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Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

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(Night Sitting)

The House resumed at 6:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Order 2.

SPEAKER: Order 2.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 5.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

We are now considering Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No 2.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2." (Bill 5)

CLERK (Hawley George): Amendment to clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall the amendment carry?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Chair.

It's always a pleasure to stand in this House to speak on whatever matter, and the matter that's before us is the volatile industry of oil. We're discussing a proposed amendment to Bill 5. At the end of the day, I guess we could classify it as an amendment to do more. Will you do more is the question at hand, that we're challenging the government to do. Because we certainly know that the people of this province could do with more to reduce the cost-of-living stress that's on them right now in terms of gas prices.

Every night, morning, whatever, when you turn on your TV, you can see what's going on in this world and decisions that are made in other parts of the world that affect us deeply. We know that the gas prices are affecting people within our province and us, personally, as well.

I know there's been some debate. We talked about not just this amendment but gas taxes, we reduced it and now it is proposed to being made permanent, which is a good thing. Any reduction in any tax is good for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and that's good for our constituents.

In terms of cost-saving measures, as well, sitting on the government side, I believe all intent is to do better for our constituents. We're here every day to try to attempt that. Sitting on that side, you know you have two sides of the ledger. You have expenses and

you have revenue. The challenge is – and I refer to the Minister of Finance, in terms of measuring productivity and stuff. That's a strong measure because your returning revenue, more revenue allows you to do more for whatever your plans be.

When I was over on the other side, we gave over \$500-million worth of cost-saving measures to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I know it's been tossed back and forth, oh, you haven't done anything in 10 years, which is you know what, because we did do measures. I think it's worth repeating because all of that money, \$500-million plus, was certainly to the benefit of all districts in this province.

Sitting on the other side of the House for six years, when the Members of the government now are on this side, they always wanted to do more – asking for more and more all the time. They land on that side with close to a billion dollars in deficit. Well, if we did all of their measures, then we probably would have ended up with more than a billion-dollar deficit. But it comes down to choices about what you want to do and decide not to do for people in the province.

I guess reducing taxes – and I think it was the Leader of the Third Party, and others have talked about it, in terms of the pillars. One depends on economic conditions, environmental goals and the public needs. I think what we're talking about here too is this can be immediate cost relief. Gas taxes can quickly reduce prices, helping householders. That's a comment that I made based on an email I received from a constituent of mine.

As I said, when you stand here and you discuss any legislation of whether it's to reduce taxes or whatever, it's always speaking to your constituents and you're proud of that. I'm proud of it as well and to speak to the challenges of my district down in the rural parts of the province, which is

200-plus kilometres off the Trans-Canada Highway and the towns and their assets. I've had a lot of chats with them about the barrel of oil going up, so that's going to end up more costs at the pumps.

I don't know what it's going to be. I don't have an announcement but I bet you're going to pay more, tomorrow, at the pumps. There are lots of, not just individuals, but the town councils and the trucks, the vehicles they have to do their work, so they have to reflect on their budget in terms of the cost. Those costs are real.

Gas stations – I've had owners in my district that have said about employing people and this cost will go up. Somebody has to bear that cost because they just can't put that extra cost and absorb it, because you're not making a lot of profits. That's a concern for gas stations within my district.

Fishermen – I've heard it from fishermen in terms of gas is expensive enough as it is and now it will put more burdens on my crew in terms of going out and facing extra costs. That is a concern for them and, again, that's all relevant to my constituents in terms of the fishery as a whole.

The aquaculture – I can tell you that gas stations in my district, when you have two fish plants that, during COVID, I don't know if they missed a day. Their fuel from managing their sites, boats, they use a lot of fuel. When you use a lot of fuel, as a company, you have to sit back and say it's going to cost us a lot, lot more. That's a challenge for them and they employ people.

You never want to see that a cost is going to force companies to reduce people's employment in rural parts of the province. We know with regard to employment insurance, hours have increased in various parts of the province and that's becoming a challenge as well. As I said before, these concerns are, certainly, a real concern on many levels.

In my district, there's a mining operation now in Belleoram that has a lot of potential for down the road. It's happening right now. There were a lot of doubters that this would happen, but now it's happening. They're going to supply a product that's going to go to the States and other parts of the world. It's a refined rock that is in high demand.

So, for me, during the digging out of the product to the finished product, there are going to be long-term jobs and we never thought it would happen down there, but again, it all is reliant on oil. That's just from a business perspective.

In rural parts of the province, ambulance operators, even though now it's under a provincial umbrella, but it's still a cost in terms of it increasing. We look at tourism. We're already hearing on the news that flights are increasing because this is always the trademark of companies saying, well, the price is going up. We could debate it, I guess, if they should increase their flights, but what does it take for an airplane to operate? We all know that.

Marine Atlantic and also farmers, so it's a lot of businesses that a small increase in cost to their business is a big problem for them and we don't want to see that happening.

Roadwork – now I know the minister is listening very carefully. This is not Question Period, so he can relax a little bit but contractors are all sitting at their tables in terms of calling workers back to work and in terms of this oil as a cost and that's factored into really a headache at the end of the day if owners have to sit down and say here we go again, but they have to make profit. They have to make profit as a company. They have to employ people.

Mr. Chair, my time has come to an end here now, but I'll certainly have more to say to continue on with that to talk about the importance of what this amendment means

and that would mean to do more for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

I stand today to speak to an amendment to Bill 5. As the Member for the District of Placentia - St. Mary's, I'm deeply mindful of the positive impacts that this amendment can have on, not only the people of my district, but of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We're here this evening and it's almost 6:50, but we believe we're here for the right reasons. Because this amendment can truly impact the daily lives of individuals across this province.

Chair, in my district alone, Placentia - St. Mary's, it is a huge district. You go right from Peter's River to Branch to Green's Harbour – a massive geographical area to cover. As some of my colleagues here in this House of Assembly understand what it means to have to travel such huge distances for your district, if you're travelling, the people of your district are travelling also. They're travelling for health care. They're travelling for education. They're travelling for recreation. They're travelling for groceries. They're travelling just to exist daily in their lives.

In my district, some of my rural schools are decreasing in numbers and because they're decreasing in numbers, families are having to take their children to other schools to avail of recreation opportunities. Just this week, two young girls from Fatima, their parents had been travelling back and forth the whole year from Branch to Placentia, Laval, just so they could avail of basketball and they joined a team at Laval and they just competed in the provincials and they won.

That's going to impact their lives because some of these girls may, in fact, end up going on to MUN and being part of the team. There's a cost to this family and the cost is in the fuel. Every time they go to the pumps, they have to fill up. We know there's a geopolitical disruption happening right now and that geopolitical disruption means we have less supply, there's global panic and there's higher prices for oil.

The Newfoundland government finances are tied to offshore oil royalties. When the prices jump, as they have recently, our government has access to extra revenue. That extra revenue belongs to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In my district right now, the people in the Whitbourne area and into my neighbouring districts, they have to travel into Whitbourne for urgent care. Unfortunately, urgent care now is Teladoc, when it used to be a person. It's turned into Teladoc but they still have to travel in for that care.

In Placentia, they have to travel from the Cape Shore in for medical care. Actually, on the Cape Shore if they want groceries, they have to travel into Placentia for anything large. There are some small, local stores but you can't get your regular groceries, so you have to come into Placentia.

There is a significant amount of travel involved when you live in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. This amendment here today to decrease the price of gasoline for individuals when they go to the pump has significant impact on the people.

Now, I understand the government put a bill forward that would keep the decrease that we put it in in place, and that's good. There's nothing wrong with keeping it in place, or keeping it permanent. Right now, they have access to additional revenue and, with access to that additional revenue, I really believe the government needs to

consider putting this amendment, that we've put on the floor, in place, right now so we can positively impact the people.

Fuel used off-road in the primary industries such as fishing, farming, forestry, mining and manufacturing is often exempt or rebated but fuel use on-road in cars, trucks, transport businesses is taxed normally. These costs are then passed on to the consumers and passed on to the families.

Tourism is huge in my district. It'll start up in a couple of weeks time with the Dildo Brewery down in Dildo. People just flock to that area. We have Cape St. Mary's on the Cape Shore. As I spoke earlier in the House, this week, we have St. Vincent's Beach. Come the mid of June to late July, you'll have a job to find a place down there. Everybody travels there. People travel from St. John's. They travel from all over from Newfoundland and Labrador and they bring revenue into my district but, again, there's a cost to it.

There's a cost to their vehicles because there is probably one cost-shared social support avenue in the Placentia area for travel. Other than that, taxis are extremely limited. There are some taxis that come back and forth to the city to bring parcels back and forth, but not to bring people daily around. So you can't even access taxis. You have to have access to a vehicle. You have to have the cost of a vehicle and now you have the added cost of fuel. It doesn't help in day-to-day lives.

Chair, as I was saying, tourism is a main economic driver in the District of Placentia - St. Mary's. I've been in this House for over 10 years, so we've all heard people talk about tourism over and over and we know that tourism is big in all of Newfoundland and Labrador. We often compete in this House, as Members, to try to determine whose district is the best when it comes to tourism, but we know it's Placentia - St.

Mary's, and I'm sure the Premier would agree.

People – they really do. They do come to the communities in the District of Placentia - St. Mary's. They do come to Dildo. I know I'm not naming all my communities. I have 54 communities in the district, so I can't stand here and name all 54 communities. I can name the communities that we do see a significant influx of tourism, significant influx of visitors. The staycations are extremely popular since COVID days and I'm sure, maybe all of us in this House, have availed of a staycation.

Again, we burn gasoline when we travel and you go to that pump and it hurts your pocket and it hurts you when you look at the price tag, and it just keeps going up and up and up and up.

The piece of legislation that is on the floor to keep it, like I said, as it is, but the amendment added to that will positively impact the lives of people. There's no way we can say it doesn't. Some people will argue that it's not a large amount but if you are travelling consistently and constantly for health care, for chemotherapy, for treatment – as seniors if you're having to hire somebody, again, the cost to your pocket is astronomical. A lot of seniors also in rural Newfoundland and Labrador don't have access to vehicles and today they don't have access to family, so they do have to hire someone who is not a relative and someone who they have to pay to bring them to the hospital or bring them to urgent care or bring them for blood work or an X-ray or multiple things.

So why now; why this amendment; what it is the intended outcome; what revenue changes are expected? These are questions that are going through everyone's mind in this House. But people deserve to understand what is changing, not just what we're doing, but why we're doing it.

As I said right now, there's geopolitical disruption. The price has gone up. The government has access to additional revenue. Opposition here strongly believes that the government does have an opportunity at this point in time to decrease the cost for people and, therefore, we are here at, like I said, almost 7 at night debating this amendment because we believe it's an extremely important amendment.

The bill is about more than fuel taxation. It's about fairness, it's about affordability and it's about the realities faced by people in communities, like those I represent, the District of Placentia - St. Mary's. Sometimes you'll hear me say the District of Placentia - St. Mary's and Trinity South because I believe it's going to be this year that government is going to go back and review the individual district sizes, names and everything that comes with it. We are over 10 years, so it's due. Hopefully, after this review, that this district in fact will be called Placentia - St. Mary's, Trinity South, as it should have been called in 2015. There are three bays.

We have a responsibility to ensure that policies like this reflect the realities of life, that they do not place additional strain on families already doing their best to get by. My time is starting to wind down here, so because at the end of the day, every cent added at the pump is felt in the homes of the people that we are here to serve. That is really the bottom line.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

It's my privilege to stand and speak on behalf of the residents of St. John's East -

Quidi Vidi on the amendment proposed to this bill, of which myself and my colleague are happy to support.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. O'LEARY: I want to just speak to the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's because, of course, she talks about the tourism component which is near and dear to my heart. Yes, I'm a townie and I represent a district that's firmly in the downtown core of the City of St. John's, but I love the Cape Shore and she knows it.

So while the challenges that people have that live in rural communities, in terms of moving around, the cost of gas that happens, that occurs is not quite the same for those that are living in the City of St. John's but smaller, shorter commutes do take up a lot of cost for people. Not everybody, of course, who works in the City of St. John's lives in the City of St. John's. There is a lot of transit going back and forth and transportation methods as well, city transportation.

I do want to say that tourism and the cost of tourism, because the folks that are visiting are getting bused around and renting cars and things, so there are costs that are incurred. There are costs for the people who are visiting and the tourism market and all that, but I represent the NDP and the NDP really, firmly believe in affordability.

We put out a costed platform in our campaign and it was all about cost-saving measures for people so that we could, not only come out with a good plan for how we were going to afford to do the things that we wanted to do to make people's lives more affordable, but it was a sound plan that was costed out. So things like HST removal from home heating. These are things that, obviously, we've been putting forward. We've been trying to chip away at the block to try to find options that the government will take on to help make life more affordable.

The original bill here, coasting – it's good in theory to just lock it in but, really, what we're doing is we're not giving any extra cost savings to individuals right now. We want to take it another level.

So when the amendment was tabled, we were happy to support that because we know that every dollar counts when it comes to the residents of the district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. O'LEARY: I will speak on behalf of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and my colleague in St. John's Centre as well, I will speak on his behalf because I do know that he certainly serves a demographic of people who really are struggling to cover the cost of living. So any of these kind of measures, to ensure that we can save a few dollars in people's pockets is crucial. Small things maybe for a massive budget here for the government, but things that actually will move and change things in people's lives. They will impact it.

I live in a part of the city where I'm watching the supermarket trucks coming back and forth all the time, rumbling up the roads. All of that fuel that's being used to transport food products to our supermarkets, to our corner stores, which we know are outrageously expensive and we need to get a handle on the cost of foods. The food insecurity is out of control.

Again, another measure, another piece of the pie that we try to tackle, but that's not what's on the table right now. What is on the table right now is the ability to create that bit of balance, that little compromise, that little change that could possibly make a difference in people's lives when they go to the gas tank and fill it up. But, again, many people can't afford to fill up their tank.

Well, lots of people can't afford to have a vehicle in the first place, but those who do, oftentimes, are going in now, like in the old

days, people squeezing the lever and going to \$5, \$10 and having to cut it off, because they can't afford it and scraping up all the coins or whatever that they can and such to make sure that they can transport their family members and others around.

It seems like a small measure, but it is a cost savings that will directly hit people in their pocketbooks. Any lowering of gas tax is a positive. This amendment provides a really great opportunity. It's an opportunity, a plan to have the lowest gas tax in the country. We know what's on the table. We're hearing that they're going to be tax cuts that are coming. We're hearing that they're going to come in the budget. We're all anxious to get our teeth into that budget and find out what's going to happen there but we also know that there are investments going into certain areas that, perhaps, are questionable as well too.

When we're talking about potential subsidies to multi-billion-dollar oil exploration companies, these are the things that really boil my blood. I think that people are suffering. Here's something very tangible that's on the table right now in terms of alleviating cost to people for fuel in their vehicles so that they can transport themselves and their families around and here's an opportunity to do a little compromise. Move it out of the standard status quo, which it is right now, because going with the original bill and supporting that, it's not going to change anything for anybody. It's just solidifying it. That's all it's doing.

This extra amendment, while it's not exactly everything that I would wish for, all the things that we, with the NDP, are certainly advocating for, and we'll continue to advocate for in terms of cost savings for people who are really below the poverty line, this is one step that we can do to try to alleviate that kind of pressure, that kind of tension on people and their families.

My final notes here is that, look, our task is to try to make people's lives better. We do have to try keep fiscal responsibility in the forefront of our minds, but we need to do whatever we can to make life more affordable for people on this province and whether or not they're living in the heart of the downtown of the City of St. John's or whether or not they're living on the Northern Peninsula or whatever corner in Labrador, people deserve to have cost savings.

With that, Chair, I thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Chair.

AN HON. MEMBER: What a Member.

P. PIKE: Thank you very much.

I just want to say what a pleasure it is to stand in this House this evening to talk about the amendment to this bill. I guess I'll start by saying that the Liberal government reduced tax by half in 2022; saving 8.05 cents per litre for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This was done in conjunction with everyone, with both sides of the House. This was done, we all voted for it and it was great.

It was great and it was one of those moments when you felt proud that we were in a financial crunch, people were having difficulty, the pandemic was on and we did it and we did it together. I'd like to see this happen the same way.

Each year, we maintain that tax. For the last four years, we have said yes, let's continue to do it and we would have done it, as well, over the next number of years. It was never our intent – what you proposed to make it permanent is good. I'm not saying anything

about that. But what I'm saying is we would have done it.

The Liberal Party realizes the significance of helping taxpayers, like you, when faced with high gas prices. When gas prices are impacted by factors that are outside of our control – that's what is happening here. It's outside of our control. There's really nothing we can do about it. Hopefully, it won't last long, but right now it's a reality.

Just imagine, when I was growing up, the world was much larger then and it's much smaller now due to technology and the TVs and things like. When I was growing up, until I was seven or eight years old, we didn't have a television.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. PIKE: Not that old.

But anyway, now something that's happening far away from us is having a direct impact on our tiny communities and our tiny province and our great country. It's amazing.

The legislation that you have brought forward is great. I have no issue with it. I think it's wonderful that we're going to continue it for however long that is, but all you're doing is just maintaining the cost that already exists, the reduction that already exists.

It's like I've heard so many people say in this hon. House, come March 31, people are not going to see a difference at the pumps. It's going to be the same as it always was. Some people have already said to me, wow, it's going to be a big reduction, the end of the month. We'll be okay. It will go down. No, it's not; it's remaining the same. That's fine. I'm glad that you're going to keep it at the same rate, because I was worried that you weren't.

Our caucus has introduced an amendment that reflects extraordinary times. We live in extraordinary times now. We really do. Our caucus has put something forward that will have lowered the tax to 6.5 cents. Now, 6.5 cents –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: – is not a big difference, but it is a difference. It makes a difference to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I remember I was talking to someone a while ago and they had received some monies. It was only about \$40 or whatever extra per month. I forget the full story, but this is the gist of it. But \$40 was a lot of money to them because I heard the lady say now I can get milk and juice for the kids. They don't like the powered stuff. That's what happens. That's what we do as a government. We try and make the lives of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians better.

When changes occur in fuel prices, it impacts everything – it impacts everything – not only at the pump, but in our grocery stores. The cost of transportation – well, gas itself, as the Member for Placentia West will be able to tell you as well, the gas down on the Burin Peninsula is more expensive than the gas in Goobies and then there's a difference here in St. John's. I pay more at the pumps on the Burin Peninsula than I do in here. So every cent matters.

Rural Newfoundland should not have to pay any more, and that's something we've always said down there. But if you look at the cost of transportation, you drive the Burin Peninsula Highway tomorrow you're going to meet 10 to 12 transport trucks going, always. That's our supply chain.

Our manufacturing, it has an impact on that. The fish plants in our area, the mining industry in our area – the price of gas impacts all of that. Business has two

options. One is to absorb it themselves, which will put them under; or the other is to pass it on to the consumer. That's something that, in most cases, it's passed on to the consumer. So it has an impact on every individual.

Again, when the price of gas goes up, it has a very negative impact on rural Newfoundland and Labrador. People in my community – the main hub in the community is in Marystown. You've got to go to Marystown for pretty well everything. There are no banks in my community. There's one store.

For pretty well all your services, you have to go, which is return, about a 60-kilometre run. There are no taxis either, by the way, in most of rural Newfoundland but if you were to get a taxi from Marystown back to St. Lawrence, the cost is set anywhere from \$50 to \$75. People can't afford that.

We have a lot of challenges but we, as a government, have a duty – that's why we're here – to make sure that all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are treated fairly. It's our duty. The cost of getting goods into the district is certainly multiplied the farther rural you live and the farther away from cities you are.

Before I finish – I only have a minute – I just want to also mention that it's very important, as well – and listen, don't take this the wrong way, anybody in the House at all, please. Churchill Falls costs are now mitigated by the provincial government.

AN HON. MEMBER: Muskrat Falls.

P. PIKE: I'm sorry, Muskrat Falls.

CHAIR: Excuse me, there's a point of order.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: I stand on a point of order. Article 60, paragraph 2, speeches in the

Committee of the Whole House must be strictly relevant to the item or clause under consideration. This is not a money bill.

CHAIR: I will take it under advisement and we'll make a rule. We'll take it away and report back to the House.

P. PIKE: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

Without rate mitigation, our lives would be much more difficult in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I get it when people say we weren't here. You weren't, but it's still costing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians a lot of money to live in this province and keep the light bills down.

We also have a duty, as well, to look at the high cost of home heating fuel for our residents. It's through the roof. I've got seniors that are paying \$1,100 or \$1,200 a month, living in my district, and they can't afford that anymore. They can't do it.

Anyway, the only other piece that I'd like to see that this government take on as well is the 10 per cent off electricity bills, which would help everybody so much.

Thank you so much, Chair. I see I don't have much time left.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Hi there, thank you.

Chair, I rise to speak –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Everything good? Because I thanked him?

CHAIR: No, it's good, carry on.

B. FORD: Good, we're very polite from Gander. I'm going to thank him, okay.

Thank you.

I rise today to speak in favour of this amendment to reduce the gas tax even further.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Since we met last week, I did take the opportunity to share some of my remarks that were made in this hon. House with followers and friends on Facebook and with my constituents and the news media as well, really since we've been having this discussion, did a lot of highlighting of this topic of what all of us are talking about on behalf of our constituents.

Back in the district, this past weekend, just to share with all of the hon. Members here, people are really paying attention to this. I mean, so much of what happens here is procedural. Sometimes it's not that interesting. It can be a little dry, a little dull. We're working through pieces of legislation. But when people start talking about the cost of living and taxes, people in the coffee shops, people out on the go at these events, they really wanted to stop and talk about it. They wanted to stop and talk about what they're tuning in to and what we're discussing and lowering the cost of gas, opportunities to lower taxes for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The sitting government, as we're reminded regularly in this House, ran on a campaign and some taglines – taglines that really resonated with people. Lower taxes was one of them. We know that resonated. It resonated because people are really feeling the pinch. We're all paying more. You're paying more. I'm paying more. The people are paying more. We're paying more everywhere, for everything, but for the sitting government, voting for this amendment, it's in their control. This is something that they

have control over. This is actually doable. This is something that can happen in the House of Assembly where we can say, it happened – it happened. We did it – we did it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: When the opportunity came up for this government to stand and say we had an opportunity to reduce taxes –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I need to hear the speaker.

B. FORD: – and we did it willingly, that's an opportunity. That's a good thing for this government to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: You should do it. It's the right thing to do.

I hear, as a new Member, as the sitting government reminds me often, they keep saying the people voted for us – the people voted for us. Well, do you know what? The families in my district, they are looking to their government. Whether it was a PC government or a Liberal government or an NDP government, people of this province are looking to their government to help them and to help with cost of living.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: The cost of gas impacts all demographics, and especially seniors on fixed incomes, but I'd really like to focus, this evening, my remarks for now on young families. The District of Gander, the population is growing. It's one of the few areas in Newfoundland and Labrador, outside of the Avalon, that's experiencing population growth.

Back in the district this past weekend, I had an opportunity to attend a Healthy Baby Club and at that Healthy Baby Club, the moms, the dads, they were talking about the high cost of living. They were talking about how much they appreciated the value that they were getting from the benefits of the Healthy Baby program like groceries, juice that was being provided, fruits and vegetables and items to help them be able to afford the necessities that they needed.

The other thing that I noticed a lot in the District of Gander is that many families travel into the community of Gander and that could be from Glenwood, Appleton, Benton or Gambo for opportunities for their children. Speaker, I know that in the House we have many hon. Members who have children, who have grandchildren and who know the benefits of getting their children involved with things like music lessons, theatre, recreational opportunities, opportunities like Kiwanis Music Festival.

Those are just some examples, and I have people in my district who have to make that travel for programs like that so that their children or grandchildren can benefit. Of course, the cost of gas, in traveling within my district, that hits families. The lower we can make gas for them, the easier it's going to be for them to help them access those opportunities for their children.

Chair, I also think about rotational workers who are in my region, my district, and people who travel and they're travelling to access transportation infrastructure. They're travelling in to the retail sector. Young families as well – just last week in the House, I raised a concern to the Minister of Health, about young families whose children have to access orthodontic procedures due to cleft lip and cleft palate situations and they, too, are driving for medical appointments for that necessary service.

All of the sport and recreation opportunities, again, just think all of the families across

Newfoundland and Labrador, and those of us as parents or grandparents have been there. So if you have a child whose ever been in hockey, gymnastics, swimming, any kind of sport and you think about the families, Chair, I need not remind the Members opposite who live in the western side of our province or all the way up in the Big Land about the cost associated with getting to a lot of provincial tournaments that are hosted out here on the Avalon because of the infrastructure that's provided. Moving children and all of those volunteers and the coaches and officials around, we know that's hard on the pocketbook and that families are then having to budget. I'm always concerned, as someone who has worked in community and in municipal government, about access to sport and recreation.

I really hope that the minister whose responsible for sport and recreation is listening to comments like this in the House so that the minister, Chair, can hear from people across this province to know how we do not want sport and recreation that is only for the elite. That only people who are well to do can afford to put their –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

B. FORD: – children in sport and to travel with them across the province.

So you know, Chair, I'm going to quote now from the Speech from the Throne. This is going to sound very familiar to the Members opposite, it was read out not that long ago and I hope they have not forgotten. I quote: "This Cabinet reflects a simple principle: that public service is a privilege, and that every decision must be grounded in a clear question – will this help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?"

"Ministers have been directed to focus on results, not rhetoric. They have been tasked

with working collaboratively, acting with integrity, transparency and accountability, and delivering on the commitments that earned the trust of the people of this province.”

Chair, in the context of this gas tax reduction amendment, will this amendment help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? Yes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Is our amendment focusing on results, not rhetoric? Yes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Is this working collaboratively? Yes, it is. Will this help you deliver on your promise of lower taxes for all of us? Yes, it will.

Mr. Chair, I can't imagine, based on this and this bold commitment from the hon. Members opposite, how the sitting government could possibly vote against it. I implore each of you to vote in favour of our amendment.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: My goodness, I tell you, it's a hard act to follow. the Member for Gander might be new, but she's found her footing and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: – she's a very good voice for the people that she represents.

Chair, happy to stand in my place and be the voice for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair on Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue

Administration Act No. 2. For those watching from home, I'm sure the Linthornes from Bonavista might be watching again tonight.

This bill, Bill 5 that was brought forward, is a bill that would amend the *Revenue Administration Act* to maintain the reduction of the gas tax on certain grades of gasoline by seven cents per litre. That's something that the Liberal government started doing in budget '22, '23, '24, '25 and now we're happy to see the current government continue with what's been in place because we know the burden of the increased taxes to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Somebody recently said to me, right across the country, there are all kinds of reasons cost of living is at an all-time high. So we're happy to see that. But as we've already said in this hon. House, from March 31 to April 1, are people going to see a change at the gas pumps, are they going to wake up and there's going to be a big break? No, they're not. It's status quo.

That is why we put forward an amendment. I'm speaking to the amendment tonight that's on the floor, Chair, an amendment that would see the gas tax go a little bit further down to 6.5 cents. That would give people a real break, Chair. It would be a noticeable difference.

When the amendment was put forward, it was ruled in order and I understand that because I used to sit in your chair and the amendment that we brought forward in no way changes the intent of what the government had brought forward earlier.

We've been hearing different speakers tonight talk about the impact of the higher taxes, the impact of the cost of living and everyone in this House – I would love to see everyone on their feet tonight, every MHA here, your job is to be voice for your people. You have a window in time – four-year term

generally – to be a voice for the people you represent, to advocate so that what you do can make life better. If you're talking to your constituents – and I would wish that every MHA here would be calling back their constituents. I hear a lot about some MHAs think that's their constituency assistant's job, but it's not. We should be talking to our MHAs, and I'm sharing tonight some of the things that I have heard.

I'm going to speak about Labrador. It's a very big land, large land mass; it's a small population and everything there is an additional struggle. The Member for Burin - Grand Bank talked about a lot of struggles. Somebody talked about struggles on the West Coast, but we're in a whole league of our own when we come to Labrador.

I know other Members here in this House, from Labrador, have got up many times and talked about the higher cost in Labrador. Let's put the freight boat back in Lewisporte because that's going to help with the cost of the people on the North Coast. The food Market Basket Measure, we know, got the cost of food, the cost of living, everything is higher in Labrador. We face higher fuel prices, longer travel distances and fewer transportation alternatives.

Even our food supply, Chair, that comes across the Gulf, comes into Port aux Basques, comes all the way across the Island to Bay Roberts, gets sorted, comes all the way back across the Island, hits the ferry in St. Barbe and then it's about another 1,000 kilometres that it travels to Goose Bay. Then it gets on a boat and it goes north all the way up to Nain.

So it is a big land, it's a lot of travel and the taxes on the fuel, we are disproportionately impacted in Labrador. That's what I hear from my folks all the time, the people who work for, the people who have hired me. Fuel in Labrador is always more expensive than what is on the Island. That's due to long supply chains, fewer suppliers.

We actually have big variances in the cost of fuel in different parts of Labrador, even in my district. I fought super hard for the PUB to do a review. It took about three years to get it. In my District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, in that small district, there used to be a five-cent difference from Lodge Bay to Red Bay, 78 kilometres.

So what was happening was people in Lodge Bay, who could afford, who had the wherewithal to take several drums and put in their pickup truck, they could go to Red Bay and get a break but Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe who was on the pension, who had to walk across the road with their can, they could only get so much at a time. Once again, we see the lower income being impacted.

I would encourage – you know, we've seen multiple increases in the price of gas over the last month – if you do a quick google, it will show you week over week over week how high gas has been going up. If I was to be a betting person, I would say before we're done here tonight, if we go until midnight before we're done, we will see that the gas is going to go up substantially again tonight. We know that \$1 change in US oil prices is about a \$30-million change to the Treasury. We talked about, in the House, giving the power to the Finance Minister so that when the price of oil goes up, they could give the people of Newfoundland and Labrador a break.

Chair, it impacts everybody. It impacts everything. One of the things that I did when I was the minister for Labrador, I pushed super hard to get more money for Sport Travel Subsidy. It's really sad when you want to give kids a fighting chance – we're just coming off the Labrador Winter Games and it's been absolutely beautiful to see the way Labrador came together, to see the way that the games have become more skilled and so many positive things. We want those children to have a chance to get

out and participate provincially. So we increased the subsidy.

The Labrador Winter Games received about \$500,000 for many, many years. When I was the minister, one of the things I heard was I'm driving 400 kilometres, 500 kilometres, 600, 700 kilometres. It's costing me way more. It's not enough money now. We secured an extra \$250,000 for this games and again and again, I heard people say thank you.

One man came up to me, down on Otter Creek, the other day – it was about minus 35 in the morning there, as the dogs were heading out. He said it's costing me \$140 in gas. I'm buying shavings for my dogs to lay on at night. I have to buy food while we're here in Goose Bay. The money stayed the same forever. You're going to lose the tradition and culture in Labrador because if we don't put more money in, we don't help with those things, we're not going to be able to afford to do it.

Tourism was talked about a lot. We're really seeing an increase in tourism in the district. We talked to a hotel owner recently and we had over 200 tour buses. One of the things that we do struggle with is we have one airline. I met the Minister of Tourism. Up to that point in time, she hadn't met with the one airline and I really hope she has sat down with the one airline by now. I did – I just did again recently. It's our job to be a voice and to advocate for the people who hire us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: So the high cost in airfare, it's all having a big impact on the people who we work for.

Home heat, we're not eligible. In our coastal communities, we're not eligible for a home heating rebate because we're on diesel-generating stations, which is costing us more. Chair, we hear it every time we go

into the seniors' homes – and I will say a lot of times, when they're talking about the cost of living, sometimes people on the other side say we're the ones who care. Well, I can tell you that every single one on this side cares and wants to make life better for the seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The delivery of groceries, essential food, a higher gas tax increases transportation costs for businesses. Well, my family is in business, have been in business for about 75 years and it's frustrating for them when they go to places like Walmart and can buy it right off the shelf cheaper than what they're getting it for in wholesale on the Coast of Labrador. It's very difficult to pay for groceries and to fill up your vehicle where everything is disproportionately more. It is especially painful in remote communities where goods are already expensive.

The bottom line, Chair – I hope I get more time tonight because I didn't even dent what I had here – is that Labrador residents are disproportionately affected by fuel costs due to geography, limited infrastructure and higher baseline prices.

When the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador declines to support a lower gas tax, it effectively locks in a heavier financial burden for people who already pay more and people who have fewer alternatives. I encourage the government today, you wanted lower taxes for all of us, we've got a great amendment on the floor, we want you to vote for us and go that one little bit further, the price of fuel is going up every night and it will help all of us in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Chair.

I really appreciate the opportunity to get on my feet and speak in this House of Assembly. I think the camaraderie that we saw this afternoon, with respect to the bill that just passed, has continued into this evening. It's been pretty good. The MHA for Lake Melville was clapping and standing on his feet for the previous speaker. I was very excited to see that. It warms the heart as he stands up and claps for what our Member from Gander was doing today and speaking about.

One of the things we're here to talk about is the amendment to lowering the gas tax bill that was brought forward by the government. I will say thank you to the government for bringing forward the legislation to maintain the Liberal tax cut that was done a number of years ago. We saw, a number of years ago, when we made that tax cut, it was done based on the fuel prices of the day.

We stood in this House and I think everyone in the House of Assembly was supportive of that. I think, Mr. Chair, you were on the other side of the House when that happened and I think everyone was in favour of that. I'm very excited that we get the opportunity to do a little more.

The campaigning on lower taxes, better health care and safer communities, it's great taglines but this is where you put, as they say, words into action. This is exactly what we're trying to do here today. I hope that everyone in this hon. House will support this. It's a small measure that will help people. I think the cost for the measure is somewhere in the vicinity of about \$16 million. We've far eclipsed that into the provincial Treasury based on what has happened.

Since January 19, a barrel of oil, Brent crude, was \$66.99 per barrel US. We budgeted, as a government, pre this government, around that number, around 60-some-odd in August. That was continued

in the fall update that was done by the current Finance Minister. That was continued. As we sit in this hon. House, as of March 19, which is the numbers I have, that same barrel of oil is now \$106.67 a barrel, today.

AN HON. MEMBER: Forty dollars.

B. DAVIS: Right. That's a 37 per cent increase over what it was in your own fiscal update. If we equate that, as the hon. Member before spoke about each dollar of an increase in the barrel of oil – and I know the Finance Minister is feverishly writing notes because I know he always listens to the people on this side of the House and all people, I am going to assure. He's making notes because I'm sure he's going to go and ask how much they've taken in, and I know that's not an easy answer. It's not an easy answer. But what we've always used is between \$20 million or \$30 million per \$1 increase in the barrel of oil over the fiscal year.

I think everyone in this House wants the conflict in the Middle East to end and hopefully gas prices will stabilize and lower. That's what we all hope. But for the last two months now, gas prices have been higher than what was even budgeted, so there is a windfall – and that may not be the right term. I'll let the Finance Minister stand on his feet and correct me on the term “windfall” or what he would call the increase in the provincial Treasury, but there is an increase, there's no doubt. It's quite more significant than \$16 million. This is a very, very modest increase and putting money back into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Campaigning on lower taxes, this is a prime opportunity on how to do it.

I look forward to the Finance Minister bringing forward the budget in the very near future, with more tax cuts that they promised and better health care and safer communities, which is all important. But I

want to take a few moments of my time – and I’m going to get ample opportunity tonight, I’m sure, to stand on my feet and talk about some of the things in my district or across this province that are really important.

Every one of us in this House have a small business in their communities – every one of us. I would say it’s the heart of the economy; it’s the driver of our economy in this province. Whether it’s a corner store or a hardware store or local contractor or coffee shop, we all know that margins are tight. We all know that. Now, for many of those business owners, they’re budgeting. This is a prime opportunity – I’m very thankful and let me be very clear, I think everyone on this side of the House is very thankful that the Conservative government is continuing the work that we put in place with maintaining that 7.5 cent a litre reduction.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: I’m very excited about that. I know everyone over here is. I know my colleagues in the NDP are very excited about that and I hope you’re excited that you’re doing that. That’s excellent.

What we’re asking is a little more. Do a little more that’s going to help those individuals across our province, that have had to tighten their belt a little bit more because of these changes in the global equipment, the global state of the world.

So what I’d suggest it is a perfect opportunity for us to do that. But if we do not approve this amendment, all we’re doing is as a military person would say, like our Sergeant-at-Arms, you’re just marking time – you’re just marking time.

When we approve this, whenever it happens, you are just giving people the exact same situation they are in today – the

exact same situation; no worse but, definitely, no better.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) a little bit because we budgeted for it.

B. DAVIS: That’s excellent. Thank you.

You’ll get the opportunity to speak right after me. I hope. I’d love to hear what you’ve got to say. It’s always thought-provoking and I really appreciate hearing it.

The burden of fuel costs on small business is real. Newfoundland and Labrador consistently ranks among the most expensive provinces in Canada for fuel. That’s a fact. We do, and I heard the Premier stand on his feet, earlier in this debate, saying that we have the lowest tax on fuel in the country. True – true – and I’m excited about that. So let’s do a little better. I know the Finance Minister is agreeing with me on the fact that we have the lowest. Let’s make it a little lower.

Our geographic situation in this province makes it more difficult than most other provinces. The MHA for Lake Melville will know this is quite real. He has a very big area. I come from a smaller district in our province and the Member for Torngat Mountains and the Member for Humber - Gros Morne, all of those areas are far bigger than mine. This change is even bigger for those individuals.

Every good that we get in our province from coast to coast to coast comes in via trucks or boats, some by plane, of course. I would be remiss if I didn’t say that all we’re asking for is a reduction in the gas tax for fuel, propane, diesel, marine fuel – all of which is going to be beneficial to each and every one of our constituents in this House.

The hon. Member before me spoke about, I guess, ministerial letters or direction from the Premier is the blue book. Make sure that every decision that you make, is it going to

benefit your residents? Everyone in this House can say, yes, to this amendment. So I urge each and every person in this House to vote that way. This is not hard.

I have a couple of seconds left. I was listening to the media the other day and I had the pleasure of hearing Chris Howlett, the owner of Akita Equipment. I'm sure people in this hon. House know him. He's out there and he's a very strong advocate for reducing fuel costs, the cost of business. He's big in helping move goods around our province.

He had said that in the short term, like in a day or two of an increase for gas – I thought it was very honest and very good – it impacts his bottom line but it doesn't impact the price of goods that he carries because it's a short-term measure.

But, as this continues on, we're into a number of weeks now, we're into actually two months where oil has gone up which gas is climbing every day. So it affects his business which, in turn, affects each and every person that receives goods off his trucks.

I think all of us in this hon. House should look at what this amendment is trying to accomplish. It's a small measure that will help individuals across our province, everyone who uses those fuels that we listed earlier. I encourage everyone in this hon. House, you get the opportunity to vote the way you campaigned on to say lower taxes and I encourage them to do that. I look forward to getting to speak again a little bit later.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

It's a privilege to speak, again, to this amendment. As my colleagues have said, the government campaigned on lower taxes. With the gas tax bill – I'll be honest, I didn't think it was going to be in order but I was certainly pleased and I think you could hear it in my voice when we did find out that it was in order, so that was excellent. I just kind of made assumptions but that was excellent.

Chair, I do have to say before we put in the amendment, we put a lot of careful thought into exactly what the amendment would be. I'll be honest, I wanted it to be a realistic, small change – not a drastic, not a ridiculous amendment. I wanted it to be a reasonable amendment that the government could get behind.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: So as everybody knows, what the amendment is, it's to take a cent a litre off regular gasoline –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I can't hear the speaker.

S. STOODLEY: Take one cent off a litre of diesel, take one cent off a litre of marine fuel. No change to the price of aviation fuel and then to take three cents off a litre of propane. We haven't really talked about that so I wanted to give some context to that for anyone who is interested, if anyone is listening, Chair.

Just to give some additional context as to why we went with the three cents off propane. Propane is much smaller than the other amounts of fuels, so there is less fuel sold. If you look at page 19 of the Public Utilities Board's report of the review of gas prices for the Island of Newfoundland and

Labrador, that's publicly available on the Public Utility Board website: "Sales of propane are subject to maximum price regulation only when the fuel is delivered to a customer's residence and used primarily for space heating."

What's what we're talking about, propane. We are not talking about commercial use of propane. We're talking about propane used in people's houses, primarily for space heating. So that's from the Public Utilities Board report on the review of gas price on the Island on page 16.

Because the volume of propane sold is much smaller, it would have a much smaller impact on the Treasury, we went with a bit more for propane. By having a lower amount for propane, by three cents, we're giving relief directly to people who use propane for space heating.

I just want to give that context to Members. We really wanted it to be a reasonable amendment that they could get on board with and also that the money they've already made – we don't know what's going to happen next year and, as colleagues have said, we really hope that gas prices come back down and we can come back here and change it any time. Every year, we've been changing this act. We added the sunset clause and, as my colleagues have said, I commend the government for removing the sunset clause now, but we do think it can be a little lower. It's very reasonable to be a little lower.

This is not a ridiculous amendment, and we anticipate it would have about a \$16-million impact to the Treasury, plus a little bit more for HST. We don't have all the financial experts. So if the government has better estimates, then I certainly welcome that information because they have the hundreds of accountants and tax lawyers and finance experts and we just have, kind of, basic rudimentary math that we put together. If there is any additional

information that anyone wants to throw into the discussion, we certainly welcome that.

A few other things I wanted to chat about. Today, as I've been speaking, I didn't keep my little piece of paper where every time I spoke the price of a barrel of oil was significantly higher. So today, the maximum price on the Avalon is \$178.1. Of that, 40.73 cents go to taxes, of which now we're talking about this amendment. This is about the taxes. The retail markup is 14.28 cents. The wholesale markup is 15.65 cents. The carbon price adjustment is 5.40 cents. The benchmark price is \$102.06.

That is the number that keeps changing as the price of Brent crude goes up and down, it is the benchmark price that changes. In order for the retail markup and the wholesale markup amount to change, retailers and wholesalers have to apply to the Public Utilities Board for an increase in that amount. They do grant it sometimes.

What we're talking about now is the tax amount and, obviously, depending on if this amendment passes, that number would go down as of next week.

I do want to talk about that and we do see gas prices are incredibly volatile. The interruption formula is used by the Public Utilities Board very often. I want to give anyone watching some context and additional information about that. So the key rule for the Public Utilities Board is if the benchmark price goes up and down between six and eight cents, in a seven-day period, the Public Utilities Board can intervene and reset prices immediately.

There is a formula, but they use a variety of factors: how volatile the markets are, how volatile the numbers are, and this is explained on the website. They've made changes to the regulations, I think, a year ago because this House in the *Petroleum Products Act* changes, I believe it was 2023, we gave the Public Utilities Board more

power to be more flexible. So that every time a small element changed, we didn't have to come back to the House and make changes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: We know the interruption formula gets used more and more as gas prices are more and more volatile.

Sorry, I apologize, when I double-checked, in terms of now the regular price of gas, the Public Utilities Board tracks the benchmark prices over a seven-day rolling average. It was a seven-day rolling average but last year, the Public Utilities Board changed it to five days. They thought that that was more accurate, so over a five-day rolling average, so they keep that average and they use that to change the price of gas when it changes at the pumps, Chair.

This is not trickery. I know we've previously had experts who call in on the radio shows and talk about what's going to happen with gas prices. It's all outlined in the regulations. You can have a spreadsheet; you can work out what the change may or may not be. We don't know exactly what the Public Utilities Board is going to do because the key rule is if the benchmark changes six to eight cents over a seven-day period, they can intervene. They don't always intervene, but there is discretion of the Public Utilities Board of when they can and cannot intervene, and they have intervened.

When we look at the change in extraordinary adjustments, between 2005 and 2008, the PUB only made one extraordinary adjustment and that was in response to market volatility associated with hurricanes, Chair. Then, in 2020, there was one extraordinary adjustment and that was related to the COVID-19 pandemic. But recently, we've seen many, many extraordinary adjustments and I believe

within the month of March, there were four extraordinary adjustments by the Public Utilities Board.

Gas prices are becoming more and more volatile. It's incredibly complicated but incredibly important. I also wanted to give this House information on the gas price review. In this House, in this Legislature, I believe it was 2003 we changed the *Petroleum Products Act* to direct the Public Utilities Board to do a review of gas prices. There were three phases to that report. This is all available on the Public Utilities Board website.

Phase I was done by a company called Kalibrate and their job was to identify what issues should be in scope for the review. Phases II and III were done by a company called R Cube Economic Consulting, and those are all on the Public Utilities Board website. Phase II was the supply dynamics, the pricing benchmarks and wholesale markups and Phase III was the retail markups.

The Public Utilities Board asked retailers and wholesalers for inputs. They said, how much does it cost you to deliver gas from where your storage facility is to Burgeo? How much does it cost to deliver to Fogo? How much does it cost to deliver to Costco in St. John's?

So the industry had to submit inputs, which the Public Utilities Board then used to calculate what the wholesale markup should be. They asked retailers, how much does it cost you to sell a litre of gas or a litre of diesel and pump it into a car? How much does that cost you? The retailers had to provide receipts for actual costs and the Public Utilities Board used those costs to come up with the retail markup.

I do think it's important to know that, as a result of the petroleum products review, the wholesale markups stayed the same. It did not change, but the retail markup went up

significantly. Retailers, gas stations in Newfoundland and Labrador got a big bump in the amount of money that they made because they were able to show the Public Utilities Board that their costs went up significantly. So that's a significant change that happened.

I just a few more minutes left. The Public Utilities Board has all this information on their website. There is a separate report for Labrador, a separate report for Newfoundland and Labrador and Labrador, it's kind of a unique model in some parts of Labrador. Because the boat comes in full of fuel and the price you pay is based on the price that they bought the fuel, literally, on the boat. So the price changes, again, when the next boat comes in.

Sometimes it's really good and sometimes, unfortunately, it's really bad because if prices go down or up after the boat comes, they're kind of stuck with whatever that price was until all that petroleum products are used up.

There is so much to talk about gas prices, but I encourage the government to support our very reasonable amendment.

CHAIR: I remind the Member that her time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

AN HON. MEMBER: And Seniors.

C. PARDY: Seniors.

I just want to address, just in a few short minutes, some of the inaccuracies that were just expressed here. I just want to bring to the viewers' attention and the House's attention that I'm not sure if the hon.

Members from across the way know the amendment that they have put forth.

The Member for Mount Scio, I was listening here, and was the fact she had referenced that they really wanted to increase the propane usage because it was going to help those people at home who burn fuel as a heating source in their homes.

Well, let me correct and I stand to correct, for those viewers at home and the Opposition who have voted for the amendment, is that it does not apply to home heating fuel. It is combustion, anything that would be in a combustion engine. If we're looking at the *Revenue Administration Act*, we're looking at (inaudible) would tell you that everything in this act is for combustion engine usage.

If you really wanted to amend that, we're talking about something different. So here we are debating and we're sitting here and the Member for Mount Scio had stated that this is why we've added three cents on. What it applies to are propane forklifts which is very important. Propane forklifts would be the best example I can provide for you, but our understanding it is not the home heating fuel.

I would say homework needed to be done on your amendment, because I really wasn't sure what you were looking at, why three cents for propane combustion engines and not home heating. I just wanted, for the viewers at home, to stand and correct that tonight and I'm not sure for those people voting for the amendment, you probably need to go back and check on your amendment to make sure it is what you would think it to be.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

The Member does have all the expertise of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador absolutely. I'd be happy to send the Member page 19 of the Public Utilities report in terms of regulated gas prices and the propane amount that is regulated of which taxes applied, on page 19 of the Public Utilities report on the Island's amount for Newfoundland and Labrador, says – and I quote – sales of propane subject to regulations only when the fuel is delivered to a customer's residence and used primarily for space heating. So I'd be happy to send that to the Members.

If the government would like to make an amendment, I believe we would seriously consider that. If they want to make the changes of propane to one cent, then I'd recommend that my caucus support that as well.

Thank you very much, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak. With all due respect to the Finance Minister, there are probably very few people in the District of Conception Bay East - Bell Island who are worried, this evening, about propane forklifts, but there are many, many thousands of people who are worried about the price of gas.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: I would also like to say –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

AN HON. MEMBER: It's not ours. It's yours.

F. HUTTON: It is because we want to lower the tax. You don't.

You'll get a chance to speak if you want to speak but for now, just let me speak, please. I have the floor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

F. HUTTON: By the way, when it comes to reading bills and amendments, you may want to share that with some of your caucus as well, so they're up to speed when they come to the floor to present bills.

What I would like to say is a couple of days ago, the Finance Minister –

AN HON. MEMBER: You done a great job b'ys.

F. HUTTON: Sure.

CHAIR: Order, please!

F. HUTTON: How about the misguided project of Muskrat Falls? I'll table that. I'll table that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

F. HUTTON: A couple of days ago, the Finance Minister, when he was speaking about this bill, he referenced the fact – and I know that in the cut and thrust of Question Period things can get heated. The Finance Minister referenced the fact that he hopes that we don't hope that the war, which is ongoing now in Iran, continues so that we could benefit. Of course, we don't. I know he knows that. Nobody knows, at this point in time, when that war will end in Iran – nobody.

I want to talk a little bit about how, in reference to that, when you think about last

month how we just marked the fourth anniversary of the war in Ukraine and what that did to the economy. The world has become a very small place, not just because of technology –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

F. HUTTON: Chair, I would appreciate it if you would step in.

CHAIR: Order, please!

During this speaker, I've had to ask order three or four times. The floor is being offered to the Conception Bay East - Bell Island Member. I would like to hear the Member speak, please.

Thank you.

F. HUTTON: Thank you, I appreciate that.

What I was trying to say and there is relevance here to what is going on in our own province now. The war in Ukraine, the war in Iran, events that are happening in the United States, of which we have control over and nobody could predict from one minute to the next what somebody down there is going to do on any given day with a tweet that could impact the price of oil or the price of anything, the stock markets whatever, we live in, once again, unprecedented times. I'm unfortunately having to say that.

We do live in a small world. We live in a very small world, but we live in a big province and it's unusual that because of events that are having in the Strait of Hormuz how that could impact things that are happening on the Bell Island tickle, the place that I represent, in Conception Bay East - Bell Island and every district in this province.

Things that happen on a daily basis – I listened to VOCM the other morning and one of their top stories was, how what is

happening in the Strait of Hormuz and how 20 million barrels of oil are not getting through and how that's impacting the price of gas, at the three stations in my district. In Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and on Bell Island, there are three gas stations. Everybody needs gas to get to where they're going. There is no public transit. We have to use our own vehicles. We have to use our own trucks and cars.

The Energy Minister talked the other day about benefits agreements, and these are the things that bring in extra revenue to Newfoundland and Labrador. They employ people; they build projects, be it an oil project or any kind of large construction project, these are the projects that come in.

There was a reference to how, over the last 10 years, there wasn't one benefits agreement brought in. Now, I've only been in this House for just over two years, and I've worked in government for three years prior to that, in the Premier's office. I want to talk about, just in the last five years or 5½ years, some of the benefits agreements that have come to this province.

I'm going to start with one back in 2020, when, just a few months after Premier Furey took over the eighth floor and there were a couple of thousand people who protested on the steps of Confederation Building because the price of oil was tanking, their jobs were in jeopardy, West White Rose was shut down, Terra Nova was shut down and the benefits agreement we brought to the table was \$320 million to infuse into the oil industry in Newfoundland and Labrador to keep those projects going, to make sure that West White Rose was continued and finished and towed out to sea so that it can continue to develop and extract oil and so that the Terra Nova FPSO would be brought back out.

It was a big benefits agreement for all of Newfoundland and Labrador and the provincial coffers benefited from it. The

benefits were measurable for those thousands of people who work in industry.

I want to talk about a \$5.2-billion benefits agreement we brought for rate mitigation. Forget about why we had to do it. The fact is, you have to do it, and the Finance Minister is currently facing that situation right now, that money that he could have to lower a tax. He could lower the tax by maybe 20 cents a litre. I haven't done the math. He will, but you could with that money. These are benefits agreements that were brought in.

I want to talk about the biggest benefit agreement of all that we brought to the table. which was worth \$227 billion over 50 years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: A benefits agreement that could be lifechanging for many, many people. The people in my District of Conception Bay East - Bell Island, they want to see those benefits. They want to see tax reductions. It's why we reduced the auto renewal by half. It's why we took tax off home insurance. It's why we increased the Seniors' Benefit by 15 per cent and indexed it. It's why we did all these other things, the nutritional tax for children. The Finance Minister knows.

CHAIR: I ask the Member to bring it back to the gas tax and the bill that we're discussing.

F. HUTTON: It's all related to it. It's relevant because without the money to do it, you can't but they've got the money. They've got the —

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

F. HUTTON: I'm not questioning the Chair at all. It's germane to it.

Stand up and talk if you want to talk or you're not allowed to intervene. You've been told not to intervene, I imagine. All of this is germane to it because if you can have more income, you can give the people of Newfoundland and Labrador a benefit, a lower tax, that's the benefit. What the initial proposal from the provincial government right now, the PC government, is to keep it the same. There is no change. Nobody will benefit in any way.

Now that there is a possibility of extra revenue because of the increased oil prices and the revenue that is coming as a result of it, albeit for bad reasons, we now have an opportunity to do what we did earlier today and also help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador by reducing the tax further. If the war ends, and please God it will, we can come back in here and change it again. We will understand that because we've been over there as well, some of us, and we understand how this works.

There isn't an endless stream of money, but right now there is an ability to give people a break at the pumps. Everybody in my district has to operate a car to get their kids to school, to get themselves to work. They have to use the vehicle. It is a way to instantly give them some relief, financially.

It might only be \$4 or \$5 every time they fill up their car, but that's \$4 or \$5 they can spend on something else: a carton of milk or some juice, as one of my colleagues said earlier. It's an opportunity for us to do something instantly. The folks who ran on the other side heard the same things we heard when we were at the doors. They are hurting, financially, and this is an opportunity to do it. We reduced the tax four years ago in 2022. We reduced it in '23, '24, '25 and we would have done it this year. Now they have the opportunity to do it.

So I'm imploring to them, please, look at this as a possibility of voting for the amendment which we have put forward, because what

you're doing is keeping the same as it's been for the last four years. It's not going to change. April 1 it won't change. It won't change at all.

It won't change for your constituents either but it will change if you vote for this amendment and bring the tax lower. We're willing to work with it, in the future, but for now, give the people of Newfoundland and Labrador what you promised: lower taxes. You can do it tonight and we'll agree with you.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Thank you, Chair.

I'm here and happy to rise tonight in this hon. House to speak to the *Revenue Administration Act*. In my District of St. John's West, I see how many residents are feeling the added pressures of the rising cost of living, the cost of gas.

While we often speak in this House about broad economic issues, the reality of the legislation we debate here is affecting our constituents day to day. Affordability is just not a policy talking point; it's a common concern that echoes across every community in this province. Families, workers, students, seniors and small businesses, they're all watching their budgets now more than ever. Whether it's a young family in their first home or a senior who has lived in the same house for 50 years, the message I hear is consistent, every single dollar matters now more than ever.

Chair, the residents of St. John's West are facing a variety of financial pressures. They're just not dealing with one bill; they're dealing with the rising grocery prices that

make the weekly shopping a source of worry. They're seeing high housing costs in rent that consume a larger portion of their take-home pay. They're facing increased utility bills to keep their homes warm and lite and, on top of all these costs, almost the inescapable cost of transportation.

People may assume that because we have a bus system in St. John's that fuel is an avoidable expense, but it's simply not the case. In an urban area like mine, fuel costs remain a major, non-negotiable part of household budgets.

The people of my district rely on their vehicles every single day. They rely on them to commute to work, so they can provide for their families; to get their children to school on time or to activities that keep our youth healthy and engaged; to run simple errands, from the pharmacy to the hardware store; and perhaps, most importantly, they rely on them to access health care services, appointments that cannot be missed and then that often requires a vehicle to get there in a timely manner.

We need to be honest about our transit infrastructure. While some public transit options exist in the metro area, the reality is that many people still rely heavily on their personal vehicles to get around the city efficiently.

When families in St. John's West are balancing rent, mortgages, groceries, child care, even a small sudden change in fuel prices can completely disrupt their monthly planning.

I've heard from several constituents in my district recently who are concerned about the rising cost of living, every dollar matters, especially for a working parent I've heard from recently who has to carefully plan everything to keep their family going. One constituent recently told me that between dropping off her children at school, before

making her 8:30 a.m. shift, she sees buses pass by, but the public transit routes simply aren't a viable option for a mother trying to navigate multiple stops and strict school bell times.

For her family, fuel is not a luxury; it is as essential as bread or milk. The rising cost of gas has turned this family's planning into another source of worry. Every time she pulls up to the pump, she thinks about the other inescapable costs a family faces. The true weight of these costs hits home when she has to drive her kids to hockey practice or to a health care appointment – things that cannot be missed and that require a vehicle.

In these moments, she isn't thinking about broad economic policy; she's thinking about her family's stability. When she hears about legislation that aims to keep fuel prices lower, it seems like a small weight has been lifted off her shoulders. To families like my constituents, that means one less disruption to her monthly budget, allowing them to focus less on the price at the pump and more on the children in her back seat.

This legislation recognizes that, for many households, managing expenses has become an increasingly difficult challenge. By supporting this amendment, we are voting for stability. We're voting to ensure that at least one part of their monthly budget remains predictable. In districts like mine, where residents are working hard and doing their absolute best to manage these rising costs, that predictability is incredibly important.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

It's certainly a pleasure, as always, to rise and represent the good people of Burgeo - La Poile and speak to the amendment that is before us here today, that was introduced by my colleague, the Member for Mount Scio.

Seeing we're talking about the amendment; I figured it was a good time to actually reiterate the amendment so that people listening at home on the broadcast can understand exactly what we're talking about.

The amendment is to section 51 of the bill, would then read as follows: a person who acquires gasoline at a retail sale in the province shall pay to the Crown at the time of sale (a) on propane fuel grade of gasoline, a tax of 0.04 per litre; (b) on gasoline for the operation of sea-going vessels or boats, other than pleasure craft, a tax of 0.025 per litre; (c) on diesel fuel grade of gasoline, a tax of 0.085 per litre; (d) on gasoline delivered for consumption for use in an aircraft, a tax of 0.025 per litre; (e) on all other grades of gasoline, a tax of 0.065 per litre.

So this is the amendment we are currently discussing here in the House of Assembly. Chair, as in most times that I rise in this House, I like to talk about the perspective of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, which I represent many of those communities. Especially, it's also a privilege to serve as critic for Rural Development, which I know certainly plays an important part of our province.

With this amendment, Chair, the bill talks about maintaining, but with this amendment we're actually offering a chance for real chance to the fuel taxation – reductions that will be felt directly by residents, businesses and essential services across the province. I know that the people of Burgeo - La Poile certainly do appreciate the opportunity to see the taxation go down.

As I've mentioned, a lot of times and I always talk about the communities that I represent, but fuel is not a discretionary use for these people, a discretionary purchase. You know, it's absolutely a necessity. They have to travel long distances for all kinds of services, whether that's travel for a medical appointment and we talked about small businesses, trying to maintain small businesses, keeping them viable.

Whether we talk about our tourism operators, we're getting into that season now where our summer tourism season is going to peak up. These costs are significantly important to small- and medium-sized businesses because it factors into how they operate and how they are going to thrive in a season. They want to see those changes happen so that their businesses can continue to grow and continue to operate.

I heard Members mention workers that commute for seasonal rotational employment. The Member for Gander mentioned that. I know a lot of people in my area especially who work on the Great Lakes, who travel back and forth to Deer Lake all the time. They get a flight to Ontario to go back to work. I mean those are significant costs to families across Newfoundland and Labrador and in my district, which most of those people have young kids at home that have a lot of activities to go to, so costs are certainly important to family households all the time, so this is something for them to consider as well.

Chair, we're back to the reduction that we're seeing, yes, especially on fuel for most residents in their vehicles. I mean this will have a significant impact on them. Just a small change will make a significant impact to them in their lives.

We also talk about having predictable transportation planning for ferry services. As I've previously mentioned again, I have

many ferries in my district, communities that relay on these services to get back and forth to where they live and go to different communities and places in the province, where they need to get their services and access medical appointments. So they're looking for reliability on that end. That plays an important part as well.

Then we talk about one of the fuel taxes, especially, is the marine fuel tax side of things, and that hasn't been particularly brought up a lot here during this debate. I think about the fish harvesters and the tour boat operators, conservation activities. It's all an input cost to these businesses and these folks that operate in these businesses. So margins can be tight and the seasons are definitely short for the people. Having that reliability, having those cost savings for them is certainly important, as well.

It takes in a factor to the harvesters that we talk about. Fuel plays a significant part in their business and their operations. So lowering those taxes for people and the operators and the harvesters is certainly a significant opportunity for us in this House.

I think about the diesel reductions and how diesel is a part of rural central services. We talk about ambulances – ambulances have to travel from Port aux Basques to Corner Brook or Deer Lake or other areas to take folks to, probably, get an air ambulance to here. Those are costs to those people. I think about our fire departments. A lot of volunteer fire departments, especially throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, who rely on lower costs for them as well to operate.

I think about snow clearing – our operators, even private operators who operate during the year. Obviously, this winter they probably would have had a busy season. So that's certainly important for them to have those costs reduced to help save money for them. That's a change to them. The bill itself

is maintaining something that's already happening. So if we want to actually lower taxes for people, what better opportunity to do that than this amendment?

Chair, I always talk about the rural communities, as I mentioned, and I look at legislation through that lens because I know how important it is to the people of my district and what it means to them, especially, for reliable, low cost, any which way that they can save. They have all these considerations to take in – going to the grocery store and travel for their medical appointments, as I mentioned. These are all very important, everyday factors in people's lives, considering what they're going to do and how they're going to manage.

I mentioned, before, the lake boats. A lot of times that employment can come and go a little bit. Boats tie up and stuff. People could be off work for a long period of time, so they're looking for these cost-saving measures to do exactly that.

We're proposing this amendment and we're giving government an opportunity to live up to their slogan of lower taxes. This is their first opportunity. Maintaining a tax is very well and good. We, obviously, all indicated that we support that, but here is the real opportunity to lower a tax.

We've heard from Members opposite many years now about gas tax and lowering taxes. I have a couple of quotes here actually, just to read in as well. I changed them a little bit because they refer to a name of a former premier, so I'll refer to that one as premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, just to change in the quote.

I'll quote here now: It's time for the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador to lead. It's about making choices and right now the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador needs to choose the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That's a pretty significant quote, Chair. I'll read another one, actually. After repeated calls by our PC caucus for relief at the pumps, the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador has, yet again, forgotten the people of the province by failing to implement measures in his budget to provide relief at the pumps. That was in 2022.

Chair, those two quotes are from the now Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador. Those are his words, not my words.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: Those are his posts on social media. Those are the quotes that he has made in the public. So if that is what he believed then, I don't understand why now, when presented the opportunity to actually lower the taxes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, they seem to say no. Actually, we probably don't even know because we're not hearing from them. So if they would like to explain to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador why they want to lower taxes.

That's their words; that's not my words. So if they want to live up to their words, they want to live up to lower taxes, this is the perfect opportunity for them to do so. This is an actual opportunity to save costs for people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

They may laugh at that, Chair. They may laugh at the businesses that operate in this province. Earlier, they were laughing at those people who are trying to save costs. They probably laughed their way into winning in the election because they fooled people to say lower taxes. Well, Chair, I'll reiterate, here is the opportunity on the floor of the House of Assembly now to lower taxes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The opportunity is here. It's time for them to join us and support lowering taxes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Chair, a little concern of the Member who spoke before referenced about laughing – you have to forgive me and forgive us the fact that you just came from government, really you did, and then you propose an amendment for us. I've already stated that the previous amendment where you referred to home heating propane in there, but then I listened to say, well, what we've proposed on the amendment is going to help reduce the taxes for our harvesters and our farmers. They don't pay taxes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: When the Members look across and say chuckling, I'm saying that they do not. They are exempt. The South Coast ferries –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I need to hear the Finance Minister.

C. PARDY: – the provincial government pays the fuel for the South Coast ferries in your district. We pay the fuel.

The goal here was to listen, but we've got a serious concern with your amendment because when you stand and talk about the amendment that you're proposing, that are two incorrections that we highlight for you

that you are presenting in front of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to the government and you don't even know the amendment, with the pieces that qualified, as to what you're speaking about.

I've got to reference to the Third Party as well. I know that the hon. Members have stood several times about they're a costed platform. Take a look at our costed platform and one thing I would say that the platform, I was curious and I don't know because I didn't review the costed platform, but would it include oil?

If it includes oil, that's a little disingenuous because we know the stand the party has with the oil revenue and what we're talking about, but does it include the revenue? If we were going to make a targeted effort, which we will, during the budget, to make life more affordable for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have two strands. Make it affordable for everybody, which is a great idea – everybody, for all of us. The second thing would be to target those who are in the greatest need in our province. Target those who need it most in our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: So the Third Party, they stand and they talk about those on affordability because your campaign is on affordability. You stated that, earlier, when the hon. Member stood and spoke so well. We are the affordability.

I would say we need measures to help people out but we've got to make sure that we focus on – here comes the socially progressive part of our party – those that need it most, to make sure we look after those who need it most.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: One Member opposite stood within the last two days, here, and he said,

what maybe is all true for all of us, it didn't matter whether they got the subsidy for child care. It didn't matter because they could afford to pay for it anyhow. I understand that because someone said we stand here and we're privileged.

I would say to you, if there's going to be an affordability measure that this House stands for, let's make sure we focus on the ones who need it most and target it to those people who need it most in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the comments from the Minister of Finance and I want to thank my colleagues. I feel like we've now –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: Chair, I feel like we've descended into another level of debate here in this House.

If I made a mistake with the amendment, I accept that and I'm happy for us to make another amendment. If you want to get rid of propane, that's fine. We can get rid of propane. That's no problem. If I misunderstood, that's fine.

I will not apologize for putting an amendment forward to this House that was very reasonable. Chair, if you want to talk about people who do not understand their jobs, how about 4:45 p.m. today, we were not going to sit tonight. The government didn't realize that the gas tax would go up on Tuesday –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The floor is offered now to the Member for Mount Scio.

Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

If they are going to berate me for bringing in an amendment and having an incorrect understanding –

L. DEMPSTER: Point of order.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Chair, Standing Order 49, it's absolutely ridiculous what's happening in this House, day after day after day. Now that they're on the other side and their job is to govern, we're belittled for asking questions when, again and again, they stood and said this is our job to ask. My colleague has been disrupted like multiple times. She submitted an amendment. It was in order and we ask for courtesy. I say to the Member for Conception Bay South, courtesy to allow –

CHAIR: I ask the Member to get to the point of order.

There is no point of order.

The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: I stand in response to the point of order that the Member just made. If we want to talk about decorum in this House, we should look on both sides because I can tell you, right now, the Members over here have been berated just as much by the example, right there, right now.

So it's been ongoing every day. I tell you what, if you're going to get up and say it, you should say it internally to your own people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

I will not apologize for putting forward what I believed was a very reasonable amendment. If I've made a mistake, with one of my assumptions, I'm very happy to change it. We can make another amendment. I thank all the experts in the public service for telling the government and explaining that gas prices are extremely complicated. I really try my best to understand every nuance and I'm not above making mistakes, but I will not be berated by the government, Chair.

We were here 4:45 today and we thought we were going home. We didn't need to order supper. We were here on Tuesday, ready to debate this bill until midnight, but the House closed. You can see on social media what other people were doing, while we thought we were staying talking about the gas tax, Chair.

I'm happy to make another amendment to remove propane, if I've misunderstood that. I will not apologize for making a reasonable amendment for lower taxes, which was a pillar of the government's platform.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Chair, I'm just going to make a couple of comments, as well, to the Minister of Finance who got up, and I totally

understand what he's saying. I assure the Members opposite that I do my homework. I can tell you there are lots of people in my district who drive trucks, who are fish harvesters, and they drive vehicles. Lowering taxes will lower costs for them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: The people who drive their vehicles from smaller communities to bigger centres – everybody has a vehicle in my area. It's not a choice. They have to use their vehicles to get to where they need to go, to make a livelihood, to get to medical appointments.

So I understand what the minister is saying and I certainly appreciate that, but my point is our amendment is lowering the tax. As I quoted earlier, if they want to see relief at the pumps, vote for the amendment. People in this province will see relief at the pumps.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

Again, here we are tonight. I think this is the first late night that we've sat for this sitting. It's going on 8:30, now, just for the people at home. What we are doing, we are proposing that the government of the day take this bill further.

It's good to see them follow our lead, what we've done for the past several years with regard to cost-of-living measures by doing what we've done with the gas, but here's an opportunity to take it further. Of course, as we know, we just had an election last year, last fall, and one of the actual main pillars of the election was to lower taxes. The Premier still talks about it every day. You're going to increase services, yet lower taxes.

So here's an opportunity to do just that. We know what's happening and we know what's happening globally, what's contributing to this. Again, I would like to extend our prayers and our thoughts to those Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that are living in the Middle East.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: I know I have a friend there. I said his name, Darren Butt, and his family. He's actually been providing updates through the media on how life is over there. So, again, our thoughts and our prayers are certainly with him, his family and everybody, all Canadians that are currently in the Middle East.

But, again, let's take it further. We've done some great measures over the years, lots of cost-of-living measures over the years. For example, cutting motor vehicle registration in half. Again, it's about cost of living.

B. PETTEN: (Inaudible.)

P. PARSONS: I'm flattered that the Member for CBS feels necessary to pay such attention to when I'm talking and to keep interrupting.

B. PETTEN: (Inaudible.)

P. PARSONS: But here he is again. Again, Chair, we've got to compete with our speaking time. You see the tally light here on my desk? That means I get to speak right now. That's what that means. So you're certainly welcome to get up and speak. These are just basics. With that said, though –

CHAIR: Order, please!

You talk to the Chair, not the Members.

P. PARSONS: I want to commend the newly elected MHAs on the government side, the backbenchers, because their

behaviour is far better than the veteran MHAs that are there because they're actually listening and paying attention.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

P. PARSONS: But anyway, I digress. Again, we are debating this amendment. This is something very simple. It would make life more affordable for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It would increase the gas tax break, and that's what it's about.

All MHAs here in this House, we all take calls from our constituents about the struggles that they're having making ends meet. Whether that is going out and buying groceries. We do know that some people don't necessarily qualify even for dental health and they fall between the cracks there. I mean, they have to make decisions in life. Do they want their teeth fixed? My point is there are people who can't afford to live with the basic rights.

It's an opportunity for the government to step up and to do just that, and they can do that. Again, we were prepared to sit late on Tuesday, I believe it was. The House Leader gave notice the week prior, in week two here of our sitting of the House of Assembly, but I think we actually got out early that night. We don't know why, but we got out early. I mean, we were all prepared to stay. I think supper was even ordered, and we didn't even need it.

My point is we're here debating. The Member for Lake Melville has made a second appearance in the House of Assembly again. I appreciate his attention as well when I am speaking. He's standing. I don't know if he wants to be recognized, but he's over there standing as well in his seat.

Again, everybody here has an opportunity to speak. Let's see the government side get up, because when they were over here, my gosh were they passionate. They were up on their feet. I've even heard people say, my God, the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans was so passionate, but we haven't heard a word from him this term now they're over there. They're quite silent. The only time we do hear them, actually, is when they're heckling and heckling when we're trying to speak.

We have a job to do in Opposition, which is now to question government, but when we're doing that, they –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

P. PARSONS: I'm not going to compete for speaking time to be heard. My colleague, the Member for Mount Scio, I couldn't hear what she said. The Member for Mount Pearl North was behind her and couldn't hear, and she was only right behind her. My point is the decorum here is absolutely ridiculous. It's shameful.

Again, I stood here yesterday in my seat and I said you're government now; lead by an example – professionalism. Really, sincerely –

CHAIR: I ask the Member to talk to the bill.

P. PARSONS: Well, it's all about the bill and it's all about them taking the leadership. Support the amendment. Chair, I ask them to take it further. They campaigned on it: lower taxes, more services, better services, four ferries, among their promises.

So here's an opportunity tonight, surprise the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Surprise the Official Opposition. Surprise the Members of the Third Party. Surprise the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands and show us what you can do. You have the ability. You have the authority.

Again, I call on the Members. They are very passionate when we're speaking. They pipe up and they're chirping. It's gone beyond chirping now to clapping seals and everything else, but stand up. Stand up and speak on behalf of our districts.

You made promises on lower taxes, cost-of-living measures. We know what we did when we were in government. We even issued cheques I believe in the amounts of \$500 to help people for the support of cost-of-living measures. We also matched our federal government and gave a GST holiday that was just done Christmas prior to this one past. I think that's when the timeline was, for what we've done. Again, cutting motor vehicle registration in half.

AN HON. MEMBER: Plus the Labrador supplement.

P. PARSONS: That's right. Also, we brought in the Seniors' Benefit. It was \$400 and the Liberal's platform was to actually double that, to give seniors \$800 to help. As we know, seniors are on fixed incomes. They're limited.

In listening to *Open Line* calls today, to hear about the cost of living and the struggles that people have are very, very real. Every time they get up to answer a question, they talk about how the people of the province elected them to lead the government. Here's an opportunity to come clean and make good on your biggest promise to cut taxes and do just that.

We call on them; do it. There's still time tonight. We're all prepared to stay here until the midnight hour, because that's what we do here as MHAs. That's part of the responsibility. I will commend the newly elected Members. Their conduct actually something to be admired. I think we can take a page out of that book.

I invite them to stand on their feet as well. Here we are again. It's funny because when

a Member on this side stands, in particular what I have noticed, when a female Member stands, the noise level gets extremely loud in this room. That's the truth. We can go back and we can look at *Hansard*. We can go back and we can see that that's the case.

Unfortunately, like I said, it is like 20 to 9 now. This is the hour that we're here debating this bill tonight and here's an opportunity, again, that I call on the government to do good. Come through on that first promise to lower taxes. I call on the Premier to do that. Let's see your leadership, Mr. Premier, and let's see you do that.

Let's do that tonight. We can do that tonight. As every Member has said, we can do that tonight. You have the support. We supported you. We worked collaboratively together for the betterment of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, in particular with the disabilities bill. Let's see that collaboration, again, here tonight at this hour and make good.

I think the price of gas is scheduled to go up again tonight. So people are watching and people would appreciate it. Let's do it.

With that said, too, I look forward to getting up and standing up again on behalf of my district. I encourage every Member to get up and stand up. They were very passionate when they were here. They had so much to say. They had all the answers about freight boats and cutting taxes. Just do it – just do it. Well, here's your opportunity to just do it. Just like the Nike logo: Just do it.

On that note, Chair, I will take my seat and I will look forward to speaking again.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: Chair, thank you.

I'm certainly delighted to get up this evening to talk about the gas tax and the amendment that the Opposition has put forward. I want to thank the people of my District of Mount Pearl North and all the support that I've received over the past number of years from the people of Mount Pearl.

Mount Pearl was always known as a rich community. When I moved to Mount Pearl, over 50 years ago, we were blessed to raise our family in Mount Pearl and we were considered the youngest growing community in this province. I was very lucky to have served on council to be part of working with the council of the day to make Mount Pearl grow and become what it is today.

Gas tax affects every single one of us. This evening, I want to talk about the seniors in my district, the ones who struggle every single day. They're struggling to put food on the table. They're struggling to pay their power bills. They're struggling to keep their cable on. Just this morning before I came here – it's not only seniors struggling – I had to go out and pick up a hamper for a young family that had no food on the table and had nowhere to get it. So it's not only seniors affected. It's every single person in this province that's affected by the cost of gas.

The seniors can't even afford to go to events when they're free. We have a large community of seniors, and we have the best seniors' groups in the province, and they offer all kinds of free activities. A lot of the seniors can't even go to these events because they don't have the gas or they can't afford to pay a taxi to get to those events, Chair.

So we have to do something. Our government has to do something to make it easier for those people to be able to afford to get out and enjoy the quality of life.

Seniors and people on low income are the most impacted when it comes to increase in cost of living due to the high cost of gas. Seniors and those on low income live from cheque to cheque. They are mostly impacted when it comes to price change.

Newfoundland and Labrador has the largest population of seniors. In 2024, it was 24.6 per cent, the highest in the country. As mentioned, seniors often have limited means to address the increased cost of living.

The seniors report in 2025 examined areas of seniors. There were six areas that the report focused on: well-being, individual health, health care, finances, housing, transportation and public safety. All of those things were impacted by the amount of money that people have to spend, especially seniors on a low income.

High cost of fuel results in people having to make choices, and those on limited income. One of the things that you can do, your government can do and your Premier can do is support this amendment. I ask the government today to support this amendment.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Chair, I stand here tonight saying that I'm challenged. I'm challenged on many levels. I've sat here in the last two hours. I've been in and around this Chamber since 1995, and I don't know if I've seen the level of disrespect – and I'm not pointing my finger at anyone on either side.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: It is relevant because I'm talking about the Chair and his role challenged. I've got to go through him talk about gas tax, I say to the Member for Exploits or Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, whatever your title is. But he has a very challenging job because we all go after him when there's not decorum and there's not people listening in this House.

People are standing on their feet – and I say to the Minister of Energy, yes, it happened when you guys were over here, absolutely. I'm not denying that 100 per cent. But past behaviours don't say it's okay to do it again now. She stood on her feet and it's important for the people of Mount Scio. I mean, the Minister of Finance got up and he charged us and he challenged us, I got that, but he charged us. But that doesn't mean that I got to go after the Chair to recognize me or recognize her or recognize anybody.

We have to stop it. I challenge every Member in this House – every Member. If people are listening to this House tonight, I got to tell you, I said to our leader that I was about to leave my seat and go out because I felt that the people of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune was not given a fair opportunity to stand here and voice their concerns because they are worried about their cost of living and affordability.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: That's for all of us. No matter if we're from Stephenville or Deer Lake or wherever the case may be, we represent by political colours, but we still have the same concerns. But if a Member gets up and makes a mistake, we're after each other. What are we becoming in this House? I don't appreciate your chuckle. This is serious.

AN HON. MEMBER: I told you to calm down.

E. LOVELESS: This is serious. I am calmed down. I'm passionate and I'm emotional. I'm emotional about it, absolutely. I felt that it was important to say that, Chair. Because of the responsibility that you have, it makes it difficult for you, absolutely.

I challenge everybody on both sides, our side as well, let's listen to each Member's speech, what they have to say. Because remember, we always say you're speaking on behalf of your constituents and what we're talking about here is the cost of living for our constituents.

What we're proposing, you don't agree with it on the other side, I understand that and appreciate and respect that, but what we're asking for is this amendment can help. It can make a difference. It may mean small but, as the NDP Member had stated, that people put \$5, \$10 in their car because that's all they can afford, or some can't afford to have a vehicle. That is real life concerns and that's what we're stating here. I don't think it's fair on either side.

I know I am going to get a chuckle. I don't chirp. I do, I'm guilty of it, absolutely.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: Let me finish.

Absolutely, I do as well. It's part of the political process in this House. Let's be honest about it. Don't be a fool and say it's not. It's a part of the process. It happens, but I think we all need to look in the mirror –

B. PETTEN: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: – and I say to the Member for CBS, who's chirping all the time, to look in the mirror when you're pointing your finger, look in the mirror.

B. PETTEN: Look in the mirror. I asked you to look in the mirror.

E. LOVELESS: I will look in the same mirror you look in any time and I'll put my reputation up against yours any time.

CHAIR: Order, please!

E. LOVELESS: So here we go, again.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The floor is offered to the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune and I will remind the Member to address Bill 5.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We talk about this attempt by us in terms of an amendment to do things to help our constituents. As I was alluding to in terms of what the Member, the NDP Member was talking about in terms of making a difference for her constituents and those who can't afford it.

With the volatility with oil prices and what's going on in this world right now and the possible deal that we may have with regard to Bay du Nord, then are there concerns there? I'm sure the Premier or the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Energy will say, what will this mean at the end of the day, even for Bay du Nord? Will it interfere with what we want to get accomplished here in terms of that deal? Because that deal like many other deals are important to the people of the province.

I go back to my district and being a rural district and the challenges of the cost of gas. If I could tell my constituents tonight that the government has made a permanent decision which they've made clear, that's a good thing for them, but we're going to do a little bit more. We put an amendment forward, the government has agreed and we're going to help you a little bit more, then that would be a win for the people in my district. We all talk about seniors, because I

know government, the programs that we offered in terms of senior transportation programs, will those programs now be challenged because of the increase in gas or oil? I don't know. We'll wait for the budget to come down. But I know those programs are important, but will those programs be there in terms of additional cost?

Medical appointments for people down in Fortune Bay to go to Grand Falls, Gander or St. John's, some of them now have to get family members – I've even went back to bring people in here for appointments because they can't afford it because of gas prices and everything else. We see that stress and strain on them as we speak today. That's a reality certainly for my district. I mean, we have the representatives for Labrador. They certainly can appreciate it even more than what I can in representing a district like Fortune Bay.

I know the Minister of Energy talked about, when they were over here, all the back and forth and everything else, but I'm going to tell you I've heard a good many Members when they were over here say just do it – just do it. The Minister of Fisheries is looking at me. I think he might have a little bit of a smirk on his face because for his constituents, just do it – just do it. We did many things. We did many things for your constituents.

AN HON. MEMBER: We asked; you didn't do it.

E. LOVELESS: Well, you don't acknowledge that we did anything. That's unfair, but that's your choice. Anyway, he stood there many times and said just do it, no matter what it was.

In terms of taxi drivers, that cost, too, is a reality. I know some people had said that Uber drivers were charging \$100, \$150 on Saturday night to get home safe from their events, and gas prices going higher certainly is a challenge for the taxi industry.

At the end of the day, that cost goes to the customer and that's a cost for them. It's not just about going downtown and getting home using a taxi, people have to use a taxi to go get groceries: a single mom for her children.

It's been phrased here in terms of government's action. We know that they're not going to support this, but as was referenced in terms of the Speech from the Throne, the question was asked, will it benefit Newfoundlanders and Labradorians? Then the support of this amendment certainly would.

I know the Minister of Finance got up and talked about combustion and all those things. I heard him many times get up here and speak to the seniors in his district that were listening. Well, I would argue that this reduction would help seniors in your district; those that you spoke to many times in your district. I know he knows that. That goes to his point where he said target those who need it most. We both argue, I guess, who those targets are but I could say that probably the target that he'd mentioned the most in his six over here were seniors.

I just hope that the government would reconsider supporting this because it would be immediate help and reduction in a measure of cost of living that we know is way too high in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Energy and Mines and Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just go back to previous Member there. There's no doubt that everyone in this House wants what's best for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, no question, and the way we get on in here sometimes, I would agree with him too, but it goes all around the whole House and there's no question then. To quote the Leader of the Third Party, when we point one finger out, there are three fingers pointing back. We need to consider that.

This amendment to the bill is flawed. It's why we don't support it. You've got propane that doesn't apply to home heating fuel. That's the first thing. I've heard Members over there talk about ferries and fishermen and farmers and they apply for gas tax and get their money back. It's there.

So now you're asking that government spends six cents in order to get one cent. That's exactly what this amendment does. It's why we don't support it. If you go and add the numbers up to what you have there for propane and diesel, marine and all that, it's six cents to get one cent off gas. It doesn't work. It's flawed. So we're not supporting it.

Then when you stand up and you try and explain it and, to be frank, you don't know it, in some parts of it, how do you vote for that? It's not our job to come in and change it. It's wrong. That's why we don't support it. We've tried to explain that.

As a matter of fact, the Member for Mount Scio stood up tonight and she admitted she was shocked that it was even found in order. She said that. So you've got to think about that. The bill was presented and you didn't think it was in order. It was found in order. Fair, but she said that. She didn't think it was in order.

We understand the situation we're in, but we also understand that the war is 20 days in and what is being asked here is to amend what we are making permanent. What was

always temporary is now being made permanent. So now we're asking to take extra taxes off a permanent bill because of a 20-day situation. And it's 20 days. This could change tomorrow and it could get a lot worse tomorrow, but we need to give it a chance.

I can tell you right now, when the Finance Minister, President of Treasury Board or the Premier stands up and talks and they talk about lowering taxes and the talk about the things that are in our blue book, it's going to happen – it's going to happen – and it's going to be targeted and it's going to help all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. And guess what? There's only so much money and that's what we were left with.

If you talk about the plan and we talk about the fiscal forecast and all of the millions and millions and millions of dollars that were left out of it, there was no plan before this. So now we're in here trying to present a solution. The solution is to make the gas tax permanent. On April 1, there's never going to be a question – we won't go through this debate every year.

So we've gone through this debate every year for four years and, to be quite frank, the main reason that this got passed four years ago is because of us. It's because of a deal that we made in the House in order to get it through.

Here we are tonight, asking for an amendment that's broken. Who, in their right mind, would spend six cents to get one cent? Don't take my word for it. Do the calculations and when you go up and down and it's from 30 cent back to 24 cents overall, one cent goes to gas, the rest of it goes to boats – so it goes marine, consumer, diesel, propane. Propane don't apply. Marine don't apply. It's nothing for the farmers. It does nothing.

Anyhow, I got nothing else to say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre and Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I'm absolutely honoured, Chair, that the Minister of Finance called out our beautifully costed, balanced platform. I can only say that if they had come to us before the election, we could have helped them craft their own balanced platform as well, but we got a lot of promises that weren't delivered until the day of the debate but we had ours out. We were unafraid. We did the research and the homework and if you turn to page 28 in it, you will find exactly where we get the revenue.

Now, I find the fascination with our platform and our stand on oil and that really encouraging in some ways, because one of the things that the Minister of Finance brought up was that this current gas tax, that we're talking about, will not apply to farmers and fish harvesters, and the Government House Leader just said, well, they can apply to get it back.

Well, guess what? The carbon tax didn't apply to farmers and fish harvesters either, but that didn't stop the PCs from opposing it. They were not taxed, but that still railed against it because it was going to drive costs up. So I find the irony is – and we can wave our hands, but the fact is, that's what it came down to.

Actually, as I said before, the carbon tax actually put money into the pockets of people who needed it. People who did not drive, it helped them with their food, their heating, yet it's scrapped. The baby was thrown out with the bath water.

Now, the minister also talked about, I guess he finds it ironic that, well, are we factoring oil revenue into our platform. We're looking

at the fiscal envelope of the province, what was the revenue in that, but I'll put this to you. We also had, as a source of revenue, the removal and the elimination of subsidies for oil and gas corporations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: That was factored into it as our income, and we would repurpose it because we do not believe in corporate welfare for multi-billion-dollar industries. If they're going to make a profit on us, they damn well don't need our tax dollars for it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: Simple as that.

That's one of their sources of revenue. Phasing out travel nurses, phasing out for-profit shelters and reprofiling into front-line services, we had a number of things laid out there as to where we were getting the revenue.

We even put out another plan so that we wouldn't rely on the volatility of oil – we wouldn't even need to discuss this really – and that was our PMR on just transition. That would move away from a volatile industry that had the potential to strand assets and workers in this province, and we'd crash out like we did with the cod moratorium. That was voted down.

Last night, I attended a conference at the Alt Hotel, From Oil to Energy Justice; 16 speakers and over 200 people in attendance, about that transition – about the need to move away from oil. As one speaker said at that time, fossil fuel storylines are preventing us from a just transition and moving ahead. The transition is happening.

What I'm seeing here is that we're doubling down on oil while we seem to be ignoring the opportunities to move to a greener economy. I use the Churchill Falls MOU,

regardless of whether it's flawed or not, I get the feeling that it's going to die before it even gets a chance to come here to be voted on.

There is an opportunity not only to create jobs to bring money in, also to deal with the whole issue of rate mitigation because I've had to listen in this House of Assembly for the last 6½ years to the banter over Muskrat Falls. I will point out, we had nothing to do with it. Our party voted against it at the beginning. Regardless of that, I'm not even interested. The fact is that in 2030, guess what? Rate mitigation runs out. How are we going to deal with it?

Anyway, Bay du Nord, if we look at any of the projections from Futureworx, by 2030 – not at 2030, but we will be basically at then end of our oil production. Our oil is already declining. We have a project out there now. It's in international waters. It's a high-risk marginal project. I've heard, over here, Members speaking how we do not know about the war and oil prices go up and down. Do you know what? You're right. In six years, it could be that no company will want to go after that oil out there because it's too expensive to produce when they can get cheaper sources elsewhere.

Why do we focus on a green transition? I guess for the same reason that China is going into solar energy. Why? It's stable. It's reliable. It's not affected by international conflicts. It provides long-term work. They're not necessarily environmentalists, but they're seeing the writing on the wall.

So if you want to have a look at our platform, you'll see that the focus is very clear as to where we're getting it. Repurpose it into helping the people of this province. That's sustainability.

I will finish with this, and I'll have another say on this now. I was deciding whether I was going to say anything, Chair, but when I get our wonderful platform, the orange

book, referred to by the PCs, I can only imagine what it is, is platform envy that I just had to get up and extol the virtues of it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: Now, I'll come back to some of the more exciting aspects of this because I get the feeling I've got an audience for it over there, which is fantastic.

I have heard here talk about the cost of how this won't help people. Well, I'll tell you this, I've heard people talk about we have to use cars. We don't have public transit. Well, we do have public transit. They're called ferries. The decision to put ferries in place was as much as a policy decision not to have public transit on road. We got rid of our rail service. I'm thinking here, we put money into finishing the Team Gushue Highway, which I think will save approximately 10 minutes off the commuter drive.

I've driven out towards Torbay and towards Conception Bay South when the traffic was coming into the city; it's a string of lights. I often think, why don't we have more public transit that's more affordable, that's efficient, and so on and so forth? That would help. I will tell you this, that will help many people who can't afford a car, that will help many people who no longer drive a lot more effectively than even lowering the gas tax. That much I can tell you.

I have one minute 47 seconds of so left and I'm going to finish, but I'll be up again now that I have the inspiration back, the energy back and the fact that, believe it or not, I have a captive audience.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: I have a captive audience here and I have a captive audience over here. It's fantastic. The last time I had a captive audience, I was a teacher. I love it.

Chair, thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

Quite the stirring speech from the Leader of the Third Party. If I had known how to get him excited, I would have complimented him on his orange book five years ago, imagine the speeches we would have got. Oh my, oh my, the later it goes, the more excited the Leader of the Third Party gets.

But do you know what? I joke and laugh about it, but he's passionate about what he's talking about and we're here talking about tax cuts for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and everybody on this side of the House has the opportunity and they are taking one, two, three, maybe four times tonight to talk about this tax cut.

There seems to be a bit of frustration on the other side of the House. Why are you talking about a tax cut? They seem to forget that they talk about the election, they talk about the fact that they won and one of their key three pillars was to lower taxes. They've been in power now since October, November, December, January, February, March, we're heading into April and no tax cuts yet.

One of the things that they certainly talked about, I think, it was early on in the election was they'd bring a tax cut to the *Income Tax Act*. That hasn't been done yet, so we haven't saved any money. Not one Newfoundlander and Labradorian has saved money since this government came to power.

We have the sugar tax, that I'm sure we're going to – I don't know actually, if we're going to get a chance to debate the sugar tax bill in this session of the House of

Assembly. That legislation, of course, will change the tax from zero to zero – another big tax cut for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: We've spent the last week debating the gas tax cut which will go from 7.5 cents to 7.5 cents.

So I think what we're trying to do is help them help themselves, by making an amendment to lower taxes for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Again, this was a promise that they made to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to lower taxes and they won't do it – they won't do it. They won't do what they said they were going to do. They won't deliver on a promise and we're saying, look, here's an idea. Here's an idea how to lower taxes. Make the number lower. Make it not 7.5, make it 6.5 cents.

Now, I missed a little bit of the debate about the propane portion of this, but the saying that they don't want to vote for this amendment because it doesn't work, it doesn't fit the propane – I didn't follow it all and if I have it wrong, that's fine, but I didn't hear any comments about if we can lower the gas tax on gasoline at the pumps from 7.5 cents to 6.5 cents.

If the Members opposite want to agree to amend that and lower that portion of our amendment, then we're happy to have that discussion as well. If there's a problem with one of the four subsections that we're debating here, we can strike that. But if we're wrong on that, that's fine, we'll strike it and we'll just lower the taxes on the other three things that are in that subsection.

So we're certainly happy to have that discussion. I'm sure the Minister of Finance

can get up and say those other three work and if they don't work, we're happy to listen to why it doesn't. Now I am confused about why it works at 7.5 cents and not 6.5 cents. I'm very interested to hear that. But if we're wrong on that, that's fine and we'll accept that. But if it's only one of the four subsections that's wrong and doesn't work, well, let's lower the taxes on the other three. I think that's a very reasonable thing to talk about and to do.

Now again, the Leader of the Third Party talked about the fascination with the orange book. I couldn't help but notice somebody showed me then, when the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune was talking, you know, soon as we get into a debate, the memes start flying from the PC Party Facebook page. The memes start flying and who is it? It's my face out there on a meme.

So we're in here debating the gas tax for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We're focused on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Who are PCs focused on? Me – of all people that they've got to focus on me. The obsession continues with the past. It is time to accept the responsibility and lead as ministers and premiers in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I can't help but think of a lyric from my favourite band, Gord Downey. He said: You can't be fond of living in the past, cause if you are, there's no way you're going to last. I can tell you if you keep focusing on me, fellows, you're not going to last.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: It is time to step up and deliver on what you promised Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Look, we are disappointed that we lost the election, but that's never going to change. We wish we were still in government. We felt we had a

great platform that we could deliver for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but that's not what happened. You won. The votes were counted. You are now in charge of the province. So be in charge. Be leaders. Do what you said you were going to do. Accept the responsibility.

You promised to deliver tax cuts, yet you refuse to deliver tax cuts. This is not a huge amount of money. This is only an extra cent on what the taxes are right now at the pumps. The Government House Leader talked about the permanency of this bill. He's making it sound like this is set in stone for all eternity, if we vote on an amendment here today.

I spoke about this earlier when we debated this. Nothing in this legislation, in any piece of legislation is ever permanent. It is, literally, our jobs to make legislation not permanent. It is literally our jobs to come in here and debate legislation and to change it – every session, amendments, new legislation, progressive legislation. Times change, people change, the province changes and we must change with it.

For the life of me, I can't understand why the argument is the war might end tomorrow. So let's not touch anything. Let's not focus on what's happening in the world. Let's close our eyes and plug our ears and pretend nothing is happening to the oil prices in Newfoundland and Labrador because if we change it, and the war stops, oh my God, what are we going to do? We can't come back to the House of Assembly and change it again. Heaven forbid we do a little bit of work.

Heaven forbid we come to the House of Assembly and amend the legislation that we've already amended a number of times over. These arguments are not making any sense. What they are, they're a deflection away from the real fact is that they don't want to support an amendment. I can tell you why they don't want to support it,

because it's a Liberal amendment. Let's be honest.

That is why they don't want to support this amendment. It has nothing to do with the fact that it's a reasonable, rational amendment. It has nothing to do with the fact that it's actually what they promised and they won't deliver. Maybe they're right to obsess about us because it certainly sounds like we're the ones that are still in government. We're the ones that are making proposals on the House of Assembly floor to deliver tax breaks for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: We know what will happen if they vote for it. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will say, oh, maybe they still are in charge because the PCs won't do anything that they promised. The Liberals, literally, have to take the blue book and make amendments to deliver on the promises that the PCs made during the election.

So is that what it's all about? Is it really political theatre and political games that you won't vote for an amendment because it's a Liberal amendment? Is that what it is?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

J. HOGAN: I hear a little bit of chirping over there so you can answer; is that what it is?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: The Minister of Environment just made that point.

I'm trying to say it's not my responsibility; it is your responsibility to lead as ministers and premiers. I am not the one in love with myself; I am not the one who puts out red memes with my face on it. But I do appreciate the one you put out tonight was an actual photo of me and it wasn't doctored

like the ones you've done throughout the campaign. It wasn't doctored, people's teeth and faces with AI that made them look like the people that they aren't. They weren't abusing Members of this side of the House of Assembly for political gain. At least this was a real picture.

I can tell you what, when my daughter saw an ad during the campaign of a photo of me that was doctored and said Daddy, what is that, that doesn't really look like you; how do you think that made me feel? How do you think that made her feel when I had to explain it to her?

So you want to talk about what's shameful. I'm up here standing up for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for a break at the pumps.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I'm not making memes with doctored images of anyone's faces on the other side of the House of Assembly. So I can tell you what, I would rather sit over here for 10,000 days than act like that and sit over there for one more day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Because I can tell you, I can take a loss at the ballot box, but I will never sacrifice my morals and my principles for the sake of sitting over there so I can have minister in front of my name.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: (Inaudible) well, shame on you (inaudible).

CHAIR: Order, please!

L. EVANS: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: Again, they will say that I'm talking about myself. Well, shame on me talking about the history of what's happened.

L. EVANS: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: Chair?

CHAIR: I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services –

L. EVANS: I'm stuck with a big mess (inaudible) –

J. HOGAN: Chair?

CHAIR: I ask the Minister of Health and Community to leave the floor to the Official Opposition Leader.

You can continue, but I please you to speak to the bill.

Thank you.

J. HOGAN: I've been asked to stop speaking to the foolishness. I'd ask the foolishness to stop, Chair. I'd ask the other side to grow up and stop putting out memes like that.

I didn't intend to stand up here and talk about that. When I get chirped about things like that – I wanted to stand up and talk about the bill. I wanted to talk about the tax cut for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Chair.

With my 10 seconds left – unfortunately, I think I lost about a minute there, but that's okay because we still have a few hours left.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this bill tonight. I'm disappointed with some of the comments that are going on right now.

I'll leave it there, Chair.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, our leader said a lot of things tonight that really, really resonated with me. I used to serve with an individual that said I would rather lose honourably than win dishonourably, and it really struck a cord.

My first experience – and, I mean, the leader is supposed to be in charge. So everything that happens in this Conservative government falls to the leader who signs off. I'm telling you that now, Chair. I'm speaking to Bill 5 –

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance.

CHAIR: The government side is asking for relevance and I'd ask the Member to stay to Bill 5.

L. DEMPSTER: – and the tax cuts and the cost of living, Chair, but the memes that's going on and the videos, it's just shameful.

I'm happy to say that we conducted ourselves, as ministers when we was on the other side, Chair, and, right now, we're talking about the cost of living for residents. There is nothing yet to show what this government have done one single thing to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador with the cost of living, so we're asking them to support our amendment tonight.

That's what we're doing. We have an amendment on the floor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

L. DEMPSTER: The Member for Conception Bay South can be the Deputy Premier of this province, it –

B. PETTEN: I am calling you out for what you are at. I'm calling your bluff.

AN HON. MEMBER: Stand up.

B. PETTEN: Yes, I will if you want me to, no problem.

CHAIR: Order, please!

There seems to be heated debate; everybody deserves to have a time on the floor. What I'm going to do is I'm going to call a 10-minute recess, so everybody can cool off and come back and be hon. Members of this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: And that's what I expect to see when we come back.

Thank you.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): As the Chair of the Committee of the Whole, I just want to stand and let all 39 Members that are in the Committee know that decorum is ours to keep in the floor of the House of Assembly. We all represent the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We're all passionate. We all got voted in to make a difference to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I think that some of the personal items that are being said – we've gotten away a little

bit from this being a gas tax and treated a little bit like a money bill. I would ask that if I call order and I'm sitting in the Chair of Committees, that we would have order. It's not much to ask.

If we lose the authority of the House, then we don't deserve to be here. Let's all do better and let's all be our best. That's all I ask.

Are the House Leaders ready?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

It is really, truly an honour to be on my feet here in the House of Assembly at 9:47 p.m. on a Thursday night –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: – to speak to Bill 5 and debate is continuing on an Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2. What's on the floor right now is something that would keep the taxes the exact same. So whether you gas up on March 30 or gas up on April 1, there will be no difference. Our leader did an incredible job of outlining all of the things that we are going to be debating on different bills going forward that, in essence, there will be no difference.

So I'm speaking to an amendment that the Liberal Opposition have put on the floor. It doesn't change the intent of the bill at all, and that's why the amendment was ruled in order. The amendment is actually urging, encouraging, imploring government, given the high cost of living that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are feeling, to accept our amendment.

There are four different subsections. There's been a little bit of informal dialogue back and forth across the floor in the House of Assembly tonight and, apparently, there

is some concern with one. I believe it's the propane. Because we have an amendment, for anybody who might be watching or might watch when this is over, we cannot propose an amendment to the amendment. We do understand, if they have concern with one, don't throw out four subsections, good measures in place that will help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I know that they say for all of us. I'll tell you one of the things, during COVID, when I used to say we're all in the same boat, and I had an assistant at the time and she used to say we're not all in the same boat. We are not all being affected by COVID. I would say, with the cost of living, we're all being affected the same.

When we have people on fixed income, couples that get old age security, spousal allowance and it's actually so low that they qualify for the income supplement and the gas, the taxes, they have to gas up every single week whether they're going to the grocery store, whether they're going perhaps to an arena, if they have one, to see their grandchild play hockey, all life stuff that is very important.

So if the Members, if the government is primarily concerned with one aspect of the four subamendments, then propose your own amendment. One cent is what we're asking. If one cent is too far to go, propose a half a cent. It would be something. People who are watching, I already mentioned \$1 change in oil prices, \$30 million to Treasury and so if it's not one cent, propose a half a cent.

I've been using my time tonight to talk about the high cost of living in Labrador. Although I will say, I'm hearing from people a lot on the Great Northern Peninsula. I've been hearing from people on the West Coast. Just last night, when I got home, in one little community I had somebody reaching out saying thank you for asking about MTAP. Because it's really expensive.

I do know the program was under me. The government have said that they're bringing in a fully covered MTAP. I'm anxious to see it. Is it going to be just insured services or uninsured services? Is the escort going to be covered? Is there going to be a cap? Is it going to be income tested? Many questions that go through my mind, because I have a lot of familiarity with that program for people who are living outside of province and people who are living inside of province.

People who go for transplants that are away nine months, two years, four years – I know a number that are out right now in Ottawa, in Alberta, sadly waiting on transplants. So there are all kinds of things that contribute to the high cost of living, and that is why we have this amendment on the floor.

In Labrador, everything is so spread out. Because I only have flight options three days a week with the one airline in Blanc Sablon – I used to have six days a week – I don't go through that way a lot. It's a two-hour flight and then I only have to drive 275 kilometres to my home. But, mostly I'm going into Goose Bay, which is three hours on a flight and then I'm driving 420 kilometres to home and having a day on the coast, doing constituency work, and hardly ever home, when I'm home because I take my job as an MHA very seriously. I'm quite committed.

While I'm in, I'm all in, Chair. Then I'll go do the three-hour flight, drive the 420 kilometres and run around the district for a day. If I'm going up to Cartwright, that's another 210 kilometres and 210 back, and then I make the trip back to Goose.

The reason I'm sharing that is that I have people that have to do that every day. I have people that are taking cancer treatment, and I'm so thankful for the road that we have right now. I've had to really intervene for a number of constituents that are on the coast in my district that have been told Goose Bay is at capacity – you

can't go to Goose Bay; you got to go to St. Anthony.

I'm dealing with Coast Guard as I'm sitting here tonight. We got ice in the Straits; we go through it year over year. It was the Liberal government that put on planes after the ferry don't move for four or five days – couldn't get anywhere before that – couldn't get anywhere. We had more rackets with transportation, and we did that to help make it a little bit better for people, recognizing that it all contributes to the high cost of living.

So now we have people that, thankfully, are able to drive; but if you're driving from Charlottetown to Goose Bay to do your treatment – and I have a family member who has been doing it right now for a long time – it's 840 kilometres. If you're coming from the Straits, it's 1,400 kilometres. There are all kinds of examples and when the cost of gas is higher, that impacts your bananas, that impacts buying your loaf of bread. We know the cost and, Chair, because of the high cost in Labrador, that is why we brought in the Labrador Air Access Program.

Today, I understand, is the last day that you could book a flight. All through the night last night, people were reaching out to me: Is there going to be another program? I said: The blue book says we're scrapping the Liberal one and there's a better one coming, better coverage. So people are anxious because it's about the affordability; the taxes are high. Airfare has 100 per cent doubled since I started. When I would make my travel back and forth from Blanc-Sablon to St. John's, I was paying around \$600 or \$700. We're now paying double that; double what I was paying return, now we're paying one way.

That is why we know, going right back to ancient times in any Parliament – and I've been in nine legislatures across the country and actually had the privilege to represent

Canada over in Guernsey in the Channel Islands with parliamentarians from 42 countries around the world. We know that all democracies – I mean, you have government by consensus if you're up somewhere like in Yellowknife – are a little bit different but, the essence is, an Opposition, right back to ancient times, has a right to be heard.

We have a responsibility when we knock on someone's door to say, I would be honoured if I could be your voice, and then they put us back. We have a responsibility. So that is why, tonight, because we have consistently heard about the high cost of living, we are saying to the government: accept our amendment. The gas is going up again tonight, did someone tell me, 13 cents? We don't know where it's going to end.

I'll be up again to finish my train of thought.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Chair.

Chair, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move, pursuant to Standing Order 46, that the debate on Bill 5 entitled, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2, shall not be further adjourned and that further consideration of any resolution or resolutions, clause or clauses, section or sections, schedule or schedules, preamble or preambles, title or titles, or whatever else might be related to debate in Committee of the Whole respecting Bill 5 shall be first business of the Committee when next called by the House and shall not be further postponed.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

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

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

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for the District of Placentia West - Bellevue and Chairman of the Committee of the Whole.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports the Committee have considered the matters to them referred, have directed them to report progress and have leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that this House do now adjourn.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

This House is now adjourned until tomorrow, Monday, March 30, at 1:30 p.m.

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