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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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June 14, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Are the House Leaders ready?

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Humber - Bay of Islands, Mount Pearl - Southlands, Harbour Main, Bonavista and Terra Nova.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, on June 1, the City of Corner Brook and the Corner Brook men's soccer, ladies and minor soccer honoured a long-time soccer volunteer.

For over 50 years Doug Sweetapple has been involved with the sport of soccer as a player, coach and as executive member, and has been a driving force behind developing and building a strong soccer program in Corner Brook, including the recruitment of coaches, players and officials. It's because of this unwavering dedication and commitment that the Wellington Street Sports Complex soccer pitch has been renamed the Doug Sweetapple soccer field.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: Doug mentored many young athletes and he provided guidance and mentorship off the field. As it was stated after the Rodney King riots: If they're on my field, they're off the streets, Doug lives by: If they're on the field, they're under my guidance, not the streets.

In 1987, Doug was inducted into the Newfoundland Soccer Hall of Fame and was also awarded an honorary life membership with the Newfoundland and Labrador Soccer Association in recognition of his outstanding contribution and leadership to the sport.

I ask all Members to join me in offering congratulations to Doug in receiving this well-deserved recognition.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, while the City of Mount Pearl has long been known for its well-maintained public infrastructure and its top-notch service delivery, it is truly its people that make it great. Unfortunately, in recent weeks we lost two exceptional community builders who I would like to recognize today.

Mr. Jim Greenland had a great passion for volunteerism, being involved with the Children's Wish Foundation, the Shriners, Masons, Kinsmen, K-40 and the Frosty Festival. Jim also loved sharing his wonderful gift of music. He had a beautiful crooner's voice and was always a favorite at the old-fashioned Variety Show and Irish Pub Night during the Frosty Festival. His voice, along with his charismatic personality, will be very much missed.

Mr. Gerry Taylor was one of the nicest gentlemen you would ever want to meet and was a huge contributor to minor hockey in Mount Pearl and throughout the province. Gerry had a significant positive impact to countless lives over his many years of dedication to the community.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in recognizing the accomplishments of these two fine gentlemen and offering our condolences to their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

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

I am honoured to recognize an extraordinary 21-year-old woman from Makinsons in the District of Harbour Main. Ms. Rhegan Robinson was born with a cognitive impairment, which never impaired her ability or determination to achieve many things in her young life.

Since the age of 12, she has been a member of the Tri-Con Giants Special Olympics club. In 2018, Rhegan attended the Special Olympics Canada Bowling Championships where she received a gold medal, her first National Games. In 2019, she was a member of the silver medallist unified bocce team and in 2020, finished fourth place at the National Special Olympics Games in Ontario. Also, in 2020, Rhegan was the Unified Sports MVP of the Year and the Newfoundland and Labrador Female Athlete of the Year for the Special Olympics. She has also achieved her Gold-level status with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award program.

Rhegan also recognizes the importance of her community in serving others and is a dedicated volunteer at All Hallows Elementary School in North River with the Breakfast Club.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in celebrating Rhegan Robinson, a perfect example of what we can all achieve when we challenge ourselves to be the best we can be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an honour to celebrate the extensive and exemplary community service of Harry Faulkner, who dedicated a large portion of his life serving the residents of Bonavista.

Mr. Faulkner was a member of the volunteer fire department for three decades, serving as fire chief for seven of these and chairman of their executive. He is presently a member of the Royal Canadian Legion since 1980, serving as president for four years.

Harry has been a member of the Bonavista Lions Club since 1968 and has served as their president as well. He was a member of the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps Matthew for nine years, serving as their second lieutenant until 1980.

He taught Sunday school for seven years from 1965 to 1972, and has engaged in a whole host of other acts of volunteerism, including coaching minor and senior hockey and serving on the Journey for Sight committee, recreation associations, town council and Cabot 500 celebrations to name but a few. It is challenging to find someone who has dedicated more of their life serving their community.

I ask the Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the outstanding lifetime of community service from Mr. Harry Faulkner of Bonavista.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic many groups have stepped up in response to the challenges faced by our communities. Three volunteer associations in the Clarenville area have once again gone above and beyond to support families throughout the District of Terra Nova.

The Clarenville and Area Community Youth Network, Clarenville Lions Club and the Eastern Health Youth Outreach Program have developed a Community Meal Initiative, free meals for families with school-aged children in the Clarenville area.

This program came about from an application to the President's Choice Children's Charity grant that a local business owner of Michael's No Frills submitted on behalf of YouthTube in Clarenville. The community saw the need for this and have ensured the success of the program with donations from businesses, families and friends.

The Community Meal Initiative started in April of 2021. On average, there are 40 to 45 meals prepared weekly. These meals are prepared by volunteers based on preregistration. They are hot meals and are available for pick up at the Lions Club or delivery, if needed. This initiative shows another wonderful example of community helping in a time of need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

S. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, today, I want to recognize this year's East Coast Music Awards winners and nominees from our province.

Newfoundland and Labrador had many amazing artists nominated in a variety of categories.

Of these nominees, we had six winners. Congratulations to Silver Wolf Band, who took home the award for Indigenous Artist of the Year; Kellie Loder, who won the Fans' Choice Video of the Year for her song "Molded Like A Monster"; The Swinging Belles won Children's Entertainer of the Year; The Heavy Horses won Country Recording of the Year for their album *With Darkness In My Eyes*; Peter Green took home the award for Live or Virtual Sound Engineer of the Year; and Buddy Wasisname and the Other Fellers won a Stompin' Tom Award.

Mr. Speaker, some of the most talented musicians in the world hail from Newfoundland and Labrador and play a vital role in the continuing success of the cultural sector. I would also like to recognize MusicNL, an organization that fosters the growth and development of our province's music community, supporting it as a viable industry on the world stage.

The cultural industries generate jobs and attract new investment to the province. In support of the cultural sector, *Budget 2021* included a new Artist Support Program, which will be a

component of the new Tourism and Hospitality Support Program; \$10 million for the Film and Television Equity Investment Program; \$5 million for ArtsNL; and \$3.3 million for the Cultural Economic Development Program.

Culture is not only vitally important to the social fabric of this place, but it is an important pillar of our economy. We must continue to support our artists in every way we can.

Mr. Speaker, I invite my hon. colleagues to join me in congratulating all of our East Coast Music Awards winners, as well as all of those nominated.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

We in the Official Opposition, too, want to congratulate our nominees and winners at this year's East Coast Music Awards.

It is without a doubt that we have some of the most talented musicians in the world and they continue to export our culture and their talents throughout the globe. We recognize MusicNL, who work night and day growing and developing our province's music industry for the region, country and the world.

We certainly appreciate the various programs that government provides in support of our cultural industry, but unfortunately artists have been struggling for years, and particularly during this pandemic. They are some of our greatest promoters, bringing thousands of tourists to our shores each year to explore and learn more about our culture and heritage. We think that more can be done to assist this integral component of our culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

The Third Party caucus would like to congratulate all the talented nominees and winners of the ECMAs.

Considering the importance of the cultural sector, we believe it's time for us to start providing the same level of support to youth artists as we do for youth sports. One change we could think of that can go a long way in fostering talent and growth in this province is music and other art communities with the addition of a youth artistic tax credit similar to the physical activity tax credit. This credit would enable families to foster an appreciation for and skills in and appreciate our culture that is such a big part of our identity.

I hope the government will consider this idea so we can continue to be well represented by our talented people on a national and international stage.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

K. HOWELL: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Professional Municipal Administrators on their annual convention last week. This year's theme was: Leading through Turbulent Times.

I was pleased to address their virtual conference and recognize the work that they do each and every day for our communities. Sessions at the conference included effective municipal politics, diversity, inclusion and equity; and a presentation from my department on municipal elections.

Mr. Speaker, I want to extend a heartfelt congratulations to the 52 recipients of the Long Service Awards presented at the convention. This year more categories were added for eligible municipal employees recognizing those with 10 to 50 years of service.

The Long Service Awards acknowledge the critical role municipal administrators play in municipal government and the contributions that they make to their communities and to our province. Thank you for your service.

It has been a challenging time as we navigate the stages of the pandemic. The leadership displayed by Professional Municipal Administrators and from our community leaders has certainly shone through.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Professional Municipal Administrators and this year's recipients of the Long Service Awards for their work and dedication to the people of the province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the hon. minister for the advance copy of her statement.

Mr. Speaker, our caucus joins the hon. minister in congratulating Professional Municipal Administrators on their annual convention. As a former mayor myself, I can personally attest to the importance of these individuals in our towns and our municipalities.

Elected officials, Mr. Speaker, will come and go, but our municipal administrators provide the professional continuity through the years, advice to council and leadership among their staff.

I'm also delighted to note that the Long Service Awards were given out for the first time, recognizing those with 10 to 50 years of service is a tribute, and their dedication to all the communities.

Today, I'd like to recognize four individuals from my district, from the Town of Torbay: Dawn Chaplain, Ann Picco and Brian Winter, and from the Town of Flatrock, Diane Stamp, each with 15 years of municipal service.

Congratulations to all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Municipal administrators do a lot of heavy lifting at the community level. They have, indeed, been here for us through these and other turbulent times.

On behalf of the Third Party, I congratulate the recipients of the Long Service Awards and thank them for their devotion to our municipalities all across our province.

I would also like to call on government to do more to help Professional Municipal Administrators champion the causes of diversity, inclusion and equity – key themes discussed at this year's convention and core values of the communities they serve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are now less than a day away from the deadline to find a solution to get the Terra Nova FPSO operating again, and getting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians back to work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: I ask the Premier: What negotiations took place over the weekend? How many hours did they last? Who was at the table?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member opposite well knows, this is an issue between the private equity investors, the multi-billion-dollar oil companies. We have put a healthy deal on the table for them. We've set the table for them with over \$500 million of value. This is an alignment issue amongst stakeholders; the private equity owners; the multinational, billion-dollar, profitable companies, Mr. Speaker, as the Member opposite knows.

I will not bend a knee to them. They need to sort this out themselves.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Nobody is asking the Premier or the government to bend a knee to any company, but for months you've been negotiating in secret. Thursday, you proposed to go out publicly without sharing any other information with anybody else. Now, all of a sudden, when we're at the 12th hour, the government determines that they're not going to be involved in the process, Mr. Speaker. That's not good governance from our perspective.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Is the deadline for the deal still tomorrow?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is not our deadline. This is a deadline that the private equity owners have put in place. We haven't subscribed to any deadline and we won't. We hope that they come to the table and work together to find solutions for the men and women who work in this important industry and this important project, Mr. Speaker.

We're here to support the hard-working women and men with the avenues that we have in place in front of us. It strikes me as odd that the Member opposite wants us to continue down the path of the myopic and sclerotic ways of thinking and decision-making of the past, the eleventh hour pulling the wool over the government's eyes when involved in megaprojects.

We are not prepared to do that. This government is not prepared to do this. Right now, this is a private sector issue; it needs a private sector solution.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

From day one all we've asked of the Premier and the government is to share information so that we all can determine whether or not everything was done that could have been done to salvage this project, Mr. Speaker. Our caucus, through access to information, informed the public of the government's offer to buy a 15 per cent equity share in the project.

I ask the Premier: What changed between April and today to shift your position on the equity stake in Terra Nova?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I find it offensive that the Member opposite continues to say that this was done in secrecy. I'm not sure the Member opposite understands

an NDA and perhaps cannot even spell NDA, Mr. Speaker. These are commercial interests and we need to protect the commercial interests of the province.

It is not done in secrecy; this is how business works. This is how commercial deals between individuals and government – that's how it happens, Mr. Speaker. So the Member opposite is misguided with respect to any significant negotiations in secrecy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't lower myself to get at that level. I thought we had moved beyond that in the House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

D. BRAZIL: Our PC caucus is not all-in on equity stakes, let's be clear. But if it makes sense in the broader economic picture, it has to be considered. We need more information.

Would the Premier's support of an equity stake have been different had they paid abandonment costs on the oil that's already been pumped – been taken off the table?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to take this question as it relates to this topic. Certainly, it's something I've dedicated a lot of time to over the last days, weeks and months.

A couple of things as it relates to equity. Equity in and of itself can be a good thing. The equity stake depends; in fact, we have three right now in various projects. But I would note that they were all done at the ground floor of those projects coming in early.

In this particular case, an equity stake would be coming in, as I've said before, on a project that is 85 per cent completed. Essentially, what the province would be doing is assuming a significant amount of risk for a field that is significantly depleted.

Equity was something that, obviously, has been considered through this. We always have said that we would do anything that we could, but in the long run we decided, as a government, that this was not the right path forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Energy Minister said, "I am hopeful that these owners will take the money that's been offered to them and they will bridge the gap."

Can the Premier disclose how much additional funds are needed for the Terra Nova life extension to proceed? What is the gap?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's hard to point out the gap here; we may have to talk to the companies. I'm a little nervous about getting into actual technical terms here as it relates to the possible non-disclosure agreements. I think the biggest thing when we talk about bridging the gap would be equity and that's not a gap that we are willing to close. We think it's a gap that the companies should close.

What I will point out, though, is that right now, the \$500 million is helping these companies mitigate their risk and it's helping them with their liquidity. I will point out that the price of oil has risen significantly since last year when this happened. So we think that everything is there for these companies to make the deal happen and, obviously, with \$500 million of provincial government support as well.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The media is reporting that four partners with 40 per cent interest in Terra Nova want to exit the project and that two partners, Suncor and Husky, are willing to increase their share.

How much of the 40 per cent is Suncor and Husky willing to purchase?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a conversation that I'm not able to get into for legal reasons, obviously, but it is something that's being discussed by all of the current partnership group. All I can say is that we, as a province, have indicated that we are not open to an equity stake in this project going forward.

We entertained those discussions as we felt was appropriate. We, as a government, felt we should do everything we could and look at every angle that we could, but in the long run we decided that this was not the move forward for us.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government says that the case for the Terra Nova asset life extension is marginal.

Will the Premier clarify? Does that mean there are benefits in the project going ahead?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, there has been a significant analysis done of this project. I can tell you that the staff in the department, as well as in Finance, has been working this file diligently for days, weeks and months. Sometimes when we look at a project, again – many of the companies that look at it, it's not a case of profit versus not profit; it's a case of profit versus more profit.

What I will say is the issue for us is that even if there was the opportunity for profitability, the risk associated was too great. We are a province that is coming off the heels of another megaproject where the risk was too great and we're still dealing with the burden of that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier: How much revenue to the province will be lost if this project folds?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are varying numbers here. Again, the reality is that nobody can tell this for sure. That's the reality. It's all based on various base models and analysis, but the reality is that when we looked at this, the risk was too great.

Yes, there is the possibility of revenue. No doubt about it there is the possibility for revenue, but there also exists, in our mind, a significant case for risk. That's when we start talking about the loss of hundreds of thousands – and perhaps millions – of dollars of money that belongs to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government used to believe in our offshore oil and gas resources, but now they're turning their backs. In 1985, it was a federal equity stake in Hibernia that saved the project and got us to where we are today.

I ask the Premier: Did you reach out to the federal government to ask them to take an equity share in the Terra Nova Project?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have certainly discussed with Minister O'Regan the significance of the Terra Nova Project and the importance of offshore oil and gas to the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. I can assure you the prime minister and the minister recognizes the importance not just to the overall coffers of the Treasury, but to the hard-working women and men who work in the industry, Mr. Speaker.

They have provided \$320 million to allow us, as a province, to invest in different pieces of the industry to ensure that it is well positioned to emerge after the pandemic. That's what we're acting with, Mr. Speaker. They had no obligation to do so. They firmly believe in Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore and the fact that it's some of the lowest carbon oil around the world. We need to market it as such to ensure that this industry survives as we go forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government has purchased equity in energy projects in other parts of the country. Apparently, Newfoundland and Labrador does not get the same treatment.

I ask the Premier: Would the federal government be turning their backs if it were a Quebec energy project?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER A. FUREY: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak to what the federal government does with Quebec projects. It's certainly not something I'm privy to or within my purview.

What I will say is equity for us right now, as a province, is risky. We have to look no further to our cousins in Alberta to see what happens when you bet and lose. I'm not willing to bet on the future of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kenney, in Alberta, is currently burdened – with the taxpayers of Alberta – with a \$1.3-billion bill for a pipeline that goes nowhere. This is a bet that we can't afford to take and lose, Mr. Speaker, and we're not prepared to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There'd be no bill if it were Quebec.

Simply yes or no, Mr. Speaker: Did OilCo recommend the province buy an equity stake in Terra Nova?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The answer would be no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Again, yes or no, Mr. Speaker. Did the department's analysis recommend the province buy an equity stake in Terra Nova?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know the Member wants yes or no, and that's fine, but this is not an interrogation, it's a Question Period. What I will say is it's not that simple. It is just not that simple to say yes or no. The reality is that there have been various options that have been put forward there. The reality is that we've considered so many different possibilities based on various base cases, various models and various analyses.

The reality is, at the end of the day, our department, our government and our oil company have decided not to proceed with an equity stake in the Terra Nova.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Simple question, Mr. Speaker, what did they recommend?

We all know right now that there are two different sets of analyses.

Will the minister table those two sets of analyses?

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

A. PARSONS: As I've said on multiple occasions, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that a lot of the information that we have used to base our decision on is governed by non-disclosure agreements involving commercial sensitivities and commercial actions. I'd love to table it here, but the next thing you know we're going to be sued by the oil companies and then I'll have Members on the other side complaining to me that I did that. So I'm just not going to go down that road.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I would suggest our internal analyses based on whether or not it was viable are our own.

There could be more oil in the Terra Nova oil field than we know about. This could make a case for further exploration or development.

Is government doing additional seismic work to determine if there is additional oil?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly not aware of any additional seismic being done on this particular oil field. I think that work's actually been done a significant period of time ago by various players here. But, again, I will say that we have used all kinds of different analyses to deal with this, including dealing with different possibilities as to what is out there. Using very negative outlooks, very positive outlooks and median outlooks. We have crunched significant numbers.

Again, I'll give a lot of thanks to the staff within the department who have worked a lot of time on this file to help us make the best decision going forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Those outlooks are pale in comparison to the actual outcome.

The Finance Minister said this morning that 6,700 jobs in this province are directly working in oil and gas. Under the Liberal watch, West White Rose is idle, there's no active discussion on Bay du Nord, West Aquarius, Barents and Henry Goodrich are gone, and the Terra Nova's future is on life support with the plug about to be pulled.

I ask the minister: Of these 6,700 jobs, how many people are working directly today?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I listened to the Member opposite throwing out numbers. I've heard all kinds of numbers thrown out by Members of the Opposition in the course of debate today. The reality is not all of them are accurate. I want to go on –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

A. PARSONS: Again, give me a second please, thank you.

What I would point out is that the Member references all the negativity. It's sometimes depressing. It's really depressing when he talks about nothing going on in Bay du Nord when the reality is that we have three times, possibly even more, according to speculation about what's out there. We have West White Rose that again we've had very positive conversations about Husky.

The Member likes to blame and that's fine, but I can tell you one thing, we don't control the price of oil and we didn't cause COVID.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know how to respond to that.

I will ask the Minister of Finance: In your revenue projections for your multi-year targets, have you factored in any royalty revenue from Terra Nova?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member opposite for the question.

The answer is yes. There would be Terra Nova royalties factored in. Of course, we all

understood the asset life extension was progressing, Mr. Speaker. I will say that we're still hopeful that it will be progressing once the decisions have been considered.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Again I ask, Mr. Speaker: In that case, does that mean if this project does not go ahead that these numbers – multi-year targets – will have to be changed?

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

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

I will say that the multi-year targets does assume that the Terra Nova progresses. It does assume that there would be approximately \$35 million in royalties starting, I think, sometime in late '22, early '23, once the asset life extension – so we would have to make up that revenue, but I'm still hopeful of the Terra Nova Project will move forward.

Again, as I said this morning, Mr. Speaker, the price of Brent crude today is approximately the same price that it was when the Terra Nova Project asset life extension was sanctioned in 2019.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's a \$500 million offer on the table, as we've heard; \$300 million of that is a reduction of future royalty payments and the other \$200-and-something million is from the federal government.

I ask: If this project does not go ahead does that \$300 million disappear?

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

S. COADY: I just answered the Member's question by saying that there is approximately, in the forecast, the revenue forecast, starting in late '22, early '23, Mr. Speaker, we had assumed \$35 million over the forecast for our royalties from the Terra Nova Project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Noia has said that the Terra Nova life extension would bring a 10-year, \$1-billion economic benefit to the province.

Does the province's evaluation of the project agree with this assessment?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, let me preface my response by saying that I appreciate all the energy that Noia brings to this. Certainly, I have a lot of respect for that organization, their members and their board. We have done a lot of work together over the last little while.

They have obviously done their own economic analysis of this. What I would point out though: Theirs would be different than ours because they did not have access to the information that we did. There are certainly some issues with methodology. There are certainly some issues with the different findings there. That doesn't mean that it's not a piece of work that we would look to. But, at the end of the day, I will take the advice of the officials within Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly where I got this question from. This morning on

the briefing, when we asked about the indirect benefits of the project, they did not have them in front of them, but referred us to the Noia document. That's why we asked that question: The officials actually referred us to the Noia predictions and said, outside of the royalty regime, it was accurate.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Would you please table the economic projections on asset life extension, including the benefits that the province would receive through HST, personal income tax and spinoff jobs?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll guide him towards the economic report that was just recently tabled with the budget. I will say there is approximately \$35 million per year that could be attributed in the forecast – \$35 million a year – to HST, personal income tax and payroll taxes from the Terra Nova Project. I will tell him that in the forecast, there are no corporate income taxes from Terra Nova, mostly because they have some writeoffs, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

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

Today in the briefing provided to our caucus, government went to great lengths to explain the lack of details due to the non-disclosure agreement – NDA.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I ask the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Have you discussed or written the oil companies requesting that they agree to waive the NDA?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll certainly take this as the former minister of Justice, but currently the minister responsible for Industry, Energy and Technology.

That's not something that we have written to the companies to ask for at this time. Right now, all the attentions have been paid on trying to encourage the partnership to come to an agreement. Our concern has not been the information available for a debate here. Our concern has been trying to get a deal, having \$500 million out there and trying to have these companies come to a consensus or a conclusion on bridging the gap on equity. That is where our attention has been paid and that is where it will be continued to be focused.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, surely the minister would want the public and the Opposition access to as much information as possible about their data, their calculations, their risk assessment and their reasoning. The people of the province have a right to know, so let us lay those facts out for them to decide.

I ask again: Will the minister write the oil companies to waive their non-disclosure agreement?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess, at the end of the day, I just have a fundamental disagreement with the Member on what we are supposed to do here. At the end of the day, we were elected to govern and govern we will. Part of that is engaging in negotiations with companies on a whole number of files, and this is one of them. What I am not going to do is disclose any information or ask for a company to disclose any information that may hurt our position as it relates to getting the best deal for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Now, what I will say is the information will be forthcoming when it is done, but it certainly

won't be right now when we're trying to help these companies get a deal done.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Mr. Speaker, if the Terra Nova Project does not continue, there will be over a thousand jobs lost, along with countless indirect jobs and spinoffs.

I ask the minister: What specific supports will be available to help these families in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the question from the Member opposite. Certainly that has been one of our concerns. Probably our biggest concern, obviously, has been the people associated with this project. We've seen those numbers go down. In Q1 it was around 1,100. It has gone down to about 450 or so in the last quarter, but then there are the indirect; there are the families.

What I can say are a couple of things here. Again, there is no definitive answer because up to this point we have absolutely, totally been focused on trying to get a deal done. I will say, politically speaking, that if we said otherwise, we would be pilloried by everyone for doing that. What I will say is that the money that is being allocated to this project can be used for workers in other means, including through other departments. That is something we have discussed and did actually speak to the union about yesterday, but right now we are still hopeful for a deal.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for answering that with class, which he did.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador has a population growth problem. A large portion of this problem is directly tied to jobs.

I ask the minister: If the Terra Nova Project does not proceed, does the department have any projections for how many families will pick up and leave our province?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, that's an important question. We do know that as it relates to various economic drivers in our province, if there is bad news, there is the fear that we will have people leaving this province, and we have seen it in the past. Certainly, we would not have those projections. I know that my colleague may have something there. Again, it's hard to determine because we know that there are and will be further opportunities in this field and otherwise.

The other thing I will point out is a counterpoint to that argument, and the counterpoint is that if we engage in a very bad deal that has bad repercussions for this province, we may end up driving these people out ourselves because of the steps that we have to take.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

And it could be a great deal where we keep a lot of people here in the province once again, and keep these people working that want to work.

Mr. Speaker, what discussions has the minister had with our colleagues in universities to ensure appropriate retraining opportunities are available

for these workers should talks fail, if that's what they wish to do?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, what I will say is twofold. Specifically as related to this project, that's not a conversation that has happened.

What I will say is that I've had multiple conversations, as have my colleagues in Population Growth and in Education. These are, I guess, conversations we have had, certainly, with both our private and public post-secondary institutions. We have invested a significant amount in allowing for other trades for other options, especially as it relates to our tech industry, and I've actually had people in the field reach out. That's one thing that is being worked on quite quickly.

As it relates to this project, what I can say – and, again, to quote the Premier – is that we want to see a deal here that benefits everybody in this province, but if that is not to happen, then we will be there to support the workers.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week there was a large amount of dust kicked up from the mining sites in Labrador West.

I ask the Minister of Environment and Climate Change: Will his department review the allowable thresholds to ensure that those living in mining regions don't sacrifice air quality for economic prosperity?

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

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

I know that our department has looked at that and talked to officials at Tacora, and had been advised that they had – the contractors that were working on hydroseeding in the area for dust-mitigation measures. There have also been some exceedances based on some street cleaning that's been done in Lab West based on the winds that are going.

I appreciate the question, but we're going to keep a close eye on the proponents there.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Greene report says, "Develop an inventory of other hydroelectricity opportunities on the Island and in Labrador"

I ask the minister: Is there a list of rivers that are being considered and does this government intend to end the moratorium on hydro development on the Island?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As it relates to the first part of the question, a list of rivers, it is something I could certainly provide to the House. It's not something I would have or be able to remember, but I would have no issue providing that to the Member.

As it relates to the moratorium question on hydro development, again, that's not something that I've actively considered right now. We have been more concerned about our developments in Labrador and the possibilities that exist there. Certainly what I would say, as a follow-up outside of the House of Assembly, I would certainly do my best to provide you with the specific information.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, 2041 is not far away, and we have a tough negotiation ahead with

Hydro-Québec on the future of electrical supply from Churchill Falls.

I ask the minister: When will the negotiation begin, and is the federal government involved?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can say that there is no set timeline for negotiations to begin, but it does seem interesting that it's 20 years away. It seems like a good time. The reason I say that is that in the very near future, we will be announcing a committee designed – again, it was a recommendation from the Muskrat Falls inquiry to have an expert panel designed to help us with that negotiation, people with background in the field. We certainly have a number of names of – actually, we have a long list of people that would be interested in that.

That's one thing going forward. A second part of that is I do think that the federal government will play a role in this. This ties into something that they want to see, which is the distribution of our assets outside of this province. We'll be prepared to deal with the feds; we'll be prepared to deal with Quebec, and at the end of the day, trying to get our assets developed and getting the best value.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Recent news surrounding the Terra Nova FPSO, global trends away from fossil fuels and policies and technologies being introduced specifically to eliminate the market demand for oil and gas highlight the necessity for a just transition.

When will this government present a fulsome, just transition plan and protect workers from what is coming?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The question, I believe, is when will we transition from fossil fuel or oil development into renewable energies. There are two ways that you can approach that question.

The first part is that we will be launching a renewable energy plan hopefully sometime during 2021. That's the plan. I do not have a set date, nor do I want to pin myself in, but 2021 is what I'm committing to right now. Certainly, there is going to be a lot that goes into that.

The second part is that we do know there's a transition. Everybody knows it. Whether it be Noia, whether it be the oil companies, everybody knows that there's a transition. What I will point out, though, contrary to the beliefs of the NDP, is that we are not prepared to give today on the workers that are involved in the oil and gas sector. We can have a transition, but that doesn't mean we forget the people, the men and women, working there right now.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're not asking government to give up on anyone, certainly not the workers of this province, Mr. Speaker. We're asking to develop a plan so that they're looked after when the oil economy does come to an end.

In a May 7 *SaltWire* interview, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change said he's reviewing the Court of Appeal decision to determine the department's next steps regarding the Northern Harvest Smolt Limited's application to expand its salmon hatchery in Stephenville. It's been over a month.

Would the minister update us on what the department's next steps will be?

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

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

That is true. We are following the decision of the court. We are looking at the next steps that we're looking at to do that. Decision to release the project was done with the full due diligence following thorough review. Environmental protection is always top of mind with respect to this.

I will say to the hon. Member we are working through that process with our staff. Stay tuned and we'll be moving forward on that hopefully in the coming little period of time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise on a point of order, under Standing Order 49.

During Question Period, an exchange between the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, there was a remark made, and I quote: The Member opposite doesn't know what an NDA is, let alone even know how to spell it.

Mr. Speaker, I find those comments disparaging. They're offensive. They go against what we're trying to accomplish in this House. We say all the time we want to work together. Publicly, the Premier has been – I've said it in this House, we all said it. We want to work together. Comments like there is no place for it in the House. It's no place between two leaders. Like I said, I find it very disparaging.

I'd like to let the Premier know, we may not all have medical degrees, but I would go to war any day, anywhere, every day with this man and this group of people over here. Anywhere.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: On that note, I think the Premier should at least apologize and withdraw those remarks because there's no place in the House for that.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: I think it's just a difference of opinion between two Members.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The decision has been made.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion: that notwithstanding Standing Order 63, this House shall not proceed with Private Members' Day on Wednesday, June 16, 2021, but shall instead meet at 2 p.m. on that day for Routine Proceedings to conduct government business, and that if not adjourned earlier, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that on tomorrow I will move, in accordance with Standing Order 11(1), that this

House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 17, 2021.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

In 2020, government announced that Route 520, the highway between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and the communities of North West River and Sheshatshiu, was a priority under the Five-Year Provincial Roads Plan. A later summer tender call was not successful, so on the 19th of September, 2020, in the House of Assembly the minister of Transportation and Infrastructure stated government would expand the scope of the contract to find better value for next year's construction season; i.e., in 2021.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

P. TRIMPER: That's the year we're in now, Mr. Speaker. This commitment was confirmed again on the 11th of December, 2020, by the minister in response to a petition by the MHA for Lake Melville – that would be me.

On the 9th of June, 2021, in response to a question from the MHA for Lake Melville – that is me – the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure indicated he was still reviewing which highways would be addressed in 2021. The comment by the minister was that "It's very important to note that I must live within my means and I intend to do that, in terms of a budgetary perspective." Given that the budget of \$170 million for highway paving is consistent with that of last year, this should not be a problem to maintain this long-standing commitment.

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to issue the tender for expanded work on Route 520 immediately so that the expanded contract can be awarded and work started also immediately.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken about this a fair bit this last little while in the House of Assembly and I need to advise everyone in a decision-making capacity that this highway, like all other highways in this province, does not have the ability to heal itself. The potholes, the dips, they are not getting better; they are getting much worse. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, my office is, I would say, on occasion, inundated with calls and complaints. I am sure the minister is also hearing much about it.

It is not fixing itself. Here is the situation: We have that same highway. It is deteriorating. We also, though, have the same budget we had last year. This highway was identified as a priority for Lake Melville and a priority for this province. The only thing I can see different, Mr. Speaker, is that the MHA representing this district is no longer a member of the caucus; he is actually an independent MHA.

Can the minister please explain to me how politics have been taken out of the pavement of this province?

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

I couldn't see behind me the last time. I had my mask off quick, so I'll get to the point.

The background to this petition is as follows: Route 10 from Trepassey to Peter's River is a part of the scenic Irish Loop drive, a destination for many tourists, foreign and local.

WHEREAS many of these tourists travel to visit the various attractions along the parts of the Irish Loop. Visitors come to see both old and new tourist attractions in recent years, therefore

increasing traffic volumes and traffic along this section of the highway.

We call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to upgrade this significant piece of infrastructure, including asphalt, sightlines and shoulders so many tourists will become more inclined to visit the area and residents will be provided a safer commute during day and night.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke on this once before already and I'm going to say it is a reoccurring theme in my district that – yes, we got some pavement last year, four kilometres, but every petition seems to be around roads. I'm sure there is more in the province but we seem to have a lot more than most.

It's called the Irish Loop, to go right around the Loop takes about four hours. On one section of it there is a lot of pavement done – not in our district; I'm going to say in the government's district – and we haven't had that touched and looked at. If you drive up there you go from, I'm going to say Trepassey, right to Peter's River. If you drive in the daytime, you'll stickhandle around, moving around potholes, going to the left side of the road if you're going up the shore – coming down, you're going on the right side – to avoid the potholes. It is just something that the minister should get up and have a look at and see the condition of the road.

This time of the year with tourism coming on, you'll see people going up there now – I'm going to say in the next week or two, because I heard there's capelin in Ferryland today, but I don't know if that's the case or not. You'll see big whale attractions in St. Vincent's. You'll drive along the road and you'll be able to – and there will be a big tourist attraction going there to watch it. It has been big the last three or four years for some reason, and obviously, the reason is because the whales are right next to the road and you can see them.

For that area, it is vital that they get in and look at that road. The potholes are unbelievable. When you get up there you can jump out of your car and go take pictures of the potholes and drive down to Trepassey. Just the maintenance alone on that for cold patching and in the area of Trepassey, as well. Along the route there would

be some tree trimming as well, just sightlines for tourists going in the area. It's very important that we get to look at this and hopefully the minister can get up and have a look at it.

Thank you very much. Have a good day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any further petitions?

Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper: Motion 9.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, June 14, 2021.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper: Motion 10.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 15, 2021.

SPEAKER: All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper: Motion 1.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great honour to sit in this House and represent the people of Placentia West - Bellevue that unequivocally, I guess, in the past election wanted me to come back in this House and represent them, and I'm very proud to do so in this 50th General Assembly. I thank them very much.

I also thank my election campaign team. They certainly went over and above with all of the unforeseen circumstances and they handled it quite professionally with a lot of integrity and respect. That's something that we did as a group for our district.

I had a lot of other things I wanted to speak about when it came to the budget, but with what's going on with the FPSO, the Terra Nova, I think I'd be very remiss if never spoke to that today because the people out on those steps today they're the people I represent. A lot of those people are from Placentia West - Bellevue and they're bewildered right now. They want a government that supports them. They're not looking for a free handout. They've worked all their lives. They haven't been a burden to this province, whatsoever. It's time for this province to really stand up and have something to say about it. To me, starting the House this morning and me not being able to stay out on those steps with my constituents is actually despicable. I think it was a very poor show of what we do here and what we represent. Really, it was playing politics. We know your stand on it; you know our stand on it. We're here to support the people and you're here to support yourselves.

This is something that I wanted to stay out on those steps and support, because I strongly believe in our oil and gas industry. Not only this

project, but our oil and gas industry is world renowned. For our federal counterparts to turn their back on us, especially the fact that our Cabinet minister from Newfoundland – we're lucky enough to have one when we only have seven seats as it is – is not representing us. He's representing the federal government. He's representing his buddies. I don't know who he's representing, but he's certainly not representing us, because there's no support from our very own Cabinet minister. He was elected to represent the people that are out on those steps as well, and not his own interests.

Yes, we're heading to a green economy and so why not create a seamless transition? There are not very many products you can touch in this House of Assembly today that hasn't got some part of the oil and gas industry as a part of that product. As I see everybody on their phones, obviously it's in their hands right now. If we can make a seamless transition from our oil and gas industry – which is a non-renewable resource; we know it's not going to be there forever, but we need to utilize it to our advantage. We need to utilize it to the advantage of our own people. That is the trick to this. It's about making a transition seamless enough that we come out of an oil and gas industry and we go into that green economy, but we do it through our global leadership and our global stewardship of clean oil and gas to get to this transition.

I hear the minister talk about we have the lowest carbon footprint per barrel. If the federal government is looking at us moving into a green economy, doesn't it make sense for us to be putting this oil out to the world, instead of the oil that's in Saudi Arabia, Russia and Guyana and all this stuff, that's not as clean as the oil that we're refining here in Newfoundland and Labrador? Shouldn't that be the driver to bring our oil and gas ashore? That's the reason why we should be out there getting it.

I mean, if we look at our history, everybody likes to bring up – they don't go back any further now than Muskrat Falls, but in the meantime our history is fraught with giveaways. We did it in the fishery, we did it in forestry, we did it in mining and now we're doing it in oil and gas. When it comes to energy and a clean, green economy we can also be world leaders and

global leaders in that as well, because we have the resources and the assets.

I'm not interested in what Quebec's benefit is going to be out of this, because I still hear it and, I mean, if we want to talk about history, our history was sold out in 1949 because of the giveaways. We had to give something to get something. Albeit we were in a very desperate situation, which also brings us to the Churchill Falls deal. It should never have been a sanctioned deal based on duress. If anyone understands a business contract, one of the mitigating factors in a business contract is duress. We were under duress in 1967 to have this Churchill Falls deal completed. We didn't have the money and the British Newfoundland company was becoming dissolved, so we had nowhere to go. What did the federal government do? Did us a favour, didn't they? They did us a favour and gave it to Quebec because Quebec was able to bail us out because they were getting so much money from the federal government. They didn't bail their selves out with what Quebec is producing. The federal government gave them the money to bail us out and gave them the equity stake in our Churchill Falls. That's the problem. For anybody that's listening in this House, the next time you mention Muskrat Falls put your hand in your pocket and feel Joey on your hip because he's the one that started it with the giveaways.

We're getting \$60 million a year from Churchill Falls and Quebec gets something like \$2.4 billion. Does that sound equal? They don't have to report that now on their financials for the end of the year and they still get \$13 billion of the \$18 billion that goes out to the country in transfer payments, in equalization. Why is Quebec getting such a sweet deal and we're not fighting for the same sweet deal? I don't get it. I really, really don't get it.

If we're all equal in this Dominion of Canada, then we should all get a say, but we don't. While we have seven seats, Quebec has 77, which, I might add, is more than double all the Atlantic provinces put together. To say that this is a democracy is the biggest fallacy that this nation has ever fallen under. It's not a democracy. It's an aristocracy, because we boosted up these provinces that we call rich, all because they have a bigger population. Quebec is certainly not

adding to the coffers of this province per capita the way Newfoundland and Labrador is, especially if we have the oil and gas industry up and running to full capacity.

If we don't do this with the Terra Nova, this is another opportunity lost, because guess what? We're talking about \$300 million of this \$500 million that we're saying enough is enough, so \$300 million is based on royalty regime fix, which is not coming out of our pocket. It's coming off the black line that we'll end up with at the end of the day. At least we'll be able to keep our people working. That's the trick here. It's about those thousand families and getting those people back to work and letting them have some pride in keeping their possessions.

The biggest industry right now in Newfoundland is the Buy and Sell. It's disgusting. Like I said, this is another lost opportunity.

If you look at 1,700 indirect jobs and you say every one of those families has a partner and one child, we're talking about over 5,000 people in this province that we're turning our back on, that we're not giving an opportunity to put their tax dollars to work for them. They're contributors to the economy. They're not people that are asking for a free handout. These are \$120,000 minimum a job. The \$300 million is not an investment, because it's coming off the profit share and the \$200 million is coming from the federal money that came down for COVID, which, I might add, that everybody is quite proud of. Three hundred and twenty million to save the oil and gas industry on the East Coast of the country of Canada.

Again, this is another lost opportunity. There are no opportunities being thwarted here, because there is a big difference between risk and risky. If the \$300 million is coming off the profit share and the \$200 million came from the \$320 million, then just remind me again what is it we're investing out of our own pocket not to take this opportunity to get these profits that are still in our grounds? I don't get it. I don't understand it. To turn around and say that they were spending \$500 million, because from my understanding and what I've listened to from industry experts, it is only \$740 million for the project to be a go. It's not that big of a gap when you're talking millions and millions of dollars.

They gave us \$320 million to save our oil and gas industry. The next day they put out a fund for \$1.8 billion for electric charging stations. I didn't know we were there yet, but it is nice to know now. I don't have an electric car, by the way. I don't mean to offend the Member for Lake Melville, but in probably 20 or 30 years I'll have one, because then we can all afford them. It is a more expensive car. It is a bigger demolished footprint to the earth, yet the footprint that we're doing to extract the oil and gas, there is something dirty about that when we have the cleanest oil and gas in the world.

And you know what? It is kind of a bit of a shame to be here and call it the oil and gas industry. Because while the oil is what people are looking to extract, the biggest reserve out there is the gas. What's this government done to figure out what to do with the gas?

Let's go back and blame it on Muskrat Falls. Well, you know what? We haven't paid anything on Muskrat Falls yet, so I don't know where we're coming off with this big burden. If you look back on the project – and yes, it is overbudget and stuff like that, which is under the management of this government longer than it was under the PC government that sanctioned it. They don't see it that way. They want to sidle up with their partners at the federal level and stuff like that so that we can get to this new green economy. Mr. Speaker, \$1.8 billion for electric charging stations and \$320 million to save the oil and gas industry on the East Coast of the country. Don't sound like good economics to me.

If somebody told me tomorrow that my buddy was going to give me \$200 and I can possibly get \$1,000 out of that. I'd say: Well, do I have to pay back your \$200? He said no. Well, it seems to be it's all profit for me. Because even if I only take 70 per cent of what I profit from, I'm still in the black; it's not costing me anything.

To sit here and talk about costs and all that kind of stuff, I would challenge, I guess, the people in the medical profession to step into the business world for a change and have a look at what their education is offering them there. To sit here and insult anybody here about spelling things and all that stuff and not retract it, again, no integrity, no respect.

What we're about over here, yes, we want to be progressive and we want to move forward. We want to make this province better, but we also want to be conservative and understand mitigated risk. There's a big difference between risk and risky. Don't get the two mixed up. I explained it to Premier Ball before he left as well, or the former premier. He actually commended me for it, because he understood because I put it in layman's terms for him, the same as I'm trying to do here for you guys today.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. DWYER: You're very welcome.

It's that cocky attitude that has got us in this situation as it is, because we're not looking out for the people; they're looking out for their own egos. That's what's going on here. As you can tell by the comments from across the way, they don't think anybody else has anything to contribute.

I'll guarantee you one thing: There's nobody in this House that's voting for me. I'm here to represent the people of Placentia West - Bellevue. I'm going to do that to the best of my ability with the business degree that I have. I don't need a medical degree to run the province, because I'd rather have a premier, actually, that says expert than trainee. If he's going to sit here and insult my leader, I'm going to let him know what his parameters are, too.

If you look at the money that we could do with this seamless transition and have these projects up and running, in a district like mine when you have so much industry, Muskrat Falls would be a very dusty conversation if we were up full and running with the refinery, which hopefully is going to be done sometime this week; if we had Bull Arm up and running full capacity; West White Rose, Vale. I have a state-of-the-art fish plant that the owners have invested \$10 million into a town of 895 people. You can't say that the people are not out there trying to do their best to make this province better. We have to be better in here.

It's not personal decisions. I don't take anything in here personally. I'll be quite honest in that. I do have a lot of reservations about the amount of

respect and integrity that comes out of this House. That's not what I signed up for, I can guarantee you that. I signed up to represent the people. That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to represent their interests with the best of my ability. I'm not one that says I have all the answers. I've heard it a lot in there, though. There are lots of people in here that have all the answers, apparently. I'm here to work with people. I'm here to make it better for all of us. I'm not here to look for pats on the back and all that kind of stuff.

I just got the ultimate pat on the back in this last election when I won every poll in my district. The people said they wanted me to come back here. You know why? It's because I bring integrity and respect to this House.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. DWYER: I'd say you'd be better off probably figuring out the budget that you just presented, instead of trying to figure out what I'm saying over here, now.

AN HON. MEMBER: Probably.

J. DWYER: Yeah, probably.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DWYER: Yes. Well, that's why I'm trying to dumb it all down a shade for you. Because I know it's over your head if I spoke in business terms.

The 1,700 indirect jobs –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. DWYER: It's a big joke to you, isn't it? Yes.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DWYER: Oh yes, we've been here before.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DWYER: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the protection, because obviously as I speak

about integrity and respect, it's lost on the people that are heckling.

I'll just say this: The money that we can get from actually investing nothing and using the regime that we're talking about, it'll help all our programs, roads, schools, hospitals. The two extra government departments that were added since the last election – that in the last election was determined, actually, and my colleague across the way from the District of Burin - Grand Bank can attest. He was on the same video saying that the Burin Peninsula is booming. That's how out of touch that side is.

Let's get back to work. Let's stop making this personal and let's get to work for the people of the province, not ourselves, it is not about our interests. It is not about pats on the back. It is not about what we can get for ourselves. It is about representing the people and utilizing the money that we have to our advantage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to start off today with a Chinese proverb, those of you who have sat with me here have noticed that I use a lot of quotes. The Minister of Finance likes to quote a Chinese proverb, so I thought I'd start off with one today. This Chinese proverb says the best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago; the second best time is now.

The reason I say that is because we've had lots of banter back and forth across the House about who done it. Whose fault is it? And a lot about the past, about what happened or who did what. At the end of the day, it makes for great politics, but it doesn't make for much real good economic sense in terms of moving our province forward.

Again, I want to try to focus on, today, where we're going as Members of the 50th General Assembly and what we want to see happen. Despite what Members opposite – it's not about failing; it's about making sure we get it done and

we get it done right. Any budget you do is a tough one.

There is another old saying that says balancing the budget is like going to heaven: Everybody wants to do it, but nobody wants to do what you have to do to get there. I think that sometimes that is a real truth to that. There are tough measures that need to be taken and we all know that. We find ourselves, unfortunately, in a position where despite having the resources that my hon. colleague talked about over the years, after 72 years of Confederation, instead of sitting here and getting a royalty cheque, we're pretty much what someone would describe as flat broke.

There is a lot to be done. I also want to reflect on something that Barack Obama said. Barack Obama said: "A budget is more than just a series of numbers on a page; it is an embodiment of our values."

When you look at Schedule VI, for example, of the Budget Speech, you get an idea of some of the things we value. Two of our largest expenditure items are health care and education. Clearly none of us, I think, looks at those as a cost. We should not be considering health care as a cost. We should not be considering education as a cost; rather, they are services that we need to provide to the people of our province. The challenge we have is how we roll them out.

We know we're spending a lot of money on health care. We've increased the budget year over year. At the same time, our outcomes haven't kept up. We also know that in health care there are many different providers who all have their own ideas about how we can spend our money. That sometimes does not necessarily line up with each other or where we may want to go. I think the focus in our health care system has to be on outcomes. Today, clearly, we are challenged.

I know the minister has said – and it's probably a true statistic – we have more doctors now in our province than we've ever had in the history of our province. Yet we can't seem to find them. Because they're not in my district. They're not in CBS and they're not in a few other districts. It becomes a real challenge as to how do we

change that. It's not just about doctors anymore. Nurse practitioners can play a vital role in our communities, especially in our rural communities.

The fact that we have Sister Elizabeth Davis and Dr. Pat Parfrey doing a review, I think, is a good thing. I'm looking forward to what that review will tell us. No doubt, it will be something we will sit around and have some serious chats about and some conversations. In the meantime, we can't just sit still.

I have, as I mentioned in the House previously, people in my district who have been waiting over a year to have cardiac surgery. Sitting at home waiting for a call that doesn't come. I have people in my district who have waited more than two years, as I'm sure you have, for eye surgery and a call doesn't come. We have people that have been waiting for months for a CT or an MRI.

We only have 500,000 population. Yet if you look at the stats, we've been told, oh yes, we have enough of this equipment, but at the same time we don't seem to be able to have timely access. That has to change. How we fix that, I don't have all the answers, but I tell you I'm looking forward to what the review will show us and maybe tell us about how we might make some changes to that. We've talked about utilization a lot and whether or not certain things are necessary or certain procedures are necessary, and all of those things need to be factored in. But clearly, as I said, it's not about cost, it's about service. How do we improve the service to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians no matter where they live in our province? That's the real challenge we face.

On the education front there are opportunities galore. I mean, Eastern Health is closing long-term care beds because they don't have enough nursing staff. How is that even possible? The biggest regional health authority in the capital city of the province and they cannot recruit nurses. Do we have to have more nurses available for schools? Do we need the admissions to go up? I don't know. But that, in itself, is a major issue.

We heard of several vacancies throughout different government departments. The Minister

of Finance alluded to the fact that we have over 500 jobs on the board for core government services – 500 job vacancies. What type of skills are we looking for? How long have those positions been vacant? What do we need to do to get people to go to school and basically guarantee them a job when they graduate? Maybe we have to start looking at things differently. If we have 500 job vacancies in the civil service and they've all been put through an attrition lens, they're needed, then surely we need to take a look at what type of skill sets are required and change our education system to adjust. People want to stay in our province to work, so let's make sure that we give them a career where the jobs are. That stat just floored me; we were waiting that long for 500 positions.

Another one that I found hard was the transportation on our provincial ferries. I know there is lots of discussion around that, but there's a significant amount of overtime being spent on our provincial ferries because of a lack of deckhands. Who would have thought that the government would not be an employer of choice anymore and that we would have vacant positions on our ferries and in our core government departments? That certainly has changed. At one time getting employed by government was considered to be – you had a good job. I don't know what the answer is, but I know we need to look at it.

I think when it comes to education from K to 12 we have to make sure we are creative. We can't simply turn around and say we have low enrolments and so we're going to close schools and put people on a bus. There has to be more creative solutions than just that. We need to think outside the box and find a way to come up with different solutions. We all recognize that things need to change, but let's make sure we do it right.

Earlier they were talking about some paving and taking the politics out of paving. Years ago we all grew up in those days where you knew – you could put a sign up: You are now entering an Opposition district. Because the road went from smooth to rough. Whether you were Liberal or PC, for years, that was always the way. It was election paving; that's what we used to call it. Now, we've heard the fact that the Auditor General has made some recommendations on a

new program that will hopefully take the politics out of paving and we'll be able to rank projects. The minister has made mention that he intends to implement the recommendations of the AG and so I compliment him on that.

On a personal note, of course, I'm on my third minister now when it comes to Cold Brook, in terms of getting some paving down there. I'm kind of hoping the third time is lucky and that we'll get some acknowledgement for Cold Brook. I do believe my colleague across the way, when he used to represent that area, was also pushing for it, and so I know he supports me on it. That's just one piece on the transportation side. Certainly, again, it's something that we look forward to. I know there are a lot of districts that are looking for paving, but having a system in place where it's easy to defend, then that makes it easier for everyone and I look forward to that.

The third area, of course, that I didn't talk about in the pie chart that concerns us the most is the amount of money that we're spending on interest on our debt. The fact that that is in our top three expenditure categories is a concern for all of us, and it speaks to the need to start really getting serious about our expenditure levels and how we adjust them or how we make changes to them. As we have all said in this House, it's not going to happen overnight and it's not going to happen in one budget cycle, but it has to happen, it has to start. As someone said: If you don't start you'll never finish. As a result of that we have been delayed starting. Since 2015 we've talked about it but we haven't started it yet. I think it's really time that we have a more serious effort and not simply focusing on the revenue side. That's a bit disappointing in this year's budget again that it seems to be focused on the revenue side again. Significant increase in revenue, taxes going up and oil revenues going up, but not a lot on the expenditure side. I think that's a concern for everybody and we need to find a way to get a handle on it.

My colleague from Bonavista talked a lot about the fishery when he spoke. Of course, we can never forget about the fishery. It's why most of our ancestors came here years ago and settled on the coasts around the province. Basically that's where they lived and fished and how we made our living. I remember, of course, in 1949 – I

don't remember it; I was told that when Canada took over, but some people say I would remember it – when we joined Canada that we actually had the richest fishing grounds in the world. I can't remember outright how much we – the ranking went from, like, 24th down to 14, but that was the value of it. Over the last 72 years we've had a lot of issues with the fishery. I think the fundamental principle for us is the adjacency principle and, for me, it's always been the person who goes out on the water and risks their life every day that should be the one that benefits most from the fishery. I think that has always got to be the way.

Of course, when we talk about the fishery we can't not mention our friends, the seals. Again, my colleague spoke a lot about that, about the fact that we have seven-million-plus seals out there and the videos that we all saw on VOXM of the herd heading south. They're not heading south for Florida, they're heading south to eat and they're heading our way, I guess. Unfortunately, the federal government has no desire to get involved in the seal industry. We do have a quota which we're never able to fill.

My colleague alluded to the seal as the wolf of the ocean. That's true, it really has no natural enemies, maybe killer whales and as the climate changes we're likely to see more of those, maybe, in our northern waters, but right now I don't think there are a lot of natural enemies of the seal. So the wolf continues to eat and they don't fish in season and they don't have quotas, they simply eat every single day, 365 days a year. What they eat can be up for interpretation, but they eat. One would argue it's fish, it's capelin, it's cod and it's crab, it's whatever.

If we had seven million wolves on the Island of Newfoundland, I think we would have a problem. I think we would be out to try to do something about that because they would eat everything in sight, too. Every single thing. Because it is a seal, somehow or other Canada doesn't want to help, doesn't want to get involved in it. I think maybe it is time that we as a province took it upon ourselves to take another look at what we can do.

I'm not 100 per cent sure what that may or may not look like, but I really believe that we need to seriously talk to the people in the industry, talk

to some of our own experts and start looking at how we're going to deal with this seal population, because it is certainly having an impact on our fishery. Again, don't ask me; ask any fisherman who is on the water about it and they'll certainly tell you that.

I wanted to keep going a little bit more on the budget in terms of where we are, what we can do, what else we might look at. Again, as I said earlier, a budget tells us what we can't afford, but it doesn't keep us from buying it. I guess, again, it comes down to choices. Sometimes we disagree on the choices, but that doesn't make the choice necessarily wrong. It doesn't mean that the suggestion we make is wrong. I think it is important that we have our data lined up and that we do our research and we make sure that the investments we are going to make are going to be ones that will benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador long-term.

There have been too many short-term investments. What I mean by that is cycles of four years; i.e. – what was it that they used to say about Joey Smallwood? His thing was that your first job was to get elected and your second job was to get re-elected and so on. I think everyone here in this House is beyond that. I think people have a genuine interest in doing what's right for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Like I said, we can all disagree to some extent on how we get there, and we'll have our arguments. Like I said, we'll disagree with it and we'll challenge on the numbers and we'll continue to challenge, but I think we have to keep that going. We have to ask questions and we have to get answers. Hopefully, the government will be in a position to be able to provide us with those answers and to certainly give us some indication on where they're going.

I know I'll have some more questions for the Minister of Finance in the days and weeks ahead. I look forward to the responses, as we dig in even deeper into the budget and into the numbers and also into the rollout of the initiatives that are outlined in the budget. I certainly have in my district, lots of challenges and discussions with different ministers and look forward to chatting with them. Municipal Affairs, I've had some early conversations with

the minister, and certainly with the Minister of Transportation. I can't wait to get him out in my district. I don't know if I'll let him back, but I want to get him out there first.

I think there are lots of things, and I think, as you all know, sometimes you have to see it to get a true appreciation of what needs to be done and where it needs to be done.

I guess, in closing, I'll get a little more philosophical and perhaps give you a little bit of advice for all of us individually. It goes like this: Before you spend, earn. Before you invest, investigate. Before you retire, save. Before you die, give.

Thank you so much for your time, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Division

SPEAKER: Are the House Leaders ready?

All those in favour of the amendment, please rise.

CLERK (Barnes): Mr. Brazil, Mr. Petten, Mr. Wakeham, Mr. Wall, Mr. O'Driscoll, Mr. Tibbs, Ms. Evans, Ms. Conway Ottenheimer, Mr. Parrott, Mr. Pardy, Mr. Paul Dinn, Mr. Forsey, Mr. Dwyer, Mr. James Dinn, Mr. Brown.

SPEAKER: All those against the amendment, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Furey, Mr. Crocker, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Haggie, Ms. Coady, Ms. Howell, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Loveless, Mr. Davis, Mr. Abbott, Ms. Pam Parsons, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Hogan, Ms. Stoodley, Mr. Reid, Mr. Warr, Mr. Pike, Ms. Stoyles, Ms. Gambin-Walsh.

LAW CLERK (Hawley George): Mr. Joyce didn't vote.

CLERK: He has to vote. He can't be in the Chamber and not vote.

LAW CLERK: There are no abstentions, Mr. Joyce. Do you vote for or against?

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the bells stopped before 10 minutes. (Inaudible).

SPEAKER: Ten minutes is only on the clock until the House Leaders call for the vote. We discussed this earlier at a previous correspondence.

If the House Leaders are ready, 10 minutes is put on the clock. Once they call for the vote, then the vote can go ahead, as per *Standing Orders*.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have no objection from the government side for the Member placing his vote.

SPEAKER: The Member can vote. You were in the Chamber at the time.

Order, please!

As Members were in the Chamber when the voting started, they are obligated to vote either for or against the motion.

E. JOYCE: Against the motion.

CLERK: He's against the motion, okay.

What about Mr. Lane?

LAW CLERK: Mr. Lane was against the motion.

CLERK: Okay.

And Mr. Trimper?

LAW CLERK: Mr. Trimper, are you for or against the motion?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: If I may, I would like to confirm what the motion was.

As soon as the bells rang, I started running.

SPEAKER: We're voting on the amendment for the –

CLERK: Non-confidence.

P. TRIMPER: Non-confidence.

I vote against the motion.

CLERK: Against, okay. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 15; the nays: 24.

SPEAKER: I declare that the amendment has been defeated.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper, Order 3, Concurrence Motion, report of the Social Services Committee.

SPEAKER: We're back on the main motion so you have to adjourn Motion 1 first.

S. CROCKER: Oh, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that we adjourn debate on Motion 1.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 3, Concurrence Motion – the report of the Social Services Committee.

SPEAKER: The motion is that the report of the Social Services Committee be concurred.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to speak in favour of the motion. Estimates is an intriguing process to someone who's outside of the House. It really is the one time that the public, via the wonders of broadcasting, actually get an opportunity to interact, even remotely as it were, with the staff of the department whose head is called. This year our staff was a little bit leaner in Health than in previous years in the light of COVID. We kept it down to basically our senior executive.

As the people who were here from the Social Services Committee would know, a kind of small but mighty crew. They were only visible to those Committee Members for a day, but for the other 364¼ days of the year, they have worked, in some cases, almost round the clock – that's not an exaggeration – to do the kind of things that they never expected they would have to do, simply because of the pandemic and the Coronavirus issues that we have had. I have to say that with their effort, hard work and diligence, I think it's quite easy to look around, and look backwards and see how Newfoundland and Labrador has fared as a result of their hard work.

I think it would be unfortunate if I did not use this opportunity to very clearly, as minister responsible for that department, but also as a citizen of this province, to actually thank each and every one of them and the teams who sit in their back offices, all 261 of them across the Department of Health and Community Services, Mr. Speaker. I really think they deserve a round of applause quite frankly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HAGGIE: In terms of the actual Estimates process, itself, it is an opportunity for the Opposition and any interested MHA to ask questions. It's always intrigued me that in actual fact for a department that spends, this year, only 36 per cent of the province's revenue – that is a noteworthy dip of itself. Before that department, the questions around the sums of money, more often than not would focus on a couple of hundred thousand here or there in terms of salaries within the department, yet the issue of the \$1.2 billion or the \$2.4 billion for the regional health authorities, by comparison, was glossed over in terms of that accounting.

The questions once we moved off the kind of minutiae that you expect of the Minister's Office, the Executive Support and the Departmental Operations, once we moved away from there, really the discussions in this, which was my sixth Estimates as Minister of Health and Community Services, was very much again policy based. A lot of what we discussed was how we intended to supply services and what we could do to make access more straightforward.

As the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port mentioned in his previous comments around the budget more generally when speaking to the amendment, we are challenged with, basically, in many respects, being a territory, because of that we have a very scattered geography. My colleague and seatmate from Transportation and Infrastructure will tell you at great length about the 9,820 kilometres of road for which his department is responsible. That is a significant factor in a lot of what we, in Health, have to manage when it comes to access.

One of the things that has really been kicked into high gear as a consequence of the Public Health requirements around the pandemic has been the

issue of using technology to defeat geography. That is more commonly referred to as virtual care.

We have made significant investments in virtual care from the simple approach of adding services to telephone lines with 811. We now have a nurse practitioner service available as a background activity in some respects so that when you call and you have your request for advice or guidance, it's triaged by a nurse – an RN – and then, if appropriate, sent along to a nurse practitioner who has the ability to prescribe and issue prescription refills. It's designed for intermittent episodic non-urgent care, because that was a need at the time of COVID.

It is also the case that we have spent around \$70 million in physician fee codes since the start of the pandemic for virtual fee codes. The majority of these have actually been telephone based rather than the Zoom or the Skype that we here have become used to in terms of managing our relationships as MHAs with constituents, or alternatively as MHAs with our colleagues or ministers with our departments and colleagues.

Virtual care is no doubt the way of the future, but it is not the only way of the future. Indeed, there is a challenge professionally for health care providers to educate those in practice already, but certainly to provide training for their trainees – be it social work, be it family medicine, specialty medicine or the realm of nurse practitioner, for example – in how to best utilize virtual care, also how to provide that and at what point virtual care cannot provide what is necessary for the person in need. Those challenges we will continue to work through and our pandemic-related fee codes for virtual care will fade and be replaced by a more structured mechanism as negotiations, particularly with the Medical Association, for example, progress.

From the point of view of the other comments that were made, again, by the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port and, indeed, this was a stress I laid in Estimates, access is the issue that I hear most of as minister and as MHA. We can look at the numbers all we want and we argue over them regularly with various care providers. We have over 1,330 actively licensed physicians in this province; a number we have

never ever seen before. We have been blessed with one of the highest, if not the second highest, number of registered nurses per 100,000 of population. Yet, in each of the categories of care that you talk about, people have concerns about their ability to access a provider.

What we're looking to in health care is to try and change the dialogue to the right care from the right provider in the right place – which could be your home – at the right time. That is very easy to say, it rolls off the tongue and it's a nice sound bite, but in actual fact it is something of a challenge to deliver because it requires a change; it requires multiple changes. But what it does is, I think, really we need to re-emphasize and go back to the roots of health care, which is where you put the patient and their family, in the context of a community, at the centre of what it is health care services do.

We have, in some ways, gone down that road already with mental health and addictions. I spoke at some length the other day around *Towards Recovery* and how that lived experience, persons with lived experience, the Recovery Council, the involvement of stakeholders when I spoke to the private Member's resolution from the Opposition last week about removing barriers and making sure access was straightforward. We have gone further down that road with mental health and addictions, I would argue, in the last five years than we've gone down that road in the previous 15. That is a testament to the involvement of people with lived experience.

I think what we now need to do – my level prior to COVID which started those discussions with various patient representative organizations at the national level – is we need to clone that approach and bring that very much to the forefront.

On an individual level, you'll not find a care provider who says: I'm not putting my patients or my clients needs first. But it is done in a way that, collectively, somehow doesn't seem to manage as a system.

COVID has not helped, quite frankly. If you go back to the lockdowns and the Alert Levels that we had to go through to control COVID in the early days, particularly last winter and the winter

before, that actually made it harder for patients to access what they felt they needed when they needed it. It provided barriers to support for individuals because we walked that awful tightrope between risk of infection, which we had yet to learn about in terms of how to manage and support, and emotional support for the individual patients. I'm sure that one of the things that you would get is equally criticized from either direction, which probably means on the day we weren't far off, but that needs to be addressed.

There is a window now; there's an opportunity as the vaccine rolls out. We passed 70 per cent at the end of last week with dose one. We are expecting significant increments of, particularly, Moderna vaccine over the next couple of weeks. That then lends us the opportunity to actually beat our timelines, our decision gates, for want of a better word, about our reopening plan, because we've said 75 per cent. We will hit that and pass it well before July 1.

Our dose for 80 per cent for dose two, I think we will get there well before September. That then leaves us with some significant leeway in the broader sense, but it also leaves us with significant latitude in terms of how we can reopen our health care facilities, how we bring the families back into long-term care and how we re-establish those connections for people whose home is now a facility or a building rather than the house they raised their family in.

I would go a little bit further on a principled approach and the discussions that we had, I've mentioned it in at least two Estimates if not more, is that, in actual fact – again echoing the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port – health care isn't a cost pure and simple, it is an investment because a healthy population is a prosperous population. It contributes individually and collectively. It is a happier populace, it is a better place in which to interact. It is a service that we provide. You can argue about what the cost per capita is and should be, and we've always been compared with other provinces and we are now heading on a trajectory that will let them to overtake us within the next two or three years, so our costs will compare very favourably with other provinces by 2025.

If you compare us with the territory – that off the Avalon we actually are – our cost per capita as a territory is the lowest in Canada. Not just lower, they are lowest by a factor of four or five per capita. I think that speaks to some of the distributed nature of our health care system.

As we look to find out the results of Dr. Parfrey and Sister Elizabeth's work with their task force and their various subcommittees, I think one of the challenges for all of us is to make sure that we get that balance right. We can't have a neurosurgical unit in every clinic in the province. We have 187 facilities for a population of 516,000 or 520,000 people. We have 13 hospitals in this province, where if you go to somewhere like Mississauga or Hamilton, they have one for that same population. Our challenge is not population, it is the distribution of those people and how to provide realistic, timely access to people wherever they may live and whatever their issues may be.

Certainly Sister Elizabeth and Dr. Parfrey bring vast personal experience to this endeavour but, quite frankly, also their teams tap into a wealth of expertise of a variety of stakeholders, a variety of community groups and, again, people with lived experience. I think that balance there will enrich the conversation and the discussion that has to be had over the course of the period of the creation of their report and its conclusions, but also in terms of the discussion that it would generate as advice and recommendations to government, in general, and myself, in particular, as Minister of Health.

To flick slightly to the actual financials of the Estimates of Health, essentially, we have seen a slight increase this year compared with previous years. That, in a sense, is a structural issue. We have seen an increase in cash allotment to the RHAs as a cash-flow issue. This is not a deficit impact; this is simply a borrowing requirement, short term. A lot of the RHAs find the bulk of their expenditures fall asymmetrically across the year. They tend to come in a batch at the beginning of the year, so we need to have provision for that.

Bearing in mind the ever-increasing demand for new and better drugs, it is a testament to the hard work and diligence of our negotiators for product-listing arrangements and for our

engagement in the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance that we've been able, each year, to moderate the extra that we have had to put into that drug budget. We've usually – and, again, this year we did, too – found at least 50 per cent of that new money. Whilst the number has not gone down, the range of drugs, for example, has increased with money we have reinvested.

Rather than repatriating money to my colleague, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, we have been very enthusiastic about reinvesting that money within the health care system itself. Indeed, the principles on which the Health Accord NL Task Force was commissioned was that monies that were realized, were saved and were identified through efficiencies and changes would actually go back, not just particularly into health, but a recognition that, for each and every one of us, 75 per cent of our health is actually derived from things outside of health. The biggest predictor of your longevity and your wellness over life is actually your family income at birth. That is not new news. It's a statement that's been there since the days of Lalonde in 1974 and Hall even earlier than that.

As my time winds down, Mr. Speaker, I wish to once again say I will be voting in favour of concurrence of the report of the Social Services Committee. I've obviously concentrated on my own bailiwick, as it were. I will leave others to speak to theirs and maybe the generality of our social policies as manifested through this budget.

Really and honestly, Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that lays the foundation for transformation. I think on that basis alone, it deserves support.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's a pleasure to speak here in this hon. House, representing the wonderful residents of Topsail - Paradise.

I do thank the minister for his comments. I will say that the Estimates process, for anyone watching it from afar, it's much like watching paint dry, I guess, in some instances, because you get down to some of the lower numbers and that and asking questions on it. It is nonetheless a process we have to go through.

In my past life, of course, I was on the other end of it. I worked in government. You were called over and you had to sit out in the hallway or be on call should your minister require any additional information. It was a bit stressful on their part. As the Minister of Health and Community Services has said, the staff do a fantastic job. They put in a lot of work, put in a lot of effort to ensure that we as ministers – down the road – but as ministers you look good. They make sure you have all the names, the numbers and that in front of you.

Again, the Minister of Health and Community Services, I give him credit there. He's very professional in what he does and has an answer for many of the questions.

Certainly, I do, as well, applaud the staff behind the minister, and those staff, all the essential workers, everyone that has done an amazing job during COVID. In fact, looking at the vaccine rollout, seeing that we're going to be close to 70 to 80 per cent fully vaccinated by September is nothing to sneeze at. Certainly, I look forward to that and look forward to coming closer to some form of normal.

As the minister mentioned, we go through some of the smaller questions. In fact, with this Committee, I suspect – when I sat in, I sat in with, of course, the Third Party and the independent Member for Lake Melville. A lot of good questions asked. A lot of good questions on policy.

We actually finished ahead of time. We normally get allocated three hours per sitting. Of course, we were able to get out of Estimates a little earlier than expected. I guess that's also attributable to the answers, as well as the co-operation of the minister and staff in terms of providing or offering to provide us with their information after the fact, which I guess we'll receive in due time. That will give us, certainly,

a better indication of the information that's available to us.

The minister spoke about COVID. Yes, it's been very negative on all of us but it's also helped us in some ways. One that he mentioned was kicking virtual care into gear and looking at it as the way of the future. And how there will now be a challenge to train and educate those in the health care profession. You also have to think about those in smaller communities that do not have the access to either Internet or the programs to access virtual care as easily as those in closer communities could.

That is a challenge and I think we all know that. As we move forward, hopefully we'll be able to get the public to catch up by offering broadband Internet in the communities that don't have it. That will allow them to avail of things such as virtual care.

The minister spoke about health care as an investment. I don't think any of us can argue that. Health care is an investment. We need to ensure that our population is healthy and taken care of. Because the other side of that is you're going to have individuals who are ill and sick and actually costing more for us to take care of. That's even more prominent now in a society where we are a fast-aging population.

I've heard the minister say in the past, too, about wellness over illness. We also agree there. We have to start doing more to promote wellness over illness. Some examples that have been brought forward: Last November, I brought forward a question in the House on the continuous glucose monitoring and the flash glucose monitoring devices. The minister committed to having staff look at that.

I asked a similar question six weeks later in December and, again, a similar response. I'm hoping now that as we move further along, the minister will have a more clear response on that. Certainly, I hear lots of positive comments on the glucose monitoring devices and how it's made life easier for individuals, how individuals have been able to participate in society to a greater extent and how individuals have avoided hospital visits because of that. If there is anything that's going to promote wellness over illness, looking at some kind of assistance for

glucose monitoring devices would be one step in the right direction.

I mentioned this previously in Estimates – I believe I mentioned it – but I'll mention it here. I had the pleasure of speaking to some medical students who presented a paper on diabetic boots, and these are devices that help take the pressure off your feet and limbs and help prevent ulcers, which eventually would result in amputations. This is also another area where we need to look at the wellness over illness. We need to look at how that helps people stay active, stay in the workforce and stay involved in society. I know everything comes down to dollars and cents, and so I think it's a no-brainer when you look at it. If you can promote a healthy community, a healthy society, then I think down the road – as we said, health is an investment – we will actually save money.

I gave this example before and I will give it again. This is just some numbers that the medical students came up with when they were looking at the diabetic boots, and I will just read it right from their document here. They say: Newfoundland and Labrador currently incurs \$16 million to \$18 million annually in direct costs associated to diabetic foot ulcers, as well as an additional \$2 million to \$3 million annually in indirect costs. That's, of course, from Diabetes Canada, those stats. The estimated cost of a single amputation is \$74,000. So there are huge financial implications for those dealing with diabetes, as an example.

They go on to say that Diabetes Canada estimates that a provincial offloading device program in Newfoundland and Labrador would cost between \$1 million and \$1.6 million annually; however, such a program is expected to result in gross direct cost savings of \$5.7 million to \$6.1 million annually. Thus, a province offloading device program is projected to result in a net direct cost savings of \$4.1 million to \$5.2 million annually. That's just one example of how health care is an investment and if we invest in the right areas, in the long run, we're going to have a society that participates to a greater degree, we would have a society that's healthier and we would have a society that has less strain and drain on our health professionals and our health system.

I did have the opportunity to hear a presentation from Dr. Parfrey and Sister Elizabeth Davis on the Health Accord NL piece of work that they're working on. I know they're expecting to have some interim reports between now and December with, hopefully, the final report in December. I am – and I've said it before in this House – very encouraged by the information they presented and I'm looking forward to the final report and we can have a discussion on it. I certainly think they also look at not just the medical but the social implications of a health system. As you know we presented in this House just recently a private Member's resolution on mental health, so they also have been looking at the mental health concerns here within the province.

I think the minister also spoke to looking towards individuals with lived experiences, for those and those experiences, and their comments and their suggestions to be fed into where we go with the health care system in here in the future. He talked about changing the dialogue to looking at the right provider, at the right time, in the right place and for the right reasons. That's so true. That's not something that happens overnight, but it's certainly something we have to target now and move forward.

Mental health, again, is a good example. Government has in place so many apps, phone lines and different options that individuals can call when it comes to mental health issues, but we continue to get or, at least, I continue to get calls on long-term supports for those in need of mental health programs or services. We need to look at that and I realize we have to start somewhere. Some of these 1-800 lines that you can call can give you some direction on where to go next. But I've spoken with people that have been in extreme dire need and that can't even dial the phone. We have to start looking a little deeper at that. As we said in our discussion with the PMR, there will be more people coming out of this. There's going to be the echo pandemic coming out of COVID that will deal with some huge mental health issues for individuals dealing with those.

I think everyone in this House – I mean, every call we get as an MHA, you know, you might say it's a complaint or it's a concern. I'll go out on a limb and say I get the most calls in this

House congratulating me. No, that would be a lie if I said that. We rarely get people calling us up and patting us on the back. Most people call us up because they have a concern and that's why we're here, to listen. They'll call us up –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. DINN: Oh, sorry, the Member for St. John's Centre gets the most calls. Sorry about that.

These are people who are calling with lived experiences. They're calling about something in their life that went wrong, or something that's not working for them or they're calling for information. I mean, that's the types of calls we get. I always say if you had two horns and a pointy tail and you called for help or you called to talk, then that's what I'm elected to do, to talk to you. We have to start putting ourselves in their shoes and showing a little empathy, for sure, that you have to have.

One of the other calls I get, and it's very prominent up in Topsail - Paradise, Harbour Main, Conception Bay South area and I'm sure at pockets throughout the province, and that's with regard to the shortage of family doctors. I think it's actually mentioned in the first report from the Health Accord about the potential of 90,000 families without family physicians. That's people calling with lived experiences. The minister noted that we have upwards of 1,330 actively licensed physicians. That may be true; in fact, I have no doubt it is. I have no reason to disbelieve the minister in providing that data. But, I guess, when you dig a little deeper, where are they? Some may be in family practice, some may be teaching at the university and some may be working on something else. It's something to look at.

The second point that was raised was that we're second in the country – I stand to be corrected, though. I think he said we're second in the country in terms of the number of registered nurses. That's a good thing, too, because some of the comments when I was going around door to door was a potential solution to the family physician shortage is to ensure our nurses, especially our licensed practitioners, our nurse practitioners – ensuring they are used to a greater capacity. It can help ease some of the strain and some of the burden on doctors that are

currently practicing, and perhaps help in some of the communities where there are shortages of family doctors or physicians. I think that's something we have to look at.

The minister also mentioned about going back to the roots of health. I was going to say the roots of hell, but it's the roots of health, it's where we're going with (inaudible).

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. DINN: Yeah. Sometimes we may have to go back to the roots of hell. The roots of health, we need to go back to the roots of health and look at – I look at that comment is sort of like zero-based budgeting. Go back to health and say: Well, what health care services do we really need and how do we provide them? And then work out from that. We have to work out – it goes back to changing the dialogue on having the right provider in the right time and the right place for the right reasons.

Geography – as the minister mentioned – is an issue here. But it shouldn't be a huge barrier because through virtual health or using the nurse practitioners to a greater ability we can help alleviate some of that. We're not going to get past the geography, it's going to be there. I know many of us certainly don't want to see rural Newfoundland wither away. I think that's what attracts a lot of people here is our rural communities and our culture.

We go back to the comment: health is an investment – and it is. That doesn't mean you spend at all costs. There's a cost to us of providing a service. When we look at the cost of providing a service, we really need to look a little deeper and say: Okay, what's the return on investment? Not that we're looking for a return; we know we have to provide health. But like the example with the diabetic boots – I'm sure there are similar examples when you talk about the continuous glucose monitors – when you look at devices like that you have to look at that for a relatively smaller investment upfront, we can save huge dollars in the long run.

Not only that, I can't even talk to the people who avail of these devices that can participate to a greater degree in society. Just think about it, if you were asked: We're going to amputate your

leg or we could save it if you utilize this boot. I mean, really, we shouldn't have individuals that are caught up in a cost of providing that. That should be a no-brainer, we should be able to provide those devices that allow people to be healthier and continue on participating to a greatest degree possible in society. We need to do that. We'll have people working longer and people contributing longer.

The RHAs – the minister mentioned the RHAs and there were some increases in the RHAs due to some structural issues he noted. We didn't dive deep into the RHAs as much in the Estimates – again, because the minister had offered to provide us with the information, and I expect that shortly so we can have a look at that. I also know the Premier's Greene report made a statement about consolidate, eliminate the RHAs: bring them all under one, which was pretty much a blanket statement with little detail.

I was encouraged by the Health Accord in our discussion with Dr. Parfrey and Sister Elizabeth Davis. There is more to it than that and they would have a closer look at that and, hopefully, as we move forward and as we get those reports – which again, December will be sooner than later for us. The sooner the better so that we can get a better grasp on what we need, what we don't need, where we can get savings, but, in most cases, where we can promote wellness over illness.

That's the reason we have a Health and Community Services Department. That's the reason we provide these services. We want to make sure people have access, we want to make sure that we have a standard of access and we have guidelines that treat the individuals who need that and give them the opportunity to get the treatment they need. At the end of the day, we want them to participate to the best of their ability in society and be contributing members.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I get the opportunity right now to speak as the Chair of the Social Services Committee. For those who are watching at home, what that really means is I had the honour to be able to sit and maintain some order during five of the Estimates meetings. I actually was able to attend six. Most people say, yahoo, you got to attend Estimates, but Estimates are anywhere from three to four hours long, each meeting. Sometimes it's a long and arduous process and you're here all hours of the night. But I'll be really honest, this was my first opportunity to be Chair and it was really a privilege. I chaired Justice and Public Safety; Children, Seniors and Social Development; Education; Municipal and Provincial Affairs; and Health and Community Services, Mr. Speaker.

Justice and Public Safety is a department that ensures the impartial administration of justice and the protection of the public interest and the dual offices of the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice and Public Safety. Within this department, Mr. Speaker, we also now have Fire and Emergency Services. It's the delivery of fire protection and fire prevention services throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the District of Placentia - St. Mary's alone, I have 13 volunteer fire departments. For those MHAs that reside in St. John's, sometimes you share the same fire department with another MHA or you just have one. But for us rural MHAs, we have, as I said, 13-plus at times. We also have varying degrees. I have Whitbourne and Placentia which are really large fire departments; two really small ones like Branch and Point Lance, but nevertheless all the departments are equally important.

It was a privilege to be able to sit through Estimates and to listen to the minister and the staff answer questions on such a vital and important service to our province. The planning, the response, the recovery and support functions are provided under Fire and Emergency management and support services are managed through this department; a very, very important service for our province.

Mr. Speaker, law and order is the foundation of a civil and just society and the Opposition and Third Party did ask questions pertaining to

operational issues. They were answered with clarity and precision by the minister and the staff. I just want to say this was a really good and very informative Estimates session.

Children, Seniors and Social Development: Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of being the minister of this department from 2015 to 2017 so I was very interested in the advancement and the changes that have occurred in the department because, as an MHA, you're working away for your district. If you're a minister, you're working for your department. There's a large volume of work. Until you get to sit through, listening to the Opposition and the Third Party really drill down into the department and the changes over the years, can you really tune in to the advancement.

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing: I was really, truly interested, and there was a significant number of questions asked about the programs, the resources and how we managed to get through the COVID days. When I was the minister, we did revamp the organizational structure in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. I'm very happy to report that it sounded like it was working really, really well and the staff answered the questions well and the minister answered the questions well.

Child Protection is a very costly and important role of any government and, specifically, this department. This department also oversees persons with disabilities, Adult Protection, Poverty Reduction and Income Support is added. I was very interested in listening to Income Support because all of these dynamics, having a place to call home, a roof over your head and having programs and services to help reduce poverty, all of this ties into one's individual wellness and the wellness of a family unit. That's what this department is all about. I'm happy to report that I feel that the minister and the staff did answer the questions very well during this session of Estimates.

Education: No doubt, this has been a very difficult year; COVID-19 has really impacted our children. It's been challenging; it's been challenging for our teachers, for administration, for custodians, for bus drivers, for students and, especially, children with disabilities. As I was listening through Education and listening to the

questions, I was just kind of tuning in to how children with disabilities were reacting. I was thinking back to my days when I was a parent of a child with a disability in school and knowing how difficult the days in school were and can be for some parents. But I must say that the staff in this department was very informative, again, and I feel questions were answered very well.

I also remember – I was going to say the date, but I won't – many years ago when I graduated from high school and I was heading off to university, the excitement around that. You think about that; you're getting to move to St. John's with your friends, you're getting to go to a new place and you're getting freedom from your parents. There was a whole group of students that had to delay that for one full year, and probably two years. Just think about the impact, the impact on those students' lives, how we were able to continue to focus, as a government, and deliver the education, virtually, and, at times, with different arrangements.

I understand some days there were children in school, some days they weren't in school. Yet, as a government, we were able to work through COVID-19. This Department of Education, they were diverse, they were able to change and they were able to get our children educated. That was very, very important. Even those kids that are graduating were going to have to do some university – there first year at home; our government was able to assist and deliver. I think it was marvellous and you have to give credit. You have to really reflect and look back on what has happened during COVID-19 days.

There's been so much change in education, there has been so much change around education: important ceremonies were missed or changed and things became outdoors – ceremonies were outdoors and we all know what Newfoundland and Labrador weather is like, yet here we are with all these grad pictures been done different days, different times; kindergarten ceremonies outdoors.

Everybody from the Department of Education, to the school board, to the teachers, to the administration, to the parents, to the students; everybody adjusted and changed. They were able to get their education, they were able to

maintain that social component that comes with education that you learn in school.

Municipal and Provincial Affairs: This was a very interesting Estimates. I have 56 communities in my district so I was really tuned in to listening to some of the changes or some of the ways the minister is going to work towards change. This particular department is going to lead in building a prosperous future for this province. Within my particular district, in these 56 communities, I have such a huge combination of municipalities, local service districts, unincorporated areas and I also have some municipalities who have taken it upon themselves to do regional services.

So when the minister speaks – and she has often said – regionalization is going to be different for everyone. I can actually nod my head and say: Yeah, it is. I'm living it in my district and I'm seeing how some of my communities have maintained their individual identities but have come together on their own to develop a program or a service or some way to give their constituents a service that is needed in that area.

Municipal and Provincial Affairs is definitely going to lead the way for Newfoundland and Labrador. There is no doubt about it. The Estimates went well. There has been some changes in this department – Environment has branched off.

Listening as the Chair, I was specifically listening to where some of the tasks have moved to. Often I found the Opposition or Third Party would ask a question but it was with Climate Change now or it was no longer Municipal Affairs. We were doing the Estimates of last year so the numbers were there for the previous year, but next year you'll be looking somewhere else or asking another minister those questions. It was very informative and it went really well. Hats off to the Opposition for the questions that they asked during this particular Estimates.

Health and Community Services: Without a doubt, there have been significant demands placed on this department this past year. You really could see it in Estimates. It was evident. I marvelled at some of the things that the staff have been able to work through in this department since we've been faced with

COVID-19. As Minister Haggie did earlier, I have to applaud the staff. I truly, honestly do. They were not only working through and with COVID-19, but they were able to maintain all the other services that we would get on a regular basis for Health and Community Services.

We all know Health and Community Services takes up a large portion of the provincial budget, and it has for years, so that's not something new. There are a lot of programs and there are a lot of staff and there's a lot of work and a lot of wheels turning in this department. Then, all of a sudden, COVID-19 was thrown in and they had to take that on because we were in a pandemic. My health needs or your health needs or anybody else's health needs didn't go away because of COVID-19. We still had to address the health needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mental health and addictions: I was part of the all-party Committee when we formed government back in 2015. It was very informative to listen to how we are moving along with some of the recommendations from the all-party Committee and how resources are going to move into the community. My background is nursing. I'm a 1990 General Hospital school of nursing grad. My background is nursing, so you do tune in to these questions when they're asked by the Opposition, the Third Party and the independents. The independents ask questions also.

You do tune in to this, especially when you have some lived experiences being on this all-party Committee, you're heightened by some of the responses. While there are a lot of numbers and a lot of dollars and a lot of details, there's no doubt that the staff and the minister addressed the questions around mental health. I feel they did give some good answers and responses around mental health and addictions and how we are going to move forward as a government and as a province.

Virtual care has truly impressed me as it has evolved during COVID-19. There's an old saying: Everything happens for a reason. Well, virtual care is a service that I've used for my son, who is one of the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who does not have a doctor. Right now, we're using a specialist for his medication.

It was very evident that the virtual care and the use of that particular system and how it's going to evolve and how it has evolved during COVID-19 is definitely going to be a valid and very vital tool in our tool box as we move forward in society and as we change and evolve in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Being the Chair of the Social Services Committee is actually a very good position to be in because you get to listen to the questions about the health and wellness of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and how we as a government and how we as a province are going to move forward.

Again, I just want to thank the Opposition, the Third Party and the independents for all of the questions. I would like to thank the ministers and these five departments because the Estimates went really well, the questions were very informative and I think the answers were very detailed.

So I will be voting in favour of concurrence for the Social Services Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you – who are you now? Mr. Chair or Mr. Speaker? Chair, is it?

SPEAKER: Speaker.

P. LANE: Speaker, okay. With the way the House is rearranged and so on, I wasn't sure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, will be voting in support of concurrence on Social Services, obviously, if I'm voting for the budget.

As has been said, the departments covered under the Social Services Committee would have been Children, Seniors and Social Development, Justice, Health, Education and Municipal and Provincial Affairs. I have a few random comments, I guess, as it pertains to the various

departments that would be contained under the auspices of that.

First of all, on the Department of Education and part of the Department of Education is also responsible for child care. I just want to, I guess, reiterate a point that I have made in the past because I continue to hear from parents and child care operators and so on, and it relates to the \$25-a-day child care. On the surface, it's a wonderful program. One would think: My God, how could you possibly have a complaint about \$25-a-day child care? It's great – it is. I will be the first to say it is a good program if you can get it. That's the key: If you can get it. There are a lot of families that have taken advantage of the \$25-a-day child care; however, there are many families who are not able to take advantage of the \$25-a-day child care.

Not that it's tied to their income and so on, because it isn't. Depending on who you talk to there's – I've had some people who I've spoken to that said it should be tied to income. They thought that it was an unnecessary expenditure of money. Like, make it \$25 a day for families of a certain income, but if you're a millionaire do we really need to give your child \$25-a-day daycare? I suppose that's an extreme example, but I get the point they were making. Nonetheless, it is universal \$25 a day and, as I said, it's wonderful for the families that can avail of it. The problem we have, though, with it is that – and I suppose it comes down to the consultation, perhaps, that may or may not have taken place with child care. I'm not going to say there was no consultation, but to what degree and so on I'm not certain; I can't speak to it.

One of the problems we have with the \$25-a-day child care is that – I'll just take a child care facility in my district. There's one just up at the top of the street from me. I won't name them, but they're just up at the top of the street from me in Power's Pond. Their business model was built on \$45 a day. That's their business model and like any business they had to take into account the number of children they're going to have, whether or not they are renting a facility or they own the facility, what the mortgage is on the facility, how much they're going to pay their employees, what kind of snacks they're going to offer, what kind of programs they're going to offer and all of those things. We know there are

certain minimum standards, but then there are a number of facilities who arguably go beyond the minimum standards because they're trying to offer a quality child care for their clients.

If you were a child care facility and you are charging \$45 a day and then the parents say: Okay, now I only have to pay \$25 a day. The problem was that if they were to charge \$25 a day instead of \$45, the government is saying: We will subsidize you \$13. It might be \$12; it might be \$14. I think it's \$13, though. We will subsidize you \$13. If you were making \$45 a day, and you're only allowed to collect \$25 from the parents of the child and the government is giving you \$13, well, \$25 and \$13 is \$38. Where does the other \$7 come from? The answer is, basically, you have to suck it up and take a \$7 loss per child in order to avail of this program. You have to cut your rates and take \$7 per child per day out of your revenue stream. Many operators have said: I just can't do it. I cannot survive on that. I will not make any money.

What ends up happening, of course, now is a lot of them have said: I can't do it. Therefore, they don't avail of the program. They say to the parents: I know there's \$25 a day over at this daycare; perhaps their model allows for it. Maybe they have more kids, whatever. So you can go there, but if you're staying here, you have to pay \$45, because I can't get the \$13 from the government unless I put my rates at \$25. I can't, for example, say instead of \$25-a-day daycare, I'll go \$32-a-day daycare. You're paying \$45. I'm going to drop it down to \$32. I'll take advantage of the \$13. But government is saying: No, you can't do that. We're not subsidizing you \$13. We are saying it must be \$25. If you're more than \$38, then you're taking a hit.

It's not working. As a result, there are a number of daycares that parents are still paying \$45 a day. Some of these daycares have said, well, luckily right now we're in a situation where there are a lot of families that are saying: Well, even if I have to continue paying \$45 a day, it's worth it because my child has been going here, they like the ECEs and they have their friends. So they're managing to continue to pay the \$45.

The other thing is that there are not enough spaces out there at \$25 anyway. Even if I wanted to go somewhere else, there's nowhere for me to

go because there are not enough new places out there that are charging \$25.

I'm not knocking the program. I'm really not. Government's heart was in the right place. I'm just pointing out that it is an issue and when we say every child in this province has \$25-a-day child care, that is simply not true. It is simply not true and it's not going to be true because it's not going to work for the business model of a lot of daycares.

They asked me to raise that again, so that's what I'm doing.

I want to jump over now to Health. This is an issue that some Members may have seen. This particular example, they may have seen it on social media last week. It was shared with me, maybe other Members as well. Basically it was a couple. Because of health reasons, they had to go into long-term care and so on. I'm not sure if it was the husband or the wife. I think it was the husband was perhaps a Level III and she was a Level II or whatever. The bottom line is a couple that's been married and together for like 50 years or whatever are now being separated and being put into two different care homes.

That's not the first time I've heard of that. I know government has this first-available-bed policy. I had a situation a number of months back where there was a person contacting me that all the family were in – I think it was St. John's, and their father had to go to Carbonear or something like that. There was another one out around Bay Roberts area and they had to go to Placentia because it was the first available bed.

I understand the conundrum that government has with some of these things, but there has to be compassion. I've heard some people say we need to put the care back in health care because some of these policies and so on, you have to question it. I know that there are only a finite number of beds and there are costs associated with it all, but surely, God, we can't be taking a couple who have been together for the last 50, 60 years or whatever and then separate them, and basically say you'll never see your husband again. Essentially, in a lot of cases, that's what we're doing with some of these policies. It's

terrible. It's heartbreaking. We need to find ways of doing it.

In this particular post that was put out there last week, it was indicated by someone – I don't know if it's true or not; maybe the Minister of Health and Community Services knows. They said – it's total hearsay – that Nova Scotia recently put in a policy that says that spouses cannot be separated. You're not allowed to do it. In the health care system, if you go into long-term care or whatever, they have to be kept together. I don't know if that's factual or not, but it's worth looking into. That came down in Nova Scotia. Again, it's showing a bit of compassion for people.

I understand the budget and the fiscal situation we're in; I support the budget. It is not about that. It is not about dumping on the minister. It is not about dumping on the government. This is just basic dignity and humanity for our fellow citizens. I'm not saying that you're the ones who initiated this. It was probably on the go long before now, but it needs to be fixed.

I know at one point in time when the Minister of Education was minister of Health, back – jeez, I don't know how long ago that was. At one point in time I can remember having a talk with him. At that time, government was looking at what they called – aging in place was the concept or something like that, where basically seniors' facilities would be set up in a way that you had your independent living and then you had your assisted living and then you had your long-term care.

They were all in the same community, so at least if you had a couple and they advanced through the system, they would stay where they were to. If one spouse needed long-term care, at least the wife or the husband was just next door in the cottage or in the assisted living and they could be together every day and so on. That was sort of the concept, I don't know what happened to that concept. It is something that I think needs to get revisited. I did want to throw that in there.

Staying under Health – and my colleague from Topsail - Paradise raised this; this is something I'm sure we've all heard from constituents about. It is the family doctors. I will just add my voice to it as well. I have gotten lots of calls

from people who can't get a family doctor. Simply can't get them. I know that you can say: Oh, go to the walk-in clinic and stuff like that. I've had people who told me they went to the walk-in clinic, but the walk-in clinic never had their medical files and stuff like that. There were issues they had that the doctor at the walk-in clinic said: I can't write you a note for this or I can't recommend this or that because I don't have your medical file. You need to go to your family doctor for that.

That is something that I have heard from people. It might be fine if I go in there and I got a – not me, but for argument's sake, someone went in and they had a UTI or something like that and they go in and then they just write them a prescription. Fine for that. That's probably fine to do just virtually. That's all good. There are a number of things where you need the family doctor who knows your history and your medical information and everything else that can care for you properly. There are a lot of people don't have it.

I know the minister has said that we have more doctors now than we ever had in our history and all that. I'm not saying he's not being forthright and honest in saying that. Maybe we do have more doctors, but maybe we either have more sick people than we had before or perhaps we have more doctors, but they're not family doctors. We might have more specialists. We might have more doctors working at the Health Sciences or at one of the health care facilities or whatever. They don't have family practice clinics. They're just not there. We're not making it up. I've heard a number of Members raise this. It's not being made up. Ask the people. They just can't get family doctors.

I'm not sure what the answers are. I know that government has been doing some things with offering bursaries and so on. I think you've had discussions with the NLMA and so on. I'm glad you have and I encourage you to continue doing that, but family doctors are still an issue in my district and I'm sure throughout the province. I've heard other Members raise it on numerous occasions.

Again, sticking to health care, one of the things, of course, that would've been noted in the Estimates this year, no different than last, is the

fact that much of the Estimates budget for the Department of Health is simply one line, a transfer to health care authorities and so on. There is really no way of delving into where all the money is really being spent, other than \$3 billion or whatever it is to health care authorities.

I really do applaud the government once again for taking the initiative to now having a system that's going to be put in place where there can be Committees that can actually examine ABCs and health care authorities and so on so we can start drilling down through the actual line by lines and understanding of how this money is being spent in health care. Again, I'm glad that's happening and it really needs to happen.

On to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation – because I'm running out of time. I'll try to be even quicker here. A couple of things on Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, for my district at least. More affordable seniors' housing is definitely needed. What I mean by affordable is not some private guy that's selling condos for \$300,000. It's also not this situation which we've had through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing where a private developer puts up a building and they say: Okay, we'll give you \$40,000 a unit and you can knock \$300 off the rent for 10 years, and once the 10 years are up, you can kick the seniors to the curb if they're still there. That doesn't work either.

We need more units like we have at Masonic Park, as an example. Masonic Park could be twice as big and it would be full. It is a real need.

Of course, the other issue on Housing is more accessible housing. I know I've had a number of constituents over the years, I still have a couple, looking for accessible units. We have an aging population and so on, as we know, and the houses, when they were built, were not built with universal design in mind.

I was glad that the minister did say that is now something that the department has adopted. On a go-forward basis, universal design will be adopted. That's a wonderful thing. It's a positive thing. In the meantime, that need is very real in my community and I'm sure throughout the province. With the aging population, it's going

to be a bigger issue as time goes on, I would suspect. People are getting older and with the advancement of medicine they're living longer. The more people you have that are living longer ages, chances are there is going to be a greater need for accessible housing. It would just naturally work out that way.

The other thing – I have a minute and a half left – Municipal Affairs also falls under here. I'm glad to see that Municipal Affairs is going to be bringing forth a new cities act. Something that I know Mount Pearl, in particular, was calling for when I was on city council. It was always: We're working on it, we're working on it. And nothing happened. I'm hopeful, hopeful, in listening to the minister when we asked some questions that there will be a cities act before this House of Assembly this fall. I think it was indicated that there would be a municipalities act first, and then on to the cities act. I'm hoping we get them both; waiting long enough on that.

Of course, we don't have to wait on the cities act to get the code of conduct piece in. I understand that's going to be sort of a standalone piece that can be brought forward. Hopefully, if the cities act doesn't get done this fall, at least the code of conduct needs to be done for our municipalities including our cities.

The final point under Municipal Affairs is, I certainly encourage the government to get on with regional services and more regional co-operation, more regional sharing and so on. Certainly, I'm not going to prejudge what it's going to look like but it's definitely needed in a lot of areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, we have been asked to concur with the Social Services Committee's review in acceptance of the Estimates of expenditure from my Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development and the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

I want to compliment the Chair of the Committee for her work in guiding us through the Estimates discussion. I also wanted to thank the Opposition critic, Member of the Third Party, as well as the independent for the questioning and discussion during the Estimates. I found it both insightful, helpful and, as a new minister, I certainly appreciated the opportunity.

Previous to that, as a deputy minister, I had certainly prepared several ministers over my career for the Estimates Committees, so it was sort of interesting to see what it was like on the other side. Certainly, getting the budget documents together for a government is an onerous, deliberate activity and I wanted to compliment the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for the skill that she and her staff brought to that exercise this year.

The total expenditures for the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development total now over \$400 million, and with a staff compliment of over 980 staff. Our major program is Income Support, which is funded to the tune of over \$220 million. This program was transferred to my department on my appointment as minister in April. It is incorporated as a key element of my mandate as minister as given to me by the Premier and something I was certainly excited about.

The Income Support program: We have roughly 22,000 cases and over 30,000 individuals who are supported on an annual basis through the Income Support program. Now, despite these high numbers, the caseload happens to be one of the lowest in recent history. I think that's a reflection of the state of the provincial economy, despite some commentary otherwise, and the growth in employment in recent years.

Also worth noting is that for single individuals who are employable who make up roughly 76 per cent of our caseload, our rates are the second highest in the country. For single parents, our rates are also the second highest in the country. That is not to say that we can't do better to support them, as we know the cost of living in this province continues to creep higher and higher.

Over the coming year, we will be reviewing the Income Support program, looking at how the

program is structured and looking at how the rates are determined, to determine what, if anything, we can and should do to change those rates.

In addition, we will be looking at the Poverty Reduction Strategy. That's a broader approach to looking at poverty, looking at income levels and determining how best to restructure policies and programs of government to support those who, over time, do become dependent on government programs and services. We will build on the former strategy but we'll be certainly looking at a different approach in that. As minister, I want to look at how we define the needs, whether it's single-parent families, what it is for seniors and what the need is for persons with disabilities; look at how we can structure our policies and programs to support their particular income needs.

Our next area of focus in the department and expenditure comes with respect to our Child Protection Services. We have offices across the province staffed by some of the highest skilled social workers across the country. I'm very proud to be associated with that profession and with the staff.

I have been over the past week or two on Zoom calls with the staff to get an appreciation from the front lines as to what they've experienced and certainly what they've experienced over the pandemic and how they've been able to deal and treat and work with the families and the children in their care. It's been exceptional that they have really met their professional obligations, at the same time as meeting the needs of the children and families. We have found that the service levels have been met or exceeded in many cases.

Now, that's not to say that there haven't been particular challenges in the workplace. We are currently working with the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public Employees through a joint committee to identify and work through those issues. I'm certainly pleased to note that the president of NAPE and his staff have been very supportive and are participating in that work. We have put out a joint release to update both the department, the government and the public at large as to the progress that's being achieved.

One of the issues facing social workers, certainly through the pandemic, working from home and as they were going doing visits, is obviously their personal safety. That's something I take quite seriously and the Committee is working through some very concrete solutions to support them, such as making sure they all have cellphones and other technical supports so that we know at all times where our social workers are and the work they're doing.

Some of the good things that are coming about in terms of child protection are a result of the new *Children, Youth and Families Act* brought in and introduced by the predecessor minister, who is now Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation. She and others had the foresight of really focusing on early intervention and prevention so that more children can stay with their families and within their communities. What we have seen over the subsequent years is that the number of children coming into care is actually coming down. That's a good thing.

We've also expanded our programming to support children who are in care, whether it's through enhancing foster care arrangements, independent living arrangements and everything else in between that supports the children.

The other positive thing is that we are working with the Indigenous communities to support their approach and to allow their children to stay within their communities. We have worked extensively with the Innu Nation, with the Nunatsiavut Government and also here on the Island to make sure children are supported within cultural arrangements that support their aspirations as governments and as Indigenous communities. Again, the number of Indigenous children coming into care has and is coming down. Our goal is to continue in that vein. We will be saying more on that in weeks ahead.

Of course, this did not and is not happening overnight. It certainly takes leadership at the political level and through the governmental and bureaucratic level and within the communities themselves. There's a commitment to new forms of social-work practice so that cultural planning and elements like that are incorporated into their work. We are spending exceptional resources to

make sure that that training is and gets done. We're committing new resources when and where it needs to happen. As I said, we are working with NAPE. That has been a success story, and we will continue that working relationship.

One of the immediate issues that we will be working with through our friends with the Human Resource Secretariat and the Treasury Board is for those of our staff who are working at home and what arrangements we will be looking at in the future. Right now, most of our Income Support program is delivered by our staff working from home. That is working quite well and we've actually saved money doing that.

Many of our social workers are working from home or, also, a combination of working from home and going to the office. We want to see how that can work and work better going forward. What I am finding is that staff are feeling that they are empowered now to do their work they have been hired and paid to do, that that is their focus and that the outcomes are actually improving. That is really what we want to achieve as a government.

As I said, we have a good and new working relationship with the Innu Nation and we have a good and new working relationship with the Nunatsiavut Government. There are continuous challenges, but we are working on them collaboratively and that's paying dividends.

The other area that I'm responsible for is our seniors and I have a seniors portfolio. We are working extensively with SeniorsNL and the Provincial Advisory Council on Seniors. Again, through collaborative efforts, we are addressing policy and program issues that need to be addressed and we will continue that in the foreseeable future. The other thing that we are also working on is making sure that through the funding that has been allocated through the budget, we can provide grants to different community agencies to support seniors programming and activity in the various communities across the province.

Last week we did announce the Community Transportation Program for seniors to, again, look at creative solutions to allow seniors to get to activities in their communities, and really

calling upon community agencies, municipalities and the like to figure out a way that they can support their seniors with some additional funding provided by the government. What's important in that process is that those ideas and those initiatives are sustainable for the long term, because it doesn't begin and end with one grant. We need to engage and challenge our local communities to find those solutions. We are there to provide some funding.

I'm also responsible for the status of persons with disabilities. Again, we have a provincial advisory council which has been very active in providing some very solid, reasoned recommendations to the department and to government in how we can improve the lives and circumstances of persons with disabilities. One of the things that are at top of mind for them is new accessibility legislation. We are working quite diligently at the department in conjunction with our colleagues across government and with the Department of Justice and Public Safety to develop legislation and to bring that forward. I suspect it won't be this session of the House, but in the fall. That will challenge all of us throughout the province to work through the issues facing persons with disabilities.

For those who read *The Telegram* this weekend, there is a very compelling letter to the editor from a person with a disability in talking about a life as a person with a disability and all the challenges that she faces where the person without a disability does not face. It really, I think, will set the tone for the discussion in the fall.

I'm also responsible for the community sector. That's a new responsibility and a new component added to the ministry and to the Cabinet. That has come about through the work that the community sector generally has been advocating for – a renewed focus on the role of the community sector – currently, it's employing around 16,000 people – and how we can strengthen the community sector, look at it as sort of a third pillar, if you view the private sector as a pillar, the public sector as a second pillar and then the community sector as a third pillar to help drive social development activity as well as economic development activity in this province.

We will be working through the Community Sector Work Plan and develop new programs and services to support the community sector. One of the key things that I have been talking to them about – again, based on what we have said in the budget – is that we want to focus on improved transparency and accountability of all our agencies, whether it's government direct or the community in terms of any funding that is provided to them that we, as a government, feel secure that we know what they're doing and that they are and will be held accountable for receiving those public funds.

The community sector, there's a working group in place right now. They are very supportive of that approach. That will be, certainly, a key message that we'll be bringing to all the agencies going forward.

The thing that intrigues me most about the ministry right now is the focus on social development, because it takes in all the aspects that I've just spoken about. But it also takes in the housing component and the work now that we can look across the continuum of social activity in the province and come up with some very integrated and comprehensive solutions that will help address the work that will come forward with the Health Accord NL and their focus on the social determinants of health. Because outside of income and education, the thing that people will need support for will be around housing and will be around other social supports that we are doing piecemeal at present.

I'm looking forward to the Health Accord NL recommendations. Because we want to be in a position to respond and respond immediately and effectively to what we think are going to be some very eye-opening and comprehensive recommendations to help improve how we deliver health and social services in the province. I've already had some discussions with Sister Elizabeth Davis and Dr. Parfrey on some of the ideas that they have that I think will coincide quite nicely with some of the work we're doing.

If I may, in term of the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, I agree and concur with his observations in his district and what we are seeing right across the province. Seniors and the need for better and more accessible housing and

affordable housing for seniors is definitely on our radar. We will be working with the federal government in terms of the new funding that they have provided under the joint agreement we have with them over the next number of years to develop those types of solutions that he mentioned.

We will be looking at the rent supplement program and how we can expand that because that's quite successful. We will be reviewing our housing stock. We have now over 5,500 units across the province. We know many of them need repair and we will have money allocated this year and subsequent years to improve the housing situation across the province.

We're working with community groups on supportive housing, because quite often a house in itself is not sufficient. The person or persons need supports. We are finding with Connections for Seniors, as an example, where they are helping provide housing, they're also providing supports. We're doing that for youth through Choices for Youth. We're doing that for others in the community and that is paying dividends as well because once they are secure in their own home or an apartment and they feel supported, then we can help and work with them on their other issues: whether it is mental health, addictions and the like.

We also are working on a new housing and homelessness plan for the province. We will be piggybacking on some of the work we have done already with the federal government because we developed a three-year plan with them and we will build on that for a province as a whole.

We feel if we can come up with the appropriate plan, obviously, it will be discussed here in this House, then we can look at when are the appropriate investments of the public sector but also engaging the private sector in the types – again, that the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands identified, what are the housing options for the province, whether it is private, public, non-profit, affordable, supportive, the full range and that's where we'll be focused.

One of the things I'm finding as a new MHA, the issues I'm dealing with for my district are around income, they're around housing and

they're around child protection. All those three elements fit within my mandate. Already, we are seeing the ability to bring officials together to problem solve on an issue that, in that past, would have been siloed and not addressed or only partially addressed. I think the benefit, and I commend the Premier and I thank the Premier for the opportunity to take on this mandate because I can only see good things happening going forward.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I will leave it. I want to thank the Members of the Social Services Committee for their support through the Estimates and I look forward to a success year.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to thank the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's for chairing the Committee: much appreciated, very professional, very well done. I also want to thank the table staff for providing all our documentation and everything that we needed to get through our Estimates.

I also would be very remiss if I never thanked the minister and his department staff for being prepared, because I have to be quite honest, I've been through Estimates a couple of times, and not to take anything away from my previous ministers, I think they did a great job as well, but Minister Abbott comes with some background in health care, therefore he was a little bit more prepared for some of the questions I had to ask.

One of the biggest things, I guess, that I appreciated through Estimates was that there is talk now of these wraparound services. I think that's the whole reason of adding Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Income Support to the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development and persons living with disabilities because that way it kind of cuts down the redundancy. Really, all that needs to be brought in once these people talk to an intake worker or

anything like that is to bring in their Health and Community Services file.

I think that would be something that would be a great advantage to us. As we've seen through Estimates this time, it's been a great savings actually having people working from home, which hasn't been a real big decline in the amount of services that are being provided.

It was nice to hear the minister agree that it's an opportunity for us right now to look at a new model, because if working from home is working, then bricks and mortar are probably going to be a thing of the past for most people in this sector. Because as I tell people, when they say where is my office. I say right here in my pocket because wherever I'm to I can answer questions, not only from the ministers and stuff that they reach out but my constituents as well. For that reason, I think there is a good opportunity to look at a new model. That way we can continue with the savings in our department.

It's a great privilege to be on the Social Services Committee on behalf of the Official Opposition because it's our opportunity to hold the department to account for expenditures. I will say that while there are some things that are being worked on, one of the biggest things I think in our department would be the fact that we look out for our seniors. These are the people that paved the way and trail-blazed for all of us. The least we could do is give them the respect that they deserve for getting us here.

When it comes to that, one of the biggest things is – while housing and supplemental housing is a great benefit to seniors – a lot of seniors find themselves really looking for support in seeing an eye doctor, an auditory doctor or a dentist. In Estimates, that was something that I questioned and it's something that we're going to look at for developing that socially, I guess, for seniors. Obviously, it's hard to say that there's either one or the other out of those three that are more important, but when it comes to your teeth – if you don't have teeth it's hard to eat and stuff like that, obviously, but it also affects your digestion, your amount of saliva and everything that's produced. It's something that really needs to be looked at.

One of the things that I thought about was that it might be an opportunity for us to see if companies want to let employees, if they have a dependent senior, add them to their benefits. It wasn't necessarily that the government has to fund the program, but it needs to find examples of how this can work to our seniors' benefits.

Right now, I guess, when I look at the youth in our province, things have improved. The amount of intake persons are lowering. Like I said, our children and our youth are our greatest asset and they're our future. One thing I'd like to do for them all right now, for our school-aged students from kindergarten, Grade 3, Grade 6, Grade 9 and Grade 12, who are all trying to figure out their graduations – these are rights of passage for – it doesn't matter what age because you know for our kindergarten kids it's an opportunity for them to realize that they just got through a whole year of full-time learning. That's something to be proud of and getting ready to move on to Grade 1 and be a great contribution to their education.

Grade 3: It's a lot of apprehension. You're leaving primary school and you're going into elementary where, for the first time, you're coming out as being the oldest in the school to going back into being the youngest. That brings its own dynamics.

Grade 6: Same thing, they're getting ready to move into junior high. It's a right of passage. It's an opportunity for them to celebrate with their friends and prepare themselves for junior high.

Grade 9: It's almost like a right of passage for moving into adolescence, understanding about going to the junior dance and all that kind of stuff, actually being treated, I guess, a little bit more maturely.

Grade 12: My son graduated last year from Grade 12. He certainly never had the experience I had and it was unfortunate, but that was a COVID situation, it was nothing that anybody could do to remedy that situation. In the meantime, I congratulate all of our graduates – not necessarily just this year but last year as well. Just know that we're here and we want to get that back to normal as quick as possible as well.

One of the other things that came up in Estimates as well was that I've recognized through this department and the work that I've done here the last couple years, being the shadow Cabinet minister, is that we have a very active Seniors' Advocate and a very active Child and Youth Advocate. My suggestion is that I think it is time now that we have an advocate for people living with disabilities because then they have an outlet of somebody that understand where they're coming from and what those wraparound services are going to look like, because Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Income Support are added to Children, Seniors and Social Development and persons living with disabilities. It is quite important and I think that they need that advocate to bring their concerns forward as a collective group.

Fire and Emergency Services has also been added to this department. I'd be very remiss if I never gave a shout-out to Chief Duane Antle of Come By Chance. I got to celebrate with him on the weekend actually. He just received the Lifetime Achievement Award from fire and emergency services Canada. He's the first Newfoundlander and Labradorian to receive this award, nationally. It was actually quite an honour that COVID let us do this little get-together in Come By Chance because normally it is done in Ottawa and presented in Ottawa. But being the first Newfoundlander and Labradorian to receive this award, with 27 years experience now, I'm certainly not the first MHA that he's been a firefighter under but I got to represent all those MHAs that he has been a firefighter under for all these years. It gave me quite a lot of pride to hear his speech and talk about wrapping himself in people that were going to raise him up as he raises them up.

Congratulations, Chief Antle, you're very deserving of your award.

One of the things that I spoke on earlier today is that with Fire and Emergency Services and stuff like that, I have 34-plus towns, including LSDs, and I have a recreation committee in an unincorporated area as well, but my district is very industrial. If we want these programs for CSSD, Income Support and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to work, then we need to start understanding that we need income. It's not about keeping the lights on, it's not about just

paying the bills; it's about putting ourselves in a better financial situation so that these programs can be availed of for everybody. There is a great percentage of our population here in Newfoundland and Labrador that do need these services.

Like I said, it's good to have it in place, but we want to eliminate anybody that's taking advantage of the situation or the programs and make sure that it is actually there to give people a hand up, as it's stated in the budget. Because with adding Income Support and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to CSSD it cuts down on the redundancy. I think we are putting our constituents and the people of our province in a better place to get that hand up and actually realize it.

One of the things that I did mention about Income Support is that we want to encourage people to get back into the workforce, but as soon as they find employment or anything like that we just cut them right off from the benefits that come from Income Support. Because if we're truly going to give them a hand up, then we leave it in place for the month and probably even the benefits until their probation period is over because we don't want to discourage them from continuing to work. If we're going to give them a hand up, then if somebody takes a new job, let's say the first of July and we cut them off from Income Support, then by the time the end of July comes and they get that first pay cheque, it's pretty much already gone. So we want to make sure is that if we can get those bills paid, that hand up for that extra month might actually put more people back in the workforce and retain more employees for our employers.

One of the things that I've noticed recently that's come to my attention is that the RCMP here in the province hasn't had an increase to their funding in over 13 years. That seems a bit bewildering to me because we talk about how we're including more programming for our RNC officers and stuff like that. The federal government pays 30 per cent; we pay 70 per cent. They're at a crucial point right now where the underfunding is actually not really helping us police our more rural communities.

I think that's something we should certainly look at. When you look at an \$8.6-billion budget, when they're looking for anywhere from \$15 million to \$20 million annually to really increase their services and their presence on our streets, then I think that it might be something we need to address very closely very soon because, to me, it's an invaluable service. It actually gives our children, our seniors and our people living with disabilities that sense of security in their hometown when they know there is a police presence there.

Like I said, I applaud the RCMP for the job they do here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the RNC for that matter as well. With that being said, we can't let it fall by the wayside when it comes to funding our police services; the same with our fire departments and our paramedics. As long as we get the right equipment and stuff, then our constituents and our whole province will be really taken care of.

One of the big things, I think, that will change this department is the commitment to Wi-Fi and cell coverage. That's one of the things that are actually holding us back from doctor retention as far as I'm concerned. If we don't have these tertiary services in some of these rural areas, these people don't have any propensity to want to go there. They want to bring their families and their kids and stuff like that.

I'll just use Arnold's Cove for an example; we've known for a while that we need a doctor there. We've been pushing for a nurse practitioner for the interim, but with that being said, we need to find some incentive. We're rolling out the best doctors in the world. They're going all over the world and they're becoming the heads of medicine in other parts of the world. Here we are we can't retain them, all because they have such a debt load when they come out of school.

I suggested something like a trust, so that all students, whether they can afford it or they have to get student loans or anything like that, they add to this trust. After their seven years of studies, we give them that five-year break to pay back loans and then they get to draw from the trust so that they can set up their practice and become successful in that first five years. It

seems to me to be a pretty solid business plan globally.

With that being said, we need to understand that it's taking us now 20 and 30 years to be repaid, the student loans that we're putting out to these new doctors. Whereas if we gave them that five-year break after graduation in year 12, they're probably ready to pay this back en masse because they have a successful practice, they're already entrenched where they're to and they want to stay.

So we turn around and within 15 to 17 years we'd probably have these loans paid back, which is cutting anywhere from 10 to 20 years off some of these repayments. I'm not saying that these are fruition suggestions; these are suggestions that certainly can be built on. They can certainly be expanded. But we can't talk about virtual medical care without having that Wi-Fi and cell service everywhere in the province. If taxpayer money is paying for it, then it's not just for people that live inside the overpass or live in bigger centres or anything like that, it's for everybody to avail of.

When I first got in here, I guess I was a little naïve in that I trusted a couple of people that told me that Brookside was going to get Wi-Fi and cell service. They still don't have it to this day. They have the poles in their driveways to prove it, that it went through their town, but it wasn't a good business model for Bell Aliant, which I didn't find to be great reasoning.

Like I said, to present the petitions that I did on Wi-Fi and cell coverage, I took it from a personal perspective: business, virtual medical care, tourism and fire and emergency services. So when we're now here in a global pandemic, we notice that working from home, getting educated from home and these Zoom meetings and stuff like that all rely on these services. It's something that we have to get done ASAP, but we need to do it for the entire province, not just the larger centres. Every person in this province deserves to have the same services no matter where they live.

With that being said, I would like to recognize also that it is Pride Month. It's an opportunity for people to express themselves and live their best life. I commend everybody that is enjoying

Pride Month. Be proud. That's what it's all about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Thank you.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will stand down; I have nothing else to say. All I want to say is let's make strategic investments in the right areas where it's going to benefit everybody in the province, not just a few.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that we adjourn debate.

SPEAKER: The motion on the floor is that we do now adjourn debate.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, that we now recess for supper until 6 p.m.

SPEAKER: The motion is that we now recess until 6 p.m.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

This House stands in recess until 6 p.m.