



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF  
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

---

Volume L

SECOND SESSION

Number 46

---

HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA*

Wednesday

October 25, 2023

The House met at 10 a.m.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

Admit strangers.

### Government Business

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

**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 Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Speaker.

I move that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 43.

**SPEAKER:** A seconder, please.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Seconded by the Minister for Education.

**SPEAKER:** Thank you very much.

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 (Warr):** Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 43, An Act to Amend the Schools Act, 1997 No. 2.

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

**CLERK (Hawley George):** Clause 1.

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair is recognizing the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to stand and speak to this bill a little further than I did yesterday. I know yesterday the minister had stated that it was enabling legislation; just a transition basically within this for this particular amendment; minimal changing words that

she mentioned yesterday and there was nothing substantive.

There was nothing substantive when we had the first amendment having to do with the Schools Act in 2021. Then we had there was nothing substantive in 2022. Now we are in 2023 where there is nothing substantive; it's just a transition.

One thing I know that I had mentioned yesterday, that the minister had stated in her opening preamble, was that there was nothing negatively to impact our students, and that is a good thing. One thing that we would like to see on this side was legislation that's going to positively impact students, that's going to move the teaching and learning further than what it currently is. I think all of us on this side would think that this legislation does not speak to that. I know the previous minister was very enthusiastic about the collaboration and talked about what the benefits were going to be in the teaching and learning environment once we got this merger put in place.

We failed to see it in this legislation and we failed to see as to where we're going to go and what the benefits are going to be going forward. I'm sure my colleague from CBS is going to have many questions to present because, really, we're looking for where the legislation is going to take us.

If we want to improve our PISA scores, our academic achievement scores, our critical thinking scores, how is this going to achieve that for us? Because that was mentioned last year when we had the second go at the amendment of the Schools Act. How are we going to do that based on what we currently have?

I'd ask three requests of the minister, if I may. We talk about the housing issue that we've had and the number of housing units that fell into disrepair. I would like for the minister, at some stage, to be able to inform the House on the maintenance budget for our school system, in particular the previous

English School District. Where is our maintenance budget? Has it grown? Where is it over the past three years that we can look at to make sure that we don't have a repeat of the crisis that we found ourselves in with housing and with the housing units?

A second request I would have is that we transition from the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District to the department. In the past three years, how many personnel have we lost from the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District who knew that this merger was coming and they went on to find some other duties or other profession outside of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District? I know we've lost some.

I'm just wondering how many did we lose in the transition because if the government were doing a transition and at the start saying nobody is going to lose their position, there is a chance that you may have kept them. But we didn't do that at the start; that came later. How many did we lose?

Finally, the third request I would have for the minister would be, we're going to have school councils play a significant role going forward in order to make sure that we're hearing the voices of the population that we have: How many of the school councils in our system are active? How many of them can we go on to their school homepage and find out that we've got the minutes of the previous meeting? That data would be helpful because that is a significant piece going forward.

I would find that we probably pattern ourselves, like we do in all legislation, off our colleagues in the rest of Canada. The Liberal government in 2018 in Nova Scotia abolished school boards. I'm thinking that's probably where this initiative came from, maybe, conceivably. So in 2018, they did away with school boards, and school boards, I would acknowledge, had issues. We didn't have elections, sometimes we

had trouble filling positions; we all know that.

So the only thing being, if we looked at the Nova Scotia model, the Nova Scotia model said that we'll use school councils. It is now that they're realizing that doesn't work. That has not borne fruit and has not yielded what they desired using the school councils. But I noticed that when it was first launched in 2021 by the previous minister, school council advisory councils were going to be a significant way of making sure those local regional voices were heard and represented. That is missing here.

Nova Scotia has spent \$80,000 studying as to how they can get that voice from the schools and the school regions to the policy-makers and the decision-makers. That is what they're struggling with in Nova Scotia.

So, yes, we have very few boards left in Canada, we do. But if we're going to put in a new system, we've got to have confidence to make sure that the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, who want a voice in their schooling, occurs, it's available. I would think on this side, we've got reservations about that as to whether we've achieved that or not.

That's one thing for the future. What is it in the legislation that one could desire that we've bringing forth in legislation? What is that we would liked to have seen in legislation?

I just touched on it last year, we're all in agreement of the importance of early childhood education, of catching the young learner and making sure that we enter early in the child's lifetime. We all agree with that, but we never made any endeavour in this legislation in order to bring that in, to make sure that we emphasize the need for preschool, for our pre-K education.

Remember I said yesterday that was on the Order Paper in 2019, when I first took my

seat in the House of Assembly, I was excited to see it on the Order Paper in 2019, pre-K. That is where we should be going. What year are we in now? We're in 2023, that's four years and no longer is pre-K on the Order Paper. We've got literature upon literature and research would state that it's very, very important that we get the student engaged at an early age. We've missed an opportunity with this legislation; it's not there.

We talked about early childhood education in rural Newfoundland. We've got physical space in the schools in the District of Bonavista but we find that in those populations, in those schools, they can't find early childhood education. We could be utilizing the school system. That might be something that would be added to the legislation to say we are going to make every effort, or in the legislation, would be that schools would be available for early childhood education centres where and when possible. That would serve rural Newfoundland. I know in metro St. John's, it certainly would not but that would be something that certainly we can look at.

One thing when we look at centralizing government, streamlining it, because when it was launched in 2021: we're going to streamline the money that was going to be saved with this streamlining process, it was going to the classroom to support the classroom, the teaching-learning environment. Not mentioned thus far.

If I missed it, Minister, in the preamble, my regrets and apologies, but that was what the discussion was in 2021 when this concept was first launched. We were going to put the resources that were going to be saved from this venture to help the teaching and learning and the struggles that we would have in our education system currently.

We know that we have struggles in our system. We do not want education to enter what we'd call the status of a crisis. That is

what we're trying to do in this regard, to make sure.

The minister or the Premier first launched that by 2031 we are going to be the healthiest or one of the healthiest provinces in the country. That is a good, noble pursuit – a good, noble pursuit. What better way to start with the healthiness than to have something mentioned with the legislation in the Schools Act. It's not there. I'm just saying it's something to look at, whether it be quality daily physical education, something we'd look at that we're going to make sure that we have some activity oriented part of our school day. Look at the allocation; I know that is separate, but the legislation could mention where we could look as far as the well-being of our children in the legislation.

Anyway, those are some issues, but I know that in being a past administrator, we've had lots of issues with operationalizing the school system. We had trouble getting student assistants. We know, and I'm sure my colleague who's been in education for as long as I was, would equally say that sometimes we had struggled that we had students who had higher-level needs that we had trouble getting the resources within the system. That is something that we could be looking at within the legislation.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, I'll end there and give my colleague a chance to speak. We look forward to the questions from my colleague from CBS soon.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I'm recognizing the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

I'd like to thank the Member opposite for his contributions to the conversation.

I will say that the issues that you've identified are largely outside the scope of this piece of legislation. We recognize that the Schools Act is such a massive piece of work that we've had to break it down in bite-sized chunks.

You reference that we have brought it to the House a couple of times before and those were pieces that we needed to lineup in order to make the nomenclature appropriate or to get access to the act to open it up for improvements.

That is kind of where we are; we're still operating in that space right now. In this piece of legislation, we're replacing where the district would be written and we're changing that to the department or to the Crown or the Conseil Scolaire. So that is simply the intention of this act.

The measures that you have mentioned and the other things that you have referenced are certainly things that we will consider when we open it up for broad-scope review. Right now we simply need to change the names on the legislation in order to proceed with the integration process. I say simply and I certainly would not say that this is not substantive. If I did say this is not substantial, I don't mean that in reference to what it is that we are accomplishing here. This is a massive undertaking; we're bringing in the school district into government. It has been a very lengthy process. It has required the input of a lot of stakeholders, a lot of people on all sides of the conversation. So I certainly don't want to be dismissive when we speak about how much work has actually gone into making this legislation possible and to getting us to this point.

For right now, our focus is to change the nomenclature, change the names. We want to remove references to the school district and implement places where the department would be referenced, the Crown would be referenced or the Conseil Scolaire would be referenced.

I do appreciate that you do have some concerns around representation and the school councils. I did take note of some of the questions that you asked. A lot of those might be Estimates type questions so I'll get some information on that and we'll be able to bring that back to you in terms of our budgets and how many personnel and things like that.

But in terms of the school councils, there is certainly a role for the school councils as we move forward. That will be another conversation moving on, but for right now we're simply trying to change the nomenclature. Change the name of the school district to come out of the legislation, to be replaced with the government, the Crown, the department or the Conseil Scolaire.

There is certainly a role for school councils. To your point, I don't know how many are active right now, but we want to continue to build that relationship. I think that is probably one of the things that I am most passionate about and have been most passionate about is that ensuring that we still have representation.

So don't let my eloquent speech fool you. While I might sound like my big city lawyer friend here, I'm still a girl from the bay and it is very important to me that we have representation from the rural areas of the province and that all schools get a chance to be represented as we move forward with some type of advisory council towards this initiative.

Also, I don't know if I referenced it yesterday in terms of cost savings, but any savings that are achieved through this process will certainly be reinvested into teaching services, back into our students, back into the education system, so you can be assured of that.

In terms of some of the questions you had about our pre-K, we're really at a great spot right now in this province, in terms of our

early learning, and again outside of the scope of this piece of legislation, but we've had significant changes to some of the federal funding models that have been revolutionary in how we do early childhood education in this province. I could talk for an hour and a half on just that alone. But I'll save that spiel for a chance when it's more relevant to the piece that we're working on.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I'm recognizing the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Chair.

So the minister indicated when she spoke in her opening speech the other day that this was a simple transition. Transition indicates change, or a move from one state to another. I guess the issue that I have with it, being a father of two school-age children, is: Why are we transitioning? We know what's being done and we get the legislation, but the question is why are we doing it, and what will be the end result?

The in-between is clear, and I guess, as my learned colleague from Bonavista spoke about some of the shortages and issues in schools and whatnot, when you sit here and you wonder about how we're going to make education better for children, the act is opened and there are missed opportunities, I guess, you start to question how does this make things better, going forward?

Does government manage school boards better than what's happening right now? I don't think anyone can answer that question. Again, in 2021 a part of the reason we discussed this legislation to start with was to see savings and, as my colleague said, see money go back into the school systems. I don't know about every school in Newfoundland, but I was talking to a lot of educators over the last six months and I can tell you, there's a big strain on people in the school systems, raising money for extra curriculum activities. Raising

money so there's technology and all kinds of resources available in the schools.

So where is this money, how much money is going to be saved and where is it going to go? Those are things that we should know as we debate legislation, but we don't know any of that. It hasn't been mentioned, not once, since 2021. You know, when I talk around my district, every school has teacher shortages, and we know there's an issue there. Again, how does bringing this back into government, who has failed to recruit people into government, who has failed to recruit doctors and nurses and all kinds of different positions – now they're going to take over recruitment of our educators.

Look no further than Labrador West, or anywhere in Labrador or rural Newfoundland, and look at the shortages that they have. We have teachers taking on multiple roles, just so kids can go to school. I just don't know how this bill changes or makes things better.

I guess one of the real things that bite at me is the conversation that we had yesterday, that we've got three departments now managing different resources inside of a school. I just think, how does that make things clearer or easier for government or for the school boards or the teachers or the students? I know the conversation was yesterday, the minister said very clearly it comes back to her and I get that and I respect that and I think that's where it should go, but it doesn't eliminate the steps and the processes involved in all of this.

If it's a school bus issue, you still have to go TI to get things done. I don't know, I'd say it adds red tape but we all know all the red tape is gone. So it just really, really creates a problem.

I guess for me, as a parent, with my two children, and listening to some of the issues that we've heard throughout the province, we hear about the lack of schooling in Paradise and rodents in CBS and class size

issues right across the whole province; shortage of teacher aids; kids going to school and not getting any of the assistance that they need right now; lack of teacher resources; the fact that schools are fundraising. All of these things are huge issues and transitioning from the current situation into government is a higher priority than fixing those things. I know that the minister never said that, but those are the things that that parents and students and teachers want to see fixed. Nobody has explained how this legislation or bringing the school boards into government makes any of those things better.

Not just as an MHA or a Member of this House, as a parent, it concerns me that that's not the conversation we're having. I find it hard to believe that there's not far, far more important issues inside of our school systems that should be handled that aren't being handled or talked about.

The healthy initiative that we talked about, we pat ourselves on the back all the time and talk about Kids Eat Smart, but there are a lot of communities and schools in this province that don't come under Kids Eat Smart and they don't have the supports that they need, just another example of a shortfall. Where do we turn for that? Government hasn't talked about it. Kids Eat Smart isn't able to keep up with it. Everyone should be on a level playing field, again, rural Newfoundland and urban Newfoundland, two entirely different things.

My colleague from Bonavista talked about the availability of schools and spaces for early childhood entertainment. Listen, there are a lot that schools could be used for throughout rural Newfoundland that nobody – and I think government should step up and do it. If you look to small communities, these schools could be the recreation centres. There should be access to the gymnasiums, not just for the students and the teachers, but for the communities after hours.

Government should be looking at those things. If we want to talk about being healthy, then we could change the Schools Act to allow rural Newfoundland to utilize the facilities they have on a regular basis. We don't have that conversation but it's a simple conversation to have and it's something that we should do.

Now, again, I'd be really curious to know who would be responsible for that. Would it be the Minister of Education? Would it be the Minister of TI? I mean, who do you go to? Who do you have that conversation with? I don't really think anyone over there even knows.

What I would really like to see and understand is what this does when it's finished. How does it save money? How does it make our education system better? How does it change the curriculum in schools so our students are learning the things that they need to face tomorrow? Because, obviously, curriculum is a huge issue and we've had that conversation 1,000 times in here. Students aren't learning how to manage finances, they're not learning all kinds of things that are easy, easy things to teach in school. For some reason, it hasn't been a priority here. It puts our kids at a disadvantage when they get out of school and they go out into the real world.

Real work education is important, as is physical activity, as my learned colleague from Bonavista indicated earlier. All of those things make a kids day, not only better, but it gives them a better chance as they age and get older. It gives them the right habits, the right outlook on life. It does everything that they need to do.

So the other thing outside of cost savings is, again, I'd like to understand – and the question was asked here yesterday – how breaking some of this out into three departments across government makes sense and makes things easier, internally, and for the school system itself, for the

teachers, for the students and for the parents that have to deal with it.

I know my colleague from CBS talks all the time about the 1.6-kilometre busing which is fixed apparently. But I'll tell you, those issues are right across the province. I'll give you a great example. You drive into the school in Clarenville, I don't know how a parent in the wintertime would want a child walking into that school. The lighting issues are terrible.

Now, the previous two ministers ago was out, he seen it and he did a lot of good stuff out there. He helped us get the road paved and make things safer for the kids walking in and everything. There was some additional lighting added. But go to these schools and tell me that the maintenance is being done. I can tell you, you look at some of these schools and the lighting outside and the issues inside, it's just not happening.

So how does that get fixed now? Is it the minister's responsibility? Is it the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure's responsibility? Who's looking after that stuff now?

Again, do we have the staff to do it? I doubt it. Are the jobs posted? I doubt it. When do we get there?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** We can't get the roads fixed.

**L. PARROTT:** We can't get the roads fixed, exactly.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

I'm recognizing the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the protection from my own people.



I guess I'd say to the minister, if there are things that she can highlight how this is going to save, how this is going to create a better situation inside the schools, what the end result is from a staffing standpoint, all of these things that nobody has even mentioned in this legislation. Again, we say all the time, if you want to lead, you have to listen. I don't know what consultation went on with the NLTA or anyone inside. There are a lot more questions here than there are answers right now.

On that note, I'll take my seat.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

I felt like I want to answer everybody because there's so much coming out that I want to get the chance to respond instead of waiting until the end.

Thank you to the Member for Terra Nova for those comments. Again, a lot of the things that you've mentioned are outside the scope of the legislation that we're dealing with today. We'll have a chance to look at that when we open up the act for a full-scale review.

Today, we're simply trying to change – and again I say simply not referencing the amount of work that went in here and I mean no disrespect to the staff that have worked diligently on this, but the issue that we are rightifying today is changing the name, taking out references to the district, replacing it with government Crown or the Conseil Scolaire.

There were some issues that he identified – and I will let you know that if there are any safety or any infrastructure or any maintenance issues in any of your schools, by all means, please reach out to me. I don't

know how to articulate more clearly that any issues regarding education will be the responsibility of the Minister of Education. So regardless of who farms out the response to the issue, they will all come through the Department of Education and the minister will then coordinate services as required to collaborate with the other departments, like we do now.

We're already working with several departments to address the issues that come up in our schools. That will remain the same. Teacher recruitment, all of those things, will still be done by the individuals who are doing those things now, but we'll have the opportunity to leverage our collective strengths.

This is kind of the first step; integration bringing the school districts in is the first step in operational changes in better aligning our services, our curriculum development, our service delivery efficiencies, all of those things are part of this first plan of integrating the school district. We'll have all of our folks under the same roof. We'll have our program specialists, our curriculum development specialists, all the folks that do the good things will be all operating out of one space and will have the opportunity then to share ideas, collaborate more closely because we have that type of unity when the school district is brought in. We're continuing to work on that.

In terms of some of the cost, as I mentioned before, any of the cost savings that will be realized in this process will be reinvested into the education system but that's not the priority. This is not really an accounting or a cost-saving exercise.

Primarily, we want to bring the school district in so that we have that continuity, we have that ability, as I said, to work together to leverage the collective strengths so that there is a quicker, more streamlined process to get answers to get things done.

**CHAIR:** The Chair is recognizing the hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**T. WAKEHAM:** Chair, I'm going to take a couple minutes. I don't think I'll use the full 10, but I want to start off my comments with an old expression that says: In God we trust, everybody else requires data. So you realize now why we would like to see data on this particular side of the House.

Clearly, this is a very important piece of legislation, but we are not seeing the data. We are not seeing the evidence to support this piece of legislation. That is very concerning to me, as someone who is being asked to stand up and vote on a piece of legislation that will impact people, the education system and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I have travelled all over the province this summer in a previous run for leadership and I experienced a lot of challenges in the education system. All of us would have had opportunities, I'm sure, in your school days when schools were closed, normally because of either a snowstorm or because of a teachers' workshop. I actually travelled and experienced a school closed because there were no teachers – because there were no teachers.

So when you start thinking about that and you think about all of the news media and all of the teachers and all of the schools that are reaching out now with a shortage of teachers right across the province, not just in the English School District, but also in the French school district, in my own district where we have a couple of French schools, the number of vacancies. Those are all very, very important topics that we should be talking about.

The minister, herself, eluded to opening up the act for a full-scale review. That is something, I think, that is long overdue. That is something that I would welcome that we would be here talking about in this House of Assembly.

But it goes back to, again, consultation. There is lots of talk about consultation. Who did you consult with? Where are the reports? Why is it that we are not allowed, when we get briefings, that we don't actually get the work that has been done to verify, to justify, to show that this decision to change this legislation is the right thing to do?

We all want to support this; we all want it to be the right thing to do, but it's very difficult to do that when we do not have any kind of mechanism or any kind of document in front of us other than trust me. Well, I alluded to in my opening statement, there's only one person that we talk about trust in this House right now.

Let's go back to the whole point of, why do this? Again, that's the fundamental question. I appreciate the fact that Transportation and Infrastructure will assume responsibility for maintenance issues. That, in itself, is alarming, because right now the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure has a challenge to actually do maintenance on their own vehicles.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**T. WAKEHAM:** They have, and all of us have experienced that. I'm sure the minister would acknowledge that. There have been challenges in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure in actually recruiting people to do and provide the maintenance on their own vehicles. Now we're asking them to take on more.

We've all talked this past week, of course, about the maintenance challenges in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and the fact of all of the positions that are vacant there that haven't been filled and all of the maintenance issues and the number of units that have gone vacant for years because nobody's done any work on them. Those are serious issues.

We're talking about now putting more work on a department that I'm not sure is ready to take on the work. That's not a reflection of the staff, that's just a reflection of reality, of where we are.

The other thing that we talked about and my colleague for Bonavista mentioned and my colleague for Terra Nova mentioned is the whole premise of why we went down this road to begin with. It was pointed out nearly two years ago that we were going to wind up with efficiencies and savings and this money was going to be reinvested into the education system. Again, we've been asking where is that money; where have the savings been identified? Maybe we'll save that for the minister for Question Period so that she can have an opportunity with her officials to actually show us how much money has been saved and where it actually has been allocated. Because that's a question that needs to get asked.

Ultimately, this comes down to assurances. Assurances to the principals, to the teachers, to the students, the front-line staff that they are not going to be unnecessarily burdened because we're now putting an extra layer of process on their lives. That they now have to go on what used to be a one-way street is now a three-way street. Because we now have three different departments going to do what was being done by one before.

Those are all legitimate concerns. But the biggest concern is the fact of how will this benefit the children of Newfoundland and Labrador, the teachers and the parents? Ultimately, because that's what this is about: education. We'd love to have a big debate, a full-scale review and get more teachers in the classroom.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** The Chair is recognizing the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Chair.

I just wanted to respond to some of the comments made by the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port. Thank you again for the information and the questions and concerns about the operations of the school system in general, but those are outside of the scope of the act that we're addressing here today.

This act will aim to replace references to the school district with references to government, to the Crown or to the Conseil Scolaire in places where that exists. I'll certainly take the comments that have been under advisement, because we don't have to wait until the Schools Act is open to make improvements in our school system, so let's be clear on that, too.

All of these conversations will inform our decision-making as we go forward and if there are opportunities to improve, we'll certainly take those as they arise. Again, I would like to take the opportunity to assure those who may be listening and parents and teachers, guardians all across the province that this act will not reflect any front-line changes. They won't see any changes to how schools run on a day-to-day basis from the implementation of this act.

This is more of an effort to bring the school district in and teachers and students will still continue to do the things that they do in their classrooms in the day to day. As we move forward, we'll continue to build and to work on that. Again, I would like to take the opportunity to state that any issues that arise will be the responsibility of the Minister of Education.

The process of communicating issues or concerns will still be the same for parents, guardians, teachers, students. You follow the communication chain. You speak to your teacher, you speak to your principal, you speak to your director of schools and then it's allocated appropriately from there. The Minister of Education will still be

responsible for all of these issues in collaboration with the other departments.

We're not adding any additional burden to the TI staff as education staff already do these types of things. It's an issue of who is managed where and how staff are siloed. Right now, we're trying to do away with some of the barriers between departments and between the department and the school district.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I'm recognizing the Opposition House Leader.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's interesting debate. I suppose we discussed a lot of this in second reading and I always find Committee to be more interesting in the sense we asked questions, we get shorter, pointed commentary and a back and forth directly with the minister. I like the concept, actually, and I don't show my hand too much but I kind of rather Committee over second reading.

On that note, it's interesting; when I'm listening to my colleagues and the minister talk about this merger of the school boards within the department, I looked up and I tried to remember, it was in 2021 when the current Minister of Health was the minister of Education, and it was reported, and I took a screenshot of it, he said: It was a marriage, not a takeover.

And that's how the former Education minister viewed the merging of the NLESD into the department. And the move comes as the government hopes to find financial efficiencies in the province's education system. I have yet to hear of any dollar amount, and I know the minister may remember this or maybe not, but I had an extended debate here a couple of years back that we don't know.

I recalled actually last night when I was thinking about it, like, I remember saying there was a budget to come in and no one knew any answers. There were a lot of things in it but no one had any answers. And I termed it, in a lengthy debate here in the House, it was: We don't know. There were no answers to any questions, but a lot of moves.

The school district move was in that so-called, we-don't-know budget. Because I asked so many questions and I got frustrated back then, and I knew it was on the heels of an election. That lengthy election that was later budget. But the school board merger was part of that budget, and we never had any details. We're two years later, almost to the day – next month it'll be two years – and we're talking about this coming in the department, and unfortunately – I hate to repeat myself – but we don't know.

We really don't know if there are any savings. There's not going to be a mass layoff, he says in his interview, with department believing savings can be found through attrition. And we don't know that either. So I guess we create more questions than we get answers and these sorts of things. I mean, I've got lots of questions to ask as we move on through Committee, but my colleagues, including our leader, we've got general concerns of, students are not going to be hurt, but are they going to be helped? I said this yesterday in second reading. I think our focus should be everything we do in education should be to help those that are most affected, which happens to be our children.

So we're not hurting them, but are we really helping them? Is there improvement? Will their class sizes be improved upon? Will air quality in the schools be improved upon? Will maintenance issues be improved upon? Will teacher shortages be improved upon? Will student assistant shortages be improved upon? Will IRT shortages be improved upon? The list goes on.

Minister, I've dealt directly with the current superintendent of schools on various issues and they retain to students with pervasive needs; shortages of specialized IRTs to deal with those individuals. Parents as recently as 6 this morning – I was emailing back and forth with Mr. Hall and, to his credit, he's been very forthcoming. These are real issues we're faced with in our school system. So is any of this going to help those that matter?

We're spending a lot of time – and I know your staff gave a great briefing. A lot of your staff are spending a lot of hours, have spent a lot of time doing this merger. But are we better off as a province, as children, as teachers, as parents, as grandparents, you name it? Are we better off? I'm not sure we are.

I make a few jokes back and forth with the Transportation and Infrastructure Minister, and I was the actual critic for Transportation for a long time. Pretty well since I got elected up until recently. A lot of people in the province have reached out to me, all over the province. They're calling me the roads guy. I don't know if that's a compliment or a criticism because of some of the roads – I don't want to be responsible for the roads all across the province, but I'm referred to sometimes as the roads guy.

So the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure got his plate full with roads and more roads, bridges and ferries, you name it. Does he need to have school buses, school board maintenance and school maintenance in his department? When you say, and fair enough, you're going to come to the Minister of Education, you will be responsible for any of those issues, but then you have to go to that silo. Until we change the structure of government, governments will operate – I've been there on the other side and the current minister was a former deputy minister. He knows more about the integration, the way governments work in the back rooms than

anyone in this House probably. There are silos.

There's an independent – one department bills another department. The staff are seconded to another department. We don't operate as one. We're operating as whatever number of departments we have, we're operating independently. I never understood it. I've always struggled with it. Your budget, you're getting close to the end of the fiscal year and your budget is tight, yet you've got more money earmarked for another department in government. But ultimately it's in the general revenues of the Department of Finance. So you're fighting with – to me, it's just dysfunctional.

Now we're going to throw these two important – and I say important because maintenance and school busing are two of the areas where I think you cause the most issues. Whether it's mould or mildew, rats, leaks, storm damage, we all speak up on it and we all got concerns. School maintenance will always be an issue.

Busing and inspection of school busing – if you look at education, school busing unfortunately, really, it meets the headlines more than probably some of the more equally as important issues as IRT shortages, as teacher shortages, class-size issues. Now we're going to have that in another department. We may seem like we're beating that issue to death, but we are not. We went through all this and two years later we don't know to this day – we are on the verge of this bill and they want us to pass it and they're hoping to get it done today – we do not know if we've saved five cents.

There are going to be no positions lost. But like my colleague from Bonavista said, how many people have left the system in advance of this? We don't know that. Where are maintenance budgets? I think I'm picking up through the grapevine, through other MHAs, other school districts, other teachers that the maintenance budget is not

where we need to be. Isn't that where we should be focusing our attention?

So we have a school district that, like it or not, sometimes you got your criticisms. We all can criticize day to day. I've had frustrations dealing with them; we've all had them, but we have had other good measures. Should we not leave that as it was? What is the benefit?

Now we have more issues. As my colleague from Terra Nova said: We've run out of red tape but we are creating more of it. We must have more on order because that's all that creates.

So the Minister of Education, on the school busing issue, her officials are going to contact officials in Transportation and Infrastructure to instruct their staff to deal with an issue. When that happens, then they have to go back and loop right around again, so you've created a new bureaucracy.

But then, along the way, you're going to have to stop in and talk to the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL to make sure that something is done with a bus. To me, it's not functional, it's not efficient and it's not the best use of, in my opinion, our time.

I don't know how much time our minister's staff spent on this merger. I know they put a lot of work into it because they basically told us in the briefing that it's a lot work. It's not just so much the i's and the t's and the removal of words and what have you, when you're digging into legislation – and I think this document, the Schools Act, is a pretty thick bill. You've seen the bill. There are a lot of changes and that takes a lot of review and a lot of time to do that. But I think we all need to ask that question. It's not being political; it's that we should ask the question every time a piece of legislation comes through this House.

We did the Uber legislation yesterday and I think there is value in that legislation. I think there are benefits to the people of the province. I think it will be generally well accepted. Now, we don't like the regulation piece showing after. I have a problem with that and I have expressed that. At the end of the day, that will benefit the people of the province. I do not see any benefit to the merger of the school board in the department unless we are missing something. What reports are done? What savings? What is the purpose of it?

I guess it comes back to it and sometimes I think – maybe I think too much, but that's not a good thing some days for me, when I overthink stuff, but I kept thinking and even since yesterday I'm thinking, I can't think of something that's the benefit of this. I don't see a benefit. I don't really see any benefit. It's nice to claim to say that students who will not be hindered by it, but what benefit is that? Sure, I'm glad they're not going to be hindered. They should be helped. Our system should be helped by this and I don't see it being helped.

As the time winds down, I have lots of questions, a lot more to talk about but I'll take my seat and I'll await my next opportunity.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The Chair is recognizing the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Again, thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to respond and, to the Member opposite, thank you for the input that you've made and some of the questions that you've had but they are, again, outside of the scope of the legislation that we're talking about here today.

We are attempting to change the references to the school district, to the government, the Crown, the department or the Conseil Scolaire. The issues that are identified, regardless of what we call it, we will still

have to address. Again, I don't have to wait for another rendition of the act to make these changes, but we'll certainly take those comments under advisement.

In terms of improving outcomes, that is a priority for the Department of Education and by aligning our program and our curriculum development to help our students excel, we'll see the long-term impacts of the outcome for students. Because we can't quantify or put a number on it here today, I don't think we should be small-minded enough to think that there won't be overall improvements when we have all of the opportunities in-house to develop curriculum to build on our education system.

We have a deputy minister who is actually responsible for transformation of our system and by him having access to all the folks that would have previously been employed in the school district, we'll say, they can collaborate more efficiently and decide and determine how we can move forward with transforming education.

The students are, of course, at the centre of all that we do. We have our skilled, dedicated staff who are certainly interested and part of this process and as we merge our collective strengths, we'll form a stronger team to be able to foster a united direction for the benefit of our students.

The curriculum design and delivery is one of the areas that we're looking at for a positive change, but it goes much deeper than that. The benefit of being able to share resources in terms of some of our information technology and our corporate services will certainly see us make some movements in efficiencies. So those are things that we hope to achieve once this is implemented.

Acknowledging that there is a cost to the integration of the school district into government, as there is for any major movement. Costs incurred to date have been minimal and we anticipate that there will be associated costs with full integration.

There will be cost savings realized as we move forward so we're tracking both of those and any savings that do result will again be reinvested into the education system.

I don't know how to state more clearly that any issues about schools, any issues pertaining to students will come through the Department of Education. Those issues will be addressed here in collaboration with the departments that are relevant to whatever the particular issue is.

Given that this is clause 1 and the same conversation is coming up and the same questions are being asked, I'll reserve comment from here on, on some of the commentary, until it just gets down to a more concrete back and forth question and answer.

We'll be happy to answer those types of questions as we move forward, but other than that, I thank the Members for their contributions to the discussion. We'll certainly continue to take notes and use those to advise us as we move forward in changes for the education system.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I'm recognizing the hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I'm going to say the issues that I face in Labrador West when it comes to this, plus the previous act, it all started with the first degrading of our education system in Labrador with the removal of Labrador school board and that was done by a previous Tory government. Since that time, the quality and everything about the education in Labrador West has degraded and now we're going to centralize everything into the department.

When we lost everything out of Labrador and centralized it into St. John's, we lost our

regional voice, we lost our ability to influence our education; we became a forgotten land is basically what happened when it came to our education.

Now, we're going to move everything into the Department of Education with a report that we haven't seen; with numbers we don't know. We don't know what's going to happen. We don't know the outcomes, anything; the determination of why. We don't know. It wasn't shared with us.

I know the minister keeps talking about oh, this is just a nomenclature. No, it actually is the dissolving of the NLESD. This is what it is. You're taking away the words, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, and calling it the Crown. This act is actually dissolving the NLESD. This is what it is. It's not just nomenclature.

So this is what's happening now. This is it. This is the end of the board. For me and my people in Labrador West, this is the end of, actually, having some determination on what our outcomes are and our determinations. We're now going to become even more forgotten up there. Just to pass it off as nomenclature, it actually is bothersome for me because we have had nothing but issues since we lost the Labrador school board.

We have become absolutely forgotten. Our issues have become just another issue in a giant pile of all the schools. We have to compete with the Avalon for everything. We have four schools, three that are of the NLESD and one French-language school in a population of 10,000 people. We can't even get enough teachers to run the schools up that way; yet, here we are trying to deal with that stuff.

This is bothersome to me; I can't support this. It is the end of actual regional voices; this is it, we're done. So this is what I have an issue with and I have an issue with how we're passing it off as nomenclature. This is disturbing to say the least.

This year, we have less actual ability for course offerings in our schools. We have had students who have had dreams and hopes of doing these courses so they could go off to university. Well, guess what? They have to put it all off because we couldn't find enough teachers to actually staff the high school.

We hadn't had a guidance counsellor in the middle school in two, going on three years now. We can't even get that done. We've had maintenance issues for years. There was a time that every school had a maintenance person and through the dissolving of the Labrador school board, they also dissolved job positions and now we only have spaces for two maintenance people for four schools.

These are the things that we forget when we're doing these big decisions to centralize things is that there are regional places, there are smaller places that have unique issues that completely get overtaken.

Someone in St. John's has not sweet clue what is going on in Labrador West. It is fine to give them a call and try to explain it to them but they have no sweet clue what's going on up there. That's just Labrador West, a more urbanized part of Labrador. Let's talk about my colleague for Torngat Mountains when you talk about the North Coast; that is a whole other different challenge in itself. But someone in St. John's does not appreciate how unique those situations are and now we're going to dissolve everything into the department and hope and pray that things are going to get done correctly. I have no faith that this will happen.

Taking things out of regions and centralizing it is nothing but a cost-effective measure to save money and hope that you get the services delivered. It should be the other way around. We should be working to get services delivered first, that should be the mandate; not saving money on the backs of children because that is what you're doing.



So I have no faith in this. You already know I am not going to support this. I never supported the last iteration of this and I'm not going to support it this time around. But I am going to have my say because this is disaster for Labrador. This is a disaster for Labrador West and it is on the backs of children and their education.

I don't support it. I think honestly the department should shake their heads in shame at what they're trying to do here because it has no responsible representation. Once again, after seeing what's going on in my region right now, I have no faith that this will actually save money and efficiencies and all this stuff. That's just spin, in my opinion, right now of this; a spin on what is actually happening up my way.

Unless someone comes to me with the actual document that you're keeping from me and says this is what's going to happen, you don't get my support on this.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I'm recognizing the Minister of Industry – sorry, of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**J. ABBOTT:** Please don't overload me there, Chair.

I just wanted to make a couple of points, if I may, a very specific point. The Member for Terra Nova made a comment about schools should be used after school. If you go into the bill, it specifically speaks to that, section 51.4. It says: The department may "permit a school building to be used outside of school hours, where this does not interfere with the regular conduct of the school"

That's something I was definitely looking for, because I know in my own community, in my district, when you pass by a school and the lights are off in the evenings and the weekends, and knowing that children in the

community would like to have and need access to that facility, now this legislation will do that. I think that's probably one of the important pieces of this legislation when it comes to making sure we maximize the use of our facilities. I just wanted to just refer the Member to that.

For me, the end of the NLESD is probably one of the more progressive things that this government is doing and should do. I ask people to think back in terms of public participation in our school boards and our school board elections. If we are true to the facts, we recognize, and certainly over time, that public interest in the school board, the school district, we were getting 5 or 10 per cent turn out in participation. What does that demonstrate? That the public itself lost interest in really a dysfunctional or non-effective construct when it comes to education in the province.

So what's the obligation then for any government? Well, it's to look at that and size it up and say well, what is the more appropriate model? In this case, we have taken the position, after due consideration and doing a fair bit of consultation, and there has been numerous consultations around public education in this province, which, I think concluded that the government needs to step up, the government needs to take control and the government needs to take on full responsibility and accountability.

That's what this minister and former ministers of Education who have been dealing with the Schools Act have determined and have come to Cabinet to say this is what we think will make the best sense and be the most effective means to move our education forward.

This minister has certainly stepped up to the plate in my view, coming to the House and promoting this legislation. Because the issues and the questions now, if they're not resolved at the school level, at the community level, they have a venue here in

this House that now the Member for Labrador West, all the issues that he's identified, real or imagined, then they can be brought to the House and they can be discussed and they can be debated.

Before, what would the government of the day do? It would deflect and say no, that's a school board matter. If you want to close a school, it's a school board matter. If you were concerned about school busing, it was a school board matter. Now it's a government matter. Now it's a Department of Education matter. Now it's the Minister of Education's responsibility to address and respond to those issues.

I think in this province, given the size of our population – 540,000, give or take – that we can effectively manage our schools and our school system through the Department of Education, through the construct that it will have. There will be regional representation. There will be school councils. When it comes to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, in terms of the school structures themselves and the school busing, we are certainly looking forward to taking on that responsibility.

We have mechanisms in our department that, when applied to the schools, will make them better schools. There's no doubt in my mind. But I'm also prepared to be held accountable if and when that is not working the way we said it could and should. So we're prepared to step up to the plate to make the schools a much better place, physical place, for students and for parents to have their kids go.

For me, that's as simple as if we're going to have a flagpole on a school ground, then it's going to have flags on the school flagpole. They're not going to be moonscapes. We are going to make sure that they are landscaped. Very simple things but things that represent, for me, that we show value for the schools, for the community and for the kids that are going to that school.

I grew up in St. John's. I went to an all-boys school and every blade of grass was in place. We were not permitted – and we're going back numerous years, obviously, but it speaks that even though it was an all-boys school, 800 boys, that those grounds and those schools were meticulous. Why can't we have that today?

I see that the school district has fallen down on that very basic responsibility. And then when it gets into the classroom, what is happening? We have the best-educated teachers in this country. We all know that. But are they resourced? Are they supported to the degree that they need to be?

This act and the further work that the minister is doing will ensure that they are. The school councils will be empowered to make sure that the parents' and kids' voices are heard and brought forward. That's going to be critical to the success. So the Member for Bonavista made very, very key points when they talk about how that voice gets heard, what lessons have we learned from across the country. And we are listening. We have to make that work. Because it's going to be essential that that voice is heard.

That's something we're doing. We're also doing it when it comes to the new Health Authority. To make sure that the community voice is heard in the design and the delivery of the services. We work closely with the NLTA. They are strong advocates obviously for the teachers, but also for what's going on in the classroom. They will have a voice in this new act as well.

I'm anticipating through this debate, those that are listening, that we will re-engage the public on the future of education in this province. It can't be left just to the department; it can't be just left to the NLTA or the teachers, and the parents need to be fully engaged. The onus is on us as a government to ensure that that happens. That's why I think the school councils, as

they are embellished in their roles, that we can see that happen.

I'll just come back to my role here, and we've already started discussions in the department, with the deputy minister and others, we've reached into the school district already to see how we can support things that ongoing right now. I've had conversations with different Members of our caucus on very specific things that my department can and should be doing, and we're undertaking that as we speak.

I'm optimistic that at the end of this – and as the Minister of Education said, this is just the start. She is looking at the whole Schools Act and how we can make sure that that is stronger when we bring forth future plans for our education system.

There are challenges. There are very specific things that are going on in the schools that we know are very problematic today. There's school violence. That's become almost epidemic. I know the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, the Minister of Education and others, are engaged on that. We need to collectively figure out how we support the school principal, schoolteachers and families who are facing those situation. To me, they're the more germane issues that we really need to focus on in any expanded new Schools Act in the very near future.

Chair, I'll finish on that note.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** I'm recognizing the hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I just want to say that I have the utmost respect for the minister who just spoke here, but to suggest that the public somehow is not interested in education and

not engaged because you're not getting a whole lot of people wanting to run to be on the school board, I think that misses the mark a bit, I have to say.

**B. DAVIS:** (Inaudible.)

**P. LANE:** Do you want to speak, Minister?

**B. DAVIS:** (Inaudible.)

**P. LANE:** Okay, well after me you can get up and you can speak, the Minister of Climate Change there, he has the answers.

Basically, what I got from the comments was basically that the public is not engaged in what's going on with the school system so, therefore, the government is going to take it over. The public don't care, necessarily, because they're not running for positions on the school board. I do take some exception to that commentary, but I do know he's heart is in the right place and I've said this before, I'll say it again, as far I'm concerned, he's one of the better ministers over there, for sure.

He mentioned about the NLESD not providing the appropriate funding and so on for teachers, positions, IRTs and so on. I would remind the House that if the NLESD is not providing the funding, well, where did they get the funding from? They get their money from the government. So if the NLESD was not providing funding for required positions, it's because the government wasn't providing them with the money to fund it. So to simply blame that on the NLESD, that's a bit disingenuous as well, because we all know it's this House of Assembly that passes the budget. The government prepares the budget. The NLESD can only work with the money that they are provided by the government.

So we can't go blaming the NLESD for the fact that they never received enough funding to put all the teachers, IRTs and guidance counsellors in place. That was on

the government, all governments of all stripes.

I also wanted to make the point to the Minister of Education, and I agree with my colleague from Labrador West, that while she keeps on going back in her comments, over and over again about the fact that this legislation is simply a name change, the reality of it is – and I agree with my colleague – that in order to make this transformation – and this is a huge transformation, let's not kid ourselves, very, very extensive. It's going to have huge impacts on our education system moving forward, positive or negative; the jury is out on that one.

I hope it's positive, as I said yesterday, I really do. Because I have three grandchildren, one who just started kindergarten and I have two others who are, of course, a lot younger than that, three and almost one, who will be going to school in the next couple of years. So for me, as a grandparent, I want this to work, absolutely want this to work.

But for the minister to suggest that, well, it's only a name change, we're just changing this from school board to the government, basically, to the Crown. While that may be true from a technical point of view in terms of the actual piece of legislation, it is another step along the way of getting rid of the NLESD and bringing it under the Department of Education – getting rid of the school board altogether.

So instead of coming to the House of Assembly with one piece of legislation to do everything we're talking about, because now we're talking about another review, the minister's talking about well, we're going to do another review of the Education Act to make changes and so on to deal with all the issues that my colleagues have raised, but that'll be the third go-around, or maybe there'll be four, or five go-arounds. Who knows?

We've already had one go-around a year or so ago, now we're doing another step and there will be other steps. But all these steps are all part of achieving one goal and that is getting rid of the NLESD and bringing it under the department. So while, technically, this piece of legislation, the minister could argue, and she has, fair enough, is changing some names here and changing it from NLESD to the government to the Crown and so on, it is part of the bigger picture of dismantling the NLESD; dismantling the school board and bringing it under the Department of Education.

That's why Members on this side, I would suggest, certainly from my point of view, when we're raising concerns here today that may not technically be what this piece of legislation is doing, it's part of the bigger picture and we're concerned about the bigger picture. I'm not concerned about changing a few names in this document, it's not that. It's the bigger picture that I have concerns with and this is contributing to that bigger picture. That's why we are raising these concerns.

My colleagues are right, I heard the minister say – I don't remember the exact words, but the Minister of Education basically said – staff are monitoring this and we believe there's going to be savings, or I think she said we know there are going to be costs associated to making this move and we also know there are going to be savings and everything. If staff are monitoring it and they know there are going to be costs and they know there are going to be savings, if someone is monitoring the data, could you please provide us with that data? If it's happening, the minister has said herself that staff have anticipated costs and staff are anticipating savings, let us know what they are anticipating. If your staff know, I'm sure you know, let us know.

That brings me to the biggest issue of all. This came up at the last debate on this bill, which is why I didn't support it at the time and still won't. We were advised that there

was a report, that government hired a consultant to do a total analysis of whether or not we should maintain the status quo or whether we should get rid of the NLESD and bring it under the Department of Education. That analysis is there, allegedly. Somebody would've looked at all these things. They would've looked at the pros and the cons. They would've looked at the costs. They would've looked at: What are the benefits? What are the positives? What are the negatives? They would've done their SWOT analysis. They would've done all that stuff. But we were told we can't see it, it's a Cabinet document. We can't put in an ATIPP request, it's a Cabinet document. You won't give it to us, it's a Cabinet document.

Why wouldn't you want to give it to us? I have to ask the question. Just because you don't have to give it – there's one thing to say you don't have to give it to us because it's a Cabinet document, you don't have to do it, but that doesn't mean you can't do it. It means you don't have to and you're choosing not to.

Why would you choose not to? If we want to make this significant change to our education system and you have a report and the data to back up what you're doing, who wouldn't you want to share it with the House of Assembly? I don't understand it. That's the part that boggles my mind.

If I was going to make a move like this and I had the data to show it was the right thing to do, I'd share it with the world. I'd share it with the general public and say, look, these are the findings. This is going to save us money. It's going to make our education system better. It's going to streamline services. It would all be outlined for the world to see. If it was the right thing to do, why wouldn't you?

So that's why you then have to look at this with a jaundiced eye and say well, maybe that report wasn't as positive as we're led to believe. Maybe there are downsides to this

that they don't want us to see because then we'll criticize it and challenge it – maybe. We'll never know, but I would say to the minister, if you want us on board, if you want me on board with this – you don't need me on board, you've got the majority; you'll do what you want anyway. We all know how that works but if you would like this House, this side of the House – I speak for myself only – I'm sure my colleagues would probably agree. I won't speak for them, but I would think that if my colleague from the Official Opposition was given this report, which clearly demonstrated it was the right thing to do, I've got a feeling they would support it.

Why wouldn't they? It wouldn't be an issue.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It would be a problem solver.

**P. LANE:** It would solve the problem.

I challenge the minister, if you have that report, table it. Please, Minister, table the report for this House and I can guarantee you that if I read that report and it can demonstrate to me with all the data that this is the right thing to do, I'd be on board.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, again, to the Member opposite for the comments.

I have my staff searching diligently because I have no idea what report the Member opposite references. The PERT report was a publicly available document that suggested the integration of the English School District into government and *Budget 2021* was an announcement that it would be integrated. As we said, we planned to reinvest any of the savings back into the classroom.

While there have been many contributions to the discussion around how to integrate

and what that would look like, there is no specific report on whether or not to integrate the school distinct into government.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I am recognizing the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have some questions I'm going to get into now, which was the normal part of Committee, but it's always interesting to –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**B. PETTEN:** What's that?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**B. PETTEN:** The first one?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** The first part is admirable.

**B. PETTEN:** Admirable, yeah.

I'm not sure if the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands is thinking about moving on the other side but I find he's very complimentary to government. I'm not sure. He might be able to explain that.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**B. PETTEN:** That's a little bit tongue-in-cheek. It's all in good humour but I'd be remiss if I never mentioned it because he passed a lot of compliments along lately across the way, I've noticed that.

Anyway, I'll get back to serious business now, Mr. Chair. I couldn't resist.

Minister, on a more serious note, I guess the question I have and we've all talked about it: What savings have you found so far? Because your former minister originally said there would be millions in savings; I know you've eluded to the fact that you are

tracking costs so what savings have been found?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Right now, as we've identified, the costs incurred to date have been minimal. We do anticipate that there will be more costs associated as we fully move through and we are tracking that from a cost and a savings perspective.

But, again, integration is not about saving money. While it has been referenced as one of the cornerstones of any government, I suppose, to find where you can find efficiencies, but right now it is about ensuring that the money that we do spend is targeted in the classroom and that any costs that we do find will be redirected.

It's not a budgetary exercise, but, of course, there will be budgetary implications. When it's fully implemented, we will have a better picture of that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Chair.

So I guess I'll go back to, not the same question, but the minister did clearly state in the House at the time and to media and publicly in many questions, there were savings anticipated in the millions. Would I be right in saying now we're not going to anticipate millions of dollars in savings? Because, at the time, he said through questions that they would be directed back to the classrooms into the school.

From what I'm reading here now, you are tracking, but would it be right of me anticipating that we're not going to see millions of dollars worth of savings as a result of this?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** I don't have a number to present to the Member opposite as to what the final savings will be.

The way that things are going, and things are changing right now, the cost of things you anticipate is not always what you end up spending but we do recognize there is a cost associated. Once the department and the district are integrated, there will be cost savings.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Minister, I question again, we're going back almost two years: Is there any explanation or was there any anticipation that this would take so long?

I know when it was announced there seemed to be a lot of, I suppose it was, false expectations at the time, but I think we all thought it would be quicker than what is has been. It seems like a longer process to merge within the department because we do other merges sometimes and they seem to happen a lot faster.

Is there any reason or was that expected because I don't think it was, at the time, anticipated it would take nearly two years?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Chair.

I recognize the length of time that we've been discussing this and talking about integration. There have been significant moves made already and there are different pieces to the puzzle that had to come in play. I think one of the biggest things was that we certainly don't want to do anything too fast. Far be it from government to move quickly on anything, but we don't want to do things too fast. We also didn't want to do it to interrupt the school cycle. We had to wait until there was an appropriate time, a break in the school year to do that, to do some of the measures that had to be implemented.

I think it has taken time; change takes time. We wanted to communicate appropriately. There was a significant consultation process with the unions. There was a lot of alignment of policy directives and things like that that had to be brought under one umbrella. So those things obviously take time and we wanted to get that done properly.

So we've set the deadline now for December 31, should all things be considered here today, we're aiming to have it done then.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Chair.

My questions were the – actually I had three questions regarding consultations with unions. You did say you did spend a lot of time consulting with the unions. I guess I'll group this into one question and you can probably answer it in generalities.

I know CUPE, NAPE and the NLTA are the three main unions in the school system. Did they address any concerns or what were their concerns? What's their response to, I guess, this overall merger? How did that go I guess is what I'm asking?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you, Chair.

The questions and concerns that came up when we chatted with the unions were largely around their collective agreements and how their employees would be affected. We've assured them of those measures. We've had great discussions with them and been able to establish those parameters. We've aligned the policies so that all matches up and we've been able to have open communication with those members

as well the Federation of School Councils and the French school district.

It's something that we've been talking about for, as the Member referenced, quite some time, but all of the partners have been part of the conversation ever since we started. They've given significant feedback that we've built into the process.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks for that, Minister.

Again, we're knocking off questions in groups, which I don't mind doing that either because it's no repetition.

Will there be any changes to the collective agreements? What's the role going forward now for school councils with this new merger?

I guess the two of those together basically: Is there any change to school collective agreements and school councils' roles on a go-forward basis? I know you said they had lots of consultations. Do you have any idea what their new roles would be?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** As we mentioned before, in this legislation there will be no changes to the rules and responsibilities. The teachers on the front lines won't notice any difference. These are more aligning the backend functions and bringing the district into the department.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Will there be any role for school board trustees when this legislation goes through?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** As we've mentioned before, we've had significant conversations with the federation of schools and the role that they have in removing the board from the equation when we moved that into the school district, those roles and responsibilities – there will still be a role for our advisory council, as such.

There are going to be members who will be appointed according to regulations. Right now, we have over 250 English schools and 6 schools in the CSFP and we wanted to ensure that we have representation from all those areas as we move forward.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Minister, did you consult with the Francophone school board and what was their view?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, we did. They had questions and concerns. They were eager to be part of the conversation, recognizing that the French school district won't be folded in because of a constitutional right to maintain their own French first-language schools.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, on a Francophone school board issue, again I would be remiss if I never asked this question because I don't know the answer and it's kind of one of the ones that slipped off the radar. The expense controversy of the former director, I know



that the Comptroller General has a review ongoing that your department had ordered.

Has there been a legal opinion? Has that been resolved? I guess it is all part of the Schools Act so could you elaborate on that?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Sorry, that is a conversation that we have almost every time that we meet with the French school district. It continues to be ongoing. I'll get more information for you on that if you want to have that conversation about more specifics.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Has there been any analysis done on how minority school boards are treated in other jurisdictions across the country? Have there been any cross-jurisdictional scans on that sort of stuff?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** We have looked at, jurisdictionally, what has happened and there has been some reference to some of the pitfalls of such in different jurisdictions. But recognizing the population and geography that we have here in Newfoundland and Labrador, it's not fair sometimes to compare apples to oranges.

So as we look at moving forward, this is a policy directive that we believe fits for students and teachers and staff – and parents and guardians here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, how will the school procurement be done after this is complete? Will there be any changes in how we perceive the procurement now?

Because I know right now it goes through infrastructure, the committee – well, most of infrastructure in the province and maintenance we know is going to go to TI, so how will school procurement be now on a go-forward basis once the merger is complete?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** I do have a note on the procurement process if you'd just give me a moment to look for it.

Again, things that are delegated to responsible departments will be done in the responsible departments. Staff who are responsible for procurement in the school district right now will move to the Public Procurement Agency.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you.

A lot of moving parts, though, as we've stated several times already. It's a lot of moving parts. I sure hope it works.

How will school hiring be done after this is complete? Because, again, we are dispersed around. Will your department be the entry point for that?

I guess what I'm trying ask, we've talked about the busing and the maintenance, so do you apply to Transportation and Infrastructure? Do you apply with the portals – basically how will hiring be done? Who will be responsible for that?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Those processes will not change. They will remain as they are.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** So you still go will through the Department of Education, early childhood learning, and then it will be your staff and that public schools branch will be responsible for doing all the screening and hiring?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Okay.

Minister, how will school repairs be budgeted and completed after this is complete?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Sorry, can you repeat?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** How school repairs will be budgeted and completed after this is complete?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** As they are now.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** There will be no changes whatsoever so the exact same process?

What I'm saying is in any school, the school operations, they will not see – they will deal with the same people. Will it be seamless, I guess, is what I'm trying to say because with any change comes change. So it will be seamless and they will not see any difference; is that correct?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** That is certainly the intention. I wish that I could predict that it would be seamless but that is the intention, that front-line administrators, staff, teachers, students will not see a massive change or difference in how they conduct business right now.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Chair.

I'll go back again because these things might seem minute or whatever but they matter down the road. I said it in the House and I said it in the briefing and I'll ask you directly – and I said it in the second reading. I'll go back to myself and you doing a tour of Frank Roberts. So any maintenance, busing, any issue, even though it's not in your department, will you still do that tour with me or do I have to get the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure – and that might seem minute and I bear repeating, but I've been around enough to know, too, and everything changes in government that it can pretty convoluted and complicated.

Could you be on record, I guess, to provide clarity to that issue now?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** The process will remain the same. Any issues related to schools, anything that impacts students, anything that falls within the purview of education will still come through the Department of Education and if a double date is necessary

with two ministers, then by all means we'll sign up for that too.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Now, I'm not sure if I'd be participating in that but the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands might do it but not me. I appreciate that, Minister. It's all good humour.

I guess, Minister, a question – and, again, it's tied to this double department. As you can tell that's something that does not really sit right with me and probably my colleagues.

So important school repairs, Transportation and Infrastructure, people can agree or disagree – I happen to know that department quite well through my time I worked in the department. I was the shadow minister for the department for many years. For many years I felt, some times I probably had more of a knowledge of it than the new ministers coming into the department, and that's just a reality. It's no disrespecting anyone there. Things get lost in Transportation and Infrastructure. The minister, he can agree or disagree, whatever – I'd say he disagrees to me but that don't shock me with him because he's on top of things but I still think things get lost.

Is there any concern with these group of employees going up because we all deal a lot with these individuals – we know a lot of them, busing, bus stops, what have you – going up into the second, outside of Justice – I think Justice are, employee-wise, the second largest or the largest department for staff in the province in the government. Are you concerned that they're not going to get lost in the shuffle?

Again, I'm going back into that point but it comes through experience and experience

does matter in these things. You've seen it first-hand. When the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructures clarifies this, eventually – I'm sure he will because he wants to clarify, but I'm not being facetious. I'm trying to ask a general question because I think it's a genuine issue. I've worked in six or eight departments with the provincial government when we were the administration – I wasn't elected but I was there and a minister's office, you get a good understanding of how things work.

That's my fear. So you become an afterthought in a big conglomerate department that is up there with a billion dollars worth of roadwork. I always said TI was like an engineering department, it was never like a government department because there were more engineers and vests going around the department than there were suits. I think it's a genuine issue and concern. I think it's a fair concern.

It looks good now on paper, and we pass this stuff and I'm not trying to be difficult either but I do believe it's something that could pose problems, when you're no longer the minister, you're somewhere else in the government – things change. Right now, today, you're assuring me and I fully respect your assuredness, but down the road you're a small fish in a big ocean in that department. So feel free.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** I thank the Member for the concerns and I don't pretend to know what happens in TI and I certainly do respect your experience and your time there. To your point about seeing how it all plays out, I mean, if I could see what it was going to look like in the end I'd see the 649 numbers and I wouldn't worry about none of it.

But there will be a team within Transportation and Infrastructure that's designated to public schools. They'll be responsible for the school maintenance, and

that team is already the team that conducts school maintenance. They're moving from the district into government. They'll have two ministers on their case to make sure that things get done, because those concerns will still funnel through the Department of Education and be able to spearhead making sure that that's done and conducted and foster a better communication between the two departments.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** I'm going to ask a stupid question now. Why did we ever put it over in TI? Why did it not just stay in your department?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Sorry?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Why was transportation and maintenance put in TI, not brought into your department?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** So that's part of integrating it and, as we recognize, those are questions and concerns often that we have to consult with TI on. As they work on their end of things, it will be a part of the integration. They will be a team that is specifically responsible for infrastructure concerns and transportation concerns within the school district or department.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, do you have any concerns now that the superintendent of schools will be an ADM within the department, in the public schools branch? Are there any concerns because, previously, I mean, let's be honest, the superintendent of schools provided a level of cover to any government. I said yes, that's why I believe the school boards were put there, it was to give government some reprieve because a lot of these issues are really difficult. But now this person will be operating as an ADM directly under your leadership.

Do you have any concerns? There are a lot of issues that are going to be filtering through the department that never filtered before because if they don't like the answer, before you went to the superintendent of schools and usually that's where it stopped because the minister of the day would say that's a school board issue and they dealt with it. That layer of protection will not be there now.

Do you have any concerns with the functionalities of that? Because what I heard in the briefing yesterday, right from evaluation and everything will come through the department. You're going to have upset people or parents or teacher issues.

Before, the superintendent had sole discretion, basically protection. You, as the department or any minister there, could just put it off to the board and let them deal with it. Now these issues are coming basically into your purview as well.

Are there any concerns or is there any anticipation of how you've managed that? Because that would be more of a management concern than anything else because the issues will come. They're there every day now. Is there any plan or any concern as we go forward?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

Of course there's always the concern, but to your point, I hear them anyway. We work very closely with the superintendent of schools. The issues that are brought to the superintendent, they're not exclusively kept to the superintendent. Most of the major issues are always communicated to the minister.

The day-to-day operating things, they will still be managed by the person who's in the role. Anything that needs to be escalated to the minister will, which is the same way we do things now.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thanks again for that, Minister.

I totally appreciate that they do come your way and I do understand from my time within the ranks that's what happens. Now you can no longer say that decisions are final. I guess I'll use just a small example for the benefit of the people who probably don't know where I go with stuff. I remember the 1.6-kilometre busing, every time that was discussed with ministers of the day, ultimately it was a government policy, but the school board was left to implement. It did provide a level of – the minister had some – even though they're fully aware. Now, an ADM in your department outside of that reports to you. You and the deputy, that's it.

I'll leave it at that, but that's my thing. I know you're aware of it, but now you're going to be actually – you could be – point taken or point given, I guess.

Minister, the spending scandal with the NLESD in 2018, is there any assurances, I guess, or protections that this won't happen again? I know we're now moved into government and I know from my time in Public Accounts there was an asset-management system, I guess that's what it

was called at the time, to protect – the asset-management system wouldn't happen again. It was a fairly large investment, I believe a couple million dollars and then it was a million dollars a year in maintenance, I may be wrong in those figures but I know that when it came to Public Accounts of the day.

I know in the briefing they said that this is being merged or supposedly merged within government. So are there going to be any issues with that? Do they foresee that that's going to be compatible because it might seem like a computer system but we're looking at fairly significant investments in any technologies?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

That is an issue that has been identified. We did spend a significant amount of money to invest in a system that assures those things won't happen again. Then we're going to bring those folks into government. So the microscope gets zoomed in a little bit more.

I think these are measures of accountability and transparency that we're interested in pursuing and making sure that we are upholding the high standards for our school district, our school spending and by having them in-house then they are subject to all the same rules and implications and we'll be able to monitor that in our department.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, the Teacher Allocation Review Committee, the report on teacher allocation review, with this new merger and, I guess, upheaval that's going to be caused regardless, no matter how seamless it is,

will this delay any actions of the hiring of teachers? Will this have any delay in that process and even a new teacher allocation model?

I guess the recommendations of the report, will this be further delayed now because we haven't seen anything on it? Will this be a further delay as a result of this merger? We're talking about the merger today, but it still hasn't really fully occurred. This is going to take a process. So will that delay this further down the road or are there any plans in the immediate future for that?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** We don't anticipate any further delays because of bringing the school district in. If anything, it's to make things more streamlined and we'll have everybody operating under the one roof, so to speak.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Will this Teacher Allocation Review recommendations be implemented soon? Is that what you're saying is your response to that?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** We're still continuing to work on plans for transformation of education here in Newfoundland and Labrador and that will be a piece of that puzzle for sure.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** So stay tuned, okay.

Will this legislation affect the settlement of survivors of sexual abuse who have made

claims on former and current school buildings?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Can you ask that question again?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** We're wondering will this merger have any affect on – I mean we're dealing with the school sales for the settlement, the Catholic schools, I guess, will that have any impact on that issue, or is that totally separate?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** No impact.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Winding down on my questions, Chair, and I appreciate the minister's responses.

Thank you very much.

You said earlier in your commentary, a full-scale review. So when can we expect a full-scale review of the Schools Act?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** As with any policy or act or any governance structure in government, we continue to monitor and update those in a timely fashion, is my intent. As we get the school district implemented or integrated into government, then we can move on to other pieces of legislation that are of importance. I think this Schools Act is one of those that we need to do some work on. That will be my direction to the department, is to pick a time and get a time frame into which we can offer a full-scale review.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Minister, I totally agree and we've debated another issue on the Schools Act that was open on the floor, it was the previous minister, and there's a lot of stuff in that Schools Act that's dated, that's archaic, it needs to be changed and renewed. It's so much, it's a lot and the sooner we get that done, the better.

I guess one final point I'll make is the consultant's report. There's a lot of conversation about a consultant's report. So where is it to? Will it ever be released? Could you offer some comment or response on that, please?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** So the PERT report made reference to integration of the school district into government. To anything else, there is no report about the pros and cons of bringing into government. As I've said, we've had significant discussion and contributions to the conversation about how we do that and what that looks like. But the PERT report is out there and that is the piece of information that identifies the integration of the school district into the department.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm not going to spend too much time on this, but I can see where, in the legislation, you got to start somewhere to put it in the right area, and I get that. The regulations are where it gets us, and we'd like to be more involved in that and just get the information. That's one of the things.

So when you say that you're going to come out with the full-scale review, that's great if it comes to the House of Assembly so we can debate it and discuss it. Because some of the issues if it's going to happen like it's happening now, in coming in with this – and we get the reason for it, but we have reservations about it and, rightly so, based on some of the stuff that's happened.

When I'm talking about some of this stuff, I don't get to mention it until we get the legislation. We get to speak to it in debate but we don't get to offer our suggestions to get it into the debate. It's after the fact, so that's some of the stuff that as an elected Member – and I think we should be all thinking like that, how can we help you? I've said that before when I spoke and I continue to say it that hopefully there's something that one of us over here will say that may be added into the legislation. That's basically my claim. Not that I want to be a part of it, just that it gets into the legislation. Sometimes you're doing it after the fact and we say we should do this and we should that. So that's some of the concerns that I have and I always have reservations about.

One example would be teachers. Where did a 0.25 come from? If it was the PC government or is the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, where did it come from? A 0.25 as a teacher, it's ludicrous. You go up a school for a 0.25, either you're a teacher or you're not in the school. It doesn't make any sense. That's some of the stuff that should come to the House to be discussed. So if I don't bring it up now, when do I bring it up? If the legislation comes, it's too late. So that's some of the stuff that I just don't see any sense in it. Now it's a cost-saving measure somewhere along the way, but it makes no sense to the teachers in the school. It just makes no sense.

It's just up for discussion. That's why I throw this out there and that's why I wanted to get up and speak on it. Some of the custodial issues, in regard to snowstorms, a field has

been cleaned – and I heard the minister over there of TI and I will compliment you that when I text both of you, that the answers come back and we get a chance, or you get to speak to somebody. That's what our job is and I do appreciate it. I'm not going over on that other side, so just to let you know.

An example would be cleaning the fields or mowing the grass in the buildings, and I heard the minister say it, three weeks to wait to clean the grass. So they get up and they get a group of students to do it, and that's not acceptable. You're right, it should be pristine and it should be done. Again, when it comes to that kind of stuff and discussing it, teachers sometimes have to stay quiet. If they come out and speak, they can be frowned upon. It's not the way it should be, that's just the way it is but they are looking to get things done in these schools.

If we can streamline it to make it better, then that's what our job is. Again, bringing in the legislation after the fact or not having a say in the legislation or how we can help it, that's what I think our job is. If I'm wrong in that, then somebody can correct me but that's why we're here: to help.

We, from both sides, have a lot of knowledge in regard to the education system for sure. I mean, I listened to this gentleman here from Bonavista and there is education in here; we have a Member over here, in the NDP; we have a Member on the other side. They have a lot to offer and they should be included in the conversations because they certainly help us on our side.

There are always experts in every field in here. We should be bringing that to the forefront to help you. It's an incredible amount of stuff. How we can save money maybe? It's all about saving money. If you were running this as your own business, you'd be trying to save money. We should be trying to do that and not on the backs of the students.

Again, this is why I got up and we're talking about programs that are in school. I was in the car industry for a long time. Programming in school should be teaching, at least, Grade 12 students about how credit works in your own life when you leave school. A lot of these kids, when they leave Grade 12, if they come from a family that didn't understand it when they were there, then they are going to go out and have the same issues with regard to credit. So my opportunity is to get up and be able to speak to this and be able to bring that out.

One of the issues is learning about credit. Obviously, we are not going to go into schools but I know when I was selling cars, I said I'd love to get an opportunity to get in to Grade 12 so that when four kids go together or four people go together when they live out in St. John's and live in a house and the light bill goes in my name and the other three don't pay and you leave it and you say I'm not paying the bill if they aren't paying it, well, guess who that hurts? Only the person whose name it is in, not anybody else. Do these kids understand that? Some might but others don't. They should be taught some of that stuff. That's the kind of stuff that we need again, as legislators, to be able to get in and help this stuff out with whatever we can do.

And I can touch on other topics. I said I wouldn't run-on too much but they are important. It's just important that we be part of the regulations and helping the legislation. That's what I feel that we should be talking about.

Maybe, Minister, when you get to do a full review, you bring it in here, we offer some suggestions then you go away and make your legislation and then if there's something we can tweak up, maybe we can.

That is my take on that. Thank you for your time.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!



**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you to the Member for the contribution to the conversation.

I will say we don't have to wait for a full-scale review to make changes and improvements in our education system. So if there is anything that anybody on any side has to add to the conversation then please, by all means, reach out to me and we can have a conversation on how we can make things better.

That's one of the points that I like to stand on and believe in in my own profession here is that I'll always defer to the experts in the room on the things that matter and those that can speak to the things that we're discussing. It has been a great opportunity to be able to sit and share with members of the NLTA and to get feedback from them on several issues, even outside of this legislation, but it is important that we hear from the folks who are front line and the folks who are implementing these things day in, day out. Always interested in deferring that conversation to experts in the room or in the field.

I welcome all the feedback; we're continuing to work on the regulations for this piece of legislation, which again the things we've talked about are outside of what we're working on today. But if there is anybody who wants to have a conversation about those things, by all means, reach out to our department.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Further questions?

I recognize the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Chair.

I do have some questions. With the elimination of the NLESD, is there anything

in this bill that guarantees the transparency on how decisions are made? Will transparency decrease as a result of the merger? What did the consultant or the decision document say about this?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** As always, it is the intention to have accountability and transparency in all these measures and we'll continue to work with all Members of the House of Assembly to answer any questions or concerns that they have in that and bring forward from their district. The school district will be folded into government and the policies and procedures will be conducted in the same fashion.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you.

In transferring the duties of the board to the department, I note that the current act had a provision to "ensure that policies and guidelines issued by the minister relating to special education for students are followed in schools under its jurisdiction."

That is no longer listed as duties under the proposed 51.3 of the bill. Why was this omitted and was this a result of the consultations?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** I'm sorry; it'll just take a minute. Those will be functions of government as we move forward, so the staff that would have been responsible for that will now be members of the department.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Minister.

But why was it no longer in the legislation? Why was it removed from the legislation? Why wouldn't it be kept in even though it is a function of government? Is it going to be in the regs or is it just going to be like an operating manual? Why was it removed from the regulations?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Because it'll be under the departmental process so there was no need for a legislative component to legislate government process.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Who will now determine the priorities of the new schools constructed in the future? That process, what will it look like? Before, the NLESD would make recommendations, internally. What will now take place inside government to make sure that the new school process is done?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Those discussions will still occur with the same folks that they occur with now. These individuals will simply be part of the department. We'll conduct the consultations with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and review the information as we build the priorities for school construction.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Chair.

So you say it will be done with the same people there. Will it be done externally or internal consultants within the department now that there is no school board?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** It'll be the same process that we undergo now.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Given that the school board was a separate ABC outside of government, technically, now that it's going to be internal, will it be an internal process or are you saying that now it'll be a strictly internal government process that will have internal decision-making? Because before it was done outside and now it's going inside. So you're saying that the government itself will just do it. It seems that there's a lack of transparency now, when it comes to this process.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** So the process will be the same. It's always been an internal decision. It was done on the recommendations of the NLESD, which will continue. Those individuals who would have informed the decision-making process prior to the integration will still inform the decision-making process once the integration is complete.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you.

Under 51.4 of this, it says that the department may similarly dismiss employees who have not made a reasonable attempt to obtain the examination or assessment. How is a reasonable attempt defined and will the department go about trying to prove such a thing?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** I'm just going to need a minute to locate that. I ask the Member if he could repeat the number.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** In this bill, it's under 51.4(1), it says that the department may similarly dismiss an employee who has not made a reasonable attempt to obtain an examination or an assessment.

How is a reasonable attempt going to be defined and how will the department go about trying to prove such a thing?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** The definition will remain the same. Nothing is changed in that piece.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Is there any new wording in the proposed 51.11 that governs how denominational property is managed or is it all the same as section 84 in the current act?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** There will be no change in how it's managed. It will just simply be managed by the department, the Crown or the Conseil Scolaire. The only change will be in the name.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Just looking for clarity. Will teachers now be employees of the Department of Education? How is this case going to look, also giving a description of the education committee?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

The teachers will be employees of the Department of Education and there has been no change to any of their descriptions, job descriptions or anything of that nature.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Given the regional differences within the province, and now that we're going to be merging all into the Department of Education, how will the regional offices look? Will there be improvements to the current structure of the regional offices, given that there are so many challenges right now in different regions of the province, or is it going to be status quo going forward?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** So folks who are operating in offices in the periphery will continue to operate. There will be no collapsing of those services.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Given that the regions are having such difficulties as it is, will there any improvements going forward? Can the minister commit to any improvements going forward with the merger or is it going to be status quo?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** As we will have the opportunity to handle all of these things within the department, I would hope that there are efficiencies and that things do improve. As we are moving forward, all of these things, the policies, procedures and operations of the department and the school district will be streamlined; therefore, we do suspect that they will improve.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Given that the French language school board is not coming into government and this will have to be of their own choice, because they have the ability to say no, have they made indication that they would like to be a part of government or are they adamantly saying that they're not going to be a part of government?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

Those are conversations that we continue to have. As we've mentioned, the Francophone community have a Charter of Rights to main control over their French first-language schools. They're constitutionally protected and it won't be integrated at this time, but as the Member referenced, if there's interest in that, I'm sure we can have the conversation. We'll continue to have our internal control mechanisms in place to support the practices of the CSFP.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you.

So given that they chose not to at this time, is there any concern now that having one school board and one non-school board is going to cause any issues going forward with the delivery of education in this province?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

The management of the CSFP or Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial continues to have open conversation with the Department of Education and their mechanisms align with the best practices of government policy.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you.

Given that there are a lot of regional differences and stuff in the province, a suggestion to the minister is will they go about and check, go visit every region to see where the issues that do arise with regions can be addressed, given that at this current time there doesn't seem to be any mechanism or anything like that to address some of the regional issues.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

It's certainly the intention to have representation in all areas. As the Member referenced, there are some that are more difficult to fill than others. But those will be maintained and efforts will be made to ensure that regional representation is available. I look forward to visiting as many regions, as many schools as possible.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to weigh in on the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure when he had mentioned about the school board elections. I know that the amount of people engaged in that was very poor, I agree 100 per cent. But I think that as an administrator in the school system, we often were never aware of it. So I look at the process and the communication that we had out to engage people, that we may have done a poor job over the years in relation to the school board elections. I just want to weigh that in.

He had mentioned about the schools and making sure they look great and are well maintained. That is fantastic, that's what we

want to hear. I know the public in my area would look at the roads if they damaged a vehicle on a pothole, then government has no liability, no matter if the pothole is recognized or determined three or four months prior. There's still no liability on that.

So I know that the residents of my district would say, if government now is going to ensure the maintenance of buildings and looking after it, they would piece that together and say, well the liability of doing so, it's a little different. But I say in the faith in the government, I know that mine always defaults back to roads.

Minister, I just wanted to restate what I had stated earlier this morning, the three requests that I've had for information and getting that. One was the amount of active school councils. I know active is pretty broad. You can't define active. But I was looking at ones who would be active that would have active websites with the minutes posted on the webpage of the school. Someone says they're active but you go into a school website and there's no communication, you can't see the minutes of it that would deem that they are not active. I don't know if that would be readily available or not.

Of course the other two were the transition from NLESD for the past two years about the personnel we may have lost and the maintenance budget. In the Schools Act, if I could bring your attention to section 21, just for curiosity and clarification, Minister, Liability for damage.

**CHAIR:** Did you have a question?

**C. PARDY:** Yes, I do.

Section 21(1)(b) states, "... property of an employee for the Crown engaged in duties related to primary, elementary or secondary education ...." That's clear. If you go down to (d), it doesn't say the same thing for those: "... property of an employee of the conseil scolaire."

I immediately jumped to say why the difference, because you probably could've handled that in the same clause. The more I thought about it and read it, I wondered as to whether an employee's home if they suffered damage, whether there's any difference between being a member in the English system or whether it be as an employee of the Conseil Scolaire. I didn't know why the difference between the both there.

The property of an employee of the Crown engaged in duties. That means if there were damages to property, the property of an employee of the Crown engaged in duties related to primary, elementary or secondary education; and, (d), would be just strict property of an employee of Conseil Scolaire.

**CHAIR:** Is that a question you're posing to the —?

**C. PARDY:** Yes, I'm not sure I was clear on that.

**CHAIR:** I think I'm going to throw it back to the Member for Bonavista, if he'd like to reword his question.

**C. PARDY:** Take two. I was trying expedite it as quick as I could.

But section 21(1) says: Where the following property is destroyed, damaged or lost by the intentional or negligent act of a student — so that's what we are talking about — then there would be an individual and collective liability to the Crown or the Conseil Scolaire. So that's fair, I understand that: a student damages.

But I wonder why the distinction between teachers in the English system and as an employee of the Conseil Scolaire? Because it says — remember the liability for coverage — if your "property of an employee of the Crown engaged in duties related to primary, elementary or secondary education ...."

That means on the job, in the school, I would assume.

Whereas, in (d) it would be “property of an employee of the conseil scolaire.” It would mean that it could be a teacher’s home. Whether that is the difference or not, I don’t know.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** I’m still not entirely clear on what the Member is asking so I’ll do my best to offer an explanation and if I’m not correct, then you can ask it again.

It is meant to cover all employees: teachers or students, student assistants. Anybody who would an employee of the government at this point or of the CSFP, and engaged in duties may mean something like their car could be parked in the parking lot. So those would be avenues by which that would have to be employed.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**C. PARDY:** You don’t need to belabour it, Minister. I just looked at why it was worded differently for a member of the English School District than what it is for a member of the Conseil Scolaire.

The only thing I can think is that, as an employee of the Crown, the student or the parent is responsible for the damages if an employee is engaged in duties – that means at the school and yes, you are right, the car or whatever.

But to word it differently for property of an employee of the Conseil Scolaire, I think that would mean any property associated or owned by the employee which could involve their homes. So say there is a wilful neglect and damage of their home, would the individual student and student’s parent be liable?

When I read it, I looked at a distinction between the two. One could say the property of an employee of the Crown and the Conseil Scolaire. That would put two of them together. But the fact that you’ve got two of them separated and worded differently would mean that there is a difference between both.

We can leave that for some time; that was just a question that I was curious on. I often know that if you had a student go out to do wilful and neglectful damage of a teacher’s home, would under this by-law, both those in the English School District and those in the Conseil Scolaire have the parents of the child and the child liable for the damages. There seems to be a distinction between the two. But I can leave that with you and you can probably get back to me on that.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** I will offer that it’s the intention of it to be engaged in duties of education, so it would be more applicable to anything – you know, it’s not a wide-open spread for any property that’s related to any teachers, so it would have to be those that are required to engage in their duties, but everyone in the CSFP would still be part of that conversation because they’re still employees of the Department of Education. They’re still employed through the Department of Education.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have one question, I guess. I heard the minister talk about – and we brought this up a number of times and even questions that were asked by other Members, about would savings be redirected back into the department for obviously teachers, support for students, whatever the case might be. And the minister said yes.

I'm taking her at her word that that would be her personal intent, as she sees it, but I guess I just want to make the point that given the way our system works, our budgetary system, there's no way we can guarantee that that's going to happen. No different than when the government was collecting carbon tax for 2½ years, and we said, oh, the money's going to go into environmental initiatives.

Now I'm not saying there was no money went into environmental initiatives, but I'm pretty sure that all the money collected didn't go into environmental initiatives. It went into the general coffers of the provincial government, and I would say that this is no different. That if the government saves money on this initiative, it's not like our system works by, the government saves money and because it was saved in education, well that means that money is automatically in a special bank account for it.

There's no Department of Education bank account per se. It would be the same thing as saying that if we were to put up toll bridges – I'm not suggesting we do that, by the way – but if we were to put up toll bridges to improve our highways, it would be great. Some people would say, do you know what? I'd be prepared to pay a little extra if I knew it was going into highways. But the problem is that all the money goes into the general accounts of the government. We get to budget time and then the government allocates it as it sees fit. So there's no guarantee that any savings is going to go back into education.

That might be the minister's intent; the minister might not be the Minister of Education in six months from now or a year from now. There could be a provincial election; there might be a new government. Who know what will happen, but I just make the point that when we say savings are going back into education, there's no way possible to guarantee that.

Every budget year there is a determination made by the provincial government as a whole, based on the revenues coming in, the asks, the needs, the wants and everything else and the government decides what money goes where. So it's not like we can simply say yeah, we saved \$5 million as a result of this, that's \$5 million to hire more teachers. Maybe that's what the minister would want. That's probably what a lot of us would want, but there's no way of guaranteeing that would happen because we have the big budget debate, the Cabinet decides on where the money goes any given year. It could be a different minister, it could be a different Cabinet so there's no way of guaranteeing that.

I just wanted to make that point, just for the record, that when we are saying yeah, the money is being directed, that may be this minister's hope and intent but there's no way of actually guaranteeing that's going to happen.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Any further questions?

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Just one comment, and I know the minister is quite aware of an issue that's near and dear to my heart and I believe to hers as well, that's a new high school in Paradise.

Conversations we've had, I'm still hoping to meet and I'm sure we will. I've got nothing but good vibes, I'll say, in terms of that school being considered or on the radar. But the facts here are that this school has been deferred eight years. That was recommended by the arm's-length agency, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District. I look at the section 51.2 where all those agreements, contracts and so on get transferred over to the Crown.

I guess my question is in relation to that: Given that it was an arm's-length agency initially and now it all falls under the one department, what assurance, I guess, or what level of confidence can you give to, not just Paradise residents, but anyone, any new school that's happening in the province or being recommended, that it's going to be done in an objective and data-based manner?

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

Thank you to the Member for the comment.

Again, as I have said before, we always consider the community growth, the populations and the needs and based on all of those parameters in our decisions about where new schools will be built.

The information that has been provided before were recommendations from the NLESD and those same folks – hopefully those same folks – all the same individuals, the same positions will exist to inform the decision-making process prior to integration, they will exist after integration.

Those recommendations will still be brought forth to the Department of Education, who will, in collaboration with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, make the decisions on what requests go forward for new schools.

As the Member is aware, the budgetary process unfolds but consideration is always given to communities, their growth, the potential, the need and we'll continue to do that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

**CLERK:** Clauses 2 through 63 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall clauses 2 through 63 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 63 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 Schools Act, 1997 No. 2.

**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 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 hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 43 carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 43.

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.

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 Baie Verte - Green Bay and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

**B. WARR:** Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them

referred and have directed me to report Bill 43 without amendment.

**SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed him to report Bill 43 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Now.

**SPEAKER:** Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

**L. DEMPSTER:** Tomorrow.

**SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Speaker.

I move that this House do now stand in recess.

**SPEAKER:** This House do stand recessed until 2 p.m. this afternoon.

### Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

**SPEAKER (Bennett):** Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Good afternoon, everyone. We'll move into Members' statements.

### Statements by Members

**SPEAKER:** Today, we'll hear Member's statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Conception Bay South, Exploits,

Ferryland, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans and Harbour Main.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, on Wednesday, October 18, my colleagues, the MHA for Topsail- Paradise and MHA for Harbour Main and myself attended the 12th Annual Bright Business Awards ceremony held in Conception Bay South.

The Town of Conception Bay South hosts this event annually during Small Business Week. It's a great opportunity for local entrepreneurs to network and showcase their individual achievements in our town. These businesses play a very important role growing our economy and creating employment in our community.

The 2023 Bright Business Achievement Award winners are: Beautiful Business, Multi-Tenant Award: Golden House Restaurant; Beautiful Business, Single Tenant: Brian's Auto Body; Community Pride and Partnership: Taylor's Fish, Fruit & Vegetable Market; David Murphy Chamber Leadership: JOYFIT; Established Business of the Year: Taylor's Fish, Fruit & Vegetable Market; Downtown CBS Member of the Year: Ninepenny Brewing; Glenda Noseworthy Award: Darren Kennedy, Home Hardware; New Start-up of the Year: Newlander Meat Shop; and Sustainable Business: good2growNL.

I'd like to extend my sincere congratulations to the award winners and nominees. A special thank you to the business community and sponsors for their support and contributions. Again, well deserved and I wish their continued success.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

Today, I would like to recognize the organizers of the Leo Brothers Memorial Softball Tournament.

This tournament is hosted in Bishop's Falls, in honour of Leo Brothers and his brother, Tony. Leo was an avid softball player and athlete in the community. He eventually lost his battle to cancer in 2004.

The Brothers family started the tournament, spearheaded by Tony, his wife Susan and son Paul, until Tony also lost his battle to the same disease. The tournament was continued by a volunteer group, chaired by Rob Canning.

During its 18 years, the tournament has continued to raise funds to support cancer care in the region.

Speaker, I would like for all Members of the House of Assembly to congratulate the organizers and to thank them for their continued commitment.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

I rise today to congratulate and recognize the amazing and talented cast, crew and staff of the Southern Shore Folk Arts Council on their 2023 Dinner Theatre performances.

A play called *Next Stop, Heaven* was written by Katie Barbour and Randy Crane based on anthology of Annette's Mooney's writings.

The Southern Shore Folk Arts Council has been performing wonderful shows for the past 20 years and never seems to disappoint. Always a great night of humour.

This year was no exception, a great performance by the cast Katie Barbour, Denise Leonard and Randy Crane and the crew Matilda Mulcahy, William Carey, Ava Brothers and Bonnie Lillies.

I was delighted to have the opportunity to attend a show over the summer. It was an enjoyable night of fun, laughter and a delicious meal. It makes me proud to see the amazing and wonderful talent that is displayed on the Southern Shore.

I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating the cast and crew of the Southern Shore Folk Arts Council on another successful season.

Thank you

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you Speaker.

New Found Tao Brazilian Jiu Jitsu started in the basement of Paul Clancy's house almost a decade ago. Paul was just trying to find some people to train with. Paul's wife Sara would answer the door to strangers on a regular basis who would just show up and go right to their basement.

A few years later, in 2016, he began renting space from the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor. At that point, he had about 15 adults and kids training once a week.

In 2017, Paul was promoted to blue belt and started teaching with the original owner of NFT, Mark Feener. In January of 2019, Mark no longer was able to teach so Paul began running classes with a focus on building membership for the club.

Membership quickly rose from 30 students to roughly 100 within eight months.

This past year Paul and his organization found a new home to train his 150 students in. Twenty of these students trained under their scholarship program for underprivileged children and adults. His motto is: If they show up and work hard, they stay regardless of their financial situation.

What started as Paul's vision, New Found Tao, has grown into a family that offers discipline, encouragement and guidance.

Congratulations to Paul and New Found Tao on the much success.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Speaker, Lindsay Phillips Oates, originally from Colliers, now residing in Avondale is a dedicated wellness professional and entrepreneur in the District of Harbour Main. She opened a natural therapy and wellness practice in Holyrood in July 2021 called Central Wellness.

The first of its kind in the rural region, Central Wellness has as its mission to foster intergenerational wellness and create a safe haven within rural communities. In addition to the services she offers, a mental health and addictions counsellor and a naturopathic doctor also work in her practice to broaden the services available to rural communities in the Conception Bay area.

Lindsay strives to provide her clients with the tools to understand the positive energy they hold within. Her offerings can be virtual or in the great outdoors like her most sought-after experience, the MUG UP Meditation Experience and retreats. She is

passionate about building community connections and embracing the culture of our province. This is the kind of positive energy and entrepreneurial spirit we truly value in our district.

I ask all hon. Members to please join me in congratulating Lindsay for her commitment to helping make the people of the Harbour Main District feel well and empowered through natural therapy.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

**G. BYRNE:** Speaker, today I'll take a moment to raise up the performance and the success of the team that has turned the tide on a seemingly intractable provincial problem.

The plan, the effort and the team that this administration has assembled to tackle population decline and turn it into growth has turned a true corner, adding not only numbers, but new skills, diversity and social and economic growth.

For the last 2½ years, Speaker, the population of our communities has now grown by 12,000 people – new families.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**G. BYRNE:** New families are arriving daily; where once our schools were hollowing out, for the first time since the 1970s, enrolment in our schools is now growing.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**G. BYRNE:** Last year, 2022, was a record year when we received 3,400 landed

permanent residents in our province. Never before has that occurred, and we actually ran out of space to nominate more under the federal rules. We successfully doubled our spaces and, halfway through this year, we exceeded the performance of all of last year, receiving 3,800 new permanent landed residents, well ahead of schedule of meeting our target by 5,100 by 2026.

Speaker, our Ukrainian initiative is a model for the world. As of today, the Association for New Canadians informs me that 3,238 Ukrainians are here as our neighbours, choosing Newfoundland and Labrador as their new home.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**G. BYRNE:** I recently met with the Ukrainian ambassador to Canada, who offered her nation's gratitude for what Newfoundland and Labrador has done.

Speaker, newcomers arrive from Ukraine each and every week to our province with only two suitcases to their name and the desire for a better life. Fourteen hundred Ukrainian families, 94 per cent of all Ukrainian arrivals are now housed in our neighbourhoods and this is a very, very positive thing.

Speaker, given the incredible success, this incredible turnaround of a seemingly unsolvable social and economic problem our province faced, I ask all Members now, all Members of this House, to say thanks to the team at the Association for New Canadians, to the team at the provincial Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills and the full community of people and organizations who make our province such a welcoming place.

For the first time ever, immigration is on the front burner of public policy importance and, Mr. Speaker, this shows.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, re-growing our population is key to growing our economy, breathing new life into our communities and making Newfoundland and Labrador a place not just to come from but to go to.

We welcome immigrants and refugees who seek to build new lives here and add to the cultural wealth and diversity of this place we call home. We especially welcome those from Ukraine who are fleeing a devastating war that has to end. Newfoundland and Labrador will always be a safe place for you.

We must do more than open the door, Speaker. We must step up with support, social and community support, language support, help turning people's skills into meaningful employment and help finding homes. We need a strategic housing plan that accounts for and accommodates this growth, because more people naturally requires more places for people to live.

If this government fails in following through, then those who come here will definitely move on. Sadly, that has been a pattern for too long.

We need to do more. We need to do more than celebrate on the tarmac when people arrive. We need to follow through so people will be able to stay here in Newfoundland and Labrador and call this place home. Let's do something about tuition fees, Speaker, because all post-secondary institutions bring in skilled people and professionals who fall in love with this place and choose to stay. Let's do all that we can to keep our doors open.

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.

Welcoming new people to our province is something worth noting. I hope that the newcomers decide to make this province their permanent home, and a quick hello to Sergei and Katarina, my neighbours in Labrador West from Ukraine.

This is only happening if government focuses on retention, issues that cause people to choose to leave and go to other parts of Canada.

We encourage this government to report on outmigration numbers, as some people do choose to move on to other parts of this country. If we are transparent about these results, we can use this information in efforts to help find the solution and keep people here as permanent residents and choose to make Newfoundland and Labrador their permanent home.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

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

**P. PIKE:** Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House to recognize October as National Foster Families Month.

I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the contribution of foster families in our province who provide safe and nurturing homes for children and youth in need of care.

Currently, there are close to 600 foster families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador who provide vital guidance and support to help ensure the well-being of children and youth. We want to thank all foster families for their crucial role in ensuring a continuum of care for children and youth, whether they provide respite on weekends, daily care or a forever home.

It is also important to recognize the ongoing work of the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association, which supports foster parents in collaboration with the team in the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

Speaker, I invite everyone in this hon. House to join me in commending foster families for their unwavering dedication and compassion, as they help create positive experiences and lifelong memories for children and youth in care.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**B. PETTEN:** Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Our caucus joins the Foster Families Association in celebrating National Foster Families Month. We commend the 600 foster families in our province who have opened their hearts to children whose greatest wish is to have a safe, loving and nurturing place to call their home, whether it's from time to time or forever.

We must do all we can to support our foster families and encourage and support others that were thinking about stepping up. It's not always easy, but it always matters. Many of these circumstances are extremely sensitive and complex, involving children whose parents are struggling with complex needs

of their own. Foster families can provide a bedrock of support for children whose families are suffering or healing.

Sometimes cultural connections are an essential part of the plan for care so the children never lose their sense of cultural identity. There are many, many success stories that demonstrate the profound difference fostering can make. We should clear away every obstacle so more families can step up and open their lives to children in need.

Thank you very much.

**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.

Being a foster parent is a decision we, and the children being fostered, appreciate and we encourage others to consider this path as well. We, in the Third Party caucus office, join the Foster Family Association in celebration this week.

We call upon government to make sure supports and tools are in place for families fostering children who have survived traumatic experiences so that they can thrive and continue. We appreciate the striving for family reunification as an option as well.

Thank you.

**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.

In an eye-opening report just issued, the Citizens' Representative said: Parents and caregivers are overwhelmed, experiencing financial hardship, and lacking support or guidance from the Liberal government. The report clearly outlines this Liberal government's lack of support for families with complex needs.

I ask the Premier: Will you commit to a timeline to implement the 12 recommendations of the report?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

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

Of course as the Member opposite is aware, we just received that report, Mr. Speaker. It will take us some time to actually read it and digest it, but we are committed to improving the situation for families with children with complex needs. It's something that we need to do a better job on, and we will, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, I'll take that as a yes, that the 12 recommendations will be implemented.

Speaker, whether it's locked emergency rooms or government offices closing all over rural parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Liberal government is making it harder to live and do business in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

I ask the Premier: Why are you surprised that Scotiabank are following your example?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

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

As I've said to the media, the Deputy Premier has reached out to Scotiabank; I've reached out to Scotiabank. We understand the services they provide to our rural communities, Mr. Speaker. They are important services, especially to seniors. We'll make sure that their voice is heard loud and clear to the people in Scotiabank. We will not be subsidizing the bank in any way, shape or form. They collect fees from people and make billions of dollars a year. We will be taking the voice of the people to Scotiabank, and look forward to seeing what they have to say. In the meantime, the Member opposite was the one who suggested taking nurses out of rural communities, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, nobody is asking the government to subsidize any banking opportunity here, or any banking business. Seniors are having to go back to work after retirement, not to pay for vacations but simply to get extra money to pay for food, to pay for heat and light, to heat their homes, and now to get to the nearest bank.

I ask: Why is the Liberal government forcing seniors out of retirement?

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

**S. COADY:** Thank you.

I thank the Member opposite for the sincere question; we certainly on this side of the House know how the cost of living has been very, very difficult for people. That's why

we've put over half a billion dollars towards supporting people. We've increased the Seniors' Benefit by 15 per cent; we've increased the Income Supplement by 15 per cent. We've provided a home heat rebate program of \$500. We've been able to support people where they live and work.

We've been able to subsidize electricity rates, for example, based on the fact that Muskrat Falls is coming online. We put \$192 million into that last year.

Speaker, it is challenging but we're doing the best we can. We're putting money back in the pockets of the people of the province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, the reality is carbon tax is a punishment to the people of this province, especially rural parts of our province. Record numbers are visiting food banks, including seniors and working couples and working people.

Again, did the Liberal government make a mistake in introducing the carbon tax?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

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

It's always a pleasure to rise on the carbon tax. It is a federal tax, as the Member opposite is aware. As some of the Members opposite said in debate, they recognized at the time it was a federal instrument. They recognized at the time that it was industry wanted at that time. Things have changed. When the federal government changed its tact, this government responded by cutting the gas tax in half to offset the carbon tax.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**A. FUREY:** In addition to that, we've been very loud and very clear with respect to the

federal Environment minister that we do not agree with this tax. It does not work because it's based on a premise of optionality and the options don't exist right now in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** I was here in this Legislature when the Liberal government introduced the carbon tax. I was here in this Legislature when the Liberal government passed the carbon tax.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**T. WAKEHAM:** I was here in this Legislature when the Liberal government voted to increase the carbon tax.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, seniors are resorting to cutting their pills in half in order to pay their bills.

Do the Liberal government believe that their sugar tax and the carbon tax is helping this senior?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**A. FUREY:** Once again, Mr. Speaker, I have in front of me here, because the Member opposite doesn't seem to want to recognize that the federal government has jurisdiction over the carbon tax. I would remind the Member opposite that it is in place –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**A. FUREY:** It's in several Progressive Conservative jurisdictions across the country. Surely he will trust the Supreme Court decision. I'm happy to table it. Would



you like me to table it, Mr. Speaker? I'm happy to.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, I'm amazed that the answer the Premier gives is that his Liberal cousins in Ottawa forced him to do it.

Speaker, 77 per cent of residents in the province are living cheque to cheque. A delayed payday could put them in bankruptcy. Every single dollar counts.

I ask the Premier: Will you rebate back the \$35 million you have collected in carbon tax?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**A. FUREY:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

I'm always happy to rise and speak about the carbon tax and why we disagree with it, Mr. Speaker. It's a federal tax. It's based on a premise of options; no options exist, Mr. Speaker. As a result not only the economic issues but the environmental imperative is not being because those vehicles are still on road, Mr. Speaker.

It was potentially well designed in 2015 –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

It's hard to hear the answer.

The hon. the Premier.

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

Again, perhaps well conceived in 2015. I don't know, I wasn't here. But options haven't kept up. There are no options to

change and that's punishing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We have been very clear on that from day one. Part of reducing the gas tax was to help offset that and put \$500 million back in the pockets of people, part of which is the \$35 million.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Clearly, Speaker, from that answer, he has no intention of rebating back the \$35 million they collected in carbon tax.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**T. WAKEHAM:** They're opposed to carbon tax but they refuse to rebate back the \$35 million they collected. Three-quarters of the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are struggling to make ends meet again, and again, the Premier's response has been: new taxes on the poor.

Well if he can't do anything about the carbon tax, will you do the right thing and cancel the sugar tax?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**A. PARSONS:** Yes, that's the right department. Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to say, I have to stand up, I've been around in the House for a little while and the new Leader of the Opposition talks about rebates.

Do you know where we have to put most of the money, Mr. Speaker? We have to make sure that we keep electricity rates low

because of the decisions that they made and that we inherited.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**A. PARSONS:** Now I say to the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue: You haven't asked a question in two weeks. Time to get on up.

Here is what we are doing. We are taking care of the mess that was left. So if you want to talk about the rebates, they are going to every citizen of this province to keep the rates low from the debacles that were inherited.

But, again, as we've heard many times over there: Old leader, new leader; same old, same old.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, the only same old, same old here is the fact that one day they think Muskrat Falls is great and the next day Muskrat Falls is bad.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**T. WAKEHAM:** Speaker, the Premier himself has admitted the Liberal carbon tax is not changing people's behaviour. The sugar tax is not changing people's behaviour.

Will the Premier cancel the sugar tax?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

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

As I've offered to table here in the House before, the evidence behind the sugar-sweetened beverage tax. Happy to do it again. British Medical Journal, Cambridge and multiple articles supporting the fact that it doesn't decrease beverage purchases.

What it does is it decreases the amount of sugar people consume through the beverages. As a result, it reduces the rates of diabetes, Mr. Speaker.

I need to, again, remind the House that we have the highest rate of diabetes, the highest rate of cerebrovascular disease, the highest rate of cancer, the highest rate of cardiovascular disease and we're going to make sure that we – the idea of this tax, Mr. Speaker, is hopefully to have zero revenue from it.

But in the meantime, is the Member opposite suggestion that we not do the glucose-monitoring program?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. WALL:** Speaker, I have to question the minister of Housing on his numbers once again.

On October 16, the minister announced a process to get 143 vacant units repaired, this includes only 12 for the West Coast. However, our office was previously told the total number of 143 included 32 in Corner Brook.

Can the minister please clarify?

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

**P. PIKE:** Thank you for the question.

The numbers that I gave, the 32 in Corner Brook, we did a cost analysis on those and we have to replace them so they're not included in the 143.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. WALL:** Speaker, the mayor of Corner Brook knows there are only 12 units that will be repaired. If the minister announced 143 would be fixed and we were previously told that included 32 in Corner Brook, what happened to the other 20?

Can he please explain?

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

**P. PIKE:** Again, thank you for the question.

The housing under the 143 that you talk about, the 32 that we were set to demolish, if we had gotten funding to do so, those particular houses are not included in that 143.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, that is not what we were told before, so we have a serious issue of misleading information from this government. We have heard from the Premier, we have heard from the Deputy Premier and from the minister and they believe 750 homes were built but there were only 11.

Can they please clarify?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

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

Again, we have addressed this issue, Mr. Speaker, we said 750 options. The minister at one point misspoke, he has recognized that and done the honourable thing and apologized to the people of this House and to the people of the province.

In the meantime, we are continued to commit to the 750 options, Mr. Speaker, that are currently under construction and under development; 143 renovations and 850 new units coming in the not-too-distant future.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** It's always an information or a math issue. Always.

Speaker, my district has empty housing units, plenty of them, some of which have been vacant and in disrepair for well over a year.

I'd like to ask the minister: How many current vacancies do you have in your department for tradespeople?

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

**P. PIKE:** Mr. Speaker, thanks for the question.

We do have a number of vacancies, but our staff are doing their best to keep up with the emergency repairs that happen and we are making great inroads there. We're very thankful to have such a great staff. They're very committed to their work. As with any organization, there are a number of vacancies that can occur over time but we are certainly out recruiting each time.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Speaker, I've gone on all the job sites, I haven't found any advertising. I've even gone on the minister's own

website and I haven't found any job postings.

The union has spoken out with a simple solution to fix these units. They've said: Let's fill these positions.

I ask the minister: Why are we not recruiting tradespeople for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corp?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

**G. BYRNE:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed we are. That's one of the reasons why we're filling jobs, unfilled jobs, with skills of immigrants, of newcomers, but also we are providing up to \$170 million each and every year training Newfoundlanders and Labradorians not only for the jobs of today but for the jobs of tomorrow.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**G. BYRNE:** So as we look at the labour market situation, we recognize that we have a responsibility and the ability to be able to train our own, to be able to train Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but, as well, accept as our own newcomers, who will be Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the moment they arrive here, become permanent residents. They are our neighbours. They are our future.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to hear the Opposition stand in uproarious applause, supporting this government's initiatives towards immigration.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** The minister obviously doesn't know the difference between

training and hiring and that's part of the problem with every sector in this province.

Speaker, I have a young family with a brand new, newborn baby in my district. They've been selected for a housing unit but they continue to couch surf because the repairs have not been done. They were notified three weeks ago. These individuals are living on other people's couches with a newborn baby.

I ask: How much longer is it going to take before these houses get fixed?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

**G. BYRNE:** Mr. Speaker, I'm informed that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing has a very, very aggressive, a very assertive recruitment policy. There are jobs right now on their website looking to be filled. We recognize that each and every sector of our economy, every sector, there are job vacancies that are out there that we're actively engaged in trying to fill.

It's one of the reasons why we spend up to \$170 million a year training Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the trades, in the skills that are required, not only today but for the future. We are preparing the workforce of Newfoundland and Labrador for the future.

We recognize those skills, every sector of the economy; every element of our province needs additional skills. That's why we, as a House today, this Legislature, celebrated this administration's efforts towards immigration and newcomers.

**SPEAKER:** The minister's time is expired.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

The list continues to grow for housing.

Speaker, yesterday during debate the minister was asked how a ride-sharing app is supposed to work in regions without Internet coverage. The minister said 10 minutes outside her family's home in Oxford, UK, where there's no Internet, the ride-sharing app won't work.

Is that the minister's plan for the areas of the province without Internet coverage, you will have to do without?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very pleased to stand here and tell everyone about the exciting work we're doing to bring ride sharing to Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. STOODLEY:** I also welcome my colleagues to talk about all the efforts we make in terms of bringing cell coverage across this province. We have invested a lot of money with the federal government in increasing cell rates across the province, Mr. Speaker.

So I take the concern seriously, obviously. Ride-share companies, we're currently building the rules. We'll soon be ready for them to apply, Speaker. Happy to continue this discussion.

As a government, we have improved cell coverage across the province.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Speaker, I don't know what district she's in. It's not in these districts that the Internet coverage has gotten better, I can tell you that – not a chance.

The minister assured us her legislation is designed to create a level playing field. But how is it level when regions are without Internet and cellular coverage that cannot participate in this project?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'm extremely pleased to celebrate the *Highway Traffic Act* changes that we made, which were unanimously passed in the House, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. STOODLEY:** Which will bring ride sharing to Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**S. STOODLEY:** We are creating a level playing field, Mr. Speaker. I met with the owners of taxi companies this morning, walking through all the options for them. I've been speaking with taxi operators and I think there's going to be an interesting opportunity for them to create a ride-sharing company and potentially grow their business.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I thought she was going to get up and say she was going to make an announcement on the Internet coverage.

Maybe you can say that, Minister, when is that going to come?

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

**A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'm happy to stand up and talk about it because the reality is we just had a cell coverage –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**A. PARSONS:** Hang on a second. Give me a second.

I said to the Member, I just had a cell coverage EOI close and we had actually 70 communities apply.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**A. PARSONS:** We're looking forward to moving forward and bringing coverage to communities. I will say this is on top of last year's announcement where we had \$20 million invested in it, and that was on top of the \$136 million from the federal government.

But I say to the Members chirping across the way, it's funny because the Member asking the question, I have never had a single email from you on it. So why don't you –?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**A. PARSONS:** I know the Member himself has Internet coverage so why don't you send me an email?

**SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Speaker, last spring we introduced a PMR and the former minister of FFA acknowledged severe problems within Crown Lands.

Since then, what progress has been made, specifically on adverse possession to help individuals acquire their own land?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

**E. LOVELESS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question.

Let me begin by saying that the former minister did tremendous work on that file and many files in FFA.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**E. LOVELESS:** I commend him for that.

On Crown lands, I know it's near and dear to everybody's heart. There's no doubt about that. But we are reviewing it within the department. I have had extensive discussions. There has been feedback from the public. We're taking all of that into consideration. I even had conversations with Members on this floor yesterday and challenging them, asking where we can do the right thing for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

There will be changes coming. I think there will be positive changes and I look forward to bringing them to the floor of this House of Assembly.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Well, there was a review done in 2015, another one done in 2023. Will we see legislation this fall to address the problems plaguing Crown lands?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

**E. LOVELESS:** Again, Mr. Speaker, it's a very important topic and I'll say to the Member opposite: Stay tuned.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**J. DWYER:** Thank you, Speaker.

Better than the Members opposite, I don't have to say stay tuned. I play as a team player as opposed to going out individually and making a mess of things.

The Canning Bridge is an essential connection in Marystown, whether for medical appointments or for basic transportation. Constituents of mine are having to drive further, meaning delays and increased expenses through no fault of their own.

What is being done to help residents of the Marystown area that have incurred extra costs because of a condemned bridge connecting Marystown North and Marystown South?

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

**J. ABBOTT:** Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to respond.

A couple of weeks ago I was in Marystown; I met with the town council to talk about the replacement of the Canning Bridge. We held a public meeting and there were up to 300 people attending, at which point we discussed all the issues surrounding the replacement. We're committed as a government to make sure that that bridge is replaced as quickly as possible.

So we're doing the engineering studies, and we will be starting decommissioning of the existing bridge and building the new one starting next year. We are also open to any suggestions from the town to deal with any of the social issues that arise in terms of allowing people to move from one side of the harbour to the other. So we're open to any suggestions that the town wants to make.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**J. DWYER:** Speaker, what I'm asking the minister is that: Is this the responsibility of the government to put in the implementations to help, whether it's a taxi subsidy, or a GoBus or anything like that?

Is he saying that the implementation needs to be addressed by the community, to address government to request this, or is it going to be something that's going to be implemented with government, because it was government that condemned the bridge?

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

**J. ABBOTT:** Speaker, the simple answer is: It is the former. In the conversations I've had and the former minister has had with the town and the community, we are open to working with – and as I said in Marystown a couple of weeks ago, I am open to working with the community in make sure we can address any of those issues.

We will provide the necessary funding if needed, but I need the town and/or the community to come forward with a proposal, and then we'll address it at that time.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**C. TIBBS:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, taxi owners want to have a level playing field between taxis and ride-sharing companies. The minister yesterday could not provide any information on how much insurance would cost or how it will work.

How will insurance costs compare between taxi companies and ride-sharing businesses, today after you met with taxi drivers, after the legislation was passed yesterday?

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

Auto insurance is mandatory in Newfoundland and Labrador, but we have a private auto insurance market. So for private passenger vehicles, insurance companies have to apply to the Public Utilities Board; they have to file their rates.

For fleet rating, that does not need to go through the Public Utilities Board. Fleet rating is not approved. But in case someone is not able to get insurance on the private market, they can go through Facility. So we had that conversation this morning, Speaker. I had that conversation yesterday morning with different taxi operators, Speaker, and we encourage anyone interested in ride sharing to reach out to the private market, and we actually gave taxi owners this morning a list of all the insurance companies across Canada that provide ride-sharing insurance to their members.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday the Deputy Premier stated: We've offered people living in tents many, many things to ensure that they have what they need to have a good, fulfilling life.

I ask the Deputy Premier: Does she believe that the uncleaned housing with rat feces, unfinished plywood walls, which her government put some of these members of tent city into yesterday, is that setting someone up for a good, fulfilling life?

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

**P. PIKE:** Thank you for the question.

Inspections on the private shelters have been completed. The expectations have been clearly articulated to the owner of these shelters. As a matter of fact, we don't have anybody from the tent encampment staying there any more.

We continue to encourage people to take the shelters, especially we have a new not-for-profit shelter now that has been offered to all the people that were in the tenting encampment to avail of that because it does have wraparound services available.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

I listened to a witness at the Innu children in care inquiry testify that overcrowding and inadequate housing has had a terrible impact on Innu lives. We know that overcrowding has been a continuing problem for the Innu and Inuit of Labrador contributing to intergenerational trauma. It's not only impacting people in my region, Speaker. You can just look at tent city that sprung up here right across the street from the House. Everywhere in this province people are being harmed, Speaker.



So why does this government continue to allow this well-documented housing crisis to continue unresolved?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

**L. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Speaker.

I want to say to the Member opposite that we're all following the Innu inquiry into the treatment, experiences and outcomes of children in care. It's very heavy. It's very sobering. Our government committed to the inquiry and we're moving forward on that and we look forward to outcomes, but I also want to say, for the benefit of this House, Speaker, and even going back to my 3½ years as the child welfare minister, changes are being made along the way. We are not waiting for the inquiry to finish and then we're going to implement changes.

There have been a number of reports. There have been a number of recommendations. We embrace those recommendations, because every child does matter and we want to work with all Indigenous governments and organizations on their priorities and, in particular, make life better for the children, Speaker.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**E. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, the City of Corner Brook passed a resolution to support a motion and encourage the Community Mental Health Initiative, Corner Brook Status of Women, Qalipu First Nation and the Salvation Army in its joint efforts to address the housing crisis in the city. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is not part of this group. The community partner's advisory committee on September 13 stated there are 34 people in emergency shelters.

There are at least 14 people sleeping in tents or unattainable conditions.

This is a crisis. With only 12 repairs of units on the West Coast, which is very disappointing, according to the mayor of the City of Corner Brook. While the minister is blaming the federal government, people are homeless, scared and cold.

**SPEAKER:** Get to your question, please.

**E. JOYCE:** Will the minister ensure the necessary funds to open up these units immediately?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

**G. BYRNE:** I am very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to take this question because, of course, it does deal with Corner Brook but it also deals with how the government is dealing with a problem which has grown in magnitude but we are dealing with it.

As the hon. Member will know, there was an RFP that was issued for 30 temporary accommodation units that is currently in flow. There's a recognition of the problem. There's action of the problem. I'll also reference or refer back to the comments of the mayor; there seems to be a bit of apprehension about the fact that there were 12 units that needed repairs.

There are a significant number of units, hundreds of units of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing stock in Corner Brook. The fact of the matter is that a relatively small number needed repairs. I think that should be celebrated.

We're going to repair the ones that need to be repaired. We're going to expand housing in Corner Brook and we're going to expand housing across the entire province. This government is getting the job done.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**E. JOYCE:** I say to the minister, if you think there are only 12 that need repairs, we should take a drive around your district.

Mr. Speaker, there's a housing crisis in the Corner Brook area. There are currently up to 60 vacant units which need repairs to be used for social housing. They are living in hotels – hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on this. In the Crestview Avenue, there are 32 units which the minister said a shovel should be put in the ground but the federal government refused the request. Residents are suffering, knowing units can be made available. There are many others which need repairs but funding is not available.

I ask the minister: Will you ensure that funding is available to give these citizens a roof over their head, to be united with their families and give them back their dignity?

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

**G. BYRNE:** Mr. Speaker, action is already being taken and the hon. Member doesn't know that because, maybe, he's not completely aware of what's happening on the West Coast. Action is being taken. An RFP has been issued for temporary housing. We're moving on renovations and repairs to housing stock that needs repairs.

The fact of the matter is that in Corner Brook there are a relatively small number of houses that require repairs because ongoing maintenance has been provided. We will repair that which needs to be repaired.

Mr. Speaker, we also know in the Member's own riding there is vacant housing stock, which, according to the Member himself, we really need to concentrate on housing in Corner Brook as a centre for housing of those in need. That's exactly what we'll do.

I appreciate the hon. Member's consent to really focus on developing housing in the City of Corner Brook for the entire area.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

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

**J. DWYER:** Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

WHEREAS there are no current operations at the Bull Arm Fabrication Site; and

WHEREAS there the site is a world-class facility with the potential to rejuvenate the local economy; and

WHEREAS the residents of the area are troubled with the lack of local employment in today's economy; and

WHEREAS the operation of the facility would encourage employment for the area and create economic spinoffs for local businesses; and

WHEREAS the site is an asset to the province, built to the benefit of the province by the people of the province and a long-term tenant for the site would attract gainful business opportunities.

THEREFORE we, the residents of the isthmus area near the Bull Arm Fabrication Site, 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 expedite the process to get the Bull Arm Fabrication Site back in operation. We request that this process include a vision for a long-term viable plan that is beneficial to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The reason I'm presenting that today, Speaker, is because we just had another success with having Terra Nova come in there to get refitted and it's now heading back out to the Grand Banks, done by our own people.

We saw what happened when it got sent to Spain. Actually, we can do the work better here. Therefore, we want to attract the work here for our people, our tradespeople and get our people back to work because that's the only way we're going to get back to the levels of health care and the levels of education that we've come to expect. We need to get our people back to work.

I ask the minister if he'd be able to address the current operations of what's going on at Bull Arm.

Thank you.

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

**A. PARSONS:** Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the Member for his petition. It's one that he's brought forward on a number of occasions and I think it's important because Bull Arm certainly is a world-class asset that we have here in Newfoundland and Labrador. One that we basically have a weekly chat on within the department.

What I can say is that obviously we want to see maximum utilization there. There have

been, in the past, multiple attempts to see what the interest is there. I will say, sometimes government assets, people would love the option to have it but they certainly don't want to pay for it and we're not going to let this asset go for nothing.

What I can say obviously, we know that it's been probably the busiest year that we have had there in terms of Terra Nova coming back there and the work that was done. We know DFB is doing some work out there. There have been some infrastructure upgrades that have been happening out there. We've got a cold stack going on, as well as Kelson & Kelson doing some warehouse space.

What I will say there, and I think this is more about the gist of what the Member is saying, which is, local employment, local opportunities and there are a couple of good things, I would say there. Number one, I just happened to be at TEAM Industrial today in Paradise talking to a buddy of mine. They have operations in multiple places including at Come By Chance. They are looking for people.

So sometimes, as I said here before, the difficulty we have is that we have these spaces, we need to find the people to fit it and that speaks to skilled development, that speaks to having to bring people home, which leads into the second part.

One of the things that there is interest in in Bull Arm – and we're going to have multiple opportunities here affecting the Member's area – is wind hydrogen opportunities. We continue to work on that. The Member and I have spoken about that. We are going to have thousands of opportunities there. We will continue to work with the communities to ensure that the most here that we can get.

Thank you.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Route 10 on the Southern Avalon forms a large section of the Irish Loop. This is a significant piece of infrastructure and is the main highway along the Irish Loop. The highway plays a major role in the residential and commercial growth of the region.

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador that immediate brush cutting is required on Route 10 on the Southern Shore Highway as large sections of brush along this highway is a significant safety hazard for the high volume of travelling motorist who travel the highway daily. This work is essential in the prevention of moose-vehicle accidents along Route 10.

Speaker, I've spoken on this before. It's certainly an ongoing concern in the district. It's something that, I think, the department has to look at. We always look for suggestions here, so we throw it out, maybe they should start a maintenance program to do brush cutting across the Island and then in 10 years you go back and revisit again or eight years or however long it is. There should be some program, it's called maintenance and that's what they should be doing.

I drove Saturday night to an event in Trepassey, an hour and a half, an hour and 45 minute drive, rain sideways and coming through some of the areas the brush is right on the sides of the road. When the wind is howling and the leaves are coming off the trees, they're ending up on the road, not in the ditches or if it was cut back and the leaves were falling, they'd fall down in the ditch but they're falling right on the road. It's

a safety hazard, along with the moose, when you're driving.

So it's a very important that we do the maintenance that's required in all these communities and if you started it somewhere along the way, you can go back and follow it up in eight or 10 years and have a cycle going that you can go do it. But to do very little, in my mind – when you do paving, they do a great job on the brush cutting. We did some paving on the Witless Bay Line and they did the brush cutting.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** If we can get it.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** If we can get it. That's right.

You know, there are areas that do need it. There really are areas that do need it. You wouldn't be getting up here – you've got to represent your district and it's a safety hazard. We really need it looked at.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for a response.

**J. ABBOTT:** Thank you, Speaker.

I just want to take this opportunity just to let people in the House know and elsewhere we've committed just over \$2 million for bush cutting this fall and that work is under way as we speak. In addition to any brush cutting that has happened for any of the new road construction.

I will certainly take the Member's suggestion on a go-forward basis for next year and we're going to make sure we expand brush cutting in the future.

Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

This is a Newfoundland and Labrador housing petition for Coastal Labrador.

Inadequate housing negatively affects our Inuit population in a different ways, including child welfare, families, health and justice. These areas were highlighted in the Canadian government's call to action in the Truth and Reconciliation final report. Further, in 2016, the federal and provincial governments committed to follow the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

One of the declarations states that Indigenous peoples have the right to adequate housing. The systemic housing insecurity in Nunatsiavut clearly demonstrates that there is significant work that must be done before Inuit in Northern Labrador can access this right. For example, seven vacant housing units were identified in Nain and that was back in 2020, 2021. Some of these houses have been vacant for up to 10 years, despite the desperate need for safe and affordable housing.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure that the Newfoundland and Labrador vacant houses have established timelines for reoccupation of these units including building safety inspections, renovation and repair.

Speaker, I brought this up many times and I've had promise of action of repairs for these vacant houses to go back in. I have some stats here to show that that has not happened.

Speaker, back in 2021, in the spring, a letter was written on behalf of the Nain Safe House and that's, basically, a safe house for women fleeing abusive relationships. In the second paragraph, the letter that was wrote to the then minister of CSSD at the time,

says, according to the Canadian Human Rights, adequate housing in an inherent right to human rights and safety of all individuals.

Now, I'm not going to read the rest of it, but I mean that applies to everybody in the province. We see over in Tent City how they're being treated. We hear about rat shit and I have to tell you that if people are offended by the last part of that phrase, they should be really offended by the fact that there are rat feces in people's houses or their options, I should call them because they're not actually houses, they're options.

But, Speaker, housing is a problem across this province. The people who are suffering are the people who are the most vulnerable and we have to have a call to action to address that. I have tell you, we talk about Tent City over here; very, very visible, getting a lot of media attention, but there are thousands of people out there in the province now that are on the verge of becoming homeless and if something is not done to help those people, we're going to see a lot of people in severe crisis, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development for a response.

**P. PIKE:** Mr. Speaker, we certainly continue to invest in housing in Northern Labrador and in northern communities, with a number of repairs under way or a number of tender calls already been out. Our problem is challenges in securing bidders and that has been an age-old problem for us. But we continue to work with the communities to secure some company to come in and do the necessary repairs. As you know, that always has been an issue and we try to get past that.

If you have suggestions, we certainly will take a look and we can contact those people who can help us get the repairs done.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Speaker, the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador feel that the 800-metre restriction for disability of big game licence and salmon angling licence does not adequately meet the needs of disabled hunters or fishers.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to change legislation of the 800-metre restriction.

Speaker, this year during the moose-hunting season, the big game licence, I have had a number of calls from hunters. I know the 800 restriction is there for the disabled to have a note, but I am finding since last year people's health has diminished a little bit more. They did have a previous licence but their health changed a bit, especially people with dementia, they find that if they get into a situation where they've struck a moose, injured a moose and they have to keep chasing it, they have to go more than 800 metres and they can't leave somebody with dementia or severe health conditions like that in a vehicle to go and try to retrieve this animal while trying to wonder what's happening to the person in the vehicle that's waiting.

In a situation like that, the same thing with salmon angling, we'd like to see some changes on that. We'd have to see what restrictions we could put there, but there must be some sort of notes or something that we can give them – especially in situations like that – to be able to retrieve that animal. Especially if that animal is injured a hunter should go and retrieve that animal and have the right to do so.

Speaker, that's one of the situations we'd like to have addressed. We'd like for that to come to the House of Assembly.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Speaker.

Once again I bring a petition for anti-temporary replacement worker legislation. The reasons for this petition are:

Anti-temporary replacement worker laws have existed in Quebec since 1978; British Columbia since 1993; and the federal government has committed to introduce the legislation by the end of 2023.

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

Anti-temporary replacement worker legislation has been shown to reduce length of 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 imbalance between workers 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 lockout or strike.

Once again, residents of Labrador West signed this petition asking for the government to consider this legislation to

follow along with the federal government's plan to do the same thing. They're asking that they want this; they've seen it themselves as workers. We've seen it in this province; you just go back to D-J Composites and the Vale strike.

We've seen this happen in this province, and we've seen long dragged out strikes and we've seen the imbalance between the worker and the employer. This is legislation that has shown that it does keep that balance in check. At the same time, makes sure that people come of the bargaining table in good faith.

Once again, I'm going to ask the Minister Responsible for Labour to take this into consideration, to work with his colleagues and this department to craft this legislation. I hope to see that it will be bought to the House in an expedient time. I'm sure it's on the top of his list.

Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister Responsible for Labour.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very happy to stand up and answer a question from the temporary Leader of the NDP right now. So I'm excited that I get the opportunity to do that. I do want to correct him because I know it's a Freudian slip. I'm sure he means anti-replacement workers, not anti-temporary replacement workers.

I know he is temporarily replacing the leader of the NDP, right now, and I know that's challenging. I know he's doing extra work and I do want to thank him for bringing this forward but, in all seriousness, it's a very important issue. We understand there's a balancing opportunity between holding the rights of workers and, obviously, the desires for employers to be able to do their work as well.

Currently no legislation of this type exists across the country as he has highlighted. I know the federal government is working towards that. We're going to continue to be looking at opportunities across the federation, as we've done in the past. We're going to continue to do that as Labour ministers.

I do thank him for bringing this issue to the forefront, like he always does. I know he's working very, very, very hard in the House of Assembly these days.

**SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 13, a second reading of An Act to Amend the Buildings Accessibility Act, Bill 52.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, that Bill 52, An Act to Amend the Buildings Accessibility Act, now be read a second time.

**SPEAKER:** It has been moved and seconded that Bill 52, An Act to Amend the Buildings Accessibility Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act to Amend the Buildings Accessibility Act." (Bill 52)

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

The provincial government is committed to safe and sustainable communities for all

and a key component of that is improving accessibility. Inclusion influences all aspects of an individual's life, including family, community, recreation, education, employment, as well as access to information services and opportunities.

The bill we're bringing forward in the House of Assembly today, An Act to Amend the Buildings Accessibility Act, represents a culmination of many years of hard work and consultation and builds on several measures our government has already implemented in recent years.

So the measures we've already implemented include: requiring all new buildings to have automated door open operators; requiring improved accessibility in public washrooms; clarifying counter height requirements in public buildings; increasing fines from \$400 to \$700 for illegal blue-zone parking.

This bill considers the thoughtful recommendations of the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board who were tasked to review the legislation and present recommendations on ways to improve public building access throughout the province.

The board which reports to and advises me as Minister of Digital Government and Service NL on the application of the act and its associated regulations has played a major part in the review of the current act. We couldn't have done it without them and I do want to thank them for their significant, significant public service in not only coming up with their original recommendations, but then also participating in all of the consultations and all of their ongoing advocacy work in making recommendations.

We received the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board's recommendations which have been public since last summer, I believe. Then we sought feedback on the board's recommendations.

Public stakeholder consultations were held to inform the ongoing legislative amendment process. This included an online questionnaire on EngageNL and three virtual consultations sessions, which I had the pleasure to participate in.

We were very pleased with the level of engagement during the consultation process. We received 151 submissions through EngageNL and 86 individuals representing several stakeholder groups and organizations participated in the virtual consultation sessions.

When the consultations were finished, we released a *What We Heard* document, outlining the kind of input we received, and that's been available on our website for a while now, for anyone interested.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the review of the *Buildings Accessibility Act* and shared your input and ideas on how we can make improvements.

There are three areas that we're proposing today in the House of Assembly. The first is the removal of the pre-1981 exemption. The second is clarification on how the act applies to home-based businesses and, third, we are doubling the current fines under the act to ensure compliance.

I'll now take the opportunity to walk through each one. The first one is how it applies to older buildings in the province. Currently, the act only applies to building built after 1981 and only applies to pre-1981 buildings that undergo reconstruction costing equal or more than 50 per cent of the cost to build a new building similar to the existing one. This presents key issues and was a key issue for the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board.

So we're proposing to amend the *Building Accessibility Act* so that buildings that existed pre-1981 will now be required to comply when undergoing a reconstruction, additions and/or change of use, regardless of the cost. We're aiming to find a balance



between the interest of accessibility advocates and business owners, recognizing that some business owners may be concerned about potential costs they incur during renovations or those business owners where the structural characteristics of the building may not make compliance possible through the province.

As part of this amendment, our department will have the authority to consider deviations from strict compliance with the act and regulations in exceptional circumstances where that deviation provides equivalent or greater accessibility in an approach that is used in the National Building Code.

Instead of the strict framework we have today, Speaker, we are proposing to adopt the National Building Code, which will allow our team of experts more flexibility in coming up with accessibility solutions, where possible, with building owners.

Today, it's very black and white, so we're hoping to add a lot of collaboration into the solutions all in the name of accessibility. This authority will not only help to address concerns regarding the preservation of historical significance but also provide the ability to consider alternative solutions to improvising accessibility that takes into consideration structural characteristics of buildings that may be challenged to fully comply.

As we considered this and the historic properties components, we consulted with TCAR, Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, as well as the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador. Both of whom were very positive and supportive of making all heritage properties and businesses accessible, as much as we can, as they recognize the value in doing so.

Our department believes that this can be accomplished without an amendment, so while you may not see this reflected in the bill, we will be incorporating a heritage lens

as part of the Building Accessibility Design Registration process for pre-1981 buildings.

The approach government are taking to address the issue of accessibility compliance on a go-forward basis, while taking into consideration the possible additional costs pre-1981 building owners will now have to consider when doing reconstructions, additions and/or change of use.

The next proposed amendment is how the *Buildings Accessibility Act* applies to home-based businesses. The current act does not include specific reference to home-based businesses. In its absence, our department has been requiring home-based businesses to comply with the act if the home is subdivided or divided by firewalls and where there is no physical connection between the subdivisions.

We have been applying this act in this way for many years, based on advice and other jurisdictions, and now we're amending the *Buildings Accessibility Act* to include and align with current practice, what we've been doing already, enhancing transparency and encouraging a better compliance. We're advising that these requirements have been in place informally since 1995 and applied to only those home-based businesses that meet the criteria outlined in the act. We are not proposing any change; we're just taking the current practice since 1995 and putting it explicitly in the legislation.

The final proposed amendment will see the increasing of current fines for non-compliance under the *Buildings Accessibility Act*. The Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board, as part of its reviews, specifically recommended fine increases for instances of non-compliance and fine increases are considered a major behavioural deterrent.

The new fine amounts have been doubled; for individuals, a minimum of \$1,000 and a maximum of \$10,000; for corporations, a minimum of \$2,000 and a maximum of

\$50,000; and continuing offences beyond the correction timeline, a minimum of \$400 a day and a maximum of \$4,000 a day. Based on these proposed increases, Newfoundland and Labrador would be in the middle of the road when it comes to accessibility fines compared to other provinces and territories across Canada.

Fines are a last resort. Our staff continues to work with building designers and proponents to achieve compliance. While fines are rarely issued, by increasing the amount of our fines we are trying to signal that this is very important and we're trying to increase the punishment for non-compliance.

Along with these three proposed amendments, the regulations will also be updated to include a requirement for public buildings with a capacity of over 300 people to have a full-service family washroom, as recommended by the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board. So this will apply to any new building or any time there's a design approval process that goes through my department. Any washroom of a public building, where there's capacity over 300 people, will need to have a full-service family washroom.

We'll also take the opportunity as a part of this work to review and ensure the use of inclusive, consistent language throughout the legislation so the act recognizes the different types of disabilities individuals may be living with: physical, visual or sensory.

This review has been incredibly comprehensive. It is aimed at strengthening and modernizing the legislation. We believe what we are proposing today is a very positive step forward.

This is an ongoing area of improvement, Speaker. This process has been ongoing for a while. We will keep engaging and listening to those people with disabilities, accessibility advocates and people of the province, and fully adopt the concept of

continuous improvement. I'm looking forward to debating these changes with people in the House today.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

It's good to see some legislation come in when it comes to accessibility. I'm sure that we can all say that accessibility is extremely important. I want to go on record saying that first and foremost. Any way we can make accessibility, as important as it is, or to build on the accessibility of places throughout the province, it's extremely important. I want to make sure that we are at the forefront of that and we're on board to doing whatever it takes to get it done.

I would have to say, if you look around you have to ask yourself: What buildings aren't accessible? You might not think on a lot of them, sort of thing, but in all honesty we have nowhere to look but the House of Assembly itself. The House of Assembly is not accessible itself. If somebody were to take a seat, be an elected Member here in the House of Assembly, how would they get up onto the platform right now? That's an issue. So we don't have to look very far for buildings or for spaces that aren't accessible. Again, you just take a look around here and it's not accessible. I'm sure that we had renovations done here a time or two.

In debating this legislation and talking about it today and starting the conversation, again, foremost to have accessibility at the front of this conversation, but we also want to make sure that it's not at a cost to a business owner that's going to put that business out of business. That same company or business that the person that has accessible needs wants to get into can't go

out of business. We need to try to find the right balance in that.

My hope is that the minister and her team did find that right balance when it comes to legislation. We'll have questions about it moving forward.

That's a huge issue. We just came from COVID, the world hasn't been right since COVID; it hasn't. That's including our province. A lot of business owners, they hurt over COVID, they hurt over Snowmageddon. Some of these businesses they walk a very, very fine line of profit.

Now, don't get me wrong, some businesses, skyrocketing profit, great to see free enterprise, I'm in total support of it. But some of these businesses, especially when you talk about restaurants and whatnot, they walk a fine line from week to week. To hurt their bottom dollar, it wouldn't take much.

To take on a huge undertaking to make something more accessible if they were doing a small renovation, to turn into – if it's a \$50,000 renovation, if that turns into a \$300,000 renovation, that could sink a business.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Makes a difference.

**C. TIBBS:** Yeah, it's going to make a huge difference.

I hope today we can have a conversation that walks that line; that walks the balance. Again, we want to see more accessibility for people that need it, persons with disabilities. We all have them throughout our communities. We have great people that just need a little bit of help every now and again. Life can be tough on some of these people as it is, we want to make sure that we make it as easy as we can from a government level. We are total on board with that.

Following consultations, the Buildings Accessibility Review Committee released its report in July of 2021. This is government's response following the public consultations and this bill would amend the *Buildings Accessibility Act*. That's what we're talking about today.

Of course, it would update the definitions, and we'll get into more of that in a little bit here, but that's always good. It would remove the exemption for buildings that existed on December 24, 1981 – we're talking now over 40 years ago, Speaker – and require those buildings to comply with the same requirements as buildings constructed on or after December 24, 1981.

Again, I don't want to scare any business owners. I'm sure that all the business owners out there as well, they want to comply to make sure that their business is as accessible for person with disabilities as they can possibly make it. I'm sure we're all on board with that.

It clarifies that compliance with the act is not necessary until a building is reconstructed, added to or undergoes a change in use. Of course, that's what we just talked about a moment ago.

Around Newfoundland and Labrador, throughout the province, we have a lot of aging infrastructure, a lot of aging buildings especially here in St. John's and downtown St. John's. These building, there are constant renovations going on, constant renovations. We need to make sure, again, that we walk that line.

It clarifies the act that it will only apply to said portion reconstructed or added to. What we got from that is that if there's a building with five floors and the third floor needs to have some work done on it, that's the floor that we'll see become more accessible for those persons with disabilities.

This is an interesting point right here: it will allow for exemptions in exceptional circumstances. I hope the minister digs into that a little bit more and tells us about it. We're going to have some questions about that in Committee as well because this can be very subjective. This is can be very subjective, Speaker. I'm looking forward to seeing from the minister's department exactly what these exceptional circumstances will be, who will get exempted; who will not get exempted.

Again, that could be very, very subjective and we're going to be asking who is going to make these decisions and what criteria are these going to fall under? Again, a level playing field, we talked about it yesterday, we need to ensure that it's a level playing field for all businesses throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. So we're going to dig into that a little bit more.

Increase fines: we're going to be curious to see how many fines have been given out in the past year or so and the reason to increase those fines. Again, do you know what? We want to make sure that businesses comply with the legislation that will be put forward, but we don't want to bankrupt any businesses either if they can't, if they fall on hard times and if there will be exceptions for the fines that could be given and who they would talk to about that.

Replace references to Trial Division with the correct reference Supreme Court, of course, and update gender-neutral language, which again is very important. We see it throughout all of our bills nowadays. Again, that's just second nature to us at this point and so it should be.

That balance between making accessibility for persons with disabilities and to ensure that the business owners maintain their success is going to be key to this bill and key to this legislation. We need to make sure we keep an eye on that moving forward.

I will say this, Speaker, during the technical briefing there was no background material or slide deck. We're hoping that moving forward with any of this legislation, it's a great opportunity to put out as much information as you can so we can get the right information that we can.

When we talk about bringing forth legislation in this House of Assembly, again we have 40 Members, that's 40 different brains going. That's 40 different ideas being thought about at the one time. When it comes to a democracy, all 40 people should be able to have their say.

Speaker, one day I'm looking forward to sitting on that side of the House and when that happens, I will look forward to hearing people over here.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**C. TIBBS:** I've got lots of time, don't worry, Minister.

Hearing the ideas come from this side of the House, and that's what I will be looking forward to. When we hear different ideas, it's going to be very important to implement them into the bills we take forward.

There's nothing wrong with saying, I'm not sure, I don't know but I'm going to grab that answer for you, instead of giving some of the answers that can come out. If you don't have the answer, just say it. Just say I don't have the answer right now but I've going to give it to you later on, or maybe I can give you a call later on with that answer. That's a totally acceptable answer, in my opinion.

We want to make sure that all ideas are thought about. The biggest day that I look forward to, the greatest accomplishment, when I do sit over there one day, will be looking over here and taking an idea from over here and saying thank you for that idea. I guarantee you, lots of ideas come from that side, as well, but lots of ideas come from this side.

When it comes to legislation, when it comes to briefings, I would ask that just bring forward as much information as you possibly can. If we bring something forward, or the NDP, or the independents bring an idea forward it's okay to take that idea and run with it. It's okay. There's not one person in this House that knows everything, I guarantee you. Not one.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**C. TIBBS:** Maybe so.

So, Speaker, we'll be looking forward to asking questions in Committee but again, moving forward, I hope that we get this balance right and everybody wins. That should be the objective of legislation as it passes through this House.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

**L. EVANS:** Thank you, Speaker.

Just speaking on the *Buildings Accessibility Act*, anything that improves accessibility is a positive thing. The act is being amended to remove, as the minister said, the 1981 exception for buildings that weren't compliant with the current accessibility standards and regulations. That's all about inclusivity.

Now I think, in this day and age, we're becoming more aware of a lot of the barriers that people face, not just in terms of mobility, but also visual, hearing loss, those issues. So this act here, this amendment is, actually, a very positive thing. I do understand back in the day with a lot of the older buildings it was very costly and a lot of times businesses couldn't afford to make the changes.

What's happening is over time it allows to ease in the improvements made when any renovations are being made to improve that accessibility.

So with us, we're in support of that and in our briefing we were made to understand that a lot of the time the problem with the exception for the 1981 one was businesses, when they were undergoing renovations, if the cost exceeded the 50 per cent mark they would have to actually include work to make the area accessible. What was found was that a lot of businesses didn't want to incur that cost, so they were skirting the 50 per cent. Now with the removal of this, they don't have that back door.

That's very, very important because at the end of the day everybody needs to be able to access public buildings, public spaces, and that's very, very important. So I guess closing that back door is a very important thing for us.

Looking at the clarity on the issues, the minister said that was the second thing, and that's very important as well. I was wondering about the definitions there that come up. The minister did say in her consultations, the online questionnaire and three virtual sessions, but I was wondering if the consultations was also extended to the general public with any kind of public meetings, venues for people who are not very Internet savvy, not very technical savvy, so we need to make sure that they are included as well.

Also, I was just wondering there, looking at the regulations about some of the clarity on the definitions. Just looking at how Ontario regulates their building accessibility. They do it through their provincial building code. So in Ontario, renovations include the installation of new interior floors, walls or ceilings. That's quite defined there. What we found in the technical briefing when we were asking about the definitions, it was quite vague. The description of renovations was vague, described as spatial changes,

so similar meanings but it shows that they don't have a concrete idea of the threshold at which renovations would be triggered, in terms of getting that compliance.

So Speaker, it's good to see positive changes where amendments are brought forward to sort of, make buildings accessible, but at the end of the day we've got to make sure that we're not creating venues, or the ability for businesses to actually not come into compliance. We need to have better definitions of a lot of these words that are being used in the legislation.

Looking at the fines, the fines are doubling, as my fellow colleague there from Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans talked about, but in actual fact the fines are doubling and that's about making sure that people are in compliance. What they've found is that in the past, if there were, just looking at here – the question was asked by us in the technical briefing: How many times did the department actually collect fines under the act? And I'm not sure if everyone is aware of it, he actually could only remember two specific times where fines for non-compliance for accessibility were collected.

So doubling the fines, hopefully now that will force businesses to be more compliant, and make sure that they're following all these rules and also the regulations. But I do have a lot of questions that I'm going to wait for Committee. But this is a positive thing, something that we would support, but we've got to make sure it's being properly implemented and that it meets the needs and the intent of the amendment.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you, Speaker.

According to some of the comments from across the way, I guess, this bill is coming just in time. Speaker, it's always nice to get

up and talk about a bill, especially An Act to Amend the Buildings Accessibility Act. I like to see this one; it certainly talks about some situations for access for all people with access to buildings. I can certainly relate to that because it changes people's lives. This is certainly a piece of legislation that can change people's lives in a positive manner. I'm certainly sure we'll be in favour of it, anything to change people's lives would certainly help.

I was looking through the bill and saying that the Buildings Act for 1981, but I can remember – I'd like to speak to something that's very dear to me, and that's the Lion Max Simms Camp, which was built in 1981. In 1981, they had the fortitude back then in 1981 to change everything in that building. It was made a camp for people with disabilities. Everything in the camp was –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**P. FORSEY:** It is a beautiful camp, a beautiful structure and used by many, many people for the past 42 years. Actually, the camp last week was inducted into the Business Hall of Fame –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**P. FORSEY:** – by the Exploits Chamber of Commerce, which is good to see.

But at that time, the Lions members and the groups around the area had the fortitude to see probably a little further ahead and to help those people with disabilities. They made everything in that building accessible. The doorways were probably three feet or more, I'm not exactly sure the dimensions on that now, but they were made for accessibility. The beds made for accessibility, bathrooms and the swimming pool at the time was made for accessibility for disabilities, which gave people ample opportunity to be able to go to that camp, which changed their lives.

I saw that happen year after year after year for 42 years. Being a Lions member myself I did see this happen. It's very rewarding to see how people with disabilities, their lives can be changed by just simple things like this, to be able to make access for them in those buildings and to see this act coming about for the buildings that certainly doesn't have access for people to use.

Today, there are all kinds of – we got wheelchair vans; we have motorized wheelchairs up and down main streets. Even in my community, in Central Newfoundland in Bishop's Falls, we have those motorized vehicles. Some of the buildings are not accessible for wheelchair access; most of them are. I must say, most of them are by now, which is a good thing to see. But when you have accessibility with regard to motorized vehicles, you should be able to have accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Apartment buildings, same thing; try to get into some of the grocery stores but I think most of the grocery stores by now are accessible for the disabled so it is a good thing to see.

I'm not going to speak long at it, it's just that I do agree with it. We will have some questions in Committee. Again, to see this change lives of people with disabilities, to make life easier for them, to make life a little bit more accessible to where they want to go certainly is a plus for all individuals.

So with that, Speaker, I just wanted to speak on this act and bring up basically the Lion Max Simms Camp and what they did back in 1981, given the date that it was there and how they foresaw the future of people with disability and made that change in their lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**P. LANE:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 52. Mr. Speaker, when I saw this bill being tabled first, I was excited about it because it was something that certainly I have raised in this House of Assembly now numerous times, with not just this administration, but the previous administration as well, issues around blue zones and issues around building accessibility. Of course, we know the 1981 rule. That rule certainly stands out for an awful lot of people with disabilities in this province – it certainly stands out for me.

I have to say, I think I've talked about this one time before, if you're not somebody who has a disability yourself, it's not necessarily something that comes top of mind. I can remember when I first got elected, I had a constituent of mine reach out to me who has a disability and he brought an issue to my attention. That was blue zones at the time. We had a chat. I said I kind of know what you're talking about, but not really, not fully. So he said you come out with me.

So anyway, we got in the car together, we met and we drove around and he showed me the blue zones, or the lack of blue zones. He showed me blue zones covered with snow. How do you know it's a blue zone because there was no requirement necessarily for a sign in addition to the blue zone? Then we looked at a blue zone. Yeah, blue zone here, sign here. Now, if I have a wheelchair, how am I going to get up there on top of that curb because there are no curb cut downs?

These are all issues that if you're not somebody who has a disability, you'd walk on past that a million times, it would never even occur to you necessarily that it's an issue, unless you're a person with that disability. So he made me keenly aware of that, God love him. He is a fierce advocate. The Member for St. Mary's knows who I'm talking about because she's had many a

conversation with him when she was the minister of that department.

So when I saw this 1981 rule was going to be coming out, I was very excited; finally, finally we're going to get the breakthrough that advocates, such as my constituent, have been looking for and calling on.

This constituent was also part of an advisory committee put forward by this government and he tells me that what is before us now and what the recommendations were from that advisory committee are not one bit the same.

They had a plan, they had recommended a plan to make the 1981 rule truly go away, but in recognition of the fact that people have businesses to run and there are costs associated to it, it would all be about giving businesses a heads-up that this is coming and then giving them time frames to phase things in so that they didn't have to come up with all of a sudden we're going to drop this big bill on them. Seemed fair and reasonable to me.

Now what we have before us – and I know everyone's saying it's a positive thing, I'm not so sure it's very positive, to be honest with you. Because unless that business decides to make some significant – I don't even know if it says significant but to make renovations, unless that business decides to make renovations or to change the use of that facility, then they can carry on forever.

It was supposed to have been, according to what I was told with this advisory committee, a 20-year plan to make Newfoundland totally accessible in 20 years. We'll be 120 years and some of these buildings still won't be accessible under this plan.

I told this story before, I was out to the Special Olympics out in Grand Falls-Windsor not that long ago, a few months ago. One of the events they had was bowling for the Special Olympics. I went

down to the bowling alley and it was shameful that they had to literally lift people in wheelchairs, a man on each end of the wheelchair, lifting an athlete down over the stairs. It wasn't accessible. The washroom wasn't accessible.

Under this rule, unless the owner of this particular bowling alley decides that he or she is going to renovate the place, 20 years from now it's still not going to be accessible. It's going to be the same.

My constituent tells me that through his work on the advisory committee that we still have public libraries in this province that are not accessible. Do you know why? The 1981 rule. According to this legislation now, unless the government decides we're going to renovate the library, in 20 years' time – not our predecessors, those who come after us – our successors will still be talking about the fact that we don't have accessible libraries in this province.

It's not that long ago that our Arts and Culture Centres weren't up to code. I can remember sending out things on the Arts and Culture Centre, the one here in St. John's, where they never even had blue zones. They have them now, thank God, finally, someone clicked in and did it, but that's not that long ago. These are our public facilities.

Then, of course, we have facilities that we're renting, spaces that we're renting. I wonder are all those throughout the province accessible? We had schools that never had proper blue zones until recently. I guess our schools are accessible now. I suppose they are. Most of them are, I would imagine.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Mine are not.

**P. LANE:** Okay, my colleague says his isn't.

We're relying on the 1981 rule and our own government departments – just think about it – are relying on the 1981 rule, so that they



don't have to make public property accessible, so that they don't have to make government buildings accessible. Oh, 1981 rule, b'y. Sorry, you don't have to do it.

We should be doing it. I don't care about any rule. I mean, the government, it's a public facility and it should be accessible. But based on the changes that we're making here, or we're not making here, 20 years from now public libraries in this province will still not be accessible, unless they decide to do some renovations. Buildings like that bowling alley and how many other businesses and buildings are out there throughout the province everywhere that are not accessible and now unless they do renovations, they're going to continue to not be accessible.

Again, I appreciate the fact – I really do – that there's a cost. I understand there is a cost. I would argue there's a cost to businesses for not making their businesses accessible. I would argue that if you want to have a successful business, given the fact that we have the population of people with disabilities, particularly with our aging population – because sometimes when we're thinking about people with disabilities, in our mind, we're thinking about someone who might have been born with a particular affliction or so on, that they had a disability. Maybe they have cerebral palsy or they had whatever the case might be and they're in a wheelchair.

One of the things that we don't necessarily think about is there a lot of us who are born who don't have a disability but, as we age, now we do have a disability. There are an awful lot of seniors who never used a wheelchair or a walker and now they are. With the aging demographic, there will be more and more and more. The percentage of the population is growing that has a mobility issue or a disability. We need to be cognizant of that. We need to address that.

I think businesses on their own should be recognizing that, that growing demographic.

If I have a restaurant, or whatever I have, a business, that's a growing percentage of the population that cannot access my business. They can't go there.

So they're harming themselves in that regard. I would hope that some business owners would bear that in mind. Because that is a reality. And I'm not trying to create any undue hardship on any business. They provide jobs; they provide taxes that the government needs, that the municipalities need. A lot of businesses I know in my community, in everybody's community, go well above and beyond that, sponsoring hockey teams and sponsoring special events, like in Mount Pearl the Frosty Festival, and Mount Pearl City Days, and all that great community stuff. In Paradise, I know – all the communities have businesses that are supporting that over and above the fact that they are creating employment, paying taxes to the municipality, paying taxes to the government, creating economic development spinoff, all that.

So this is not a knock against business, at all. But there has to be, as legislatures, as government, if we want to truly be an inclusive society – that's the buzzword for the longest time, inclusivity, right? Everyone's talking about being inclusive. We've got a large percentage of our population, and a growing percentage of our population that we are excluding – we are excluding – because we are not providing proper access to facilities and programs and services, whether it be in the private sector or like I said, even in government itself.

We had a person here in this House of Assembly, I think Members can remember last year, in a wheelchair. Had to put that person down here by the Sergeant-at-Arms on the floor, because our Legislature is not even accessible. This is the people's House, a large proportion of our population with a mobility issue, with a disability, and this Chamber is not accessible. Something wrong with that picture, there really is. I

know there's a cost to it, I get that. But we can find money for everything else.

We don't have to do it all at once, but there needs to be a plan to make it accessible. I would argue there needs to be a plan to make the whole province accessible, not just government buildings, but private interests as well. Open to all the public, and yes, the change we're making on the 1981 rule, if before I think it said you had to have 50 per cent renovation for this to kick in, now we're saying any renovation.

So that's an improvement. I'm not knocking the fact that it is an improvement. It is on what was there. I would argue it doesn't go far enough. I would argue it doesn't go far enough and it's not just for renovation. It also says that if you have a building or a business and there are different aspects to your business, different parts, if you will, and if you only make a renovation to this piece, then you only have to make this piece accessible.

So, let's say, you had a bar and restaurant. I'm just throwing that out there as a wild example off the top of my head. Maybe it's not a great one, but say a bar and restaurant. I renovate the bar. That got to be accessible. The restaurant entrance does not have to be accessible because this is the bar and this is the restaurant, two separate. We don't make the whole business accessible. We only make half of it accessible, the part that I did the renovations on. That's how I read this. If I'm wrong, I'm sure the minister will correct me and I would welcome that. I hope I'm wrong.

With that said, I'll take my seat. Like I said, it is a small improvement. It's better than what we had. Definitely, in my opinion, it does not go far enough. I'm sure – and again, my constituent who is one of the strongest advocates you would want to meet on this issue. As a matter of fact, he won the Human Rights award a couple of years ago for his advocacy for person with disabilities and he was on this advisory committee and

he would tell you, if he was here – and he'd have no problem telling you, telling every one of us – that I can guarantee you – that what was envisioned by that advisory committee and what we have here today are two different things.

I will just finish by saying, once again, that I am disappointed that, in my view, this does not go far enough. I would also say and empathize once again, regardless of the 1981 rule, regardless of the renovation requirement and everything else, for God's sakes, b'ys, when it comes to it, the very least we can do is when it comes to public buildings, like public libraries, this Legislature and so on, we have to do better. At the very least, we have got to make public institutions fully accessible. That is the very least we can do.

I understand you're probably getting some pushback, maybe from the Board of Trade and some of the Chambers of Commerce and so on about the cost. I understand. We all understand the politics. We get that. But when it comes to our public facilities, there's no excuse. There really is no excuse.

To have another person come into this House of Assembly to be recognized or maybe they're just someone who wants to come in and see what we do all day and not be accessible – totally unacceptable. It's 2023, b'ys, 2023 and this Legislature is not even accessible. We have to do better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

**L. PARROTT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wasn't going to speak to this bill but I guess I thought with my personal experiences it would be a good opportunity for me to get up and have a little say. I'll

agree with the previous speaker that maybe the bill doesn't go far enough.

I guess I'll start with a little bit of a preamble and say that if you're on the fifth floor, the eighth floor, the seventh floor and you look out the windows, you can look out into the parking lot and there may be 30 or 40 accessible parking spots out there, which is great, blue paint, it looks beautiful. I love blue. But if all of those parking spaces were full, those individuals don't have access to this building.

I will say from my own personal experience and for those in the public who are watching, I'm an amputee. I lost my leg in 2007. It's not something I talk about very vocally. I get around very well. Better than some people with two legs.

Last winter, I went through a fairly traumatic surgery and there was an emergency session here in the House. I came in to debate because it's my job as the MHA for Terra Nova to be here to represent the people in my constituency. I couldn't come in in a wheelchair. Now I had a wheelchair, I spent 15 weeks in a wheelchair last winter. So I came in here, in the winter, on crutches. I didn't want to draw no attention. I did it intently because I believe that we had a job to do at that time, it was the ambulance legislation. I sat down and I made the comment after about inaccessibility.

It's really discouraging. I know the 1981 act didn't go far enough then and we're repealing and we're trying to bring things forward, but a government that doesn't have accessible buildings, that expects the public to make their buildings accessible, speaks volumes. I believe it's long overdue to make all public institutions accessible for everyone.

We don't see everybody's disability. There are people who would walk into this House of Assembly and these lights would cripple them. We don't know that. We don't make

decisions that actually reflect that we're an accessible bunch of people here in this House.

I'm not going to stand and speak all day long. I will say this legislation is long overdue. It doesn't go far enough. But I also think that, as a Legislature, certainly if you're a minister of a department and as the Speaker of the House, I believe that we need to make this Chamber specifically more accessible, certainly the upstairs area. We've seen people come in here in wheelchairs and there's nowhere for them to go except to sit right here in front of the door. We fail our people when we don't give them access to this Legislature, to this House.

So, again, I'll say all those beautiful blue parking spots are wonderful outside the door, but if they were full – because they're never full – but if they were full and individuals came to this House, to this building, it's not accessible and that's not acceptable in 2023.

On that note, I'll take my seat.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**J. BROWN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the Member for Terra Nova, as an individual who would know, to point out the things like that because it's important that we recognize that there are people with disabilities. Not many people are visibly disabled. So there are people that need accommodation that we don't know about and it's up to them to disclose or not. But if we don't have access for them, it's a whole other thing.

Here in this House it's another thing we discuss, that it's not an accessible room. If, by chance, we elect somebody who is in a wheelchair, they won't be able to take their

seat, not until the House gets renovated. So we're not even prepared for an MHA who may be in a wheelchair.

I agree, it speaks volumes about how a government looks when it wants the general public to do its part, when it's not doing its own part itself. So it's something for TI or something to come back and say if we ever elect someone in a wheelchair, they will not be able to take their seat in this House. That's an important thing to think about.

On top of that, another disappointing thing that I want to talk about is a few years ago accessibility advocates came to Labrador West and did an accessibility audit of Labrador West. Every single public building in Labrador West failed. The recreation centre, if you want to go bowling, you better not be in a wheelchair because you can't go bowling there. If you want to go to the pool, it's a journey through a snowbank in order to get you into the pool in Labrador West.

Government buildings, municipal buildings and the building I'm in as an MHA, my office in Labrador West is in a provincial building, which is half a courthouse, half of that. There's some kind of contraption to get you into court if you are disabled, but none of the doors are automatic, none of the doorways are wide enough for anyone with a wheelchair. So if you have a day in court in Labrador West and you're in a wheelchair, it's going to be an interesting day for you because you can't even get into the courthouse.

The Wildlife building, you're not getting in there, most buildings like that. So when we talk about accessibility, 90 per cent of the buildings in Labrador West that are government, you're not getting in.

Another interesting one, my daughter went through school with an individual in a wheelchair. It wasn't until his last day of primary school that they actually started to put ramps up to the doors for the child. The child spent four years in a school and

having to be lifted over the doorways to get in because none of them were accessible for him. It wasn't until the last year there that they actually got the ramps and stuff put in. Now, next year, he's going over to another school and we all noticed there are no ramps up to the doors to get him into the building. There's a lift inside the building but to get him into the building, there are no ramps. This is 2023.

This is what a child with disabilities is going to experience starting off life, that the schools weren't even accessible. We talk about this, it's great, but until initiative is shown by government that they actually are going to practise what they're preaching, it's all in vain.

I'm glad we're going to do this and we're going to start encouraging businesses to do it. At the same time, while government's ruling this out, they should at the same time be in the background going: we have to make this building accessible, we have to make this building accessible, we have to make this building accessible.

This is my ask for the minister: Do an accessibility audit of all your buildings, schools, hospitals, everything. Because you'll be frightened to know what is not accessible in the public sector. I'm just talking about my little corner of the world and how it failed miserably in an accessibility audit done by an advocacy group.

At the same time, I'm encouraging my community of both Labrador City and Wabush – and they're trying. They're slowly doing their work for municipal buildings to make them accessible. At the same time, the building I'm in as an MHA, if I had someone with a disability coming to see my office, it's going to be hard because it's not accessible. It's not an accessible building. I know it was built in 1971 or '72, but that's not an excuse anymore for a government building.

We should be leaders in accessibility. We are a province that is kind and caring. We should be extending that to make sure that every space that is open to anybody is actually open to anybody. It's inclusive and that way we can come in here.

One thing we can take back from this is we have to start practising what we're preaching. That's what the government needs to start doing here because we can go through every building in this province and I can guarantee you, you'll be frightened to know what's not accessible.

Thank you, Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**E. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to stand and have a few minutes on this and I'm going to tell a few stories. One of the stories that I have is one of the premiers back years ago, they used to have a national awareness day for people with disabilities. I remember I got the premier to go with me to one of those events. I had the media there.

At the end of it, when we came back, we were going into the Sir Richard Squires Building. We had the media there and I said here's what we're going to do, I said to the premier: Sit in the wheelchair. He got in the wheelchair. I said: Okay, get in the building. He couldn't get the door open because he had a wheelchair and couldn't reach up to open the door. When he got in, he couldn't reach up to push the buttons. I remember that and then we got the Sir Richard Squires Building accessible.

This building is not accessible. I go back many years to when I was the president of the Canadian Paraplegic Association we pushed for accessibility all throughout Canada, not just here, not just one building,

all through Canada with the Canadian Paraplegic Association, on the provincial board also.

I heard the Member for Labrador West talking about an audit. There was a group that was with the Canadian Paraplegic Association that would go into a building and make all the recommendations of what you need to make it accessible. You can walk in and they say they'll do an audit of the whole building, here's your letter and here's what you need to do to comply with it. That was taken out; they don't do that now. This is what needs to be done with a lot of the government infrastructure buildings.

I know a young person, back a few years, would come up, when they used to have Youth Parliament, and they couldn't get on the floor here; they had to lift them up. They couldn't get on the floor; youth, who are supposed to be our next generation about people with disabilities.

It is an issue for a lot of people and I know the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands mentioned the demographics and the increase in the seniors in the province, and that is a big issue. A lot of people with disabilities can't get into a lot of places they used to when they were younger because of the accessibility.

I see the bill here saying that only the portion of the building that is going to be renovated needs to be brought up to – that there, in itself, is taking the legislation a bit lower than what it was. Before, if you had a building before 1981 and if you were doing 50 per cent or more renovations to the building, the whole building had to be made wheelchair accessible. Now what you're saying is that if you're doing 50 per cent or 60 per cent or just one area, all you have to do is that area. The next part, the other 50, 60 or 70 per cent doesn't have to be touched. It is almost like the bill is being taken away.

I definitely understand the business side, but if we're going to truly make it accessible, if we're truly going to say to the people that we're going to bring in this act and say, okay, if you're going to do this renovation to a building, we're not going to make you do it all – I'd like to know the minister's rationale later, and I didn't know that the Advisory Committee went and recommended that –

**P. LANE:** Phase-in plan.

**E. JOYCE:** Phase-in plan, I didn't know that. So that's another bit of information. It would be great for the minister to look at that.

I'll just say to the minister of Housing, there are a lot of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing that's not wheelchair accessible, as something there now. That's just something and can you do it all overnight? No. But you can phase it in bit by bit. In Nova Scotia there's a regulation now if you're building a new house, you have to have your doors 30 inches so a wheelchair can fit in.

**P. LANE:** Universal design.

**E. JOYCE:** Universal design. You have to have it a certain length. So if you get older and you a wheelchair, you can get in. You have to have access to the door. That's the kind of thing that we need to be looking at a bit more.

I say to the minister and I ask the minister when she gets a chance to speak, where did this issue come up that you only make it accessible to the part of the building that you're actually renovating? How did that come about? Because if you're doing 50, 60 per cent and the other 40 per cent just leave it alone, it's almost like you're taking away a lot of the teeth in the bill. You're almost making it weaker than what it was before.

It is a big issue, absolutely no doubt it is an issue that's always ongoing. Numerous speakers spoke here today about the idea that government buildings, all government

institutions should be made accessible somehow. Start it in, phase it in, bit by bit, get an audit done of it all. Find out what needs to be done and get it done, because it's pretty hard to be out preaching and telling the businesses you have to put everything in, wheelchair accessible.

There's another thing – I think Mount Pearl has it and Corner Brook has it. It's another big thing. People who are part of the CNIB or has some kind of a disability with their eyes, for example, if they walked into that building they would not know which floor to push, which one going up and down. The one in the Sir Richard Squires Building, you beep, beep and you know you pressed ground and you go up to the eighth floor you listen to the eight beeps. That's the other thing is people with sight problems, that should be included in something with this bill.

I'll take my seat and I look forward to the minister's responses on those questions. It's an ongoing concern and it's an ongoing issue that we always have to keep improving accessibility for people with all types of disabilities for our province.

Thank you.

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

**J. DWYER:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'll just take a couple minutes to talk about this. Being the shadow Cabinet minister for CSSD for the last four years, it's something that we've dealt with, with me and several ministers from the other side. Like I said, I don't think there's anybody up against this. I think it's something that we understand. It's a day and age when we need to make improvements because it's the right thing to do. Not because there's eyes on us, but it's the right thing to do.

We also have to acknowledge that this 1981 rule is so archaic. I mean, it's 42 years old

already. Many buildings that are prior to that probably need refurbishments and stuff like that. One of the things that we're talking about here – and I do agree with my colleagues about being able to physically enter a building and stuff like that. But not all times, as we've spoken about with department officials, is accessibility about just the physical landing in a space. It's about the lighting, it's about the noise and it's about many different things. It's about the height of stair rails, it's about buttons, being able to get into elevators, or access elevators, period.

So what it's about, is it's about equality of experience. So if you can walk into this building, I should be able to walk into this building, so should my son, so should my colleague from Terra Nova. The thing is the lived experience is something that we need to listen to, and that's what we kind of miss here a little bit when we're making legislation, is making sure that we're listening to the community and we're listening to those lived experiences.

I have a son that has autism and one of the things for him is that sometimes the door itself is just too heavy for him to push open. He's a big kid, 11 years old, but he doesn't have that kind of forearm strength, I guess, or that tangible strength to push the door open. He'll get it open somewhat. He's going to try. He'll make the effort. But sometimes I see him struggle and I give him that little opportunity to succeed, but you've got to help him; it's just too heavy. And that's just the weight of the door, if you understand where I'm coming from.

So that's just a small piece, and like I said, the lights – I'm not sure how long my son would be able to be in here. I've brought him in to the Legislature a few times, when we're not sitting, and he loves it. He thinks it's very regal and important. And he gets that part of it. But I think if he was in here today with us, he would find some issues with the lighting and probably the bell was a little bit loud for his liking because I notice

that sometimes when we go in the grocery stores or we go into different buildings, the first thing he does is cover his ears until he gets the opportunity to slowly take his hands off his ears because then he's warming up to the amount of noise, we'll call it white noise that's already in the building. There's not really much we can do about that for the simple fact that it's the generators and stuff like that. The thing that we can do about that is the bushings and stuff that are in there to quiet the noise.

To go back, I mean, we've made great strides. There's no doubt about that because we're a more understanding culture and people. There's no doubt about that, but we still have a long way to go because as long as we're going to be all right with a 42-year-old rule that's in place, then that kind of gives us an opportunity to get off the hook. Getting off the hook is not as important as making sure that that building is safe for the people that are utilizing it.

So anything that's 42 years old and they're looking at not doing renovations because of this new rule – they might need renovations on the third floor but, now, all of a sudden, they're got to do floor one, two and three to get to the third floor to make sure that the whole building is up to code. I think that would be more important than just doing renovations on the third floor and leaving floor one and two under the 1981 rule. To me, it's archaic and I think it needs to go away.

The other thing is, I had a constituent this summer reach out to me that was dealing with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. They were already in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing; they already were utilizing one of our assets. This gentleman went in the hospital and came out with one of his legs amputated. Therefore, he had accessibility issues with the domicile that he was staying in.

What we went after, I guess, was that we could get a ramp built on to this Newfoundland and Labrador Housing asset. It came back to me that we weren't going to do that, but it was suggested that the gentleman of – not a senior age, we'll say, I don't want to say his age – he was given the option to move into a senior's manor because of his now disability or his accessibility issues. To me, that wasn't a very good response and I certainly made sure that I let the department know that. We went about it a different way and we got things straightened out for the gentleman. There's no doubt about that.

Like I said, there are some people that are born with accessibility issues and there are some people that, through an illness or an injury or an accident or something like that, have to experience that life of worrying about going into accessible buildings.

Like I said, it's not just the physical, while that's a big component of it and that's what kind of drives legislation like this, I think the thing about it is that we have to realize that there are other cognitive disabilities that make many buildings inaccessible and that's something that we really need to consider as well.

I thank you for your time, Speaker.

**SPEAKER:** Seeing no other speakers, if the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL speaks now she'll close the debate.

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

**S. STOODLEY:** Thank you, everyone, for your feedback.

Lots of very valid points raised in the discussion, Speaker. We did get recommendations from the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board. They have been available online. I have spoken to them about them on *Open Line* many times. They're open to anyone to consider and

review. That's what we used as a basis for our consultations, Speaker.

I'm happy to answer any questions in Committee. I just also want to mention things like door widths and things like that, those are under municipal jurisdiction. Some of the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board recommendations were around new housing builds, which I fully support, but those are municipal jurisdictions. I certainly encourage municipalities who regulate the rules around new builds to adopt those accessible standards for new private homes.

Thank you very much. I'm happy to answer any questions in Committee.

Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 52 now be read a second time.

Is it the pleasure of this House to adopt this 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 Buildings Accessibility Act. (Bill 52)

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

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

**J. HOGAN:** Tomorrow.

**SPEAKER:** Tomorrow.



On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Buildings Accessibility Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 52)

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 2.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, that Bill 47, An Act to Amend the Insurance Companies Act, be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third 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:** A bill, An Act to Amend the Insurance Companies Act. (Bill 47)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Insurance Companies Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 47)

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 3.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL, that Bill 48, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022, be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third 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:** A bill, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022. (Bill 48)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 48)

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 4.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Minister of Digital Government and Service NL that Bill 49, An Act Respecting the King's Printer, be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third 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:** A bill, An Act Respecting the King's Printer. (Bill 49)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting the King's Printer," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 49)

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 5.

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Minister of Digital Government and Service NL that Bill 50, An Act to Amend the Change of Name Act, 2009, be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third 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:** A bill, An Act to Amend the Change of Name Act, 2009. (Bill 50)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act to Amend the Change of Name Act, 2009," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 50)

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of DGSNL that Bill 51, An Act to Amend the Embalmers and Funeral Directors Act, 2008 be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third 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:** A bill, An Act to Amend the Embalmers and Funeral Directors Act, 2008. (Bill 51)

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

On motion, a bill, “An Act to Amend the Embalmers and Funeral Directors Act, 2008,” read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 51)

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

**SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**J. HOGAN:** Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Minister of Digital Government and Service NL 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, Bill 55, be now read a third time.

**SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third 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:** 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 third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, “An Act to Amend the 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 third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 55)

**SPEAKER:** 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 this House concur in the second report of the Standing Orders Committee of the 50th General Assembly, tabled 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 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 1:30 o'clock tomorrow.

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