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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.

Before we begin, in the Speaker's gallery I'd like to welcome family and friends of Tony Andersen, including his daughter, Julia; and former Nunatsiavut Government Ordinary Member and Speaker, Pat Ford.

Also, Mr. Andersen is tuning in the broadcast from Nain and will be recognized this afternoon in a Member's statement.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Baie Verte - Green Bay, Bonavista, Cape St. Francis, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans and Torngat Mountains.

The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

B. WARR: Speaker, today I rise in this hon. House to recognize a 15-year-old resident of Triton, Grayson Budgell.

Due to the number of iceberg sightings this spring, Craig Budgell was inspired to instill a business work ethic for his son, Grayson, to provide bergy bits to his buddies. With hard work and effort they could bag, store and supply safely harvested iceberg ice for their family and friends.

Once out at sea, Grayson assisted his father in harvesting bergy bits aboard their boat. In the cool of the evening, they chipped, washed and bagged the final product.

After reaching out to Newfoundland iceberg report with the idea of posting online, the

response was phenomenal. The father and son duo travelled across the Island selling the sought-after bergy bits. Grayson, alongside his dad, travelled from Corner Brook to St. John's selling iceberg ice, including supplying ice for two weddings. The iceberg venture was a great success which included the profit covering the cost of a 12-day salmon fishing trip for Grayson and his dad.

I ask my hon. colleagues to join me in congratulating Grayson on his iceberg venture, another Triton entrepreneur to be watched.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Mark Clench of Princeton started a journey on October 4, 2023, to accomplish a dream that most would hesitate to undertake. Aiming to raise money for children, Mark began a bicycle journey from Wabush to Princeton, some 2,000 kilometres away.

During the pandemic's lockdown, Mark struggled with his mental health and relied heavily on his bike and guitar for support. He peddled whenever possible, realizing that solo activities in the great outdoors were safe and therapeutic. Seeking a way to pay it forward, he came across a foundation called Can'd Aid which promoted biking. It also assisted youth in acquiring their own bikes and provided safety lessons in their operation.

Along his travels, Mark highlights to individuals who struggle with mental health that there are resources available via phone as well as walk-in clinics in the more populated areas, both of which he availed of. He hopes individuals struggling with their mental health will reach out to these resources and realize that they are never alone.

I ask the Members of the 50th House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the humanitarian efforts of Mark Clench, from the District of Bonavista, in supporting youth and their mental health.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize a yearly coast-to-coast motorcycle ride across Canada, the Rolling Barrage.

The Rolling Barrage has now completed their seventh year, a ride across Canada bringing awareness to combat the stigma associated with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health concerns for veterans and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, first responders and emergency health care providers. The ride shows strength and unity among members, while at the same time raising the necessary funds and awareness to support programs for those in need.

On Sunday, July 30, the Rolling Barrage rode through my district, thanks to one of the organizers, Chris Sainsbury. Over 50 motorcycles travelled Route 20, stopping in Chris's hometown of Pouch Cove for lunch, photos and important discussion on post-traumatic stress disorder as, Speaker, many wounds are not always visible.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members of this 50th General Assembly to join me in congratulating the Rolling Barrage for another successful ride, for raising the awareness on ending the stigma on post-traumatic stress disorder and to the riders who completed The Full Pull from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Speaker.

Chad Haggett was born February 26, 1975, with the biggest heart this world would ever know. Chad's volunteer and community work in Grand Falls-Windsor and throughout the province proved to be extraordinary.

He was a member of the Corduroy Brook Board of Directors, River Gold weekly volunteer, Special Olympics organizing committee for 2023 and a very proud Lions member. Chad also did some great work with the Crime Stoppers through the years but some of his greatest accomplishments would have been with the Ronald McDonald House Charities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Chad was a giver. He was selfless, kind and generous but, above all, if you knew Chad, you were family. Chad was a pillar of our community and his love was felt across the province. He always put others before himself. Sadly, Chad passed away on September 7, 2023, at the young age of 48.

His team of friends in Grand Falls-Windsor raised \$10,500 in his memory this year as the acts of giving continue in his honour. Chad was a huge political guru. He loved a great political debate but could always put aside politics for friendship. Trust me, I know first-hand.

To my friend, you will forever be missed and always loved. God Bless you, brother.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Tony Andersen has spent a lifetime working towards improving lives of Nunatsiavut people. Not one for public praise, his legacy is significant. Positive change he forged for elders, children and the lives of our people. He lost his father at a young age and attributes his kindness and inner strength to his mother, Muriel, and his brothers and sisters.

Staff throughout the Nunatsiavut Government and the former Labrador Inuit Association, LIA, praised Tony's knowledge and wisdom. How freely he helped them and supported them and, most importantly, the respect and kindness he showed to them.

There are many types of leaders but best legacies are of those who care.

In 1992, he was elected to the LIA board representing Nain. Later, he served as advisor on Aboriginal issues to VBNC. In 2001, he returned to LIA, serving as vice-president and acting president. In 2005, he became first minister of the transitional Nunatsiavut Government. In 2006, Tony was elected to the first official Nunatsiavut Government becoming Nunatsiavut's first, first minister. He served consecutive terms up until his retirement, except a term he served as Nain's AngajukKâk.

His ministerial portfolios included Finance, Human Resources and Information Technology; Lands and Natural Resources; Education and Economic Development; and acting minister of Language, Culture and Tourism.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I stand to acknowledge the 6,000 brave volunteer firefighters in our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Volunteer fire departments are the heart of so many of our communities. From fighting fires to responding to emergencies, to organizing community events, volunteer firefighters make our towns safe and enjoyable places to live.

Recently, I witnessed first-hand the community building efforts of volunteer firefighters with a visit to Jack Connors Training Centre in Pouch Cove.

Through fundraising and support from the town council, a new training facility was built to service the local fire department, as well as departments from neighbouring communities. A project that epitomizes volunteer fire service.

As we put our faith in volunteer firefighters, we must ensure that they are equipped with the right tools. This year our government doubled the budget for fire protection vehicles and equipment, enabling us to work strategically with communities and fire departments to enhance the protection of property, infrastructure and public safety.

Province-wide Public Safety Radio is another tool that we are delivering into the hands of volunteer firefighters. Last month, at the Newfoundland and Labrador Fire Services Annual General Meeting, we announced that each volunteer fire department in our province will receive at least two portable and mobile radios. That is over 780 radios at a cost of \$2.6 million.

This will improve communication during emergencies. These brave volunteers help

protect the province and we are forever grateful.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in acknowledging Newfoundland and Labrador's volunteer firefighters.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

We, too, acknowledge the 6,000 brave volunteer firefighters in our province. Where would we be without them?

The Official Opposition have put their faith in these individuals, when in the spring we brought forward a private Member's resolution to this House, calling for government to provide greater financial supports and other aids that would ensure their safety while carrying out their duties. The resolution was passed unanimously and received many words of support. But where is the action?

We salute these brave volunteers who serve and protect our communities, with outdated vehicles and substandard equipment, in many cases. These people who give freely of their time and risk their lives to protect and serve their neighbours deserve more than lip service.

Let's give these heroes the tools and the supports they deserve.

Thank you.

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 his statement.

I congratulate the Town of Pouch Cove on the opening of their new Jack Connors Training Centre and its regional success. As a former volunteer firefighter, I can appreciate what a centre like this does for a region.

I remind the government that the role of a firefighter has evolved over recent years to responding to motor vehicle accidents, hazardous chemical spills, cold-water rescue and high-angle rescue. Training for this has many costs and fire departments can't afford them.

I urge this government to properly resource fire departments for the vital services they provide in all different types of roles when it comes to rescue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I ask: Why did the Premier tell the people of the province that the Liberal government built 750 homes when the Liberal government knew it was not correct?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Allow me to read from the budget. It says: "Building on more than 750 new housing options that have been created over the last two years or are under construction, in

partnership with the Federal Government, Budget 2023 includes almost \$140 million to address diverse housing needs.” It goes on to talk about “A new, provincial, three year, \$70-million Affordable Housing Program that will help construct over 850 affordable homes, with a focus on seniors.”

I will remind the Leader of the Opposition he didn't support those initiatives.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, perhaps if the Members opposite, including the minister or the Premier, had read the budget maybe they wouldn't be talking about 750 new homes being built.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Why did the Deputy Premier, on at least three occasions, tell the people of the province that the Liberal government had built 750 new homes when the Liberal government knew it was not correct?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Speaker, I'm going to refer to page –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. COADY: I'm going to refer to page 14 in the Budget Speech that I read in this House. It does talk about building –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I heard the question quite clearly. I'd like to hear the response.

The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you for your protection, Speaker.

I will say that the Budget Speech does talk about building on the 750 new housing options. It goes on to talk about the 850 new affordable homes that are under construction; the \$70 million that we put in the Budget Speech. If I slipped in my language six months ago in a video, I think the Member opposite should tell us why he did not support these initiatives that would help people in the housing crisis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, it's one thing to slip; it's another thing to say it three or four times.

Why did the Liberal minister of Housing tell the people of the province that the Liberal government built 750 homes when the Liberal government knew it wasn't correct?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Speaker, the Member opposite thinks he's got gotcha politics here.

I will say to the people of the province, it was clear in the Budget Speech; it talked about 750 housing options.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm not going to have Members shouting back and forth. The minister speaking is right in front of me and I can barely hear her so I ask Members to keep the noise down, please.

The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: I will say, Speaker, it was very clear in the Budget Speech where it says 750 housing options, building on those 750 housing options. Going forward in *Budget 2023*, we allotted \$70 million, a tremendous amount of money, to construct 850 new affordable homes.

Now, Speaker, I think the Members opposite should reflect on the fact that they didn't even vote in favour of those initiatives.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, what we are seeing here is a pattern, a pattern of deception, a pattern of misleading the people of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Why did the former minister of Health tell the people of the province that there was a Health Human Resources Plan when the Liberal government knew it was not correct?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have started the Health Human Resources Plan, Mr. Speaker. There is a proponent that is doing the work for us, that will help guide the future of human resource planning within the Provincial Health Authority and the Department of Health and Community Services.

Mr. Speaker, we are focused on recruitment; retention; having the right staffing levels; and being able to have a solid plan in place to guide us into the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, why are seniors and others being forced to pay up to \$65 to see a nurse practitioner because they can't see any other family care provider? Why can't the Liberal government fix this?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are fixing this; we are putting Family Care Teams, primary care teams in place throughout the province which are multidisciplinary teams, Mr. Speaker, that will provide access to individuals to primary care. In addition to that, we have a virtual physician program that will be unveiled, made public, go live within the coming weeks that will provide every individual in the province – once it's fully up and running – with access to a physician from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and provide 24-7 emergency department coverage. It will start rolling out location by location for the emergency departments and for physician coverage we'll start with those on Patient Connect NL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, today, as we stand and I stand here in the House of Assembly, there are seniors and others still paying that \$65 to see a nurse practitioner. Nothing I just heard says they will be any better off after what the Minister of Health just said. They need help right now; that's what we're talking about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, why does a mother have to pay almost \$11 in sugar taxes on a \$4 purchase of fruit punch powder for their children?

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address the preamble to that question. We are putting Family Care Teams in place throughout the province, Mr. Speaker. We are working to make the public health system more available, more accessible to the people of the province.

I wonder is the Leader of the Opposition, who has promised people over politics, he hasn't proven it so far by his questions in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker. He seems to be bitten by the political bug; is he advocating that we privatize nurse practitioners as opposed to encouraging publicly available nurse practitioners?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, we're talking about seniors and others who are paying out of their pockets. That's what we're talking about.

Why does a mother have to pay almost \$11 in sugar tax on a \$4 purchase of fruit punch powder for her children?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I have indicated to the Member opposite, I'd certainly look into that particular case that he's speaking of. But allow me to say, this government is very, very, very focused on ensuring our better health in Newfoundland and Labrador. We're moving towards a 2031 goal of being one of the healthiest provinces. We know from the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Diabetes Association, the Canadian Paediatric Association, the World Health Organization that the consumption of sugar in sugar-

sweetened beverages is what is impacting our health.

Speaker, we have put a tax on to ensure that we signal to the people of the province that this is very, very impactful on their health and to make healthier choices.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, let's use education, not taxation.

The out-of-control spending at Memorial University revealed by the Auditor General is being placed on the backs of the students. Tuition has spiked on the Liberal government's watch.

Why are food banks on Memorial Campus overwhelmed while expenditures are out of control?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member opposite has alluded to, the Auditor General's report on Memorial University was released yesterday. We, on this side, as the government recognize that there is a responsibility to any funds that are distributed that would come out of the public purse.

That's why we asked the Auditor General to go into Memorial in the first place and now that we have the report and have a recognition of what it is that's actually happening at Memorial University, it's our intention to work with the university towards a resolution for this problem so that the expenses of the university aren't borne on the backs of the students here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, will the Premier freeze the tuition costs until expenditures are brought under control at Memorial University?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Mr. Speaker, we'll continue to work with Memorial University on the measures that have been recommended in the Auditor General's report. We'll continue to work with the students at Memorial University to ensure that they have access to an affordable education.

We have significant measures that have been implemented in the Department of Education in terms of our student assistance, our financial aid and the needs-based evaluations for these students and we'd encourage anybody and everybody to reach out to our department to take advantage of those programs that are there to support educational opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, while students at MUN have faced massive tuition increases and cuts to funding, the university leadership ordered custom chocolates and called a limousine.

Why are students being forced to pay for the failure of the Liberal government to reign in spending at MUN?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I just referenced in my earlier answer, we recognize that there's a responsibility to the public in terms of how their funds are being spent. That's why it's our intention to work with Memorial University on implementing the recommendations of the Auditor General's report.

We know that there are things in there that are certainly concerning and we want to continue to work with the leadership at Memorial University. Since the audit period had begun in 2019, we can already see some changes that have been made in Memorial University. We're confident that they have the ability to work with us to continue to make changes that will impact the lives of students and the funds that are required to achieve an education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: The minister may be able to elaborate at another time what's changed, because what I saw in that report, this is alarming. I'd like to know what change she's referring to, because we haven't seen them.

Speaker, again, the food bank on campus has been overwhelmed and residents are outraged by chocolates, limousines, oil changes and free liquor.

Why is the minister refusing to condemn this behaviour?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have already recognized and acknowledged that there are certainly issues at Memorial University that are concerning for this government. They've recognized that as well. They've acknowledged that there has to be change.

We're willing to work with them. As I said, they've already demonstrated measures in which they've changed. They've already stepped up. They've made changes to how they conduct their meetings so that there's a more appropriate flow of information, which was identified as one of the issues for the Auditor General.

They've also identified that they're working on doing their human resource searches in-house. They have five deans that they're searching for right now and they've already made significant steps in how they do that without the use of an outside source.

We're confident that these measures are just the beginning of ways that Memorial can step up and make the changes required.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

We only saw the report lunchtime yesterday. All these changes are happening. Why are they happening? Because they were called out. Who called them out? This side of the House; we called them out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Why did the AG come in? Because we demanded the AG go in.

This is now cold comfort to the people of the province. We don't see any action yet. These are only words. The minister should be over in the president's office asking for change today.

Speaker, last year, when the former president's lavish contract became public, residents were outraged by personal trainers and expensive office renovations. While student housing has become

impossible to find, the government attended a \$100,000 retreat at the Fogo Island Inn.

Why are students suffering while everyone else at MUN is living high on the hog?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first take the opportunity to correct the Member opposite. There was no member of government who attended the retreat that he's referencing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. HOWELL: However, I would also like to take the opportunity to identify that Memorial University has acknowledged that there are challenges.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

K. HOWELL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like the opportunity to answer the question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Mr. Speaker, we've had the opportunity to chat with Memorial University and they recognize that there has to be accountability and responsibility measures that are instituted. I reiterate that at every meeting that we have with the president and the office of the president at Memorial University.

But as opposed to the way in which the Member opposite suggests that we correct this problem with a heavy hand or a slash and dash type of method, people on this side of the House believe that consultations and collaboration with the university will certainly give us the results that we expect.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Only for I got a few seconds, I could go a long while on consultation, Minister, and lack of consultation I might add. We don't see any consultation. It's a play with words.

Speaker, the buck stops with this Liberal government. They appointed the majority of the Board of Regents. The Liberal government must stop hiding from accountability and step up and take responsibility for it. Students are facing a cost-of-living crisis and need something from the minister except excuses for inaction.

When is the minister going to start representing students versus defending the elite at MUN?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Mr. Speaker, it is certainly an issue that we are concerned with. As I've said before, we are taking every opportunity to work with Memorial University to correct some of the issues that have been identified. But when it comes to support for students, that's top of mind. That's top priority for this government and we'll continue to work and do that.

Just this last semester, we were able to offer \$10-million relief to the students of Memorial University. The direct impact that they'll be able to feel with that money returned to their bank accounts. So we'll continue to work on measures like that to allow the student life to grow and to continue to excel at Memorial University.

On the other flip side of that, we also recognize that there has to be more accountability and responsibility, which is why we've since beefed up the Board of

Regents and been able to appoint a new board that will continue to –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

The minister needs to admit, the Board of Regents, the majority of them were appointed by government – their people. Their people are on that Board of Regents.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: The buck stops with them.

The Auditor General found Memorial has the highest administrative salaries per student, compared to comparable universities; \$375 per student higher than the next highest university. MUN's administrative cost was \$893 per student higher than the average for all universities compared.

Why does the Liberal government force students to pay for the administrative bloat at MUN?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like first to take the opportunity to address the preamble to the question. When we look at the Board of Regents, there was a significant amount of time where there were vacancies on the board. We've since had the opportunity to correct that.

We have now in place 16 members on the board; we have a chair of the board now who will be working with those new members. We've had the opportunity to

have elected members who are alumni representatives that have been on the board. We have faculty representatives who now sit on the Board of Regents and there are student representatives that have been appointed as well.

We're confident that the board that's in place now will take responsibility, they will institute measures of accountability and responsibility and that they will have an open line of communication with the university to ensure that these measures are in place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, the mayor of Corner Brook is calling for help after only 12 new housing units were announced under this Liberal government's housing plan.

I ask the minister: Why did you forget about the West Coast in the housing plan?

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

P. PIKE: Thank you for the question.

Our government remains committed to continuing to work with our partners, that is the federal government, municipalities and community stakeholders, to ensure that we have the challenges that you just mentioned taken care of and to make sure that every Newfoundlander has a safe space and a roof over their heads.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

But the mayor of Corner Brook is more than concerned. He's very worried what's going to happen to the people who don't have a roof over their heads.

Speaker, this housing crisis isn't just a PR exercise for the Liberal government. People are struggling, families are homeless and we have people living in tents across our province.

I ask the minister: Do you think the 12 units are enough for the City of Corner Brook?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much for the sincere question.

I will say there are two sides to this housing challenge. One is social housing and we've already talked about the \$140 million, the investment that we made of \$70 million to ensure the affordable housing program will help construct over 850 affordable homes, with a focus on seniors. I'm sure some of those will go to the Corner Brook area.

But we've also announced a way to make housing more affordable. The five-point plan that we brought in place in the last couple of weeks, including the new residential rental property rebate, including lighting up surplus lands that government has, including the homeownership assistance program. These are but some of the programs that we have to help make housing more affordable.

So investments in social housing; investments in making housing more affordable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, I suggest that the government consult with the municipalities as they go forward in making affordable housing there for the residents.

Speaker, I ask the minister: Will the 12 new housing units make up for the 37 housing units that have sat boarded up in the City of Corner Brook for quite some time?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

As the Member opposite knows, there has been a tremendous investment to put more of the boarded up houses, as he said, back on the market. We're putting a tremendous effort into revitalizing and refurbishing some of the social housing that we have available.

I will remind the Member opposite, I will remind Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, the Opposition didn't even vote in favour of these initiatives.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, this week marks 151 weeks that Kristi Allan has been advocating for greater access to long-term mental health care.

When will this Liberal government heed the words of those with lived experience and address this mental health care crisis?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is an important issue. We do have money in this year's budget to address long-term mental health. The *Towards Recovery* Action Plan has 54 recommendations which were put in place in large part because of an all-party Committee that put the work into

Towards Recovery and the development of those 54 recommendations.

I would like to think that the Official Opposition, the PC Party, Mr. Speaker, took this seriously as well. We have invited both the Third Party and the Official Opposition to an all-party Committee. I know the Third Party put their Members forward. We are still waiting, unless in the last two days we have the Members from the PC Party, so we can get on with the work of the all-party Committee and continue to build on mental health and addictions in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: I think you only have to ask Ms. Allan: 151 weeks out there waiting, waiting for this action and it's a Committee – it's a Committee.

Speaker, we have heard mental health supports need to be available 24-7 and that mental illness does not do well on wait-lists. There have been cases when persons have called 811 while in crisis, only to be told a nurse will get back to them. In two instances, the callers had thoughts of suicide.

I ask the Premier: What urgency is being placed on providing immediate life-saving care to those in need?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, this is an important issue. We heard from families who were on the steps of the Confederation Building in terms of some of the challenges that they face. The 54 recommendations that were put forward, Mr. Speaker, are a very solid foundation. We are miles ahead of where we were four or

five years ago in terms of mental health and addictions. We have much more work to do.

That is why the All-Party Committee is so important. I ask for the Members to be put forward from the PC Party so that we can get on with the work of the All-Party Committee and continue to build on the solid work that has been put in place over the last three or four years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. DINN: I correct the minister on his three or four years. They've had this issue to deal with for eight years – eight years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. DINN: Speaker, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association, between 2018 and 2019 there were a 61 per cent increase in youth visiting emergency rooms due to mental health concerns and a 60 per cent increase in youth being hospitalized for mental disorders.

I ask the Premier: When will he make mental health a priority, because mental health does not discriminate and affects everyone?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With the increases in the budgets over the last three or four years towards mental health and addictions in this province, I believe we have made it a priority. It takes time to build on the programs that we have, but the FACT teams that we have, the assertive treatment teams, the opioid addictions hub, Mr. Speaker, all of these things were put in place over the last three or four years. We continue to build on what

is in place. We have Doorways, Bridge the gapp, which is recognized as one of the most progressive programs in the country that other provinces are borrowing.

It is a priority for this government. We've increased the budget again this year. I ask the PCs to make it a priority, put forward the names so that the All-Party Committee can start their meetings.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I have been hearing heart-breaking stories from constituents about their experiences waiting in emergency rooms.

This past weekend one constituent described a 12-hour wait while in terrible pain in a crowded waiting room in Carbonear hospital. Surely, Speaker, there has to be a more compassionate and humane system in place to keep patients comfortable and informed while waiting to be seen in our emergency departments.

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

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Member. We are working towards recruitment and retention of our health care professionals. As the Member knows, there has been a shortage of health care professionals across the country and, in fact, globally.

There are pressures in areas. We have made significant improvements, Mr. Speaker, in terms of recruiting the health care professionals that are needed. But I agree, it's unacceptable to have long waits in our emergency departments. That is part of the reason we are putting Urgent Care Centres in place to take the pressure off our emergency departments.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

On October 6, the Leader of the NDP wrote the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development. The minister has not answered this question, so I'll ask it here.

Will the Deputy Premier today provide those living in tents a reasonable time frame as to when they can expect to be in a real, long-term home that is safe, affordable and allows them the privacy that they deserve?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We have sent a lot of experts to those that are living in tents across from the House of Assembly. This is of great concern, of course, to not only this government, but to the people of the province. That is why we are sending in experts every single day.

We have worked with the people that are there to try and find them good places for them to live. We've offered them supports. We've offered them many, many things to ensure that they have what they need to have a good, fulfilling life.

I am encouraged that we are continuing to speak about housing and housing issues in the province. As the Member Opposite knows we are working very, very hard to ensure that we support those that need this type of supportive housing.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

While OrgCode Consulting helps develop a shelter standard framework, will the Deputy Premier take an immediate action to make sure that all shelters provide adequate nutritious food that reflects the dietary needs for those who stay with them – do it today; not wait for the report.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

We've put a tremendous investment in housing; we've put a tremendous investment in social services. We've been really working on ensuring that we have a supportive, affordable housing network and we're going to continue to work with our partners in all areas of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure that we provide a wraparound service to support those that need social housing, that need affordable housing and we're going to do the best that we can with the investments that we are making.

I'm glad to hear the Member raise the issues. We've put \$140 million into this program this year. We're going to continue to working very, very hard with the partners in the community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Speaker, the Leader of the New Democratic Party has pointed out co-operative housing and not-for-profit housing models are real solutions to address the housing crisis but there is a lack of resources to buy land.

Will the Deputy Premier commit this government to establishing an acquisition land trust so that co-operative housing associations and other not-for-profits can acquire the land they need to build affordable homes in this province?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I think it's really interesting to have this question raised today. One of the things I did speak of today in Question Period was – social housing, we're putting a tremendous amount of effort to construct 850 new, affordable homes this year. We're also putting a tremendous effort on making housing affordable. As the Member opposite knows, in recent weeks we announced that we're going to unlock surplus government land and buildings for this very purpose.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

People are struggling to find shelter across this province in many different forms.

I ask the Deputy Premier: To show this Liberal government is truly committed to help address the housing crisis, as called for by our Leader of the NDP, will they form an emergency all-party Committee of this House to tackle the housing crisis and find a solution?

Will they form a Committee to actually help the housing crisis?

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

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, one of the areas that we are going to focus on is the social determinants of health, including housing. That is one of the things that the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions will be looking at.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

In 2020 the then minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development responded in Question Period stating that run-down Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units were under repair and would be ready in short order.

So I ask the Deputy Premier: Can she explain why renovating Newfoundland and Labrador units were just announced as a new initiative in the five-point plan when the minister said that they would be ready in short order?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

As in understand it, the houses of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing go under regular maintenance. There's a team, a very professional team within Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, a lot of workers that do maintenance and repair. Of course, some of these need more repair and when you get inside of them, it takes a little longer.

But I do want to give kudos to the men and women who work for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, who work very, very hard to ensure that these homes are turned over as quickly as possible and given to new families. I'm sure the Member opposite would support those men and women as they go through their work to bring these social housing back onto the market.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I'm pleased to present the second report of the Standing Orders Committee in the 50th General Assembly.

I want to thank all Members of the Committee for their diligence and hard work on these matters and I recommend this report to the House of Assembly.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Are there any further presenting reports by Standing and Select Committees?

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, yesterday, when tabling a petition, the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue asked about the schedule for replacing the Canning Bridge. That was presented at a public meeting in Marystown and we have it here.

SPEAKER: Are there any other tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I give notice that I will ask leave to move the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Assembly as follows:

WHEREAS the harmonized sales tax base is established by the Government of Canada, pursuant to the federal *Excise Tax Act*, and the collection of harmonized sales tax is administered by the Canada Revenue Agency; and

WHEREAS a rebate of the federal portion of the harmonized sales tax on new purpose-built rental housing is provided by the federal government, under the Government of Canada's existing and enhanced GST/HST New Residential Rental Property Rebate; and

WHEREAS the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador intends to provide a rebate of the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax on new purpose-built rental housing;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that a rebate of the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax on new purpose-built rental housing be provided, and that the rebate mirror the Government of Canada's existing and enhanced GST/HST New Residential Rental Property Rebate.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I give notice on tomorrow I will move the following motion: That this House concur in the second report of the Standing Orders Committee of the 50th General Assembly tabled October 24, 2023.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I give notice that I will, on tomorrow, move the following motion:

That in accordance with Standing Order 65, the Public Accounts Committee shall comprise the following Members: the Member for Harbour Main, the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, the Member for Exploits, the Member for Labrador West, the Member for Lake Melville and the Member for St. George's - Humber.

SPEAKER: Any 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 Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Yesterday when we were debating Bill 51, there was a question that I just wanted to provide additional clarity into my answer. We were talking about unclaimed bodies. My department is not aware of any unclaimed bodies. I just did want to provide additional information, detail.

There is a process today where bodies are managed by funeral homes and funeral directors and then they go through the medical system. We have a sophisticated portal where all these stakeholders, each body are tracked and flows through the process. There are also bodies which may be at a funeral home which while the funeral parlour are awaiting payment or waiting identification of next of kin. There are also bodies or remains which may be at a funeral home at the request of a family.

I just wanted to provide that each clarification. We're still not aware of any unclaimed bodies but there's a process whereby bodies flow through a system of funeral directors and the medical system and there would be different numbers of bodies at different stages of process.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Any further answers to questions for which notice has been given?

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

The driver's road testing was always offered in Bonavista to serve 8,000-plus residents of the region until a few year's ago.

It assessed the drivers of the area, youth and senior, in an area that they will be driving and have trained on 90 to 100 per cent of their time. Currently, in order for youth or seniors to avail of a driver's road test, they must travel 1½ hours to be assessed on a road network that they are not overly familiar with.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reinstate the driver's road testing in Bonavista to more adequately serve the 8,000-plus residents in that area.

I mentioned that petition before, Speaker, and many rural areas in Newfoundland and Labrador now have only received notice that their local bank is closing. Scotiabank in Bonavista, we've been informed, is closing. You need to drive to the nearest bank now, you're travelling 1½ hours to get to Scotiabank which would in a neighbouring community of Clarendville.

The cost of living in rural Newfoundland, all 40 Members are aware of it. The driver's testing is one thing that government would control 100 per cent. Scotiabank, they probably ought to have to been a little more proactive if they had a rural sustainability plan and we had a plan to know that we

would keep some institutions or lobby to keep some institutions in some large rural areas and to see where we are.

We know that we can't control Scotia Bank. Scotia Bank's net profit will be – I think, according to 2022 – \$10.1 billion. We know they're driven by shareholders. But government decisions to take things out of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, like the drivers' testing, is creating undue hardship on the residents in the Bonavista area. That is one fix that they certainly can look at.

The advanced education and skills office, back some years ago this government closed that office in Bonavista. One that seen 100 residents per week visit that office for service. Yet, the government has closed it.

So when it comes to the driver's testing being reinstated, all we need is the driver's examiner to go down when there's enough interested individuals for their driving examination, travel to Bonavista to spare the many of coming up to Clarendville to get their examination. I would suggest an easy fix that would reduce the cost of living on the residents in the Bonavista area.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to speak to one part of the petition. I wasn't sure if it was about the driver's closure or the Scotia Bank. I got confused. He was talking about both but I can speak to the Scotia Bank one. All I'm going to say is this – and again, I'm happy to stand and speak to it because the reality is that sadly, these types of things happen.

I think the part that I sort of took offence to was that government should be proactively prepared for a multinational billion-dollar corporation to close some rural branches. I mean, you can get mad at us all you want about government decisions or about closing an office. I did the same over there when they shut the courtroom in Burgeo down when I was in the Opposition. Same thing, I got ticked off. But when I saw other multinationals, I picked and chose my spots about what to actually get mad about.

So I will just say this: You can get mad all you want about government decisions, but to say that we should have been prepared for a multinational billion-dollar corporation to close, I think it's a bit much and I think you've got to sort of pick your spots.

What I will say is that we are reacting here because there are options to prepare after for when these things happen. Right now, we're talking about co-operative efforts, credit unions, things like that that can happen. We have seen this. In fact, this is not just the first time. We actually had this happen last year. It's one of the realities of evolving into online banking, is that you have a smaller amount of foot traffic going into banks.

I just wanted to put that out there. Again, if the petition was about the closure, that's one thing, but I had to sort of have some commentary on the second part there.

Thank you.

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Approximately 100,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador live with mental illness. Only about 40 per cent of the people affected by mental illness and addiction seek help. Seventy per cent of mental illness develops during childhood and adolescence and most go undiagnosed.

And less than 20 per cent receive appropriate treatment.

Emergency and short-term care isn't enough and it is essential more long-term treatment options are readily available.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide access to long-term mental health care and ensure continuity of care beginning with psychiatric and neuropsychological assessments being more accessible to the public so they can access proper mental health treatment and supports on a regular and continuous basis.

This is a very important issue, as I alluded to in Question Period, we have Kristi Allan and her group at week 151 of advocating for better mental health care in this province.

As I know, a report that was put out by the Canadian Mental Health Association-Newfoundland and Labrador last year or two years ago talked about the need for continuity of care. It talked about being proactive rather than reactive and it talked about the difficulty in not accessing these services.

I listen to the minister's responses today and talking about *Towards Recovery* and giving himself a passing grade on the action items of *Towards Recovery*. But just as an example, one of those recommendations, I think it was Recommendation 44, spoke about increasing the provincial health and addictions spending from approximately 5.7 per cent to 9 per cent. That was five years ago, they were supposed to meet that target April of last year and it is still unmet.

If you're misleading the people on these, what else are you misleading them on? But this is a very important issue when you talk about mental health care. You may have allotments from different departments but I can guarantee you there is no 9 per cent in Health and Community Services budget that

is allocated to mental health as was agreed to.

We need to do much more on this; they need long-term supports and continuity of care when it comes to mental health in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is actually named petition for timely and adequate access to health care for our Northern Labrador residents

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure that our Northern Labrador residents in Nain, Natuashish, Hopedale, Makkovik, Postville and Rigolet are provided with access to timely and adequate health care.

Frequently, patients are prevented from getting to medical appointments at outside Provincial Health Authority health centres in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, St. John's, St. Anthony, Corner Brook, et cetera. Some of the delays are due to inclement weather but, often, patients are prevented from getting on the medical flight to their appointments because there are no seats left on the flight. There are multiple reasons for this and we are calling on the government to work towards removing these barriers so patients can access their medical appointments for diagnosis and treatment.

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 provide adequate and timely access to medical care for patients in Northern Labrador by ensuring enough medical flights are available so patients can travel.

Now, this petition is about access, not about getting an appointment. It's about access to travel out to your appointment, to your treatment. Some of these treatments that people are bumped off the plane trying to access are cancer treatments. I remember getting a call last summer and I thought there was something wrong with it because an adult daughter had called because her mother, who is a cancer patient, was bumped off the flight to go out to Goose Bay for her cancer treatment.

When I started looking into it, a lot of people told me that this happens to cancer patients. Anyone who has ever gone through cancer – like, not talking about the fear of having cancer inside your body and you're trying to combat it, you're trying to survive, but anyone who goes to cancer treatment now knows about the importance of timely access to that treatment; it's scheduled. So people know that and the problem of getting out to the appointment is a lot of times there's no room on the plane and so you're bumped.

Then when you do get out to your treatment and you're coming back, I mean, you could have gone through treatment surgery, you could be going through your chemo appointments and then you're delayed. You're delayed in Goose Bay; not able to get on the flight. You've got children at home that people are looking after and then there are problems with that. You may have households to maintain and you can't get back.

We're not talking a day delay. I'm talking, sometimes up to five to seven days, patients have been stuck in Goose Bay and the reason why I know these dates, this time, is because as the MHA for Torngat Mountains a lot of times these patients call me.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

The Exploits District has seen increased speeding and ATV activity in the area causing issues for residents with safety in their communities.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to increase enforcement in the district to provide adequate safety and protection to our residents.

Speaker, the lack of police presence in the district and throughout Newfoundland, of course – I'm hearing it all across. But in Exploits in the last couple of years it's really been noticed that the ATV activity, speeding activity through the roads in different areas, the kilometres – one part of 350 is only a 50-kilometre zone but people usually go 80 kilometres, that sort of stuff. There's no enforcement there.

People feel the safety and the need for this is going to an extreme. ATV activity, of course, all throughout the community, speeding. They feel the response time from the RCMP, of crime and whatever, when they call for the RCMP the response time is slow. Sometimes they don't even show up.

I know I've talked to the RCMP and they tell me it's a staffing shortage. I know the minister said over a year ago there was a staffing shortage, but there has still been nothing done to increase staff in that area. When they're working half-staff, they can't really police the area.

We, the residents of Exploits, certainly would like this attention given. I know they tried to have a number of meetings. I know a couple of years ago we did have a meeting with the staff sergeants. They were going to try to put in some enforcement work with the wildlife enforcement with regard to the ATV activities, but they didn't have enough staff to get that up and running. There are some staff shortages

there and the RCMP is certainly lacking in presence in Exploits. We'd like to call upon the government to increase the RCMP presence in the Exploits District.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to amend the *Limitations Act* to remove limitation periods for civil child abuse claims where the abuse complained of occurred against a minor, (a), within an intimate relationship; (b) within a relationship of dependency; or (c) where the defendant was in a position of trust or authority; and

And amend the *Limitations Act* to state limitation periods do not run during any time a defendant, (a), willfully conceals or misleads the claimant about essential elements of the claim, i.e. the fact that an injury, loss or damage has occurred, that it was caused by or contributed by an act or omission or that the act or omission was that of the defendant; or (b) wilfully misleads the claimant as to the appropriateness of a proceeding as a means of remedying the loss, injury or damage. The above-mentioned legislative changes should be retroactive and apply regardless of expiry of any previous limitation period.

Speaker, I'm glad but I'm sad in the same way to have to present this petition again today, signed by a number of people throughout our province. Of course, this was initiated by the Whalen family. Mr. Whalen has been up in the gallery every day since this House has opened; he's still here.

The man has significant health issues; he should be tending to those issues and his

own well-being, but he is here every day nonetheless, because he is hoping – not just for Question Period, and not just for Petitions, throughout the whole day because I feel that he is probably hoping that somebody on the government side is going to stand up at some point in time and say: Yes, we're going to review this. We're going to have a look at changing this legislation to bring it in line with legislation in, I think, every other province except – I want to say New Brunswick or it might be Nova Scotia; it's one of the two. I think I heard his daughter on *Open Line* today say it was either Nova Scotia or New Brunswick is the only other province besides Newfoundland and Labrador that has this statute of limitations.

What the man went through was horrendous. Had there have been any sexual misconduct or touching or so on that had happened during his time at Whitbourne and in care, then he would be able to deal with this through the courts. But because it was simply physical, he cannot. When you look at the emotional toll this can take on someone, to be locked basically in a cage for extended periods of time; to have a minor incident that results in being locked up for two or three years or whatever the case might be, just at the whim of – I'm not sure at whose whim it was, certainly not like it would be today – and that person, I'm not saying it happened, but just think about how wrong it is that somebody in that circumstance, they could have tied him to a tree and flogged him every day, and there would be nothing he could do about it.

And that's absolutely wrong.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member's time is up.

P. LANE: We need to change the legislation.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

Another petition?

J. BROWN: I've got one petition.

Thank you, Speaker.

Anti-temporary replacement worker legislation – these are the reasons for the petition:

Anti-temporary replacement worker laws have existed in Quebec since 1978; in British Columbia since 1993; and the federal government has committed to introduce such legislation by the end of this year.

The use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or a lockout is damaging for the social fabric of the community, the local economy and the well-being of its residents.

Anti-temporary replacement worker legislation has been shown to reduce the length and divisiveness of labour disputes.

Since 2015, the right to strike has been clearly protected under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* because it helps stabilize the power and balances between the worker and the employer.

The use of temporary replacement workers undermines that right.

THEREFORE, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to enact legislation banning the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or a lockout.

Once again I'm bringing this petition to the House of Assembly from the residents of Labrador West. They want to see this legislation. They understand a lot of them are union members. They've experienced similar situations and you just have to go

back to D-J Composites, Vale. We've seen the use of temporary replacement workers on strikes. We've seen that they drag out strikes. We've seen the damage they do to the community but also to the bargaining process.

We see the federal government has recognized that and I think it's time for this province to also look at it as a way to rebalance between the worker and the employer and to bring down the divisiveness and the length of labour disputes, either be lockout or strike.

Once again, on behalf of the residents of Labrador West, they're asking to see this.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 7.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, October 24, 2023.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that notwithstanding Standing Order 9, this House shall not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, October 25, 2023, but shall continue to sit for the conduct of Government Business and, if not earlier adjourned, the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 8.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 26, 2023.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 15, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act, the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999, Bill 55.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs that Bill 55, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act, the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999, now be read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 55, And Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act, the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act, the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999." (Bill 55)

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very excited to bring this forward today. We've been having a lot of back and forth with different municipalities over the last few years about ride sharing.

So ride sharing has been permitted. A definition of a taxi includes carrying

passengers for money, and so a ride-sharing company could operate within that framework and follow municipal guidelines.

In 2021, we took measures to make it easier to get a Class 4 taxi licence. We reduced quite an expensive training course that taxi drivers had to do. We removed that, with the hopes of making it easier to get Class 4 taxi licence, recruit more taxi drivers and potentially attract ride sharing to Newfoundland and Labrador.

That did not see ride share come to Newfoundland and Labrador, Speaker, so now we're taking it a step further. In consultation with municipalities, community partners and ride-share companies, we are taking it up a notch and we're announcing a provincial approach to ride sharing.

Currently, the requirement is at the municipal level. If we think about the metro area, we have the Town of Paradise, the City of Mount Pearl, the City of St. John's, CBS; they all have their different municipal bylaws. They are allowed to create their municipal bylaws currently to oversee this area.

So having a provincial approach to ride sharing reduces the risk for ride-sharing companies that they have to abide by four, five, six, seven or more sets of rules that could change, that may or may not be in place today.

That level of risk and uncertainty, in my opinion, was part of the reason why we haven't seen ride sharing come here and so now, Speaker, we're proposing to remove that risk and uncertainty for ride-share companies and hope to see them join us.

We are doing this in two ways: Firstly, we're going to make an amendment to the legislation, which you have in front of you today, to create an overarching provincial framework for ride sharing. This means that any ride-share company interested in operating in Newfoundland and Labrador

would have one set of rules to follow and these would be outlined in the *Highway Traffic Act*.

Other things we are doing, which we do not need legislative approval for, we're changing the requirements to obtain a Class 4 taxi licence to operate a taxi or ride-sharing vehicle. These are currently at the discretion of the registrar at the moment.

Currently, the requirement is that you have a Class 5 driver's licence for two years, that you have a medical, a vehicle inspection and you need to pass a written test and a driving test. And that is currently similar to BC and Alberta. We are changing that to be more like Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and we're removing the requirement for the extra driving test and the extra written test to get a Class 4 taxi licence. That should help both the taxi industry and ride sharing, Speaker.

So with our proposed changes all other requirements for a Class 4 driver's licence will remain in effect. Taxis and ride-sharing drivers will still have to require two years driving experience with a Class 5 licence, a medical, an annual vehicle inspection and an active and applicable insurance policy.

We're not making any changes to the licence requirements for ambulance operators, buses that carry up to 24 passengers, people that carry passengers – I believe it's under six for a contract under a school board and for vehicles under contract to carry children with a school board to and from school and school-related activities.

So taxis will continue to use taxi plates as a means of vehicle identification. Ride-share vehicles will not have to feature a taxi plate, will be required to display your sign or decal while engaged in ride-sharing services and they can use their existing J plates for their private passenger vehicles.

We currently have a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol and drug currently outlined in the *Highway Traffic Act* and that will continue to apply for ride-sharing drivers and taxi drivers.

To enable provincial oversight of this, we're making changes to the *Highway Traffic Act* here today, including a clear and concise definition of a transportation network, a transportation-network company and a ride-sharing service. We're clarifying the definition of taxi, not to include ride-sharing service and to include a specific reference to ride sharing. We're introducing a system of licensing of transportation-network companies and amending municipal legislation to limit their jurisdiction to taxi services only and not to ride sharing.

Details around the conditions for operating a transportation-network company would be set out in the regulations and so the idea is these would be things like they're responsible for ensuring their drivers have Class 4 taxi licences, maintaining a system of criminal background checks, maintaining the appropriate insurance and ensuring vehicles are inspected annually.

I also think it's important – obviously, municipalities are all different and they all have different interests and different things are important to different municipalities. While we're introducing a provincial approach, we're also providing the ability for any municipality who is not interested in having ride share in their municipality, they can request to be exempt from participation. We're outlining what will be required for that. They need a motion from the council and then a letter to the minister and we would, essentially, exempt that geographic area from ride sharing.

So these amendments will require the same safety standards for both taxi and ride-sharing drivers in Newfoundland and Labrador. They're going to ease some of the administrative burden to help meet demand for reliable and safe transportation

services in the province and they will support a competitive industry that will continue to thrive.

Not only will this help result in new ride-sharing companies entering the market, my hope is that it also allows a more flexible business model for taxi companies that might want to transition to a new model. There's nothing stopping taxi companies from becoming ride-share companies or to kind of maybe split off their company into a ride-sharing part and then a traditional taxi part.

I do want to give a shout-out to the taxis in the St. John's area, the metro area have been using apps and using technology to help make the user experience better for taxi companies and I know that they've seen great success with those apps. I take taxis a fair amount and I do talk to the taxi drivers and the drivers are also very pleased with the use of that technology. I want to give a shout-out to the taxi companies for that.

I know our Premier has said multiple times that it's not one or the other. We seen in cities all across North America and in Europe, that both ride sharing and taxi companies exist and both are able to run successful businesses. We anticipate that that would be the same, no different here in St. John's and the metro area, Speaker.

I also want to reference every time I've talked to someone, almost every time I've talked to someone about ride sharing, they mention the illegal social media ride-share services that operate. So there are illegal Facebook groups that operate where people ask for a ride and then they're matched with someone who can drive them.

I want to be clear, with anyone listening or anyone watching, that those are completely illegal. It is illegal to drive someone for money in that type of model without the proper oversight, the proper licence, the proper insurance. As a passenger, if you were to take one of those rides, likely the

insurance policy of the driver would not cover you if there was an accident. In fact, that accident might not be covered. So there's a significant risk to the general public if you are participating in one of those illegal ride-sharing services.

My hope, also, is that by introducing ride sharing to Newfoundland and Labrador, we significantly reduce or hopefully eliminate the illegal use of these ride-sharing groups for the protection of everyone.

In conclusion, we had an announcement yesterday, which I thought went really well. I want to thank the Board of Trade, Destination St. John's, Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador. We've been working collaboratively with a range of stakeholders, getting input from some ride-sharing companies and municipalities. I'm very pleased to bring this legislation forward to the House today.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Warr): Thank you.

I'm recognizing the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Speaker.

It's a great opportunity to stand up and speak about this today. Anything that's going to propel Newfoundland and Labrador and its citizens into the times with the rest of the country, with the rest of the world – this has been on the go now for over a decade and it's good to see so that's what we're going to do today, we're going to flush out some of the legislation here and possibly ask some questions in Committee.

The bill would amend the *Highway Traffic Act* to allow ride sharing, for an example Uber. It will require the same safety standards and establish rules for both taxis and ride-sharing services. We feel as

though that's very important. When it comes to anybody getting in the vehicle with another driver, especially that they don't know, safety should be of the utmost concern.

Especially here in Newfoundland and Labrador, some of the roads aren't the best, we have big furry obstacles jump out every now and again, and we want to make sure that those drivers are equipped, what they need to do, and ensure they're not under the influence. When you get in with another driver, you're not sure exactly what you're getting in with, so we want to be sure that a precedent is going to be set with the ride-sharing industry, that's safe for everybody including the drivers.

I would also restrict the municipality from making bylaws concerning ride sharing. So putting it back into the municipalities' hands, I think that could be a good approach and again we're going to get more opinions here today, but the fact is in Newfoundland and Labrador we have rural areas and we have urban areas. They are very different. They are extremely different when it comes to anything, and that will be including taxi drivers or ride-sharing industries.

We want to make sure that a rural area gets exactly what's best for them at the time, what will work for that municipality. I'm actually curious to see how that's going to play out in most rural areas across the province, because it's going to be very interesting.

Our caucus of course welcomes the addition of choices to the industry as we all have seen rental car shortages, which is a big deal, and especially when it comes to tourism, that's going to be a huge deal here. I can only imagine that it's going to boost our tourism industry if there are ride-sharing services here. It has to. It's everywhere else, and as you see, most tourists are very familiar with ride-sharing industry such as Uber now, so I'm sure that'll be a welcome

for the tourism industry here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Taxi brokers have said they would welcome the ride sharing if the playing field was level. And that's something that we need to keep in mind as we move forward. And that will be included in regulations. Speaker, I'll go back and I'll say that I feel as though this House has gone through a regulation process that has happened after the bill has passed and gained Royal Assent, and sometimes it isn't what we expect.

I'll be looking forward to see what will be in the regulations of this, but make no mistake, as supportive as we are, we want to ensure that it's a level playing field so the taxi drivers, those good men and women, that the owners, the operators, the drivers themselves that have put so much into their industry, that have played by the rules all this time, don't get left out in the cold.

We want to make sure that everybody is on that same playing field and everybody has the same opportunities. Because we want to make sure, again, that the taxi drivers are taken care of, that they don't see this as a disadvantage to them. Open markets or free business is a great thing, but we want to ensure that our taxi drivers are looked at before we leave this legislation where it is.

Having these drivers fully qualified, licensed and insured is critical – and that is exactly what we talked about. In addition, it is critical the industry is on a level playing field with taxis that have been facing skyrocketing insurance rates and high fuel costs due to the Liberal carbon tax that we now see.

Again, these taxi drivers have been open and transparent about this for quite some time; they have been hurting and I would just hate to see another industry come in and not have to follow the same rules. It is extremely important with the ride-sharing industry now would be the time. People are hurting out there. Whether it is the metro

area, the rural area, Grand Falls-Windsor, Corner Brook, people are hurting out there.

Hurting to the fact that when you see a used vehicle now – and my colleague for Ferryland I'm sure can speak to this as well – a used vehicle today is the same price five years ago as a new vehicle might have been. So to go out and buy a vehicle under the circumstances that a lot of people find themselves in now, with the gas carbon tax, maintenance, insurance, it is a lot of money to drive. It is a lot of money to drive your own vehicle in Newfoundland and Labrador right now. So ride-sharing companies, of course, people will take advantage of it and my hope is that it will work out in time, precedent will be set and I think that it will be welcomed here in Newfoundland and Labrador, whether it is in the rural areas or the urban areas.

When I say that those are different areas of the province, you know, here in metro there are some great taxi drivers, both men and women, in the metro area, but you get in with one and you have a quick chat and that is it, you may never see that person again. In the rural areas, it is quite different. In the rural areas, the taxi drivers are almost like family: they truly are. They've been there since you were probably knee-high to a grasshopper as a kid. They are there when you need them; you get in and have a yarn, you have a chat, and you talk about everything that is going on in the community over the past while.

The fact of the matter is some of those taxi drivers have been around forever, for decades and we have entrusted them. We have entrusted them with our children, to take them back and forth to places, with ourselves. Again, I just want to make sure that they're not left out in the cold.

We have some great taxi drivers in Grand Falls-Windsor as well. One of them is a good friend of mine. I'll just use him as an example, Terry O'Halligan with ASAP Cabs. I know first-hand that Terry has done a lot

for our community, just like many taxi drivers have throughout Newfoundland and Labrador in the rural areas. He's done a lot of work within our community. I know that his heart is quite big and he's taken people probably when he shouldn't have, or who couldn't pay sometimes, or didn't have enough to pay. I know he's taken pregnant women to the hospital. But that's him.

That's what we enjoy in the rural areas with those trusted taxi drivers that we have. And they are trusted. So again, I can't wait to hear the rest of the debate; I can't wait to get into Committee to ask some very pointed questions, but I will leave off on this.

I just want to make sure that our trusted taxi drivers throughout the province, whether it's metro, or Grand Falls-Windsor, or anywhere else, Musgrave Harbour, wherever they have a taxi, I want to make sure that those taxi drivers continue to stay on the same playing field, and they're not left out in the cold. The minister just said, we don't need to have one or the other; we can have them both, but just make sure that it's equal for both when it comes down to it, and eventually I'm sure we'll get into a trend where everybody gets along, everybody can have the ride that they need, nobody's left out in the cold, and it'll be great for our tourism and the people that rely on them every day.

So thank you very much.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously it's good when legislation comes in that moves forward the province and certainly when it comes to ride share and Uber and the likes. Obviously you would hope that it would create an area where it's cheaper for people to get transportation, certainly given today's economic climate and what people are going through.

There are some things that concern me, I guess, about the bill, and I'll talk about the first thing, which is the ability for a municipality to get an exemption. I guess for myself, I just wonder why municipalities wouldn't have to apply to be a part of the legislation, why the government is automatically blanketing it. The reality is you could have Uber operators or ride-sharing companies working inside a municipality without the municipality having applied for their exemption, and it could create some problems.

The other thing about that that I have to question is, while a municipality can apply for an exemption, we have lots of LSDs and unincorporated areas throughout the province that may have an incorporated business working inside of those areas, as a taxi lot, transporting people and their business could be negatively affected. Now we don't know that that's the case. We would hope that as business expands, it's just going to create competition and give everybody a better experience.

I guess the biggest thing that I'm concerned about is as the minister stood up and talked about this bill, while she said it was a provincial approach, she referenced St. John's a dozen times. I see, and I've travelled, and I've utilized Uber all over the world, and I know how well it can work. I believe it can work very well in St. John's, but I think once you go outside the overpass, there are some difficulties that will be faced, certainly with smaller taxi companies and their ability to compete with Uber.

But the one thing that really bothers me again, and it's the thing that I've said in this House time and time again, is that we need to put a lens on rural Newfoundland. The way these ride-sharing companies work and Uber – any of them; they're all the same – is they work through technology and apps. Once we get outside of St. John's into rural Newfoundland, we all know that the technology is not there, the cellular service

is not there, the ability to access the Internet is not there. So what is the solution? I haven't heard anyone mention anything about that today.

So while it's okay to say that this is going to be great for the province, it's a provincial approach, once again, this Liberal government is alienating a large portion of the province – absolutely. You can shake your head no, but come out in my district and I can show you lots of places where Uber could not work.

AN HON. MEMBER: So what are we going to do?

L. PARROTT: Well, obviously we need to start talking about our ability to get cellphone service and Internet into these areas, and it's not happening. We all know that.

So, I guess that's the biggest thing for me, is what is the approach? Why have we overlooked it again? Why haven't we talked about that inside of this bill? Because when a company comes here to go to work, they obviously want to be able to go wherever they want to in the province and they will absolutely be alienated in their ability to deliver these services in rural Newfoundland. It doesn't work by a telephone call. It works by an app. You go in, you put what you want and they come. We all know exactly how it works. So it just does not work. That's the reality of it.

I know the government always talk about the consultations that they've done, but I'd be curious to understand what consultations they've done outside of the Avalon again. Again, in remote areas in Labrador where there are taxi stands operating, in the Bonavista Peninsula, in the Terra Nova District, on the West Coast, Stephenville - Port au Port, Burgeo - La Poile. There are cabs and taxi stands operating in all of these districts and I would be shocked to find out that there was any consultation done with any of them.

So, again, I'll say these small companies that have been around, these mom-and-pop companies that have been around for a number of years are going to struggle if Uber goes into some of these small communities. Now, that doesn't mean I'm against this. I'm just wondering if these conversations have been had and if there are solutions that are being offered, because obviously I haven't heard anything in this legislation.

We know for certain that there's an appetite to bring these types of services to Newfoundland, all of Newfoundland and Labrador. Uber and these ride-sharing programs have for several years attempted to go here and I believe that it's only PEI that doesn't have them. So I think that we'd be the ninth province to bring this in and it's long overdue, there's no question.

But again, I'll say with zero hesitation, if we're bringing in a provincial approach, it has to be beneficial for the whole province, and I don't think that this is. I don't think there was a lens put on rural Newfoundland and their ability to operate any of these types of services. So we're going to legislate something – it reminds me of what's going on up in Labrador.

You go to Labrador and you pay for a recycling fee, dispensing fee for your recyclables in Labrador West, and when you walk away you own the bottle. There's no way to bring it back. So government takes the money away, they've got legislation that says you've got to pay it and they don't give it back. And I'm just wondering if this is the type of legislation that's going to work throughout rural Newfoundland.

Anyhow, that's all I've got to say.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm just going to speak briefly on the amendment. The amendment is to the *Highway Traffic Act*, the City of St. John's, Mount Pearl, Corner Brook Act and the Municipalities Act. I just wanted to mention that. So there's a lot involved here. There are changes coming. These various acts are being amended to allow ride sharing.

When you look at ride-sharing services, it started becoming prominent about 13 years ago, and now several of the agencies have grown to giants in the industry, going from operating in a single city to national and international. We just have to look at the word "Uber." Everybody knows about Uber and also Lyft, right?

So for me, one of my concerns with any kind of legislation that's going to have a huge impact is: What impact is this going to have for our taxi drivers and the taxi companies? As my colleague from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans talked about, he did raise some of the concerns as well, to make sure that the taxi industry and the workers are supported.

That's very, very important for me, because the taxi drivers and the companies have been here. It's established work, that's their career and that's their livelihood, unlike the people who work for the ride-share companies. So just looking at that now, one of the concerns I also raise is that the ride-share industry is different from the taxi industry, because ride-share drivers are not full-time employees. That's something that we need to be looking at as well.

I was listening this morning to an owner of a taxi company and he was being interviewed. He wasn't really negative towards this ride share, but one of the things he said is: We welcome it as long as it's a level playing field – a level playing field. So we've got to

make sure that people who go to part-time work for these ride shares don't impact people's livelihoods. We can't allow taxi drivers and the companies to be disadvantaged. So that's really, really important. We've got to make sure when this legislation is introduced that it's not going to harm the taxi industry and the workers.

Like I said, there are a lot of different things I could talk about here. There's an option there for municipalities in the legislation to pass the resolution to prohibit ride sharing, to make a request to the minister to prohibit operation in their area and in the regulations. That's a positive thing because it's giving some autonomy back to municipalities. So they do have that option.

Another thing the minister talked about when she introduced the amendment is that Bill 55, the Register General is changing the criteria for obtaining a Class 4 licence, required to operate as a ride-share driver. So that in itself can be a little bit concerning. The written and road test requirements are dropped. Drivers are required to complete a medical examination, yes, and have at least two years driving experience to qualify for a Class 4 licence.

So some of the things that I am concerned about is, from what we can tell, there's no accommodating legislation to amend the *Labour Standards Act*. We talked to people such as those of the Federation of Labour. There's nothing to protect gig workers trying to make a living here. There's nothing to protect the gig workers here in terms of any changes to the *Labour Standards Act*.

Just looking at some of the key considerations here, why I brought up the gig economy, the gig workers, is the working conditions of independent contractors within the gig economy leaves much to be desired. We know that. It can be a difficult and trying occupation, even if you could consider it an occupation.

We've heard from agencies, workers who work for SkipTheDishes, DoorDash and they're not receiving much pay, Speaker. So we are concerned that the gig industry can prey on immigrants also, who are coming here that need jobs to be able to get established in our country. Also, their employment opportunities, because they're new to the company, are often limited. So a lot of times they have to resort to working in the gig economy. So we've got to make sure that gig workers receive full protection under the *Labour Standards Act*, and that's something that we will call for.

When we were in the technical briefing, there was a simple statement made that the insurance requirements are the same for ride-share drivers as for taxis, but it's not that simple. It's not the same. Taxis are commercial vehicles, versus the ride-share vehicles which are hybrids of personal and commercial vehicles. Also it's not the same because looking at the insurance, insurance providers in other jurisdictions have had to work to develop specific policies to accommodate the dual nature of ride-share vehicles. Also some providers flat-out refuse to insure the drivers who intended to work in the industry.

It's important to ask if the government has consulted with the insurance industry in Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure the drivers will be able to adequately insure their vehicles, and that's something we'll bring up in questions.

Just moving on, municipalities also have been shut out of governing a means of transit within their borders. So we'll ask some questions about consultations when we get a chance to ask questions. For us, it's worrisome. Ride-sharing services, when you look across the country and internationally, when ride-share services have taken a hold and become very popular in cities and municipalities, it's been shown that ride-sharing services have been observed to cannibalize the public transit system and increase congestion.

When you look at climate change, when you look at most vehicles still emit carbon emissions, not a lot of the vehicles are electric. So we need to be encouraging public transit. This is something that I wonder if the government has looked at. We should be taking every opportunity to enhance our public transit system, which is the most economical and efficient means of transportation. Also when you're looking at the data, public bodies can leverage the data collected by ride-sharing services to refine its public transit systems and make up variable fee requirements to discourage direct competition because of the two models of transit.

Now, government did say in the briefing that it had put no thought into how ride sharing would interact with public transit and had no idea on how to enact a data-sharing agreement, because that's important. So are we undercutting various carbon emission efforts that are so important now in climate change by failing to properly manage ride-sharing industry?

For us, this bill is concerning. It's really hard to support when we look at climate change and we look at the impacts that have been felt across the country. For me on a personal level, I always look at an established industry and how it's going to impact employees, the workers, the taxi workers, the taxi drivers and also the operators. You have to make sure it's a level playing field. We have to make sure as these ride shares take off that it's not increasing congestion and it's not doing a disservice to public transportation, Speaker.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

It's certainly a great opportunity to get up and represent the District of Ferryland and, for the record, we will be supporting this bill.

First of all, I'm sure there are lots of people here that have been away and on holidays and used Uber. I've yet to hear anybody complain about it. It's nice that they're going to be on a level playing field, that everybody can use it. You haven't heard a complaint.

When I was away, anyway, for a couple of times, Uber was absolutely awesome. They give you the plate number, they give you the colour of the vehicle and they tell you what time they're going to be there; rather than go outside a restaurant or go outside a shopping mall, that you got dropped off at, they'll tell you exactly where they're going to be and how long they're going to be there. So, for me, I think it's great that we have the opportunity.

I live in a rural and a metro area, really. I have the Goulds who does have taxis and we have a taxi up on the Southern Shore but, further up, they don't have those opportunities and there are fellows up there who have nicknames as Uber. They're bringing fellows around the community; that's a fact. That's their nicknames and they're bringing people to destinations and if somebody pays them after they get there, fine, but that's their nickname and they call them and they're on call.

One of the big issues – and the Member for Terra Nova had said the same thing – is they don't have the Internet service in the district where I'm to. I leave Bay Bulls and I get to Tors Cove, I have no Internet service from Tors Cove up to Cape Broyle. You go up over Cape Broyle hill, you lose the service. Going down into Calvert, you lose the service. Outside of Ferryland, you lose the service.

In Aquaforte, there's no cellphone coverage or very little. Unless you get to the right spot in your house or the right hill to get on, there's no cellphone coverage. Now, there may be seniors that may use that to go to the Foodland in Ferryland, if they had the opportunity with an app, but you're not going to be able to use the app.

Hopefully we can get through some of those things. Listen, I'm all for it. I have to tell you, I'm all for it, but there are some regulations that we have to get figured out.

As for consultations, I hope everybody was consulted on it; it's very important. I know that on this side, there are 18 or 19 people; I don't think we were consulted on it. We're here to make the rules in this House of Assembly. No one has asked us, whatever the regulations are coming, or whatever the rules – and Uber has their own set of rules; I'm pretty sure of that. They've got the rules that they're going to tell you how they operate.

But you talk about consultations? It never happened. No one ever called this side of the House or our groups or parties and mentioned it. It never happened. If we're in here elected as 40 people, we should be together on this to make sure that the rules and regulations are in place. Are we consulted? No. It's the same as the helmets issue. Regulations come in after. No, they all go up in arms and wave their hands, never consulted after to what was happening.

Came in here and had a great debate on it, but the regulations, it never came out the way we were promised they'd come out. So the same thing here, that's my concern. And that's a big concern for the people of the province, I'm sure it is. And the taxi drivers as well, I mean, they're concerned. They want to make sure that they're treated equally, and I'm sure you're going to try to do that.

But for consultations, and we're all elected in here to represent the people of the province, and there are 22 making a decision, and we weren't consulted to see if we have anything to offer? I think that's ridiculous. I really do. It's disappointing. You get in here, oh, everything's going to change. This has gone on for 50 years – 50 years – unbelievable. It just can't get there.

In regard to vehicles, rental vehicles, you know that's an issue since COVID hit. Why that is since COVID hit, I don't understand it, but I was in the car industry for 22 years; I was at a dealership. And every summer we would put in 300 to 400 vehicles in a rental fleet. So they'd come in right direct, they didn't deal with Hickman's other than we did a PDI on them, fuelled them up, and brought them to their destination and put plates on them. That was it; we didn't do nothing more than that. They were already negotiated through the companies, they'd sell 300 or 400, and every dealership had pretty well the same thing, there were thousands of rentals.

Now we're down to no rentals; they can't get the cars. You go in to buy your own car now, there's very few available. They're getting better. I was only in there last week and went in to get a change of oil in the vehicle I had, and you know, speaking to them, yes, it's a little better, but you don't have an option to pick your colour, or here's what comes in that somebody didn't buy, they bought somewhere else while they're waiting. It's certainly a big issue, for sure.

In regard to inspections for these vehicles, and I'm sure – I don't know the rules on taxis. I'm saying that a taxi has to be inspected every year, and I'm just saying that off the cuff but I would think they do, or pretty close to it. But from the industry I was in, I don't want to cost people more money, because that's what we're not about, obviously, costing people money. But we've got vehicles that are on the road and there are no inspections after a certain point in time.

You buy a vehicle, it should be good for five years; you've got 100,000 kilometres. But when you come to motor vehicle inspections, to me I've worked in the industry and it was a concern of mine that people would come in with vice grips on the brake lines and pads gone right down to the rotors, wheel bearings falling off and there are no inspections. It's scary. The safety

issue is the big issue. I'm not saying nothing about the rest of it but, overall, in the safety aspect of all this, that's the most important. We look at this and I look at inspections as the one thing.

So if a car gets over 150,000 kilometres, I think an inspection should jump up to say that we should have that inspected on the road. We're driving it, you're driving it and same as these vehicles are going to be driving it. These regulations that Uber have, I would think – and maybe the government may have something on it – that the inspections are a certain period of time that they have to be inspected. I know they will but a certain age of a vehicle as well, I would think, will come into it.

So that's really important. We'll ask a lot of questions and they're going to be tough questions. I'm sure they are and we probably won't have all the answers today but we're going to ask them. That's our job in here is to ask those tough questions. We're not going to let it go. We're going to hound on it. We're going to make sure we get this right and not put a pile of red tape behind it and slow them down. Let's not do that. Let's get it done. Let's get it right and do the consulting; absolutely do the consulting.

It's nice to included, if you're going to do that the next time we have some legislation – we rush legislation in. Every single time we do legislation, we do the same thing. A briefing in the morning and come here and talk about it in the afternoon and try to get people briefed up on it to know what we're talking about. It's ridiculous that we do this every single time since I came in here and we're going to be 40 people that got elected – do things different for the province and get this legislation, yesterday or today, and spend that time. It's unbelievable and that's consultation.

Why can't they give us this a week ahead of time. When did we come in? October 16 we came in here. That's when we came in. We

had all summer to get legislation ready. You could have gave it to us in September and we'd have our homework done and be able to ask these questions and have something to offer maybe. Never once has it happened since I came in here. It's unbelievable.

AN HON. MEMBER: A Committee.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Yes, form a committee. Slow it down again. Let's change and be different. We've got 40 people. Let's change and be different on legislation. This is important. Let's change and be different if you want to act as a group of 40 individuals. That's what we're here to do is set government and rules and we sit here and don't talk to each other – never involved.

Anyway, Speaker, I've had my say on that and hopefully someone else will have a say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very happy to speak to Bill 55, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act and, as it's been stated, the intent of this bill is to allow ride sharing and that would be Uber, for example. I think there are two important themes for me that I'd like to highlight here with respect to this bill. The first is the fair playing field, Speaker. This is about equal opportunities. This is about saying that no competitor has an unfair advantage over another, especially in a competitive environment such as this. We need to ensure that there's equal chance of succeeding for all parties that are involved in this industry.

From what I'm hearing, the taxi brokers appear to support this ride-sharing model, provided it is fair. That there are fair opportunities, that the rules that are in place apply fairly to all parties, that they are

following accepted rules with respect to the industry. But what I have some concerns about, Speaker, is with respect to when we find out what those accepted rules are and whether the parties are following those accepted rules, will that be in the regulations? Is that going to happen later, after the bill is passed, after the amendment is passed?

So that begs the question about consultation, Speaker. That is what my colleague from Ferryland was referencing. Consultation is very important with respect to legislation. I must say that the record so far for this government, in terms of engaging and collaborating and having consultations with the bills and the legislation it passes, has not been very good, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I would say it's been lacking.

Why is public consultation important? My colleague from Ferryland referenced that all Members be consulted and I agree that would be very important. It's a great starting point, but we also need to be hearing when legislation like this is being passed which will impact people – this is action that will impact the public – and it could adversely impact certain groups in the public. So there needs to be consultation with outside stakeholders as well.

So I'd like to know – and we will find this out – what level of consultation did the government and did the minister engage. Were taxi owners and brokers engaged? Were they consulted? What did they have to say? I hope that they were consulted. Obviously that would be an important starting place for taxi owners and brokers to be consulted. What did they say about this amendment? Did they have concerns and what were those concerns? Was the Insurance Bureau of Canada consulted? What did the Insurance Bureau have to say? What were their concerns?

Speaker, municipalities and Municipalities NL, were they consulted? What input and

what feedback did they provide with respect to this legislation?

This is so important that we have this feedback, that we have the opportunity for all parties to have their say in legislation that will impact them. Why is that? There are many reasons. It encourages the public to have meaningful input into the decision-making process. That is very important. Why? Because on key public policy issues, they are better informed and they know then what their government is doing. It provides a strong foundation, a strong basis for trusting relationships between government and the people that government represents. It builds and maintains and essentially it will be the foundation for better decision-making and a stronger democracy, too.

These are all ways to improve – when we have consultations – our democratic governance. This is extremely important. It is important to have consultation because it means we will have a more inclusive and a more democratic society. It improves transparency. When government takes the time to consult with the public, with important stakeholders that will be impacted by the legislation, that will improve the transparency of the government. If we work on finding solutions together, Mr. Speaker, it improves our effectiveness; it improves our efficiency. It just makes good sense for better legislation.

When government is considering action that has impact on people's lives, then they must consult and they must collaborate with the people that are impacted by the legislation. Sadly, the record, as I stated, is not good when it comes to government's past record. In terms of consulting with the important people and groups that are impacted by the legislation, their past record is dismal.

Speaker, on that note, I just want to say public consultation is critical and we will find out in questions in Committee the level and the extent of the public consultations that this government has done. We will examine

that and to see if that is at an acceptable level.

The other thing is the fair playing field. If this is not a fair playing field we are going to see, perhaps only in the regulations, exactly what rules are in place, in terms of to determine whether it's a fair playing field for all parties that are competing in this industry. But if it is an unfair playing field, if one party has an unfair advantage over another in this competitive environment and that all are not following the accepted rules at the same level, then that is going to be a problem, but unfortunately it will be too late because the regulations will be after the legislation is passed.

One final point I'd like to make is with respect to what my colleague from Terra Nova had raised with respect to the impact of this legislation on rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Personally, for me, as the MHA in the District of Harbour Main, who has very desperate cellphone service in many areas, for example, Holyrood – which we've raised in the House many times about that lack of cellphone service in our district and the inadequate cellphone service – how is that going to impact the people that cannot access cellphone service? I mean, that is a crucial element in order for the Uber service and this ride-sharing service to be effective in the Harbour Main District.

That is a very serious concern and, again, it raises the issue of the unfair playing field too. Because is one area of the province going to be able to access this ride-sharing service and yet other areas, such as rural areas, for example, like in Harbour Main, are we going to be left in the dark?

Again, I have some concerns about this legislation, primarily the level of public consultation, whether it's going to be a fair playing field, when do we find out if it is going to be a fair playing field. Is it going to be in the regulations and then there's not much we can do about it? These are all some concerns that I have. I look forward to

hearing from the minister in Committee with respect to her answers on these important questions. I thank you for the time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further speakers to Bill 55?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, will be supporting Bill 55. I have to say while I do support the bill, I was a little disappointed when I saw the bill tabled originally and I heard the minister talk about the *City of Mount Pearl Act*, *City St. John's Act* and *Municipalities Act, 1999*, I was thinking that we were finally going to see the new Municipalities Act that the cities have been asking for for so long. All the towns, I guess, in terms of the Municipalities Act but, in particular, I know the *City of Mount Pearl Act*, for years and years, we've been asking for a new act that would be an enabling legislation.

Of course, it was supposed to happen – I thought it was supposed happen this fall because the last sitting of the House the former minister brought in just one piece of the legislation relating to the Code of Conduct. I believe she indicated that the act itself would be here this fall. Here we are this fall, I don't see it. Maybe the Minister of Municipal Affairs will present it next week – hopefully. I look forward with bated breath for sure.

We are talking about ride sharing, Uber, if you will. I think that's something that people in my community would welcome. I know the mayor of St. John's has been in the media and he said that they welcome it. Of course, Southlands and Galway is part of my district, so I'm glad that they are in

favour. I also believe that the City of Mount Pearl, Mayor Aker, has indicated as well, that the City of Mount Pearl would welcome this change.

Those are the people that I represent, those two municipalities, those two cities. So obviously, from my point of view representing that area, that would be my number one priority.

But with that said, in listening to the debate, I do understand and recognize and concur that there could be challenges for parts of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, communities and Local Service Districts in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly in areas where they do not have Internet service and phone services are bad or non-existent in areas.

I do appreciate the commentary and the concerns brought forward from my colleagues who represent rural areas of the provinces. We are all here as 40 Members to work together and to support each other and the province as a whole, as opposed to just our own district. Of course, our own district is what is obviously most important to us, but we should all try to work together.

I look forward to some of the questions that my colleagues will have, representing rural areas, representing Labrador and so on, and how this is going to apply to them to ensure that they are not left out of this opportunity.

The only thing I would say, again, this has been raised and this could impact people in my district and so on. I did receive a call from a taxi driver yesterday, actually, who's a constituent of mine. He's a long time in the industry, and he raised the same concern that other Members have heard from other taxi drivers, who have the concern around the fact that: not against Uber per se, but just want to make sure that there's an even playing field.

I've heard that said numerous times in the debate this afternoon, ensuring there's an even playing field between taxi drivers and Uber drivers in terms of the legislation, in terms of the regulations to ensure that they're on a level playing field and that both Uber and traditional taxi can co-exist, and that one will not be put in place to the detriment of the other.

That was his concern, and I think that that's the concern that most taxi drivers would have. I did hear Peter Gulliver on the news last night, I do believe – owner of City Wide, the largest taxi company, certainly in the St. John's metro area – and he indicated that as a taxi owner, he was in favour of the legislation. So that would be a positive, obviously. But I'm also concerned for the individual drivers themselves and ensuring that they don't fall through the cracks somehow and they're not disadvantaged.

I have a number of people in Mount Pearl and in my district, who I've known, who have been taxi driving for years and years and years, and have worked endless numbers of hours to put food on the table. It's not an easy job, it's awful long hours and the remuneration is generally not great if you're just a driver but you can make a living.

It is becoming more and more difficult to make a living, over the last number of years, with the skyrocketing cost of insurance and the cost on fuel and so on for taxis. It's been even harder than ever for a taxi driver to make a living and it does require very, very long hours. It's important, though, that for people who have chosen this field to make a living to support their families for all these years that they are not disadvantaged by what we're doing here today.

As long as the appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure that taxi drivers, Uber drivers are on a level playing field and that the taxi drivers will not be adversely affected by this change, then I will certainly support the legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

If the hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL speaks now, she will close the debate.

I'm recognizing the hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you everyone for your questions and comments and happy to answer lots and lots of questions in Committee.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 55 be now 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.'

Motion carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act, the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999. (Bill 55)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a second time.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Presently.

SPEAKER: Presently.

On motion, a bill, “An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act, the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John’s Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 55)

SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I have a short comment that I would like to make to the House regarding Bill 43. Members will note that the Notice of Motion and First Reading refers to the bill as an An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997; however, the title should read, An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997, No. 2, as this is the second bill to amend the Schools Act in this session.

I am advised this is correct and appropriate from a legislative drafting perspective. I would like to draw the House’s attention to the adjustment required. I suggest we proceed to second reading and debate in Committee of the Whole and that any required adjustments to the record of the House be made.

SPEAKER: Any further speakers?

I’m recognizing the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 11, Bill 43, second reading of An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997 No. 2.

SPEAKER: I’m recognizing the hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL that Bill 43, An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997 No. 2 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997 No. 2.” (Bill 43)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Speaker, I stand today to introduce Bill 43, An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997 No. 2. The integration of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District into government was announced in *Budget 2021*. A lot of work has been done to date and we are on track to complete the integration by the end of 2023.

Our government is focused on improving educational outcomes by aligning programming and curriculum development to help students excel, as well improving the service delivery. These improvements will be directly supported through integration. Through integration, we also expect to become more operationally efficient. This means collaborating to ensure we’re using things like equipment, inventory and contracts for services in the best way possible to serve our school systems.

Operational efficiency in this context does not mean job losses; rather it means a better way of doing things. While the English School District is being integrated into government, the Francophone community and the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial have charter rights to maintain control of French first-language schools. Therefore, the Conseil Scolaire is not moving into government.

I’d like to highlight some of the efforts of the Department of Education and the leadership and staff at the English School District that are helping us along this path of integration.

The department has done substantial work to consult with stakeholders, including unions, to ensure that policies do not fundamentally change as a result of the integration process. This will help to ensure that teachers and administrators do not notice a change in their daily work come January.

Regular communications related to integration are also occurring and will continue to occur. These communications are being shared with district staff and teachers as well as their unions and they're all available to the general public on the department website.

The importance of communication cannot be understated during times of change and I would like to thank the staff within the department and the district for their feedback as we progress through this integration process.

All of that to say that integration is well under way; however, one key piece of the puzzle in order to complete integration are changes to the Schools Act. This bill, An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997, No. 2, is enabling legislation to allow transition of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District into government. When this bill comes into force, the school board of the English School District will be dissolved and its operations will move to government. Throughout the act, previous references to the school board will be amended to the Crown, the department and the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial as required.

The intention of this bill will not fundamentally change the Schools Act or impact the spirit in which it is described. This bill is a mechanism to allow for integration to occur. So like I often say, a rose by any other name. Many of the proposed changes are minimal and simply replace a word. Others that are not so simple will likely be discussed further here in this hon. House today.

First and foremost, I think it's important to outline that these proposed amendments will not negatively impact students. The student educational experience underscores all of the work of integration and these amendments aim to maintain or improve processes where possible.

There are changes proposed that will impact student processes, such as student appeals. Student appeals that were previously appealed to the school board will now be appealed to the superintendent. Parents and children will have an opportunity to be heard and make their case, as will teachers and staff. It is anticipated the appeal process will otherwise follow along the lines of process that are already in place today.

Another change that relates to the review of student expulsions. I would like to note that student expulsions are very rare and they don't happen very often in Newfoundland and Labrador. A senior member of our staff has recognized that in his time involved in the school district and the department, he cannot remember a time when an expulsion occurred. Long before I was a consenting adult, I do believe, is when some of these were last spoke about.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

K. HOWELL: However, if they occur – we won't talk about the age of some others that who may have been consenting adults at the time – appeals will be made to an expulsion review panel. Details of the appointment and the expulsion review process will be set out in regulations. This expulsion review panel is currently a process that is used by the English School District, if an appeal is submitted. The rationale for this amendment is to put into legislation a process that has been proven to be effective.

The duties and powers of the department proposed in the bill have not substantively changed from previous duties and powers

of the board. However, where government process applies, duties and powers are not set out in the act. For example, the current Schools Act does not need to set out provisions to allow the department to employ staff and assign duties. It also needs to set out that department employees follow policies and guidelines issued by the minister as this is already in place. The department staff already follow policies and procedures that have been outlined.

Also proposed is the amendment related to responsibilities of the superintendent. As an employee of the Department of Education, the superintendent will be responsible to administer, supervise and evaluate all education programs and services for the operation of schools under the public schools branch. The superintendent will also promote a safe and caring learning environment for schools.

A topic that has come up in my previous conversations with many of my hon. colleagues, and one that I am pleased to share information about today, is school-generated funds. Fundraising and school-generated funds are very important to schools. Fundraising helps to offset the costs of sport uniforms, sporting events, school activities, graduation events and the like. The proposed amendments will allow school funds to remain within the schools. Schools will continue to have the ability to raise and use school-generated funds, including school fees, school levies, proceeds from fundraising, food service commissions, school-sponsored events, donations made to a school, special purpose grants awarded to a school and any other funds that are set out in the regulations. School-generated funds will include interest earned on any school-generated funds described in the act.

The purposes for how school-generated funds can be used will be set out in the regulations. The regulations will also set out the requirements for the administration and maintenance of funds. The department will

have oversight to ensure funds are administered and maintained in an appropriate manner.

As referenced earlier in my remarks, the Francophone community and the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial have chartered rights to maintain control of the French first-language schools. Therefore, the Conseil Scolaire is not moving into government.

There are no substantive amendments applicable to the Conseil Scolaire; however, there are a number of sections that are not applicable to the Crown or the department and they're moved to Part V, French first-language schools. The duties and powers of the Conseil Scolaire and the duties of the director are updated without reference to the previous Part IV or the new Part III.

This is a positive change for the Conseil Scolaire. These changes allow for a more comprehensive section within the act that relates to the Conseil Scolaire. Previously, many sections of the act did apply but by reference only.

The last item I'd like to note for my hon. colleagues is that there are a large number of consequential amendments that relate to the amendment of this piece of legislation. I won't go into great detail in all of those. I'd like to be clear that many of the consequential amendments delete a reference to school board and replace it with a reference to the Conseil Scolaire, the Crown or the department.

For example, in the *Highway Traffic Act*, the bus regulations required amendments to continue to allow the employees of the Department of Education and the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure to be carried on the school bus in the course of their employment. These are instances when student assistants may ride on the bus to school with a student. Given that the student assistant will now become an employee of

government, it is important that all the amendments allow government employees to ride on the school bus as part of their employment.

Those are the type of consequential amendments that we speak of and those that will occur based on an amendment to the Schools Act. All of the amendments that I've described here today are necessary to serve and to enable the integration of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District into the provincial government. Every step that we're taking is with the goal of improving educational experience of students and improving educational outcomes by aligning programming and curriculum development to help our students excel.

As I mentioned, the Department of Education has been working closely with the English School District and the NLTA, NAPE and CUPE through the entire integration process. It's important to emphasize that there will not be job losses because of integration and the work of teachers and the district staff will not be negatively impacted by this legislation. I certainly do look forward to further discussing these proposed amendments in this House today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker, I appreciate that.

As I stand and speak on this legislation, it's an interesting piece of legislation in the sense that I went to the briefing yesterday – this is not a new issue. I believe last year or probably the year before, the budget two years ago, I think it was announced the amalgamation of the school district into the department. At the time we asked a lot of

questions about job losses, cost savings. We never really got answers on that and I know the former minister or a couple of ministers back answered those questions at the time and they never really gave us any clarity on the answers. The current Minister of Health, actually, was the one I asked a lot of questions of back then.

One thing that jumps – what cost-benefit analysis has been done; or, better still, are we better off today as a province, as a government, schools throughout the province, your students, your teachers, you name it, as a result of Bill 43? Are we in a better place financially? Are the students better? Are teachers better? Is government better? Is the Department of Education better as a result of this bill?

I read it, I went to the briefing, we've had discussions in caucus, I've thought about it, we threw out ideas, questions for Committee and what have you, and I have not got clarity in my mind to know that if we are better off.

I asked this in the briefing, so the minister may have already been told this by her officials. I asked the question yesterday and it was a tongue-in-cheek question, but it was a legitimate question. I said during my issue with Frank Roberts last year or this past year with the rodent issue, the well-publicized issues at the school the minister – and I respectfully thank her – invited me to do a tour of the school with her before the school opened for this year. We had a meeting and we had a good conversation. Full marks to her on that.

We did the tour and we've had discussions since that as well. My question was if that issue arises again, since maintenance now has gone to Transportation and Infrastructure, do I reach out to the Minister of TI to do that tour, or do I reach out to the Minister of Education and early childhood learning?

I said it was tongue-in-cheek, but I legitimately thought it was a valid question. I'm not usually too tongue-in-cheek early in the morning. When I asked that question yesterday morning, I was really puzzled about it: So who do I reach out to? If I got a concern with maintenance in schools and I want the person that's in charge of that division, obviously, it would be the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

But officials said, and respectfully – did a great job I might add – no, it would be the Minister of Education, early childhood learning. That was fine and I moved on. Then part B comes up and I got a busing issue. There is not a Member in this House outside the St. John's area and I would say a lot of the St. John's area does not have busing issues. I know, Speaker, you and me have discussed this many times, of busing and my opinion on busing and my fight for the 1.6 kilometre as it was well noted in this House.

So now do I go to the Minister of Education and early childhood learning or do I go to the Minister of TI? Because busing is in TI now but inspections are over in Digital Government and Service NL.

You can see the picture I'm trying to paint there. I'm not being opposed to this legislation but it is our role and where we sit over here, we sometimes refer to it as the Opposition, to bring out those issue because anyone listening at home or that would be following this does not know this legislation. We only seen it yesterday morning ourselves.

So all the parents in our districts that have issues with maintenance, have issues with their child's window in the classroom not working, have issues with busing, when they're reaching out they always used to reach out to the school district and they would be channelled to the right person. No doubt they will be told to contact the department and they'll put you through to the right person.

But are we making things better? Is this bill helping the cause? I beg to differ. I don't think it is helping the cause. I think it's making things more confusing.

In a time when back in the day, back 20 years ago I suppose with the Williams administration, one of the first things they came in with was the red tape reduction. They had a department on removing the red tape. I know that there were a lot of things removed but I think as we removed one we added two.

It is governments that do a great job of that. All stripes, by the way, it's not just the current Liberal government. There are PC governments that did the same thing and it's something about governments in general. That doesn't help anybody. Nobody wins in that debate.

You would like to think 20 years later or 20-some-odd years later we would be further ahead, but it doesn't appear that way. Because, again, I'm looking at this and I went to the briefing yesterday and our staff person was with us, who I might add is not lost for words and can be very colourful on any given day, had some choice words. Not nasty but in his own context. He was just totally confused. He said we've created more confusion than anything. We've created more confusion than what we started with.

So we had the Eastern School District that's been operating for a long time. When that was set up back in the day, I felt it was set up to provide cover for government. That's not in a bad form, that's respectful and I understand governments doing that. The Minister of Education and early childhood learning, should she be dealing with evaluations? Should she be dealing with down in the weeds stuff in a school? No, I don't think she should to be frank with you. I think, when it gets to a certain level, it has to get to her. The board was always set up. So the board dealt with those issues.

Many times, and I know the Speaker again was the former minister of that department, you send it back to the board because the board were ultimately responsible for administering education in this province and they done that job for a long time. Ironically, I mean we all have our issues with school districts, busing, maintenance you name it, we never ever stood in this House or at least I hope not. I hope someone can quote me in *Hansard* as saying I don't think we ever lobbied for the school district to be amalgamated into government. At least I don't think. I stand to be corrected but I think I'm right. I don't think we did.

So when government brought in this legislation or this move that was announced – I think our current Finance Minister announced it in one of her previous budgets – it was about cost savings. We thought it was meant to make things better. We were all led to believe at the time you're amalgamating the school district into government, it was meant to be cost savings, maybe less positions, more fine-tuning, more streamlining and more efficient. That's really what these things should be about.

That's kind of the way it was told, it's time to move on and create streamlining and it was the full package. But, Speaker, I don't see that. Again, it's unfortunate. The question is: Why? That's I guess my question and I have a lot of questions for Committee, but why? To what benefit? To what end? What's this process about? We've been two years almost waiting for this legislation to come through the House. You sit and wonder and you question and every now and then – and I've been the Education critic for several years and I used to say: What happened to the school board legislation? It finally showed up this time.

Again, I'm at a loss. I'll go back to the cost-benefit analysis. Actually, that was our Leader this morning who had mentioned it to me and it was a good point: Do we have any cost-benefit analysis done? What

information and what research did government base this decision on, other than it sounded good or it was a good budgetary announcement or it looked good on paper because a lot of people felt that when it was announced. Government must be trying – this must be a way of trying to save money.

Education is a \$1.2-billion or \$1.4-billion budget line. The Minister of Finance could probably correct me on that quote, but I think we're somewhere over the \$1-billion mark, roughly \$1.2 billion. So I guess we're going to save money.

B. DAVIS: (Inaudible.)

B. PETTEN: The Minister of Environment is having a little sidebar conversation as I'm talking about this issue, but I guess he's going to speak after me.

The point I'm making, Speaker, and I don't plan on going on endless because I have a lot of questions. But the point I think the minister opposite probably gets where I'm coming to with it is are we better off? I really don't think we are. I think you'll get your questions. If anyone else wants to speak, I guess we'll figure that out.

But I do believe that's the problem. I don't see how putting bussing and maintenance in Transportation and Infrastructure, having inspections in another department and having Education as superintendent, or will it be an ADM, under the public schools branch in the department. So now we're touching on three departments, three different ministers; all of them are very important issues.

I don't get how that makes things any better, how that makes us more efficient, how that saves us money. I don't see none of those things happening. As a matter of fact, I would hazard to guess this is probably going to cost more money, it's going to create more confusion to parents; to teachers; to MHAs, all trying to get stuff

resolved; to operators; bus owners; you name it, it's going to create more headaches and the right hand is not going to know what the left hand is doing.

At the end of the day, the ones that suffer most are the students and the children that go to our schools and the teachers that provide the education and, ultimately, also the parents.

Speaker, I've got lots of questions for Committee. On that note, I will take my seat.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

The last time we did the amendments to the Schools Act I said it, and I still am not in favour, I've said it before and I'm going to say it again: I'm not in favour of the idea of moving the schools into the department. After seeing what happened when we went from a Labrador school board into a provincial school board and seeing how that has affected the schools in Labrador West and now seeing this, I have nothing but reservation on what is going to come.

I have heard time and time again from parents, educators, people who work at the school, that since we lost our Labrador school board, things have gotten more difficult. It has gotten more bogged down and we have now seen it this year, we're actually offering less courses this year in Lab West than we ever have, when it came to education now.

It has caused issues with recruitment. It has caused issues with retaining teachers in Labrador West. This whole school board thing, amalgamation, I have nothing but fear for my district on how the education system is going to play out, because we have less teachers in Lab West now than we had

before. I got a letter from the minister's office the other day telling me that they're having trouble recruiting teachers.

So here's the thing: This is going to cause more problems. I have never agreed with it, I never will agree with it, I think this is going to actually degrade it. I would rather see either leave it the way it was or improve it, but by pulling it into the department I've been hearing nothing but fear for my district on the future of education up there.

This is a mistake. It's a big mistake and I have nothing but worries for it. Right now, I'm standing here, we have less course offerings, I'm missing teachers at my high school; we haven't had a guidance counsellor at the middle school in three years and now we're going to put everything into the department.

There was a time when every school had a maintenance person. Now they've degraded down to two maintenance people for four schools. We've seen the actual attrition through the school system where we actually have less people doing the job. I've talked to administrators, they're just burdened with the work they have to do. Then on top of that, they're understaffed.

I can't see how this is going to solve that problem. If anything, I see that as just going to cause more layers of bureaucracy, more layers of confusion and we're going to try to manage all the schools across a large geographic area from one centralized location.

I know they can say they've got the Labrador office, but from my dealings with the current school board, with no administrators or anything in Lab West, that's been nothing but issues.

So here's my thing: I don't agree with it, I'm not voting for this, I'm not agreeing with this. You can check my party's policy book, we never advocated for this. This is what I have to say: Take it back and review it, or show

us the document that you guys have hidden away that we can't see, because the Member for Mount Pearl is right, there is a whole report that we can't see, telling you how to do this that we haven't seen on how to do this. Show us that. Show us where there are actually savings, show us where actually we'll do this. Because I haven't seen any proof of that. I haven't seen any proof that this is actually going to do what government's telling us it's going to do.

From where I'm standing and from what I'm seeing for my district, centralization has done nothing but cause problems for my district.

I don't agree with it. I'm not voting for it. I've got lots and lots and lots of questions on this, but at the same time, I think maybe it's time for government to take this back and revisit it because I think this is going to come back to bite us and it's going to bite us hard. Just ask PEI. They pulled it in and then they put it back out again. If it's so great, this whole plan is so great, then why was there a court challenge in BC when they tried to do it to their French school board? Because, obviously, there is constitutional issues with it.

So here's the thing: Take it back, try again because I don't think this is what we're going to do. Mark my words: It's going to cause nothing but more problems for Labrador West.

Thank you.

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess in the name of consistency, I didn't vote for this the last time, I voted against it; I'm going to vote against it again, I think. Quite frankly, I'm like the Member for Conception Bay South, I don't know if this is a good thing or not. I honestly don't.

We've seen in the past – I'll go back to when we got rid of the denominational education. We can go back to then, even. I can remember, at the time, when that was on the go, I was chair of the school council at St. Peter's Elementary, at the time. I'm not taking this from a religious point of view because I'm actually Protestant, although my kids went to St. Peter's and that was a Catholic school at the time. Anyway, we won't get it all that but it's not a religious thing. I'm not saying it for that point.

But I can remember at the time the rationale for doing it, I believe it was, I want to say Premier Tobin, maybe I'm wrong, but I think it was Premier Tobin that brought it in.

AN HON. MEMBER: Wells.

P. LANE: Wells, was it? We were going to save money, it was going to save a pile of money and the money was going to be reinvested into more teachers, more guidance counsellors, better equipment, computers and everything else. That was what was supposed to happen at the time that they and the idea. I would argue it didn't happen.

Then we can fast forward to around maybe 2013, 2014, thereabouts, when we had a number of school boards and we collapsed them into the one school board. At that point in time, Clyde Jackman was the Minister of Education, if I'm not mistaken, and we were going to save a pile of money by doing that. Lo and behold, the next year, I can remember when the budget came out; I think it was \$2 million more to operate the new structure than it did the old, even though the purpose for that was supposed to be to save money and to make things better as well.

Now, here we go again for a third time around. Like the Member from Labrador West says – and I asked this when we debated the first piece of legislation, back a year or so ago. I can remember asking the minister: How did you come to the

conclusion that this was the way to go? How did you come to it, that conclusion?

I was told in this House of Assembly – unless I’m dreaming it; I don’t think I am – by the minister that they had hired a consultant. That the government had hired a consultant to look at the pros and cons and to make a recommendation as to whether or not they should fold the school boards into the Department of Education. Based on the recommendations of that consultant’s report, that we paid – I don’t know how we paid for it. They didn’t tell us that either. But there was a consultant’s report – I’m sure I’m not dreaming – that they made the decision.

I asked: Okay, great, can I see this consultant’s report so I can understand the rationale? You want me to vote in favour of doing this, show me the consultant’s report. You saw a consultant’s report. They studied the whole thing and they came back with recommendations saying this is the way to go. This is the best solution for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, the children of Newfoundland and Labrador, in terms of a better education, more efficient set up for the taxpayers and everything else. Do you know what I was told, for those who can’t remember? The minister said: I cannot show you the document. I said: Why can’t you show me the document? Because it’s a Cabinet document, you can’t see it.

So the Cabinet utilized taxpayers’ money to hire a consultants, to do a study on whether this is the right thing to do. They hired a consultant. They spent I don’t know how much money. The consultant comes back with recommendations saying this is what you do – and this is a huge deal here. I mean this is not like a small amendment. We’ve had lots of amendments here, where you’re gender-neutral in language and changing a few words around or whatever, this is major. This is a major amendment. This is going to shape the education system for the future of our children for years and years to come.

So the government hires a consultant to do the work, to study it, to come back with recommendations and in the last go around I asked to see this report so I could vote with the knowledge that the Cabinet had – nope, can’t see it; it is a Cabinet document.

I think it would be pretty hypocritical now for me to say I didn’t vote for it the first time, but I’ll vote for it this time because I still have no idea; I still never saw the report, but I’ll just vote for it anyway. In good conscience, I don’t think that is the responsible thing to do. It might be the best thing in the world; I hope it is.

I hope this makes the education system in our province better. I hope it will result in better busing. I hope it will result in safer busing. I hope it will result in better schools, better curriculum, and lots of teachers that we need, guidance, inclusivity and all that stuff that we need and we aspire to provide our children. I hope that this move helps facilitate it, I really do. I will be your biggest cheerleader that it works out because, guess what? I have three grandchildren of my own. One who just started school this year so I want it to work, but in good conscience, out of responsibility, I cannot vote for something when I have zero idea as to whether it is the right thing to do or not because you have a report and I don’t. You saw it; you read it; I can’t, but I’m going to vote for it anyway – trust me.

Sorry, no offence to anybody but that doesn’t work. I wasn’t elected to simply say trust me, go along with it. If I am going to make a decision, all of us over here – all of us in the House, for that matter, we should be doing it based on the facts and on all the information. This side of the House doesn’t have that information; I can’t vote for it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

I just wanted to briefly speak on this amendment to the Schools Act and just looking at bringing the two school boards together.

Speaker, my colleague for Labrador West spoke about some of the issues that Labrador is facing. I am just going to briefly stand up to show my support for everything that he said and to add a little bit of my own as well.

We're looking at the amalgamation of the Labrador English School District into the Department of Education. Now, one of the problems that I've had in the past when the regional school boards were dissolved and we came into one Labrador English School District is the people in Labrador, especially the people in remote areas of Labrador, really, really struggled. The students struggled, the parents struggled and also the people who were involved in the school system actually struggled.

Now we see it coming under the Department of Education. Speaker, one of the biggest issues I have with that integration of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District into the department is the impact, the effect of that. The integration of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District into the department ultimately has the effect of bringing the K-12 education more directly under the control of government. That's something that each Member of my caucus raised: under the control of government.

We actually here as MHAs, we see what happens when something comes under the control of government. After four years in the House of Assembly, I find that very unsettling. I have no reassurances from what I saw that the school system would be better served by bringing it under the provincial government.

Because – and I note in some of my notes I have written here – it will eliminate any independence for those managing the schools and the education system. For me, that's very, very unsettling. Also, with my fellow colleagues in the Third Party. There's a danger of making their management and funding more political and being handled and managed like political footballs, political opinions. What is the agenda of the government? Who has an agenda here? From donors, from advocates, from different people in the different parts of the province having undue influence, some might say.

For me, just after serving as MHA for four years, I am worried by bringing it into the department that we will actually have an erosion of transparency. We all know about the lack of transparency when something is managed through government. We have no recourse but to have to deal with it and try to effectively draw things out. But at the end of the day, I can't support actually putting our school board into government. It has serious concerns.

Just looking at one school district by itself, the English-speaking school district. Since that came into existence and it went under one school district, my district in Torngat Mountains, Northern Labrador, has suffered, suffered greatly. I've raised some of the issues here in the House of Assembly. Anyone who hears me speak on the issues will remember when I brought up that high school students in my district went to school at the beginning of the school year and they were told that their online courses, that they needed to graduate, were going to be in the Newfoundland time zone. Not what we call the Labrador time zone – the Atlantic time zone.

Then, I didn't realize but through email, the principals were supposed to tell each school in my district that the entire school was going to go on Newfoundland time zone. So what that meant is that teachers and students would actually go on their lunch

break a half an hour before the parents got home.

My communities are small. There is no cafeteria in schools and the students go home for their lunchbreak. So the students would be getting home before the parents got home, for all ages: somebody in Grade 2, somebody in Grade 4, somebody in Grade 6.

But that was to accommodate so that the high school students could do their CDLI courses online. The only option that they were given, because of changes made by one school board that was managing the entire province, the time zone was now going to be in Newfoundland time zone. On the North Coast we rely heavily on CDLI courses for academic courses that are not offered. But if you want to go into university or into certain education streams, you have to have these courses.

I raised that. I petitioned that almost weekly sometimes because we needed to revert. We needed an option given to our students. Why? Because the changes created was with our high school students doing CDLI courses, they were on Newfoundland time zones but the rest of the students in the classroom being taught by the teachers were on, what we call, Labrador time zone – a half an hour behind.

So if a student was doing an online course, they had to get up from their in-class lecture within 30 minutes of starting that class and go register online. Then when they came back to the classroom, the teacher had already been teaching for a least a half an hour. So they were missing 30 minutes of each class before and after they were doing these online courses.

That created a lot of hardships. Not just for the students but also for the teachers who had to help them. The teachers felt an obligation to make sure that the students didn't fail and that they weren't punished by these unilateral decisions that were sprung

up on the students and their parents the day they went into the classroom, the day they started in September. That was their welcome-to-school announcement. That created a lot of hardships. No thought was given.

This is what happens when we do things like this, when we form one for the province that's going to manage things. Now I see that happening in health care. I only stand up here and call attention to that because of my concerns, and you can draw the parallels between education and health care.

It's not only Northern Labrador; it's not only Labrador that's suffering. But you look at rural areas in the province, out of sight, out of mind when things are ruled by one school board, one health authority, because what happens is everything is urban. The decisions are made urban to help urban people, to help urban organizations, to help – anyway, I won't say it because I'll probably be kicked out, Speaker, but this is problematic.

Another example that I raised in the House of Assembly – and there are multiple examples that I could be using but in Nain, at the beginning of the school year, the school board actually had vacancies at the junior high level. There were junior high vacancies and they didn't have them filled. So their decision, with very little consultation was, okay, we're just going to take all the Nain high school students and put them online, CDLI. None of these students had any experience doing CDLI courses.

At home, they had ultra-slow Internet. There were very few families at the high school level that had access to Starlink. We're looking at probably 0.2 to 1.9 megabits per second, and we were routinely doing the speeds. That's what the students walked into and they're expected to do online courses.

I talked not only to Nain students and parents, I talked to parents across the District of Torngat Mountains and the teachers, and the students were telling me when they went to go online, say to download some notes, or to actually go online to participate in the classroom, a lot of times their computers would lock up. They wouldn't actually be able to get online or when they go online, they were booted off because of the Internet. That was the quality of learning they were exposed to.

In actual fact, that's what the Nain high school students were exposed to. Speaker, I'm bringing it up again because in actual fact, the way the people in my district, especially those students in Nain were treated, was very, very unfair. That's what happens when you have people making decisions for the entire province and not caring enough to address the concerns or even to ask what the concerns will be when you make these decisions. That's what happens for my district.

Back in the day before Internet and before people really had good ways of communicating, we had to suffer in silence. But we don't do that anymore now. In actual fact, we elect our own people to the district to serve as the district MHA. We elect our own people and we actually represent the district quite well because we bring forward these concerns.

Now, the thing is a lot of the times these things are still done to us, but no longer are we silent. I gave a Member statement today to honour Tony Andersen. I grew up listening to Tony Andersen. I grew up learning from Tony Andersen. Although Tony Andersen is a quiet, soft-spoken man, he gets his point across and he defends the people of Nunatsiavut and he makes sure that they don't fall through the cracks.

I tell you in my four years as MHA, I called up on him a lot of times. In actual fact, I called upon him when this situation was going on in Nain and he actually got his

resources through Nunatsiavut Government to actually show the school board how they could increase the speed in the school up to three to five megabits per second. That was revolutionary; that was what we were looking for.

Sadly, he shared with me that he had made this information available to the school board but they didn't act on it before the school year began. I have to wonder if they thought that, okay, well, it's up in Northern Labrador. We're just going to let them ride it out. They'll complain a little bit and then they'll go away and then everything will be the same.

But at the end of the day, taking teachers from high school to put down in junior high and forcing the students to go online creates for them a lot of stress. But in actual fact, that's compounded now. My concerns for Northern Labrador and for Labrador in terms of access to education is compounded by the fact that now we're going to put it into government. I have to say I don't have any reassurances there. I'm not comfortable and I'm not confident that that's going to make the system better because all I see is barriers to improvements and I see, actually, lack of transparency and I see the way decisions are made.

So, Speaker, at the end of the day, there's no way I'm going to support this legislation and amendment. In actual fact, I'd like to be able to go back and reverse some of the decisions that were made that impacts my people and the people on the North Coast of Labrador and the people in Labrador.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista – oh sorry, the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker, we just shuffled the deck a bit there.

SPEAKER: I hear you.

P. DINN: I won't be long. I think I'd be remiss if I didn't make a comment in support and representing my constituents of Topsail - Paradise.

I look at the act here, and just one clause in particular that I'm interested in is 51.2, subsection 2(a). It essentially goes on and says, "The Crown is the successor in law to the school board of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and (a) all agreements, contracts, debts, liabilities and other obligations of the school board of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District are assumed by the Crown and the Crown shall fulfil and satisfy all those agreements, contracts, debts, liabilities and other obligations."

The reason I focus on that clause is, as we know, the community, myself included, and other Members of the House have been lobbying and pushing for a school, a high school, in Paradise. This high school was proven to be needed back – well, eight years ago now – in 2014-15, by the then-school board, which was operating as an arm's-length agency to government.

So my only concern here is, as it moves under the department, and we know that school has been deferred by government for eight years, I'm just, I guess, nervous and anxious for the parents and residents and students of Topsail - Paradise in how this will affect that school being further deferred or delayed. I have had brief conversations with the Minister of Education and I hope to have further conversations.

There's nothing that she said that leads me to believe that the school is not being considered; she's indicated that it is something that's on the radar. But I do hope that this change, this moving under government, this moving away from an arm's-length organization does not negatively affect a much-needed high school in Paradise.

I would hope, like all the parents and those in the community, they want to see that announced in this budget.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Now I'm recognizing the hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the recognition.

I just want a few moments on this. The minister just gave the preamble to us when she was introducing this bill, Bill 43, and she said – quote – students will not be negatively impacted. I would state to you that anytime we launch a bill in the Schools Act or anything to do with the Schools Act, we have to look at improving the life and the schooling involved in the youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The spirit of which the bill was launched back in '21, and when I spoke to it when we debated it in this House, was we were going to avoid the duplication of services – avoid the duplication of services between the Department of Education and the Newfoundland school district so that we can put more resources into the ground level entry of the school system, which would be the classroom. That was the spirit of which we discussed it back in '21, streamline the operation so we can put more resources into the school system: I haven't heard that yet.

I've heard colleagues state, well, it's saving money. That was never discussed about streamlining to save money; it was to improve the teaching and learning environment in the schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. We want to improve the impact for students in our school system.

That was two years ago. If we're going to improve an act, the Schools Act, then here are some things that I would have hoped to have seen because back in '21: I referenced a session, a meeting, a conversation, a

debate we had in 2019, where we talked about updating of the Schools Act.

But here are some things that can positively impact students that are not in this amendment. We have, in Newfoundland and Labrador, a compulsory age to start school, six years of age – six years of age to start. We know the benefits of early childhood education, we've talked about it here. We know the benefits of pre-kindergarten because in 2019, when I came into this House, on the Order Paper was pre-kindergarten. We are now in 2023, that's a significant amount of time.

We're looking at the value, as I said, of preschool. The value of extracurricular activities. These are some things that we would look at. Student-teacher ratios, accessing student records, in our legislation, in our Schools Act, it's 19. In most legislation, in the schools act, it's 16. They're able to drive a vehicle, they ought to be able to access their school records. We have 19, no change brought forward in that and we have a lot of sections that we can look at that are obsolete in our current Schools Act.

We talk about the French culture, which is very important. We're all proud of that. If you look at the current Schools Act, we don't have a whole lot of emphasis or references to our Indigenous culture, which we're all on board with to update the Schools Act, and we don't see a reference in the Indigenous culture, I would say that's a miss. That's a miss.

One thing that I was concerned about – and I think my colleague for Mount Pearl - Southlands referenced it – when we talked about it in 2021 we were worried about the centralization of decision-making. Myself and the hon. Member who spent our careers in education would know that when we first started, we had local school districts. We had local school districts with parents represented on the boards that had input, meaningful input, into the schooling in

their area. That changed over the years and all of a sudden we had the Bonavista Peninsula along with the Burin Peninsula. We had a little larger board. Then it moved to a provincial board. Now we're moving to a provincial board through the Department of Education.

Back in '21, we alerted the minister to state that we need to make sure we have a provision in the Schools Act where parents' voices are heard, where it's not centralized, but we want meaningful engagement of parents on meaningful decisions within their school. Will this Schools Act amendment make it better or will it further centralize and eliminate the voice of the parents that would be in the system? Fair question.

As I've said, we went from small school districts to a large school board and now to the government doing it. One of the changes they've got here is the school board in the act now is removed and we have the Crown, we have the French school and we have the government. That is replacing the school board where the school board had always had an elected board that made decisions, pertinent decisions, for their children.

We're now down to appeals. Now the superintendent will make the decision on the appeals that would occur, and I think the minister mentioned that there would be a Committee that would be organized to help or to facilitate that as well, an expulsion review panel.

The only thing I would say is that I was in a teaching career, as I'm sure my colleague was, when the Williams government was in, and I was administrator of Clarendville Middle School in Clarendville. Many people say, well, they spent like drunken sailors. We operated on \$27 a student. We couldn't make it. We really couldn't have technology in the schools because we couldn't afford it. We had to depend on fundraising.

It was the Williams government that moved it from \$27 to \$107 per student, and wanted to make sure we don't collect money from the people and eliminate the school fees – big bonus. We had SMART Boards, we had computers and we can offer a diverse program within the school system with the dollars. I'm a little more looking forward to the minister elaborating a little further when she says: Fundraising is so important.

Just think of the narrative I just said to you, where we came from. We came from a point where fundraising was essential, now to a point where it wasn't, but we seem to be going back to the point where fundraising is going to get a whole lot of prominence and a necessity again. I shudder to think, in today's environment, we're going to need more fundraising to operate our school system.

There should be no fundraising to operate our school systems in Newfoundland and Labrador – no fundraising at all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: My colleague has many questions for the minister, and I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the recognition.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further speakers?

Seeing none, if the hon. the Minister of Education speaks now, she will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

I have several comments; I'm trying to organize the thoughts, but I certainly do thank all the Members for their contributions. There are a few things that did stand out to me that I would like to take the opportunity to discuss.

I would ask the Member for Torngat Mountains if there is a discrepancy in the time zones in your area for your schools doing CDLI, that should not be the case. A cohort from Northern Labrador should be conducting school in an appropriate time for them. If that's an issue, please do reach out to me and we can certainly have that looked at.

To the Member for Labrador West, I haven't had the opportunity to discuss some of the great things that have happened in terms of recruitment and retention in the Labrador region in some of the hard-to-fill positions. I would like to look to you to have that conversation to talk about how we have several positions, 4.5 vacancies, remaining in Lab West and we've managed to fill 39 of the positions in that area. So, again, we'll continue to have those discussions.

Some of the issues that you've identified and brought up before, we had the opportunity to work on: some of the housing concerns, making housing available for the teachers and certainly interested in how we can further that to enhance those roles.

A lot of the discussion and the things that were talked about here were references that are really outside of the scope and intention of this bill. It's simply to align the nomenclature, to remove the references to the district and replace it with the Crown or the government or the French school district.

So a lot of the recommendations or questions and concerns that came up would be considerations, certainly, as we move forward to modernize the bill. We'll certainly look at that for future renditions, but this piece, specifically, is simply to change the name of the school district to the government or the Crown so that we can move forward with the integration process. We'll look forward to having those discussions as we move forward.

In terms of questioning: Are we doing it better? Is it going to be better? I think we've had conversations with a lot of teachers across the province. We've had conversations with the NLTA and with the individuals who are actually working at the district right now. Even in the short time, we've been able to open those lines of communication to have everybody in under the one roof. As such, we have seen a difference in the communication aspects. We have seen a difference in how the team has been able to work together to resolve some of the issues because we have a more direct line of communication and a more concentrated effort.

I do believe that, as this unfolds, we'll have the opportunity to discuss some of those specifics. But to your points about how we can do things better, this is certainly one example of how, already, we've noticed that there will be an improvement.

Somebody said: The right hand won't know what the left hand is doing. But right now, after we amalgamate the school board into the government, we'll actually have the right hand and the left hand attached to the same trunk. So we'll be able to have fulsome conversations, we'll be able to have access to things in-house and we'll be able to do those things swiftly and promptly.

There was a question, I believe, about the chain of communication that came up. All matters pertaining to schools and to students will still be the responsibility of the Minister of Education who will have a consultation process with colleagues in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, the Department of Digital Government and Service NL, as we do now as those things currently exist. So we're not essentially changing how they are done. The path will still run through the Department of Education.

The French school board, there was a reference made to some of the constitutional challenges and that's why we

haven't addressed the French school board in this act. Because they do have a constitutional right to manage the French first-language schools. I would just like to reiterate that the policies and pathways of how students, parents and teachers bring forward issues will not change. Your first communication is always with a teacher, then to a principal, then to the director of schools and then onwards from there, if necessary. So I wanted to just let everybody know that those pathways of communications will still be in place, as they are today.

Hopefully we will get a chance to discuss more in Committee as we talk about the questions and the specifics.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 43 be now 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.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

SPEAKER: Motion carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997 No. 2. (Bill 43)

SPEAKER: The bill has now been read a second time.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997 No. 2," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 43)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move that this House do now resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 55.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider the said bill.

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.'

Motion carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Trimper): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 55, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act, the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999.

A bill, "An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act, the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999." (Bill 55)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Chair.

Uber has been in Canada over a decade, why is the minister taking so long to bring this legislation forward? Why now, Minister?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

Before Come Home Year we did look at our legislation and the regulations, the framework that we had considering the lack of cars, rental cars, all that kind of stuff. We did have some initial conversations with ride-sharing companies at that point. When we looked at all of the elements that were in place, there was a course, a defensive driving course, that Class 4 taxi drivers were required to take. I believe the cost was between \$600 and \$800, which was, I agree, quite a burdensome part of getting a Class 4 taxi licence. So, at that point, we decided to remove that requirement and we thought that that might be enough to entice ride-sharing companies to come.

So now we're here recently and it did not entice ride-sharing companies to come. It did not entice existing companies to become ride-share companies, although we have seen some of the local taxi companies leverage technology and kudos to them for doing that. So now we are here today just taking a further measure to attract ride-sharing companies to this province.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, when will this legislation take effect?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

There are some regulations. I have not yet seen the regulations. We have to produce those. The Lieutenant-Governor in Council has to agree on the regulations. Then part of the process we're proposing is that a transportation network company has to apply to become a ride-share company in Newfoundland and Labrador. If they meet the criteria, they apply. We then grant them a ride-sharing licence and then they could go about recruiting drivers and things like that.

I don't have a timeline. I'm hopeful that we would have the application process for ride-sharing companies available before Christmas, let's say.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

After the ATV fiasco, Minister, will the Opposition get a chance to see these regulations?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

I will not apologize for protecting the brains of ATV riders and Side-By-Side riders.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: I just want to put that out there. I will vehemently defend that all day.

Part of the process of this Legislature, which I know all Members are familiar with, is that we have –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Order, please!

Let the minister respond.

Thank you.

S. STOODLEY: We pass legislation, there are regulations and there are also things that are policy that aren't even regulations. For example, the requirements to get a Class 4 taxi licence are not in legislation or regulations. Currently, they are at the discretion of the registrar.

I'm not a lawyer, but there's a reason why things are at the legislative level, things are at the regulation level, things are at the policy level. It's not always feasible or practical to come to this House to make an operational change, for example.

The legislation is here, happy to answer any questions. I can tell you what I believe will be in the regulations. I have not seen it yet. There are other things that are in policy.

So, no, the Members of the Opposition will not see the regulations before they are live.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: I'll just remind the minister, it's important to see the regulations, not just us, but it's for the people of the province. It's not for us; it's for the people of the province and how it's going to affect them in the future.

Chair, the minister has said in the past that municipalities could move ahead on ride

sharing without legislative changes.
Municipalities said they could not.

Are these changes now confirmation that the minister was wrong?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

In the current framework that we have today, the definition of a taxi is carrying people for money. I know we think of a taxi as not an Uber. There was nothing stopping ride-sharing companies from coming today.

What we have heard from municipalities and from ride-sharing companies is that the reason they haven't come is because the way that the municipalities regulate that industry is through bylaws and they're different at a municipal level. There's a risk for a ride-sharing company coming here with five, six, seven, 20, 30 sets of bylaws they have to align with that could change at any time. So given that risk and uncertainty, they were hesitant to come to the market. We are now getting rid of that uncertainty and taking it a step further.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Who did the minister and her department consult with prior to bringing this legislation forward?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I've been minister since August 2020 and many, many, many times was I in meetings

with taxi companies, insurance companies, small business owners, the Board of Trade, the George Street Association, Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, Insurance Bureau of Canada, the City of St. John's, the Town of Paradise and in almost all of those discussions, we talked about ride sharing. You know, this is a huge priority for organizations such as the Board of Trade, such as Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador and so we have had many discussions with stakeholders and small business owners and community organizations, municipalities and mayors all across the province.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Am I to understand, Minister, that you consulted with all of those that you just said about this particular bill and would the St. John's International Airport Authority be included in that?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

We consulted and we had discussions with all of those and more about ride sharing, yes.

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

C. TIBBS: Was the St. John's International Airport Authority included in that list?

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

S. STOODLEY: Airports are governed federally so in my capacity as Minister of Digital Government and Service NL I have not spoken with the Airport Authority, but

they are covered within Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador and Destination St. John's, which is very much in support of this would also be considering the needs of air travellers.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Will both taxi owners and ride-sharing providers have the same insurance requirements?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

From an insurance perspective, our only requirement is that they have appropriate and applicable insurance coverage. We know that taxi companies, today, can find insurance on the private market. If they cannot, they can go through Facility and they also the option of getting fleet policies, which go outside Facility.

In February of this year, just to think about in case ride sharing did come to the market, our Superintendent of Insurance approved a bulletin, which is on our website since February, essentially outlining what a standard policy could be for ride sharing. So that has been on our website. We issued a bulletin in February and that was shared with the Insurance Bureau of Canada. That's been available and we've only received positive feedback about this.

If a ride-sharing company wanted to come to the market or if an existing company wanted to become a ride-sharing company, they can access this form that we've had public since February or they're welcome to

find a different form of insurance and our superintendent just has to approve it.

We do require a minimum of \$200,000 liability as part of the superintendent's review of those insurance policies.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Will the approximate cost to both groups be the same when it comes to taxi drivers and ride-sharing drivers?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I know we've talked a lot about insurance this week here in the House. In terms of the private markets, we don't tell the private market what to offer for auto insurance. If a company is able to get private insurance, at a certain rate, that's their prerogative.

Fleet rating is not approved by the Public Utilities Board. In terms of taxis and Facility historically – and there's a closed-claim taxi study in the 2019 auto insurance review. I encourage anyone who's interested in learning more about taxi insurance to read that closed-claim study. It is like a bubble. The taxi insurance costs are a bubble. It's like self-funding. No one makes any money; they lose money, but it's like a bubble. The accidents are what the cost of those claims are. You can read more about that in the 2019 auto insurance review, taxi closed-claims study.

There's nothing stopping a taxi company from getting private insurance at a lower rate. It's up to the private market what insurance rates they might be able to avail

of or they can certainly also call Facility, in which case they will likely get a similar rate as the taxi companies who go to Facility.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

So would the minister consider, in terms of insurance, it to be a level playing field for both taxi drivers and Uber drivers?

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

S. STOODLEY: It's a difficult question to answer because it's a private market. They're level in that they're both in the private market.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Minister, I have to be honest, that doesn't sound level right off the hop sort of thing. We need to make sure that our taxi drivers are left with the same deals or the same outputs as these new Uber drivers.

Minister, will ride-sharing providers have to be licensed by government and what will that cost be?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

Yes, we will outline the requirements to get licensed as a transportation network company for ride sharing. I haven't seen a proposed cost yet, but my expectation is that it's not unreasonable.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

We just touched on this a minute ago, Minister. When will the people of the province see the regulations?

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

S. STOODLEY: When they are published in the Gazette.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Given that the number of taxi licences are capped by a given municipality, will there be any cap on the number of ride-sharing operators in the community?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

Currently, the City of St. John's caps taxis. Other municipalities do not cap the number of taxis. That is a municipality-by-municipality decision currently. Local Service Districts do not regulate taxis, currently, under today's legislation.

This legislation, no, does not contemplate a cap. I did speak with an owner of a taxi company. He suggested a cap so that's certainly something that we'll consider, but at the moment we are not proposing a cap on the number of ride-sharing drivers.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, any concerns that you'll oversaturate the market with this?

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

S. STOODLEY: That would be a good problem. It's an evolving industry. We are the last province in Canada to see ride-sharing services. We are trying to make it easier for companies to do business here and those are commercial market decisions that I can't answer.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Of course, we need to ensure that safety is of the utmost importance when it comes to this new legislation.

Minister, will ride-sharing providers have to complete an annual motor vehicle inspection and how will the minister ensure this is completed?

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

S. STOODLEY: Yes, there will be a requirement of an annual inspection. It'll be up to the ride-sharing company to manage that.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: That might give some people some cold comfort getting in with other people that they don't know, that the ride-sharing company, who are going to be profiting from this, are the ones who is going to be making the rules about this.

Did the minister consult with taxi owners and brokers and what was the overall feeling from the taxi owners and brokers?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I did speak with taxi owners. I'm sure they were hoping that we didn't do this but, as the Premier said, there is room in our market for both taxis and ride sharing. Ride sharing is disruptive, no doubt, and that's something that every other city in North America and Europe have encountered.

I believe that creating a provincial approach to ride sharing means that if a taxi company, let's say, wants to be a ride-sharing company, they don't have to follow the City of St. John's bylaws anymore for ride sharing. So I think it proposes an excellent opportunity for the current taxi companies who are experts in our market, who have the drivers and who have the knowledge, they have a competitive advantage, if you will, in starting a ride-sharing company.

That's what I have to say about that.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Did the minister consult with the Insurance Bureau of Canada and do they have any concerns?

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

S. STOODLEY: We did consult with the Insurance Bureau of Canada. Both in February when we released our standard form for ride-sharing insurance, and I spoke with them a few months ago when I met

with their board when they were in St. John's – the Atlantic Canadian Board.

Actually, they were concerned about the illegal ride-sharing services that are operating. We did talk about this and I'm not aware of any outstanding concerns.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Will ride-sharing drivers be allowed to drop off and pick up at the airport in St. John's?

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

S. STOODLEY: I believe that's a question for the Airport Authority.

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

C. TIBBS: I think if the minister and her department had consulted the Airport Authority we would have an answer to that. They tender taxi services. There are people up there spending a lot of money to ensure that their taxi services are the ones that are going to be doing these rides. So we need to ensure that they get their money's worth at the end of the day.

Will the PUB have any role in this bill or setting rates charged by ride-sharing providers?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

The Public Utilities Board does not regulate fleet insurance policies. If you are unable to get an insurance rate on the market, they do provide insurance. So I would anticipate that they would not regulate unless someone is

unable to get an insurance policy at a market rate and then they could go to Facility.

So, no, the Public Utilities Board won't be involved generally in these fleet insurance rates.

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

C. TIBBS: My apologies, Minister, I may have not provided enough information. I mean the rates for the rides themselves.

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

S. STOODLEY: No, the Public Utilities Board would not be involved in setting the rates consumers pay when they sit in a ride-sharing vehicle.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Why will drivers of taxis and ride-sharing services no longer be required to pass written tests or road exams? How many people have failed this in the last year? Minister, do you have any concerns about unqualified drivers on the road?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

Obviously, there's a kind of continuum across Canada. What we're proposing aligns with Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in terms of the qualifications of the drivers. We also do have over 5,000 people today with an active Class 4 taxi licence. Those people do not have to do anything and they could be a ride-share driver.

We are aligning with other Atlantic Canadian provinces and I think some could say we're not going far enough. Some provinces don't require a Class 4 taxi licence. I think if you ask some ride-sharing companies they would prefer that we not have any requirements and that a Class 5 licence be sufficient. We are not doing that. We're still requiring a two-year driving history, a medical and a vehicle inspection.

I will say with a Class 4 taxi licence, in addition to that, the registrar does look through your driving history and they have the discretion to make a decision. If the registrar feels like you are a very unsafe driver, then they can deny a Class 4 taxi licence to you.

I'm satisfied that we have appropriate checks and balances in place.

Sorry, my team has just corrected me. My team have corrected that it's 800 active Class 4 taxi licences, which is not what they told me last week, but anyway now it's 800.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Anybody fail their Class 4 in the past year? If so, how many?

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

S. STOODLEY: I imagine, yes, people would have failed their Class 4 licence and I don't have that number.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Minister, you can see why that would be a concern. If we have people who have failed the exam in the past and now these same people don't have to take the exam anymore, there must be a reason why they failed it.

Minister, do you have any concerns about the unqualified drivers now that may be on our roads?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

The registrar will look through the driving history of anyone who applies for a Class 4 taxi licence and will make a decision around the safety and suitability of that driver based on their driving history.

Thank you very much.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Will drivers have to have a certificate of conduct or vulnerable sector check?

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

S. STOODLEY: Yes.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Did the minister consult with municipalities and Municipalities NL, who will not have any power to pass bylaws concerning ride-sharing services?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I think it's fair to say we have heard from municipalities across the province on many, many occasions. I have had numerous meetings with many municipalities on the Avalon asking us for a regional approach. I did speak with numerous mayors recently and they were very much in support of this approach. I did have an informal discussion with MNL and they did not have any concerns with this approach. We also, though, thought it was important that if a municipality did not want to be involved at all, then they had the option of withdrawing.

We did hear kind of overwhelmingly that municipalities were very happy not to be regulating this and they were happy for the provincial government to take that responsibility on. I think we've got a good happy medium now where municipalities have the option of withdrawing from ride sharing if that is what their municipality wants.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

How will this work in unincorporated areas such as Local Service Districts? How about a service that's set up in an incorporated area but operates in another?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

As we are taking a province-wide approach, part of the value is that there is one set of rules and they can operate across municipalities or LSDs, as long as the municipality has not withdrawn. Currently today, LSDs do not have the authority to create taxi bylaws so LSDs currently cannot control vehicles plying for hire in their jurisdictions. There would be no change to

their jurisdiction in terms of vehicles plying for hire.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Who would police that, Minister? If an unincorporated area wants to but the municipality next to it doesn't, who would make those decisions?

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

S. STOODLEY: We have in the legislation that if a municipality wants to withdraw from ride sharing, then I believe they need a motion from the council to the minister and then our department would regulate the industry. We would ensure that ride-sharing operators did not operate in that municipality. If they did, then we would withdraw their ride-sharing licence.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: How would that be enforced, Minister? Tell me how that would look if it was enforced?

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

S. STOODLEY: We would withdraw their ride-sharing licence and the company would no longer be allowed to operate in Newfoundland and Labrador. That would be the punishment for not following our rules or there could be a fine.

CHAIR: The MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Is the minister worried about the impacts on smaller taxi operators, especially in small and rural areas? We don't want to put anybody out of business, either. We need to ensure there are checks and balances for that.

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

S. STOODLEY: It's difficult. This will create more opportunity. There might be some taxi operators that decide to become a ride-sharing company rather than a taxi company and that might open up business for them.

I did speak with the owner of a rural taxi company this morning. He did not think that this was going to infringe on his business. I did have a conversation about that.

Let's say if Uber decides to apply to come to our market. Personally, I don't see them operating outside the metro area. They may, that would be a company decision. There are also other ride-sharing companies. For example, PEI has a company called Kari, it's a PEI homegrown company. There's also Lyft. There's also a local company, Hitch. I think there are lots of potential options for local companies and new entrants in the market.

I guess that's all I can say about that.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, if an individual takes on the chance or wants to invest in this and buys a car to provide ride sharing, then the council turns around and withdraws from that program, is their investment just lost at that point, I guess?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I think that scenario, if a local business-owner decided to create a ride-sharing company that our department then granted a ride-sharing licence to, I think if a municipality then decided to then withdraw from ride-sharing, municipalities make decisions that impact local businesses all the time and that would be a decision of the municipality. I'm not aware of any municipalities who currently want to do that, but that's not to say that that doesn't exist.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

What protections does the minister have for the personal and private information customers will share, such as name, address, credit card information? I mean there's a lot surrounding private information here.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

So there are federal privacy laws that govern how private companies use data and those laws would apply to ride sharing.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

How will the ride-sharing apps function in the many areas of the province with no

Internet coverage? Of course, my colleague from Terra Nova spoke about this in length. There are many places across the province that do not have cellphone service. How are we going to adapt to this?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

So this is not a Newfoundland and Labrador – it is a problem here, but this is not a problem unique to Newfoundland and Labrador. Honestly, my parents-in-law live in the UK, they live 10 minutes outside of the City of Oxford and there is no cell service, and there is no Uber 10 minutes outside the City of Oxford. There's Uber in Oxford; there's cell coverage in Oxford. I cannot call an Uber or use my cellphone 10 minutes outside the City of Oxford.

I'm sure the Minister of IET can talk to all the broadband initiatives and the cell coverage initiatives we are doing. It's a difficult situation as a government. We are working hard to maximize cellphone coverage across the province.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: It may not be a problem here in St. John's, Minister, but it's a problem across this province, both Newfoundland and Labrador.

Minister, will community bus services be impacted by this legislation?

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

S. STOODLEY: I have no reason to believe that regional public transportation systems will be impacted by this.

Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: Were any of these buses consulted, Minister, Metrobus or anybody else?

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

S. STOODLEY: I have had many, many discussions with – you mentioned Metrobus – the City of St. John's, with the City of St. John's councillors about ride sharing and their concern about the effect on Metrobus has not been raised as a concern.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair. I always appreciate that.

I had a couple of questions for the minister. First of all, will municipalities require a zone change for properties that are now used for ride sharing?

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

S. STOODLEY: Ride sharing will involve vehicles. I'm not sure it will involve properties. I'm not an expert in municipal property bylaw zoning. I don't see that being an issue whatsoever, no.

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

J. WALL: Chair, I'm not very comfortable with that answer, to be totally honest with you. Municipalities do require – if there's a commercial property now being used from a residential property that's not permitted in municipalities, it does require a zone change. That would be to operate any

business in any municipality across our province. So I would expect and hope to get an answer.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: My understanding of zoning, firstly, it's a municipal issue. It's not provincial jurisdiction. The second thing is that if you are operating a business from your home, then there may be an expectation for a zoning change unless it's allowed in discretionary use in the housing zone in which you live. My understanding is you, through ride share, your business only operates when you sit in the vehicle and log on.

So I don't think any municipality requires vehicles to be zoned for a business.

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

J. WALL: Chair, that's not correct. With respect to a business, any municipality, if it's a bus, if it's a taxi, if it's a ride share, they have to have a property that it's going to be sitting on when it's not going to be used. If it's going to be maintenance done on the vehicle or what have you. With respect to the level of the zoning, zoning is required for a business in a municipality, not only to mention then the level of taxation that the municipality puts on that business. So I would like to have the response from the minister.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: Those are vehicles with J plates. They don't have T plates. They are only ride sharing and only insured for ride sharing when the driver gets in the vehicle and logs on. That is a condition of working for Uber and I think it's pretty much the same for any of the others.

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

So has the minister had meaningful consultation with the municipalities in this province to ensure that they know what they have to do with respect to this level of taxation and business zoning in each municipality? Because I'm not comfortable with respect to the minister's answer.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

J. HAGGIE: The ability to tax businesses directly is a feature of the Municipalities Act. It will also be a feature of the towns and Local Service Districts act and it may well clarify that further for the Member opposite, should he watch this space.

Thank you.

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

With respect to Local Service Districts and unincorporated areas, municipalities have to have a motion of council to opt out of this and go to the provincial government.

What is the recourse for Local Service Districts and unincorporated areas?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister for Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

Today, our Local Service Districts do not have any jurisdiction to regulate taxis so there is no change. Taxis are allowed in Local Service Districts but they do not have the authority to regulate them. So there is no change for ride sharing in Local Service Districts.

Thank you.

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

J. WALL: So, Chair, if I understand it correctly, you can live in a municipality and operate in a Local Service District but you can't do the reverse?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister for Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I'd be happy to explain again. We are introducing a provincial-wide system for ride sharing with one set of rules for anyone to follow. If a municipality is not interested in participating, they do not want ride sharing to occur within their municipal boundary, they can have a resolution of council and we will cordon out that area in which ride sharing will not be allowed.

Currently, municipalities have the power to regulate taxis operating within their municipality boundaries. That's why we have the City of St. John's taxi bylaw, for example, but most municipalities do not have a taxi bylaw.

But Local Service Districts are not municipalities, obviously, they do not have any such powers to regulate taxis. They currently do not have power to regulate taxis and that will be the same for ride sharing.

Thank you.

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

So can they operate within that Local Service District and unincorporated area? We have many across our province that are not municipalities.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister for Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Yes.

CHAIR: We have a yes.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

So with respect to the compensation that my colleague from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans said earlier, if a municipal council changes every four years, they change their mind with respect to allowing the council to take part or not take part in the ride share – and I don't want this to happen, but are we opening the government into any litigation with respect to loss of compensation for the particular person in the ride share?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister for Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

So the example that the Member provides is exactly the reason why the current framework is deemed too much of a risk for ride-sharing companies with each municipality governing a ride sharing, but we do appreciate that there could be a municipality that really, really, really does not want it in their jurisdiction and we are allowing them to cordon off ride sharing, if they so choose to. Then a new council might come in and vote to remove that and that's perfectly acceptable as well.

We're trying to find a balance between allowing municipalities to have control over their municipalities versus having an attractive system for ride sharing to make things easier for the people of the province.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the answer from the minister, but I was asking about the province opening themselves up to litigation. Is this a chance that this can happen? That's my question.

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

S. STOODLEY: If that was likely, I'm sure we have a lot of government lawyers who would have raised that already, but anyone is welcome to take any matter through the courts at any time. That is not a concern of mine at the moment.

Thank you.

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Chair.

Chair, I'm not a lawyer, I'm a former mayor and I know how municipalities operate and how they work. I know that many municipalities across this province don't have the resources if that comes up at the time. So I was asking a question to make sure that we don't have any provincial litigation come back on the province with respect to loss of compensation for a ride-share operator in any municipality. That is important, Chair. When we're looking at opening this up to municipalities across the province, we just want to make sure that everything is on the up and up and there won't be any litigation coming back to the people of this province.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Given how a lot of these ride-share employees are deemed as independent contractors by their respective companies,

they operate in what is now known as the gig economy, which can leave a lot to desire. In a lot of jurisdictions they've had a lot of issues with worker's rights and stuff when it comes to these ride-share companies.

My question is: Given that there is a large amount of exploitation for gig workers, I ask has there been any work done to make sure that they are protected under the *Labour Standards Act* as there are some gaps in *Labour Standards Act* when it comes to gig employees?

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

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

Drivers would be classified, as the hon. Member said correctly, as independent contractors, but he is right, this is an evolving situation both here provincially, globally and nationally. We're going to continue to look at that. I know our federal colleagues across the country are looking at that. We want to make sure that workers are treated fairly regardless if they're independent contractors or not. Independent contractors are treated under the act in a particular way and some larger jurisdictions are reviewing this right now as we speak. We're going to continue to keep a close eye on that.

I know that our federal colleagues across the country and the FTP table are going to be looking at this on a go-forward basis. So it's a very good question that the hon. Member asks.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: I want to thank the minister for the answer.

We're doing this now but we haven't caught up to our labour standards to address the

issues that other jurisdictions have already been facing when it comes to the exploitation of gig workers.

So I'm asking the minister now: When will we have a timeline to make sure that the loopholes in our current *Labour Standards Act* will be filled so that these workers who are going to work in this industry will not face similar things to what their colleagues across the country have faced when it comes to worker exploitation?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

He raises a good point. It is something that we're always going to be looking at to ensure labour legislation is looked at and fulsome for what people require that we all represent. One of the things that is interesting in this case is that no jurisdiction has moved on this at this point. They are treated as independent contractors, although I do encourage, regardless of the employee and the relationship between the employee and the employer, I think we all would want people to be treated fairly.

So I encourage people to do that. My understanding is that the independent contractors that would be put in place would be dealt with under the jurisdiction that we have right now. As we move through this and as this grows across the country, and we've seen immense changes in this industry, the gig economy, over the past number of years, and we're going to be evaluating that very closely.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for the response.

I ask the minister: Have they had consultations with the Federation of Labour leading up to this, given that we all see in

the media and we've all seen some of the stories about those working in the gig industry, especially those who are working for these large ride-share companies?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We have had multiple meetings with the Federation of Labour on the gig economy in general terms. Not specifically to ride share, but we have had multiple meetings with them and this is a topic that's on our regular quarterly meetings that we have with the Federation of Labour. It will probably be on there until we find some solutions that may or may not be coming based on what other jurisdictions are doing. But it's something that's very topical and it's something that we're considering every time we sit down with the Federation of Labour; it's a topic we're more than happy to discuss.

CHAIR: The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for that answer.

Since we're going to go down this and we've already talked about the insurance, but given that they're required to hold certain insurance for this, I ask the minister: How are we going to make sure that people who are using the ride-share act are holding the correct insurance to do this commercial work? At the same time, how are we going to make sure that if they did change their policy and tell their insurance company no, I'm not doing ride sharing anymore, but they're still doing ride share just to save money. How are we going to crack down on that potentiality that could come up as people try to evade paying for the actual insurance that they actually require?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

So it will be a requirement of the transportation network company licence that they have and their drivers hold the appropriate insurance. They will have to demonstrate that to our department during the application process. I guess being malicious and deceitful about that is extremely serious and we would take that extremely seriously. So if someone wants to be a ride-sharing company, they're going to have to demonstrate that they have the appropriate insurance.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Also going in line with that, the possibility of someone trying to deceive their insurance on this. Will vehicles that are being used for ride sharing be tagged within the department's system so that we know what plates are of people who are using their vehicles as a ride share?

CHAIR: The Minister for Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Yes.

CHAIR: The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Given that there were consultations with municipalities and given that they will be divested of their ability for bylaws on this, other than saying they don't want to have a ride-share company, has any municipality outside of, I guess, MNL reported back to the government that they didn't like the idea that they are being divested of their ability to bylaw this industry?

CHAIR: The Minister for Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: No.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Government said in the briefing that they had no thought that ride sharing would interact with public transit and they didn't use any data or collect any data on possibilities of this. Going forward with the ride-sharing app, will government be keeping an eye on if it will be having a negative impact on bus services and other public transportation that these municipalities have to make sure that we're not actually going to be undercutting the public transportation system?

CHAIR: The Minister for Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I think public transportation is incredibly important and I will be the first one to support more public transportation. I do think we're talking about different audiences and different use cases here. So Metrobus, I think, is \$2.50 to get a ride, or you can get a 10-ride card or a semester pass. That is an extremely different price point than what a ride-share ride might be. I think that's more comparable or even more expensive than taking a taxi.

So I think it's a different audience, a different use case, and I don't expect that this will cut into the public transportation usage. I know that has gone up dramatically recently, which is amazing. If it does, then I'm certainly willing to seriously look at what we can do about it but I really do not anticipate that it will be.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Given that we're moving in this direction with having ride share and that the

minister is – which is great because it falls right into my next question – talking about the importance of the public transportation system, ride-sharing apps do collect a lot of data on traffic, on all this, through their own thing.

Will the government be working with ride-share apps to use this data to improve public transportation in large urban areas?

CHAIR: The Minister for Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

That's an interesting suggestion I'll certainly add to my list of things to chat with next time I chat with the City of St. John's or the Metrobus leads. I mean, it's commercial information. It's a fair point and we'll certainly keep that in mind.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you.

Just one more question that the Minister Responsible for Labour would probably be able to answer. Given that we just discussed, you know, the exploitation of gig workers and past incidences and whatnot in other jurisdictions, would the minister be open to the idea of having a hotline or tipline to help collect data or collect complaints of those being exploited by the gig economy into his department to help formulate possible legislation to improve their lives?

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

B. DAVIS: Yes, thank you, very good suggestion. We currently have an ability to receive those complaints through the labour standards. I can go back to the department and ensure that that's fully made available

to individuals that start in the ride-sharing process, so they will understand which numbers to call and how to best advocate for themselves, of course.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Just a quick question.

Just wondering, will the government be availing of Uber for some of the clients that you take care of to pick up and drop off to some government services, or whatever the case may be?

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

S. STOODLEY: I do not anticipate it. So currently, my understanding is that most arrangements with taxi companies and the government happen through contracts, or they sign a multi-year contract. So I do not believe that, let's say Uber, will be interested or will apply for those types of contracts. It's a different kind of business model.

So I do not anticipate that would be a problem.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Will Uber have a chance to bid on some of these contracts?

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

S. STOODLEY: I guess in terms of the Public Procurement Agency, I can't speak to who may or may not apply for a tender that might go out on behalf of the provincial government. In terms of Uber, I do not believe that that is part of their business model, but that's not to say another company, another ride-sharing company –

let's say a local start-up that's currently a taxi company; they might become a ride-sharing company and might bid on that business. You know, those are commercial opportunities, which could arise for small businesses.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I guess my wrap-up is probably some commentary. As I sat and listened to the debate this afternoon and the questions back and forth from my colleagues – and I might add I think they're good questions, they're pertinent, they're necessary questions, and it's what we're all elected to do and what we do during the Committee debate. Because a lot of people, again, they watch Question Period sometimes and they'll probably watch a few petitions, and they don't really understand this, what we do in second reading and Committee and what have you, and it's a very important process.

I guess what spurred me to speak for a minute here on this, as I sat and listened – and again, I think all questions are good questions. There's never a bad question. The saying goes no question is ever stupid. You're never wrong to ask a question. My colleague from Cape St. Francis asked a very valid question. I don't think we got a clear answer. I think, in fairness to Members opposite, I don't think they fully thought out that one. I think it come from someone who got municipal experience and it was one that never occurred to me until they brought it up and it was a valid question.

But I guess the broader point that I wanted to make is we have sat in this Legislature – a lot of us have been here for a while now – and over the years we continuously debate legislation. We go through the process of

second reading and Committees and what have you, and we go through all of this debate. We never see the regulations. We always find that they're gazetted. There's evidence today. The minister said no, we won't see them. You'll see them when they're gazetted.

There was a point made by my colleague from Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans – am I right? I think that's the name of the district. (Inaudible) all right. But, anyway, his point was this happened with the ATV legislation. I know the minister responded she was protecting people's brains when they operate bikes and the government opposite applauded her for saying that.

But on my side of the House – and this provides clarity too, to be on the record – that's not what my colleague referenced. That's not what anyone on this side of the House wanted. It's always been something we stood for.

But, again, you're debating legislation, you've got some concerns, you've got some questions, and back in that debate, that debate went on into the night. One of the agreements we kind of all agreed to at the time, and I know as House Leader, they agreed with their House Leader of the day, that we would look at regulations, the minister would take it back and consult with officials and we'd get an idea.

Now, whether you went along with whatever or whether you never, that wasn't the argument at the time. No one disputed having helmets. But there was some cases where there was some debate about are you better off with them or without them? So I think it's important to provide that clarity because to anyone watching – and I like to have stuff on record – there's no Member on this side of the House ever advocated to cause any harm to anyone in this province.

When the minister responded that you're protecting the brains of people on bikes and that and I know there are colleagues over

there that applauded her, that to me was a direct jab at my colleague who asked the question and all of us on this side of the House because that was a long debate. It was actually one of the better debates I think that happened in this House because a lot of good questions, a lot of good debate. I call it an intelligent debate because sometimes, unfortunately, that's not always the case.

But in that case in particular, I thought at the end of the day, I don't agree with the fact that we are always debating legislation and we never see the regulations. The regulations are where the rubber hits the road, that's where the meat goes on the bone.

So, in general, we are in favour of Uber. I think it's a great concept, I've used Uber outside this province; I think we all generally agree Uber is great. There are lots of questions we have or concerns or curiosities, what have you, that we are asking, we're asking for the people we represent. But we can't get any answers; we'll see that after we pass this legislation; we'll see that when it's gazetted, whenever.

So there may be some glaring issues that we've brought up in questions today, that maybe will make us nervous, but you can't have both. To see the regulations, you've got to vote in favour of it, they've got to pass it; see it's almost like you're at this gateway so you walk through it. That's how we do legislation. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to see some regulations, or some framework of a regulation? We see nothing. Absolutely nothing. You're told: No, you won't see any regulations, you'll only see them when they're gazetted, after we vote on them in this House.

I don't think it's the proper way of doing legislation. I don't think it's the right way that we should be passing anything in this province. We do it repeatedly and over and over again. I think it's very important to clarify that in my role as House Leader

representing our caucus that we all strongly and unitedly believe, we've always had an issue with the regulations coming up after the fact.

When the day comes that we're on that side of the House, I sure hope we use Committees more and we provide more meaningful debate to the people of this province to get better legislation.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 15 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 15 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 15 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act, the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 55 carried without amendment.

CHAIR: It is moved that this Committee do rise and report Bill 55 carried without amendment.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Thank you.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Lake Melville and Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole reports that they have reviewed Bill 55 and they have carried it without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed that Bill 55 be carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

J. HOGAN: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

J. HOGAN: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before we continue, I understand there's been a request of the House for leave.

Myself and the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands had a discussion regarding the PMR that was given notice to be presented for Wednesday and has mentioned there has been a number of people mentioned in the PMR, that they are a lot of sitting Members and there are a lot of sensitivities to this issue; therefore, the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands is asking leave to withdraw the PMR.

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the PMR and with leave of the House, I present a second PMR.

SPEAKER: Does the Member have leave to withdraw the PMR that was given notice?

We'll pause for a quick second.

Does the Member, first of all, have leave to withdraw the motion that was given notice yesterday?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader asked me to read it in on Thursday so it won't be for tomorrow, it will be the following Wednesday, from my understanding.

SPEAKER: It will be the following Wednesday, November 1, correct.

E. JOYCE: Okay, I'll wait until Thursday to read in the –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

So it's my understanding that there has been an agreement made that tomorrow we will resume regular Government Business

on tomorrow, Wednesday, and then a notice will be further given that the PMR will be deferred and a new resolution will be brought forward. That's good.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

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

E. JOYCE: WHEREAS there is a housing crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS there are many vulnerable residents who need social housing; and

WHEREAS families are split as residents are in emergency shelters or hotels; and

WHEREAS in Corner Brook, the mayor of Corner Brook stated publicly that the 12 housing units in Corner Brook are not adequate.

THEREFORE be it resolved that the House of Assembly urge the government to immediately take steps to reduce the lack of social housing in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SPEAKER: So this is the motion for the private Member's resolution for Wednesday, November 1.

Is this the private Member's resolution that you want to bring forward, Sir?

E. JOYCE: Yes, it is.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

That's a notice.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

J. HOGAN: I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

This House do stand adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.