



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume LI

FIRST SESSION

Number 12A

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

Monday

March 30, 2026
(Night Sitting)

The House resumed at 6 p.m.

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

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

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Waterford Valley.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. KORAB: Thank you.

It's my third time – the first time, the Member for Humber beat me to it, the second time we called a recess and now I'm full, so good luck.

I rise for the third time to speak to the proposed amendment brought forward by the Liberal caucus. An amendment that would actually lower the gas tax for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In 2022, the provincial gas tax stood at 15 cents per litre, then the world changed. The Ukrainian war drove global oil prices up and the people at their homes felt it immediately, at the pumps, in their grocery bills, in the cost of simply everything they do to getting to work, to taking their kids to their activities.

At that time, the Liberal government stepped up, made a decision to cut the provincial gas tax in half, from 15 cents down to seven point five cents per litre. When you factor in the HST that means about 8.05 cents per litre for families across the province. They didn't just introduce the cut, they maintained it, every year after it was brought in. We don't know what would happen if we had still made government, but one could safely assume it would have been kept going.

We understood that people needed stability and they needed relief that they could count

on. So now we fast-forward to today, Chair. We have a new government across the aisle and have brought forward this legislation – fantastic, great. But what does it do? It simply maintains the very same tax cut that we introduced.

So let's be clear. If this legislation passes as is, there'll be no change at the pumps. That's it, no additional savings, no new relief, nothing extra for the families that are in need of support right now. In fact, you don't have to take my word for it. Earlier this week, in the House, the Member for Topsail- Paradise, said himself, April 1, there'll be no change.

Chair, maintaining the status quo is not a tax cut. Calling it a tax cut doesn't make it a tax cut and trying to present it in that way, to me, is misleading. Because here's the reality. Once again, we're faced with global events driving up the price of oil. This time, it's the war in Iran. Families are feeling it, just like they did in 2022.

As we all know, when gas prices go up, it doesn't affect just what you pay at the pump, it pushes the cost of almost everything up. If you look at transportation costs, trucking, shipping, deliveries, all rely on fuel. When the cost of fuel rises, the company pays more to move the goods, Chair, and that gets passed on to where? The consumers. Yes, there'll be some forklift savings as well.

Groceries: Food has to be transported, often long distances, to places in the Big Land, Lab West, Makkovik, Red Bay, on the Island, St. Anthony, Burgeo, Harbour Breton, St. Lawrence, Fogo, Nipper's Harbour, Bonavista, Old Perlican, St. Bride's, St. Shott's, Pouch Cove and Red Head Cove – it's all I can do on one breath. Higher fuel prices equal higher prices for things like milk, for meat, for snacks, for things that kids need for school. Even local

food can go up because, as we know, farming equipment runs on fuel.

Construction and materials: Heavy equipment, transport of materials for manufacturing use fuel. This drives up the cost of lumber, concrete and things to construct homes. We all know we're in a housing shortage. We're going to be talking about that more on Wednesday but, as the cost of fuel goes up, this drives this cost up. From my time at the City of St. John's, I know a number for developments that were approved – some controversial. The Member from Quidi Vidi can certainly relate to that. A lot of these have since been cancelled because prices have gone up.

Retail goods: Clothing, electronics and everyday items all have to be shipped in at a cost. Stores raise prices to cover these increased transportation expenses. They have margins to hit and they're going to hit them or they go under. Again, passed on to us.

We've talked a bit about travel and how that affects fuel prices and how it affects people. As we said, we have over \$1.4 billion in total revenues from tourism. It's a major industry in our province, certainly in rural. It supports jobs, local business and it's important to the public sector. The Minister of Tourism also said this is something we should celebrate. I couldn't agree more. If we want to be the tourism capital of Canada, people need to come here. When gas prices are high, people question that. Things like airline tickets, ferries, even taxis and Ubers go up. Tourism overall, as the price of gas goes up, it costs more to travel.

I was at a Hospitality NL function a number of years back and they said something that stuck with me. They said, people don't accidentally come to Newfoundland and Labrador. There's no accidental tourism. You have to plan to come here. You have to book your trip and you can come. If you

were driving from Ontario to, say, Nova Scotia, you may stop and drive down to New Brunswick, go to the Bay of Fundy, stay a few nights. They get accidental tourism. We don't.

So as the cost goes up, if the ferry fuel surcharge goes higher, people then look at the lower cost option and, unfortunately, that means they may not come here to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Home heating – often as the price of fuel goes up, home heating, they tend to rise a lot together. Certainly, electricity can greatly be affected from this. Just any services, for that matter, any business that relies on vehicles, plumbers, electricians, any delivery services, they're going to charge more. It costs them more to get from point A to B; they're going to charge more. Again, they have margins to hit.

So as you can see from just some of these items at the high level, higher gas prices create a ripple across the entire economy. As everyone in this hon. House knows, small businesses are the backbone of our economy. That's why even a small change in gas prices, even that one cent per litre can matter. It doesn't just save you at the pumps. It can help slow down the price increase across your daily life.

How many times in this House have we talked about the cost of living, in this sitting and in many of the previous years? This is one of those means, one of those levers that we talked about that we can pull to help with the cost of living. That's why our Liberal caucus brought forward an amendment, not to maintain, but to reduce. We are proposing to lower the gas tax further from 7.5 cents to 6.5 cents per litre. That's a real tax cut. That's real relief, and that's what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians want right now. This past weekend, I had multiple chats out in the public and that's what people were talking about.

So, Chair, what I find most frustrating in this debate is some inconsistencies I hear. You know, when the government were on this side of the House, they didn't just support tax relief; they demanded it. They wanted more. Well, now is their chance. I'll remind some of the Members of their own words. The now Minister of Education, at the time, was quoted back then saying, we need to take it a step further. We need to say get rid of the tax. Now is your chance.

We went further by saying we need to start eliminating taxes on other fuels, home heating fuels. Now the Deputy Premier said – quote – you could apply it to home heating furnace oil and all the rest of the fuels, that would be real savings, and I agree.

So I have to ask, what's changed? What's changed from last year to this year? Why is the government basically refusing the things they demanded?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. KORAB: You are over there and now you have a chance – whoever said that, I don't know if you were talking to me – but now is your chance to do this. Anyway, why are they settling to maintain the status quo when they told the people of this province that they would go further? Why are they ignoring their own commitments?

Chair, the answer seems all too similar. It's not uncommon with many governments when they go from Opposition to government, they say one thing when they're in Opposition, but they do another thing in government. I get there are constraints. Once you're in Cabinet, once you open up the books, there are things you can and can't do that you didn't realize. I fully understand that. But this is a simple one. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve better and I think everyone here knows that. They deserve honesty, they deserve consistency and,

most importantly, they deserve action that actually puts money back in their pockets.

To quote the Finance Minister, you had said before you need to plan and you need to act. I agree wholeheartedly because, for many families, every cent matters. Now, one of my fellow Members here said people are living cheque to cheque, that is certainly true.

So that extra cent we're proposing to cut, it adds up over the weeks, over the months, for commuters, for certainly our rural residents who have to travel – I can drive home right now in 18 minutes. Many of the people in rural Newfoundland and Labrador have much further to drive. They use much more gas. So for small businesses, as I said before, this makes a huge difference.

Let's not forget that this shouldn't be about politics. Sometimes, unfortunately, it is. But right now this isn't about politics. It's about affordability. It's about helping people manage the rising costs. It's about doing the right thing at the right time when people need it most. It's about doing the right thing when it benefits the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and not vote against it just because it came from this side or someone else put it forward.

So, Chair, to me, the choice before us is simple. We could pass legislation that keeps things exactly the same and pretend it's progress. Some might say doing the same thing and expecting different results is the definition of insanity. You can support this amendment, you can deliver real, tangible tax cuts for the people we represent.

In my district alone – I'm not going to list every property, but we've got Glenview Dairy Farm in Kilbride, operating for 150 years. I'm sure gas reduction would certainly help their operation. Lester's Farm Chalet, Lester's Farm Market, Morry's Sheep Farm, Affordable Towing, Aspen

Auto Body, Cahill Fabrication – I could go on and on and on. All these businesses rely on fuel and a discount in fuel can help them. If they don't get that discount, this gets passed on to who? Us, the consumers.

So I urge all Members opposite to reflect on their own words, their own commitments and the expectations they set for the people in this province. After all, lower taxes is one of the pillars in the blue book.

This amendment, as we said, it puts money back in people's pockets. It's not just the people with vehicles. It's everybody. I would understand the hesitation of cutting a tax or lowering a tax. There's lost revenue. We all know that. But if you look at –

AN HON. MEMBER: Not in this case.

J. KORAB: What was that?

AN HON. MEMBER: Not in this case.

J. KORAB: Not in this case. So where's the money going to come from if you cut this tax? We're going to make up for lost revenue. Ironically, it's from the very thing we're talking about. You make up that lost revenue from oil.

As we know, our province, for every dollar a barrel of oil, it's roughly \$20 million. I'm estimating here. So if the price of oil stays up, we're talking tens of twenties of millions. If it stayed up really high for months and months, we're talking \$100-plus million. So that's money right now the government could budget on in the budget coming up, which could be some announcements on Wednesday or Thursday. That's money that's there. The money is there.

This government has the extra funds to pay for this, so in my opinion, Chair, this is a no-brainer. I ask the governing party to vote for what you have in your blue book: lower taxes. I ask the other 38 voting Members

here to vote in favour of actually lowering the gas tax; vote in favour of real relief; vote in favour of the people you're elected to serve.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to do my utmost to say relevant. Sometimes I might have to say one sentence about something else, just to get to the relevance, but I'm going to do my best.

There are 40 of us here now in the House of Assembly and we're debating an amendment to Bill 5. We each get 20 minutes. Debate is working towards shutting down. Closure has been invoked and that means we can only debate for a certain period of time.

My grandmother Power would often say, you know, it's really hard to listen to the truth but the truth is right now that the people across Newfoundland and Labrador are feeling the pressure with the rising costs in their everyday lives, and gasoline is one of those factors.

They feel it when they go to the grocery store. They feel it when their home heating bill comes in and they certainly feel it every single time they pull up to the pump. I mean, it's a sticker shock on occasion, when you're filling up your vehicle there a few months ago and it was \$50 and now it's \$70 to fill it up. It's hard on the pockets. It really is.

In our province, this matters more than most because we are not a place where people can simply just hop on a subway or take a

short commute. We have to drive everywhere in this province. It's a large province. People are driving long distance to go to work. From my district alone they're commuting from Placentia - St. Mary's, into St. John's. I commuted myself for 10 years back and forth.

So, you know, there's a cost. To take their kids to school, to sports, to everyday activities, there's a cost. I believe the Member for Terra Nova has said here this evening that it's already the lowest tax in Canada. Well, it might be the lowest tax in Canada, but we are Newfoundland and Labrador and you did promise lower taxes. That was one of your promises, lower taxes, better health care and safer communities. That's how government got elected. So lower taxes, lower gas taxes – we are trying to work with the government of the day for you to start lowering the taxes for the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

What Bill 5 does is it amends the *Revenue Administration Act* to keep the tax as it exists, the tax that we lowered in the past. So there's a saying when prices go up, leadership should step up – and you're going to hear me saying that quite a bit. What has the Liberal government done? We have faced this situation before. In 2022, when gas prices surged because of the war in the Ukraine, the Liberal government took action. We made a decision to cut the provincial gas tax in half, bringing it down to 7.5 cents per litre. That's a fact, and that's what Bill 5 is about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: That did translate into savings of more than eight cents per litre, with the HST that was included. That mattered. It mattered to the people of the province and they saw the difference. It meant real money stayed in people's pockets. It helped workers get to their jobs.

It helped families manage their budgets during a time of global uncertainty. It's a little step, but it's one step and it is lowering taxes. We're moving towards budget time and I'm really hoping to see lower taxes in the budget.

It was a targeted practical response to a real problem. That's what we did at that point in time, and importantly, it showed leadership. As I said, when prices go up, leadership should step up. It's key. It's important to show leadership and recognize that when external forces drive costs up, government has a responsibility to step in and help.

There are 40 of us here. Like I said, 18 of us have been standing up talking about this. Today, the situation is once again changing. Gas prices are rising again. I believe it's on social media there today about the prices going up, and this time it's due to the instability linked to the war in Iran. Yes, we're always going to have some form of instability, but the prices are going up. Families are, once again, facing higher costs, and what has the current government done besides shutting down debate on a tax bill? They've introduced legislation to maintain the existing gas tax rate, to keep it exactly where it is.

Now, let's be clear about what that means. They are not lowering taxes. They are not providing new relief. They are simply maintaining a measure that was introduced by the previous government. In fact, one of their own Members admitted in this House – it's in *Hansard* on April 1 last year – that there will be no changes. At a time when costs are going up, no change is not enough – no change is not enough. That's what we're over here saying, each and every one of us, and this is no change. Our amendment brings in change.

Maintaining the status quo might be acceptable if the costs were stable, but

they're not stable and that is a reality and government has to lead. People are being asked to absorb rising fuel prices once again. When that happens, doing nothing new is not action. This is not action. Bill 5, as is presented in this House of Assembly, is not action. It's inaction. It means families pay more. It means businesses face higher operating costs. It means everything that depends on transportation from foods to goods becomes more expensive. That's not hearsay; that is a fact. We cannot ignore that reality because for many people in this province, there is no flexibility in their budgets – zero flexibility.

So what you're going to see is people are going to stay home and the tourism industry is going to be impacted; that is a fact. How can it not be? When you don't have money to put gas in your vehicle, when you don't have money to eat at a restaurant, it's impacted. They cannot choose to drive less if it means not getting to work. They cannot opt out of higher fuel costs, if they live in rural communities with no alternatives.

The question before us is simple, do we respond to rising costs or do we stand still and hope people can manage on their own? We've put in an amendment, which responds to rising costs. I'm absolutely not certain why the government thinks there's something wrong with our amendment. Because as I said, twice already, when prices go up leadership should step up.

Our answer is clear. We believe government should act. That is why we proposed an amendment to further reduce the gas tax from 7.5 cents per litre down to 6.5 cents per litre – a modest, responsible, but meaningful additional cut. You promised lower taxes. I mean, I am not standing up saying something that you didn't promise.

This would provide immediate relief at the pump. It would build on a measure that's already working and it would send a clear

message to the people of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that their government understands what they're going through and is willing to help. This is not a complicated policy. It is a very simple policy. It is direct, it is visible and it is effective. At a time like this, it is exactly what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador need.

What makes this situation even more concerning is the gap between what this government is doing now and what they said they would do before. Because Members opposite did not just support tax relief in the past, they called for it, more than once, over and over.

The Minister of Energy said that the tax cut introduced at the time ought to give us a larger break. It's not a vague statement. It's a clear position. They were calling for deeper tax relief and yet today, in government, they're doing less than what they once demanded.

Again, the question must be asked, why is this government not delivering the tax relief they promised? Why are they satisfied with maintaining the status quo when once they argued it was not enough? This is a pattern people are starting to recognize: say one thing before forming government and do another thing once in power.

When presented with an opportunity to act and to debate, to consider, to improve legislation, what did this government do? They shut down debate. They used closure to end discussion on an issue that directly impacts the cost of living for the people across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Premier and this government now hold the levers of power. They have the ability to act. They have the ability to provide additional relief and have the responsibility to do that. We are calling on them to recognize the reality facing

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians today, to listen not just to us, not just to the Opposition, but to their own past commitments to what they said, to what they told the people of Newfoundland and Labrador they would do.

This is about more than policy. It is about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is about whether families can afford to get through the week, whether workers can afford to get to their jobs and whether government steps up when cost rises or they just stand still.

We believe the answer is clear. Continue the relief, go further, lower the gas tax and deliver the help that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador both need and were promised.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't know if this is relevant but I know I'm not going to get any feedback from the other side. Like, right now, the Leafs are not in the playoffs. The Habs are.

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance.

E. LOVELESS: Relevance. Well, we can debate that if you wish. But, absolutely, go Habs go. Anyway, that's on record. That's good.

We're talking about Bill 5, reduction in taxes that we have proposed on this side of the House. The piece I guess about the limiting debate is unfortunate. I'll just leave it at that. If we want to talk about ideologies of parties, the ideology of a PC Party is reducing taxes or cutting taxes. I know I'm

right. We all know we're right in terms of saying that, but we know that's not happening here.

Listening to the speakers on this side, my colleague from Burgeo - La Poile, I could probably read his speech and it'd be applicable to my district because the concerns are very similar. He talked about the distance from the essentials. The essentials being shopping, health care. We know that any burden on them, which you know gas tax is and any relief at all, I don't care – because I've heard it from my constituents – we would welcome it.

Social media – you turn on social media, no matter what the social media is, but they talk about the cost of living. Everything is about the cost of living and it points to the cost of gas. It's essential to everyday living. Last week was constituency week and I, like many, went to my district and spent the full week there and, of course, meeting with town councils and individuals.

I've got to tell you, the topic at hand was the cost of living and the price of gas, where it's going. We talked about gas relief and the sentiment, the response is always, we would take any break that we can get, absolutely. Because it may be a small measure, but makes a big difference. I know it has been referred to by various Members.

We all talk about listening. Well, listening to our constituents is very important because it forms policy, I believe, here, or it should. I can say I heard some constituents say, this week, that every bill is higher because of gas prices. Every grocery trip is more expensive and every paycheck is stretched thinner because of the cost of gas and the taxes on gas.

Again, if relief was given to them, it would make a difference for those individuals. A further tax cut gives households breathing room at a time when they need it most.

These are the words of people that are feeling the pinch. Also this is a targeted, practical way to help without creating new bureaucracies or delays. This amendment is measured, not reckless – very important words.

Mr. Chair, in talking about roadwork, we know the announcement that there's a cut in this year's roads budget. I certainly heard it in my district and every mayor that's out there, we're hoping that we're going to be able to have a meeting with the Minister of TI to express their concern and why they feel that consistent investment should be made in a rural district.

But with the cost of the gas, then it worries me that companies are – because they use a lot of gas. So that has to be factored into their bottom line in terms of their cost, the bidding piece, mobile costs, company trucks back and forth when they're doing jobs. I've seen it over and over and over. The fuel bill is a very, very high bill for them. I can tell you, any movement in taxes on that would definitely be a relief for them for sure, when they have such a high cost for delivering the service that they deliver.

I listened to my colleague from Gander who was very passionate about tourism, and so she should. The tourism industry is very important for this province. She challenged the minister responsible, and the minister responsible should take it seriously that to travel to your destination, whether that's with a vehicle, plane, ferry, Marine Atlantic, with these costs being higher, that will be reflective to the customers or people that are travelling to destinations and discourage people from being confident.

So someone had referenced – I believe it was my colleague to the right of me – consumer confidence is threatened. It is threatened. It is indeed threatened. When that happens, it is felt by everyone. All

jurisdictions are feeling that. We hear it from all jurisdictions.

I said it before when I spoke to this, that only a couple of years ago, Bay du Nord paused their project. Why did they pause it? Because of increase in gas prices and a barrel of oil. Will that happen now? I don't know. Hopefully it won't, but the media reported last week that they're hoping to sign the deal next year. I don't know what that means. But will it? It's a real question to be asked, does it interfere with their investment?

CHAIR: Please address the Chair.

E. LOVELESS: Sorry, Mr. Chair, that was the minister across the way trying to take my attention away from the Chair. Thank you, Chair, for your protection.

Fisheries and aquaculture – and I know the minister is going to listen to me – the cost of fuel for companies – and I know it was responded before, oh, they don't pay taxes and all that. Yeah, they do. Companies pay taxes on the enormous amount of fuel that they use. I say aquaculture because I know they use a lot of fuel for their boats on the water to their vehicles. Their vessels are not a dory; they're larger boats that consume a lot of fuel. That is, at the end of the day, talked about as a company in terms of investment. But right now, it's discouraging, I guess, for them at the table to talk about the enormous cost of gas to their companies.

We know the government is going to vote against this, not support it. Well, I stand here on behalf of the people of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. A gas tax break, I heard it last week, would help people of Seal Cove, Hermitage-Sandyville, François, McCallum, Gaultois, Harbour Breton, St. Alban's, St. Veronica's, St. Joseph's Cove, Milltown-Head of Bay d'Espoir, Morrisville, Conne River, Rencontre East, Belleoram, St.

Jacques, English Harbour West, Mose Ambrose, Boxey, Coombs Cove, Pool's Cove and Red Cove. Now you know the layout of my district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: I know the Minister of Finance is listening really well to what I'm saying here.

Our colleague from St. John's East - Quidi Vidi also talked about affordability measures and bringing her constituents' concerns here to the floor of the House of Assembly. She said we can always do better. I don't think there's a Member in this House that don't agree with that statement. We can. The amendment can do something for our constituents and do it now.

Budget 2026 is going to be an interesting document, and I look forward to reading it. I look forward to the Minister of Finance reading it. I can remember back when one of our budgets was presented and I always remember saying it, there were good things in our budget. They were clapping like the church choir, and I witnessed it. The Members over there that are laughing at me know it was them that clapped to the point where the Member for CBS turned around and said stop clapping. Stop the clapping. Stop rejoicing in the wonderful budget that the Liberals have presented over there.

B. PETTEN: I forgot about that.

E. LOVELESS: See, there you go, now I have them awake.

But there were good things. So you just admitted that there were good things, yet you always say, oh, 10 years you didn't do anything. It's not the case.

The Member for Burin - Grand Bank also talked about rural Newfoundland and Labrador challenges, banks, lawyers,

people having to use gas to put in their vehicles to go to these very important appointments for them. We know that this amendment, if it was supported, would help them. He also referenced communities with no gas stations and they have to travel to get the gas. It's a necessity. Somebody referred to it as oxygen. It is a necessity.

The Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville talked about – I think it was you – geographic footprint in this province for the cost of living like gas.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

E. LOVELESS: Yeah, I was listening because it's important to listen. That footprint is concerning now. That footprint is in jeopardy right now. But in terms of the geographic footprint of this province, I'll go back to tourism because I know the Minister of Tourism is listening to me, that the geographical footprint of this province is important, no doubt about it.

The Member for Gander also talked about business challenges. Again, it's what I talked about in terms of the cost in terms of business challenges for gas tax, the high prices that's being paid right now. Restaurants – believe me, we're not hearing the volume right now but we will hear it. We are hearing it, but it's going to be louder.

For her, the airport in her district, it is very concerning. If the traffic volumes are down, then we know people are not coming to the province, whether they choose that way or come through Marine Atlantic, or going outside for vacations. There are a lot of people saying well, we're not going to be able to afford it this year. We hope that's not the case, but right now we know they're being challenged.

The Member for Corner Brook referenced the increase in price is up by 35 per cent or 40 per cent. That is very high.

I know I have a few more minutes, but I know the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, I never thought I would witness him not having an opportunity to support something that would support his constituents. He talked about no end date, but this was introduced back March 12. So no end date language was brought here today. The no end date, that's his argument, but it's certainly not ours.

I guess for all of us here, it's about choices and the choice that we're making is to support relief for Newfoundland and Labradorians when it's needed most.

Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Chair.

It's about – for anybody who might be watching tonight – 6:40 in the evening and I think we've still got a ways to go as we continue debate on Bill 5, Chair. For folks who maybe were not watching, last week, last Thursday, Bill 5 is an Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2. This bill would see a reduction of the tax on certain grades of gasoline by seven cents per litre.

So, in essence, we're talking for quite some time in the House about Bill 5, which is proposing to do really what the Liberal administration did in Budget '22, '23, '24, '25, recognizing the high cost of living, recognizing that people were struggling and recognizing that when you talk about gas, it touches everybody. It really does. It touches everybody. It touches everything. It's the base of our economy and whether it's up or down, we see the impact on cost of goods

and travel and everything else go up or down.

We have an amendment on the floor, Chair, recognizing that we have seen the price of gas go up multiple times in recent weeks, it's almost like every other day and it is the topic of conversation. If you live in Newfoundland and Labrador, growing up, we used to say the topic of conversation was usually the weather, but that's not the topic of conversation. Although that hasn't been very good either lately which have added to the cost for people that I represent, like Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair where we've had a lot of road closures. I hope some of the new equipment that we ordered while we were in government is going to be going to places like Shadow Pond because the workers there for Transportation and Infrastructure, they really had a difficult winter.

Yesterday morning, vehicles getting escorted through, be at the gate for 5:45 a.m. – it's really a different world – and driving up through tunnels of snow. I got in here last night and thought, my goodness, I feel like I've just been much further away than just another part of this province.

We've had ferry disruptions and lots of flight disruptions and everything that adds to cost. So we do have an amendment on the floor and my team of colleagues have been very, very passionate about having their say on how the price of gas, the taxes impact the people that they represent, the people who elected them to work for them.

I did speak about this a little bit, I believe it was on Friday morning on a call I made to *Open Line*. I was saddened to see Standing Order 47 was used and we were basically shut down in democracy here and closure was invoked and we know that we are having our last opportunity right now to speak to Bill 5 and the gas tax.

I am coming off a beautiful week in my district, I have to say. I put in an awful lot of miles. They were not all in the sky and on the road either. I believe I did drive over 1,000 kilometres. But on Saturday, when I got up, it was minus 35 with the wind chill and it was on with your woolen sweater and your heavy socks, and I went just over 70 kilometres by snowmobile to a beautiful little community, Norman Bay, and I attended a wedding.

I've actually had two notes from the bride to say how much they appreciated that I took the time on that cold day to get on my snowmobile and go to Norman Bay to attend the wedding ceremony. It was the first wedding that's been in that little community. It's a year-round population of permanent residents, I would say, of 10 people. But there was probably 60 or 70 there on Saturday.

I came back alone, because I travelled for years from community to community by myself on snowmobile. We did go down in a company of sleds, and I came back a little early. I came back myself. I was thinking how wonderful it always is to get out into community and to interact with the people that hired you.

Even though I, myself, on the other side served a long time as a minister and, often, the departments are super busy, sometimes in the larger social departments and things – I'm going to reference what used to be CSSD – 350 social workers and it felt like a full-time job just signing staffing actions and things like that. But you realize, especially if your district is rural and a long way away from where the House sits, that your constituents have no idea what you're doing when you're in the department. So it's so good to get on the ground and to hear their concerns.

One of the things that I heard again and again and again was about the cost of

living. People were already struggling, and with the gas going up and in a few days, it's going up, even households like seniors that are pretty solid, you know, that do really well with budgeting – my elderly in-laws are on the Great Northern Peninsula, so I often am a frequent there as well and they just have it down to a science on how to budget.

But, you know, it's already been said here by my team, people are staying home more. People are only going out for necessity. Many of our seniors are actually – I have many stories – checking the flyers to see what week the milk is on and what week the butter is on because the impacts are being felt. I think I said it here before, I went into a home and I saw this couple and they were eating noodles at lunchtime. I asked why they were eating the noodles – I made some kind of like joke. They said: Well, do you know how much a can of soup is now?

The Leader of the Third Party, one of the things that he often has said in here through the years that has really resonated with me is he would say we're a privileged lot in this Legislature. However, the most important job that we have as Members of the House of Assembly is to ensure that the people that hired us to work for them to ensure that they have access to basic services – the most important job that we have, bar none. It's a tremendous, tremendous privilege to serve.

So we're here continuing the debate. We have an amendment on the floor. We're not changing the intent, as I said last week, around the gas tax. Given the much, much higher increase into the provincial Treasury, given that every one US dollar per barrel increase, \$25 million or \$30 million into the Treasury, we're just asking government to put your ear to the ground, to listen to the struggles of the people right now and to do a little bit better.

Chair, when I'm passionate about things, I can get riled up in the House, probably as much as the next person and sometimes I have to try to do a little better; but midafternoon, when the news release came out from the government on advancing the gas tax legislation, it kind of really put my blood pressure over the top again because I feel that a lot of the language is really misleading. It is really misleading to the public.

It says: "This legislation is required to meet regulatory timelines Failure to pass the bill today will result in gas prices increasing on April 1." I wouldn't dispute that. I would dispute that we had opportunity last week. I'll just say the luck of the Irish probably wasn't on our side on Paddy's Day.

My colleagues here will know that we did have opportunity. We didn't have to leave this out until five minutes to midnight. So to put that out there and then as I went on to read about the government emphasizing the importance of advancing the legislation in a timely manner, this could have been a priority. Actually, we could have been in the House last fall – tons of opportunity to be in the House last fall.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: Chair, the Finance Minister, in the new release, said this is not the time for last-minute changes or delay tactics. I don't think debating here is delay tactics. For those of us who sat on the other side for a long time, Members there know, time and time again, they would stand and they would address the Speaker and say this is our job. We are doing our job.

It is the job of Opposition to question everything the government brings forward and it is with the full intent that, at the end of the day, we will get the best piece of legislation for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Whether we're over there

whether, whatever colour is over there, it's very good. Only good can come from Opposition asking questions. Did you think about this? Can we do that?

I mean how many times, even in your own household, or even when you're negotiating with your teenage children, can we do this and we got to do it this way, but have you thought about something else? Really, that is the role of Opposition. We had some discussion earlier today, looking ahead to some of the work that we're going to do about going right back to ancient times and the role of the Crown and the role of the House and all of those things all fits nicely into a package about why it's absolute a necessity.

Actually even when I was in BC, where my mom lives on Vancouver Island, we had a big conversation last year. I think they had an NDP government at the time. Anyway, a bunch of her friends were saying we love minority governments because everybody gets to have a lot of say in minority governments. So sometimes we don't think people are really engaged, but certainly they're more engaged than we realize.

Another quote that I have to mention – I just cannot let it go, while I have the floor – was from the Premier of the province where he said people in this province expect their House of Assembly to work with them and not against them. I don't know what he was referencing there, but I do want to say what we're doing here is not working against the people; we want something better for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador because –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: – it's never been more important than right now, Chair.

Then for the Premier to say the only thing standing in the way right now is delay.

That's not right. It is not right. It is misleading the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to say the only thing standing in the way is delay when we are here having a true debate. We're talking about the impacts on the people that we represent, beautiful constituency.

In my district, sometimes I have to be cognizant – and maybe some of my colleagues this will resonate with – it's easy to go into the seniors' homes and we always have a lovely time with our seniors. I made a big effort this time to get into schools, to connect with students.

I went into a school where I actually played in the gym for an hour with the Grade 4, 5 and 6's and I'll tell you that was a workout because I wanted to keep my end up too, Chair. We played a bunch of games. They introduced me to some new ones. That was the Labrador Straits Academy and we did a Wellness Wednesday. The next day, I was in a school in St. Lewis and we did a bunch of games. They introduced me to pickleball, which I had never played.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. DEMPSTER: Yes.

So it's amazing to talk to those young people and they know about the cost of living. Well, I don't go on my Ski-Doo as much now because Dad has got me a little bit limited, and then it gives us a chance to talk about the gas tax and what we're trying to do, not just to help Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe, not just to help the business owner, but to help, even, the young people.

Also, we just had an under-18 hockey tournament yesterday in Mary's Harbour. Cartwright won and they're going to be going to King's Point. They're all excited about that – the first week in May. Now starts the fundraising. The cost of gas

getting from Labrador, multiple vehicles, is higher than it has ever been.

Our gas in Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, sometimes, is the highest in the province, and I hear a lot about that. Sometimes it's Northern Labrador, up in Nain, but there has been a few times when we've been higher in a different zone. That is frustrating for the people.

We just had a group, St. Lewis drama lessons, the new drama group were just down in Goose Bay presenting in the regional arts festival for the first time ever. They came home with almost all of the hardware. What an incredible play they have about the Jam Jams that went missing and they start doing this detective work and, actually, got sponsored by Purity for doing their play. So there's the shout-out. It is about the cost of living. So to leave St. Lewis, they had to drive over 900 kilometres return. There was a cost to that.

I continue to hear endlessly about health, medical transportation, the challenges, Labrador Air Access. We put a Labrador Air Access program in place, \$3.5 million, just one airline. The costs have doubled just since I've been serving. We know that this government has said, in the blue book, they're going to scrap the Liberal Labrador Air Access and they're coming with something better.

Well, I'll tell you, people can't wait for that something better. Yesterday, I had a family from Lab West reached out to me – a man, a wife and a little one – and they were coming out here and to go back for Easter – the program is ended; I think it ends tomorrow – it is \$4,500 to get from Lab West to St. John's – \$4,500. That's what those people have to factor in if they want to go. Many aren't going.

If they drive, it's about 1,000 clicks from Lab West to the ferry and then it's another

1,000. So they're driving over 4,000 kilometres. I tell you, it's important that we talk about it because, years ago, when I worked in here, I actually worked with some people who said they'd never been further than Corner Brook. That surprised me.

Then there's the fishery. There's the most vulnerable. We've heard lots today about tourism and I represent a beautiful district with tremendous tourism opportunity, and this is absolutely having an impact.

We've spent a lot of time in this House, not just now, but in recent weeks, talking about affordability. What we're debating here, right now, is something more specific. Really, what it comes down to is whether the government is willing to ease a cost that affects almost everything else. Because fuel is not just another expense; it is the base in our economy, as I said earlier.

It affects how people get to work. It affects how goods get to the market. It affects the final price on almost everything that people buy, and my mind always goes to Labrador. So much further, so much more cost. Even if I'm in the Labrador Straits, the most southern part of my riding, and then I go to Cartwright, which is about seven hours north, the cost in Cartwright is double what it is in the Labrador Straits.

When government chooses not to reduce the cost further, that choice is not just contained at the pump, and I think it's important that I say that. When they choose not to go a little bit further, it doesn't just stay at the pump; it moves.

Mr. Chair, I saw that first-hand in my district again and again – time won't permit me to go into that, but the real impact of fuel cost is not just what one person saves on one trip. I was thinking about that, given the hundreds and hundreds of kilometres that I spent on the road, but it's how those costs scale across an entire economy. Every

delivery costs more. Every construction project costs more. Every business that relies on transportation sees its margins tightened and those costs don't disappear. They get built into prices.

That's why it matters. Because while government frames this as a small change, limited impact, the reality is fuel costs are one of the most widely felt inputs in our entire economy. Choosing not to act means choosing to leave that pressure in place.

In Labrador, those pressures are certainly – I don't know if it's fair to say much more evident to see, but I feel like they are because distances are longer, options are fewer and driving is essential. Certainly, the impact is more visible.

I visited a home a couple of nights ago where a man in that home is struggling on a very difficult cancer journey. For the type of blood work he needed – very sick – he had to go to Goose Bay. This family has spent almost everything they've got on health in the last few years.

That man had to make an 820-kilometre trip into Goose Bay and out from the coast, in one day, just to get this certain type of blood work. That's not covered with MTAP. That's not covered. I don't think it's going to be covered when we get the 100 per cent coverage, but the cost of gas for that man and his wife to go was certainly real, and they mentioned that.

This is not just a Labrador issue. This is about how cost moved through the system in every region of this province and, right now, those costs are moving in the wrong direction. We've talked about it before in this House about different ways to provide relief. Some measures are targeted, some measures are complex and some take time to implement. But this is simple and this is immediate and I urge the government to vote for our amendment on the floor.

CHAIR: I remind the Member her time is up.

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

K. WHITE: Thank you, Chair.

I am pleased to rise today to continue speaking to the Revenue and Administration Act No. 2 and reflect more on the very real and very direct impact this legislation has on the people we represent, on individual households, on workers, on businesses and on the overall strength of our communities and our economy. This is not simply a discussion about a tax. It's a discussion about how people live their lives. It's a bout affordability, stability and whether the people of this province feel supported in their everyday realities.

When I stand in this House, I do so as a representative of the people of St. John's West. I think about the parents I meet at the grocery store, the seniors I speak to on the street, the students I visit in their schools and the young workers who are just beginning to build their futures here at home. These are the people that feel the impact of decisions made in this House every single day. What I'm hearing from them is consistent. There is concern. There is pressure and there is growing awareness that the cost of living continues to rise and that the fluctuation in fuel prices only adds to that burden.

Affordability is not an abstract concept. It's just not a headline in the news. It's a lived experience. It's a conversation happening every single day at kitchen tables, in workplaces and in communities across our province.

When we talk about fuel taxes, Mr. Chair, we talk about something that sits right at the centre of this experience. Because fuel is not just about transportation or getting from one place to another, it's about access and

it's about connection. It's about participation in daily life. We're talking about the ability of a parent to get their child to school or extracurricular activities. We're talking about the ability of a neighbour to check in on another neighbour and the ability of families to remain connected, even when distance is a factor.

There is often an assumption, particularly in urban areas like St. John's, that everything is close by, that services are readily available and that the people can simply walk or take transit to where they need to go. But, Chair, that assumption does not reflect reality for many people. Our city is spread out; our communities are interconnected and, for many residents, driving is not optional, it is essential. It is how they get to work. It is how they bring their children to school and activities. It is how they care for family members and stay connected to the people and places that matter the most.

So when fuel costs rise or when they become unpredictable, the impact is immediate. It is felt in real time. It is felt when someone pulls up to the pump or reviews their monthly budget and it is felt when someone has to make difficult choices about where to cut back.

Chair, that is why stability matters. People can plan and people can participate and when costs are manageable, people can live with a greater sense of security, and that impact extends far beyond the gas station. It affects whether a parent feels comfortable enrolling their child in an activity or whether someone makes the extra trip to visit a loved one, and it affects whether people feel they can fully participate in their own communities.

Chair, I want to take a moment to speak specifically about seniors in St. John's West because this is a group that feels these pressures in a very direct and very personal

way. These are individuals who built our communities. These are ones who worked for decades and who raised families and they contributed to our economy and, now, many of them are living on fixed incomes – an income that does not increase when the cost of living rises and an income does not adjust when fuel prices fluctuate.

For many seniors, every dollar is carefully planned; every expense is considered. So when something changes, our costs increase unexpectedly, it creates immediate pressure. When the price at the pump rises, it is not a simply a matter of driving less; it often means making a trade-off. It may mean choosing between putting gas in the car to get to a medical appointment and purchasing groceries. It may mean deciding not to attend a community event or visit with family or friends because the cost of that drive is simply too high.

Chair, that has real consequences. Because when people begin to withdraw from their communities, not by choice but by necessity due to high costs, it leads to isolation. We know that isolation has serious impacts on both mental and physical health. So when we talk about stabilizing fuel costs, we are not just talking about affordability. We are talking about quality of life and dignity. We're talking about ensuring that seniors can remain active, engaged and connected members of their community.

This issue does not stop with seniors and families; it extends to young workers and students as well, individuals who are just beginning to build their lives and their careers. These are people who are trying to establish themselves. They are trying to save money and plan for the future.

What they are facing right now is uncertainty. They see fuel prices fluctuate and they feel that instability and they carry that uncertainty into every financial decision they make. It affects how they budget and

how they plan. and it affects how secure they feel about their future here in this province. That kind of uncertainty is not insignificant; it shapes behaviour and it influences decisions. It affects whether young people believe they build a stable and sustainable future here at home.

When we bring forward measures like this, we're doing more than adjusting a tax rate; we are providing stability and we are sending a message that their government understands the pressures that they are facing. It allows them to make decisions and to invest in their future.

I want to highlight the broader economic impact of this issue because transportation costs do not just affect individuals; it affects workers and businesses and the overall functioning of our economy. Our economy does not operate in isolation; it is interconnected. People move across the metro region every single day between St. John's, Mount Pearl, Paradise, CBS and beyond. These are not occasional trips but, often, daily routines. These are the movements that keep our economy functioning.

We have workforce that is inherently mobile. Construction workers move from site to site. Delivery drivers make multiple stops throughout the day. Home care workers travel from home to home providing essential services. For these workers, fuel is not optional; it is a core part of doing their jobs and when that cost fluctuates, it creates real challenges.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. They are the ones creating jobs, driving innovation and contributing to the vibrancy of our communities, but they're also the ones who feel the impact of fuel costs most directly. For many small businesses, fuel is a major operating expense. It's built into pricing, planning their ability to grow. When fuel prices fluctuate,

that creates uncertainty. It makes it harder to quote a job or to plan ahead, and even to make decisions about hiring and investments.

Chair, small businesses do not operate with large margins. They cannot easily absorb unexpected costs, so when these costs increase, they're forced to make difficult choices. They can pass those costs on to consumers, they can absorb those costs themselves or they can delay growth and investment; but, in many cases, they're forced to do all three and that creates ripple effects throughout our economy. It affects prices, wages and overall economic opportunity.

So when we talk about stabilizing fuel costs, we're talking about supporting small business. We're talking about giving them the certainty they need to operate effectively and allowing them to plan, to invest and to grow because economic certainty is critical. When businesses know what to expect, they can make informed decisions. They can look ahead and take calculated risks and grow. A contractor can quote a project with confidence. A delivery company can plan its routes and pricing. A new entrepreneur can start a business without fear of sudden cost increases.

That is the kind of environment we should be fostering. An environment where businesses feel supported, workers feel secure and people see opportunity. We want a province where small business does more than survive. We want them to thrive and to grow. We want workers to keep more of what they earn and young people to see a future here. We want families to feel competent in their ability to build a life in their communities.

This amendment contributes to that. It may seem like a small measure, but its impact is significant because it touches so many aspects of our daily life. It supports

individuals, families, seniors, businesses and more and, ultimately, it supports the stability of our communities and our economy.

Chair, in a time of economic uncertainty, our responsibility in this House is clear. We must provide stability and support to our residents. This amendment moves us in that direction. It recognizes the pressure people are facing, it takes a practical step to address these pressures and it demonstrates that affordability is a priority.

The people of St. John's West are hard working and they're doing their best to navigate a challenging economic environment. They deserve policies that reflect that reality. They deserve stability and they deserve support.

For all of these reasons, I'm proud to stand in the House and speak in support of this amendment because this is more than a vote on a tax measure; it is a vote on affordability and stability. It's a vote for our workers, our families, our seniors and our small businesses and, ultimately, it is a vote for a stronger Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you.

It is, indeed, somewhat encouraging to hear the government fight this amendment and to invoke closure in that it is sort of a tacet recognition, in many ways, of what the New Democratic Party has often said, taxes or services. That influences the collective well-being of the people of this province. We've said that many a time over about you can give tax cuts but, in the end, they don't

always help everyone, but providing good services does.

Either you reduce taxes or you cut services. One way or the other, the fact is, if you want the services that's, basically, what's going to happen here. We know that this bill was meant to, as it says here, make the gas tax cut permanent and will give some predictability around the price of gasoline.

We also know that certain businesses have already said that they might very well have to force to pass increased fuel costs on to customers, and that is really what this debate is about right here. It's about affordability. It's about predictability by making the cut permanent. So why not look at reducing it one cent further?

We have heard here the measure is modest. We'll have the lowest gas tax in the country. That if it's not passed, it will result in higher gas prices, but I don't believe any of this will really solve the problem when it comes to affordability and predictability as hoped for.

It's not lost upon us, not lost upon me, not lost my colleague that we debate this bill, this amendment in the shadow of the war in Iran and the choking of the Gulf of Hormuz. If anything else, Chair, there comes with that, a recognition of the volatility of fossil fuels and a fossil-fuel economy and on its affordability. Actually, it's the very opposite of being predictable. What we're attempting to do is to try solve this with a band-aid solution is what this comes down to.

We know that Australia is also reducing its gas tax, like us. We know that in Manitoba, the NDP government there introduced a permanent 10 per cent reduction on gas tax, as well as removing the provincial sales tax of all food items.

We know that those measures are still inadequate because, think about this –

earlier this month the International Energy Agency countries, 32 members, released 400 million barrels from their strategic reserves to try to address the affordability issue – 400 million barrels. That is the largest release of strategic reserves, yet it amounts to four days of global demand. The fact is, despite what the President of the United States says, it's a good chance this is going to get worse, after this.

We know right now that there's a paper shortage of oil versus the actual oil. There are tankers that have gotten out but, once that oil is unloaded, we are putting in for harder times, that even a gas tax will not resolve. So the worst is yet to come.

I'll go back to what I mentioned earlier today in response to a Ministerial Statement. This past week, oil industry executives and policymakers met in Houston for the CERAWEEK event, hosted by S&P Global. Yet, even their director of energy advisory at S&P Global reports the rational optimism among people in this industry right now, that the alternative is so daunting – the alternative being that if this war goes on, prices will increase and reducing the gas tax will not help at all. I've heard it already that it's projected to go above \$2 now. We're heading there.

The alternative is so daunting to think about, with the consequences so grave, that many are choosing optimism without a solid foundation. Meanwhile, we're trying to pick around the edges here.

If anything else, invasion of Venezuela, Iran, Hormuz demonstrates the precarity of an economy that's relying on oil. I guess, in many ways, that's what we're debating here because this is the effect of it. An oil-producing province and we're still struggling. We're being slammed with an increase of gas prices and we're trying to mitigate it some way, shape or form.

Now, I do believe, Chair, if you want to protect people, if you want to create predictability and affordability, then you really have to begin and look at a green transition. One thing we all know is that transitions begin with an ending and end with a beginning.

A few weeks ago, my colleague and I attended a conference From Oil to Energy Justice, hosted by Adam Walsh and Angela Carter. It's interesting, one of the speakers there said that the fossil fuel storylines are preventing us from a just transition in moving ahead.

Here we are debating gas tax, and we're focused on, I guess, the trees and not seeing the forest. It's interesting to note that there's never been a war over sunshine and wind – never. It's free. It's why China is moving towards more solar power because they also realize the precarity of oil, of an oil-based economy, not necessarily because they're more environmentally conscientious.

The United Kingdom Energy secretary said that the Iran war demonstrates that clean power is essential to escape the grip of fossil fuel markets that we don't control. Here we are, what are we trying to do? We're trying, in some way, to mitigate against the effects of a market that we do not control. We have no say in the price of it. All we can do is react.

So what has the United Kingdom done? They have mandated solar panels and heat pumps on all new housing builds. They've also made it mandatory that plug-in solar panels for other homes.

Now, I know people are going to say it will never work here. Well, actually the UK is further north than St. John's and most of Newfoundland and Labrador. But it's interesting, I'll say this, if you want to talk about making life affordable, friends of mine

who live in the centre of city, in the place really that has no business to have solar panels, have solar panels. Chair, the very thing, what they've done, they have enough power there throughout the year to power their electric car and to sell that electricity back to the grid in the summertime. They're making money on it. They charge their vehicle and they make money.

So they're not worried about the seven cents in gas tax. Meanwhile, we are committed to putting public funds into whatever oil projects come up, and I'm thinking here's an opportunity, if we want to make life affordable for people in this province, to start finding a way to have this green transition and so people are insulated from the shocks of a volatile oil industry. Not shutting down the industry, but let's start looking forward to the industries of the future that will actually protect the people of this province.

Let's face it, oil, like all mining industries, it's an extractive industry. It's good at extracting our resources and good at extracting government subsidies, but we also know that when the resources are gone, so are the companies and they leave communities behind as well.

Let's take a look at Gander. It didn't dwell on its past. It was once the crossroads of the world. I had family out there; it was a bustling place. You would think that when that industry closed or when the airport lost its status, it would be the end of Gander, not so. You look at Gander now, it's thriving. They have reinvented themselves. They didn't look to the past; they looked to the future.

AN HON. MEMBER: Bettina did that.

J. DINN: Probably Bettina did.

CHAIR: I remind the Member not to use names, please.

J. DINN: A good compliment.

The other thing is we've had a lesson in this, Chair, in the cod moratorium. Probably the greatest single out-migration of people in this province. Even though there were plenty of warnings leading up that there were problems coming.

I guess what I'm looking at right here, as we debate the gas tax, and while we're picking around the edges at affordability, let's strike a path towards affordability and predictability that lies with renewable and sustainable green energy. We have the opportunity – and I haven't heard much discussion, except vague promises, with regard to the Churchill Falls agreement.

If we're going to invest money in anything, let's get this deal done. Done in a way that benefits the people of this province, that's better than the deal that we signed many years ago, that's even better than Muskrat Falls. If we're serious about affordability, this is where we need to focus.

While I will support this measure, while I will support this amendment, while I will support this bill, I do so recognizing that, by itself, it will not lead to the prosperity of our people and to the increased affordability and predictability that we so desperately need.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

It's a pleasure to be here, in Committee, to speak again on the amendment that we made to the gas tax bill.

I'd like to start by saying that, I think, just a few minutes ago, the governing party put out a post on social media and I just saw it briefly: TikTok – Liberal delay could cause gas prices to go up. That could easily also read: TikTok – government House mismanagement causes gas prices to go up.

L. PARROTT: (Inaudible) what does this have to do with (inaudible)?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: It is relevant; we are talking about gas prices.

CHAIR: I will take it under advisement and come back with a decision.

I recognize the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

I find it interesting, when I speak, the government gets very upset and my colleagues have wagered how long it would take before relevance was called. So it was 38 seconds, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

On the 12th, I made the amendment and we were prepared to stay into the night to discuss this important amendment. We could have done this on the 12th. We could have done it in October. We could have done it in November. We could have done it in December, when we thought the House was going to sit. We could have done it on the 12th when we brought it up and we were prepared to stay and then the government closed the House.

We discussed many other things in this Legislature when we could have been talking about the gas tax. We've talked about amendments. We actually had other amendments that we wanted to make. I know the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands made an excellent suggestion; why don't we have an amendment with a sunset clause? Great, we would have supported an amendment for a sunset clause, but it's too late for that.

It would have been lovely if we could have all gotten together, maybe we meet in the middle. Maybe we remove half a cent from gas and diesel. We would have supported that but, unfortunately, it's too late for that. Given the government invoked closure, we no longer have the ability to make any amendments that will make the bill or the amendment better, which is unfortunate.

It's so interesting, the government was so threatened by our amendment that they put my face out on social media and then shut the House down within five minutes. So I can only be honoured, on behalf of the people of all parties that I represent in Mount Scio, that our very reasonable amendment was so threatening to the government.

I also want to talk about gas tax across the country. I've talked about clean fuel regulations, and I'll get into that a bit more. We do have the lowest gas tax in the country, Chair. Quebec – I think it's worth nothing, we haven't talked about there are some elements of gas tax in this House. They have an interesting cap and trade system that causes an extra eight cents on top of their gas.

I thought it was interesting; I discovered today, in doing so more research on this, that some municipalities across Canada have their own municipal tax on gas, Vancouver, Montreal, Victoria, for example. In Vancouver, it's over 10 cent a litre extra

on gas and it's called the trans-link fee, on top of the gas tax.

I thought that was very interesting that we even see municipalities across Canada have a tax on gas and here we are, though, trying to lower taxes for our constituents. I know that if I asked anyone in Mount Scio, would they like to save one cent on a litre of gasoline, they would say yes.

The government, as we know, it was one of their cornerstones of the election: lower taxes. So we brought in a very reasonable amendment that they couldn't meet us half way with. Maybe it was because I brought it in; I'm not sure. They couldn't meet us half way. They couldn't have any debate on that. It's just flat out, close the House.

I do want to talk about the change in gasoline that we've seen since January. Obviously, we know gas prices have been very volatile. January 27, for example, it was \$66.14 US a barrel, which aligns with what was in the government fiscal forecast in August and in December, \$66 a barrel. February 18, it went up to 69.8 cents; February 27, it was 72.5 cent; March 2, it was 77.7 cents; March 5, it was 85.4 cents; March 9, it was 94.35 cents; March 12, it was 101.35 cents. We've seen a barrel of crude increase 31 per cent just in 10 days in March. So there's incredible volatility here.

We know that the amendment that we've proposed, we anticipate – and no one has corrected that – would cost the government about \$16 million, plus some HST impact. They've already made that back and much, much more in terms of the extra revenue that they've gotten from the increase price of oil and the HST on the increased price of oil. So this is a very reasonable amendment, Chair.

When we look at the maximum price – and I've talked about it before in this House – if you look at the Public Utilities Board, they

have it excellent on their website, a breakdown of the price of gas, a price of a litre of oil. When you look at petroleum today, the maximum price is 188.4 cents. Of that, 42.08 cents are taxes and 14.28 cents retail markup; 15.65 cents is the wholesale markup; 5.40 cents is the carbon price adjustment; and 111.01 is the benchmark price.

So that is price of a barrel of crude, Chair. I think it's important because most people don't understand what goes into a price of a litre of fuel. If anyone is interested in learning more the Public Utilities Board, on their website, under fuels, has an interesting breakdown.

Then diesel, as well – I think it's important to talk about diesel – the benchmark is 161.69; the carbon price adjustment is 6.02 cents. The total allowed wholesale markup is 14.07 cents; the retail markup is 18.03 cents. Then they have the federal excise tax on diesel is only four cents, where it's 10 cents on the price of petroleum, of regular gas, and then the provincial fuel tax on diesel is 9.50 cents; HST is 32 cents; for a total tax on diesel of 45.5 cents; and the total real-time maximum of the pump price is 245.3 cents. All of that is broken down on the Public Utilities Board website.

I think it's very interesting, it's very complex and very few people in the province who understand the makeup and all the nuances that go into a price of a litre of petroleum products, Chair.

We know that the price of oil is going up and colleagues in the House have talked about we wish the war ends soon. No one wishes that the government be profiting on this. Obviously these forces, what's going on is outside of our control, but it is important to understand that there is a supply disruption in Brent crude. Production is cut globally. We know that 20 per cent of global oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz and shipping

has nearly stopped. That is having a direct impact on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians cost of living.

Tankers refuse to enter the region. Insurance costs and shipping costs have gone up incredibly. For the tankers who do choose, the insurance costs have gone up. The risk is incredibly high and that directly translates into costs. The New York Harbour price, which directly translates into the pump price, which directly translates into how much money our constituents and ourselves have in our bank accounts, at the end of the day.

Global demand remains high despite the high cost, over 100 million barrels a day. Production can't ramp up as fast, globally, to have a downward pressure on supply. It's anticipated markets could go up 30 per cent to 60 per cent in the coming weeks. It is certainly a volatile situation.

I know, as colleagues in this House have said, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador, we are so price sensitive based on the price of gas, especially the clean fuel regulations and everything being shipped into the province, we know that every cent added to the cost at the pumps directly gets added to the frozen blueberries that you buy, the price of the bread, flour, the carton of milk. All of those things, Chair, are directly impacted by what is going on globally, and this bill and how much tax goes on a litre of gas in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville did an excellent job when he spoke. I think it's worth repeating that our amendment aligns with the government's platform. We have not yet seen a tax decrease from the government. They've said that they're going to lower personal income tax in the budget; we'll see. But this would lower the tax. This would align with their platform. It is very reasonable, Chair.

Like I've mentioned, we had other amendments ready that we've discussed but, unfortunately, we will not be able to bring our other amendments forward. It would have been nice to have collaborative discussions around that but, unfortunately, that's not on the table.

I do want to commend the Member for Gander who made excellent points about tourism and excellent points about visitors travelling around the province. I was last night invited to a wedding in the beautiful Town of Meadows on the West Coast. I was looking at the prices and comparing should I fly, should I drive or should I rent a car? All of those costs and the price of gas, not knowing what it would be, potentially going up significantly does significantly factor into the decision.

It has a direct implication on tourists and how much people choose to travel and stay in Newfoundland and Labrador, go up to the Great Northern Peninsula, go to Port aux Basques, the beautiful beaches in Port aux Basques which I love. The price of gas directly impacts what people do on the weekend. I'm sure my grandmother used to always go for a drive on Sundays, it was one of her joys in life, in the afternoon. She lived in Deer Lake. Her and my grandfather would go for a drive on Sundays. I'm not sure, Chair, that if they were here today, they would go for a drive on Sundays, purely because of the price of gas.

I want to give a shout-out to my colleague, the MHA for Corner Brook, talking about the cost of transportation of foods. Chair, we know that the price of gas directly impacts the cost of all foods in Newfoundland and Labrador. Given that everything is shipped in, the cost of gas gets exponentially added on to all of our costs.

I also want to go back to the MHA for Humber - Bay of Islands who made an excellent suggestion about, okay, fine, he

would support the bill if we had a sunset clause on this reduction. That would have been a great amendment that we could have supported. That could have been a friendly amendment but, unfortunately, we're not able to even have those discussions now because the government has invoked closure and we're not able to deliver even that temporary relief to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, which is extremely unfortunate.

Chair, the last time I spoke about gas prices, I highlighted some changes the Public Utilities Board made in their Island report, the Island of Newfoundland. This time, I wanted to highlight some of the changes from the Labrador report. This was from March 13, 2025. As I've mentioned before and many Members of this House were here, we changed the *Petroleum Products Act* to direct the Public Utilities Board to do a review of gas prices, which they did. Part of that was they commissioned many different reports, one of which was a report on the Island of Newfoundland and then, separately, there as a report on the Island of Labrador, because gas prices in Labrador are calculated in a very different way.

As I talked about the Island last time, I did want to talk about the Labrador recommendations, and these are from the highlights of the Labrador report from March 13, 2025. Again, this report is on the Public Utilities Board website.

What the review recommended for Western Labrador, the maximum price adjustments will occur on Friday night rather than a Thursday. So that aligns with the changes the Public Utilities made for the Island, aligns it with other Atlantic Canadian provinces.

They moved from a seven-day average to a five-day average and they changed the vendor where they get the benchmark price

from. It used to be Platts and they changed it to Argus Media. That's to align with other Canadian vendors.

Then, in terms of the Labrador zone boundaries, they changed the boundary, because the Public Utilities Board for gas prices, the whole province is divided up into many boundaries for gas and diesel. We are in Zone 1 in the Avalon today, but there are zones across the province and, rightfully or wrongfully, that allows wholesalers and retailers to essentially charge different prices, so the retail markup and the wholesale markup and there's a zone differential.

If the wholesaler, if it costs them more to get gas to Ramea than it does to St. John's, they can charge more. The zone markups allow the wholesaler to charge a different amount to the customer in that zone to account for the extra costs of transporting fuel to that zone. That price of gas and the tax on gas would directly mean a higher gas price for consumers of Ramea, as an example, or for Fogo.

The Labrador zone boundary changes, Zone 11a, was changed to include Coastal Labrador South including Black Tickle; Zone 11b, Lab South, including Williams Harbour, Norman's Bay, they combined those and that was effective March 21, 2025. Zone 11c, now the primary zone, will be created. They're creating a new zone for the Town of Cartwright and the markups and zone differentials increased as well, unfortunately, Chair.

In the Public Utilities Board report, the retailers and wholesalers provided cost. The wholesale markup remained the same, but the retailers were allowed to recoup more money from consumers. So more of the price of a litre of gas went to the retailers after the Public Utilities review.

I only have a few minutes left, Chair, but in closing, we all just spent a month going door to door recently. If I were to go door to door again and ask the constituents of Mount Scio, would you like to pay one cent less for gas, they would all say yes.

I would like to remind, I guess, in the government's Speech from the Throne document, I would highlight that it says, on page five, every decision of this government must be grounded in a clear question – will this help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

That is an excellent vision statement for this government. I fully support that. I ask the government now to vote for our amendment. It clearly delivers on the direction that your leader has given you, the Premier has given you to ask, "every decision must be grounded in a clear question – will this help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador"?

I also will add, in conclusion, we could have been debating this in November and December. We could have been debating this into the night on March 12 and on many occasions between then and now, Chair. We had other amendments. We talked about them a little bit but, unfortunately, we didn't get a chance to bring forward the other amendment.

We had other amendments and it would have been lovely to discuss those with the government but, unfortunately, we've been shut down now and there's not even an option to meet half way. It's extremely unfortunate.

In conclusion, I would ask the government, your mandate that your leader has given you is, will this help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? So I ask the government, please vote –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: – for that mandate to help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador save one cent a litre on the price of gas.

Thank you, Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Windsor Lake and the Leader of the Official Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm really pleased to be having the opportunity to speak tonight on our Liberal amendment to reduce the gas tax in this province. We've had the same gas tax over the course of the last four years, which we brought in to the House of Assembly four years ago when we saw things happen in the world which weren't expected. We saw war break out in the Ukraine, unfortunately, and it sent the cost of oil rising which, of course, had an effect here in Canada and in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So we took steps that we thought were appropriate and which we were able to do, levers that we were able to pull at the time and brought in a gas tax to reduce it from 14.5 cents to 7.5 cents. That was done and had to be redone over the course of the next few years. We continued to do that because, as we saw and as we know, legislation is not permanent and it always has to be reviewed to see where we are as a province and a country and where we are in the world. It was always necessary and important to continue with that gas tax reduction over the last four years.

Here we are now, four years later, and we have seen another terrible event in this world. We've seen a breakout of a war in

the Middle East. We hear the President of the United States talk about maybe it'll be over tomorrow. We're going to get a deal. Maybe it'll be over in a couple of days, but it won't be long.

I can tell you, if people in the House of Assembly are relying on the words of the president of the United States to make their decisions, I would say that's bad advice. Do not do that. Do not rely on the President of the United States. When we have ministers here say the war is not over yet and we don't know when it's going to be over, there's only one person saying the war is going to be over quickly and that's the President of the United States. I think that we all know better than to him at his word.

I think what's better is to accept the reality of the situation and I hope this is not what happens, but I think the reality of the situation is, at a minimum, the oil crisis is going to continue for the foreseeable future. I know that they've talked a lot on the other side about the permanency of this bill and I want to talk a little bit more about that in a few minutes.

The fact is whatever decision we make here in the House of Assembly tonight or tomorrow, during the course of this sitting, we can always revisit that. We do, believe it or not, have scheduled dates to sit here in this House of Assembly in the fall of this year.

So if, by chance, we reduce the gas tax by one cent and the war is over and oil prices plummet, which would be horrible for Newfoundland and Labrador – I know the Minister of Finance, I'm probably giving him some nightmares to think about \$40 or \$50 barrel of oil, but that could happen. If that happens, we can come back to the House of Assembly and adjust the gas tax as necessary. We can do that. We can all do that.

In fact, the Member for Mount Scio, my colleague, mentioned the fact that there was something on social media talking about TikTok – the Liberals are putting the gas tax up on April 1. We're getting the blame for the gas tax potentially going up on April 1.

I've heard a lot of criticism and responsibility for whatever state the province is in, and I understand that you campaigned on being able to do a better job. You won on those campaign promises, but you can't put the conduct of the Order Paper on the Liberal Party. We have had nothing to do with the Order Paper since you were elected. In fact, only you have been able to control the Order Paper and what did you decide to do? You decided to not –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: – sit in the House of Assembly during the fall sitting, 16 days. Sixteen days this bill could have been on the Order Paper.

You want to talk about planning, well, you could have had this bill passed in October, five, six months ago to prepare to plan for the budget that's happening in just a couple of weeks. You decided not to do that. You decided not to take advantage of those 16 sitting days and now you're saying, well, now we're up against it.

I can tell you what, if you had done it in October or November, like we were scheduled to do, we wouldn't be sitting here having this debate right now on the gas tax. It would have been done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: In fact, we wouldn't be arguing about the crisis in Iran because the crisis in Iran didn't happen in October or November. We wouldn't have been asking for a reduction in the gas tax because we

wouldn't have been in the situation that we're in right now.

Now, we would probably be here saying we should come back and amend it now, but it's not our fault that you mismanaged the House in October and November.

Not only that, you've had 11 sitting days before tonight, to debate this bill –

L. PARROTT: Chair, relevance, Standing Order 48(2), this has nothing to do with the gas tax bill as presented tonight or closure.

CHAIR: I will take that under advisement and I'll ask the Member to stick to the gas tax. I understand the segways that get there but –

J. HOGAN: No, it's not a segway; I'm literally talking about the gas tax and when this gas tax could and should have been debated and the fact that we're debating it right now. Talking about the gas tax bill, I don't know how you can get any more relevant than actually talking about the gas tax bill.

CHAIR: It's your time so –

J. HOGAN: It is literally relevant.

So we had 11 days as well during this House sitting to debate this gas tax. I think there was a panic when we were in the House last Thursday and they thought, oh my God, it's almost April 1, gas tax is going to go up. Then they probably thought maybe we should have done this in October or November. Maybe we should have called this sooner.

So it is not the fault of the Opposition Members that the government mismanaged the timing of the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Now, I have a mixed sense tonight as I debate this bill and as I talk about this bill. I'm so proud and happy to have colleagues here in the Liberal Party, the independent Member spoke as well and Members from the New Democratic Party – 18 members of the 38 Members who could speak tonight, spoke to this bill. Spoke to this amendment. Of course, you can't speak, Chair, and the Speaker can't speak as well, but that's almost 50 per cent of the people who are able to speak to this bill, spoke tonight. We call that a debate; it's not really much of a debate when we only hear from one side.

We are not hearing from the other side of the House on this.

L. PARROTT: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: Again, the Minister of Energy continues to speak differently about the issues today than he did before the election. He can't help himself. He can't help being George Costanza and get away from his two different opinions, one before the election and one after the election, but that's fine.

L. PARROTT: Okay, Kramer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: I am proud that the voices from 18 districts were heard here tonight on this bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Those Members did what they were elected to do, to talk about how gas tax, how gas prices, how the cost of living affects people in their districts. So kudos to those 18 Members who got up and spoke on behalf of the constituents that elected them to represent them and to speak about

this. Because I bet you, you would have a very hard time, Chair, finding Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who would say they want higher gas in this province.

I can't imagine if anybody on the other side of the House went and said we have a vote, would you like us to lower the gas tax by one cent or not, I think if they listened to their constituents, they'd be voting on a Liberal amendment here tonight.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: So I said I want to talk about the permanency of legislation and you know it's always makes it a little easier when we go back through *Hansard* and hear what individuals said in this House of Assembly. I talked about the war and the fact that we really don't know when it's going to be over.

The Minister of Energy said this back on March 19: We understand the situation we're in, but we also understand that the war at that time 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 – it didn't. Do you know what? It could get a lot worse – and it has – but we got to give it a chance.

Now, I'm a Beatles fan and I've heard John Lennon sing about give peace a chance. I've never heard someone say give war a chance. Is that what we're doing here in this province, in this House of Assembly, to wait and see – to wait and see? Are we saying that we're waiting and seeing?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: Look, they took that the wrong way. There was not a shot at hoping for or

wanting war. If the Member took it that way, I apologize – I apologize.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: That comment was not made like that, Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: My point is waiting for this to end is not the right decision. We have an opportunity today in this House of Assembly to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

What the argument continues to be is that it's a permanent bill. They're talking about it being permanent so they can't do anything. They're also talking about waiting for the situation to unravel so we can figure out what to do at a later date. You can't argue that permanence is the goal and then turn around and say you can't do something because it will be permanent. That's a complete contradiction, Chair. A permanent tax cut is good, but you can't cut it further because it's permanent. Both of those things cannot be true.

We've talked about where we are on this gas tax. We've talked about the fact that the change that we will vote on in the bill, when the time comes, will keep the gas tax where it is right now in this province which is 7.5 cents. It will move it from 7.5 cents and keep it at 7.5.

The other unfortunate thing when we're here tonight, unfortunately, we will run out of time to debate this bill and, more importantly, we don't have an opportunity to present other amendments. I think the Member for Mount Scio said they had other opportunities, other ideas, other suggestions. In fact, the Member spoke about potential sunset clauses and other opportunities we might have had to change this bill, that maybe would satisfy all 40 Members of the House of Assembly.

In fact, I would have put forward this motion that section 51 be repealed in its entirety and be substituted with the following: The Lieutenant-Governor in Council may make regulations respecting a regime of taxation levied on gasoline. So what that would have done, is give Cabinet, maybe at the request of the Finance Minister who would know the numbers inside and out, compared to the rest of the Members – that's his responsibility, of course – to not make this permanent. To change it maybe on a weekly or monthly basis in the event that oil continues to go up or maybe, as I said, oil goes down.

That is an amendment that we would have proposed and we would have supported. It would have given that government the ability to make decisions on a more frequent basis rather than worry about the fact that the legislation, as they say, is permanent and not have to come back to the House of Assembly, it would totally be within regulation-making authority.

The last time we were in the House of Assembly and we talked about this bill as well, there were comments about how some of these tax proposal cuts don't work. I don't think anybody argued the fact that subsection (e), reducing gas at the pump, was a problem.

So another potential amendment we could have had – and maybe we all could have agreed on that as well, but of course, we can't make amendments any further – was not to do a tax cut to the propane provision. It seemed to be an issue, as the Finance Minister explained. I wasn't here for the whole explanation, but he didn't seem to have an issue with the other amendments and the other tax cuts.

We could have proposed an amendment and maybe, as I said, all 40 Members could have agreed on that to just reduce the cost of the tax on those fuels where the Finance

Minister thought it would have been able to do that.

As I said, it's a nice moment to be able to speak to this bill, tonight, but it's a sad moment that the majority government has decided to end debate early on this. We all know that this, to my knowledge, hasn't happened since 2011 or 2012. The majority government makes those decisions, as they're allowed under the *Standing Orders*. It's not done very often. I would suggest it's not done very often because it's an undemocratic procedure or process where Members who may want to get up and speak further no longer have that opportunity.

So we are in a time crunch this evening. We have a limited time. We can probably and I know we could and maybe we should and we want to continue to talk about this important amendment for the rest of the evening and maybe even into tomorrow, before April 1 comes, but we aren't given that opportunity. We don't have a say in that.

The Government House Leader, of course, it's up to him and it's incumbent on him if he makes that decision to stand up and make that motion. We voted against that motion here this afternoon. We would, have liked to debate this further. We think it's important for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to hear why a tax cut is appropriate.

I also just want to comment a little bit on some comments from the Member for St. John's Centre who talked about this, speaking a little bit – not trying to put words in his mouth – but this is not going to solve everything, and I agree. The cost of living is not just about the cost of gas. I think the words he said was, picking around the edges. I don't disagree that this is not going to make or break everyone's lives here in Newfoundland and Labrador but it will have an effect. All we can do, as legislators, not

the Executive Branch – all we can do as legislators is deal with legislation that's before us.

This is a piece of legislation that's before us, where I feel we could do something as the House of Assembly to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We could also do things like bring in income tax cuts, which were promised by this Conservative government, and I certainly hope to see the income tax come forward in the budget this year in the next couple of weeks when the budget is presented. Also, the Executive could have done things like take off the provincial portion of the tax on electricity bills.

So, yes, each one of those things, individually, is not going to really change every family's life. It's not going to make them afford everything they can but if we add them all up and if we do pick around the edges and we continue to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, it will go a long way, when all those things are taken into consideration. That's what we're here to hear from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and we've certainly heard on this side of the House that this gas tax cut will help.

This gas tax cut might be able to afford an extra bag of groceries a month. It might able them to allow to pay for their child to go to soccer. It might be able to pay for their kid to go to hockey. It might allow them to pay for extra clothes or diapers or whatever it is that every family needs in this province.

We will certainly vote for our amendment. We understand the government is not going to vote for it. We would have appreciated hearing some further detail about why it's not appropriate and potentially hear about the tax cuts that are coming down the road and that may be a reason they don't want to do this one. But all we know right now is this is the bill that's on the table. This is the

opportunity that we have on this side of the House to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We made this amendment; we are very much glad that it's in order. We wish that 21 Members were in favour of it, but I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to this tonight.

I just want to say, I really do apologize if I offended the Minister of Energy. I think he knows me and comments are made in the House of Assembly, I was reading off that and I think he knows that I wouldn't offend him and his service. I do want to take a minute to make that comment.

We do disagree on a lot of things in this House of Assembly, but we've had a lot of moments where we've come together. That wasn't even a spur of the moment kind of anger comment, I was just reading out a quote that he said and it popped into my head and I think he knows that and I hope he knows and if he doesn't know, that's why I want to get it on the record here. I do thank him for his service.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Seeing no further speakers, is the House ready for the question?

The question is, shall the amendment carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

CHAIR: Division has been called.

Division

CHAIR: Are the Leaders ready?

All those in favour of the amendment, please stand.

TABLE OFFICER (Hammond): John Hogan, Lisa Dempster, Bernard Davis, Sarah Stoodley, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Pam Parsons, Keith White, Paul Pike, Elvis Loveless, Fred Hutton, Jamie Korab, Lucy Stoyles, Jim Parsons, Bettina Ford, Michael King, James Dinn, Sheilagh O'Leary.

CHAIR: All those against the amendment, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER: Tony Wakeham, Lloyd Parrott, Joedy Wall, Lela Evans, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Paul Dinn, Craig Pardy, Barry Petten, Loyola O'Driscoll, Andrea Barbour, Chris Tibbs, Lin Paddock, Pleaman Forsey, Mike Goosney, Keith Russell, Riley Balsom, Hal Cormier, Mark Butt, Jim McKenna, Joseph Power, Eddie Joyce.

CLERK (Hawley George): The ayes: 17; the nays: 21.

CHAIR: I declare that the amendment has been defeated.

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye,

CHAIR: All those against, "nay."

Carried,

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried,

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

CHAIR: Shall the long title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill without amendment, carried.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 5 without amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is that I rise from the Chair and report the bill without amendment.

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. Member for Placentia West-Bellevue and Chair of 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 that the Committee recommends Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2, without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred recommends Bill 5 carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time presently.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the bill be now read a third time.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to rise, again, to get the opportunity in third reading to speak a little bit more about the gas tax legislation that is being talked about here today. I'm going to stay as relevant as I possibly can. I've been warned by the previous Deputy Speaker, so he's done a good job, Mr. Speaker, so you don't need to admonish him later. He's done a very good job of trying to keep us relevant, so I'm going to try to do the same and I'm sure you will keep me on the straight and narrow, as they say, if I tend to waver from there.

But I am happy to take this opportunity to stand in the House of Assembly, which has the ability to do in third reading, which is something that is good. I'm going to try to highlight three topics. One is seniors, one is students, one is small business and all of which are deeply involved in my district, like every other district in this province and would benefit from this piece of legislation going through as we've talked about.

One of the great things about what we have the opportunity to do in this Legislature is

work together. We've seen that we brought forward an amendment that we was defeated. That is the will of this House of Assembly and that's completely understandable. I wish it was a different alternative, but it wasn't. From that standpoint, I will speak about not what could have been but what we see before us right now.

One of the things that I think is interesting about where we're to is that there were a few friendly amendments that I think that the Members across the way would have probably supported, had we gotten to there. I know the Minister of Finance is a reasonable man. He would understand fully that the benefit of the increased revenue coming into the provincial coffers could have been diverted some of it, a small portion of it, to the pockets of the people in Newfoundland and Labrador that we all represent.

I think he would speak of that and speak highly of that. I don't want to speak for him. Maybe I'll get to hear him in the next little bit on this. One of the things that is interesting – and I think I heard one of the Members on the opposite side, I really can't remember who said it, so correct me if I'm wrong. I think the Leader of the Official Opposition was talking about the fact that he's heard from 18 Members and I would have liked to hear from someone else.

Because one of the good things about the House of Assembly, and I think everyone would agree, is that when anybody gets on their feet, you have the ability to learn something. Maybe you'll take something from what I said and learn from it. I know some people on the other side would say, not on your life, would we learn from that guy over there, but I do know that every time someone gets up, whether it's the Member for Ferryland, when he gets up and talks about some of things that are happening in his district – I don't live there,

so it's always nice to hear the perspective of that part of the province.

I always tend to go that little extra mile and when I do see some of the issues that he may be having in his district, I will take that and take that with me for any decision-making process that we would go for. That's understandable. I would hope that when they get the opportunity to stand up and talk about gas tax, the impacts that that would have on his constituents, I would like to hear what that would be.

I'm not singling out the MHA for Ferryland, because he's a very well-spoken man for his district and a very well-spoken Member for his district. He has no problem fighting for the people in his district, whether it be for gas tax or ambulances or even I think it was – I'm going to get this wrong – a spillway or something that was damaged due to storms. He has no problem standing up and advocating for individuals that would need those type of processes.

But the good thing about the piece of legislation that we're talking about here today is that it transcends both parties. Both sides of the House, we've had the opportunity to bring this forward, I think, for the last three years. This today and I've said, when I spoke the last time, that I fully support the process of making this permanent. I've said it. That's why I supported the piece of legislation. We wanted to do a little more, of course, but I did support the premise of what they were trying to accomplish here.

We did it. I think it's virtually the same piece of legislation we did. The difference is it's permanent. I thank the Government House Leader for bringing it forward, because I think that's a good thing and the Minister of Finance for speaking to it. It is beneficial to the people of this province to make a tax reduction that we have done, in the past, permanent. There's no doubt about that. I

think everyone on this side of the House agrees with that. I think everyone on that side of the House agrees with it.

So to make that choice or make that decision to bring it forward and make that permanent is a good thing. All we were trying to achieve was to reduce that tax a little further. I've heard the Minister of Finance say and I think even the Premier said that this was the lowest gas tax in the country. That's a good thing. We knew that and that is why when the war in Ukraine happened and the invasion happened and gas prices did spike that's why we, when we were sitting over there, decided to do a 7.5-cent reduction to the gas tax, cutting it in half. I think that comes out to a little over eight cents. I'll leave the Finance Minister to correct me if I'm wrong, 8.05 cents, I think it was.

I see him nodding – I'm going from memory now. But I do think that was a good thing to do at the time. What we were trying to accomplish with the amendment that we were talking about before, was to do that little bit more. It was within the confines of what we thought was reasonable and prudent, given the financial situation we're in, given the fact that the province is going to have increased revenue, based on the fact that the oil prices have skyrocketed.

I do agree with the Minister of Energy or the MHA for Terra Nova. I do agree with him that gas prices are volatile. They are. They tend to move up and down very quickly, like a dog's belly. That's what happens. It is that way. As I said earlier, I think, when I started to speak earlier today, gas prices for a US barrel of oil, Brent crude was \$112.50 or something along those lines. I know earlier that day, like this morning, it was somewhere around \$116, so it does have a very good movement of fossil fuels in the system.

I think the hon. Member for St. John's Centre talked about the fact that it's on paper. I would tend to agree that most of that is on paper, the longer this goes, the more impact it would have on the local gas stations, on us. I know it's happening right away today but, realistically, the fuel that's in those tanks have already been –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

Thank you.

B. DAVIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I was talking about the hon. Member for St. John's Centre and he was identifying the fact that this is going to be nibbling around the edges, and I would tend to agree, it is. But if we look at the totality of what we were trying to accomplish as government, we were doing multiple things all at the same time that was going to help move that forward.

I understand, based on what the Finance Minister said on the House of Assembly floor but also just in conversations and knowing him as an individual, he's going to try to do what he can and if he says he's going to do that, I would tend to believe him, that he's going to try his best to do that, given the financial situation that we face as a province.

I don't doubt that if we had made this change to lower the gas tax even further, there may have been other things in the budget that is going to forthcoming, in the next couple of weeks. I don't think he's going to tell me today what date it would be. I don't think he's going to tell me. He's shaking his head no, but I know it's coming soon. It's inevitable; it has to come. As we

all know, there's going to be a significant amount of time to debate and have a chat about the budget and all those things that are associated with the budget.

I hope, yes, that we do get the opportunity to debate the budget. I know there are 75 hours that we get the chance to debate the budget and have meaningful discussions and I don't think, in the history of this province, there's ever been evoked closure on the budget or anything like that. I don't think. I'd have to do some research on that. I don't think that's ever been done. I can't see it.

I've been here, I think this is my 11th year and I know, Mr. Speaker, you've been here a little longer than me. I think you were probably here through the first closure that was put forward in our time frame, but I wasn't here for that and it made national news and all those things –

AN HON. MEMBER: Two.

B. DAVIS: You're here for two? Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, this is great. Having you not get up and speak and educate me on some things is a challenge sometimes because I used to enjoy that.

But one of the things that I think is really important is that we get the opportunity, in the cut and thrust of debate, to have a back and forth. I think that's one thing that's missing in this debate here, the last couple of times we spoke, is that it seems like one side of the House of Assembly is speaking and the other side is not. I know they're listening. I know that because I can see them, always listening as the MHA for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis is nodding. He's always said that he's listening and I believe that.

There'll be a quiz on it after, tonight, when we leave here, but it's important to stand up and have your say. I said before and I'll say

again, that probably the most education that you can have as an MHA in this beautiful House of Assembly is from your colleagues, on both sides of the House. Regardless of political stripe, regardless of what they believe on an issue or whatever, there's always something to glean from what you're standing up and talking about, whether it's gas tax, budget, the establishment of the Disability Advocate. Those are all very important things to have a conversation on.

Making sure that we have an adequate debate on both sides, having people pass comments and judgments with respect to their district is an important piece as well. I know all the Members are elected by the people that they represent and have worked really hard for it. Every one of us, without question, I would say every one of us have the support of our district.

All I would ever say to people is when we look at the line in the Throne Speech that I thought was really thought-provoking when it talked about making sure that the decisions that you make impact positively the people who you represent. That's not exactly the quote, but that's the tenor of what it's supposed to say or means.

From my perspective, I think that's exactly what we need to hear. I hope and I wish the government the greatest success in achieving that, because their success is all of our successes. If they're able to deliver on the promises, that's a success for my constituents as well. We're always going to push you on those commitments that you've made and we're going to move into that as we go down the budget cycle.

Now, since I've just done my opening and the introduction of what I was going to talk about, the seniors in the district – we all want to recognize them in the best way we possibly can and provide them with clarity and the ability for them to know and plan and budget.

I think the Finance Minister and the MHA for Bonavista has said, on many occasions, that planning is important – and this is true, this gas tax bill is going to add certainty, no doubt. I think it was fairly certain that it was going to be continued. When the federal government made the change to remove the carbon tax and not use the backstop, this was a foregone conclusion that this was going to happen and it's good that you brought it forward. But our seniors need that clarity and certainty as well.

What we were looking for was to try to have them have that certainty with a little bit more money in their pockets. I don't have to look very far, other than the start of your blue book, where it starts with saying lower taxes, better health care and safer communities – all of which, every one in this House of Assembly and every one that's on the walls here in the House of Assembly and every one that's name is outside in the hallways here would agree with all three of those pillars – every one of them. We all want the same thing. We all want to provide the best possible services to our constituents at the lowest possible tax rate and make sure they're healthy. It's noble; it's what all of us want to do.

Mr. Speaker, I know when you were standing up in the back or over on the other side of the House, you've talked about many of those pillars. Maybe not in those exact words but all of those three things in the past. I know every Member in this House has.

The hon. Member for Topsail - Paradise, I've heard him many, many times talk about those pillars. Not necessarily in those words but over the last seven years, I think you've been here, all of those things have been talked about and we all agree with them.

I think if you were to look at even the red book, we were talking about similar things. Maybe in a different way, but we were

talking about doing similar things. We had an opportunity to lower taxes and achieve one of those pillars, that's a good thing, but we did have the opportunity and we will have the opportunity later tonight to make taxes stay the same, at least, not increase, which is a good thing.

I'm not going to speak to better health care today. I will get an opportunity to do that, as well as safer communities, because it really impacts every one of our communities, in every different way. But if you think about it, when we had constituency week last week, I know some of my colleagues have talked about this, we've all been out in our districts and talking to our people that elected us. I'm sure everyone on the other side has done the same thing.

Every one of those people talked about – maybe not talked about a reduction in gas tax, but they did talk about the cost of everything in the grocery stores, the cost of getting those goods that they buy every day, whether that be things for their children. I know I have two young kids at home and those costs are real; the struggle is real for people.

I know we were trying to do more when we were on the other side, and I hope and I believe that they will do everything they possibly can to support that. All those promises that were made, we're going to make sure we hold them to account.

From the seniors' perspective, lowering gas tax would be beneficial for them. Even the certainty of what we're doing here now is beneficial for them. But they just don't get any money back in their pocket. That's the difference that we are talking about here today.

One amendment that we talked about was going to put money back into their pockets and the bill that we're voting on here today is not going to put any more money back

into their pockets. It's not going to cost them any more, and I will agree with the Finance Minister that that's true. It's not going to cost them any more, and I think he'll agree with that. When this passes, whenever it passes, it's going to not increase the costs at the pumps at all, which is a good thing.

Back to our seniors in our district, regardless of where you represent, we all have seniors that have done a significant amount of work in our communities and are the people that are responsible – and we've heard many people say we want to stand on the shoulders of those that went before us, and that is true for our seniors. Many of the things that we enjoy today, whether it be better health care services or better pensions or whatever, is a result of many of the seniors that have been coming forward and bringing this stuff forward for our benefit, but for future generations.

This fixed income that seniors have, this could be a big savings for them. If you have a vehicle or you have to purchase equipment or groceries or whatever, this is going to save them money, had we reduced the gas tax. But the good thing about this today is it's not going to cost them any more. Inflation is still going, goods are still going up there, not directly related to this bill. So I won't speak about that part.

We talked about geography in this province. In my district and the hon. Member for St. John's Centre and St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, we share a similar geography. We're here to represent St. John's, the hon. colleague from Mount Scio here, but the difference from our district and, say, Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, the MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, is stark in what they have to travel and what's required for those individuals to do that kind of work and get to community to community or get to a health care appointment.

That struggle is real for individuals in my district, as well as Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair. It may be slightly different in the time it takes to get somewhere and the cost associated with travelling there, but that is an opportunity that we missed here today, to make it a little bit more cost effective for those.

Seniors, it's about their independence. If they can't take that Sunday afternoon drive – what is it, Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe that the hon. Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair always talks about, or I know the Member for Bonavista talks about members in this district I think the Linthorne family? I think one of them have passed away unfortunately, which is challenging for them and very sad for all of us in the House, because I feel like I know them. We talked a significant amount about them through the hon. Member for Bonavista.

Those individuals who are affected, we don't want to take their independence away. We don't want to make it more costly for them to get around this province. We can't control what's happening in the global world that we all live in. We can't control that. All we can do is try to work within that confines of what's left for us.

We know full well that there are a significant number of people who will be impacted by the war in the Middle East, and we're so far away from there. I think one of the Members – I'm not sure if it was the Member for St. John's Centre or not – talked about it's a long way away but it's a significant impact on the people that we all represent. It's not specifically exactly what he said, but he did say something along those lines because I tried to make some notes here.

Those individuals are affected by something we had nothing to do with, but each of those people have the opportunity to get benefits out of what we do as a Legislature, out of what we do as a people in this House of

Assembly. I would be remiss if I didn't talk about that, the missed opportunity that we would have been able to achieve, had we put the amendment in place. I really think there's an opportunity here – I think invoking closure really hurt the ability for us to work across party lines to try to find a solution what would have been beneficial and make this legislation even better. I think that's where we missed an opportunity.

I think we could have had the solution for this that could have worked very well for individuals across our province. That would have probably been making an amendment – if the Finance Minister had an issue with the propane aspect of that, that's no problem. I get it. I don't understand his issue with it right now, but I'm sure he will be willing to explain it to me and all that, that's fine. We could have removed that, no problem, with an amendment.

If it was just the one cent off in gas or two cents off in gas, they wanted to do that, we could do that. We would loved to have had that opportunity. That was not something that we had the opportunity to do, but we're excited that we still have the opportunity to voice our concerns, bring them forward.

I know the Finance Minister is feverishly writing down – I looked across the House of Assembly at one of my colleagues from Ferryland and I said to him I think he's writing *War and Peace* over there. That's a good thing; he's listening to what we have to say, which is important.

I did say in my opening that I would talk a little bit about students. I'm going to take the opportunity to talk a little bit about students as well. The issues that students face are not unlike what most other people face in this system; the difference is they are focused on trying to get educated, get out into the workforce, make those big changes in the life that's going to happen for them going forward, past the university years.

We all know those who have went to university and those who went to post-secondary institutions –

SPEAKER: I would remind the hon. Member, I'm trying to be flexible and I get where you're drawing the connection on some of it, but talking about university students, unless you're talking about them actually driving to school or something like that, then I'd ask you to keep it to the gas tax.

B. DAVIS: Yes, I was getting to that. Sorry about that, Mr. Speaker. I said, Mr. Speaker, you may have to come at me a little bit and drag me back sometimes. It's not purposeful. The intent is trying to make sure of that and I do apologize; I will try to stay a bit more relevant on this but please do not hesitate to call me back –

SPEAKER: I won't.

B. DAVIS: – if I tend to go a little bit sideways on this for sure.

Stressing the issue that we're having here, is students commute sometimes far away from campus. We have one university in this province, but that doesn't mean that everyone lives on the university campus and walk back and forth. Although there is a large portion of people that do, but some of them could live 40 or 50 kilometres away and commute in. That's easily 80 to 100 litres of fuel or more, depending on the vehicle. As we know, as a student, every cent counts and every opportunity we have to alleviate some of the stress on the students' budget would be an important one.

AN HON. MEMBER: And we have students out in Corner Brook.

B. DAVIS: Yes, and we have students in Corner Brook that are coming in. Outside of that, we have some 19 campuses in College

of the North Atlantic and those are ideal opportunities for us –

AN HON. MEMBER: And walk both ways uphill.

B. DAVIS: Yes, and some of us had to walk both ways uphill in the snow.

I think it's really important that we talk about the perspective from the students' side. If they've got to commute a long way, whether they're getting their Red Seal or whether they're going Bonavista to get plumbing, those are all things that we, not necessarily, think of, top of mind. I just wanted to highlight in the House of Assembly. I'm glad the Finance Minister wrote that down because that's really important, being from his district and all that stuff. I think it's really important that any gas tax reduction that we do could be beneficial for them.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I wanted to talk about was small business. You've heard me talk about it. It is the life blood of the province. It's the economic heartbeat of this province. I would be completely outside of where I should be if I didn't highlight the fact that they're going to be squeezed pretty hard with respect to increases in fuel costs.

They would have made out much better had we approved the amendment that we had talked about. That 7.5 cents is good. They can budget. That's excellent that they can budget for that now. I do commend the Finance Minister for bringing it to the House of Assembly and giving us all the opportunity to vote on it. It is important, beyond belief, that we have the opportunity to have a discussion on the gas tax and making this a permanent gas tax reduction that we had done since 2022.

From the small business perspective, we know the burdens are pretty high on small business. Just like our own household incomes, the margins are tight. This time of

the year is especially tight for a lot of small businesses – restaurants in particular. Those issues are not going to get any better by what we are doing here tonight.

They're not going to get any worse, which is a good thing. Sometimes you make a decision in this House of Assembly and sometimes the decisions don't go the way you want and it makes it worse. That's never the goal. I know you don't want to have that happen.

What we would like to see is things get better. We didn't get the opportunity in this piece of legislation to do that but we are, however, going to have many, many more opportunities to have this conversation with the Finance Minister and his team to talk about this.

The direct costs to small business would be transferring goods into their businesses. That will have to be passed on to the consumer. So it's hitting the business initially first, before they can pass that on, because they don't want to pass on extra charges to the consumer. In many cases, their friends and community members.

They would sooner not pass that on, so they try to wait it out a little bit. That's a bottom line hit to them right off the start. So they'll try to hold on to that for as long as they possibly can, and then they'll have to pass that on if this is sustainable. I hope today is the last day for the war. I hope today it is, and everyone in this hon. House believes that to be true and wants that to happen.

So I think the biggest opportunity we have is the one we miss. What is it? I think Michael Jordan used to say that you miss 100 per cent of the shots you don't take.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's Wayne Gretzky.

B. DAVIS: Oh, Wayne Gretzky, correct. Wayne Gretzky, yes. Thank you. I was close. I feel like the former Member for Waterford Valley when he said *An Officer and a Gentleman*, you can't handle the truth. I still laugh about that. But I was on the wrong sport, and I apologize for all my hockey fans. I'm a huge hockey fan, as you know, so I can't believe I made that mistake.

But my whole point of it is if you don't push to try to make legislation better, then we're not going to succeed at making it better, and that is a loss to the people of this province.

From my perspective, I can go on and on and on, and I know how excited the hon. Members are on the other side of the House to hear me go on and on, but I will take my seat now and I just want to say that I'm disappointed a little bit in that the amendment didn't happen. It is the will of the House of Assembly and I urge the government to do what they promised to lower taxes, get better health care and safer communities because, as of right now, that's not what we're seeing. At this point, it's not what the constituents are telling us.

I'm not saying it's not going to come because I hope it does. I'm just saying for the first six months, it has not been the tenure of what's happening. I expect that that will get better and I do thank your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, for bringing me back a little bit when I did sway a little bit from out of relevance and into relevance. It's a fluid discussion, as we say in the House of Assembly, but I do thank you and I thank the Finance Minister for his attentive nature and you can put the pencil down now, Sir.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I won't talk for too long. I just kind of wanted to clue things up and make some comments.

We're now in third reading of the gas tax bill. We did have an amendment, and that was voted down by the government. But we do support the idea of getting rid of the sunset clause and I know we've talked a lot about, you know, we said we would've done that and last year when we kept the sunset clause in, Carney was not yet the prime minister, Speaker, but we will support getting rid of the sunset clause. We absolutely would not want to see taxes to go up for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I did think it was important to stand up and speak just one more time and I want to thank the government. This is so interesting, Speaker. As we're debating the gas tax in second reading, Committee and now in third reading, the governing party have posted my picture twice on their social media, which I'm not sure what they're trying to –

L. PARROTT: I refer to article 48(2); this has absolutely nothing to do with this bill – nothing. It got nothing to do with the gas tax bill.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask the Member to stay relevant to the bill. We're here to discuss the gas tax, not social media.

S. STOODLEY: Sure, I bring it up because the post was about the bill and is about the gas tax bill. I just want to thank the government for the kudos and for highlighting to my constituents what an excellent Opposition representative I am that they have to post my –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: – picture twice during the debate. So thank you, Speaker.

I just wanted to put that out there. I'm flattered and I thank the government.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

M. KING: Thank you, Speaker.

I won't take much time also, as we go into third reading on this bill, Bill 5, to maintain gas tax. It's certainly something we've said on this side of the House that we agree with that measure and we will try to take it a step forward.

I know there has been, into the night here, some deflections, diversions, language being used in some social media posts but I can assure the Members opposite that I'll make no apologies for standing up in this House, to stand up for the people of Burgeo - La Poile to lower –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. KING: – their costs at any chance that I can take, and that is what we were trying to do.

As I said earlier, I took some of their words – we can go a little further, reduce the tax burden. That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to help the people of the province and we certainly agree that maintaining the tax is important. It is important for the people of the province; we understand that. That has been in place since 2022, and we have always said that we agree with that, but we were trying to take it a step further.

Speaker, I just wanted to get up to make that very quick point so say that we make no apologies for standing up in this House of Assembly for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to lower taxes which that government said that they were going to do.

I just wanted to make that final point on this bill because I think that's important for the people of Burgeo- La Poile, especially, to know that their Member is standing up for them to lower their costs.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

Like my colleague from Burgeo - La Poile, I won't be long. I do want to mention one thing that really struck me as we were having this debate and going back several weeks, hearing the Finance Minister talk about things, hearing the Minister of Energy and Mines talk about this as well and we're talking about the global conflicts that are happening. There is relevance because it is having a direct correlation to the price of gasoline, what's happening in other parts of the world.

I was sitting here at about 6.55 and an alert came on my phone and it was a headline about a story and the headline was, Trump Threatens to Obliterate Iran's Energy Plants and Oil Wells. To what the Leader of the Opposition was saying a little while ago, we cannot presume, for one second, to understand or try to think what the President of the United States might try to do because of his own agenda or whatever.

What we do know is those impacts are being felt here in Newfoundland and Labrador because we've seen it the pumps

over the last 30 days. Like the Members opposite and on this side, everybody would hope that that war and that conflict would end quickly for the sake of saving lives, first of all, and to create more global stability and so that people will feel safe to travel again and to go places but also so that the prices of things would be more stable.

I am very disappointed that our amendment was turned down. We had said, in the early part of the debate, that we were willing to amend the amendment so that it would fit with what the governing party might like to see there. As I said earlier today, we were in full support of the Disability Advocate. We worked together with the government to get that bill passed quickly, unanimous support.

I would also like to say that in the last few weeks, since the House opened, one comment, other than the affordability issue that many, many people face, is a lot of the constituents from my district in Conception Bay East - Bell Island say, why are you bickering so much in the House? Why is everybody yelling at each other and why is everybody going back and forth? Why do you have to sit down, Fred, and have people say, Order, please! and ask.

I'd like to point out that 10 minutes before I stood up, I spoke with a Member opposite, the Minister of Housing, who worked with the Minister of Health and Community Services to help a constituent of mine which, without getting into personal details, was facing a very difficult situation. They worked together with me. They did the work because they're in government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: What I want to say is that we are willing to work together. This is not all about opposing just for the sake of opposing. I will go out on a limb here and say that if this war does continue, if the prices continue to increase, we're willing to

come back and support an amendment that you'll bring in to bring the price of gas lower when you can. It's too late now because you voted against it. We will support the stability of it because we brought it in in 2022, the gas tax, taking it down seven cents, in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

As my colleague from Mount Scio pointed out, last year there was a different prime minister when we did this. Now we have a government in Ottawa that actually sees this, that this is important. The government in power now, the PC government, has given accolades to the federal Liberal government many times over the last couple of weeks. So we'll come back in and we'll support it.

Here's another tip: Sign the MOU, you'll have a billion dollars a year then –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: – to give lots of money back to the taxpayers in Newfoundland and Labrador. All this is relevant to everyday life for every person in this province, and this is what we could have done here today. We could have done that, but we will in the future, and I will support it in a heartbeat if the Finance Minister is able to convince his Cabinet colleagues and others at a certain point, in a week from now or two weeks, maybe there should be an amendment to that gas tax because that is a place where people can feel the impact immediately.

A lot of what we do here is so long term and out of sight. As I said earlier today, people constantly say to me, wow, is it going to impact me today? The answer tonight is it won't. The price will not change, unfortunately. But let's work together as we did with Members opposite on the examples that I gave, and do that in the future so that we're representing the people in a more dignified way, if I may say it that way.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

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

SPEAKER: The bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 2," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 5)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue, that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

This House do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, March 31, at 1:30 p.m.

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