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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Burin - Grand Bank, St. George's - Humber, Mount Pearl North, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, Lake Melville and Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, with leave.

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Speaker.

The 2021 Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador Conference and Trade Show will take place this week in Corner Brook from November 3 to the 6. This is the first time the MNL membership has gathered in person since 2019. Three hundred in-person participants will attend the event with 32 councils accessing the event virtually. Over 100 municipalities in total are represented.

The theme of the conference this year is: It starts with us. This theme certainly reflects the importance of municipalities in our province. This level of government is closest to the people they represent in our communities.

The conference agenda is full of exciting sessions and keynotes. Conference discussion will feature topics on climate change, municipal event management and a new provincial program, as Municipalities will launch its core municipal training program with the College of the North Atlantic.

I would like to join all Members in this House to congratulate our municipal leaders and to wish them well at conference 2021.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

S. REID: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I would like to highlight the efforts of people to establish the My Dear Minnie Museum in the Codroy Valley. Minnie White, the province's first lady of the accordion, was born in St. Alban's, but moved to the Codroy Valley where she met and married Richard White. They lived and raised their family in Tompkins. After her family was raised, she returned to playing music and received many awards before passing away in 2001.

After much consideration, the family decided to turn her home into a museum on their own. The museum is not just about Minnie White, but also reflects the heritage and culture of the Codroy Valley and life in rural areas of the province.

The museum opened in July of this year for the summer months and by appointment in the off-season. Speaker, the museum is located one kilometre off the Trans Canada Highway on Route 407, approximately 25 kilometres east of Port aux Basques.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in recognizing the efforts of the White family and celebrating the life of Minnie White, our first lady of the accordion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today in this hon. House to recognize two wonderful volunteers in my district: Con and Sandra Milmore, who have gone above and beyond to help in our community. They are everywhere, serving food to the homeless and collecting food and donations for the needy.

They both volunteer with groups such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul food bank at St. Peter's Parish and Mary Queen of the World Parish. They are both members of the Knights of Columbus and Ladies Auxiliary. Con and Sandra give of their time and talents freely to the community so that people in need will have a better quality of life.

Con and Sandra have both received numerous awards and acknowledgements for their volunteerism but, true to the volunteer spirit, recognition is not why they do what they do. They do it because they like helping people.

I ask all Members to join me in offering congratulations to Con and Sandra Milmore for their community involvement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

Ed Fewer of Grand Falls-Windsor has been a legion member for 22 years, the president for the last five years and a constant member of executive.

Ed attended the Royal Canadian Legion's youth Pilgrimage of Remembrance to Beaumont-Hamel. It had such a profound impact on him that he kept going back to try and understand the enormity of the loss of life. It's been a personal pilgrimage every year since that time for Ed.

Mr. Fewer travels to France and Belgium each year to visit the First World War battlefields and the Second World War battlefields. He places a Newfoundland and Labrador flag on all the Newfoundland and Labrador Regiment graves and Canadian flags for the Canadian fallen each and every year.

Mr. Fewer's great-uncle, Lawrence Joseph Fewer, was killed on July 1, 1916. He died on the battlefield of Beaumont-Hamel. Mr. Fewer just returned once again from France and will be travelling back to France this week to observe Remembrance ceremonies overseas.

Please join me as we thank Ed Fewer for his dedication to our fallen loved ones, in addition to all those who have served and serve today.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

The House of Assembly provides an opportunity to recognize excellence in sports, whether at a community, provincial or even national level. Today, I'm honoured to introduce you to an athlete of international calibre from the District of Lake Melville: Mr. T. J. Gear.

T. J. is from Happy Valley-Goose Bay, where he and his wife, Maria, own and operate Gear's Gains, a professional fitness centre that has attracted great attention. T. J. uses his own knowledge of training and fitness to create a following that competes in various local and regional powerlifting competitions. Collectively, hundreds of local residents are attaining their own fitness and training goals. Last weekend, a team of eight members of Gear's Gains travelled to the Eastern Canadian regionals in Cape Breton where each medalled and two set provincial records.

T. J. leads by example. In August, he placed second at the Pan-American Powerlifting Championships in Florida. After this impressive performance, he was invited to be part of Canada's national team. I am pleased to advise that T. J. recently placed sixth at the classic world powerlifting championships in Sweden.

I would like all Members of this Legislature to congratulate T. J. Gear for his community leadership and accomplishments on the international stage.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise in this hon. House today to wish a happy 100th birthday to Mr. John Pinhorn.

Mr. Pinhorn was born in 1921 and is the youngest of seven children. He is one of the only few surviving veterans of World War II. Mr.

Pinhorn served with the 166 Royal Artillery Regiment in Britain, North Africa and Italy, and fought in the Battle of Monte Cassino.

After the War, Mr. Pinhorn returned home to Winterton, Newfoundland, where he married his wife, Elizabeth Downey. They had two sons, Alex and Donald. Mr. Pinhorn made his living largely as a fisherman, but was also a skilled carpenter who built many homes in the area and contributed his skills to the construction of the local school more than four decades ago. Mr. Pinhorn currently resides in the Private Josiah Squibb Memorial Pavilion in Carbonear.

As we approach Remembrance Day, it is important to honour those who served and continue to serve, like Mr. Pinhorn, and thank them for their service.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in wishing Mr. John Pinhorn a very happy 100th birthday.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I would like to tell you about a visual artist whose work is delivering a powerful message.

Bronson Jacque is Inuit and a proud son of Labrador who hails from Postville on the North Coast. He has been giving expression through his art for more than 10 years, but his most recent creation may just be his most powerful.

The Nunatsiavut artist was commissioned by the Aboriginal Women's Association of Prince Edward Island to paint a commemorative group portrait. The mural depicts 10 family members and friends of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Each subject in the portrait is holding an object that connects them to a missing loved one.

The mural is more than artwork. It tells a human story that reminds us that family members who have suffered personal loss never truly escape the mourning. Before taking paintbrush in hand, Bronson studied photos of the women he was painting and he listened to their heartfelt stories over a period, Speaker, of several months. He calls it the most important project he has worked on to date.

Speaker, the mural has had a profound effect on many people who have admired the painting. Those who have viewed the portrait have reflected on the love, the fight for justice, the culture and the strength. Each of the lives lost had value and meaning. We must resolve ourselves to make this cause for change.

Please join me in congratulating Bronson Jacque of Postville for helping us increase our understanding of the resilience of Indigenous women and the power of healing.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

Speaker, I join with the minister in congratulating visual artist, Bronson Jacque, of Labrador, a local artist delivering powerful works of art.

Bronson's latest commission is particularly impactful: A commemorative portrait depicting family members and friends of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Each portrait subject has an object that represents a missing loved one to emphasize they are not just statistics; they are mothers, daughters, aunts, cousins, friends and family.

Bronson's exhibition is scheduled to be featured at the Confederation Centre of Arts in PEI until the new year. I encourage everyone that has the opportunity to see this heartfelt work and to remember the missing and murdered Indigenous

women and girls that it is meant to commemorate.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

I would like to congratulate Bronson on the achievement and to thank him for helping share the story of those women and their families. Hearing stories from the Indigenous communities about their culture and their struggle is key towards the path of reconciliation.

We can do better as a province to address the bias towards colonialism in our society. Just outside this Chamber hangs a mural filled with colonialist symbols; outside this building we proudly display a statute of Corte-Real, a propagandist gift from Europe.

We must challenge our colonial mindset and the ideas where we can. Art is one of the most powerful ways we can do that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

The cyberattack affecting the health care system of the province is deeply concerning to everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador. The health care workers of our province are under enormous stress, and we in the Official Opposition wish to

thank them for their efforts to help keep health care moving.

I ask the government: Have you asked the prime minister or other federal counterparts for assistance for our health care system, given the enormous impact this is having on this province?

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

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

We've assembled the required expertise in operational, technical communications as needed. As the Minister of Health and Community Services said yesterday, we've also alerted the authorities in this matter, Mr. Speaker.

I will say we certainly have great empathy and understand the pressure that this is putting on families, on patients and on the health care system. We certainly appreciate, as I said yesterday, the hard work of not only the Department of Health, but the regional health authorities.

I will say our main objective right now is to restore services. That's what we're working toward. We will get through this, Speaker, but it is certainly taxing on everyone involved.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, cancer treatments have ground to a halt as a result of the cyberattack. Non-emergency appointments have been cancelled in the thousands. We sympathize with the health care workers who now have to operate a paper-based system.

Can the government give any assurances regarding when non-emergency procedures and appointments will resume in our health care system?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

I think it is important to recognize the difficulties it's generated for patients and families, and also to thank the staff for their perseverance once again under yet another stressor.

Each clinic appointment will be scrutinized by the care provider who requests it or who has it, and will be prioritized in terms of when they are contacted. If you have an appointment, you will be contacted about getting that rescheduled.

For the non-urgent and the elective or planned appointments, those will likely take a lower priority than those that are urgent because it will be done on clinical need. For those people whose condition changes, I would refer them back to their primary care provider for reassessment, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

As we saw with COVID, even urgent interventions are being pushed down the road. People need to know that they can still access health care immediately to deal with those urgent situations.

This situation has been known since Saturday, four days ago. The people of the province need to know when non-emergency care will resume in our province. The minister referenced some health authorities being less affected than others at this moment.

I ask the government: Is there any capacity to send patients from one health authority to another in order to maintain some level of service?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The provincial nature of some of our programs means that they are significantly impacted. We have certainly worked very hard to try and identify those individuals and, as I've said, to focus on contacting those who require urgent treatment.

Emergency departments are open, emergency health care is available and ambulances can be called if needed. We are working hard to mitigate the effects of this failure, working towards remediation and rebuilding.

It would be premature at the moment for me to give a timeline, as that would be purely speculative. But we are discussing this on a regular basis with our managed service provider in the Centre for Health Information, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The people of this province need to know that everything is being done to ensure that this is a minimal interruption. As we know now, it's becoming another part of the crisis we face in health care.

Experts from around the country have given their analysis of the situation. One who spoke on CBC last evening stated: If the primary records and backup records are both compromised in this attack, it would be the worst-case scenario.

I ask the government: Do you agree? Is this the worst-case scenario our health care system is facing?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

As soon as we became aware of this possible attack, we engaged the appropriate authorities. We have brought in significant outside expertise. There is an investigation ongoing. In terms of

that, I think because of that it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

We are, however, working, literally, round the clock to remediate the problems of access to health care. If you are acutely unwell emergency care, ambulance services and primary care are available. Everything we can do to minimize delays and advance treatment, we are currently doing.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're hearing, all Members of this side of the House, of the hundreds of individuals who have gone to emergency and, unfortunately, the overburden on the staff there has gotten to a point where people walk out with serious injuries because it's not capable of being able to handle the situation at this point. We need better interventions.

The RCMP have launched an investigation into the cyberattack yesterday. The minister could not confirm whether a cyberattack had taken place.

I ask the minister: Can you confirm today the nature of the attack that we are dealing with and is it a ransomware attack?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I will say again that we have assembled all the expertise that we require during this unfortunate situation, all the security experts, all the operational, technical and communications, as I've indicated. Our main objective here is to really ensure that we restore services as quickly as possible.

I can appreciate how difficult this is for patients. I can appreciate how difficult it is on our health care system, but our primary goal right now is

working to restore services. All the expertise that is required has been assembled and we're working through this situation.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

Can the Minister of Finance confirm whether a ransom has been demanded of government in this situation?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

As I said and I'll repeat myself, we have assembled all the expertise that is required from an operational, from a technical, from a communications perspective. We are working through this issue.

Again, I will say that the primary goal here is to restore services as quickly as possible and that's what we're focused on. We understand the impact on our health care system, we understand the impact on patients, Speaker, and we are primarily focused on doing just that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The people of this province need and want to know exactly what's happening. Why we're hiding behind not sharing information makes no sense here. Everybody wants to know what's happening and be part of the solution here. We need to be open and transparent with the people of this province. People are fearful and we want to diminish that fear by telling people exactly what's happening out here so they can get back to having access to health care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Will the government declare a provincial state of emergency?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I will say again that we have assembled the expertise that we require. We have assembled the teams of people that need to assist during this particular situation on the operational side of things and on the technical side of things. We've alerted the authorities. Now our focus is really to restore services.

So I'll say to the Member opposite yet again, please ensure that when we're talking about this situation that our focus is on the patients, is on restoring service, is on making sure that we are focused on the right things, at the right moment and we listen to our expertise.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

I couldn't agree more with the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. That's why we're saying a state of emergency would ensure that all of us in this House focus, and all of our energies are focused, on getting our health care system back up and running for the people of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, during the COVID-19 outbreak in February, the Premier took to the airwaves for daily updates and repeatedly stated the people of the province need to know there is a Premier here to work in crisis. Today, cancer care has been stopped in its tracks; diagnostic work for chronic illnesses has slowed to a standstill. The health care system in Newfoundland and Labrador is ground to a halt.

I ask the Premier: Will you cut your conference short and come back to deal with the crisis we have in Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier has been fully engaged, fully informed. He has a very strong and competent team here in St. John's. He is engaged in this very issue, as are the experts that are required to assist us to move through this particular challenge that we're having.

Speaker, I'll say it again. We're all focused on ensuring that we restore services as quickly as possible. I think you've heard, operationally, from the Minister of Health and Community Services, and that's what we're doing.

We have faced these type of situations most recently with Snowmageddon and with COVID-19 and the health care authorities are working through the problems.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Yesterday, we spoke with members of the public who were turned away at the cancer care clinic here in St. John's. We know because of a return to a paper-based system things are moving slowly. We know that; we realize that. But cancer does not wait.

I ask the minister: What is being done to ensure a continuity of treatment and diagnostic work for those in need?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a very important question for those people who are trying to navigate their cancer journey.

From our point of view, each appointment that has been deferred will be examined by the relevant clinician and a decision made as to how urgently to bring these folks back once our system starts to commence more normal operations.

Because of the challenge of our systems being so integrated with electronic communication and prescribing through a provincial program based out of Eastern Health, we are working with the health authorities to find ways round those communication blocks.

If you have an appointment, you will be contacted about a different time and date to attend.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Family doctors and primary care providers are one of the keys to a functioning health care system. Right now, the Medical Association estimates that close to 100,000 people are without a family physician. Oftentimes, the family physician is the point of contact for a patient accessing the health care system.

I ask the minister: How will people without a family doctor or primary care provider be contacted through this situation to ensure they don't fall through the cracks?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

If they have an appointment, there will be a contact point available to staff at the facility. Private offices are not affected by this directly. This is an issue relating to regional health

authority infrastructure and IT serviced and provided by Bell among others and the Centre for Health Information.

From our point of view, we are aware of the challenges of patients without primary care providers and that's why a couple of weeks ago we announced, as an interim-bridging measure, a package of about \$30 million to improve the situation in the short- and medium-term. We are in discussions with the NLMA on primary care and recruitment, Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

We've already heard today in a couple of responses how they understand the impact on staff and they recognize the contribution of staff.

In a CBC story last week, the president of the Nurses' Union said the Janeway emergency room is in a dire situation with staff being forced to work 24-hour shifts, mandated overtime and 36, 16-hour shifts since August. To quote the president of the Nurses' Union: "When our members are tired, when they're mentally exhausted, that equates to risks for patients and risks for our members."

Now, the fallout from this cyberattack has fallen on their laps. I ask the minister: What are you going to do to help our overworked nurses through this crisis?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Again, another equally important question. The staff of our regional health authorities and nurses and others have stepped up and continue to persevere through what is a unique-in-our-experience situation.

In terms of our relationship with the Registered Nurses' Union, they are cordial and effective,

and we have multiple channels with Ms. Coffey and her team, working on things such as workplace burnout, in terms of working on scheduling and these kinds of things. Obviously, these will be a little difficult to continue with under our current situation, but the channels are open and the doors are open, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Speaker, there's a human toll to this crisis on top of everything else. Paper is being physically run around hospitals. Data entry means more delays for patients, which in turn adds stress and anxiety to our health care workers.

I ask the minister: What supports are being offered to our health care workers dealing with increased stress and anxiety now and in the aftermath of this situation?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

Indeed, I think it would be fair to say that with the efficiencies, automation and digitization of the health care system that we've seen over my lifetime and the last 20 years, we've really been pushed back about 30 or 40 years with this incident.

In terms of support for emotional and physiological well-being of staff, we actually have a very robust system through Employee and Family Assistance through the regional health authorities, we have DoorWays for those people who feel they need more and we also have a very good suite of online apps that will help with things like mindfulness, relaxation and stress reduction, Speaker.

Again, happy to talk to the RNU to see if there are any other areas they would like us to explore.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL if any external security audits have been conducted for government and IT infrastructure since she became minister; however, an answer was not provided to this very important question. Instead the minister highlighted a recent Member's statement about cybersecurity month.

I ask the minister: When was the external audit conducted?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of the security of the core government IT, we have a range of providers and tactics that we put in place to make sure that our systems and the data of the people of the province is as secure as it can be. Cybersecurity is an ongoing threat; everyone must remain diligent.

At the moment, in terms of the issue with Bell, NLCHI and the provincial government systems, there's nothing out of the ordinary for us to report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Again, the question was: When was the last external audit conducted?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

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

In terms of the government IT and our cybersecurity, we have a range tools and providers in place to help protect our systems and the data of the people of the province, which we take very seriously. There is a range of

things that we're doing; it's an ongoing effort. Everyone needs to remain vigilant, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Again, I ask the minister: When was the audit conducted?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of the core government IT's cybersecurity, we have a robust program in place. We have vendors; we have tools. It's a constantly changing landscape, Mr. Speaker, and our teams try our best to keep up. Cybersecurity is an ongoing threat; we get thousands of intrusion attempts a month that are automated intrusion attempts and cybersecurity is everyone's responsibility, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: I guess from the response there hasn't been one done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, in June 2020, a warning was sent to the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security regarding increased risk of data breaches and attacks by hackers against health care systems across the country.

I ask the minister: What has your department done to increase security as a result of this warning?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So we have a range of tools and providers in place to help ensure our systems are secure against cybersecurity attacks. It would be irresponsible of me, Mr. Speaker, to divulge certain things to this House and to the general public in terms of our cybersecurity efforts.

We are protecting the data and systems of the people of the province and we have a range of tools in place to do that. We take that responsibility very seriously, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Well, I guess the answer to the first one was, is it yes or no or was it done, and we didn't get an answer. And we didn't get an answer on this one. So I don't know when we're going to get answers and the people of the province need to know when this is going to be done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: Speaker, a disturbing detail in this cyberattack is the breach of the backup data for the health care system. The backup data should be stored separately, totally disconnected from the primary database.

I ask the minister: Is the primary and backup health care data stored separately in this province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

In addition to our robust cybersecurity plans, we also have extensive backup programs for all of our systems. They're different, obviously, for cloud systems versus on-prem systems. We have backup teams and specialists.

Again, in terms of the cybersecurity and the risk to our backups and our core systems, we have a range of providers and systems in place to help

us mitigate those risks that are very real, Mr. Speaker. We get thousands of intrusion attempts a month and we are doing our best to protect the systems and data of the people of the province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: In 2015, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador published an independent security report review relating to two incidents that occurred in previous years. The report outlined recommendations to the government in NL based on these incidents.

I ask the minister: Were these recommendations implemented?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

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

In terms of our cybersecurity and our backups and everything to do with our IT systems, in particular cybersecurity, given the most recent threat, we take that responsibility very seriously. We have a range of vendors and programs in place to help us manage that.

Everyone has to be vigilant, Mr. Speaker. I recommend everyone not click on links or open attachments from outside sources. Double-check that the sender of an email is the one that you think it is. I would ask also, Mr. Speaker, not to put your password in websites that are not your main government IT websites and to be extra vigilant in your day-to-day activities.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thanks, Speaker.

During COVID, we led the country in everything that we done. Why can't we lead the country in cyberattacks? Why can't we protect our province from that? Why can't we lead it?

Speaker, our own Verafin is an international leader in cybersecurity, specializing in protecting banks from these kinds of attacks.

I ask the minister: Has the government reached out to Verafin for their expertise in this situation?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has indicated, we have engaged all of the appropriate national experts to help us with this current issue, in terms of NLCHI and the Bell situation. In terms of our cybersecurity, we have a robust suite of products and services and staff on hand to protect the information and systems of the people of the province, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance said "we've invested a ton of money, Mr. Speaker, in cybersecurity and we're going to continue to do so."

Can the minister provide details of how much has been spent for cybersecurity in the past five years?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So in terms of our cybersecurity investment, there is a range of things that we invest in. Every program and service that we deliver, we have to look at from a cybersecurity lens. It is not just one thing, we have many things and everything

is a cybersecurity measure. Everything from awareness and education, training of our public service employees but also, yes, specific targeted cybersecurity systems.

I'm not comfortable giving additional information at this time, Mr. Speaker, but cybersecurity of the data and systems of the people of the province is extremely important to this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, I asked how much money has been spent in the last five years and if you could provide details on how the money was spent. I don't think that's too much to ask.

Speaker, how much has been spent on protecting the IT infrastructure from cybersecurity threats in the health system?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of core government's cybersecurity spending, everything, every system, every initiative that we do, in terms of resident facing and internally facing, in terms of our IT landscape, Mr. Speaker, we look at from a cybersecurity lens. We do privacy assessments, and all that includes a cybersecurity lens, which is extremely important.

All of our systems are potentially vulnerable. We have to be vigilant in all areas, in all aspects. These intrusion attempts are very sophisticated. We get thousands a month. Everyone has to be diligent at all levels of government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, the answers given by the minister to the last seven or eight questions does not provide any confidence to anyone in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that she has control of what's going on right now in our province and that is scary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: I ask the minister: Are there any concerns over the payroll of health care workers arising from the cyberattack?

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

S. COADY: Speaker, I think the question was quite offensive to the minister in that she has provided the information to the Members opposite. I think everyone can appreciate that we have to be careful in what is being said because we are in a situation where we have engaged expertise in the operational, technical, the communications area around this particular challenge that we're now having.

We're very focused, as I've said, –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) paycheque?

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. COADY: I beg your pardon?

AN HON. MEMBER: It's a yes-or-no answer.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. COADY: Do you want me to answer the question is the question? I'm answering what they've asked.

We are focused on this side of the House on restoring services, not on politics.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, some residents of Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Some residents of Labrador have been turned away and sent back to Labrador due to the cyberattack on our health information system.

I ask the minister: Will he lift the penalties on MTAP for multiple submissions in one year for these Labradorians that must rebook?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm aware that Eastern Health, in particular, have looked at those people who have travelled from Labrador for tests, and also, actually, from Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, with whom we have a health care relationship, and made arrangements to accommodate them wherever possible.

Certainly, those people who could not be accommodated because the tests could not go ahead safely, if there are concerns about their expenses, given the unique nature of this situation, I would be happy to look at that from a sympathetic point of view.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

This holdup of our health care system, on top of other factors that are ongoing in our health care system, I ask the minister: Will he call upon other provinces to help fulfill our impending health care backlog?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

The issue of backlogs and delays I think is as yet unquantified. We don't have a clear timeline for the rebuild and restoration of services. That is likely, quite frankly, to be phased in and it would not surprise the experts if there were still some difficulties with that process.

Once the magnitude of the situation can be assessed in a realistic way, it will be up to the regional health authorities to come forward with some recommendations as to how we can help them help those people who were delayed, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Will the minister ask our neighbour Quebec if he can divert Labradorians of urgent and semi-urgent situations to Quebec like we have done in the past?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you, Speaker.

I am open to any practical suggestion. The issue of those operational things I would leave well and truly to the regional health authorities because they have that expertise, that experience, and I would be happy to discuss any recommendations that they might bring forward.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

Last week, I tabled a private Member's resolution calling on government to develop a transition plan to complete our active offshore oil fields and reach a climate crisis agreement with Ottawa that would recognize the value for society to leave other commercially viable prospects such as the Bay du Nord field

undeveloped as the world moves away from hydrocarbons.

I'm asking whether government will take a serious look at this option and direction.

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly happy to answer this question, which I do think is timely given what's going on in the world and given where our Premier is right now and all the leaders of the world debating climate change and the transition that's going on in the energy sector.

What I can say is while we look at, very seriously, the reduction of emissions, I do think it is responsible that we look at the resource that we have, that is still, indeed, in effect that we've been continually working on the lowering of emissions as it relates to our oil and gas sector.

I'll point out that it was just a couple of years ago in this House that there was a unanimous vote on getting to net zero in this province by 2050. We continue to take actions to get us there, including using our oil and gas, but, at this time, we continue to work with them for all the production and for the value that they are bringing to this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: I, for one, am very pleased to see that the Premier is with other leaders around the world tackling the climate crisis at COP26. With the average temperature projected to rise six degrees in just 29 years in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and 7.3 degrees in Nain where it will become warmer than here in St. John's, for example, will our province sign on to the Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance being proposed by Denmark in Scotland?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll come back to the declaration that the prime minister made yesterday, which I would point out where there were three, I guess, prongs to it: One being supporting the global phase out of coal; number two, helping to develop the country's transition to clean fuel alternatives; and, thirdly, to reduce pollution in the oil and gas sector.

Certainly, I've had a conversation with my federal counterpart yesterday prior to his departure to Scotland. So we will continue to work on lowering emissions in this province and lowering emissions in the sector. I would point out that all the operators themselves are starting to take net-zero transition plans themselves. I think we can have a transition that makes the best of our oil resources as we have it and also looks at the fact that we have renewables that will be coming on stream and helping our neighbours in this country.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Time for a quick question; no preamble.

P. TRIMPER: Very quick: Does this government agree that the climate crisis is the single greatest threat for future generations in our province?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's hard for me to speak on behalf of the Premier and speak on behalf of government. But what I would say is that when I read all the evidence and see everything that's going on, it's hard to discount the fact that climate change may be the greatest existential crisis we have faced in some time.

One stat I read this morning from a gentleman who's called the living Darwin is that when you see we've had more animals becoming extinct than there have been in the last 10-million years,

it's hard to ignore that kind of talk. So I would say that, yes, we take this extremely seriously.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

S. COADY: Speaker, pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I am tabling one order-in-council relating to a funding pre-commitment for fiscal years '22-'23 and '23-'24.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that on tomorrow I will move the following, that notwithstanding Standing Order 9, that this House shall not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, November 3, 2021, but shall continue to sit to conduct business of government and if it does not adjourn earlier, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In answer to a question raised by the Member for Conception Bay South yesterday, I have some additional information. There was one unregulated family child care home in CBS where there was an investigation that took place on October 6, 2021. They had a large number of children, over and above what they should have had in the operation, and they were directed to reduce it to four, as they were unregulated, in order to continue to operate without being regulated under legislation.

Follow-up was completed with all parents who had children registered with the provider and we are confident that the provider has reduced the number to four children. Speaker, we are not shutting down unregulated child care services but when the department is made aware that an unregulated child care service provider is operating with too many children, staff of the department investigate.

If too many children are confirmed to be registered with the service, the provider has two options: either reduce the number of children or proceed to becoming regulated via the family child care agency or through the regional office. Staff continue to monitor the home for a period of time to ensure that the numbers have been reduced.

Mr. Speaker, our legislation is clear and we must maintain our legal responsibilities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Petitions.

Petitions

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

WHEREAS there are many hopeful mothers and couples in this province dealing with infertility issues and require medical assistance to conceive; and

WHEREAS the cost associated with out-of-province fertility treatments, specifically in vitro fertilization, is extremely cost prohibitive; and

WHEREAS there are doctors in the province trained in in vitro fertilization and have the desire to set up an in vitro fertilization clinic in the province; and

WHEREAS the province is dealing with an aging population and serious population growth challenges;

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to establish a fertility clinic within the province providing full fertility services, including in vitro fertilization, for hopeful mothers and families and, in the interim, provide financial assistance to access out-of-province fertility treatment and services.

Speaker, we presented this petition on numerous occasions. I'll just take a different route this way in explaining it. This is an extremely time-sensitive issue for many young women and couples in the province. As I said, doctors in this province have submitted a proposal in 2018 to establish an IVF clinic in the province – 2018.

The Premier committed to establishing IVF services in the province nine months ago, but has not reached out to these doctors. The Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality has committed to a review, but has not reached out to these doctors. The Minister of Health and Community Services three months ago promised a travel package within weeks, but we're still waiting. This is from a minister who – by his own words – underpromises.

This is a critical need for our population, for the young women and families who want to start a family and stay in this province. We don't need any more commitments, we need action and we need it now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality for a response.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Again, we've heard about this issue now of course for the last two weeks in the House of Assembly, and the information remains the same. However, I will say though, Speaker, that I'm certainly not going to play politics with this issue. It is a very sensitive issue for women, for couples and for families who are looking to start and expand families.

The hon. Member referenced the doctors. I have received correspondence to my department, and I have indeed been in touch with a third party, actually, the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. I have full intention to meet with anyone who wants to call the department. I can say the same perhaps for my colleague, the Minister of Health and Community Services.

The last update that the Office of Women and Gender Equality received from the Department of Health and Community Services is that currently there is a program being developed. The details are being confirmed to help get funding into the hands of the recipients who are eligible to get this treatment. The Member is right that the Premier has committed to a review of these services. We will certainly do everything within our reality, our fiscal framework, to help people who certainly want to start and expand their families.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the residents of the Exploits District have a great concern from the result of the 24-hour emergency service cut to the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre in Botwood. All residents feels that the 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. service does not adequately and efficiently address the emergency requirements of the district affecting both patients and residents to receive adequate care when needed.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to restore the 24-

hour emergency service at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre immediately.

Speaker, this is still an ongoing issue in the district. Again, it was promised in 2019; still no opening of the 24-hour emergency service, as promised by the Premier in 2019. The minister has said he would look at it after the opening of the long-term care unit. That's been done.

Mr. Speaker, they keep making promises. Even in the 2021 election, again it was announced that the 24-hour emergency service would open. They want their promises. They want what was told to them. Not service by needs, they need the 24-hour emergency service.

So if the minister had no intentions of opening the 24-hour emergency service, why did he make those promises? Why were the election ploys and promises being made? If it was just to win seats in the Exploits District, why do you play with peoples lives this way? We want the 24-hour emergency service restored in Botwood.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Speaker.

I present a petition again today on the opening of the Service NL building in Corner Brook – Motor Registration.

These four people that signed this are from Meadows. They travel probably about 40 minutes to get there. They find it very difficult to drive there and stand up and hopefully that someone may cancel so that they can get in. There are a number of petitions that I have presented from the people of Humber - Bay of Islands, Corner Brook, Massey Drive area to have this service open.

We still have not gotten any logical reasons why they closed the offices across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We've seen people out in the rain – seniors out in the rain, wind, lining up just hoping to get in. I had one person who had to start arranging their doctor's

appointments around Wednesday morning to try to get their driver's licence and get a picture – just to get a picture. If they never got it, they had to go do another test; 81 years old and had to go get another test.

I will keep presenting the petitions as long as the people of Humber - Bay of Islands, Corner Brook, Massey Drive area continue to sign them. Again, we're supposed to provide services to the people and not cause the stress and strain of wondering if they can get their licence, if they can get their picture.

I asked the minister on several occasions to explain logical reasons why they're being closed. We always hear many concerns from the government that we have to change things because of COVID and the answer you get from the minister is that it worked well during COVID so we'll keep it going. It didn't work well during COVID, a lot of people were stressed out and it is still not working well.

As we see, it is not just now in Corner Brook. I know the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands presented petitions; he is getting a lot of calls. I know out in Harbour Grace where people are lined up in the rain. If we call that service, Speaker, I think we all got to look at ourselves in the mirror. If we're putting seniors out in the rain in Harbour Grace and think that's suitable? I think we have to start looking at ourselves and I think the government has to look at themselves and say what are we doing with Service NL's Motor Registration?

I urge the government again today to reconsider that decision. Let's put it back so we can all applaud the government, put back services and stop putting people through the stress and strain if they're going to get their driver's licence, if they're going to get their picture taken in time so they can drive their vehicles.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, I take this opportunity, pursuant to Standing Order 36, to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a matter of urgent public importance, that being a current information technology disruption in our health care system and the effect it's having on all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Before we adjourn, we'll give an opportunity for quick comments.

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Speaker.

I appreciate the Member opposite bringing forward this concern, but I will say to the Speaker that I think this has happened in other jurisdictions. This is not an unusual circumstance in the country or around the world that we have engaged the correct expertise, as I indicated in the House of Assembly, operationally, security experts, technological experts, communications experts. We are working on ameliorating and restoring the services that we have.

Speaker, we've alerted the authorities. This is certainly nothing political. I think it is around the whole issue of getting ourselves back, making sure that we have the services and restoring the services and moving forward.

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to comment briefly on this and just to reiterate what was said several times during Question Period this afternoon, is that the RCMP has been contacted and engaged in relation to the IT –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: As I was saying, the RCMP has been contacted by the Department of Health and Community Services in relation to the IT

systems outages that is affecting a number of health services in this province.

We all recognize on this side of the House the concerns and frustrations that members of the public dealing with the health care system are feeling right now and we do understand how important the health care system is to everyone in this province.

But I do want to stress that the RCMP has initiated a criminal investigation and they are drawing upon specialized units within the RCMP that has expertise that none of the Members in this House have in relation to cyberthreats.

We can't provide any further information and we will not provide any further information in relation to an ongoing RCMP investigation. That is very important to stress in this House here today.

We also do not want to create an unnecessary panic in this House. That is not what leaders do. The Minister for Digital Government and Service NL answered multiple questions today that were put forward to her and the purpose of this emergency debate, in my opinion, will be to direct more questions towards a ministerial department. That is now what emergency debates are for. That's not the purpose of an emergency debate.

There are also multiple privacy issues that are raised with regard to people's health records that I don't want to, nor do any Members on this side of the House want to address in this House here this afternoon in emergency debate.

Again, the issues have been brought forward to the RCMP. I would suggest that the House let the experts in this situation, criminal investigations and international cyberthreats, deal with that because they are the experts. They are ongoing investigations that I don't want to as Attorney General and Minister of Justice and Public Safety want to debate here in public on the House of Assembly floor.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

It seems the debate has started. According to what I was told, we would present the motion, you would advise me whether it's in order or not, then we would start a debate. It seems like debate started a bit early.

I think in fairness to the general public, whoever is watching this House, there is something that needs to be clear. What the Minister of Justice just stated that time was totally false for what we want. Not false in – he's bang on, on his issue. That's not our issue. Our issue – and comments and chuckles across the way do not help that people are in emergency rooms over in the Health Science Centre waiting for 24 hours and their life on edge not knowing what to do. I don't appreciate this being humorous because it's not.

We may not be experts in the law enforcement but we're experts in dealing with people and that's why we're elected. That's what we're here for. That's why we're in this House, to represent the people who elected us.

They are concerned about the health care and that's what we want this debate about. It's about what's happening in our health systems, Mr. Speaker, the plan, how we deal with this serious crisis. Nothing to do with the police investigation. Don't muddy the waters. That's not what this is about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: This is an emergency debate to get to the issue about how we deal with the people in Newfoundland and Labrador that are in the emergency rooms worried and contacting us on a daily basis. That's what we're here to debate, not the RCMP investigation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

I think if you reflect on the remarks of the Member opposite, the Member for CBS, what he just finished in his concluding remarks. He said these are things on a daily basis and we understand that there are issues around health care. He did say in his remarks, *Hansard* will reflect, Mr. Speaker, that these are issues of a daily basis. We agree that these are issues of a daily basis.

I can commit to the Members opposite that after we move through the present security risk, the security situation we are in, this government, this side of the House is more than open to a debate on *The Way Forward* on health care.

We're having that debate, Mr. Speaker, when you think about it. This has been recognized through the health forum, through Dr. Parfrey and Sister Davis.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to reflect on the closing remarks of the Member for CBS when he says this is on a daily basis.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: This House does stand adjourned until we have an opportunity to review the adjournment for the urgent matter.

Recess

SPEAKER: Are the House Leaders ready?

Order, please!

Before I make my ruling, I would recognize that the Member for Conception Bay South has provided me with a copy of the motion as per Standing Order 36, which I will provide to the Clerk to be tabled.

In this matter, I will be guided by a ruling by Speaker Hodder in the House on April 22, 2004, wherein he based his analysis on the urgency of debate by Members of the House, rather than the urgency of the matter. This is confirmed in various parliamentary texts, including *Parliamentary practice in British Columbia*,

fourth edition, page 86, where it says: Urgency has consistently been interpreted as urgency of debate, not urgency of the subject matter.

While I recognize that this is an ongoing issue which is affecting many people in our province, Members have other parliamentary opportunities to ask questions of government regarding this matter. The matter of urgency of debate in this House today, which would supersede all House proceedings, has not been established; therefore, it's my ruling that this matter do not proceed under Standing Order 36.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Orders of the day, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: 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., Tuesday, November 2, 2021.

SPEAKER: It is 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, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, second reading of Bill 36.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader that Bill 36 An Act Respecting The Office Of The Auditor General And The Auditing Of The Public Accounts Of The Province be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the Bill 36, An Act Respecting The Office Of The Auditor General And The Auditing Of The Public Accounts Of The Province be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting The Office Of The Auditor General And The Auditing Of The Public Accounts Of The Province." (Bill 36)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's important that the Auditor General's office in this province have the means and tools necessary to carry out the important work on behalf of the people of the province. I am pleased today to have the opportunity to speak to and propose Bill 36, the amendments to the *Auditor General Act, 2021*.

With the exception of some minor amendments, Speaker, the *Auditor General Act* has not been updated since 1991. Thirty years have passed and changes are needed to modernize the legislation and ensure that the Auditor General has the necessary access to information to enable oversight, accountability and governance in the public sector through auditing.

The bill drafted aims to strengthen the Office of the Auditor General as it continues to conduct performance audits, provide independent oversight and ensure the public dollars and other resources are being used in the most effective way possible.

Speaker, the proposed bill will modernize the act, align the province's legislation with other jurisdictions in Canada, increase access to information and enhance the scope of the Auditor General. These changes are being put forward after considerable conversations and meetings with the Office of the Auditor General who was supportive of the legislation being introduced here in for second reading.

Currently the Auditor General is responsible for audits, financial statements and accounts of the province and has the authority to make any examinations that are necessary to complete that work.

In practise, he or she also conducts performance audits which go beyond the scope of financial affairs. Performance audits review the wider issues of an organization or program and whether it's achieving the objective goals and economic efficiency. They are sometimes often referred to as value-for-money audits because they can advise whether there is value received for the money that's being spent. Language in the act is updated to reflect this practice.

Speaker, the Auditor General can also undertake a special assignment request by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, the House of Assembly or the Public Accounts Committee. This can be a matter related to financial affairs, to public property or to a person or organization who has received financial aid.

This power remains in the new act. Notably, the Auditor General will also now be able to audit, as necessary, persons and organizations that have received government funding. The ability to audit persons including corporations and organizations in receipt of government funding will be on a go-forward basis from the commencement of this section of this legislation. This will not apply retroactively.

I must note that the intention of these changes is not to single out individuals in receipt of funding. It applies to funding that is material, meaning an amount that would matter to the public.

Speaker, the scope of the Auditor General will also be expanded by making it the auditor of all Crown corporations and agencies. Essentially,

the Auditor General will have a right of first refusal to audit Crown agencies and corporations.

The current practice sees certain Crown agencies and Crown corporations contract agents to conduct audits on their behalf. With this proposed legislation, the Auditor General will be able to audit by default and will be the body responsible for contracting external auditors to conduct audits on their behalf.

Delayed commencement is included in the draft bill to ensure the Office of the Auditor General and government have sufficient time to review resources and implement the changes needed.

Speaker, any time we can enhance transparency and accountability to the public, we should do so. In a recent report from the C. D. Howe Institute on financial transparency in Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador received a C plus, placing us in the middle of the pack. But, Mr. Speaker, we want to be leaders. To that end, access to information is enhanced in the new proposed act. The Auditor General will be able to access Cabinet records when it's necessary as a part of an audit.

Information regarding financial decisions of Cabinet and Cabinet records including explanations, analysis, policy options related to public expenditures can be exempted. This will exclude the deliberations of Cabinet, which is an important provision to ensure that ministers can continue to have frank and open debates on important matters before Cabinet.

Speaker, the proposed amendments in the *Auditor General Act, 2021* also has some teeth when it comes to offences that have been included and defined under the act. The penalty for obstructing is up to \$1,000 or up to three months in prison.

Finally, Speaker, there are a number of general updates also being proposed. This includes noting that the deputy Auditor General would be a position now in legislation, clarifying that audit working papers are not subject to ATIPPA, and that the Auditor General cannot serve in a public office for one year post-position.

Speaker, I close by referencing the *Memorial University Act*, as I know Members opposite have been calling for the Auditor General to have greater access and insight into Memorial University and its operations. The Auditor General can currently, as per the *Memorial University Act*, audit the Board of Regents of the university. This is not changing, but as the proposed *Auditor General Act, 2021* applies to all departments, Crown agencies and Crown-controlled corporations, the Auditor General will be responsible now for appointing an agent to act on behalf of the Auditor General.

In the same way the Auditor General has the authority to conduct performance audits, section 38(1) of the *Memorial University Act* is repealed so that the Auditor General can determine if significant investments are being managed with due regard to the economy, efficiency and effectiveness. It is a measure of accountability that is needed for a sustained investment.

Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, this legislation was drafted with the input of the current and previous Auditor Generals. We are supportive of the work of the office and I believe this legislation gives them the tools required to ensure public funds are being used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

I look forward to the debate this afternoon from my hon. colleagues to the changes in the *Auditor General Act, 2021*.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

We, too, will be supportive of Bill 36, the *Auditor General Act, 2021*. I think it's something that's definitely needed.

The minister alluded to the C. D. Howe report which was called *Good, Bad and Incomplete: Grading the Fiscal Transparency of Canada's Senior Governments, 2021*. As the minister identified, Newfoundland and Labrador was given a C-plus grade.

Officials have indicated that when they were identifying some of the legislative changes, which needed to occur for some time, I think this report was actually their precipitance to finalizing the legislative change and actually bringing them into the House.

Again, the *Auditor General Act* in itself, I don't think has undergone any significant updating since probably 1991. It's long overdue. These amendments, these changes in the legislation will modernize the AG legislation so that it will be in line, as the minister said, with the practices of other jurisdictions and certainly increase the transparency and accountability of public funds and public spending.

In going through each of the explanatory notes and looking at what the will bill do, they amend the definition of audits so that it's not limited to financial audits. I mean, the Auditor General does currently perform performance audits even though the existing legislation is not clear on whether or not they have the authority to do so. Obviously, this bill and the new act will now provide explicit clarity and authority to the Auditor General to perform those performance audits. Something that all of us in this House would agree with.

Section 18 of the bill actually gives a definition of a performance audit and it notes that it goes deeper than financial controls. It's looking at internal systems and controls; compliance with policy, legislation or appropriations; performance monitoring and reporting; and the governance, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of any activity, program, process or function. Something that was needed for a long time in the accountability for public spending. Again, something that we totally agree with.

The *Auditor General Act* says it confirms the Lieutenant-Governor in Council's authority to appoint a deputy Auditor General. Again, current legislation doesn't specify the position or the role of the deputy Auditor General. This proposed legislation includes section 11, which notes there will be a deputy Auditor General that will be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Auditor General.

It talks about it confirms the Auditor General's authority to conduct an audit of the performance of a department, an agency of the Crown and a Crown-controlled corporation. Clearly, that is something that everyone in this House has been asking for and talking about for a while now.

The minister alluded to the university, but it will change, this legislation – the Auditor General will become the auditor of record for all government departments, agencies, boards and commissions. The AG will have the decision-making power to determine whether they want to carry out the audit themselves or if they will contract it out, as the minister said, to another auditor. It leaves that decision in the hands of the Auditor General. So, clearly, they will be the ones to decide on whether or not to use an outside agency or not.

Having the Auditor General review all of the ABCs means that the Auditor General can now follow the money from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador clearly to the ABCs. Again, something that all of us in this House would certainly agree with.

We've also talked about the performance audits that I just mentioned and the other ones.

The private corporations and not-for-profits receiving Government of Newfoundland and Labrador funding: The Auditor General will now have the ability to audit any public money which has been given to a private business, charities, community groups, et cetera, to ensure that the public funds has been spent in accordance with the intentions for which the money was given.

Again, as the minister alluded to, a very key piece of this: The Auditor General will be given access, and greater access, to government records, including Cabinet records. That is something, again, I think that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador would want to see to ensure that we have full openness and accountability and a process entitled.

Again, the minister alluded to the enforcements and the penalties. Speaker, as I said, we are in favour of this and look forward to it passing. I'll have more to say when we get to questions.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

I do applaud government on doing what they said they would do, especially when it comes to the Auditor General because, as we know, when we ask questions – and there's an hon. colleague behind me I'm sure who is itching to speak about this as well – we have to make sure that accountability and what we do is transparent as much as possible, especially when it comes to public funds and the public purse.

We hear it all the time, we can go back to Nalcor, we can go back to dozens of different entities and stuff over time that people asked; they wanted these audits done, they wanted stuff looked at. Now that we have actually even added performance in there, as well, it gives at least a sense that, you know, we can keep track of what we do for the public, how we do it and make sure that the public is getting what they pay for. That's the most important thing, is that they get the services and stuff that they paid for.

We have our challenges and stuff like that, but we also have to make sure that we can look into it; the Auditor General has the ability to look into it and that the accountability is there when it comes to this.

I applaud government there, especially on this. I know we talked about the C. D. Howe ratings and that we were a C plus in there, but when you do a jurisdictional scan, we're now going to fall in line with all the A-plus provinces. This is where we should be going. This is where we should be heading.

We also need to remember that we have to keep going back and checking to make sure that we do give the Auditor General the resources and the ability to keep track of everything that's going on within the government when it comes to the public purse, but also when it comes to delivery of services. And to make sure that we are giving the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador the best possible services, spending the

money on the best possible ways, that they can rely and trust that they are getting what they've paid for and there are no two ways about it.

With that, I do say we do support this bill. We do support the work of the Auditor General going forward, especially with her new expanded role.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

This is certainly a very welcomed piece of legislation that we're debating on the floor of the House of Assembly today, from my perspective.

I just want to first of all acknowledge the government in bringing this forward. As I've said in this House many times, when government does something that I think is a good thing, I'm the first to acknowledge and congratulate them for doing so. I think we've had some good legislation thus far as it relates to the code of conduct for municipalities, as an example, as well as the *Disabilities Act*, another great piece of legislation. I think the all-terrain vehicles legislation that was recently passed with a few minor tweaks that the minister is going to look at – a couple she's already made and a couple of others she's going to look at – it's all good stuff.

I think it's important that we have these debates. Sometimes we're going to agree and sometimes we're going to disagree on certain things, like the *Lotteries Act*, for example, that I still have grave concerns about. I'll get to that when we get to third reading. But as it relates to this piece of legislation, I think it's good for the province.

Now, some of the things here – it talks about strengthening the Office of the Auditor General, it talks about agencies, boards and commissions and so on. So we're not confused, the Auditor General already had the ability to go into agencies, boards and commissions. It's making the Auditor General the auditor by default, if you will. That all ABCs have to go to for

financial audits, which right now some of them don't have to and now they will. That's for the financial piece.

The biggest issue, for me at least, is not just the financial audit – because any auditor can come in and do a financial audit – it's really the performance audits, the value-for-money, adherence to government policy, adherence to checks and balances and so on. That's really where the true value comes to having an Auditor General going in and looking at these matters. At least for me, that's where it's at. Unfortunately, over the years we haven't necessarily – the Auditor General's office has done great work in a number of areas, but of course it comes down to having the appropriate resources in place at the Auditor General's office to do that work.

I don't know if I'd call it a concern, but one of the points I would make with all of this is that if we are going to be enhancing the role of the Auditor General, if we are going to be widening the scope to some degree – I know we are widening the scope in terms of Memorial University. It's my understanding that as it currently sits, without the passing of this legislation the Auditor General can approach Memorial University, I believe, and it's up to MUN whether or not they want to let the Auditor General in.

If the Auditor General is let in to MUN, for example, the Auditor General can say, well, I want to look at A, B and C. MUN has the ability at the moment to say, well, you can look at A and B, but we don't want you to look at C. The Auditor General has no right to demand to look at C, so to speak.

That's a big problem when you look at the money that's been pumped into Memorial University over the years, taxpayers' money. Albeit, it's a first-class institution – not knocking that, not knocking any of those things – but it is operating with total autonomy. There have been issues at Memorial University, there has been questionable spending practices brought to light in just recent weeks at Memorial.

You look at the infrastructure deficit that they have at Memorial and you have to ask the

question was the appropriate funding going into maintenance and so on? Was there money spent in certain areas where it was perhaps needed to be directed in other areas? I'm not saying that things weren't done properly or above board, but the point is that from the public's point of view there's no true public scrutiny at Memorial University. This will allow that to happen and that is something I will definitely support 1,000 per cent, Speaker.

Again, the more responsibility that we give the Auditor General, the Auditor General's office – and if we believe in the concept of the Auditor General's work, of this idea of constantly reviewing programs and policies and ensuring that they're meeting their goals, to ensure that they're being administered the way they're supposed to administer, to ensure that we're getting the best value for money spent in all agencies, boards and commissions. If we really believe that to be true – and I'm sure we all do – then I think equally we have to recognize that if we're going to be adding to the load given to the Auditor General, then there has to be appropriate resources provided to that office to do that particular work.

If not, all we're going to do is we're going to say that agencies, boards, commissions and departments, which may receive an audit from the AG's office once every – I don't know – 20 years, we might have to wait for 40 years by the time they get around to it, because there'll be so much to do with the same amount of resources. This only works and has the desired effect, to my mind at least – maybe I'm missing something. That's quite possible. But it only works if the AG's office has the appropriate resources to do the work that needs to be done.

I'll just point to an example of that, Speaker. I'm not going to read it all word for word here but on August 18, 2016, I wrote then Auditor General, Terry Paddon, and I asked for a review of Nalcor – August 2016. I won't read the whole letter but I did suggest some items that needed to be looked into: A review of Nalcor's board and management structure; benefits, remunerations, bonuses expenses of board members, executive and management employees; a review of the actions taken by the former board of directors and CEO following the Liberty report and, in

particular, justification as to why bonuses were paid in Nalcor following DarkNL.

I asked them to look at Nalcor's procurement policy and the application of same; a review of all contracts which have been let as it relates to the Muskrat Falls Project; review of conflict of interest allegations that were made by the former chair of the board of directors of Nalcor before they all resigned en masse; verification that no conflicts have existed by any individuals while serving on the board, either the individual who was accused of being in a conflict at the time or others who may be in a conflict of interest; and of course I said any other matters that you, as the Auditor General, feel necessary to restore the people's faith in the operations of Nalcor.

That was on August 18, 2016. I followed up with another letter on September 20, 2016, to Mr. Paddon. After a meeting that we had, he came to my office and we had a meeting. I wrote him again following that meeting and in this particular letter I'm asking him to add to that agenda to look at the idea of conflict of interest and how the new CEO of Nalcor who replaced Mr. Martin, how it is that he could be permitted to have up to 5 per cent shares in Fortis while holding the office of CEO of Nalcor, how that could not be considered a conflict of interest. Particularly given the fact that the former CEO, in his contract, it explicitly said he could not have any shares but, for some reason, the new CEO could have up to 5 per cent shares, how was that not a conflict of interest. I asked to have that looked into.

In November of 2016 the Auditor General came out and did a news conference over on Pippy Place. I was there and sat at the table when he was doing it. He said he was going to go into Nalcor. I wrote him in November confirming that and thanking him for doing so, and I further asked him that we need to look into the *Public Procurement Act* and how that relates to Nalcor. Because apparently the *Public Procurement Act* when it comes to Nalcor in terms of the day-to-day operations, they have to follow the *Public Procurement Act* but when it came to Muskrat Falls or any project that they're undertaking, they can just throw the Public Tender Act out the window and award contracts and so on to whoever they feel like without following the Public Tender Act and with all the information

shielded by the *Energy Corporation Act* so they hide everything they're doing. So I contacted him about that.

I have another one here on March 3, 2017, where I wrote Mr. Paddon again. This particular letter related to the allegations that were made which later became subject of the Muskrat Fall inquiry. Issues about cost estimates being lowballed and risk reports being hidden and so on. I explained the urgency that he needs to look at that as well.

That's in March 2017, so it started in August 18, 2016 and now we're into 2017. Of course, Mr. Paddon moved on and then we had a new Auditor General, Ms. Mullaley. I met with her, went over all the letters, the same thing again with her: Oh, yes we're working on it. We're going to go in blah blah blah. Then –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I've been very lenient on relevance. So just try and stick to the bill.

P. LANE: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

P. LANE: The point I'm trying to make, to be relevant here, Mr. Speaker, is that it comes down to we can change this legislation, which is a good thing – and I am not knocking the legislation. I'm not knocking this government; I'm supporting them. I absolutely am. But the point I'm making is from 2016 I started. I've gone through 3½ Auditors General because we had an interim Auditor General before the new one – I forget the lady. She was the assistant Auditor General. She replaced Ms. Mullaley until Ms. Hanrahan came into place; I can't think of her name. She was sort of like an interim.

So three regulars and an interim. I've had conversations, meetings, letters, whatever with all of them. Here we are it is 2021, soon going to be 2022 and we still haven't seen the report – still haven't seen the report. So from 2016 to 2022 is six years later – six years later.

My point is that if we're going to enhance the function of the Auditor General's office, which I

100 per cent support, then we need to make sure the resources are there so that we can get to these very pressing matters. I can say to you, certainly during that time period and leading up to the LeBlanc inquiry and everything else, that was probably a big thing on the radar of a lot of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – still is, what's going on at Nalcor.

Now, I will acknowledge the minister of energy or whatever it's called – he knows what I mean. He's come in and brought in some changes to look at the salaries and all that kind of bonuses, and I commend him for that. We have seen the oil and gas moved out. Nalcor will be going under some sort of a transition, whatever it's going to look like.

I'm not saying that they're not listening and not making some changes – and that's a good thing, too. I will support every change they make, if they make sense, in that regard. But I'm using this as a prime example of where it's fine on paper to make changes but if the resources are not in place so that those things are going to work effectively, then the changes on paper are not worth the paper they're written on. That's my only point.

That's not suggesting that the government is not going to resource the office and make sure it's done. I'm not even suggesting that, so I don't want it to be taken as a negative because it's really not. I'm just making the point that we got to make sure that we do that.

So, overall, as long as the office has the resources, making these changes is a good thing. Like I said, MUN, that's a good one. I think, as I raised yesterday with the Minister of Education, when we look at the Francophone school district and some of the allegations that were made there, perhaps that's somewhere where the AG needs to have a look. I'm sure there are lots of places where the AG could have a look underneath the hood. We've seen issues raised in many departments and so on.

The big one for me, really, is – well certainly Nalcor – but agencies, boards and commissions in particular having more of a presence of the Auditor General involved in those operations, I think, are critical. Because they've really been

sort of doing what they want for years and years and years with little scrutiny, to my mind.

That's why I also support that the government did talk about this in the budget and I hope that this is actually going to happen. They said it will, and I have every confidence it will, that we're going to have more access to the ABCs through the budget process or maybe a separate process so that elected Members of this House of Assembly can start holding those agencies, boards and commissions to account. Because for far too long – far too long – a lot of these entities have operated with total autonomy.

That doesn't mean the people on the boards are bad people or they're doing things wrong; I'm not saying that at all. But the bottom line is they weren't elected by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The 40 people in this House of Assembly, we were. We were the ones who were put in place to make sure that the government is functioning the way it should and to make sure that their tax dollars are being spent the way they're supposed to be spent. That's our responsibility that we were duly elected to make sure happens.

So between these changes to the *Auditor General Act* and, hopefully, the changes that I will be supporting government on 100 per cent when it comes to us, as legislators, having more access to the books of what's going on in the ABCs and so on, I think these are all positive steps forward, particularly when you look at the financial situation that we're in in this province.

I think I read a news release that government put out yesterday or the day before that talked about the fact that even despite the good fortunes we've had of late in terms of the rising oil prices, which have helped government coffers; not so good for motorists, I would say, Speaker, but certainly for government coffers. Despite that, we're still staring down the barrel of a \$1.5-billion deficit again this year. I think that's what I read. That should be concerning for us all.

So we have to find ways – and I'm sure Members have heard this on all sides of the House from your constituents – before we start looking at jacking up taxes and everything else, people are saying you have to find ways to cut expenses, to find efficiencies and so on. That's

what the people expect. People can only pay so much in taxes. We have to find ways to be more efficient.

Utilizing the Office of the Auditor General, making sure that the Auditor General's office is a resource so that they – he or she, whoever's doing it on behalf of that office – can do their work, do it effectively, get as many audits done as possible so that we can find where money is not being spent effectively and efficiently and we can make changes, hopefully, to the better, that's what the people want.

This is a step in the right direction. It's a step in the right direction. So, once again, despite the fact that sometimes Members get mad at me, on both sides of the House, actually, from time to time, and that's fair game. Despite that, the bottom line is I said from day one that if the government does something good, I'll be the first one to acknowledge it and if there are things that I don't agree with or I think need to be taken a different direction, I'll make sure I'm heard on that too; no one will shut me down in either case.

But in this particular case, once again, that's at least four or five pieces of great legislation in the last couple of weeks that I can think of – this is one of them. It's good and I acknowledge it.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the bill.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I marvel sometimes at the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, he can speak for a few minutes and he can put 20 minutes together, sometimes longer. I don't know. He seems to make sense; he makes sense to himself.

I looked at the clock and we were at about five minutes left and I said: B'y, he's after carrying on without getting called out for relevance. Shortly after you called him. I respect where he's come from. He's been here a long time and I know the AG issue has always been a very

important one with Nalcor and he has indeed spoken many times about it. I give credit where credit is due.

Speaker, this bill, Bill 36, I don't think it's a contentious bill. Obviously, it's not. I think we're all kind of saying we're agreeing, but that doesn't preclude us from having some commentary and some viewpoints on this legislation.

We see the AG – and it's a broad term sometimes. It's almost like – I wouldn't like to use the word – it's not a tool. It's a very important office, but it's what we all feel is the foundation of what we all do. I served on Public Accounts for several years and the AG is a very – Public Accounts is a very powerful Committee, obviously, but the AG, who obviously is a part of that Committee and reports directly to that Committee, you don't realize the emphasis and importance that this office has on the overall spending of public money.

I've seen that first-hand. We keep saying sometimes, and you'll hear the public say they're calling for the AG to come in. Long before I came to this Legislature, when I read on the news or I watched the House of Assembly or whatever, there was a letter written to the AG to come in and investigate something. That was really, really serious.

I know we're in the middle of this now and you're in your bubble, we're in here, but when I was on the outside that was a very serious matter when you called the AG in to investigate something. It just shows the level of respect the general public and, I guess, we all should have for that office. I mean, it's about the office and its powers.

Now, we're giving it new powers and I think that's wonderful to be able to expand. I know I've called and we've called, as a caucus, our party as the Opposition, has called the AG to go in and look at the books at MUN. I think more and more each day that becomes more and more evident. I think I've been on record; I would like to see it done sooner than later to be honest with you. If this was part of redoing the MUN Act, getting the AG in there, I think I would rather do it months ago, but it's never too late. We're moving in that direction and I'm hopeful this

session will see the MUN Act come up for debate.

But I think it's very important to never lose sight of the importance of the AG's office and what that office actually means. It's not about the individuals. It's the Office of the AG. It's always been very powerful. I think it's needed.

We look at performance audits, you know, you're going through the bill, the ABCs, but there was a time when every time you looked at the AG, it was about dollars and cents. But when you get a better understanding, really, of what audits really need to be about, sometimes it don't include dollars and cents. It all tracks back to dollars and cents, everything we do in life, but it's the operations. You're getting into the departments: Are the processes followed right?

We just recently, with the ferry contracts, with Public Accounts – actually, I sat on the Public Accounts Committee when we asked for the AG to look at those, how the process worked.

At the end of the day, people were caught up in the cost of the ferries, but we asked the question to go in – because there were all kinds of questions being bandied about, about how the contracts were done and how these were – procurement, really.

The AG went in and did a deep dive into the process. Obviously, there was a dollar figure attached to the public purse, but the processes, you know, how tendering was done, how staff operated, how inspections were done. It gets down to the really bare bones.

An Auditor General's work sometimes is not always sat in an office; it's not always sat in an office in front of a computer with a cellphone and the phone in a boardroom. Sometimes it's boots on the ground. You have to go out and see, meet with people. It's quite different. It's not a regular accounting job. It's much more involved. I've got an accounting background but it's not an auditing background. It's two different things.

Sometimes you lose sight of really what's involved. Sometimes it's not that glamorous, but it's such a fundamental function of our

institutions and without it – I mean, it is the foundation we're built on.

When you're elected to the House of Assembly you become very acquainted with the Green report. But how that report was derived, and I'm sure most Members in the House recall – most weren't here, I think a couple might have been here. I know one was definitely here, two probably were here, but most weren't. It was based on the AG actually being able to come in and review the operations of the day, of the House of Assembly. They were never allowed to come in before.

A prime example of giving them that ability, giving them power to come in and do so, because a lot of our legislation, a lot of departments throughout government – the AG can ask to go in anywhere but some have the right – as MUN does right now – to say yea or nay.

That's a flaw in our legislation, obviously, and the powers and that's going to change, obviously, after all of this is done and the MUN Act is reviewed.

The AG came in and it shook the foundation of the House of Assembly. It shook the foundation of our Legislature, which is a very powerful thing. I remember very well and it was all as a result of transparency. It was let's open the books and let's get in and see.

So the work they did, it wasn't a good time. It wasn't a happy time for a lot of people in this Legislature, as history will show. The end result was no one questioned the work of the AG. It was a very painful time for a lot of people, but it was necessary.

The same thing applies anytime the AG goes in anywhere. You don't know, you're opening the books and opening the doors. If everything is done above board and you're following the rules, you have nothing to worry about. Ninety – I suppose I can't per cent it but I would say, the vast majority, that's the case, or it's innocent mistakes or things we could do better. I think that is somewhat where you get into some kind of performance audits. As governments, we could always be better. As individuals, you can

always be better but, as governments, we can always be better.

I liken it to sometimes you sit back and have honest moments of reflection and you look back and you could have done something better or you could have done something different. No doubt a lot of ministers in government, when they're sitting in their offices, they think about that. I remember, pre-2015, I spent a lot of time around ministers and it was nice to know they always reflected. You rehash things and you sit back and say maybe that wasn't the right decision. Maybe this was done wrong. But you do it for the right reasons.

All an AG will do, if an AG happened to come in – they do performance audits on departments just as a regular yearly business type thing. It is part of their existence. Coming back and telling you what could be done better – it is not a witch hunt, I guess, is what I'm trying to say. What could be done better and what could be improved upon, that's a very valuable function, too.

The AG has investigative authorities and abilities and whatever; they can go in – that's what it seems like, but it is not a witch hunt. Once again, it is a very important function. I do know a lot of people out there probably look at it that way. The word comes down the AG is coming in to look at something.

I think, for the most part, that if you're doing things in the right manner, which most are, it is a matter of let's see what we can do better. So when you see a review of Public Accounts or they will go back a few years after the report and do a follow-up on how many recommendations were implemented, that is very powerful, too. We come into the House of Assembly and a lot of times we ask those questions about was this implemented or that implemented or what have you. But it is given more credence; it is about the powers of the AG and what the AG has the ability to do.

That brings all governments into account. We live in that world within the core government. So to increase powers and abilities for the AG to come in and do this in ABCs, it's like the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said – and I agree; it is a really good thing. When we get

into some of the – the deputy AG, there was clarity given to that. I mean, some of this stuff is pretty routine. But I think that it's very important for us to look at what, I suppose, processes in government – I guess we shouldn't be waiting for the AG to come in and oversee and tell us what we done wrong. I think we all should be striving to do better.

My commentary when I started saying we can all do better and government departments can do better and make us more functional – I know that's an ideal world, but maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea for all through government – I mean, we're spending public money. It's the public purse. That's no light matter. As I said, my time on Public Accounts, when you sit on Public Accounts – we'll go in and have public hearings with different entities within government and the AG partakes in that and advises you and whatnot but, at the end of the day, again, you're sitting with Public Account members who have a very important role to do; you're analyzing the public money, the public purse. There's no slight matter.

So when go back to MUN, for instance, a lot of money has been spent. I'm not going down that road for the sake of relevance but there's a lot of money been spent a MUN that I think anyone in this House and most people in this province want to step back and say hang on, have a deeper thought into this spending. Is this needed? Is this necessary? You hear it all. Why are you doing this if you're doing that? Why are you doing this if you're not doing that? Now we're going to get that. We're going to get that right throughout.

Again, I commend government for bringing it forward. I think that the AG's office needed this. I look forward to, I guess – when I say look forward, but hopefully the AG gets in and if things are not up to scratch, bring them up to scratch and keep departments and agencies performing because at the end of the day it is public money and it's a very important matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's an honour to speak again in the House of Assembly and to speak on this piece of legislation, Bill 36, the *Auditor General Act, 2021*. There are a number of things that I'd like to point out, Speaker, on this important legislation but, first of all, I think it's important that we look at the role of the Office of the Auditor General in Newfoundland and Labrador. I think that's important, just by way of background, to emphasize the important role that the Office of the Auditor General has in our government.

It is an independent, legislative auditor of government, its departments, all agencies of the Crown and Memorial University of Newfoundland. I think that's important to understand the relevance of the Auditor General and the important functions that it plays within our government.

The *Auditor General Act*, which is the subject of this legislation, implicit in that act is the requirement for the Auditor General to provide the House of Assembly with important, timely, relevant information that is necessary to, in essence, enhance the public sector accountability and performance.

So I think when I look at this legislation, Speaker, it seems to me that the main purpose of it, if we were to generalize, is about transparency. For that reason, I feel that this is something I think is warranted, this legislation is warranted and I am certainly in agreement with it in its overall intent.

One of the things that I've noted is that the C. D. Howe Institute – and it's been mentioned – released a report back in September of this year. It looked at the transparency piece, the fiscal transparency of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. In that report, it's important to note that we didn't receive a very good grade.

That, I think, is important to note because it certainly acknowledges that there was time for change, that legislative changes were necessary with respect to this act. When we look at the C. D. Howe, for example, we know that is a reputable organization; it's a non-profit

organization which focuses on research. When they completed this report, it obviously showed that it was time for us to look at this legislation and the gaps that were there.

We also know that the *Auditor General Act* has not been modified or hasn't really undergone any significant changes for many years. It's quite out of date when we look at 1991, as I understand the last significant changes that took place. That clearly does show that there was time for us to look at this legislation.

It's not only about the piece of transparency; it's about modernization. We need to understand that when we have modernization of legislation and then we have, as well, transparency, we're going to have accountability; we're going to have increased accountability. With respect to the Auditor General's role and the Office of the Auditor General, who is responsible for public funds and public spending, this is very important to take place: more transparency, more accountability.

When I look at this legislation I do see as well that there's an attempt to ensure that there are housekeeping measures that are put in place. That's always good, because we see that the current legislation that's in place, the language was in need of modernization. We know that language is very important when we're speaking of legislation and that we have to improve language. That it's more precise, that it's clear and in plain language and in plain English.

I think the current legislation, for example, used phrases like "immediately" when referencing timelines in which the AG must provide reports and so forth to the House of Assembly. Well, immediately is somewhat vague. I think the new legislation will now use the phrase "at the earliest opportunity," just to provide clarity to the language.

Of course, when we see housekeeping measures like that come into play, I'm sure that we'll all agree that that's a good improvement in any legislation.

One of the things that I notice with this legislation, Speaker, is the expansion of the scope of the Auditor General with respect to the powers and the authority. There are a couple of

sections within the proposed legislation that we need to really look at and make sure. Because, of course, when we expand powers, we also have to be very mindful of the implications of that enhancing of powers to a body within government.

So currently the agencies, boards and commissions, they're able to appoint their own auditor under the current legislation. But this is going to change and the Auditor General will now become the auditor of records for all government departments, agencies, boards and commissions.

When we see this new change is it a good thing? Is this a worthwhile change? Well, I would suggest that it probably in all likelihood is. The reason is because it will provide – in my estimation – more oversight. It's an oversight measure that will be more comprehensive and will give the Auditor General the ability to ensure that there are no gaps or cracks.

For example, having the Auditor General review agencies, boards and commissions means now that the Auditor General can follow the money from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to the agencies, boards and commissions. That I would suggest is a good thing. It's a follow-through, it's a way to ensure that there's a comprehensive oversight from one process to another. I would suggest that expansion of powers is, in my view, not a bad thing.

When we look at another feature of this legislation, Speaker, with respect to expanding powers, private corporations and not-for-profits who are receiving government funding. What's going to happen with this now is that the Auditor General will now have the ability to audit any public money, which has been given to private businesses, charities, community groups, et cetera, to ensure that the public funds have been spent in accordance with the intentions.

I would submit that's a pretty wide-sweeping power that will be granted to the Auditor General. Yes, I would think that that's important for transparency, but I do wonder about that and I think that's something we need to look at, expanding these powers. I would ask: Do other provinces have this legislative authority? Is there

consistency? Is there precedent for this across the country?

I also worry a little bit about that when we have non-profits who receive government funding; we know that many non-profits are very small agencies and organizations who may not have the capacity and have that ability to do sophisticated accounting. How is that going to impact your small non-profits who play such an important role in our communities? We certainly don't want to be hindering them. I wonder what will be in place to provide that kind of support for our non-profits in our society.

Those are some of the issues that I thought were important. We need to be mindful of the expansion of powers and that we have proper oversight to ensure that there's not going to be any kind of excessive use of powers. I mean, we need to make sure that there is also a watchdog involved there as well.

But I'm all for transparency. I think that's so important in our government offices and bodies, so as to ensure accountability because they go hand in hand. If we don't have transparency, we're not going to have accountability and that's certainly a problem for us.

As legislators, I would think that this is an important piece of legislation, but we do have to be mindful of some of the concerns that exist with expanding powers. I would think that this is a welcome piece of legislation that I would be in favour of.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Always glad to have an opportunity to speak to a bill in this House.

When I look at this bill, I think about something that the Member from CBS said. He spoke about how we can do better and be better. The reality of it is that's what the audit process is all about, no matter where you work in life or what you

do. If you're in the industry and you're working on aircraft or marine vessels or if it's financial, the whole situation with an audit is it's to evaluate how you got to the point you are, either from a financial or a performance standpoint.

So this bill is really good timing, obviously. I mean, even today in the House we had a conversation about external audits. Although we didn't get an answer, perhaps if there were audits done we wouldn't be where we are today.

When I think about the powers of the Auditor General and their ability to have a look through government's business, it's really good to see that they're able now to expand into the ABCs and have more jurisdiction. The reality of it is, is that we need to be held accountable, I guess, and the Auditor General, when she does her audits, she looks at everything with a microscope. That microscope not only assures the public that we're doing what we're supposed to do but it enables us to do a better job as legislators and our ability to perform. While we all think we're making the right decisions, it's very educational for us to understand where we made mistakes in the past so we don't recreate those same mistakes.

The fact that this piece of legislation hasn't done any significant updating since 1991 speaks volumes also, I mean, it's 30 years later so it's time for this to happen.

The Auditor General's office, right now, is obviously very busy. When they begin an audit, we know that the process sometimes takes years. So one major thing about this bill that concerns me is whether or not they will have the resources, as the Member from Mount Pearl - Southlands said, to expand what they do, whether that's hiring an external agency or doing stuff in-house. I believe that it will take significant resources and money in order for them to expand their capability in a timely fashion where it serves us as legislators in a way that this bill is designed to do that.

You look no further than auditing of the ABCs, plus their regular role and any special assignment task that they have to do. An Auditor General really has to make a decision between which audits they do when they look at this. Perhaps there needs to be some consideration as

to the resources and their funding when we do this.

If you look at their past history and the audits they did, I think that the act could go further and give them broader stroke and broader ability to make sure that previous recommendations have been implemented. I'm not sure that they've always gotten the level of support that they require with regard to recommendations and recommendations not being implemented.

When they go back and they do an audit of the recommendations as suggested, they don't always get a clear answer. They get partial answers. We've started to do the recommendations; we've started to initiate. Or some departments, it's finalized, but if it's a broad stroke recommendation across several departments, some departments implement in full and others don't implement at all. So it really puts them in a tough situation with regard to not only their recommendations, but how do they push through with them.

The appointment of the deputy Auditor General obviously is a welcome thing, and I would hope that it gives the AG more authority or more ability and a larger comfort area for her task at hand – or his, whoever it may be at the time.

When we talk about the *Memorial University Act* – when the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands mentioned the *Memorial University Act* and we listened to how we can appoint an agent to act on behalf of the Auditor General, that's a really big statement. Because now it allows them, if they don't have time, to appoint someone on their behalf to work under the Auditor General in order to do these audits.

Again, the one thing that comes to my mind is while they have the ability to appoint, whose budget does it come from? So does it come from Memorial University's or any ABC, whichever ABC they're auditing? Who pays for this audit? Is it the Auditor General's office, or is the ABC? So it's not clear in the bill, but it'd be interesting to see how that comes out.

When you look at audits and the purpose of an audit, like I said a few minutes ago, the purpose of an audit is clearly so we understand all the processes. It doesn't matter if the audit is a

performance audit or a financial audit. It shows a clear, decisive trail of how things started and how you ended up. And it gives departments and legislators and everyone involved the ability to go back and review the process that they were involved in and score themselves, really. Although the AG is scoring individuals as they do these audits, it also allows us to internalize processes that we followed to get to a point.

I guess some departments aren't always welcome to the criticism that they receive, and I'm certain that's the case, but that doesn't mean that it isn't a good process. The reality is that when we look inside of our own ways of doing business we'll always win because, like I say, we come in this House and we have discussions and vote on things that we don't all agree on. We can't all be right all the time. When the AG does an audit, she certainly goes through a complete process to come to a point in time where she understands how we got there, how decisions were made, how money was spent and whether it was prosperous or whether it was a waste of time. So this act certainly does all of that.

Again, I'll go back to the resources. It's okay to implement these extra powers and authorities for the AG, but if they don't have the ability to act on them it will create larger issues, and I think that's very, very important to understand. We can broaden any scope of any department in all of government, but if they don't have the ability to act on the powers we give them, they will fail every time. I do believe that we can speed up some of these audit processes by perhaps expanding their resources or going outside. When you add more, when you're looking at adding ABCs and other components to this, you have to consider the fact that a department that's already pretty overworked will probably be much slower again.

The amendments to change in this legislation, they're being brought in to modernize the act and modernization of any of the acts that we do in this House is very important. I mean, in my brief two years here, it seems like most of the legislation that we're changing, most of that hasn't been touched in 20, 25 or 30 years. So it's very important for government to modernize. It's extremely important, as we see. But as we modernize we also need to understand the path

that we took to get there, so it's important that we don't overlook that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on that note, I will say I support the changes in this act. I think it's long overdue. I do believe that it's beneficial to not only us as legislators, but to government as a whole. It allows the AG to have a broader scope of service and to do things that should've been brought in a long time ago. I believe it's important for ABCs and anywhere where government money is involved, I believe that it's important that the ability to audit that money is there. I also think that it's important that we broaden the ability to do performance audits.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll start by saying this a wonderful step in the right direction, no doubt about it, when it comes to accountability. The Government House Leader, just to quote him in his initial remarks, he said: Any time we can enhance transparency and accountability, we should do so. That was his quote, and we want to be leaders. I don't think you'd get any argument on this side of the House. Any time we can enhance transparency and accountability, we think we should do so. So that's the crux of this legislation.

Who are we accountable to? It's the public. The public are who we're accountable to. It's their funds, it's their tax dollars and I would like to know, to the best of anyone's knowledge, where that money's being spent, where is it going, is it being spent well.

It wasn't that long ago we actually voted – I think we were unanimous in the appointment of the current Auditor General, Ms. Denise Hanrahan. Many of us know her, know her work, and I don't think there was anyone who had anything negative to say about her appointment.

So this piece of legislation, it might put a bit of added workload, but it's certainly going to be

something that I'm sure she's quite capable of dealing with.

If I walk down through the bill – and of course the definition of audit –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

(Inaudible) too loud.

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

P. DINN: Thank you.

So we're amending the definition of "audit." The good thing about this is it's not limited to financial audits only, and that's a good thing. For anyone who's been in government or anyone who's been a minister or a deputy or worked within government, when we're dealing with budgets, there's always pockets of funding that's available. And those pockets of funding, some people will refer to them as use it or lose it. So you have this funding and the way to be successful with that funding is make sure you use it or you won't get it back; you won't have it next year.

I mean, there's some logic to that; but, at the end of the day, isn't that telling you that the project or the program was successful? Yeah, you used your money, but did it meet the needs that it was set up for?

When we say that you can conduct the Auditor General's authority, you know, it's confirming the Auditor General's authority to conduct an audit of the performance – and that's a key word – the performance of a department and agency and a Crown-controlled corporation. When you're looking at performance, you're really looking at a test and from this point of view, the pocket of funding; does it meet the test of public interest efficiency and affordability? We should be looking at that.

I know in my career in government we've done many programs and, at the end of the day, you'll say: Well, we used this money; we funded 500 people and used up the budget. And you'd look at that as a success. But to be able to have the

Auditor General come in and look at the true performance there, you know, you look at: Was the money spent in accordance with the program? Was it successful in the outcomes?

This is something that is key here, too, in terms of accountability. Making sure that the programs that were run were run as they were meant to be and came up with the results that they're intended to be. Because I'll tell you, too, when you're dealing with budgets and programming dollars, especially if they're federally funded programming dollars, and you approach the fourth quarter of the year, the question is: How much money do we have left and how can we get rid of it? I mean, that's just nature because it, again, goes back to that use it or lose it way of thinking. So at least now we can start looking at the performance around it.

I mean, call it what you want; it's been called program review, it's been called organizational review and it's been called streamlining where every department looks within their department to see if there's money that can be saved or what was spent in a proper way, and everyone is operating in silos and you're trying to protect your own turf. I mean, that's what happens. That's what happens when you do a program review. Each department is trying to determine, you know, were they on par with what they should've done and are they going to keep all their resources?

This is not a knock at all on public servants because, I can tell you, our public service are very competent, hard-working individuals. But you have to be measured in some way.

The Auditor General, in this particular instance, being able to come in or appoint someone to come in, with an objective view and look at it and say, yes, they're hitting it. And it's not necessarily – because when you mention program review or organizational review, most public servants, the alarm goes off to say: oh my God, they're cutting. But I think you have to get past that and the fact that we're looking at the performance. I go back to it: How can we do better in terms of public interest? How can we do better in terms of efficiency? How can we do better in terms of affordability?

I mean, that's what it comes down to. It gives your public service that motivation to do better and I would hope it would do it with all the other agencies out there, because we just don't want to be giving money away.

There's a reason you get money, a subsidy or a loan, there's a reason for that. Again, there has to be some accountability there.

This bill also confirms the Lieutenant-Governor in Council's authority to appoint a deputy Auditor General. Smart move. The role of Auditor General comes with huge responsibilities and the Auditor General certainly, he or she, they're held to a level of accountability and transparency that's required. So to provide a deputy Auditor General I think is certainly a good move in the right direction.

Then it also says it will “enhance the auditor general's ability to access cabinet records required to conduct an audit under this Act.” I certainly have no problem with that. I think if we're truly concerned about transparency, openness and accountability, then we should be held to that standard as well. There's no issue with that. I think we need to be held to that standard as well. It's good to see that.

I also look at this next piece here in terms of what the bill would do. It would “require that the auditor general be the auditor for all agencies of the Crown and Crown-controlled corporations unless the auditor general determines it necessary to appoint an auditor to conduct an audit.” Again, big job, many, many ABCs out there that we need to be auditing and to be able to go and get extra assistance there by either contracting out, I think is a necessary piece of work that you have to do.

Again, I spoke to this; it's another point here on: “confirm the auditor general's authority to carry out performance audits.” I think it was already in the bill, to an extent or in a past act, but this confirms a little bit more, gives a little bit more detail to what's included in that. It allows the auditor to broaden the scope of what the audit would involve. It's not just dollars and cents. It's not saying we were given 50 grand to spend; we spent 50 grand. It's not as simple as that.

I really think with this bill, the enhancements to this bill, that the expanded authorities given to the Auditor General and the deputy Auditor General certainly gives them that range to actually – without handing it to the departments, which is what we've done in the past – without handing it to the departments, the Auditor General can now come in or assign someone to come in and in an objective manner, independent manner, really look at – like every minister gets a mandate letter, every department has a role – is that department really performing the way it should.

I started talking about the use it or lose it when it comes to funding; even if there are departments that have programs and they couldn't fund people because they didn't fit in the guidelines for that program, I would hope that the Auditor General, in assessing that, can also say, well, maybe that program could have been expanded.

Because I know all of us get calls on different programs – I won't name whatever program – and for whatever reason, that individual just doesn't fit all the boxes. It hits every tick, tick, tick but there's one that prevents that person from availing of the particular program.

So if the Auditor General can come in, look at the performance, because, at the end of the day, if that individual was given – sorry, if the people delivering the program were given some additional flexibility or some leeway, then maybe those individuals would get in and they would be more successful, perhaps, than the ones who are already in there.

In terms of looking at performance, I think the Auditor General, given that leeway to go in there and define performance and not just look at dollars and cents and did you spend your budget or did you not spend your budget, I think is a huge advantage here.

The background here on the act: As we know, just last month C. D. Howe Institute did a survey, a report. It dealt with the fiscal transparency of the provinces. Again, as I see this, this goes more than just fiscal. Newfoundland and Labrador was given a C plus, so some work to be done.

I think this is headed in the right direction but, again, we go back to some points that have already been made in terms of this act is 30 years now without being amended. It's time for that. The amendments and changes to the legislation being brought in will modernize the Auditor General's legislation so that it is in line with practices of other provinces and other jurisdictions, and to increase transparency and accountability of public funds and public spending. I don't think any of us can argue with that.

I know you have to treat it like it's your own household budget. If you give \$10 or \$20 to your daughter or son going out the door, you want to know where it's being spent. It's as simple as that. You go into a store; you're looking for the best deal. You're not looking for high brand names; you're looking for the best deal.

I mean, I would hope – and I have no thought that it wouldn't happen knowing Ms. Hanrahan, knowing her record in government and knowing how accountable she is and how dedicated to her job. I'm sure she would look at this with a similar lens in saying that if this were my money, how would I want it spent? If this were my money how would I efficiently drag that money further than it should go?

The public out there would look at this and probably not see all the small things within it, but I think if there's a take-away with this bill and the changes that are happening here – again, I go back to the Government House Leader's comments. I think it goes back to any time we can enhance transparency and accountability we should do so. I think this bill is doing that.

I thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the Government House Leader speaks now he will close debate.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Mr. Speaker, it was great this afternoon to have the opportunity to debate this important piece of legislation –

SPEAKER: One second please.

J. DWYER: We're not done talking about the legislation.

SPEAKER: Pardon?

J. DWYER: We're not done talking to the legislation. The reason why we didn't stand up is because I understand there was a deal about going to supper.

SPEAKER: I have no idea.

S. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, (inaudible).

SPEAKER: No one rose.

S. CROCKER: (Inaudible) go to supper between 5 and 6 p.m.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is great to have the opportunity this afternoon to move to Committee on this bill. It's a very important piece of legislation and I look forward to the questions in Committee on this.

I heard some good questions this afternoon from the Members Opposite around things like how this is actually funded and so forth. It is important that when we come back from the supper break, Mr. Speaker, that we will have an opportunity to answer some of those questions.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 36 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act Respecting The Office Of The Auditor General And The Auditing Of The Public Accounts Of The Province. (Bill 36)

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

This bill has now been read a second time.

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

S. CROCKER: Presently.

SPEAKER: Presently.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting The Office Of The Auditor General And The Auditing Of The Public Accounts Of The Province," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 36)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that the house recess until 6 p.m.

SPEAKER: This House do recess until 6 p.m.