize our legislation with other provinces, ensuring greater compliance and

oversight while allowing TCAR to take an informative and sustainable approach to tourism growth in our province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Like the minister, I won't be very long on this because it is something that's necessary because as we grow as a province, we have to move with the technology. Some of the things that the minister alluded to about cleaning up the gaps, the legislation that previously existed in other provinces and are identified by our stakeholders around the definition of primary residence, registration of tourism operators and require platform operators to use a registration number in their listing. As well, it will incorporate gender-neutral language which we do with all our legislation that's brought to the floor of the House of Assembly in this modern age.

There will be benefits in that, over time, because the accuracy of the statistics for occupy rates in these accommodations will be enhanced greatly now that the platform operators must use a registration number in their listings. The benefit of this is that municipalities are able then to better assess these accommodations in terms of their taxation of home-based businesses, something municipalities have been asking for, for some time.

With that being said, it is incumbent on us as a province and real leaders with such a burgeoning tourism, culture, arts and recreation sector that we do understand about moving with the technology by engaging the other stakeholders that are important for us to make sure that we understand this.

With that being said, I will take my seat and I have a couple of questions for Committee.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, won't be too long. Adding definitions for listing platforms, removing the requirement for the primary residence to be exempt, making sure that the registration number is displayed online, things like that are keeping it in touch with a lot of the things we're looking at.

With app-based technology and app-based listings and stuff like that, there are so many different things here now. It's coming fast, it's coming furious. Obviously, we have to be ready for the changing environment. I will say it is a double-edged sword. There is a benefit to that, but also there are some downsides, so that's why we have to keep on top of it.

I agree that these changes are good. They are in line with the rest of the country and we have to be on top of it as well. We are a top-tier tourist destination. We're talked about around the world as a tourist destination. Therefore, we have to live up to the standards that these people are expecting when they come to visit us, to make sure that they're experience is a good experience and that what they're seeing listed online is what they're getting when they show up to the door of these accommodations.

It's just like any other business, we want to make sure that we're having a top-notch product and a top-notch experience for all these people who are spending big money to come here. Because we all know it's not cheap to fly into this province, or even to drive into this province, as earlier we heard from the Member for Corner Brook talk about the exorbitant ferry fees. It's not cheap to come here, so the experience that these individuals want is top tier.

We have to make sure that the list of people who are operating these businesses are living up to our expectations and are living up to the expectations of what they're selling to people online with these app-based industries.

Once again, I think this is a great thing. I'll ask the minister to keep an eye on it because I'm sure they'll find ways to bend around this technology, too. We have to be on top of it at all times.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

It's great to have an opportunity to speak to this bill. I, too, will be supporting the bill.

Mr. Speaker, we have a top-notch product here in this province. I truly believe that. I'm sure all Members in this House of Assembly would acknowledge that.

It's taken us some time to realize. I think a lot of us took for granted for so many years exactly what we have here. When you think of our tremendous history, you think of our culture, you think of the beautiful landscapes and so on, the picturesque communities, you think about the friendliness of our people and all the historic sites we have and so on, it truly is a gem. This has evolved overtime.

I think legislation speaks to a maturing industry and that we're getting to a point, and we've gotten to a point to a great degree I guess, where we want to make sure everything is done properly, above board, professionally, to keep with national and international standards and so on.

As my colleague from Labrador West said, people are paying big money to come here.

I think one of the things we have to recognize is that a lot of the people that are coming to Newfoundland and Labrador, in terms of that demographic, we do have people who do have relatives here and so on, but it's really not that family that would be going to Disney, type of thing.

It's people, generally speaking, I would suggest, that are a more mature demographic and people with money, people with significant dollars that they are able to drop. We may not get the quantity that you're going to see in Orlando, for example, but you are going to get the quality in terms of smaller numbers spending bigger money and people willing to pay big dollars for experiences and the type of experiences that we have to offer here in this province.

Certainly, as my colleague said, if they're going to booking places online, which is the way it's done these days – at one point in time, of course, everybody went to a travel agent. I haven't gone to travel agency in years. Everywhere we go now, I do it all myself. I do everything online, whether it be booking your flights or your hotels or your rental cars or even different experiences that you want to do when you get to your destination, it's all done online.

It's important that everything is done on professional platforms and it is done in a way that when people come here and they have an expectation of what that accommodation is going to be, what it's going to be all about, the services that are going to be offered and what it's going to look like and so on, it's important that they match up with the reality when they arrive here.

Because while it is great to bring people here, we can do a lot of harm to our tourist industry if people come here with an expectation of (a) and when they get here, it's (b) and it's not meeting that expectation.

Word of mouth is everything when it comes to travel. And whether that just is people talking to their neighbours, their friends or their family members, or even online, because now, of course, you go to book a trip online and you want to stay somewhere and so on, there are comment sections there where people make comments about what their stay was at this particular resort or this particular property and if it was clean and if there were bugs and whatever the case may be. So it is all there for the whole world to see and, obviously, we want to make sure that when people are coming here with an expectation, that they're going to get what they receive.

While this is primarily to deal with accommodations – and that's what this bill is about: about accommodations – I would say, and I'm sure the minister would agree, that while not specifically in this bill, we want to make sure that we uphold the best, possible standards when it comes to all the offerings we have here in this province.

As we've discussed in Estimates this year and brought it up from previous years as well, that includes the different tourist sites and so on that are around this province. When we have things in our tourist books and so on that are saying there is a particular site to visit or to see in some part of the province, we want to make sure that site, that the road to get there is in good shape, that there is appropriate signage to guide you there easily and also when you arrive there, you want to make sure that you get what you expected. That it is kept in good repair and maintained.

I've talked about it in Estimates, where I have seen it myself, where sometimes that's not always the case. Where sometimes there may be something that's advertised as a tourist location and you may have to drive significantly off the beaten path to get there and when you arrive, it did not live up to your expectation. Perhaps it was something that may have been built a number of years ago, it could have been done as some kind

of a project or grant, it could have been done by a municipality and the money was never put in to maintain it.

The money was put there to build it and then it was left to fall to pieces. So now you have a tourist showing up at a location, off the beaten path, driving a significant distance to get down there and everything is falling apart, and that's not what we want either.

So when we talk about tourism, we have to make sure we maintain the highest standards, not just in accommodations, but in everything we have to offer in this province. But certainly this here, specifically, is dealing with the accommodations piece. As I say, it is just keeping us in touch with the modern world, the way things are done and it's part of the standards that people would expect if they were to book places in other parts of Canada and throughout the world as well.

With that said, I'll take my seat and I'll support the bill.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation speaks now, we'll close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I won't take any time, just to thank the Member for Placentia - Bellevue West – Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: I think I fooled that up earlier today as well.

AN HON. MEMBER: I think you did it on purpose.

S. CROCKER: No, I didn't. I said to the Member of –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

S. CROCKER: Yeah, long day.

The Member for Labrador West and the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands – just one of the things I missed in my opening remarks, last year when we mandated that tourism operators in this province come and register with the province, this is an interesting number because it will tell you something about the idea of why we had to bring in this legislation and, remember, this doesn't include primary residence which we're adding today.

On April 1 of last year, of 2023, there were 750 registered operators in this province. As of today, there are 2,605.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. CROCKER: Nineteen hundred operators have registered with the province and that's now a way that we can ensure – to the Member for Mount Pearl - Southland's point, imagine, only one in three operators in this province was registered with the province. So this will go a long way in ensuring the product that we're delivering to the world.

So, again, thank you very much and I look forward to questions in Committee.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 75 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act. (Bill 75)

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

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

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 75)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 75.

SPEAKER: Can I have a seconder to that?

L. DEMPSTER: Seconded by the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 75.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Trimper): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 75, An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act." (Bill 75)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm happy that you got it right and I appreciate it.

To the minister, you mentioned some of the platforms and people that were consulted. Can you give us a list of who was consulted and when this took place?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: Yes, absolutely, we can certainly do that. I can tell you, due to the fact that we have been doing this registration base for over the last year, we have talked to the platforms probably on a weekly basis because we're working into the transition. So, yes, we can certainly provide that.

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

J. DWYER: Can we have what platforms were actually used?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: The platforms that we are talking to here are obviously Airbnb; Expedia/Vrbo because Expedia is the parent of Vrbo; Booking.com; Tripadvisor.

I will give you the full list – and I have staff here who are going to tell me which ones I missed, but I can get that in your next question.

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

J. DWYER: So why the change in the definition of primary residence?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: So that is something that we have seen, that is something that we heard from Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador. We have seen it in other jurisdictions. Quite frankly, this bill would have been first brought to the Legislature, I think, in 2020. Things have changed.

In some jurisdictions, this type of legislation has been used to play a role in the housing crisis that we face throughout the country and I think, in some jurisdictions, that's why they added the primary residence. It begs the question of why it changed, but I think the change is primarily around the issues around housing.

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

J. DWYER: Is there any cost to having a registration number?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: There's no cost associated. This is post-Canada Select. Hospitality operators no longer operate under Canada Select. I think it was brought out in the comments from the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands that the reality is these are self-governing platforms now when you think about it. Because the first thing you do if you're going on a platform to book something, you look at the rating. Because there's nothing better you can trust than customer experience and reading those reviews. So this really helps with maintaining quality accommodations because these platforms are very open in adjudicating where it is someone would stay.

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

J. DWYER: Is the department investigating tourist accommodations that do not register under this legislation?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, so what we did last fall was we reached an agreement, a partnership with Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador. Right now, Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador is performing that role for us. So they're actually out, quite literally, looking on social media and others for people that haven't registered, because obviously we know who has registered.

The other interesting thing is, as Members of the House would realize, a lot of people out there who are registered are very quick to tell us who's not registered. Because all the time there's some self-governance here that I can tell you if you're not seen as being registered with the province – and rightfully so – a business that is registered and following our guidelines is very quick to say, yeah, someone is not registered.

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

J. DWYER: So how will these legislative changes affect the tourism levy throughout the province?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: I thank the Member for the question because that is an important question and one I sort of want to temper expectations on.

We have 260-plus municipalities in this province. At this time, Destination St. John's will be the only one that can actually put their tourism levy in – I think it's 4 per cent if you stay in a room in St. John's. We're having active discussions with the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs on how we do that. Do we work with Hospitality NL, also Municipalities NL, to find a mechanism? Because I think it's important that if there's a way here to generate revenue – because it's a standard, you see it right across the country, if you stay somewhere there's a levy.

Remember, this would be money, but we have to ensure that if this money is collected, that it goes directly back, either to the destination management organizations or to tourism marketing. The tourism industry would say: As much as we want to see towns collect these levies, we have to make sure they're reinvested in tourism. So there's some work being done there.

Again, it's an important question, one we're working with the department on.

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

J. DWYER: My last question: How does the registration affect accommodations in municipalities and Local Service Districts as it's pertaining to taxation?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, I think that's very similar. Again, we have a working group with Digital Government and Service NL, the fire commissioner's office and the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs. There are some things we're working through here.

I'll take this opportunity to actually thank Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, Deborah Bourden and Craig –

AN HON. MEMBER: Foley.

S. CROCKER: Craig Foley. Sorry, Craig, if you're listening, I'm sure you're not, but Craig Foley, for the hard work that they've done in bringing these changes forward.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

I just have two questions there. Has the department had consultations with the platform operators to identify means that the registration numbers they are listing can be validated to make sure that they are an active number given by the province and not something probably just typed in, to make sure that it's actually a legit one?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: That's a really good question. The answer is yes, because the number will be with us, we can actually spot check.

I will go back, because I think it's a really good point to make sure that we avoid that, but we'll take that under advisement. That's a good point, but I'm confident that we can work with the platforms to make sure that that number is an ID number.

There are people, no matter what you do, someone is going to try to find a way around

it, but it's really what we refer to in the department as: it's your licence plate and you need that licence plate to operate.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Perfect.

The other questions is, though, given that we're crossing here now, giving validation numbers and things like that over to these platforms, is there any work being done or anything for the platforms to make sure to be compliant with the province when it comes to security for people of this province given that these numbers contain personal information?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: Absolutely. That is one of the things that we would continue to work with our ATIPP office and others as we go forward in these regulations.

I think that's one of the decisions that when someone decides that they want to enter into this industry, I think it's incumbent on them to realize that, if it's a primary residence, you are inviting someone into your home. So I think this has to inform.

Again, it's an important question, but one that I would encourage anybody entering this industry to be thoughtful before you make these decisions.

CHAIR: Any further questions for the minister?

Seeing none, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 6 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 6 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 6 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act. (Bill 75)

CHAIR: Shall –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Excuse me, can I have just a little order?

Thank you.

Shall the title of the bill carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Thank you.

The title has been carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 75, An Act to Amend the Tourist Accommodations Act, carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

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

CHAIR: I recognize the Deputy, Deputy Government House Leader.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Excellent job as always.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, that the Committee of the Whole report the bill passed without amendment.

CHAIR: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair and report Bill 75 carried without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville and Deputy Chair of Committees.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

Thanks to the support of the Deputy, Deputy Government House Leader, I am very pleased to say that the Committee of the Whole have reviewed Bill 75 and have carried it forward without amendment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that they have considered the matters to them referred and directed Bill 75 be carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

S. COADY: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

S. COADY: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy, Deputy Government House Leader.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'll try and get this one right.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that this House do now adjourn.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 10 a.m.
tomorrow.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned
until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.