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HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

Wednesday November 18, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin, I just want to welcome our public gallery, Councillor Isabelle Fry from the City of Mount Pearl, as well as Vice-President of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, and my second favourite Mount Pearl councillor, next to my daughter, of course.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise on a point of order respecting relevance during Committee of the Whole on Bill 22. As Members know, the rules governing relevance during Committee of the Whole are distinct from those that apply during second reading of debate. This distinction was expressly recognized in your ruling on April 30, 2026, concerning Bill 9.

In the ruling, it was noted that while second reading in debate is directed to the general principle and objectives of a bill and, therefore, permits a broader range of discussion, the standard changes once the House resolves itself into a Committee of the Whole.

The ruling stated: "The referral of a bill to the Committee of the Whole involves a close examination of its contents, clause by clause. During the Committee stage, Members' speeches must be strictly relevant to the individual clauses being considered, with the exception of clause 1, which, by convention, may relate to any clause of the bill under consideration."

That ruling is consistent with long-established parliamentary authorities in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, chapter 13, the section in Committee stage, it states: "The referral of a bill to a committee opens the way for close examination of its content, clause by clause."

The same authority further provides: "Pursuant to the Standing Orders, speeches made in a Committee of the Whole must be strictly relevant to the item or clause under consideration."

Chapter 13 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* further explains the rationale underlying the rule of relevance, namely the debate should assist the House in reaching a decision and should exclude discussion that does not contribute to consideration of the matter before it.

While it acknowledges that broader debate can occur during clause 1 and "over the years, repetition of second reading debate and the anticipation of clause-by-clause debate were gradually excluded from the general debate on Clause 1, which is now limited to the contents of the bill."

Speaker, just yesterday's Committee of the Whole proceedings on Bill 22, a significant portion of the questions posed by the Leader of the Opposition did not address the text of any specific clause before the Committee nor the operation or effect of those clauses, rather the questions focused on comments previously made by the Minister of Finance during second reading and debate.

We acknowledge that the Minister of Finance broadened the scope of discussions during second reading of debate and the Members opposite were afforded the same allowance throughout that debate; however, once the House moved into Committee of the Whole, that procedural focus should reflect the stage of debate we were in.

The issue before the Committee is not what was said during the reading. The issue

before the Committee is the content of Bill 22 itself and the clauses presently under examination. As chapter 13 makes clear, Committee study is intended to facilitate close scrutiny of the legislation clause by clause. Similarly, the Speaker's April 30 ruling expressly recognized that a stricter standard of relevance applies at this stage than it does at second reading.

Accordingly, I respectfully submit that questions directed primarily towards debating, challenging or revisiting statements made during second reading rather than examining the provisions of the clause before the Committee fall outside the scope of relevance required in the Committee of the Whole.

Bill 22 is an important piece of legislation for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Committee process exists to ensure that Members can thoroughly examine the bill's contents, understand its legal and practical effects and hold government accountable for the provisions actually contained within it. That purpose is best served when questions and debate remain focused on the clauses before the Committee.

I, therefore, ask that Members be reminded of the distinction identified by the Speaker on April 30 and that the discussion during Committee of the Whole on Bill 22 be confined to matters that are relevant to the clause or provision under consideration.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition, do you want to speak to the point of order?

J. HOGAN: I do, thank you. We have a few Members who would like to speak to the point of order, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Okay, sure.

J. HOGAN: Thank you to the minister for laying out the argument about relevance in Bill 22. I guess the position we would take is that, clearly, this was a different circumstance when the minister introduced Bill 22, the Minister of Finance. Not only did he speak broadly about the bill, he specifically said can I have leave to broaden the scope of what I want to talk about. You can check *Hansard* because I don't have the exact words in front of me, but I do recall the minister saying something along the lines of that the right questions were not being asked about the finances and the revenue and the money that can be used from Churchill Falls for things like the gas tax.

So, that alone, if you just look at what he is talking about and money and what we can do on affordability issues is all related to Churchill Falls, as he pointed out, which will bring in over $200 billion of revenue to the province.

Another issue I have with regard to the relevance here is that if the Minister of Finance is able to make comments in second reading and we are not allowed to follow up with questions on what he raised in this House of Assembly, specifically think about last night when we were here, the minister said in relation to $8 million budgeted – so a specific amount of money. Again, that ties to the fact that he raised Churchill Falls as a revenue source for this government. In relation to the $8 million budgeted for a referendum on Churchill Falls – again, not only are we tying money into it, we are tying it to a specific line item in the budget. His quote was that we've got to find a more economical way to hear from the people.

So if you rule that it's irrelevant for us to ask questions about that, then that means the minister, and all the ministers in this government, are able to put out statements and put out arguments and articulate their side of a story without this side of the House

being able to respond, ask questions and get answers.

The answers aren't necessarily there so we can publicize or criticize. Maybe we want answers that we accept, but by not being able to ask the questions, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians won't get any answers to anything, so the result of this not being relevant is a one-sided democracy.

The ministers can get up and say whatever they want and this side of the House, and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, have to take that as factual because we're not allowed to respond and say, are you sure that's true? Why did you budget $8 million? Why didn't you budget more? Who made the decision not to budget in the budget as opposed to contingency?

Those are important, relevant, democratic rights that this side of the House of Assembly has. To allow one side to speak to an issue and another side not to, that is a dangerous, dangerous precedent to set and you will be setting that precedent, not for the rest of this sitting, but for future sittings.

So I would suggest, Speaker, you think very long and hard, review the transcripts about what's being asked and what you are being asked to do in terms of refusing the other side of this democratic institution to participate in a debate on this piece of legislation and all future pieces of legislation as well, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, respectfully, what my point of order was in reference to was Committee. We all know the procedural process here. When we go into second reading, everyone gets an opportunity to speak. When the minister spoke yesterday, as procedure states, he was asked to close the debate in second reading.

He responded to what had been said from the other side; every Member had the opportunity to say that. It is then the democratic right of the minister to close debate on second reading and we vote on it. He responded to all of the words that were said on the other side, so debate was finished.

If it wasn't finished, someone should have stood and spoke. As a matter of fact, the Member for Windsor Lake had the opportunity to speak and he didn't speak to it. So, at that time, if he had points that he needed to make in second reading, he could have done that. He did not do that. The minister stood; he closed it.

The point of order I am making is specific to Committee. Everybody had an equal right under second reading the moment the minister got up and spoke. The whole idea of leave is irrelevant. We've been told that by the Speaker; we've been told that by Members across the way.

He broadened the scope in second reading. Second reading is finished. This is about what happens when we go to Committee and it is very clear how the Committee process is carried out.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I am going to speak to the point of order and I know that there are a couple of other Members that will speak to it as well.

Speaker, when the Finance Minister came in and opened up Bill 22, as we have heard

many, many times, he opened it up for discussion on Churchill Falls. He had things that he wanted to say and we gave him leave. So I sought clarity on how the process would now work as we move through.

After second reading, I mean, government always has the final say on second reading, that is the process, but once the minister set the intent, it was my clear understanding, once that had been set, once Members spoke to it in second reading and then we would go into Committee, it would be the same thing, and then debate in third reading, if we so wanted it to again.

I am going to ask you, Speaker, because this is so, so important, I, along with others – and I won't speak for the other teams – we have been really feeling stifled in our democratic right by some things that have happened here recently, and I do believe that this is important enough today that you recess the House, when all Members have spoken, and you take a look at this now.

We only have a few days left in this fall sitting, so I would ask that on behalf of this side of the House, but I do know that, first, there are a couple of other speakers.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader, something new to add?

L. PARROTT: Yes, I would like to respond to the Opposition House Leader.

So the inference that it was put to her, from I don't know who, that there was an understanding, I think, is a little misleading because we all have access to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* and it clearly states in chapter 13 what the process is. Also, the *Standing Orders* are clear when it comes to Committee.

The whole idea that she didn't have an opportunity or she was told one thing and it is not how it played out, that is not how it works. From a procedural standpoint, from a precedent set by the Speaker, the standard is already set.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I will take one moment to respond to that. I wasn't referring to the Government House Leader when I said I sought advice, procedurally.

I don't appreciate that when I am standing here speaking on behalf of the Opposition that the Government House Leader can say I am misleading the House. That is a little bit rich and it is putting words in my mouth that are not appropriate. We are discussing something very, very important.

We just came off Remembrance Day where people fought and died for freedom of speech and we have a democratic process, I tell you, that is not very good.

SPEAKER: I say to the Member, we're not talking now to the point of order.

The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm asking the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for order.

The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to add to the point of order, please. I know the point of order we're discussing is relevance in Committee. I'd just like to reiterate, the Minister of Finance, he talked about my address here and the same level of relevancy was continued with the second reader and all subsequent readers.

When leave was granted, it was not specific to second reading. Leave was not requested for second reading only and no one clarified that leave was for second reading only.

The sponsoring minister addressed Churchill Falls financial arrangements, Churchill Falls economics, the impacts to the Treasury, general affordability, electricity price in Gull Island definitive agreements, so the absence of a restriction, absence of any discussion that leave was limited to second reading.

I'd also note that this is not dealt with in our *Standing Orders*, specifically. The Nova Scotia Legislature handbook on page 9 talks about Procedures Not Dealt with in the House Rules. "When a point of procedure is not dealt with in the House Rules, then we use other sources in the following order: usages and procedures in the House of Assembly; standing and sessional orders of the House of Commons Canada; usages of the House of Commons of Canada; usages and customs in the British House of Commons."

I note that The Nova Scotia Legislature handbook says "A usage is a long-standing practice that has been followed by the House, but is not set out anywhere in the House Rules. For example, the Committee of the Whole House permits a repeat of the discussion on the general principle of the bill that has already taken place during second reading."

I believe The Nova Scotia Legislature handbook establishes that a general discussion of a bill, as permitted in second reading, also follows through to Committee of the Whole, so I ask you to take that into consideration in your deliberation on this point of order.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: I recognized the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

One thing that my colleague and I and my predecessors, my former colleagues, have been very concerned with is about the notion of transparency, openness and, I guess, meaningful debate.

When this bill came up, I knew it wasn't a money bill so relevance did apply; however, I was really hoping to be able to speak about affordability, which is really what I want to speak most about, and I addressed that. I did reference Churchill Falls but Churchill Falls and affordability are intertwined, but I'll go back to the minister.

The minister asked for leave, not only on affordability, which is what I was hoping, but kicked the door wide open at that point to talk about Churchill Falls. I would argue that, at that time, if government Members wanted to apply relevance, the easiest thing they could have done is not grant leave to widen it.

We were asked for leave; we gave leave. Government Members gave leave also. At that point in time, they could have shut down that debate but they allowed it to proceed. It's pretty rich now that we're standing on a point of order and quoting parliamentary regulations and precedent.

I would also understand that, really, if I remember correctly from my introduction here in the House, the House can also set

precedent, if indeed there is a precedent to be set here. But the fact is, we could have applied but it has been wide open.

If nothing else, maybe at some point this discussion of relevance could have been brought up beforehand; but last night, there are questions that were asked on Churchill Falls, a lot more questions that have caused me questions of my own, but I still want to be able to talk about affordability and I do have a few points on Churchill Falls as it relates to affordability.

We talk about Members in here have the opportunity to be informed about this bill. Well, I would argue then that if that is the concern, Speaker, we could be doing legislation better here as well. I will say, in terms of the amount of leave we have to discuss it – but here, since the door is open, then we've already gone in and we're still there to see it through because, right now, to quote parliamentary regulations after the fact seems to be a pretty contrived effort to shut down debate that the government did not want but initiated.

So finish it off because it's the only way we're going to restore trust in this process. Leave was granted. Maybe you can ask for leave to go back to relevance and we'll see if we grant it; but, right now, it's pretty rich to be coming up and quoting this parliamentary procedure when, obviously, the Oppositon is not doing what government wants it to do. That's our job.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

This is about process versus substance. So the first thing I would say, again, to clarify, is second reading was over. The door opened and it closed when the minister stood up and he closed debate. He closed that debate and the procedure is very clear. Leave does not grant permanent status.

By definition, granting leave applies to procedural short cuts rather than core legislative substance, waiving required notice period or motion, extending speaking times, modifying the order of business. It does not set a permanent, binding precedent. That's the first thing.

The second thing, if this was an attempt by us to stymie anyone, we would have come in here yesterday, when we went to Committee, and we would have invoked closure. That is not what we're trying to achieve.

We are trying to pass a bill that is good for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador in the proper way, the elimination of gas tax. For it to be dragged out the way it is for no reason, the precedent has been set, the procedure has been set, it's clear in the books, it's clear in the April 30 ruling, so I agree with the Opposition House Leader that you should recess the House and make a ruling.

But what I will say is that the ruling has been made in the past, Committee is different than second reading and once we go to Committee, it's based on the content inside the legislative piece of paper.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Okay, well, I see no speakers and I've heard enough anyway. I understand the issue. Seeing how both sides have requested that we would recess the House and deal with it now, I have no problem in doing that.

So we'll recess the House. I'll take as much time as I require to decide on a ruling and we will recess until that happens.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I will now rule on a point of order raised by the Government House Leader regarding relevance during proceedings at Committee of the Whole.

Standing Order 1(1) states: "The proceedings in the House of Assembly and in all committees of the House shall be conducted in accordance with the following Standing Orders and with the sessional and other orders of the House."

Where a matter is not provided for in our *Standing Orders* or by sessional or other orders of the House, Standing Order 1(2) states, "the Speaker shall be guided by the following in the order in which they are stated: (a) the usages, customs and precedents of this House; (b) the Standing Orders and sessional orders and forms and usages, customs and precedents of the House of Commons of Canada and those of any province or territory in Canada; and (c) in all cases not provided for above, the usages, customs and precedents of the House of Commons at Westminster in the United Kingdom."

There is no Standing Order which specifically addresses the issue raised by the Government House Leader. Therefore, in accordance with Standing Order 1(1)(a), I must look to the usages, customs and precedents of this House.

The custom and precedent of this hon. House has long been that at Committee of the Whole, when clause 1 is called, the Committee holds a general debate similar to that at second reading, covering the principles and details of the bill, as well, Members may ask questions about any of the clauses of the bill. After clause 1 is disposed of, however, debate must be strictly relevant to the clause under consideration.

I note that while our usages, customs and precedents may appear to differ from those in some other jurisdictions in which debate during Committee of the Whole has evolved to be more restricted, most other jurisdictions have robust parliamentary committee systems in which bills are referred out to committees. Those committees examine the clauses of the bill in detail and Members have their first opportunity to propose amendments. The committee may hold public consultation sessions and witnesses may be invited to present their views and to ask Members questions. The bill then progresses back to the House for further consideration.

The process of referring bills to parliamentary Committees, as contemplated in our *Standing Orders*, has been rarely used in recent years. As such, our Committee of the Whole stage is the first opportunity for Members to debate and ask questions regarding the substance of a bill in any detail. It is perhaps for this reason that the custom and precedent at our Committee of the Whole stage has not evolved in the same manner as in some other jurisdictions.

The Government House Leader has referenced my ruling on April 30, 2026, in which I made a distinction between the standard for relevance at second reading and the Committee stage. In that ruling, I noted that as a general matter, Members' speeches at Committee must be relevant to the individual clauses being considered, with the exception of clause 1, which may relate to any clause of the bill under consideration. This ruling does not necessarily limit debate to only the clauses of the bill. At clause 1, the broader scope and principles of a bill, which are not necessarily written in the bill, are quite frequently debated.

At second reading, the minister introducing the bill explains its principles. The vote at second reading fixes the scope and the principles of the bill, which are applied in

subsequent stages, including during the consideration of proposed amendments by presiding officers.

In this particular situation, in introducing Bill 22, *An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act No. 3*, at second reading, the Minister of Finance sought leave to "bring in some of the benefits for affordability like this gas tax amendment would be." The minister spoke at some length about the Churchill Falls deal, stating, "Churchill Falls will bring us affordability." And going on to say that he would "like to tell you what the Churchill Falls deal will bring to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians."

I would note here that while such mention has been made of the leave granted to the minister in this respect, leave was not even necessary in this case. It is well within the minister's prerogative to set out the scope and principles of a bill the minister is introducing at second reading, whether, and what, leave was granted in this instance is irrelevant.

Given the long-standing custom and precedent of permitting general debate on both principles and details of a bill at clause 1 in Committee, the minister's statements during second reading remain important when considering relevance at Committee of the Whole. Debate at second reading continues to inform the Committee stage in this respect. By framing Bill 22 as an affordability measure and linking affordability measures to the Churchill Falls deal, and by speaking about the Churchill Falls deal at some length during second reading, the minister has included those topics in the principles behind the bill. This scope and these principles were voted on by the House at second reading and they remain relevant during Committee debate on clause 1 and at third reading.

In consideration of these matters, I find that there is no point of order.

Visiting the Speaker's gallery today, as subject of a Member's statement, is 99-year-old Korean War Veteran Leslie Mercer. He is accompanied by his son Paul Mercer and his partner, Mary Hunt, and daughters Yvonne Mercer and JoAnn Woodland. They are also joined by members of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 1: Ed Burke, Larry Simms, Joyce Reardon and Brenda Cobb.

Welcome to the Speaker's gallery everyone and thank you for your service, Mr. Mercer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: That made my day, I have to say.

Visiting in our public gallery today in relation to a Ministerial Statement is His Worship, Mayor Danny Breen, Mayor of the City of St. John's. He is accompanied by Ken O'Leary, Vice-President Newfoundland Regiment of the Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League; Brent Meade, CEO, St. John's Sports and Entertainment; and Tony Kenny, President of the Newfoundland Rogues.

Welcome to the gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also visiting our public gallery and subjects of a Member's statement today are Amy and Andrew Hillyard, Adam and Sarah Lundrigan, as well as Lana Morgan. They are joined by members of their family.

Welcome to you all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Lillian Lush, Executive Director and Cameron Chafe of the Rabbittown Community Centre are also visiting our public gallery today in relation to a Member's statement.

Welcome Lillian and Cameron.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I would be remiss if I did not recognize a former colleague, former MHA, minister of this hon. House, John Abbott. Good to see you.

Welcome, John.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Mount Scio, St. John's West, Placentia West - Bellevue, St. George's - Humber and St. John's Centre.

The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Speaker,

I am honoured to stand in the legislature to celebrate the Rabbittown Community Centre staff, volunteers and board members and recognize this incredible organization on their 40th anniversary. Since 1986, the Rabbittown Community Centre has been offering foundational services to residents of St. John's.

I am amazed at the breadth and depth of programs and services offered by the Rabbittown Community Centre. I am amazed at the energy that Executive Director Lillian Lush, Cameron Chafe and their team have and the care that they put into the programs and services they offer in helping over 300 families who count on the community centre.

They offer programs for adults, seniors, youth, children, mothers. They have employment and career services, homework help and they have a weekly nurse practitioner clinic. They have an after-school program and run summer camps.

I also met Debbie Fourn at the 40th anniversary celebrations. Debbie is herself a long-time community volunteer and centre volunteer and her mom was one of the initial founders of the original Rabbittown volunteer community association. This is a generational community, making generational social impact.

From the bottom of my heart, please join me in thanking the staff and volunteers of the Rabbittown Community Centre.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to recognize the Windy Meadow Community Garden in Cowan Heights.

What began as a dream shared by two friends, Amy and Sarah, has grown into a thriving community initiative. Founded in 2022, the garden officially took root in spring 2023.

Today, Windy Meadow Community Garden features garden plots, a pollinator garden, fruit trees, a Little Free Library and shared spaces where residents can enjoy fresh produce and connect with neighbours.

Over the past four years, 10 different gardeners and families have had the opportunity to grow their own food, while approximately 100 pounds of vegetables have been harvested and donated to families in the community.

This is about much more than gardening. It is about bringing people together, encouraging healthy living, supporting families and helping a stronger neighbourhood blossom.

I wish to recognize Amy Hillyard, Andrew Hillyard, Adam Lundrigan, Sarah Lundrigan and Lana Morgan for their dedication, with special thanks to Amy and Sarah for the countless hours they devote to planning, planting and maintaining this growing space.

Windy Meadow Community Garden is a great example of community spirit thriving in Cowan Heights. They have planted the seeds of something special and their community is reaping the rewards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two organizations doing outstanding work to support individuals and families experiencing food insecurity on the Burin Peninsula: The Salvation Army and Helping Hands Family Aid Food Bank.

The Salvation Army continues to be a source of hope and support for those facing difficult circumstances. Operating three days a week, the organization serves residents across the region, helping individuals and families when they need it most.

I also commend Helping Hands Family Aid Food Bank for its ongoing commitment to addressing hunger in Marystown and surrounding communities. Through its thrift store, purchases of clothing, household items and other goods help support its mission of reducing food insecurity and assisting those in need.

As we approach the holiday season, the efforts of both organizations are especially meaningful. Their continued dedication, compassion and commitment help ensure individuals and families facing challenging circumstances have access to support during what can be a particularly difficult time of year.

I encourage residents to support both organizations through donations, purchases and community involvement.

I ask all hon. Members of this House to join me in thanking The Salvation Army and the Helping Hands Family Aid Food Bank for their invaluable service and continued contributions to our communities.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: So I had on my list the Member for St. George's - Humber, but I believe that that's been changed or switched and it's the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, when a firefighter takes the oath to protect your community, you take the responsibilities associated with it. It requires us to continue educating ourselves, staying physically fit and mentally preparing for anything that comes our way. You are held to a very high standard. Many men and women in Labrador West have given their lives to build our fire services into what it is today.

On Saturday, November 14, Wabush Volunteer Fire Department celebrated 64 years of service. This Saturday, November 21, Labrador City Fire Rescue will celebrate 60 years of service. I want to congratulate Chief Baker and Chief Brophy, their officers and crews, on reaching these milestones.

I recognize the outstanding service provided by the brave members of both departments. Your courage, expertise, unwavering dedication and selfless service have kept us safe in times of peril. Your inspiring determination to overcome obstacles sets a strong example of hard work and commitment.

We thank you for providing us with a sense of security when disaster strikes, for your tireless efforts and for never wavering in the

face of danger. You are true heroes and always will be in my heart.

Stay safe out there my brothers and sisters and thank you for your extraordinary service.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Leslie Mercer's life is one of service to his country, his community and his family. Recently, the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 1 presented the 99-year-old veteran with his 70-year service award.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DINN: Leslie was too young to enlist for World War II so he joined the Newfoundland Home Guard. When the Korean War broke out, he joined the Special Force becoming a bombardier with the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery.

Upon returning from Korea, Mr. Mercer married, raised six children with his wife and worked as a firefighter.

For 76 years, he's been a Member of the Masonic Lodge, serving in all offices and receiving the Order of Meritorious Service. As a Shriner for 62 years, he participated in countless fundraisers and Santa Claus parades and was awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal for his volunteerism.

Mr. Mercer was instrumental in forming the Korean War Veterans Association. At recent Remembrance Day ceremonies in Paradise, Mr. Mercer, his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren – four generations – laid a wreath on behalf of Korean veterans.

While the public sees a tough soldier, to Leslie's children he was Dad and anything but tough. He understood that war didn't define a person but how we treat each other.

Please join me in honouring Mr. Leslie Mercer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: A well-deserved round of applause here.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Speaker, today I rise to recognize two important milestones: the 25th anniversary of the Mary Brown's Centre and 10 years of operation for the St. John's Convention Centre.

Known to many as Mile One, the Mary Brown's Centre has played a defining role in our province's cultural, sporting and entertainment landscape.

Over the past 25 years, it has hosted championship games, national sporting events, community celebrations, graduations and world-class concerts, bringing people together and creating lasting memories.

Home to two promising teams, the Newfoundland Rogues and the Newfoundland Regiment, the centre continues to support the growth of sport and entertainment in our province.

We also celebrate 10 years of the St. John's Convention Centre, which has welcomed conferences, conventions, meetings and

special events, attracted visitors and supported tourism and economic activity.

Together, these venues have helped establish downtown St. John's as a destination for sport, culture, business and entertainment.

Today, I say congratulations on these remarkable milestones and best wishes for many more years of bringing people together and showcasing the very best of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Speaker, I'd like to join the minister in recognizing the 25th anniversary of the Mary Brown's Centre and 10 years of operation at the St. John's Convention Centre.

The Mary Brown's Centre has welcomed major sporting events, concerts and community gatherings, while the Convention Centre has helped attract conferences, conventions and visitors from across the country and beyond.

As the MHA for the District of Gander, I know well the value of hosting conventions and special events on a local economy, tourism industry and service sector.

These milestones are an opportunity to recognize the many employees, organizers, volunteers and community partners who make these facilities successful.

Congratulations from the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

Recognizing my former colleague, Mayor Danny Breen, and as former deputy mayor, I am well aware that the Mary Brown's Centre has proven to be such an effective, economic driver for the city and the province, especially in the downtown area. Sporting events, concerts, conventions and other events have drawn thousands upon thousands here and provided residents with memorable times.

The NDP would like to thank all the staff who work so hard to keep the facility in working order every day.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm speaking on behalf of the Minister of Women and Gender Equality, who has laryngitis issues today.

Speaker, I rise to acknowledge November as Family Violence Awareness Month – a time to acknowledge the profound impact that family violence has on individuals, families and communities.

Family violence can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, culture, income or where they live. It happens in homes, relationships, communities, often behind closed doors. Yet, its effects are far-reaching, impacting physical and mental

health, family relationships, workplaces and the well-being of entire communities.

As Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we look out for each other, and we are strongest when we build communities grounded in respect, compassion and safety.

Family Violence Awareness Month reminds us that safety is a shared responsibility. We all have a role in recognizing the signs of abuse, supporting those who may be experiencing violence and helping connect people with the resources and supports they need.

During the 16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence from November 25 to December 10, I encourage all municipalities to join our provincial government and raise the Purple Ribbon flag in a show of support for ending, not only family violence, but all gender-based violence.

If you or someone you know needs help, please call 1-888-709-7090.

Together, we can help break the cycle of violence and build a future rooted in dignity, safety and respect for all.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, I rise to join in recognizing November as Family Violence Awareness Month and to acknowledge the devastating impact that family violence has on individuals, families and communities.

This is an issue that requires more than awareness. It requires continued action, meaningful support and access to resources for those experiencing violence. We must recognize the important work of front-line organizations, shelters, advocates and service providers who support survivors, often under challenging circumstances.

As a province, we have a responsibility to ensure that those experiencing family violence have access to safe housing, counselling, emergency supports and the resources they need to rebuild their lives.

I also want to recognize the upcoming 16 Days of Activism and encourage communities across our province to participate and show their support. We must continue working together to end family violence and gender-based violence.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

This government could take one giant step to prevent family violence by investing in more affordable, public and non-market housing. We hear from shelters that they are at capacity and struggle to find space to admit more women fleeing violence, simply because the residents who are ready to move out can't find affordable shelter in community.

We, therefore, ask this government to release its long-awaited housing plan and put the necessary funding behind it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

This morning in the House of Assembly, the PCs appealed to the Speaker to shut down debate and avoid answering questions on Churchill Falls. No referendum, no debate on the final agreements in this House, no answers in Question Period and now they're seeking rulings to avoid answering questions in parliamentary Committees.

Why is the Premier so scared to answer questions about his deal?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

We have no issues debating the bill at hand. We have no issues making the provincial gas tax zero per cent for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, giving them further affordability.

He is referring to a bill that has nothing to do with the Churchill Falls debate, and I would question the Member across and ask him why he didn't use his one-hour of time that he could have spoke in second reading yesterday. He didn't get on his feet and speak to it, and now he's complaining that he doesn't get time to speak to it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: The Government House Leader needs to know the rules; I do get time to speak to it in Question Period. I had a half hour last night and got zero answers.

In August, the Premier blamed urgency for not holding the referendum that he got elected on. We know there's no urgency because he's extended the deadline. Last night the Finance Minister blamed the $8-million expense, saying we've got to find a more economical way to hear from the people than a referendum. But the PCs have hundreds of millions of dollars, so it can't be because of costs.

So will the Premier finally tell Newfoundlanders what the real reason is on why he won't deliver on his promise?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, most that were in this House would know that that was a question that was asked last night. I take pleasure in being able to respond to that. I referenced last night that my job as Finance Minister is to look at the expenditures that we have to make sure that they have the value, because we have an extremely high deficit and we were left with an extremely high debt. In fact, the previous government doubled the debt for Newfoundland and Labrador.

So every financial expenditure, my job, as given to me by the Premier, was to make sure that we scrutinize every expenditure. That is what we did, but we always want to hear from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I'll say to the minister, you said to ask this in Question Period. It is now 20 hours you've had to think about this

question. So I expect, actually, for once, an answer. The Finance Minister looked for – and I quote – a more economical way to hear from the people than a referendum that was promised.

Finance Minister, what economical way did you find to replace the promised referendum?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I stated yesterday, Speaker, that I feel very confident that we have a great deal ahead of us with the Churchill Falls. I referenced last night that, as Finance Minister, I suggested that if we can find something other than expending an excessive $8 million to hear adequately from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, that ought to be a pursuit of the current government.

We did look at that. We opened the House from September 14 to 17. We opened the House, the people's House, in order to bring in experts and let everyone hear the values of this deal. Most heard, the Opposition missed most of it. So I would say that was one step we did –

SPEAKER: The hon. the minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Minister.

I highly doubt it cost $8 million, so there's still some room in your budget. So why don't you use some of that money to have a debate on the final –

SPEAKER: I would ask you address the Chair, please.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, why doesn't the Minister of Finance use some of the savings from his $8-million budgeted items to have a debate on the final agreements before they're signed so he can actually hear from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians when the actual deal is ready to go?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, he's sounding like we've got a lot of money to play with. I stated last night and I stated in this House many times, we have interest on our debt of $1.2 billion, growing by $100 million a year for the next three years and he's asking and stating that we've got lots of money, why don't we just spend it on a referendum.

What I had stated in my first response, we wanted to find something that didn't cost us over $8 million, was what the Chief Electoral Officer informed us that we would and what we can budget for, and I think we found that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I'll let the Finance Minister know I'll do the math for him. Of the $8 million out of $275 billion they expect to get, that would be 0.002 per cent. So I think Newfoundlanders and Labradorians would expect you, for that amount of money based on the amount of revenue you're telling Newfoundlanders and Labradorians they can get, to have the referendum that you promised.

So is the Finance Minister saying he's foregoing that promise just to save 0.002 per cent?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, contrary to the previous government who spent wildly, who racked up tremendous debt – they spent before any Churchill Falls deal was arranged and signed. They spent in anticipation of it.

Then we did it differently. The residents of Newfoundland and Labrador would expect this government to make sure that we analyze every dollar. If it's 0.002 per cent, they would want us to analyze every one of their tax dollars. That is what we did.

We analyze every dollar, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I agree with the Finance Minister that they expect that but they also expect promises to be fulfilled and not broken.

Now, the Minister of Finance did not answer questions last night in the Committee but he did say he'll answer Churchill Falls questions today, so I'll ask one here that we didn't get an answer from the Premier.

Why is Quebec claiming that they are buying 10,000 megawatts from the development while the PCs claim they can only buy up to 8,515? Can the Minister of Finance please explain why Quebec claims it's getting almost 20 per cent more than the Conservatives claim?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: I can't speak for the Province of Quebec. Whatever narrative the Province of Quebec puts out to their electorate, I can't defend that. All I can tell you is that the hon. Member who asked the question was in the House when the experts – three days of testimony. There ought to be no questions left, if he listened to the experts that were providing the answers. They asked the questions. We asked the questions. They gave the information. There ought not to be any surprises left.

But to question now what we heard with the experts, which the Member said they were the best of the best, and now they're second guessing the experts that came into the House.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: The Finance Minister should read the agreement because there is a lot left to be expected because there's a lot left to be negotiated despite what the Premier and the minister are telling Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

For example, the Governance Principles in Annex K says, "The Parties agree that the dividend policies for the Project Entities will be agreed upon prior to execution of the Definitive Agreements …." So we couldn't ask the members who were sat in the House because it hadn't been negotiated yet. This policy can only be agreed prior to the execution of the agreements.

Can the Minister of Finance explain the dividend policies that are done or, despite what the Premier and the minister said, are they still being negotiated?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, we had every expert who stated this was a great deal. The beauty part of the deal, which Barry Perry, our lead negotiator, stated was look at Annex D to see what the revenue for the province would be. We're talking of dividends, but Quebec has agreed that Annex D is what we get in revenue. That is what we expect to receive – $49 billion. If we're questioning now what the dividends would be, Annex D would say what comes to the province, what we get.

That was a big part of the three days that the expert testimony had. I'm not sure what the leader is missing.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Section 4(f), we've asked about this as well, says that once the NECEC and CHPE contracts expire, the price that Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro will get will be based on whatever strategy Hydro-Québec decides to implement.

Can the Minister of Finance tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians why they're allowing Hydro-Québec to decide how much we sell our power for?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, we've stated time and time again that our goal is not to put power through Quebec. We have optionality in this contract. It's an optionality for us to utilize those lines to put power down to the States. It's an optionality that allows us to sell through the premium trough at 150 per cent.

Here's what else I'll tell you, we've got a Member across the way who in one breath is saying how Quebec has outsmarted us, and then he's telling us we shouldn't be utilizing any of the prices that they can sell their power at.

Mr. Speaker, this is a perfect deal for Newfoundland and Labrador. It gives us optionality to utilize and sell our power where we want or bring it back to Newfoundland and develop our resources. We would love nothing more than to develop our resources and not sell them any power.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

M. KING: Mr. Speaker, the PCs blamed urgency for cancelling the referendum, but now the Premier says he has patience for Quebec and has moved the date for the final agreements back three months.

Now that there's time, does the Minister of Environment still support cancelling the referendum she campaigned on – yes or no?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there has been no extension. When we brought the DCIA here to the House and we talked about it when we did the announcement, we said that the goal to reach definitive agreements was December 31 with a possibility of extending to March

31. We have given that time frame. That was there right from day one. It's still there.

I can tell you what, in the 173 days, or the two years leading up to the 173 days, that the Member opposite was premier, there were no negotiations; none of their definitive agreements were talked about. There was nothing done.

We have moved this project forward. We brought back a better deal and now they're upset about it. It's pure politics.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

The PCs blamed urgency for cancelling the referendum, but now the Premier says he has patience for Quebec and has moved the date for final agreements back three months.

Now that there's time, does the Minister of Tourism still support cancelling the referendum that he campaigned on – yes or no?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stood up in this House last night and read a letter that the Member for Windsor Lake wrote while he was running to be premier of this province. In that letter, he stated the urgency. He stated an urgency that wasn't important prior to the election. Then he lost, then it became urgent. It was only a year ago that they were complaining that we weren't on the national projects list and when we got there, they were complaining that we were there.

We have taken our time and we have brought back a better deal to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, much more money, more transmission, more power, more jobs and they're still complaining about it. It's pure politics. They don't care about prosperity. They don't want the province to move forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

The PCs blamed urgency for cancelling the referendum, but now the Premier says he has patience for Quebec and has moved the date for final agreements back three months.

Now that there's time, does the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs still support cancelling the referendum he campaigned on – yes or no?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I've sat in this House for the last two sittings and listened to them complain about asking questions repetitively and not getting answers. Now they're repeating the questions and getting the answers and they don't want to listen to them. It's unbelievable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, I am, and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians should be the happiest people in the world that it isn't this group over here negotiating the contract with Quebec or anyone else on their behalf. They want to negotiate stuff in public. They want to move things forward. It

is absolutely unbelievable the type of stuff that they're getting on here with today.

We are talking with Quebec. We have a deal with Quebec and we are making sure we get the best deal.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

The PCs blamed urgency for cancelling the referendum, but now the Premier says he has patience for Quebec and has moved the date for the final agreements back three months.

Now that there is time, does the Minister of Forestry still support cancelling the referendum he campaigned on – yes or no?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, when we made the announcement on the DCIA, we were very clear that we had a date of December 31 as our goal. We also added that it could go as long as March 31. There is no addition.

Had they listened – because they obviously didn't listen in the four days we were here in debate, they didn't listen when there was an announcement and they haven't listened for the last two sittings of the House. Had they listened, they would know that we haven't changed the date.

As for patience with someone you're negotiating with, I would think that's one of the principles of any negotiation, to listen, to put forward good ideas and to make sure it is a contract that is a win, win, win for everyone.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

The PCs blamed urgency for cancelling the referendum, but now the Premier says he has patience for Quebec and has moved the date for final agreements back three months.

Now that there is time, does the Minister of Energy still support cancelling the referendum he campaigned on – yes or no?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We should talk about urgency. We should talk about urgency in the 173 days that the Member for Windsor Lake was the premier. We should talk about the lack of urgency that was used. We should talk about the lack of negotiations that happened with Quebec. We should talk about the lack of negotiations that happened with Equinor. We should talk about the lack of any urgency to do anything substantial for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We are in a situation now where we have a better contract, more jobs, more power, more transmission, more money, a better future for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and they don't want it. Yet, their 50-year deal that was far, far, far inferior, was good. They don't know what they're talking about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the Minister of Energy and Mines: If you're so confident and you won't allow your other Cabinet ministers to get up –

SPEAKER: Address the Chair, please.

E. LOVELESS: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Why don't you go across the province –

SPEAKER: Address the Chair, please.

E. LOVELESS: Mr. Speaker, why don't he go across the province and try to convince the people of this province that it's a good deal? You know what he'll get? A flat no. He's afraid to go across the province and ask the people of this province.

So, Mr. Speaker, another Cabinet minister – the PCs blame urgency for cancelling the referendum, but now the Premier says he has patience for Quebec and has moved the date for final agreements back three months. Now that there's time, does the Minister of Fisheries still support cancelling the referendum that he campaigned on and promised to get elected – yes or no?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No, I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of anything to be quite frank. We have gone across the province. We have listened to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and do you know what? They should also because if they want to understand what the people are actually saying out there, people are supporting this deal. Newfoundland and Labrador Building Trades are supporting this deal.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Industry is supporting this deal. The federal Liberal government is supporting this deal. The people in Labrador are supporting this deal and the people all over Newfoundland and Labrador collectively are supporting this deal.

Instead, they've sat back and they look at the few people that still support them who are speaking out against the deal because of pure politics and they think that that's the solution for the whole province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, the PCs blamed urgency for cancelling the referendum, but now the Premier says he has patience for Quebec and has moved the date for final agreements back three months.

Now that there's time, does the Minister of Education support cancelling the referendum he campaigned on? I just want a yes or a no.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A real honour to stand in my place and talk here. I will say this, I listened to the Member for Windsor Lake earlier talk about policy and how the House is supposed to work. So the House works like this. We get asked a question and we decide how we want to answer it. It's not a yes or no. He don't get to decide that.

What I will say is this, when the Churchill Falls DCIA was announced, when we brought it to this House and debated it, every time we've spoke about it, we were very clear that our goal was to reach definitive agreements by December 31.

We also said, in lieu of December 31, we would like to have them in place no later than March 31. We never extended the date. This date has always existed. Once again, they're not listening.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's West.

K. WHITE: Speaker, the PCs blamed urgency for cancelling the referendum but now the Premier says he has patience for Quebec and has moved the date for final agreements back three months.

Now that there's time, does the Minister of Health still support cancelling the referendum he campaigned on – yes or no?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, there is an urgency in this deal. There's no question. The urgency is moving this province forward. The urgency is prosperity. The urgency is better health care. The urgency is better education. The urgency is more industry. The urgency is an expansion in the base in Goose Bay. The urgency is for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

These guys choose to get their news from Quebec or listen to Quebec. Maybe they should move there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Cheaper electricity there.

Speaker, we asked a simple question, yes or no, numerous times and not one Cabinet minister actually stood up and said they support the decision of the Premier.

Normally, trust me, Cabinet ministers are supposed to support decisions of the Premier.

So I ask: Did he make sure that they didn't stand up because he knew what the answer was going to be and they actually don't support his decision to cancel the referendum.

So I ask the Premier: Is he concerned about a crisis in his Cabinet?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And for the pleasure of the people at home and the people in the gallery, if they didn't hear, when the Member for Windsor Lake stood up, after I said they should move to Quebec, he said it's cheaper electricity.

So for those who don't know, the electricity that is cheaper in Quebec is because they gave away Churchill Falls in 1969 and we are trying to right that wrong and they are voting against it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: They're voting against prosperity. They're voting against education. They're voting against a better future for this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: The minister just had an opportunity to say he supports the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please! On both sides. Order!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: The minister just had an opportunity to say he supports the decision made by the Premier to cancel the referendum and he couldn't stand by his Premier – a simple yes or no question. I think that says a lot.

I ask, the Premier has said on numerous occasions over the past week and a half when we've been talking about the discourse in the media, that he will let his ministers speak and answer in Question Period and answer to the media. Yet, here we are today, we asked almost a dozen questions and only one minister got up.

Premier, were you not happy with the performance yesterday and that's why you asked them not to answer questions in the House of Assembly today?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I would be remiss if I didn't address the preamble. Not only do I stand by the decision to cancel the referendum, I stand by this Premier, and I say that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are lucky that we got him and not him.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm trying to listen to the answer, unless you are finished.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I have no issue whatsoever supporting this deal. I have no issue in saying I don't support the referendum, and I have zero issues standing here in my place and telling the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that we are lucky to have him as a Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you for answering the question that you agree with cancelling the referendum.

So I ask the Minister of Energy: How does he explain to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians why they broke the promise? Can someone, for once, on that side of the House stand up and actually tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians why that decision was made?

We know it's not about money. We know it's not about urgency. My guess is that they think and they know that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will vote no if they're asked.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, we turned around and said, yes, I said we would do a referendum and then I told the people of Newfoundland and Labrador why we couldn't do it, and I will continue to say it.

But there comes a point in time in the history of the province when opportunity presents itself and that opportunity right now is here. We have a Liberal federal government who wants to invest, not only in

Canada, but in Newfoundland and Labrador. They want to help us build our resources, build our mining sector, build our hydroelectricity sector, build our oil sector, and they're prepared to make this work.

That's why the Churchill Falls deal is such a great deal, because it's a win for Canada, a win for Quebec and a win for Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Unfortunately, I have no questions on Churchill Falls.

Yesterday, the Minister of Housing stated he worked closely and collaboratively with community groups on housing, and that's good to hear.

Will the minister update the House on the coordinated housing strategy he is developing with the groups I mentioned and other community-based providers, and state the multi-year operational funding that his department will provide so that the province can avail of the Building Canada Strong funding to expand supportive and transitional housing?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being; and Housing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I appreciate the question; it's an important question.

We continue to work with community groups and we're so happy that so many of them stepped up to bid on the RFPs that are going to see the folks at 106 Horizon move into more of a transitional housing.

Mr. Speaker, I met with the federal minister on Friday. He will be coming to Newfoundland and Labrador in due course to discuss bilateral agreements between the province and the federal government and from there, Mr. Speaker, we're going to come up with a plan to make sure that people in Newfoundland and Labrador have a home to go home to.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: I look forward to hearing that plan.

Considering the price of groceries, affordability issues and the growing food insecurity, will the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being immediately stop the policy that requires client services officers to determine if the applicant for a food voucher has absolutely no resources of their own available to meet their emergency need and discontinue the practice of requiring a person to use a food bank first?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The wonderful people in my department deal with people every single day. It is not a requirement. Let me say it again, because the Member from the Third Party didn't hear me yesterday, it is not a requirement. If they call one of the social workers in my department, the social worker will work with them to reach out to community groups, if possible. If nothing else is there, Mr. Speaker, or if there are no other community groups there to step up, they will step up

along with the community groups, but there is no requirement.

We are there to help anybody at any time. I'm so proud of the department that I work in and the people who work there.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Unfortunately, I have it in writing, the policy and I also have it from the people in your department who are following that policy.

SPEAKER: Please address the Chair.

J. DINN: I am sorry, Speaker.

SPEAKER: It didn't sound like it.

J. DINN: That is policy.

Speaker, seniors in a locally owned apartment building are facing a $200 rent increase, raising their rent to $1,600, almost a 15 per cent increase. One person is facing a new car payment as well, while another senior said he's already cut back on things like his TV and Internet bill, the only thing left is food. They and other renters are concerned about being priced into homelessness.

I ask the minister: Will he follow the recommendation of the CCPA's Beyond Affordability report and bring in rent and vacancy controls that cap annual rent increases?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I stand with my other hat on here now.

We are looking at ways to make rent affordable and we understand the affordability issues across this province and the country. In other jurisdictions, they have put in caps and they are not working successfully for people. It is driving people out of the market. So we are looking for a solution. We have to find a solution that creates prices that are good for people in order to get a place to stay, that doesn't drive renters out of the market and that protects both the landlords and the tenants.

So my department is currently doing a thorough review of that. We do have regulations based on a 12-month period for raising rent, and we hear those complaints. Believe me, we get them. I've gotten them from the Member across the way –

SPEAKER: The hon. the minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

K. RUSSELL: Speaker, on November 3, I forwarded a letter from Lake Melville School about its lack of a security system. At the public safety rally in North West River, I heard from CBC that that camera system wasn't coming. I asked the department to confirm this on November 16. I'm still waiting for an answer.

Mr. Speaker, parents shouldn't have to pass the hat to pay for basic school security. Will the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure commit today to installing a security camera at Lake Melville School and when will it be in place?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

There was a camera. There was a lens problem. The lens has been fixed. The camera is working. We're waiting on an update should they need any more camera equipment. We talk with Education about that and they'll advise us what other equipment is necessary.

The Member also talked about broken windows. We got the broken windows ordered and I think they're fixed. Any other concerns about that rally, I did speak to CBC and I had a good interview with CBC and explained all this stuff to them. The Member opposite was also explained this as well because he sent me an email and I responded to him. We're very on top of the issue.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

K. RUSSELL: I didn't see that email, I'll say that.

But moving on, Mr. Speaker, for more than a year I've raised serious public safety concerns in Lake Melville. Residents have taken those concerns to a public rally. They deserve to hear what their government is going to do.

Will the Minister of Justice commit to tabling a public safety plan for Lake Melville in this House with clear dates for when residents can expect some action?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I can say with confidence that this is a very important issue to the government and to the Department of Justice and Public Safety. I can also say that we have been meeting with other departments. This is a multi-governmental approach that is needed. We need to look at a holistic approach.

We have been meeting with various residents in the area and with the municipality as well. This is an important issue that we're committed to working on and I can assure you that we will keep this a priority for our government.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to table a document as a result from our debate yesterday with my hon. colleague from Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair who did ask questions. I said I would table and get the answers for her. I table those documents and there are sufficient copies here as well, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Judicature Act No. 2, Bill 41.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Personal Health Information Act, Bill 40.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: Given the hour of the day, with less than one minute on the clock, we're going to proceed with the private Member's motion and I call on the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Actually, now there are no minutes on the clock.

CLERK (Hawley George): There are two there.

SPEAKER: There are two on the Order Paper, I'm sorry.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.
Maybe it was the same one. I don't know.

WHEREAS the cost-of-living crisis has put enormous strain on household budgets because wages and pensions have not kept pace with inflation; and

WHEREAS the most recent food insecurity report by PROOF found that one in four households in this province has difficulty affording food; and

WHEREAS the same organization found that 40 per cent of children under 18 in Newfoundland and Labrador live in food-insecure households; and

WHEREAS these pressures are leading more and more people to turn to food banks, which themselves are struggling to keep up with demand; and

WHEREAS the war in Iran is fuelling and will continue to fuel inflation, especially in food prices;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the provincial government to form an all-party Committee to study the grocery industry in this province and identify means of reducing food costs, including but not limited to, targeted financial supports for consumers, preventing predatory or differential pricing, expanding local food production and creating publicly owned grocery stores and supply chains; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the final report of this Committee be tabled in the House.

Now, our intent, certainly with an all-party Committee, would also be to include independent Members as well.

I just want to read out – a constituent of mine has put this in perspective, a gentleman who receives about $1,044 in rental support from the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and income support itself.

He gets $1,044. Rent, however, is $1,055, and it's going up again.

For the rest of the time, he receives a cheque for $250 every 16 days. An interesting number, but I figure it's because it's the way that the department can actually reduce the number of cheques overall in the year instead of once every 15 days. It does allow for the fact that he receives one less cheque than he would.

Out of the $250 or $500 a month comes everything else, including food, personal hygiene products, paying electricity and so on and so forth. Food becomes a major issue, and the food banks are worked into the budget, but what struck me is that when he goes to get a food hamper, he does a count of the number of items that he gets in that food hamper – and this is the same for a lot of others – and then calculates the number of meals that he can make out of that. If he gets something like nine items, then he knows he might be able to make five different meals out of that. More items allows for more meals.

Now think about that. I don't know how many of us here go to the supermarket, corner store or whatever else and look at the number of items and calculate how many meals we can get out of that, but that is the situation that a lot of people are facing.

The rent increase is an example I gave; there are people who reached out to me after they saw we were promoting ACORN to come in and talk about the need for rent controls – and, yes, they do work. They work to protect tenants. They keep people from being evicted, but we also need the community-based housing as well. Because rent is chewing up a lot more of the income of people which means guess what, Speaker, has to be cut back? It's going to be food – it's going to be food.

So that's one thing. When people go to the department looking for a food voucher, they do not want to be told or quoted policy that this is what must happen. It's an income problem at the very basis. So I want you to think about CERB. I remember CERB when we had it. Here's the one thing that did happen: Food bank usage dropped. It plummeted because for the first time, people had money that they could afford to feed themselves.

That's significant. It dropped significantly. Which also led to our PMR on guaranteed basic income. One of the first recommendations talks about, Speaker, establishing a pilot with the federal government just to see how that works because there are costs related to poverty and to food insecurity, mental health issues, malnutrition, you name it, substance abuse all becomes part of it.

So we didn't get anywhere with that. We have a report and it was an All-Party Committee report that actually created some very good recommendations and put forward, I think, a plan. So there's an opportunity here with this PMR to do the same.

We know that the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives talks about a living wage not being kept up with the price of food. As a teacher, I saw the effects of families not being able to provide food to their children, and usually what happens is the school steps in with a volunteer program, teacher-led, to respond to that need, breakfast programs and so on and so forth.

We are proposing not a solution that we implement, but a Committee to look at these –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask to take your conversation outside.

J. DINN: But as a Committee that will be able to establish solutions.

Now I've heard the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being on numerous occasions and others talk about that he is willing to reach out across the aisle and seek that input. I've heard that from several ministers. Well, here's a way that we can work collaboratively in a very structured process, a very constructive process as well, actually, to achieve it, because we have Members here from all parts of the province. The issues facing people in St. John's are one thing. On the Labrador coast, on the Northern Peninsula, Burin Peninsula, Central Newfoundland, you name it, they are multi-faceted.

I will say this, there are solutions there. We don't propose to say that we have all the solutions but I think between us all we can. We can submit a report together as to what the solutions are.

I will read part of the article that was in *The* Independent on this CCPA report, Beyond Affordability. In addition to implementing the recommendations that are in the report, the authors encourage governments to invest in local sustainable affordable food production and distribution – which I understand this government is doing – and address food insecurity by improving income security. They also recommend governments use legislative and regulatory tools to combat anti-competitive practices and price gouging.

There's more than one way, and maybe we need a multi-faceted approach to address food insecurity, but it is having an effect on health care, on children's education, on families, on our society as well, as people become more focused on just trying to feed themselves, it creates significant problems in society as a whole. First and foremost, we need to find a way to come up with solutions to this.

I don't see this as a multi-year Committee but I do think we can come up with something before the fiscal year is out or before next year is out, we can come up with something constructive, something productive and something that can be implemented in a way that benefits all the people of this province.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next speaker, I've been advised you may be experiencing a slight odour here in the Chamber. I've been advised that the Transportation and Infrastructure division advises that there's paving in the parking lot and the smell may be coming through the air intake system, which is on the same side here of the Chamber where the air intake is and the paving is taking place.

They're turning off the air intake for here now and, hopefully, that will alleviate any additional odour from getting in, in case Members were wondering.

The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

I welcome the opportunity to speak to this motion and discuss an issue that matters greatly to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. There's no question that affordability remains one of the biggest challenges facing families, seniors, individuals on fixed incomes and many working people throughout our beautiful province.

Every time individuals or families walk into a grocery store, they are making difficult choices about how far their paycheque, pension or benefit payment can stretch. Food prices have increased significantly in

recent years and we recognize the stress this places on household budgets. As Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being; and Poverty Reduction, I hear regularly from individuals and families who are doing their best to manage rising costs while balancing household expenses – it's not easy – transportation costs, child care and other necessities within their household, Mr. Speaker.

Our government understands these pressures. That is why we have made affordability a central focus of our work. We know that food insecurity is a serious issue. No one should have to worry about whether they can put healthy food on their table for themselves or for their children. That is why our government is taking meaningful action to support those most affected by rising costs.

Our government has committed to over $180 million in new affordability supports, building on measures announced in *Budget 2026*, combined with affordability initiatives announced over the past six months, for a total of $380 million.

The Family Affordability Benefit, a one-time, $500-tax-free payment per child for eligible households, supporting approximately 46,500 families and 77,000 children across Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker; the Churchill River Electricity Rebate, acceleration of the 15 per cent electricity rebate to provide earlier savings on power bills; Home Heating Rebate increase, the maximum rebate doubled, Mr. Speaker, from $500 to $1,000 to help offset home heating costs; temporary gas reduction of provincial gas tax on gasoline and diesel reduced to zero on a temporary basis; Seniors Affordability Payment, a one-time, $500-tax-free payment for more than 130,000 seniors across our province, and we know that they need it, we recognize that; and the Labrador Winter Fuel Subsidy, financial assistance for residents of seven isolated Labrador communities to help with the high cost of fuel.

I want to thank our Finance Minister for doing such diligent work, Mr. Speaker. The total value of these recently announced measures, more than $180 million in direct support to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and we are very proud of that, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, while we acknowledge concerns regarding grocery prices, we must also be realistic about the factors that influence food costs in our province. Newfoundland and Labrador face unique challenges because of our geography, transportation requirements, our relatively small market and our dependence on imported food products. Many of the factors that influence grocery prices extend beyond provincial jurisdiction and are linked to the global supply chains, transportation costs, labour shortages, climate-related impacts and international events.

Addressing affordability, therefore, requires more than a single solution; it requires coordinated action across government, industry, communities and consumers. Our government is already pursuing many of the measures identified in this motion. Increasing local production can improve food security, create economic opportunities and reduce our reliance on imported products for the long term. We have also demonstrated our commitment to understanding and addressing affordability challenges through ongoing engagement with community partners, anti-poverty organizations, municipalities, businesses and residents throughout our beautiful province.

The challenge before us is not simply identifying the problem. The problem is well known. The challenge is continuing to implement practical solutions that provide support to people today, while building a stronger and more resilient food system for tomorrow. For individuals facing food insecurity right now, Mr. Speaker, what matters most is timely and effective support, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Our government remains focused on ensuring people have access to the programs and services that they need, while continuing to strengthen those supports wherever possible. We will continue examining opportunities to make life more affordable for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. We will continue working with partners to improve food security. We will continue investing in programs that help reduce poverty and support well-being and we will continue advocating for measures at the federal level where national action is needed.

Speaker, I believe all Members of this House share the same fundamental goal. We all want families to be able to afford nutritious food. We all want children to grow up in healthy and secure households and we all want this province where no one is left behind because daily necessities have become unaffordable. Our government remains committed to that work.

On that note, I move, seconded by the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, that this private Member's resolution be amended as follows: In paragraph 6, by deleting the words "to form an all-party committee" and substituting the words, "as part of its work on poverty reduction and prevention."

Mr. Speaker, number two, in paragraph 7, by deleting the words, "final report of this committee be tabled in the House" and substituting the words, "results of this analysis be used to inform the development of a new poverty reduction and prevention strategy."

I present these amendments now.

SPEAKER: We're going to recess the House and get the opportunity to have a look at the amendments and come back with a ruling as to whether or not they are in order.

The House is in recess.

Recess

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

I have considered the amendment and it is my ruling that the amendment is not in order.

The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being, I think you had time on the clock, if you want to continue?

C. TIBBS: I do.

SPEAKER: Okay.

The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

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

I'll continue. I just had a conversation with the Leader of the Third Party and I just want anybody to know in this House of Assembly as Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being; and Housing, I will meet with anybody at any time to talk about the discussions.

When we put our names forward, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we're going to take care of the people of this province, that was the commitment that we made. I want you to know that, as minister, I will put myself out there every single time. I don't believe we need an all-party Committee to do that, Mr. Speaker, to sit down and come up with great ideas, to fix the people's problems in this province, and I'll leave it at that.

I'll continue on with my speaking notes, Mr. Speaker. Poverty reduction is not achieved through a single program or a one-time investment. It requires a comprehensive plan that addresses the root cause of poverty and creates opportunities for people to improve their circumstances over the long term.

That is why our government's Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy will focus on the areas that evidence tells us to make the greatest difference, reducing childhood poverty, improving income supports, supporting seniors and creating meaningful and sustainable employment.

It is also important to be honest about where we had to come from. Previous governments have often spoken about poverty reduction, but too many people continue to struggle with inadequate income supports, long wait times for services, housing challenges and barriers to employment. While they were good intentions, progress was inconsistent and many families did not experience the meaningful improvements that they truly needed.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we should acknowledge the notable success of the Progressive Conservative government's poverty reduction efforts. Newfoundland and Labrador's original Poverty Reduction Strategy, first launched in 2006 and continued through subsequent years, was nationally recognized and helped reduce poverty rates significantly. It was admired by all 10 provinces across this country, Mr. Speaker, and I truly believe we can get back there today.

Our 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy is a priority across this government. We formed a ministerial Committee and created a dedicated Healthy Communities Branch within Social Supports and Well-Being.

Our plan will strengthen social supports and improve education and employment outcomes for vulnerable people, with a focus on stronger partnerships with community organizations and service providers. The engagement we have been doing across the province to inform the strategy has been invaluable to helping us understand where the gaps are and what needs to be done to fill those gaps.

The current Minister of Health, I commend him for the work he's done before I came into this role. Since March, we have travelled the province listening directly to people and organizations on the front lines of the poverty reduction. From St. Anthony to Happy Valley-Goose Bay, from Corner Brook to Bonavista, any communities large and small throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, we've heard first-hand about the challenges people are facing and the solutions they want to see. Those conversations are helping to ensure our work is informed by local realities and lived experiences of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The lesson is clear. Poverty reduction works when governments remain focused, invest consistently and measure their results. Our government's plan builds on those lessons, while responding to today's realties, including affordability pressures and the rising cost of living so that more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can thrive and reach their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, our Poverty Reduction Strategy team with either five or six other ministers and departments, we meet on a regular basis. We met on Monday morning and I look forward to our next meeting, and we will truly put a 10-year poverty reduction plan in place that will work for this province.

We don't need an all-party Committee for that. Any person that has any sort of problem within their district and has some solutions that can help the people in their district, talk to me, bring them to me. I will bring it to our Poverty Reduction Strategy team and ensure that they get a good look at it. If they work for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, we will put them into action.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Food affordability is not simply an economic issue. It is a social support of poverty reduction and a public well-being issue. People should not have to choose between putting food on the table, paying their rent, heating their homes or purchasing medications.

Across Newfoundland and Labrador, individuals and families are feeling the pressure of rising grocery costs. For people living on fixed incomes – seniors, individuals receiving income support, single-parent households and low-income families – these pressures are particularly severe. Food security is fundamental to the health, dignity and well-being of our residents. No one in Newfoundland and Labrador should have to go hungry because they cannot afford groceries.

According to Statistics Canada, in 2025, approximately 25.5 per cent of people in Newfoundland and Labrador lived in food insecure households. That represents 137,000 people – 137,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Even more concerning is that approximately 33.8 per cent of children under 18 lived in food insecure households. That equals approximately 29,200 children.

Single-parent families are experiencing particularly significant challenges, with 45.8 per cent experiencing some degree of food insecurity. These are not just statistics; these are families, children, seniors and vulnerable residents in communities across our province. When one in four households struggle to afford food, we are dealing with a provincial crisis that requires a coordinated response.

Seniors living on fixed incomes are particularly vulnerable to rising food costs. Many seniors are relying on pensions and limited savings that are not keeping pace with the cost of living. No senior should ever have to choose between putting food on their table, affording their medication or keeping their house warm.

Food insecurity has serious implications for children's physical health, development, education and their overall well-being. Children cannot be expected to learn, grow and thrive when they're not getting adequate nutrition. Parents should not have to worry about whether they can afford to provide their children with three meals a day.

Individuals and families receiving income support are already navigating significant financial challenges. The cost of a Nutritious Food Basket can consume an extraordinary portion of the assistance available to them. For example, on Labrador's North Coast what's considered a Nutritious Food Basket for a family of four costs $501 per week approximately. That's about $2,000 a month. That's a significant cost.

Our social support system must reflect the actual cost of living, not leave people struggling to survive on outdated rates that fail to meet even their basic needs. A system that keeps people trapped in poverty forces them to make impossible choices and strips them of their dignity is not providing meaningful support. People deserve more than assistance that allows them to barely get by. They deserve the opportunity to live with dignity and have the capacity to buy nutritious good.

Food affordability is not experienced equally across this province. Rural and remote communities face additional barriers, including transportation costs, limited competition and fewer grocery options. Residents should not be disadvantaged simply because of where they live. Food security initiatives must recognize the realities of transportation, geography and access to fresh and nutritious food. Where

you live should not determine whether you can afford to feed yourself and your family.

Speaker, food banks and community organizations are doing inspiring work. They're supporting people experiencing food insecurity. However, they are increasingly being asked to fill gaps that should not exist in the first place. Charitable organizations cannot be expected to solve a structural affordability problem. We need to move beyond relying on food banks and emergency food assistance. Government has a responsibility to address the underlying causes of food insecurity. Food banks are an essential safety net but they should never become a substitute for an effective government affordability strategy.

We recognize that the PC government has announced additional affordability payments, and those measures may provide some short-term relief, but one-time payments do not address the structural factors driving grocery prices up. Families need predictable, meaningful and ongoing supports.

We need to examine how government can make groceries more affordable and improve access to nutritious food and address regional disparities. We should be looking at targeted financial supports to low-income households, addressing unfair and differential pricing practices, improving competition within the grocery industry, expanding local food production and processing, strengthening food distribution and supply chains and exploring the feasibility of publicly owned grocery stores and supply chains.

We need more than temporary relief; we need a long-term plan that makes food more affordable and accessible. The former Liberal government recognized that affordability required meaningful government action. Our government did provide more than $750 million in targeted affordability measures to help residents manage rising costs. We also maintained a commitment to no new taxes, tax increases or fee increases in several consecutive years.

In June 2026, the Liberal Official Opposition proposed the fair prices and tax-free groceries act, 2026. The proposed legislation would require the provincial government to develop a province-wide food affordability plan within six months and require the Minister of Finance to begin the process of removing the provincial portion of HST on food products and non-alcoholic beverages, while engaging the federal government on removing the federal portion of the tax.

Speaker, we believe that this government must be prepared to examine every available option to reduce the cost of putting food on the table. We have consistently recognized that affordability requires action and we will continue pushing for practical solutions.

This motion presents an important opportunity to take a serious, comprehensive look at grocery affordability in Newfoundland and Labrador. An all-party Committee would allow Members of this House, from both government and Opposition, to work together to examine this issue, to hear directly from those working in the food sector and those experiencing food insecurity and better understand the challenges facing our communities.

The Committee could invite presentations from food processors, grocery industry representatives, food banks, community organizations, anti-poverty advocates and individuals directly affected by food insecurity. These presentations would provide an opportunity to hear first-hand accounts, examine the evidence, identify gaps in existing supports and develop practical, meaningful recommendations to address the growing challenge of food affordability.

We need to understand why groceries cost so much, why certain regions face higher prices and what interventions could make a meaningful difference. We should be examining the feasibility, the costs and effectiveness of all proposed solutions. This includes looking at a publicly owned grocery stores and supply chains without prejudging the outcome. Most importantly, the all-party Committee findings would be made public and the final report would be tabled in this House of Assembly.

Speaker, the Minister of Social Supports just spoke about the poverty reduction Committee that they have on their side that's made up of five ministers. I applaud them for having such a Committee, but that truly is a one-sided approach. While this government continuously talks about working together, it's evidenced here today that they have no intentions of working together.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, our government recognizes that the cost-of-living crisis has placed significant pressure on households and family budgets across Newfoundland and Labrador. Families are feeling the pinch at the grocery store, at the gas pump and in meeting the everyday costs of raising a family and maintaining a home. Seniors living on fixed incomes are stretching every dollar and parents are concerned about how they will continue to afford the basics.

We hear those concerns, Speaker, and our government is taking action. It was just this weekend, actually, I was at a firemen's banquet – I'm going to make a shoutout to the first fire chief to start the fire department in Baine Harbour, Mr. Harry Upshall. He just had an 80th birthday last week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: So it was quite an engaging conversation with Mr. Upshall. He's very frank and upfront and he said that some of the relief that he's seeing right now as a senior is helpful. He knows that we're going to continue to move forward with other relief.

This is a government that's focused on delivering results. We have already begun the important work of addressing the root causes of poverty and affordability challenges through the development of a comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy. We made that commitment to the people of this province and we are following through on it.

In March, we launched the first phase of that strategy and meaningful work is already underway to improve outcomes for individuals and families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

While we continue to develop a long-term approach to reducing poverty and improving quality of life, we have not waited to help people. We have taken concrete action to put more money back into people's pockets and to make life more affordable.

These measures include, for our working class, the tax relief increase of the basic personal amount to $15,000 so that residents do not pay any provincial income tax on the first $15,000 of earnings. We've lowered everyday costs, eliminating the provincial sugar tax and reducing the gas tax; support for seniors, we've increased the Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent and providing a $500 Seniors Affordability Payment to help offset rising food costs; energy affordability, we're investing to keeping electricity rates lower; and extending the Home Heating Supplement so

that families are not forced to choose between heating their homes and putting food on their tables; support for children and families, we've increased the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit; and strengthening income support programs.

Speaker, our government has also continued to strengthen food security and affordability through targeted investments in school food programs, poverty reduction initiatives and support for local food production. No child should be expected to learn on an empty stomach.

We are also supporting local food production through the Agrifoods Assistance Program because improving our food self-sufficiency strengthens our economy, supports our farmers and helps make our province more resilient.

In addition, we have introduced measures to strengthen income supports, particularly for persons with disabilities and low-income families. Just this week, our government announced a new, tax-free payment for families with children under the age of 18. This $36-million investment will benefit approximately 46,500 families and 77,000 children across Newfoundland and Labrador, helping families manage rising costs and providing direct financial relief where it is needed.

I just spoke with a single mom on the weekend, with three kids, and the $1,500 that she's receiving, she was very grateful for, knowing that's not the only relief that she's going to get.

Speaker, we recognize there is always more work to do. We remain committed to listening to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, responding to their concerns and continuing to deliver meaningful affordability measures. However, while I appreciate the intention behind this motion, I cannot support it. Our government is already undertaking this work through a ministerial process that has the authority, resources and accountability necessary to develop and implement solutions.

An all-party Committee can provide valuable discussion and recommendations, but it does not have the same capacity to coordinate across government departments, direct policy development or ensure action is taken on its findings. Our Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy is already bringing together departments, stakeholders and communities to address affordability in a comprehensive and coordinated way. Creating an additional all-party Committee would duplicate work that is already under way and would not achieve the same results as the government-led process currently in place.

For those reasons, Speaker, while I share the concerns raised regarding affordability and food insecurity, I cannot support this motion. Our focus must remain on continuing the work already under way and delivering real, tangible outcomes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased on behalf of the Liberal Opposition to stand today and speak to the PMR that's on the floor addressing the affordability issue in our province, the cost-of-living crisis that has put an enormous strain on households, brought forth by the Third Party. We're very pleased to be able to stand today and support this.

What we've been hearing since we started this afternoon is Members across the way, on the government side, one by one they're getting up and they're touting the things that they have done to address affordability and why they cannot support the resolution

that's on the floor for an all-party Committee.

I could go down that road, too. I could talk about all of the measures and the actions that we took, the biggest poverty reduction investment in our province's history up to that time when we were there, but clearly, given what we are hearing in our constituency, no matter what previous governments have done, what the current government is doing, we have to face and listen and act on the reality of today.

When I think about an all-party Committee, I remember a number of years ago when the Third Party had brought forth a PMR seeking an All-Party Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Addictions. I ended up, on behalf of our caucus, participating in that All-Party Committee. I think it was in January of 2016. I had my colleague here for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, maybe others, that I know participated.

Speaker, there was many, many good things that came out of that All-Party Committee. There was a lot of work done across party lines because, when people are hungry, when people are struggling, when people have mental health issues, whatever it is, sometimes we have to rise above party lines and we have to work together.

When a government says we're doing all of these good things and we don't need help, we don't need your expertise – we can always learn from others. We can always learn. If we've got a Member that's representing Nain and the Northern tip of Labrador or if we have a Member that's representing an isolated community like Norman Bay, which does not have an airport, does not have a road, you can bring that local knowledge.

Some of the outports on the Island, where it's a huge distance to get food to those areas and where the cost of fuel, we know, is very high and it's being transported in. I believe there are 18 or 19 ferries in this province. Food that is going into communities by ferry, we know that that is an extra cost, even with the subsidy that's there from government.

So I go back to what came out of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Addictions. We travelled around the province. We heard from concerned stakeholders. We heard from people in the medical profession. We heard from people with lived experience. Coming out of that, we had a report tabled, *Towards Recovery*, 54 recommendations, a box to check, a report card of such, with the last one being that mental health facility down on the Parkway, all positive things coming from an all-party Committee.

Food affordability right now is an issue that is affecting families right across Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm going to talk about some of the disproportionate impacts in Labrador, but as I was sitting here in real time a story came to me by two seniors on the Great Northern Peninsula; one I believe is 83 and one is 89. It really, really saddened my heart the day I popped in and they were eating noodles. My daughter used to enjoy them for recess sometimes when she was 10, 11 years old, you know, the little plastic pack.

I said: You guys are eating noodles for lunch. They said: Yes, do you know what the cost of a can of soup is now? So you have seniors in their homes eating noodles because of the cost of a can of soup. That resonated with me. I believe no matter what programs we have out there, no matter what subsidies we have in place, when people are going hungry, there is still more to do.

We did the coastal Labrador supplements; we did the $500 cheques. We are at an all-time high with the cost of living and I firmly believe in my heart of hearts that we can bring all parties together to try and grapple with this issue.

I saw my former colleague – I don't see him there now – in the gallery earlier today, John Abbott. John Abbott and I went up the North Coast of Labrador. We really wanted to dig in to the Nutrition North program. I believe it was $134 million at that time. A lot of money going into a federal program, but what we were hearing in community after community is that the people that should be benefiting from that program in the communities, they were not. The savings were not being passed on. Were the businesses not applying or were they applying and getting the subsidy and not passing it on?

We went into one little store that was in, I believe it was Postville, that had a sign that said I am a participant in the Air Foodlift Subsidy. It was the cheapest prices there. I deal with Black Tickle, an isolated community, just a beautiful people. We really have to pay attention to those vulnerable communities that depend on airlines, that depend on ferries, to get their food in and out. A lot of Type 2 diabetes in that community; it's a real incredible challenge for them to have healthy food, affordable food.

Some of our remote communities, I do have to toss a bouquet to NunatuKavut Community Council. The impact that they are making in our small communities, the little bit of money that they get, what a positive impact. You can see a meaningful difference in families and I want to thank them for that.

Speaker, one of the things we all often look at – and when poverty reduction was under me a long time ago – is a market-basket measure and when we look at a market basket measure, we know that in Labrador it is disproportionately higher than anywhere else. The numbers really do tell a story. The cost of a nutritious food basket for a family of four in 2025 ranged in our province, depending on where you lived, from $321 per week to $501 per week. That's a difference of $180 a week for a family. So that's a huge, huge difference. That adds up to more than $9,000 in grocery costs.

I'm probably not going to use all of my time here, but I want to encourage the whole House, we need to look at the bigger picture. We need to rise above. What would be the reason why we would not want to support an all-party Committee? I believe we've seen the benefits before; I believe that it is a very, very worthwhile approach.

When you are in representing communities that are so vulnerable, where you see the struggle, where you see the food, the diet that they are eating is not always a healthy one because they can't afford it. Even in the Labrador Straits, in the winter, sometimes the ferry doesn't move for days and when the produce gets across it's all spoiled and sometimes the businesses have to pass that on to the consumer and that puts our cost of food up.

So I'm very pleased to support this motion. I hope that all Members of this House will recognize the importance of taking a serious collaborative look at this issue and finding practical solutions that make a real difference for families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

One of the things that always stands with me, as well, sometimes we see the vulnerable, the lower income, and we don't really see, what I would call, the middle class. They seem to be doing good. There are two people working in a household. When Snowmageddon hit this province, and I was the minister for poverty reduction at that time, boy, what an eye-opener for me. What I learned is there are many, many people in this province that are one paycheque away from not making a mortgage payment.

It could be two teachers in a home and they've got to have two vehicles because the kids are carpooling and they're just trying to make it. We can have this vision

that they're doing okay. The lower income, they really need help and they do.

But what I'm saying here is one person, one Party, don't always have all of the answers. Why wouldn't we support something that – at the end of the day, people want us to work together. We hear it every day, every day.

So at the end of the day, why wouldn't we come together? If we can maybe come up with some measures, there are many things here, take a deeper dive and look at grocery stores that turn a profit quarter or quarter and say why is the cost of groceries so high when your grocery food chain is making money? That's very difficult when people are legitimately struggling.

I know that Members on this side of the House are really pleased to support this motion today and we thank the Third Party for bringing it forward.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

The New Democrats really believe that everyone should have access to the basic necessities of life: food, clothing, water and shelter. So that's why I stand in this hon. House to support this private Member's motion.

Deputy Speaker, in my former role, first elected as St. John's City Councillor in 2009, I had a fantastic opportunity to hear a riveting speech by Gwynne Dyer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I need to hear the person presenting.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

To attend Gwynne Dyer's address, it was actually in 2010 to the residents of St. John's sponsored by the Egg Farmers of Canada. It was at the Sheraton Hotel and it was a massive, massive public engagement opportunity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

If you're having conversations, you can take them outside or take a sidebar but that's for everyone. I want to hear the speaker. It's a PMR and we all get the opportunity to speak and be heard.

Thank you.

Continue.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, in my former role as an elected official, I had the great privilege in 2009 – it was 2010 when Gwynne Dyer came to St. John's at the Sheraton Hotel and there was a full room, sponsored by the Egg Farmers of Canada. He was basically shopping around and talking about his latest book called *Climate Wars. Climate Wars* was basically incredible research on, obviously, the intersection of climate crisis and food insecurity.

Now, for those who don't know who Gwynne Dyer is, he is a notable Newfoundland-born journalist, historian, military analyst known for his work on international security and climate geopolitics. We're talking 17 years ago that this book was published.

The intrinsic connection between the climate crisis and food insecurity has only heightened this time frame. Gwynne Dyer and countless other experts continue to plead with leaders and governments to support food production, farming and an

understanding of the seriousness of this issue, which is food insecurity.

It was a very riveting speech, I must say, and it was my onset into the politic life. It really helped me understand how important and how interconnected all of these facets are. He spoke about how, at that time – and I was very interested in transportation and how food was transported to our province – we had a four-day supply of food, if one of the ferries went down or transportation ceased.

So, of course, we know our geography is a beautiful asset, much of the reason why we live in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, but it's also a huge vulnerability. So he delved heavily into that and, actually, I'm really interested right now, I want to go back and get that book and re-read it because I know the things that he spoke about are more than relevant in today's climate right now.

He talked a lot about the intersection of that and, of course, as we've heard many times, the intersection, the transportation, the fuel shortages and all that are happening, these are all things that are impacting our food security and the phone calls that we all get in our constituency offices, the emails and the phone calls that we receive.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about, in the news, we've recently seen a number of stories about the aspects of our food producers. Dairy farmers, Michelle and Eric Spears in Cormack, who wanted to see government introduce measures to help them as fuel prices continue to skyrocket. As somebody who comes from a farming family on the West Coast, I understand how hard working our farmers and our food producers are. We are seeing this continue.

We also have hay farmers and livestock owners, which we've seen again here, Stephen Cuff and Jessica Cuff of Comfort Cove-Newstead. These farmers are worried Newfoundland is facing another hay shortage. So, again, these are the producers. They're our people. They are the people of our province and they are the people that we need to be supporting on an ongoing basis.

Also, living in St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, of course, I'm in a very urban-centric district, but all the young generation are all very interested in getting into growing their own food, farmers' markets, all kinds of technologies around local food production. This is the future and it is an opportunity where each and every one of us can have the potential to grow our own foods in our own homes. That's a privilege. Let's be honest. That's not what we're talking about when we go to see the elements of the dire issues of people having to go repeatedly to food banks.

We know today that this situation has only been exacerbated by geopolitical chaos, trade wars and the rise of fascism in the world. That's the truth of it. We know it's hitting us in the pocketbook, but it's not just here for the governments, it's here for all of the people on the ground. This changing world and the onset of climate change has created food shortages and support for people facing food insecurity.

So we have the food banks, and this morning many of the people in this hon. House had the privilege of attending the Salvation Army Centre of Hope's launch of their campaign. Of course, because they do incredible work in community, we have Emmaus House in my district. We have the Ches Penney Centre of Hope, the Community Food Sharing, Bridges to Hope. There are many, many, many community organizations that are working tirelessly and the reality is it's a band-aid solution. It's not where we want to go, but we're so grateful for the work that they do.

We hear, on an ongoing basis – both my colleague and I are just astounded by the desperation of the emails and the phone calls that we get in our districts. I know that

that's not just centred around our own districts here in the City of St. John's. We know that this is province wide.

There are positive things that are happening out there. We see stories of the hard work of people like Barry Fordham, who's making sure to bring moose meat and wild game into the food banks and make sure that accessible. A huge shout-out to him.

Recently, the Food Producers Forum has organized into a co-operative, and I speak to that idea because I know the Minister of Finance yesterday was speaking quite eloquently about co-operatives and how we have a long history of that in the province. I'm a huge supporter of co-operative models, and I think that that's something that the government could continue to support in many ways.

Again, that's all embedded in this particular motion that we have on the table. These are the suggestions, these are the ideas that we can do in an all-party Committee structured model.

The successes of farmers markets right across our province, of course, I can speak to the St. John's Farmers' Market that was instated in the former bus depot on Freshwater Road and is a massive success. Yes, it resides in the hon. Member's district over here and it's just a fantastic success. I love going, the diversity that's happening, and it has so many things to offer. It is an economic driver and it's good food that is grown here. We're supporting local.

We are seeing good things happen, but it can't be all on the non-profits. It can't all be on the food banks. The government has to have a role in ensuring that we can come up with a plan all together. So that is why my hon. colleague has put forward this motion.

I know that many Members in this House come from farming people or fishing people or forestry people. We have an understanding of where we were, how we moved away from it and started becoming more dependent upon other jurisdictions. Of course, then we come to supermarkets, multi-million-dollar corporations who utilize surveillance pricing. That is something that has to be tackled for sure.

I just want to close up here now with my comments. I've heard many, many times from ministers in this hon. House about the need for collaboration. I've heard it repeatedly over and over again. I certainly hope that we can get the support of the Members of this House for an all-party Committee, because I know that this government certainly speaks to this.

It is my hope that everybody will support this to investigate all the options for all of our residents.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm going to stand and just have a few words on this important issue because it affects everybody in this province. All of our Members, we hear it on a regular basis and I know from our office, the two major concerns that we hear are health care and affordability. That's the two major issues that we hear.

I just want to say one thing to the minister who made a comment earlier. I know you're accessible. I know how easy it is to get hold of you to get things done. I know the work you're doing for Housing. I know what you're working at for Housing. I just wanted to put that on the record, that the minister is doing a lot of work on this and I know personally what he's doing because of my interactions with him.

Back years ago, all-party Committees worked. We brought ideas to the House. I don't necessarily agree with trying to get government grocery stores. I don't agree with that, but I do agree with having an all-party Committee finding some way to get all the people together to get ideas so that we can put something forward to this House of Assembly. What's happening out in Corner Brook or the Bay of Islands may not be the same, and it is not the same in Labrador and may not be the same in St. John's.

There are so many other groups that are willing to help and are helping so much that we may be able to find some way to tap in on that. I'm not sure what the outcome would be, but I know no matter what the outcome, we can say that we, as the Legislature, are trying our best to find solutions. I'll say again to the minister, and you can pass it on to the staff, I know a lot of the staff that we deal with are great people, they work hard and they come up with some very good ideas. They find ways to help, not to reject. I know that personally also.

I support the idea of an all-party Committee; I really do. Back when we had all-party Committees, we travelled the province, we got good ideas and then we came up with some plan. To be fair to this government and to be fair to the previous government, this issue of affordability has been ongoing for a number of years. It has made improvements, but especially now with the cost of living and with the cost of oil and gas, food and transportation, it has spiralled up. This is a global issue.

But if we could find some way that we could help out here in Newfoundland and Labrador by all of us working together, deciding on some initiatives that we could put forth to this House, I think it would be a major step. I can assure you that there are a lot of groups in this province who would love to meet with an all-party Committee to give us suggestions. Some may not happen because of constraints by government, and that's normal. Some more may say we'll be able to find collaboration between different groups and that's a possibility. My only thing, what would be the harm of having an all-party Committee looking at affordability?

Again, I want to put it on the record, I don't agree with a government-owned grocery store. I don't agree with that because then we're into another business. But we've got to find a way to help the people in the province. We always talk about how we've got to work together and this is a prime example of how we can work together. In my opinion, it is the number two issue in the province behind health care. That is a big issue.

If you look at some of the health care issues, a lot of it is caused by people who can't sustain their pills, can't sustain their food, can't stay strong. That has happened on a regular basis. If you speak to dieticians, another thing that they say back – I'm going back a number of years now – when they took home economics out of the classroom, that would show how to eat properly, how to ensure that you're eating the right food to keep yourself healthy and keep you out of the hospitals.

It is so strange when it is easier for a family to go in and pick up a bottle of Pepsi than a container of milk to be healthy. It is strange that you go pick up chips off the counter, but you can't afford bananas, can't afford oranges. That's the kind of ideas that we need to try to come up with, how we can make it affordable for people.

Also, I mentioned to the minister earlier, housing. Housing is another big factor in affordability for people with the cost of rent. I know the minister has committed to a certain number of houses over a certain number of years and I know he's working hard at it. That is another big issue, housing in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador for affordability, and it is. Electricity, we hear it all the time about the

cost of electricity. We hear it on a regular basis, the cost of electricity.

So I'll take my seat now, Mr. Speaker, but I just want to say that an all-party Committee would show that we are working together on one of the major issues in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. As I said earlier, every part of Newfoundland and Labrador has their own unique issues that we can find a solution to. Maybe we'll get some ideas from some parts to help in another part of the province.

To all the farmers out there and to all the people who are helping, all the food banks that are helping and all the school lunch programs, all the breakfast programs, thank you very much for all the work that you're doing because I know the government supports a lot of that also. So did the previous government.

This is a continuing issue in the province. It's not just one issue. It's economy; it's housing; it's food; the cost of living. This is a bigger issue. I know the minister and the government announced five or six initiatives and they are going to help – they are going to help. But we need to try to find some way to make it in the long term and sustainability, because I can tell you right now, after the next election, this is going to be the same issue brought up, the difference that we can make. If we could go with an all-party Committee and make a difference, it would be a less severe issue in the next election, because this issue of affordability has been ongoing for at least the time I've been here about how we can help out people who are struggling.

This is not this government's issue or the last government; this has been ongoing for a while. But if we can find some way to set up an all-party Committee to be able to find some solutions to help out the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I think we've done what people expect us to do, work together and try to find a way to do this.

This is not on one minister. This is not on the government. This is on the previous governments, how we handled things at the time.

It's an opportunity for us, and I support an all-party Committee as I just said. If it is selected, I hope I will be able to get on that Committee because I have travelled the province a fair bit. I hear a lot as an independent from all over the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and I'm willing to put my shoulder to the wheel to help out the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, that we can work together collectively as 40 legislators to ensure that we're doing something positive for the people.

I already know the positive things that are happening, but if we can find some way to make some new initiatives to the government, to each department that's involved with this problem. It's not just the housing problem. It's just not the social services problem. This is a bigger issue, a lot bigger issue and not one department in government, one minister. This is collectively a provincial problem and I'm hoping that we can find some way to help out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. MCKENNA: Thank you, Speaker.

It's an honour to rise in this House and speak on an issue that impacts many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We all share the goal of ensuring that people can afford the necessities of daily life, including access to healthy and affordable food. There is no question that affordability pressures continue to affect

households across Newfoundland and Labrador. Our government recognizes that food insecurity is a serious issue that requires thoughtful action.

While we share the objective of improving affordability and food security, we do not believe that establishing a new all-party Committee is the most effective way forward. Our government is already undertaking this important work through the development of a Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy, which is examining a broad range of affordability challenges facing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, including access to affordable food.

As a part of the Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy, our government is undertaking extensive engagement with residents, community groups, Indigenous governments and organizations and service providers to help better understand the challenges people are facing. Rather than establishing a new committee, we believe these issues can be effectively examined through the work already under way, allowing us to focus on identifying practical solutions.

While work on the Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy continues, our government has not waited to act on affordability. We have already committed more than $180 million in new supports to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians manage rising costs, including: the accelerated 15 cent Churchill Falls Electricity Rebate; the doubling of the Home Heating Rebate from a maximum of $500 to $1,000; the temporary reduction of the provincial gas tax on gasoline and diesel to zero; the $500 tax-free Seniors Affordability Payment, benefiting more than 130,000 seniors; the Labrador Winter Fuel Subsidy for seven isolated Labrador communities; and most recently, the Family Affordability Benefit providing a tax-free payment of $500 per child to 46,500 families and supporting approximately 77,000 children across our province. More of their hard-earned money and making life more affordable.

Speaker, this private Member's resolution also raises the issue of food security, which the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands is already leading work to strengthen food security and support local food production. That work includes engaging directly with farmers, food producers, retailers to help grow the sector, address barriers to long-term success and strengthen our local food supply. Recognizing that increased food production capacity here at home is an important part of addressing long-term affordability challenges.

The factors driving food costs are varied and complex, which is why addressing affordability requires coordinated action across multiple areas of government. That is why our approach must be comprehensive. We need to look not only at food prices, but also at household incomes, housing costs, access to services and many factors that contribute to financial well-being.

I agree that affordability matters, I agree that food insecurity deserves serious attention, but I believe the work already under way through the Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy, together with ongoing food security initiatives across our government, provides the appropriate avenue to examine these issues and deeply meaningful recommendations.

For that reason, I will not be supporting the creation of an all-party Committee as proposed in this resolution.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a privilege to stand and talk to the legislation. I do want to thank the Members from the Third Party for bringing this forward, to work in the spirit of collaboration, which is something that I think it's safe to say that all of our constituents would like to see more of happen here in this House of Assembly.

Again, I just want to reflect back to when we were in government and there was a motion put forth to work as an All-Party Committee on Mental Health. We saw the benefits, what that brought and how it better served the constituents and the residents as a whole across our entire province.

It just goes to show that it's the beauty of democracy. When we have a government in power that's willing to work with all the elected officials that are representing their constituents across all 40 districts, I think we get more done. It's a healthier process, absolutely, because everybody has good ideas, I think that's safe to say.

I hear that from constituents, from friends. As a matter of fact, on an issue brought forward to me today, a friend reached out in particular on some legislation that was passed earlier here in this House on vaping to say, why can't all parties get together and make the best legislation and work together? That's a million-dollar question that unfortunately that we see that continues to not be answered.

To hear Members on that side, including the minister, to get up and repeatedly say that they don't think it's a good idea, they denounce the idea of an all-party Committee, it just shows the spirit and it shows the character, unfortunately, of the government today. We're seeing that too much. There's a pattern in everything they do. It doesn't matter about the votes, they have a slim majority and they're going to put forth what they want to regardless what's being said on this side of the House, whether that's Question Period, whether that's Committee of the Whole, regardless of the legislation.

We do see that, but it's not just us who see that; it's the people of the province who see that. Whether that matters to them, that's at their own discretion, but it is fact. We hear it – I hear it in my district. Not just in my district but from people from other districts as well.

Again, I do want to thank the Member for bringing this motion forward. We certainly will be supporting this motion on this side of the House. As we know, I've heard this said, it's been said here with my colleagues that food affordability is, indeed, one of the biggest pressures facing families across our province, as we know. Not just our province, the entire country and North America, for that matter.

One in four households in our province is experiencing food insecurity and this isn't something that can be addressed with a few one-time payments or a few cheques announced here and there. Those are short-term bonuses, I guess is a way to say it. They're not measures for real, practical solutions. That will not be long lasting and, unfortunately, it's just not good enough. We need comprehensive, long-term approaches that looks at why groceries cost so much.

Something else our Members across the way, the government, they talk about how supportive they are now of the federal Liberals. So perhaps they're joining or they're going to vote for the federal Liberals, talking about the prime minister. I would encourage them, since they have so-called established such a cozy relationship, why don't we lobby to our federal counterparts on something that can be done –

SPEAKER: Address the Chair.

P. PARSONS: – for grocery stores, to make them a non-profit, as has been suggested. There must be something that can be done, that governments can do to stop the high-

cost pricing that we see across the food industry, the grocery industry. The grocers, unfortunately, their profits are significant, especially since the pandemic. It's brought a great chaos to industry in many ways, across many industries. Of course, food, simply, and affordability is one of them.

But I would be remiss if I didn't mention the great work by Eg Walters. I'm sure if he was here today, I think he would be applauding this motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PARSONS: Because that's an individual whose legacy will live on and on and on. That man done so much for addressing food security and doing his part and, of course, the team of people who worked with him. So I just wanted to mention him today. Of course, gone but never forgotten. He'll never be forgotten for his work and his spirit and charity in our province and the impact that he's made.

But it's also important to look at what this government has promised Newfoundlanders and Labradorians when they were out asking for votes. In their own election platform, "for all of us" – the PCs committed to reviewing all taxes and fees charged to individuals and businesses, with the goal of removing unnecessary fees. We know that because that's been said over and over again and people can still find it online in what's called the blue book.

Yet, when our Liberal Opposition introduced the fair prices and tax-free groceries act in June, proposing to remove the provincial portion of HST on food products and non-alcoholic beverages, the government's response was that the grocery taxation was not something that the provincial government plans to review at this time. So that's pretty sad.

We're approaching Christmastime now. We know this is a very, very hard time for people in the best of times, those who are less fortunate. At this time, I want to say a big thank you to the local food bank in my district, The Helping Hand, in Bay Roberts, as well as the Saint Vincent de Paul which services Harbour Grace and the Carbonear area.

They do outstanding work but we need to do more than just rely on the non-profits. They're doing their part. They're run thin. We hear it in the news, pretty much, daily – multiple times a week – on the struggles and even the struggles on food banks and what they're seeing and how they're not able to meet the needs to help the people who are reaching out. Record numbers of people who have never reached out for help before are having to go to food banks, people who make good money, and that's an actual fact.

Again, with the revenue and the money that's piling in because of the war in Iran, because of what's happening, what we're seeing in the United States and how the Provincial Treasury is rich – I'll use the word, a line by a former premier who recently celebrated a birthday: flush with cash. It was said years ago. That's the case now. It's flush with cash, so why doesn't this government entertain the spirit of this motion and entertain an all-party Committee?

Even the Member who spoke in favour of this, why not? It can only have benefits. As we've seen in the past, as I've said, when we were in government, it came from the Third Party, a proposed motion that came to the floor about an all-party Committee and we saw how beneficial that was. It was the former Member Gerry Rogers of St. John's Centre who brought that forward and the work that's been done and she'll be forever associated with that and the collaboration of the spirit of working together.

It's very important. It's what the constituents want to see. Again, this is a government who promised on making everything better from health care to homelessness. We have

a Member who said he's going to stand up and he's going to solve homelessness in St. John's, who services a different area of the province.

There are so many promises that have been made by this government and they're in a position to work together and to show that collaboration, that genuine support for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. They're in the position to do it, so I say, why not?

Let's see how they'll vote. Let's see if they'll support it. They've stood up. They've said they're not going to support it, but who knows? Maybe they'll have a change of heart before our debate clues up here today in the House of Assembly.

In October 2026, our province's overall inflation rate reached 4.9 per cent compared to 3.1 per cent nationally. We know that transportation costs increased by 12.3 per cent, driven largely by higher gasoline prices. The World Bank is also warning that global food commodity prices could increase by a further 18 per cent over 2026 and 2027. We do know that approximately 137,000 people in our province live in food insecure households in 2025.

Again, I do want to thank again the Members of the Third Party for bringing this forward and the Members who have stood up in support and said the benefit of an all-party Committee working together. Again, I want to repeat and say that constituents want to see politicians working together of all stripes. There are good ideas that come from both sides of the aisle so let's make that happen. Let's work together, especially when we're in a position now with significant revenue, unfortunately, because of the unfortunate circumstances with oil prices and what we're seeing in the United States, so let's do something with an opportunity to help people. Not just a one-time cheque announcement for here and there, but to really put some real measures in place that can be long lasting and supportive to help people long term.

On that note, I will take my seat. We will be supporting this motion and I thank my colleagues from the Third Party again.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that we certainly seen all the measures that you put in place over the last 10 years so we'll go from there.

Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion today because few issues are more fundamental to the well-being of our people than ensuring that families can put food on the table.

Food affordability is an issue that affects the health, dignity and quality of life of people in every region of Newfoundland and Labrador. We know that the cost of living has placed considerable pressure on households. We know that grocery prices have increased.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

R. BALSOM: Speaker, the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave had her chance to speak, it's mine now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: We know that food insecurity is a very real challenge in our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

R. BALSOM: The statistics referenced in this motion are concerning, particularly when we consider the impact on children, those numbers are far too high. Behind every statistic is a person, a parent, a senior or a child whose circumstances deserve our attention.

Speaker, there should be no disagreement in this House about the importance of addressing food insecurity. Where we may differ is in how we approach the challenge, how we prioritize our resources and how we ensure that the work we undertake produces meaningful results.

Our government recognizes that affordability requires action. It requires putting money back into people's pockets, helping families manage their expenses, supporting those who need additional assistance and creating economic conditions that allow people to provide for themselves and their families. That is precisely the approach reflected in *Budget 2026*.

Budget 2026 delivered more than $200 million in targeted affordability relief. These are practical measures intended to make a difference in the everyday lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We have increased the basic personal income tax exemption to $15,000, allowing approximately 285,000 taxpayers to keep more of their hard-earned money.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: We have eliminated the provincial gas tax, saving consumers an estimated $92 million this year. We know that transportation costs affect everything in this province, including the cost of getting food from producers and distributors to grocery shelves and, ultimately, into people's homes.

We've extended the reduction in vehicle registration fees, saving consumers approximately $25 million. We have increased the Seniors' Benefit by 20 per cent, helping nearly 50,000 seniors manage the rising cost of living. We have expanded the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit to reach approximately 3,000 additional children while increasing support for approximately 3,000 children already receiving the benefit. We have extended the Home Heating Supplement, providing an estimated $12 million in annual savings to eligible households and we committed $45 million to minimize the impact of Newfoundland Power's planned rate increases.

These measures matter because affordability is interconnected. When a family has more money available after paying for electricity, heating, transportation and taxes, that family has more flexibility to manage its grocery bill.

But, Speaker, we also recognize that putting more money into people's pockets is only part of the solution. We must also look at the strength, sustainability and resilience of our food system. We cannot have a serious conversation about food affordability without having a serious conversation about food security, local production, supply chains and the future of agriculture in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is why the work being undertaken by our Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands is so important.

Budget 2026 invests nearly $3.3 million in the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program, an additional $1 million over previous years, to help farmers and producers invest in infrastructure, land development and new technologies. We provided funding to support the agricultural development of an additional 330 acres of land and we are continuing to support the Provincial Farm Equipment Leasing Program, improving access to approximately $1 million worth of government-owned equipment to help

reduce operating costs for new and established farmers.

We are supporting community gardens through grants that help municipalities, schools and community organizations grow local produce and improve access to fresh food. These are practical investments that strengthen our capacity to grow more of what we eat and eat more of what we grow.

Speaker, just recently, the Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands launched public consultations to inform the development of a new 10-year Agriculture Strategy. This is an important undertaking valuable to food security. The strategy will examine how we remove barriers for new farmers, expand local food production, increase indoor food growing, extend the growing season, improve access to agricultural land, strengthen food processing and connect local producers with local markets. It will involve farmers, food processors, food producers, retailers, Indigenous governments and organizations, industry experts, community organizations and residents.

This is exactly the kind of work that is needed to strengthen our food system for the long term. It recognizes that food security is not achieved through one announcement or one government program. It requires sustained investment, collaboration and a clear understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing our province.

Deputy Speaker, there is another piece of important work under way that I believe speaks directly to the intent of this motion. Our government has begun developing a new 10-year Poverty Reduction and Prevention Strategy –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: – with an ambitious goal of reducing poverty rates in Newfoundland and Labrador to the lowest in Canada by 2036. This is a whole-of-government initiative.

A ministerial Committee has been established bringing together ministers responsible for Social Supports, Housing, Health, Education, Indigenous Relations, Rural Development, Finance, Seniors and Justice and Public Safety. A dedicated Healthy Communities Branch has also been established to support this work and examine the relationship between poverty, well-being and the social determinants of health.

Speaker, food affordability and food insecurity must be part of the conversation. We cannot examine poverty without examining whether people can afford nutritious food. We cannot talk about prevention without considering the circumstances that force families to make difficult decisions between groceries, rent, heating and other essential expenses. We cannot develop an effective poverty reduction strategy without listening to the people and the organizations who understand these challenges first-hand.

That is why government has undertaken engagement with community organizations, service providers, Indigenous governments and organizations and people with lived and living experiences of poverty. Working on this strategy provides an established process through which food affordability, access to nutritious food, household financial pressures and other barriers to well-being can be examined together. It allows us to look beyond individual symptoms and better understand the underlying circumstances contributing to poverty and food insecurity.

Deputy Speaker, while I appreciate the intent of the Member opposite, I do not believe establishing another all-party Committee is the most effective way forward. We already have a cross-government ministerial Committee, a dedicated branch responsible for advancing

poverty reduction work and an established engagement process that is bringing together the people, organizations and expertise necessary to inform meaningful recommendations.

We also have the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands actively developing a 10-Year Agriculture Strategy. With food security and local production at its core, creating another committee to study many of these same issues risks duplicating work already under way, dividing resources and creating another layer of process when what people need is action. Our government is currently in action on this issue.

The structures and processes already in place are undertaking this work in a coordinated and comprehensive way, and, importantly, they can look at food affordability within the broader context of poverty reduction while the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands examines the productions, processing and supply-side challenges that affect our food system. These are complementary pieces of work and they should inform one another.

Deputy Speaker, we should also be careful not to suggest that any single measure, whether it is targeted financial assistance, changes to grocery pricing practices, increased local production or public ownership of grocery stores, is a complete solution.

These are complex issues that deserve careful research, sound evidence and meaningful consultation. We should understand where pricing pressures originate, how transportation and distribution affect the cost of groceries in rural and remote communities, what barriers prevent local producers from expanding and how we can create stronger connections between the food grown here and the people who need access to it.

We should also recognize the important role played by food banks and community organizations. They are often the first point of support for people experiencing hardship, and their experiences must inform the work ahead. Our government is taking action to ease household expenses, putting money back in the pockets of taxpayers, investing in local agriculture and developing a long-term strategy to address the root causes of poverty.

Since October 22, we have provided an additional $180 million in affordability measures that touch every community across the province. From gas pumps and electricity bills and supporting families and seniors to heating homes in seven remote communities in Labrador, our government is developing impactful affordability initiatives.

We share the objective of making food more affordable and strengthening food security in our province, but we believe the best way to achieve that objective is to build on the work already under way, coordinate our efforts across government, listen to the people closest to the challenges and turn that work into meaningful action.

For those reasons, Speaker, while we support the intent of addressing food affordability and food security, we do not support the establishment of a separate all-party Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Lane): The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

Before breakfast programs became common in our schools, I remember a student at Gander Academy who regularly came to school hungry. I remember it because I was in Grade 1. I was in Ms. Bailey’s class and the staff room was halfway up the hall. I can still picture the teachers walking down that hallway to the

staff room and returning with pudding cups and fruit for a student who needed something to eat, and she was crying.

I didn't understand it at the time because I had never truly felt hunger. In fact, I had struggled with overeating as a child and I couldn't comprehend why someone would cry because they were hungry.

So those teachers went into action. I remember Ms. Jeannie Collins, the music teacher, going to the staff room fridge because the staff room door was open a crack and I could see what was happening. Looking back now, as an adult, as a mother and a Member of this House, I understand it much differently. But that is one of the clearest memories I have as a child and I think it really must have impacted me.

Food is never just about food. I remember that girl being really embarrassed and I couldn't articulate it then but I think food meant more. It was about dignity, it was about security and it was about opportunity. So when a child arrives at school hungry, learning becomes more difficult. When a parent worries about how they're going to put supper on the table, that stress follows them everywhere. When a senior is forced to choose between groceries and another expense, it affects their quality of life.

So that's why I'm pleased today to rise to speak to this private Member's resolution concerning grocery affordability in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a mother, over the last decade, almost two decades, I've watched food prices rise dramatically. Like many families, there are moments in the grocery store that stop you in your tracks. Every time I stop in front of the meat counter at the Gander Consumers Co-op, inevitably, I end up in a conversation with someone who will make comments about the cost of groceries.

I always loved grocery shopping and, as a politician, you make sure you go when you have time to actually engage with people and catch up, but it's getting harder and harder to hear those stories. As people who come to work each day on behalf of the people they represent, it's important that we hear those stories.

Now, Speaker, I would describe myself and my husband as middle-income earners. We talk about the cost of chicken breasts a lot. So when my two boys were little and we'd cook chicken breasts, we'd cook a chicken breast for Kevin, a chicken breast for me and we'd each take a little bit off the end and give it to the boys.

As the boys grew older, we'd start cooking a third chicken breast and we'd divide the chicken breast between the two boys. Then they got older still and then we started cooking four chicken breasts and we'd all have a chicken breast. Then my two boys, at 15 and 17, ended up high-performance athletes with a swim team and hungry, growing boys and, suddenly, we're looking for packs of chicken with six chicken breasts in a pack. So it was two and then three and four and six. I understand it's a privilege that I can speak to the fact that, as middle-income earners, we were able to purchase six chicken breasts for supper. That's a privilege.

The fact that as middle-income earners, that's something we reflect on often, I hear and I see how lower income earners really struggle with the cost of groceries. Families are making different choices, not because they want to, but because they have to. They know what they used to pay for a package of chicken breasts and they know that those prices are rising faster and faster in family budgets.

I think a lot about young families in my district as well, because Gander and the district is a growing district. Those young families are working hard. They're paying for their mortgage. They're paying for rent, juggling daycare, school activities and all of the costs that come with raising a family, and everything has gone up – the power bill,

the cost of fuel, interest rates and then they go to the grocery store.

I hear a lot from young families who tell me that their parents show up at their door, disguised as a visit with the grandchildren, but they're showing up with food. The other side of that story is young families who when they're cooking their supper, they're adding in the extra ingredients to make an additional portion for their mom or for their dad or for their great-aunt.

There are lots of organizations when that kind of family support is not available. I think about the Gander & Area Food Bank and Salvation Army community services who provide essential services. It was just recent, Speaker, at a community food sharing event that I was able to speak with Kevin Barrett, from the Gander & Area Food Bank and Sharon Pritchett with Salvation Army community services.
Food security is not something that happens somewhere else to someone else; it does exist in every district represented in this House. Speaker, I wanted to just share for a moment when we hear about the phrase grocery industry, I think many of us automatically think about large grocery chains. Certainly, they're a really important part of this conversation but, in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, access to food is also about small, locally owned businesses that communities depend on every day.

Just recently, I know many people in the House would have heard about a fire at the convenience store in Appleton. Not too long after that, the following day I believe, I had been speaking with a resident, a senior who's very concerned now that their only option for groceries is to head to Gander about 15 kilometres away and that access is a challenge for them because of the cost of groceries and access to a reliable vehicle. So sometimes the issue is affordability, but sometimes the issue is also accessibility and sometimes it's both.

I wanted to speak for a moment about some work prior to becoming an MHA. The organization I worked with had a fascinating program. It was called Social Enterprise through Acquisition. The concept was pretty simple but it was also very powerful.

Imagine a grocery store or a gas station in a rural community where the owners are ready to retire or they need to sell and they haven't found a buyer, or there's no one in the family who wants to take that on as a family business, maybe there are no children interested in carrying that on. Without that, the service closes, it ceases to exist, but sometimes there are opportunities where the community can come together and form a non-profit and actually purchase that business and operate it as a business.

So instead of focusing on maximizing profits or paying dividends to shareholders, the focus instead is on serving the community and maintaining access and affordability for families. There are examples of these kinds of community-owned enterprises right across Newfoundland and Labrador. I think there's real value in learning from them.

Speaker, I'm now approaching the end of my first year as a Member of the House of Assembly and one thing I've learned very quickly is that the concerns we hear from our constituents are often remarkably similar.

When I had to look to how an all-party Committee works in this House of Assembly, I can't imagine how anybody who signed up for public service at this level would vote against a private Member's resolution to form a Committee to bring together people all across Newfoundland and Labrador representing these districts. How could you vote against that?

Whether we represent urban communities, rural communities, coastal communities, communities in Labrador, we hear about affordability. Speaker, one-time $500 cheques for some of us, not all of us, won't

go very far when a pack of four chicken breasts costs $26.

Speaker, I feel certain and confident that there's one Member across the way who will be supporting this private Member's resolution and that, Speaker, is the Member for Humber - Gros Morne, who, when I asked a question about Parks Canada, was quite exasperated and suggested that we all work together and told us that's what the people want. So if the Member for Humber - Gros Morne votes against this PMR, well, I'll just lose all hope and all trust across the way.

Thank you, Speaker, very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre and Leader of the Third Party to conclude the debate.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

It's important to look at the resolution. It talks about an all-party Committee to identify means of reducing food costs, including but not limited to – I know some people said we're looking at single measure. It's not. It also doesn't suggest that the work of the various departments can't continue, but maybe there's an option here to see what other measures can be done to address this complex problem and to maybe how they can be improved as well. It's about consultation as well.

I will say, I'm disappointed to hear the fact that, really, there's no need for a Committee. But I will commend, at least the fact that Members are being honest about it. That's troubling in itself because we've heard the amendment, basically, the change. Here's the thing I'm really frustrated about, Speaker. This PMR is non-binding. They could have voted in favour and ignored it. They could have voted against it and ignored it. Either way, in the end, it's non-binding. It's putting forward an idea. But that's not what happened. Let's put an amendment in to waste more time and to change the intent of the PMR itself.

Now there's a ministerial Committee. I've heard various ministers talk about, well, our door is open, we're open for consultation. Well, that only works, and open-door policies only work, if people have the temerity, I guess, that they're going to walk across or they feel they're going to be listened to. Open-door policies are meaningless in many ways, unless there's going to be real consultation and real dialogue. After all, this Committee is about transparency and making sure that the work of this House happens in the public eye, in the open, that there's a report that's submitted to the House of Assembly.

Now the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's echoed some of the concerns I had about the unacceptable choices that families are making. Parents shouldn't have to worry; seniors shouldn't have to worry. Parents definitely shouldn't have to worry about whether their children are fed. She talked about out-dated rates and actual amounts that are needed, that food banks cannot solve this structural problem.

Food banks should not be the first line of defence. I can tell you, I've seen the increase. If that's what we're relying on for our information, we missed the boat. We should be working to make food banks obsolete; make sure people have the food they need.

Placentia West - Bellevue talked about again realized that the pressure created by rising fuel prices, then, as he, and a number of other government Members talked about, the various measures they've put in place.

I'll read the article from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives because they acknowledge that government has implemented targeted relief and every little bit helps; however, that's not a systemic or a global approach. Here's what they said:

The piecemeal approach to lowering costs for individuals and households isn't enough on its own.

So let's talk about some of the things we've talked about, livable minimum wage, tax relief to workers is one thing, but how about pay equity, paid sick leave. All those things that actually increase people's income.

Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair talked about the benefit of other all-party Committees such as the Committee on mental health and addictions. Also. I would even say, the All-Party Committee on Basic Income. I would challenge the Members – I think the Minister of Finance who sat on that one, and he can correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought that was an extremely productive Committee. There were a lot of things that were discussed there, it was productive. There was true collaboration in that. We had disagreements but we were able to come to that compromise. It came up with some very, I would say, very productive results. Maybe because it had the different eyes on it and the different points of view.

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi talked about everyone deserves the basic necessities and mentioned about the Gwynne Dyer and the intersection of climate change and food insecurity, which we're going to be facing, because that's going to have a global impact on food availability and pricing and everything else. It's already having an impact. How are we going to address that? Not by one-off measures.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, I thank him for the fact that he said, the all-party Committee is to find a way to get people together and share and create ideas. Also, I think one of the key things is that it will let people see how we are working together.

While I didn't propose this in it, previous Committees did travel. I think it's important that government doesn't take place here in this Chamber, it's throughout the province. So it's an opportunity to do that if we wished. The All-Party Committee on Guaranteed Basic Income met with a variety of groups outside, very different voices and from all over the province and from outside the province.

The Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, again, everyone acknowledges the seriousness of food insecurity, that this is not the most effective way forward, however. Work is under way but, again, nothing says that the two can't coexist.

It's about creating a coordinated, comprehensive approach. The Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave talked about the need for more collaboration and the need for a long-term comprehensive solutions; referenced Eg Walters, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul but we've got to do more than rely on non-profits.

The Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde talked about the targeted measures: eliminate provincial sales tax, gas tax, increase the basic personal exemption, but that won't help people who are already not earning enough to pay taxes to begin with. Again, families are still struggling. Even with these measures, families are still struggling. So at least here the Committee is looking at how effective are these and what more can we do.

As the Member for Gander – that really struck a note for me because as a teacher, we did have students who were coming in hungry. That didn't matter, whether it's in St. John's, on the Southern Shore, on the Burin Peninsula, wherever I taught, there were families who were struggling. That does affect a child's ability to learn, which is probably why a lot of teachers have gotten involved and volunteer with the school breakfast program.

They should not be the answers. They should not be the solutions. They're a recognition. They're trying to address the symptoms. It comes down to, I would say, if

you really want to look at it, about having enough income. That's not just about tax breaks and everything else, it's about actually having income.

For the most part, many of us might very well go and grumble about the price of a steak, ground beef, chicken but we're still going to buy it. We might grumble about the price of gas, but if we have the money we're going to put the gas in the car. For many families, not only low-income but middle-class families, they are struggling.

For me, I see the benefit of an all-party-Committee. I see it as a way forward as well and maybe bring in some collaboration here. It doesn't stop the work that government is doing, and we applaud government for what they're doing. They did have an effective Poverty Reduction Plan. I've sung the praises of it at one time, but do you know what? If that's what we're trying to get back to, if that's what government is getting back to, then we can all be part of that. That's something that's worth working towards.

Otherwise, this is sending a message we're not interested, that government is not interested in collaboration. I know from talking to individuals that's not the case but there should be at least a willingness to reach across the aisle and say we need to address some of the big issues.

Whether that's about income – I think of the bread-pricing scandal with the major supermarkets when it comes to gouging. So at least this Committee is about looking at a variety of issues and how we can resolve them. I think it's worth collaborating on because it affects all districts and people differently.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are Members ready for the question?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Division

SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER (Beazley): John Hogan, Lisa Dempster, Bernie 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, Eddie Joyce, Keith Russell.

SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

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

CLERK: Speaker, the ayes: 19; the nays: 20.

SPEAKER: The motion has been defeated.

Given the hour of the day, the House is now adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, November 19, at 1:30 p.m.