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Speaker: Honourable Wade Verge, MHA

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The House resumed sitting at 7:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure and an honour to get up in this House and speak to whatever piece of legislation is in front of this House at any given time.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully this afternoon, once we got into the substance of the bill, to some of the comments made by people on this side of the House, and also, as well as people on the opposite side of the House.

I would like to start out by saying each and every one of us, including the members who spoke towards me, will make valid points, absolutely valid points. When a person here in this House of Assembly looks at their own district, and has a look at it, and then think about that district's boundaries being realigned and taking in constituents you did not have before, well then there comes extra challenges, there comes extra work, and all that kind of good stuff. So, each and every one of us are going to do that.

I heard the hon. Member for Labrador making some solid, valid points in regard to her district and the travel requirements and all that kind of good stuff. There are a couple of members here on this side of the House included, who are from Labrador, who have similar challenges. I also have to say there are people who are not in Labrador who have similar challenges, such as the South Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, which is equally isolated. As a matter of fact, in some ways more isolated than some other parts of the Province because they do not have airstrips in their communities. The only accessible way of getting to their district is by either helicopter or by boat.

What I will say here is that, and the missing piece out of this is – and people are putting their points forward, but the piece that I will say to all members in this House is that it is an independent commission. When it comes to

Labrador, I am quite sure when the hon. Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair was mentioning all the findings of the commission back in 1995, that was reported on in 1996, are all valid, absolutely valid. They were the findings of that commission.

Really, what we are doing in regard to talking about those particular ones is thinking it is going to be something different of the present commission that will be struck in a little while, in a few weeks, or a few days, or whatever it may be when we finish debating this particular amendment. That commission will be independent. That commission will listen. That commission has all the powers to investigate and research all of the items that each and every one of us will bring forward in regard to our districts, our concerns, all of the reasons why and all the reasons why not.

What I speak of here tonight is in regard to why we should. One of the reasons why I say we should is because I do not think we have the luxury of waiting until 2019. As well, before I forget it, people say, well then we should wait for the census. The census that was used in 2006 was accumulated in 2005, so it is a year later. Any census that is done – which, I think, one is scheduled for 2016. The data will not be available until 2017. So that pushes it out again. We cannot be doing that kind of thing.

I will tell you as well, in regard to a census, I value the census done by Stats Canada and all those people who do that, but we have a fair idea of where people live in Newfoundland and Labrador. We get that from municipalities. We get that from our cities, the City of Mount Pearl, the City of Corner Brook, and the City of St. John's, the Town of Gander, the Town of Clarendville, an honest report. We are pretty good in regard to that.

I will go to the smaller communities, because I was the Minister of Municipal Affairs for three years. I think I met with every single council in Newfoundland and Labrador. One of the very questions I used to ask them was their population base. Each and every one of them, as good councillors and good mayors could always do, they could give me the exact figure of the number of citizens within their community right off the top, no more to it than that.

To be quite honest with you as well, I came here in 2003. I look around this House of Assembly now and there are people here who have served longer than I have, but not very many. I say to the House of Assembly, the members here, that I have seen a lot of change. I have seen a lot of change over those particular years with regard to our transportation systems. I have seen a lot of change – not that I use it a lot, but in the IT sector in social media and all that kind of good stuff.

As a matter of fact –

MR. A. PARSONS: A point of clarification, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile on a point of order.

MR. A. PARSONS: I will put this out there to ask the minister who is speaking. Are we saying that we do not use the census and that to measure populations we talk to mayors in communities?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, no problem at all. I will clarify it.

Yes, we would use the census data, but I was pointing out that the census data is actually dated when you get it, to be quite honest with you, because it is at least a year if not older by the time the data is collected, the data is accumulated, and is reported by the federal government in regard to the stats. That is the way it is. By the time it is ready it will be 2017, I say to the hon. member.

I will go back to my train of thought, Mr. Speaker, in regard to how things have changed. I was going to say that I spent a fair bit of time in Labrador, taking them as an example. One of the things I found quite interesting on the coast of Labrador is they have a unique network of

communication up there, and it is called Facebook – that I do not use. You can find out just about anything and everything that is happening in Labrador pretty quickly by just visiting Facebook. That is the way it is. I am just giving that as an example of the way communication has changed, and I respect that.

I would like to throw it out there as well that I have heard about people making representation here in the House of Assembly in regard to proper representation of the constituents of Newfoundland and Labrador. Yes, absolutely, each and every one of us are elected to represent the people in our districts and ultimately all the people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When I reflect then on our country, Canada, the federal ridings are much, much bigger right across Canada. We are no different in Newfoundland and Labrador as the remote parts of Saskatchewan, the Northern parts of Manitoba, Labrador as a federal seat, the Central seat as well, a large geographic area that a person has to service. They have to do all of those things that the hon. Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair mentioned in her speech here this evening, in that she has to get to events and she has to attend meetings and all that kind of good stuff. They do it, and they do it quite well.

As well, in regard to this piece of work that we want to get done, that we need to get done – and I think the people of Newfoundland and Labrador want us to get it done. As I said, I have been here since 2003 and I have heard this talked about on numerous occasions by numerous people, not only in this House of Assembly in regard to colleagues and whatnot, by people, academia people from the university, people in the media, general people across Newfoundland and Labrador asking people, me included, the question: Do you need all of the representation you have and the number of seats that you have in the House of Assembly?

To be quite honest with you, and I will say this as well, regardless – and even though it is absolutely a cost-saving measure, to be quite honest with you, if we were flush with cash in Newfoundland and Labrador, the price of a barrel of oil was \$139 a barrel or whatever it may be, I think we actually should be discussing

this. I really do, in my heart and my soul, even if it did affect my District of Gander or whatever it may be, because I think it is the right thing to do. I really do. We are elected as Members of this House of Assembly to do the best job that we possibly can for the people who have elected us and, ultimately, to the Province.

I firmly believe that we should have this discussion. I am quite sure that we are going to have a healthy debate over the next number of days or whatever it takes to get to where we need to go. I would like to remind people again midway, in regard to the words that I want to say to this particular amendment to the Electoral Boundaries Act, is that it is an independent commission and I think it is wrong for us to prejudge what they are going to find.

I say to the hon. member, he says it is the time – well, times have changed, and that is a fact. I had a conversation earlier in the evening on this in regard to being able to get that work and the availability of the resources more so now than ever in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador to get this work done, in regard to the mapping. As a matter of fact, I am sure I will bring your memory here now. It was only a couple of days ago – I do not know who the gentleman was, but there was a person who sent an e-mail to each and every one of us in the House of Assembly. I think his first name was Allan or something, and he had the thirty-eight districts worked out. As a matter of fact when I looked at them, they made sense.

So, that is one scenario. I know that each and every one of them – and I am looking at the member there for the Bay of Islands and I see him and I am sure he is going to have an impact and whatnot, but we know in our hearts and souls that this is something that we absolutely should do and have a discussion about it. Things have changed; times have changed. The mapping is much easier.

Myself and each and every member over on the side of the House and either member here on this side of the House, we could get together tonight and have a sociable or whatever it may be over a period of time and each and every one of us can come up with scenarios in reducing it down to thirty-eight seats and every one of them be viable. Every single one of them would make

sense for whatever reason, some reason or whatever it may be.

I think really and what I have heard – and I am fairly well out there in regard to speaking to people. I do not mind speaking to people, I can tell you that, absolutely; but I think the people of the Province want us to do it. I think they know and understand that the time frames that are being suggested are time frames that can be met, to be quite honest with you. I think the resources are there to get it done and the resources are there to get it done right. Because once this debate is over in the House of Assembly, we do not play any role, none whatsoever.

The commission goes to work. The commission does their work. The commission does their findings and all that kind of stuff. The only influence that we may have is that Hansard is available to the commission. They can access Hansard and see what each and every one of us have said over the last couple of days, taking out valid points that they might not have thought about or whatever it may be.

To be quite honest with you, I urge people in this House of Assembly to really respect the work of the commission. The Chair is going to be independent, the commission is independent, and they will do their work and they will come back with their findings. They may very well come back with the same findings, I say to the hon. member from Labrador, as they found before. God only knows, they may very well come back and find out that you need an extra seat in Labrador and they are going to cut us down by eleven on the Island. We do not know.

Let the commission do its work and let them figure it out. Because when I reflect, I listened –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. O'BRIEN: Even though she is my critic in the House of Assembly – and I pride myself, I listen to each and every word in this House of Assembly and sometimes I may be roaming around or whatever it may be, but the old ears are open and I will be listening to every word. I will come back to it at some point in time.

I tell you, let's think about this rationally and let's think about it in the right light, the right thing to do for the Province. I am speaking really, right now, from my heart to be quite honest with you, because I have heard about this a long time ago. It happened in 1996. There were certain recommendations that were there in 1996 and they were not accepted by the present government. That is a fact. They were done in 2006 and I thought there was going to be changes, and that is not right either. I think the commission should be independent. I think the commission should go out and do their work, and I think the people of the Province want the commission to do just that.

I respect what happened in the past. There could be lots of reasons. I was not in this House of Assembly at that particular time back in 1996 and things were different in 1996. We did not have the Trans-Labrador Highway. We did not have the pavement that we have today in regard to provincial roads and all that kind of stuff. When I got elected in 2003, there was no such thing as a BlackBerry. There was absolutely no such thing as a BlackBerry in this Province. As a matter of fact, I remember the management committee –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. O'BRIEN: We had to go and present to the management committee in regard to the BlackBerry and allowing MHAs to have BlackBerrys – and that is a fact. That happened in this House since I was elected in 2003. So, things could have been different in 1996, but things are absolutely different now today in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2014 – absolutely different in regard to accessibility.

When I look at the federal ridings and I look at the comparisons right across Canada in regard to the other provinces – I think, to be quite honest with you, over the last number of years we have led the country in a lot of areas in regard to development and all that kind of good stuff, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and that is fine. Here we are. We are not leading the country; we are following the country – we are behind them, I mean. We are behind the whole country in

regard to that whole aspect, because we have way less people and all –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I will ask members for their co-operation.

The Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, to continue.

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I think they were listening to every word; it is just that it was like they are repeating it – it is sinking in to them in regard to what I have to say. I think it was not that they were not listening, Mr. Speaker; they are just listening to absolutely every single word that I am saying. I see hon. members with their earpieces in and everything.

I do not think in this particular debate that there are really two sides of the House of Assembly. I really do not. I absolutely do not. Does it affect both sides of this House of Assembly? Absolutely it does, and it will. No doubt about that, absolutely.

As a matter of fact, I would probably venture a guess that it is actually going to impact this side more so than the other side, because of the simple reason of the number of seats. In regard to that math there, it is going to have more of an impact in regard to how rural Newfoundland and where your seats sit and all that kind of stuff. So, to be quite honest with you, when it comes down to that, on the political side I did not even give it a second thought, because I really feel in my heart and my soul for all the right reasons that it is the right thing to do, and it should have been done a long time ago. As a matter of fact, it should have been done in 2006, but it did not happen in 2006. The commission came back with a report that did not suggest a reduction in seats. The report was suggested, and it did not happen. The report is what it is and speaks for itself, Mr. Speaker.

I go back because I know people have expressed certain opinions in regard to some of the talk shows or whatever it may be. One of the areas that the person went to was the census and that it is not going to be valid because the census was not there. Each and every commission in the

past that has reviewed the boundaries of the seats of the House of Assembly, worked with a census that was at least a year old, if not four to five years old.

I believe the census that was used in 2006 was the 2001 census. There is the challenge. Not doing this at this particular time right now I think is a crime, to be quite honest with you, for the simple reason that the census will not happen until 2016. It will not be validated until the earliest 2017. Now we are into 2018, 2019 before we can actually get it done.

The commission would be struck in 2018 and then the report would come down possibly in early 2019. Now we are not even having it. The earliest possible that we could have it, if we do not do it now, is actually 2019. I think that is wrong, I will be quite honest with you, regardless of what falls out of the trees.

MR. A. PARSONS: (Inaudible).

MR. O'BRIEN: No. He is saying I am going to be gone. The hon. Member for Burgeo – La Poile is going to be gone. I tell you I have learned to love this place, to be quite honest with you, over the last twelve years. I think maybe I might die here, to tell you the truth. I might not go home tonight so I will die tonight, I do not know.

I really am speaking from my heart. I think this is the right thing to do regardless of what side of the House we sit on. We can get up and we can certainly put our points forward. They are all valid points. They are all taken in account and they will be by the commission.

I thank you for the time to speak on this important amendment tonight.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I am glad to have my turn come to address this bill that is before us, An Act to Amend the Electoral Boundaries Act. For people out there

who do not get to see these bills as we see them, there is always in the beginning of a bill that we are going to discuss in the House of Assembly Explanatory Notes.

The Explanatory Notes for this bill gives three explanations as to what the bill is about. The first one says to, “require the electoral boundaries commission to report upon the delimitation of the province into districts in 2015” – basically that means to change the boundaries and to report on that change – “reduce the number of one-member districts in the province to 38; and make consequential amendments for the purpose of a commission report in 2015.”

Basically, the Explanatory Notes, if you read through them, are saying one thing clearly: the bill is about cutting the number of districts in the Province and then making the changes that have to happen if the number of districts is cut. This government, in its wisdom, is recommending that the districts in this Province be cut by ten. I am focusing on the districts because that is what is being cut. Yes, it has implications for how many people sit in this House, but the issue is the electoral districts of the Province and cutting those electoral districts.

The Premier has been bold enough to point out that everybody in the House is in agreement on these cuts. I think my colleague for Gander just made the same pronouncement in a different way. What I want to say is I do not know if we need to cut. I am open to discussing whether or not we need to cut, but I am not open to having a bill put in front of me that has a distinct number of cuts determined by this government without any consultation.

The Premier, as far as I can tell, I have been following closely, is on public record saying, no, that there really was not consultation outside of who they are as a party. I do not know if that means consultation outside of their Cabinet. I do not know if it included their caucus. I do not know if it included the provincial executive of their party, but it did not include anybody outside of that circle.

I asked that question of the Premier in the House of Assembly and got nowhere when it came to getting an answer. Because I listened to some of

the public media, I heard in the public media the Premier say, well, we made the decision ourselves. Yes, they made the decision themselves and that is for sure. This is not a decision that was made in consultation with the people of the Province, not a decision that was made in consultation with people who study these issues, and not a decision that was made for the good, as far as I can tell, of this Province.

We have an Electoral Boundaries Act and that Electoral Boundaries Act is very clear. There is a principle in that Electoral Boundaries Act that I want to read. It is the rules to guide the commission. This is the act that exists without any changes, the act we now have: "In proposing a division of the province into districts and in preparing their report, the commission shall ensure that the division of the province into districts and the description of the boundaries give primacy to the principle that the vote of every elector in the province shall have a weight equal to that of every other elector."

We have put this question and gotten no answer so far. My concern is that by cutting our seats by ten, by going from forty-eight to thirty-eight, after all the work that was done by the commission in 2006 this government is ignoring that great attention was paid to trying to make sure that "...the vote of every elector in the province shall have a weight equal to that of every other elector." Without any public analysis that we are aware of, because they certainly have not published it, without any analysis to show that cutting ten will allow that to happen, they have the gall as a government to say they are going to put people in place and tell them this is what you have to do.

If we follow the process that has been followed before – and it was indicated in briefings that, yes indeed, the process of before will be followed – we will have a chairperson appointed by the chief justice. We will have four members of the commission and this will be under the Speaker of the House taking care of that piece of the appointments. If we follow the way it was done before, we will have two people nominated by the government's side of the House and two people nominated, one each nominated, by the Opposition parties.

We were told that will still go ahead. Well, here we are as people, we are going to have to look at somebody and say this government is giving you an impossible task. Can I nominate you to sit on a commission that is going to be impossible for them to do the work they have to do, impossible number one, to do that work within 120 days from the time of the appointment of the chairperson? Already we are losing time because the committee will not be in place. The clock is running.

You have to do in 120 days what the commission in 2006 did in eight months. You have to do it in 120 days. You also have to cut ten districts. You have to do that. We are telling you that you have to do it and you have to do it in 120 days. How are they going to do it?

The whole process of the electoral boundaries commission in the past has been a process that has required expertise from Natural Resources with regard to the mapping of electoral districts. It has required expertise from Elections Newfoundland and Labrador to then put into operation what gets figured out by those who do the boundaries and by the commission.

The work that has to be done is immense. It is work that takes months, and months, and months. No matter what the government says – and I have heard the Minister of Finance give his explanation of how Elections Newfoundland and Labrador will be doing a lot of their work parallel to the commission – he does not talk about the months of work that they are going to have to do once the commission does its report and the government says what has to happen. Yet, we are going to be asked to look at somebody and say: Will you represent us on this commission knowing that you have an impossible task to perform?

Let's move on a bit. We are being told by my colleague from Gander that this is the time it has to happen. His language was this just has to happen. It is imperative that it happen now. We do not have the luxury to not do it now. What is he talking about?

In 2006, as he indicated himself, the commission of 2006 reported. Most of the issues or most of the recommendations from that commission were accepted and are reflected in the act that

we now have. That crowd over there, Mr. Speaker – they were not all sitting there at that time – were the government. They have been the government since 2006. They have only had almost nine years to do something. The Member for Gander is saying now we do not have the luxury not to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: What were they doing for the last nine years, I ask you, Mr. Speaker? If they were so concerned in 2006 that perhaps things should have happened, why wasn't it done then? Why are they now, all of a sudden, from out of nowhere last week declaring they are going to make cuts happen to our districts without consultation, without an analysis, and putting the cart before the horse? They should be putting a commission in place in 2016. That is the role.

I heard the Member for Gander do the report from 2016; by the time they get appointed we will not have anything until 2019. That is not what happened in 2006. In 2006, the commission was formed in January and by the fall they had their report ready, within the same year. The legislation said they had to have it done within the year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: There is a big difference between a year and four months, Mr. Speaker, a tremendous difference between a year and four months.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I hear the Member for Gander – and others because he is not the only one – say that we have to do this, we do not have the luxury not to do it, it forces me to ask the question that I have asked in the House: Why now?

We have a process that has worked in the past. Every ten years we have our electoral boundaries commission. It worked before, why would it not work now? Why is it that they have decided that a cut has to happen now in the number of districts? The weak answer from the Premier with regard to deficit, nobody in the Province is buying that. This decision, in one year, will only save less than one-third of 1 per cent of the deficit, so nobody is buying that.

He has said there is no consultation. They did not talk with anybody outside. They have made this decision on their own. In saying that, he has not given us a reason for why they are doing it now. What was the wisdom that went on between their walls, inside of those walls? What was the great wisdom that happened that said eight, ten seats can be cut and people will be equally represented in this House of Assembly?

Mr. Speaker, a couple of years ago, I think it was on an On Point show on CBC when this question was raised and we gave some answers in the media. One of the things that I pointed out, I am open to discussion and the discussion would involve a lot of homework. It would involve a lot of looking at what our reality is, how others deal with it elsewhere, and to see are there similarities or are there differences. I say there are many differences between us, Newfoundland and Labrador, and other provinces.

There is hardly a province that has what we have to deal with; first of all, so much of our population on a coastline. We all know that. We all know the coastline that we have to deal with, so much of our geography being vast and with a poor transportation system. We do not have a public transportation system. We put a lot of money into roads on the Island, and in recent years we are finally seeing some money going into roads in Labrador, but that is limited with regard to public transportation.

We have a geography that really makes it extremely difficult, especially for MHAs in the rural districts. Their responsibility is to everybody in their district, not just to some. They have to spend their time making sure they are out there listening to, being aware of, and being knowledgeable on everything that is going on in their districts. This is something this

government apparently has not even thought about. We have no idea what they thought about with regard to what they have come up with. I mean, I have said publicly already in the media how horrified I was when I learned what they were suggesting.

We are here in this House of Assembly to represent people in the Province, to bring their concerns into this House, and to make sure that everybody is treated equally in this Province. Even with the representation that we have, Mr. Speaker, I have to say everybody in this Province is not represented equally. We know that. All you have to do is go around this Province and you know that health care may be not too bad in one place, it may be really good in another, and it may be terrible in another. We do not have consistency of services. We do not have plans in place that look at making sure every part of the Province is getting equal treatment and that their needs are being met.

This is something we are all concerned about because that is why we are here. We should be here to make sure everybody is being taken care of. If we cut back to the bone – because I am telling you cutting to thirty-eight districts is back to the bone – then we are going to be ensuring that people's voices are going to be lost in this House of Assembly.

We are not here for ourselves. We are here, as I have said, to represent the voices. That is why I want us to be talking about the districts because that is what is being cut. What is being cut is people's access, the access by people in the Province to this House of Assembly. This government is doing it blithely.

I cannot in conscience vote for this bill. We in my caucus cannot in conscience vote for this bill because this bill is ignoring the democratic principles of our Province. By the time this commission even starts to deal with what it is they have to deal with, when are they going to get the time to have a consultative process, as they did in 2006, as they did by the commission before that? How are they going to get time to go out and meet with people and to really find out what the concerns are?

We are already hearing some of the concerns. We heard concerns from the Mayor of Wabush.

I cannot believe that after all of the thought in the years past and all the consultation that went on to create four districts in Labrador, that we can have this government refusing to take responsibility to say they want four seats in Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS MICHAEL: They are putting it onto the shoulders of the electoral boundaries commission – again, a commission that is being given an impossible task and saying oh, it is all right; they made the decision. They will have washed their hands of it, Mr. Speaker. That is what they will have done. They will have washed their hands of it and sit back and say it was not us; it was the commission. It was the commission doing their dirty work, Mr. Speaker. That is what they are expecting, the commission to do their dirty work.

Well, do you know what? It is not good enough. We need time for this to be really thought out. We need time for people to really be able to make their voices heard. We need time for people to say why they are concerned, because they are.

So, Mr. Speaker, because of that need of time, I stand here tonight and I move, seconded by the Member for St. John's Centre, that Bill 42, An Act to Amend the Electoral Boundaries Act, be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time six months hence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I submit this motion to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the member to pass her amendment forward to the Table, and the House will take a recess to consider whether or not the amendment proposed by the Leader of the Third Party is indeed in order.

Recess

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

We have considered the amendment put forward by the Leader of the Third Party and the amendment is in order.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party to speak to the amendment.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I am very pleased the amendment has been found in order and that I can take time to speak to it because time is the operative word. Taking time to think things through; taking time to make sure the decisions that are made by government, the decisions that are made by us here in the House of Assembly, and the decisions that we have considered get the time to be considered.

When I was speaking to the bill itself earlier I made reference to some things being said by my colleague from Gander because he was the one who spoke directly before me. One of the things I heard him say was that he has been in this House, I think he said, since 2003 and he has heard the issues that are raised in the bill we have been considering. He has heard these issues talked about since 2006. He has heard since 2006, apparently, issues around cutting districts. He has heard since 2006 issues, apparently, around the seats in Labrador. He has heard since 2006 the issues that the opposite side of the House has been speaking to with regard to Bill 42.

I have been in this House since the fall of 2006. It is not as long as my colleague, but I have been here that length of time and I have not heard these things talked about. They certainly were never brought up here in the House of Assembly. I never heard this government in various bills it brought forward, or in any public announcements under any of the leaders that they have had since 2006 until now, say that we have a problem and we have to take action right away. We have to, without consulting with people in the Province, without consulting the other parties in the House of Assembly – we are saying ten seats have to be cut; ten districts have to be cut in our Province.

I have put forward the resolution we are now speaking to so that we will slow down what this

government is doing so that people can get involved. Not at the end of a process that has been forced on them and forced on the commission that will have a very short period of time to do its work, but a process that starts in the beginning. I used the phrase earlier on this evening about putting the cart before horse. Let's turn it around and say we need to have a consultation first with regard to cuts. Are cuts required? Are cuts needed?

I have heard in this House of Assembly, and I heard in some of the briefings that we have had, references made to other provinces. I have looked at some of those other provinces and I have had to say you know it is not quite the same in PEI as it is here. Think about little PEI and think about our Province. I am not sure we can look at PEI.

Where else do we need the time to look? I have heard Saskatchewan talked about. Saskatchewan does not have the realities that we have. They do not have the coastline that we have. We need time to look at a place like Saskatchewan and say does what they have there, with regard to the districts and with regard to their electoral boundaries commission, match what we have here in Newfoundland and Labrador? I want us to take the time, and I want the government to take the time to give very considered attention to what does exist elsewhere in Canada, and to answer the question: Is it the same for us here in Newfoundland and Labrador?

That is why I brought forward this resolution begging my colleagues on the other side of the House and begging my colleagues in the Official Opposition to not be doing a knee-jerk reaction here, but saying we have to take the time to make sure that what we are asking the electoral boundaries commission to do is doable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: We have to take the time to make sure that people can get their heads around what is going on. Mr. Speaker, we heard about this last week for the first time when we got a phone call. The leaders of the Opposition parties got a phone call to meet with the Premier

and I was delighted to go meet with the Premier. All of this came from out of the blue. They may have been talking about it since 2006 on the other side of the House, but we certainly have not been. There we were being asked to support this bill, a bill that has implications way beyond what I think the Premier, his Cabinet, and his caucus have talked about and thought about.

We need to have a discussion here in this House just about nothing, but the whole issue of why we have the number of seats we have, the whole issue of why. If seats are going to be cut, we have to make sure that everybody in the Province is going to be equally represented in this House of Assembly. It is our responsibility to do that, not the responsibility of the electoral boundaries commission. It is their responsibility, yes, to make the mechanisms happen, but we should be having an informed discussion in this House about the number of seats, not plucking numbers out of the air. I have heard the government pluck numbers out of the air; I have heard the Leader of the Official Opposition. He has his number. He said his a while ago, his was forty. The government's is thirty-eight. Now we are –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I do not like to interrupt the member, but we are getting some feedback. I do not know if your BlackBerry is there near your mic or something?

MS MICHAEL: Oh, it is right here. There it is. Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party to continue.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much.

We have had these numbers thrown at us, but nobody has done an analysis of these numbers. Why aren't we having that discussion first in the House of Assembly? Why didn't the government first say we want to look at the issue of cuts and bring that discussion in here? Not bring in a bill that is changing our electoral boundaries bill.

We need the time. We need the time to look at this seriously. I do not think because we already have an act – and we have an act that is a bona fide act and an act that is proven because we already have an act – we do not need to have this happen before the general election.

We need to look at the issue prior to the boundaries commission of 2016, if this government were going to stand by our legislation, because according to the timeline for that, Mr. Speaker, we probably would be debating in December of this year what the boundaries commission should be doing. That was the process with the 2006 commission. The debate around how they were going to be directed happened in December of 2005. Then the government in January of 2006 appointed or put in place the process for the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission who began its work and brought its report in the fall.

If there is anything we should be doing at this time – and that is why the six months is so important – it is looking at and discussing with the public and holding, as Opposition parties, holding as government, holding as MHAs, meetings where we discuss: Does making a cut make sense? How do you feel about cuts in the districts? How do you feel in your district if your district became twice the size? That is the kind of discussion that could be happening over the next six months so that government could then be ready by the fall, late fall of this year, after we have had our general election under our legislation that exists. After that, then have the debate here in the House around what we want to pass on to the boundaries commission that would get set up in January 2016.

So, Mr. Speaker, time is needed. Time is needed to get at the questions we have been raising here in this House. Time is needed to make sure that what we pass on to the commission is doable. Time is needed so that we really know that the commission is going to be able to do its work. Time is needed so that we can be assured that mistakes are not going to be made.

Even with regard to the legislation that we are dealing, time is needed to make sure that everything is absolutely correct in that legislation. We have had mistakes made in this House when bills were rushed. This government

should know about it because they are the ones who made a good few. We cannot be rushing the processes in this Province. We cannot be rushing the processes in this House. We have been doing this over and over and over again since I have been in this House in 2006. I am shocked by the cavalier approach that government takes to these serious decisions that we have to make in this House of Assembly.

So, taking the time to make sure, number one, that the legislation is absolute, that there is no wrinkle in the legislation; taking time to make sure that what we are asking of a commission, a commission can do; taking time to make sure that people out there have had a voice about what we are going to put in the hands of the commission; and taking time to make sure that we can stand in front of somebody and say I would really like you to be on the electoral boundaries commission. Instead of now being embarrassed to go to somebody and say would you represent our party on the electoral boundaries commission, knowing the difficulties that that commission is going to have to do what right now the bill that is front of us that we have been discussing, what that bill is demanding of them.

So, Mr. Speaker, to me, it is extremely important that the government and the Official Opposition join with us in saying let's put the brakes on. Let's recognize that we have really made a mistake. That is what I am asking of government, to recognize that people are out there, real people – not people in our offices. They are real people, but they are the people who work for us, not people in this building, but people out there living in the districts who are going to be affected by the recommendations that are being put forward by this government that they really know what is going on and they are really being listened to. If there are petitions coming to the House, they are the ones who are putting those petitions in the House. This is what we need to happen. This is the time that we need, Mr. Speaker.

So I am really urging the government side of the House to see its error, to take time itself – I would like to know what time they took in coming up with what they came up. When we met with them, Mr. Speaker, last week they did not even have the legislation written. The

legislation was finalized over last weekend. This is unbelievable. We have had this happen before, talking to that government about changes they want to make and then being told, well, the legislation is not ready yet. The least that could have happened was that they could have taken the time to finish the legislation before they sat down and talked to us. That tells us how little they think of consultation. That tells us how they rush and do not take the time to make serious decisions well, and that is what I am asking them to do: to take the time to do that.

There has to be somebody on that side of the House over there who realizes errors have been made. There have to be some people on that side of the House over there who have been hearing from their constituents, and I would like to think that the six months that we would take this bill off the table would be time for them to go out and to talk to their constituents, talk to them everywhere and ask how they would feel. How would they feel if all the Northern Peninsula is one district? How would they feel if Labrador has two districts? How would they feel if all of the Burin Peninsula and Connaigre was all just one district? How would they feel about it? Ask your districts, ask your people, take the time to really consult.

Because that is what the bill is about. The bill is about cutting. That is the bill. So do not worry about anything else, any of the consequential stuff, the bill is about cutting; yet they have done no consultation on the cutting. They are just passing that on to the boundaries commission and saying you do it.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a game. Being in here is not a game. The democratic process is not a game. This government has proven over and over again they do not know what the democratic process is; they do not know what real consultation is. I am begging them to stop and think, to think about the resolution, the motion I put on the floor of this House, Mr. Speaker, to do the right thing and to say let's put on the brakes. Let's really consult. Let's really make sure that the democratic process is happening in this Province, because it is not happening.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the opportunity to speak on legislation here in the House of Assembly. I would just like to basically explain the Electoral Boundaries Act which establishes a mechanism for the review and amendment of electoral boundaries in Newfoundland and Labrador. The act provides for the Newfoundland and Labrador Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission to be appointed every ten years.

Under the current act, the next commission is due to be appointed in 2016 and is directed to divide the Province into forty-eight, one-member districts. That is what we are here discussing and debating tonight, Mr. Speaker.

I listened to the Leader of the NDP, and we talked about technology –

MS MICHAEL: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): A point of order, the hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

MS MICHAEL: Are speakers at this time speaking to the resolution on the floor or to the act? If it is the motion on the floor, then the speaker opposite is not speaking to that motion.

MR. SPEAKER: I ask the member to speak to the resolution.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

MR. FORSEY: I will speak to the resolution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was listening to the Leader of the Third Party – exactly what we were talking about actually, today's technology and what is happening. I listened to the Member for Gander and the Minister of AES when he was talking about technology. Then all of a sudden when the Leader of the Third Party gets up she has some

interference with her mike over there because of her BlackBerry. While she is sitting in the House of Assembly, and whether she represents Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi or whether she represents the District of Exploits, she can get an e-mail while she is sitting down there, from her constituent. So that is how far we have advanced, Mr. Speaker.

She went on to say that they want to move it ahead six months. Another six months will lead it into 2016. It is actually a known fact that if the changes were made in 2016 then the census would not be ready, I am told, until March 2017. So really, we would still be going on the old census, which is what we are doing anyway. Basically, what we are saying here is that we want to move ahead with the new changes and the new boundary changes, which a lot of people have been asking for over the years.

I do not want to be just repeating some of the things the Leader of the Third Party said, but we have discussed this with constituents. She is in Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi; we are out in rural Newfoundland. We are up here debating this and we are defending this because we have already discussed it with a lot of our constituents. We have not discussed it with everyone; of course we have not. I do not say she has, either, Mr. Speaker, but that is what we are doing.

Now she has a better opportunity because of her little district that she has, whereas out in rural Newfoundland, which we are talking about, there is a big difference. We have no trouble getting around. Maybe if I were the commissioner I could see where some beautiful changes could be made probably in St. John's. We probably should only have four districts. Maybe we should only have north, south, east, and west. Maybe it would work out better. If that is your problem, maybe that is what should happen.

I listened to the Minister of Finance when he presented the act today, Mr. Speaker. He referred to the Electoral Boundaries Act of 1973. Actually, it brought back memories of back then, because in 1975 the boundaries were changed. Before 1975, us people in the Exploits Valley and in the beautiful Bay of Exploits, which is now the Exploits District, were in with

Lewisporte. We were in with Lewisporte before 1975. I might have to ask the Speaker to move over; I could be coming back to Lewisporte. We are not sure. The boundaries could go anywhere.

I wanted to mention the Lewisporte District. Most of the Bay of Exploits, Leading Tickles, Point Leamington, Botwood, and so on came under the Lewisporte District before 1975. I grew up in Leading Tickles. I moved to the big town of Bishop's Falls in 1969, which I thought was big at the time. Guess what? In the early 1970s when I travelled back to Leading Tickles – and this was in the 1970s, not that long ago – the only phone was at the post office. Too long and a short, we wanted to get through to Bishop's Falls over. You had to say over to finish your conversation.

That is what we had for communications. No roads, no communications, no Facebook, no voicemail.

AN HON. MEMBER: No BlackBerry.

MR. FORSEY: No BlackBerry and no e-mail.

MR. O'BRIEN: We used to have (inaudible) to patch your own roads.

MR. FORSEY: That is true, I say to the Member for Gander. I did have my own wheelbarrow when I got elected in 1987 because we did have a lot of infrastructure deficiencies. We did need some road patching and some good roadwork, which I must say we have done very well in the past few years.

I came out here on Sunday. I checked my voicemail. I have gotten e-mails from constituents. I have e-mailed them back. As a matter of fact, I am after getting inbox messages on my Facebook from constituents. I did not have to get in my car today and drive to Botwood to talk to that constituent.

They want to see us on the ground because we have to represent all the people, which include municipalities, which include the fire stations, and the different volunteer groups. We have to support them and I will use Lewisporte because we were under Lewisporte at the time, Mr. Speaker. If Lewisporte receives so much

funding for municipal infrastructure and for fire services, well then so does the District of Exploits, so does the District of Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans, and so does the District of Grand Falls-Windsor – Green Bay South.

Whether or not a portion of that comes under the one district now, it is the same amount of money that is going to be spread out so these people are still going to get, hopefully, the applications that they put in approved and get their work done. That part is not going to change. The representation will change, yes, and the demographics are going to be different. We know our geography.

I respect the problems and the challenges they have in Labrador, Mr. Speaker. No question about it. I travelled down there many, many years in my former career, all through Southern Labrador and Lake Melville. I worked in Lab West. I am quite familiar with the challenges in the Big Land, no question about it, but they are not unique.

We have the member there for Placentia Bay – St. Mary's, is that correct?

MR. F. COLLINS: Close enough.

MR. FORSEY: He has 540 kilometres of roads, Mr. Speaker – 540 kilometres of roads. Does he have his challenges? I would say. I do not know how many communities. How many communities?

MR. F. COLLINS: Forty.

MR. FORSEY: Forty communities.

MR. JOYCE: How many communities (inaudible)?

MR. FORSEY: Forty.

I listened to the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair in Southern Labrador who has I think, I am not sure, fourteen or fifteen communities, and 600 kilometres of travel. Six hundred kilometres and fifteen communities, 540 kilometres and forty communities; I am not talking about Baie Verte, I am not talking about the Northern Peninsula, I am not talking about

St. Barbe and all that area. It is huge. The travel is huge.

Down in Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune it is the same thing, Mr. Speaker. It has the same challenges. You cannot drive to all their communities in their district. I can. At least I think I can.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. FORSEY: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that when the time comes all the members on the other side will get an opportunity to speak. They will be able to talk about their districts and the challenges they have.

What we are doing here is making changes in the boundaries that people have been asking for some time. People out in the districts, people in the media, and even the Leader of the Opposition said he called for it a couple of years ago. As a matter of fact, they support it. They support this move.

If I am reading it right, I do not believe they want to go into 2016. They are hoping that this can be done before 2016 so we can have our election for this year. I think that is roughly what they are looking to get done and that is what we are trying to get done.

Mr. Speaker, if we wait until 2016, then we are going to be using the old census, which is what we are going to be using now, and it will not get changed until 2019, which is huge. That is another four years down the road. Another four years that we can save \$10 million. It is a twofold savings, Mr. Speaker, because there are also the pensions that would be derived by these ten members as well. That, in itself, is huge. This is what we are trying to do because of our fiscal restraints.

There are many reasons why you do things as a government, Mr. Speaker. You do it because of fiscal restraints. You have to make some tough moves sometimes, but you also need to make changes with the times. You need to change with the times. That is why technology today will allow us to do the job that we need to do. We can do it so quick today, it is just amazing.

If my father and many more fathers and mothers were alive today and saw the changes that are after coming around in the past thirty years, they probably would not believe it. For us to get from Leading Tickles to Point Leamington, Mr. Speaker, we would have had to use a boat to get to that community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. FORSEY: The problem, I think, especially with some of the Opposition members, is that some of the candidates they have out there are probably giving them a lot of trouble. They are not happy with their party because they were expecting that nominations would be called and they could have their candidates in place. They have had possibilities for the past five or six months, but the information I am getting is that they apparently do not want some of those candidates so they did not call the nomination.

Well, that is not my problem. Not at all, but in the meantime they will have their opportunity. When these boundary changes are made, they will have these chances.

Mr. Speaker, I still have a few minutes left. I would like to go back to explain a few things on the current Bill 42 amendments. The proposed amendments will require the Newfoundland and Labrador Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission to divide the Province into thirty-eight proposed, one-member districts in 2015, and in 2026, and every tenth calendar year thereafter. So it is very clear, but we have no influence on the decisions that the commission is going to make regarding the boundaries. It is left up to them and whatever the recommendations are –

MS MICHAEL: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order, the hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, the speaker is supposed to be speaking to the resolution. When we go back to the bill, he can get twenty minutes to speak on the bill – a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order, but I remind the hon. member that we are speaking to the resolution and the resolution discusses the time, the six months hence. So I ask the speaker, the hon. the Member for Exploits, to come back to the resolution, please.

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just for the information of the people out there who are watching, every time that someone interrupts for a point of order we lose our time. Some time, it is valuable time – maybe that is what she is thinking because what we are trying to explain that the thing that she brought forward cannot work, it is not what we are looking for, it is not what the people want, so maybe that is what her problem is.

As I was about to say, we have no influence on the commission report when they come in with the boundary changes. Whether that was six months down the road in what she was saying, or within 120 days, or in 2016, or 2026, it is not going to make any difference.

The Chair of the commission is appointed by the Chief Justice.

MR. OSBORNE: The other four are appointed by the Speaker.

MR. FORSEY: I thank the Member for St. John's North – South, I am sorry; my apologies. He left South and went North. I think that is North, but he came from South, so the Member for St. John's South. Thank you very much. The other members are appointed by the Speaker, that is correct, but we have no influence on the decision that they make. Like I said earlier, we have talked to a lot of our constituents out there and we have many ways of making contact today with constituents.

I do not think I want to go back to the time – and I believe the gentleman was Speaker of the House as well, from Lewisporte, I might add. Jim Russell was our Member for Lewisporte at the time and it was before 1975 because in 1975 the district became Exploits, the beautiful District of Exploits – Mr. Jim Russell, yes. He was our member, also Speaker of the House, and the Speaker of the House today is from Lewisporte as well. So that part has not

changed, they are still from the same community, but they serviced a different district. They represented a different district, and that is the point I am trying to make.

Why are we so afraid of changing? I have always said, whenever I spoke to a group, especially students, you should never mind change because if you make choices – and there are all kinds of choices; it is your choice to do certain things. If you make a choice that does not work out that well for you, you can make another choice. You can make a change. That is what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. We are making a change, hopefully for the betterment of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We are going to recommend that the districts be put down to thirty-eight. We are doing it for several reasons. Number one, it needs to be done. A lot of people have told us they wanted it done. We have a Premier who is willing to make some of those tough decisions and as a caucus we support it. It is not something that we have not discussed before because we have. Unlike the Leader of the Third Party, I do not know if she discussed it, but we have. We have discussed it, Mr. Speaker.

Now what we want to do is move forward with this very important piece of legislation. I know the Opposition are supporting it. In what manner we are not exactly sure, but I know they are. They will have their chance to speak.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly cannot support the amendment put forward by the Leader of the Third Party.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am standing now to speak to the hoist amendment which was just introduced into the House. Just for purposes of those who may be watching or listening, if it was not already explained, I am pretty sure it was, but the hoist

amendment essentially delays this process by six months to allow for study and/or consultation.

It is my opinion that all this does is guarantee that this process will be slower and that there will definitely not be an election in 2015 as the law calls for.

Now, I think we have made our points so far in this House. I had an opportunity to speak at length earlier today. We generally support seat reduction. We, as opposed to what the Premier stated earlier today, are not going to obstruct this, nor are we going to rush this. We are going to give this the time it needs and the due diligence it deserves, as any piece of legislation should have in this House. We are going to do this right.

We wish that this was done as per the normal procedure, as was done through law, a fixed election in 2015 and an electoral boundaries commission appointed in 2016. We think that would have been the proper route; however, we are faced here today with a government that has brought this forward. It is a government that has a majority and will get their will, as they have done on numerous other bills including Bill 29. A government with a majority will get what they want.

If you really want to do this process right or delay this process, we think you should take that off the table and do it as it was supposed to do. As I stated here earlier today, the natural evolution – and these are the words of government officials – was 2016; this is unnatural.

This government will use their majority. The people of the Province would like to see an election as per the law, as per the fixed election date, as it is supposed to happen. They would like to see a Premier and a government with a mandate. This hoist amendment will guarantee that does not happen. Therefore, we are not prepared to support the hoist amendment, but we are prepared to continue debating this bill, as is our job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to stand and speak to this hoist amendment to Bill 42, An Act To Amend The Electoral Boundaries Act. I fully support this hoist amendment. I believe that it is in the best interest of the people of the Province. Mr. Speaker, that is what we should be doing here this evening, looking at and exploring really, ultimately, what is in the best interest of the people of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that our electoral process, our governance process does not belong to the government, it does not belong to the Opposition, and it does not belong to the Third Party. It belongs to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I think that is a foundational principle of our electoral process. It is a foundational principle of our governance that it belongs to the principal of the Province.

Every one of us here in this House has been given the responsibility, the right, and the honour to represent the people of our districts to ensure that what happens in this House is in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Nothing short of that, anything that we decide in this House is not about what is best for government or for the majority party. It is not about what is best for the Liberals. It is not about what is best for the NDP. It is about what is best for the people of this Province and what is in the best interest of the people of this Province. That is what we should be about here tonight, Mr. Speaker.

I want to stand and give a bit of a reality check. Mr. Speaker, I think that is what we need right now. We have heard the Premier earlier today say that he is willing to make the tough –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible)?

MS ROGERS: Yes, I am speaking to the timing of this. The Premier has said that he is willing to make the tough decisions. My colleague from the District of Exploits said, Mr. Speaker, as a caucus we have made these tough decisions.

Mr. Speaker, it is not up to the caucus to decide how our governance is done. It is not up to this caucus across the floor to decide how our electoral process will be done. It is not their right to do that. It is up to the people of the Province through an appointed electoral boundaries commission. That is who gives us guidance.

Mr. Speaker, the reality check that I would like us to consider is from January 19 to 22, probably, more than likely, we will be in this House of Assembly and we will debate. Probably, more than likely, government, because they are a majority, will pass changes to the Electoral Boundaries Act. That is probably what is going to happen. They have a majority.

They said they have consulted. Who knows who they have consulted with because they have not revealed to us who they have consulted with. No one knows where this magic number of ten has come from. Maybe this caucus does, but they have not revealed that to us.

Mr. Speaker, then that brings us to January 30. At January 30 the chief justice has thirty days to appoint the chair of the commission. Government says that it will possibly be before January 30, but that is what the chief justice has. That brings us up to about January 30. Other members of the commission are appointed by the Speaker of the House of Assembly no more than five days after the Chair is put in place. That brings us to February 6.

Then if the commission, in fact, Mr. Speaker, submits a report to the Department of Justice and Public Safety, 120 days later, four months later, after the Chair is in place –

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hesitate to rise, but given that the Leader of the Third Party also rose on a point of order, I feel compelled to do so.

The member is giving us a history lesson in the process of electoral reform. As you so rightly reminded members of this side of the House a few moments ago, we are to speak to the resolution which is only about hoisting the bill that is being discussed for a period of six months. It has nothing to do with the bill itself.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

I remind the hon. member we are speaking to the resolution. The resolution says that we move this off six months hence. Please confine yourself to those, please.

Thank you.

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

My intention, Mr. Speaker, is about the timeline. I am speaking specifically about the timing. Not a history lesson. That is not my intension. My intention and I believe that what I am speaking about at this point is the timing and why we need a hoist motion.

Mr. Speaker, if, in fact, the amendment is passed, we are looking at how possible is it, why it is important at this point to do a hoist amendment? We are looking at, is it even possible for what government has proposed? Is it even possible to accomplish within a timeline, within our legislation, within a legislative, predetermined time for an election?

Mr. Speaker, the commission submits their report to the Department of Justice and Public Safety four months after the Chair is in place. That brings us up to June. The minister then presents the report to Cabinet and tables it in the House of Assembly, which then passes amendments to the House of Assembly Act specifying thirty-eight districts.

That gives Elections Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, from June to September to create new maps, voter's lists, et cetera.

Elections Newfoundland and Labrador says it needs four months, at least four months, before an election to do this work and prepare the new districts for an election. That would take us to the end of September. September 25, in fact, is the last legal date to drop the writ.

One of the things that we do know –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS ROGERS: That is right, to drop the writ, yes, for our fixed election date.

Mr. Speaker, as sure as the sun rises, as sure as the sun sets, we know that all committees, all commissions, all inquiries take longer than their target date. We know that. As a matter of fact, we have been waiting two years for the report on the Residential Tenancies Act; we have been waiting two years on the housing and homelessness act.

MR. SPEAKER: I remind the hon. member to speak to the resolution, please.

MS ROGERS: We know how long things take, sometimes simply because they do, because consultation is a very intricate process; sometimes because of political interference; sometimes because governments do not want to release information. So, as sure as the sun sets, as sure as the sun rises, we know it will take more time. We know how elections work.

I am saying that I fully support the resolution, the hoist amendment, because it is not possible to do the work that must be done – even if the work is compressed, and if it is compressed in the way that the Premier has presented, it is not possible; the time simply is not there. That is the reality check I would like us all to consider, Mr. Speaker.

It is not whether or not it is going to be an extensive consultation process. That is not possible because the time is not there. The Premier and his caucus have proposed a truncated approach to electoral reform, and we know that our electoral system is the very foundation of how we live together as a society. It is how we manage our resources. It is how we manage our economy. It is how we look at our

future. It is foundational to our whole electoral system.

Mr. Speaker, I posit that it is simply not possible to do even this truncated version of consultation, even this sham of a consultation that this government is putting before the House right now. It is not possible; therefore, we need a hoist amendment. We cannot proceed in this way.

We know that the decisions that are made in this House are decisions, again, that are so foundational to our society and how we live together. Not only is it about how we manage our economy, it is about our social programs. It is about health, about education, about roads, about transportation, about justice, and population growth. So, Mr. Speaker, all that business happens in this House by the people who are elected by the people for the people to make decisions in the best interest of the people. So, I argue, in fact, that the bill that the government has put before the House, Bill 42, to amend the Electoral Boundaries Act, to do it in this manner is not in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Perhaps it is in the best interests of the caucus that who is putting it forth, who says that they have consulted. Perhaps it is in their best interests, but it is not in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Therefore, I believe that the motion to hoist this bill is in the best interests of the people. The government may not see that it is in their best interests – of course not, they would not see that. Perhaps the Official Opposition may not see that it is in their best interests, but I truly believe, because that is our role, to make decisions, to make legislation that is in the best interests of the people. Not in the best interests of government, not in the best interests of someone's party, not in the best interests of someone's own political career, not in the best interests of whether or not someone is going to win a seat or not, not in the best interests of whether or not if there is movement that somebody's seat will be more winnable.

Our moral obligation is to make decisions that are in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Therefore, I believe at this point until government can

propose a time frame that is respectful and realistic in terms of the work that has to be done for electoral boundary changes that the hoist amendment is in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. To do anything less is not acceptable. The people of the Province know; they feel blindsided by this – most people in this House feel blindsided by this. Most people are wondering where that number ten came from. I wonder. I am sure everybody on this side of the House wonders. There has been no explanation.

So, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the hoist amendment is about putting on the brakes; it is about offering some stability. We know in the current economic climate that we are in, we are in a precarious situation, rather than throwing our electoral system into chaos – because if this bill is passed, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will not know what their boundaries are and Elections Newfoundland and Labrador will not be able to be ready for September 25.

We know that getting ready for an election is not just about putting a candidate's name forward. In order for people to fully participate in the electoral process, communities need time. They need time to organize; they need time to figure out what it is they want in a representative in their community. To ram this piece of legislation through the House violates the ability and the right of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to fully participate in the electoral process. That is what is being done. By ramming this through the House it is absolutely violating the democratic rights of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, again –

MR. KING: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: A point of order, the hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am not going to repeat the message I left a few moments and the relativity to the hoist amendment, but I will say that it is an absolute insult to every single member of this House for the member to stand there and accuse anybody

of trying to ram this through in an undemocratic fashion.

We are here today following the process outlined in the House of Assembly rules and regulations. All members of this House are free to speak to all amendments, but it is highly insulting and out of order for any member to suggest that anybody else in this House is undemocratic because they do not agree with the tenure of the debate.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, to sum up our role this evening in this House, as each and every one of us stands in the House to either speak to the hoist amendment or to speak to the bill, is about looking at what is in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is not what is in the best interest of a particular party. It is not what is in the best interest of a particular political career. It is what is in the best interest of the people of the Province.

I am sure every member in this House knows that is their role. I am sure that every member in this House is working for that goal. I do believe that a reality check is necessary in order for us to stop and look at what are the ramifications of a bill that does not give ample time for thorough consultation, but also does not give the people of the Province ample time to fully participate in the electoral process, to have the time to organize, and to have the time to become involved.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would state that I fully support this hoist amendment. I would hope that other members in the House would also support this hoist amendment in order to put the brakes on this so that this can be done properly. Our governance system, our electoral system is the foundation of how we live together as a community, how we plan our futures, how we take care of one another, and how we ensure that our resources are well used in the best interests of the people.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: There being no further speakers, I call for the vote.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: The amendment is defeated.

On motion, amendment defeated.

MR. SPEAKER: We are now back to debating the original amendment.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) speak to the bill.

MR. SPEAKER: No, the hon. member does not have any time left on the clock.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Just to explain to the House, once the hon. member made the amendment, she lost what time she had remaining on her original twenty minutes.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South speaking to the amendment.

AN HON. MEMBER: The original motion.

MR. SPEAKER: The original motion.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly is a pleasure to stand in this hon. House and speak to Bill 42, An Act to Amend the Electoral Boundaries Act. Mr. Speaker, I just want to start off just to say that for this last term of office, the last three or three-and-a-half-years, we have debated a lot of legislation.

Some of it has been quite controversial. Some of it has been pretty routine, but this probably is one of the most important pieces of legislation that we have had to debate.

While quite often, I would suggest, I have had my disagreements with the Third Party on their positions on a number of issues, I have to say when it comes to this issue I do share a lot of the same concerns. Not all, perhaps, maybe not to the same extremes, but I do share some of the concerns.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues here that I would like to talk about, but I just want to start off with the whole concept of democracy. Really this is what this ties into; it ties into democracy. We have a long history here in this Province. I know over the last number of years as members we have had the opportunity to attend Remembrance Day ceremonies, and we realize the ultimate price that has been paid for democracy. We all value that democracy. We know there are places around the world where there are people fighting every day to have what we have.

Living in a democratic society is more than just simply having the right to vote. That is one portion of democracy, but there is a lot more to democracy than simply casting your vote every three or four years or whatever the case might be. It is also about rule of law. It is also about freedom of speech. It is also about freedom of assembly. It is about basic human rights, Mr. Speaker. It is also about having a functional Legislature. Ultimately, the rules, the laws, and the regulations that govern our free society, that legislation that leads to those rules of law, come from the Legislature.

We are tasked with the job basically of reviewing legislation. We are tasked with the job of passing new legislation. We are tasked with the job of amending existing legislation in order for us to better the society in which we all live. That is a responsibility I certainly take very seriously and I know it is a responsibility that every Member of this House of Assembly takes very seriously. If they did not take it seriously, I am sure they would not have raised their hand to say that I want to run for office and represent people.

It is not an easy job by any stretch. Sometimes people have this perception about people in public life. Sometimes we bring it on ourselves there is no doubt about it, with some of the antics that occur from time to time and things that happened. The reality of it is that everybody in this House understands the role of an elected member, of an MHA.

We all understand the responsibility that we are charged with. We all understand the time that it takes to perform our role, whether it be time in the House of Assembly, whether it be time in preparing for debate in the House, whether it be out and about in our districts speaking with our constituents, attending meetings, trying to solve issues on behalf of our constituents, attending public events, and community events in our district, Mr. Speaker. Not to mention the toll it takes on family life and the fact that you are always under scrutiny and in the public eye. We all understand that. We all take that on willingly. We accept that. Nobody twisted our arms and made us run. We all understand that. It is important to understand that we do have a very important and vital role to play in our democratic process.

Mr. Speaker, what is being suggested here – there are a number of items, but I wanted to speak first of all to the representation piece. What is being proposed here is that we would take what currently we have, forty-eight seats in this Legislature, and should this piece of legislation pass as proposed by the government, we will see those forty-eight seats reduced to thirty-eight seats.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are a lot of people in this Province, I think the majority of the people in this Province would like to see a reduction. I really believe that to be the overall public opinion. I think that there are a lot of people who see merit in it. As I try to look at what we do, the districts we represent, I believe that we can see a reduction. I do. I agree with people. I believe we can see it. I am not sure what that number is. That is one of my concerns: I am not sure what that number is.

The government says the number is thirty-eight. The Premier has been asked. It has been raised over here in the Opposition and it has been raised by the Third Party as to where did you

come up with the number thirty-eight. I have yet to hear a response – unless I missed it. I know it has been asked a number of times. I have yet to hear a response, or at least a satisfactory response, as to where the number thirty-eight came from.

Before we start looking at numbers, if we were to do this right – and it is important that we do this right because it will be another ten years before we get a chance to do it again. So the decision we make now is going to impact us –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. LANE: Actually not ten years, eleven years; that is right. We are going to be eleven years before we can reverse this. So, it is important that we do it right.

I do wonder to myself, while my gut feeling is that we can see a reduction, based on that fact that other provinces are operating with similar populations or even higher populations, have higher ratios than we have in a lot of districts, there are other provinces that have less MHAs – or MLAs they may be called in other parts of the country. So based on that, based on their numbers, even looking at Atlantic Canada, I believe that we can possibly see a reduction.

However, if we are looking at democratic reform, and this is all supposed to be falling under the guises of democratic reform, and if that is truly what we are trying to achieve – and I have had some conversations and listening to some of the talk that is out there – I do wonder to myself aloud: Are we not putting the cart before the horse? That is a question I would ask. Because it is one thing to go through a process that talks about do we have enough MHAs to cover districts in terms of geography, in terms of the number of people you represent. That is one piece of the equation.

The other piece of the equation that is not being considered here, unfortunately – and if we were really truly committed to doing it right, we could have started two years ago, for argument's sake, and we should have first been looking at how do we better operate the House of Assembly. Let's look at the Standing Orders. Let's look at legislative committees. Let's look at the role of MHAs and so on. Let's look at Cabinet and the

size of Cabinet. Let's look at how we operate the House of Assembly, how we operate the Legislature. Let's put those measures in place first to reform.

Once we have done that and we have reformed our Legislature and our House of Assembly and made improvements as we would want to see, and adopted best practice, then when it came time to determine the number of MHAs required not only would we simply be playing a numbers game with a ratio of MHA to the number of constituents and geography, but we would also be factoring into that equation do we have the appropriate numbers of MHAs and so on to accommodate our reformed Legislature, our committee process, and so on.

If you were truly going to do it the right way, I think we are putting the cart before the horse, and we would have done that first. That being said, that is just my opinion as to how I believe it could have been done and should have been done. If the government is serious, I believe it could have been done two or three years ago. This was obviously – I am not sure what the reason is of why it is being done now. The only reason I have heard is about cost savings. That is the only reason that I have heard.

Maybe there are other reasons, but it is obviously not something that has been considered by the government any length of time, given the fact that the Premier has called and had his own nomination for his party in his own district only before Christmas, given the fact the Deputy Premier, same thing, and I believe the candidate for Humber Valley.

On the government side, they have already held three nominations themselves, four districts which are likely going to change in some way. If this is something that you had been planning and we were planning to do this and do it right, it does not make sense to me that you would have done that, that you would have called those nominations in districts knowing that it was all going to change, which leads me to believe that this is just basically some new idea, some epiphany, whatever the case might be, that just occurred over the last month or so.

I am not sure why. We are being told it is about the Budget. I think we all understand the

situation we are in. We all understand it is going to require tough decisions, as the Premier has said himself; but when you look at the fact we are talking one-third of 1 per cent of the deficit, I am not sure that this is something that we would want to do now and we would want to rush through. Sometimes there is a price to pay for democracy.

Again, I want to reiterate, these comments are not to suggest that I do not favour seat reduction. Because again, I believe we can do with less, based on other provinces. My concern, which I think is a concern of all my colleagues – I believe the Third Party as well – is that we just want to make sure that it is done properly so that not only are we going to make sure that we save money where we can, but also that we have a properly functioning democracy, a properly functioning Legislature, and that people receive fair representation.

I know I look at my district, I am in an urban district. A lot of members are. I know the number of issues that I have to deal with, functions I have to attend, and so on. As I said, it is very busy; but I cannot even imagine what it would be like for a lot of the rural MHAs, for the Labrador MHAs, because not only do they have to deal with the phone calls from constituents on different issues and so on, attending functions and whatever, then they also have to have the time to get there.

I am also very fortunate; I have one municipality. We have MHAs who probably have – I do not know the numbers, but maybe ten, twenty, thirty communities. So, if I went to one firemen's ball, for argument's sake, there might be some who might have to go to twenty, and so on. Or if I am dealing with one council, there are some MHAs who have to deal with thirty councils and their issues and their concerns.

I know how busy they must be, or I can imagine how busy they must be. I could easily say yes, no problem, if you want to tack on an extra 2,000 or 3,000 people onto my district, it would not be an issue for me; but I think there would be issues in some other rural areas and some of the more challenged districts.

So, it is not black and white. It is not just as simple as just taking a bunch of numbers and drawing the line on a map. We heard, I believe, the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills talking about this gentleman. I think he said his name was Allan who sent us all an e-mail. In a very short period of time, or I am assuming a relatively short period of time, he was able to take a map, divide it up into thirty-eight pieces, and say here you go.

It is not that simple, though. It is not that simple. It is easy to just simply divide up a map geographically into a bunch of pieces. It is quite another thing to understand the issues associated to the districts, transportation to get to and from, the numbers of people living in a particular town, the number of towns, and those types of issues. Those people depend on their MHAs to represent them. It is very important that they get fair representation.

To arbitrarily choose a number of thirty-eight, a number in which we do not know where that number came from and what the rationale was, I have a problem with that. That is why we have proposed at least a range. We are saying thirty-eight to forty-two.

There will be people who might argue it should be wide open, let the commission choose the number, period. We realize the people of the Province favour a reduction. We realize that we believe we can do with less, so at least by proposing a range we are not tying the hands of the commission. It is giving them that flexibility.

They are being told it must be thirty-eight. Maybe when they do their review they will say based on a number of factors we can cut a map up into thirty-eight pieces, but in terms of fair representation we believe the number should be forty, for argument's sake, or forty-one, or forty-two, whatever it may be.

They do not have that flexibility. Under this legislation, even if they know that thirty-eight is a bad number, they are forced to make the best of that bad number. I do not think they should be forced to make the best of that bad number. If thirty-nine is the number, or forty, whatever it is, if that is the best number, then that should be

the number. That is my view, it is taking independent people.

I do not have any concerns. Someone talked about that some people are saying the government is going to do it so they can pick and choose who is on the committee and they can arrange the boundaries to their favour. I do not buy any of that. I agree with the government. I do not buy that. There is going to be a judge who is going to be appointed as the Chair. There are going to be four people on the committee, two appointed. They are all appointed by the Speaker, but my understanding is the practice of two by the government and two by the Opposition; one from the Third Party and one from the Official Opposition. I am sure that will be done. It will be done fair and make sense. I have no issue with that.

I have no reason to believe that there will be anything untoward, I really do not. I believe that if you put good people there and there is a judge overseeing it, that it is going to be done properly. It is going to be done fair and square. I have no concern there. Anyone who puts that myth out there, I do not support that myth. I will agree with the government on that point.

My big concern and I have others – I will have other opportunities to speak. My main concern right now that I want to speak about is the arbitrary selection of the number thirty-eight. If at the end of the day you go with an amendment which we have put out there – and I guess we are going to put in thirty-eight to forty-two – if the commission does the review, they have the flexibility.

I would say to the government if they come back, this independent group, thirty-eight to forty-two, and they say thank you for the flexibility, we went out there, we did what we had to do, we believe the number is thirty-eight. If they agree with that number, I do not have a problem with it, if that is what it is, but they may come back and say the number should be forty.

I do not know why anybody on either side of the House, given the fact that we all believe that this is an independent group, they will be professional people – I do not understand why anybody would be against –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would not be able to understand why anybody would be against that concept.

Mr. Speaker, that is what we are going to be suggesting. We have some other issues as well, but no doubt I am going to have another opportunity or two or three to speak. I know my colleagues will as well. I will save some of the other points for the next time.

I just say to the government, this is a very, very important piece of legislation. At the end of the day all anybody wants on any side here, I believe, is to do it properly, to do it fairly, and to do it right for the people we represent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to stand on my feet. I was not expecting to be here tonight, but to tell you the truth, if I am in St. John's, there is no place I would rather be. If I am away from my family out in the district, if I am in St. John's, this is where I want to be. It is great we are able to stand here tonight and debate.

My colleague across the way talked about democracy. You are looking at it right here. This is the exercise of democracy, the fact that we can be here and debate in a sensible forum. If we do not agree with one's opinions we can cross the floor and join another party. That is all democracy, Mr. Speaker. That is what people have fought for and that is certainly what we are so proud to represent here in this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague also talked about how important this piece of legislation is. It

certainly is. Literally, it is going to change the electoral map of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is not the first time it has been done, and it certainly will not be the last time it will be done, I am sure.

We have talked about the catalyst in this, what has caused us to be here today and those types of things, and we talk about the price of oil. Obviously it has already affected us greatly. You look into the short term and certainly it is going to have a huge impact on us as well. That is not exclusive to Newfoundland and Labrador. It is affecting other provinces right throughout the country, particularly Alberta, Saskatchewan, and other commodity-based economies. It is affecting the country as a whole.

I was only reading the newspaper earlier today, *The Globe and Mail*, and they were talking about how it is going to have a profound impact, revenue-wise, on the country. I think something upwards of just over \$4 billion. With regard to provincial revenues, I think the number that was put out there was over \$7 billion. If you look at that, it is a good chunk of change. That is just in revenue this year. We obviously face challenges, Mr. Speaker, and that is something that is very important. It is important to recognize that and certainly that is the place where you need to start.

The Premier has said everything is on the table. I think we are going to be entering into a lengthy process. Us as a government, us as Cabinet are going to enter into a lengthy process of looking at exactly what is on the table. To reiterate what the Premier said, everything is on the table, because it has to be at this point.

Of course, there are things we can do before the Budget process starts. That is why we are here today. We are able to do this before the Budget process. I cannot say it enough, there are other things to follow, and other suggestions have been made on both sides of the floor and in the public, I have heard. We are going to look at all of that.

This is a starting point. I think it is an important one. I have heard some members of the Opposition, I have also heard some people in the media as well talk about, this looks to be \$10 million over the next four years thereabouts –

approximately \$10 million, and saying, no, it is not really. It is just a shot in the bucket I think one person had said. It is a very small amount, \$10 million. That kind of bothers me, Mr. Speaker. If you are looking at facing a huge looming deficit – and it could be as great as \$1 billion, we do not know, because our fortunes are so closely tied to the price of oil.

There is not one line item that we can go after and cut one line item that is going to give us \$1 billion. It is going to be done through savings and it is going to be done through initiatives such as this one. It is going to add up. It is all smaller pieces. As I said, there is not one golden bullet. There is not one thing we can do to solve a problem when you are looking at looming deficits, as we are with the price of oil where it is.

I think this is a significant move. It is \$10 million over four years, but also you have to look at the pension implications. It is hard to give you a number on that right at this moment, but that could be a large number as well. If you are looking at not only the \$10 million but plus the pension implications, you are getting up to quite large numbers. It is something that if we can do it today, why would we not look at it today? We are facing issues today. It is not the first time this has ever been brought up, but let us deal with it today. I think it shows fortitude and it shows leadership on behalf of the Premier to want to do this today and not to put it off.

If we put it off for four years, again, it is four years for what? Why do we wait four years? That is the question I would like the Opposition – why wait the four years? Give me a real reason. Let's take the politics out of it and let's talk common sense. Why would you wait the four years? If it is something that can be done today following a process that has been laid out and been used in the past, why not do it today?

We have heard a number of people on both sides of the House talk about this. My colleague for Gander said even back when oil was \$139 a barrel this was a conversation being had. I know I have heard – I studied political science in university and many topics actually. You might be familiar with one of my professors, Steve Tomblin. We often talked about representation in the House of Assembly and whether it should

be bigger or larger, or whether it should be smaller and looking at other jurisdictions. This is not a new conversation; however, we do have a new Premier. He has taken it upon himself in a very short amount of time to face this head-on.

We have heard from the Leader of the Opposition. He has mentioned numbers throughout. I think he had said when he was speaking yesterday he has been speaking about this for the last number of years. He threw out a number of thirty-eight. It is kind of ironic that my colleague for Mount Pearl South is asking us where we came up with the number thirty-eight, but he has not asked his leader where he came up with the number forty. The Leader of the Opposition came up with the magic number of eight. We are not sure where he came up with it, but he was quite comfortable in it.

Also, what I find really strange – and it was interesting, I was following along on social media – when the announcement came out at 3:30 p.m., the Premier went before the mikes, the Leader of the Opposition was on his coattails right behind him saying we agree with what the Premier is doing and I can support it. That was the Liberal leader at 3:30 p.m.

The Liberal leader of 7:00 p.m. was very different – the same person, but a very different opinion. Obviously something happened between 3:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. What that is I have no idea, and I am not going to try to speculate what happened. Something happened that the opinions changed. I do not know why that is. I was reassured when I heard at 3:30 p.m. the Liberal –

MR. BALL: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER (Cross): The Leader of the Opposition, on a point of order.

MR. BALL: The Member for Terra Nova is actually misrepresenting what was said last Thursday in that media interview. What I said was the number could be forty; it could be higher or it could be lower, Mr. Speaker. It is a deliberate attempt here of misleading this House.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

MR. S. COLLINS: Mr. Speaker, maybe I did get it wrong, but then I looked to the VOCM little cartoon of the day and it was something with regard to a bouncing ball. Then I took from it that maybe I interpreted it right, that the opinions did change from 3:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Then I look at others in the media saying what is the Leader of the Opposition doing. He is at one place at 3:30 in the day and just a short time later, hours – we are not talking days; we are not talking that he went into deliberations over weeks and months, hours – the opinions changed. I do not know because I do not know who is running the show but his opinion has changed and that is fair enough.

MR. A. PARSONS: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, my question is if the Minister of CYFS gets all of his information from cartoons. The people out in the public are wondering.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

MR. S. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have obviously struck a chord. I hope the people are out there watching. I have been interrupted twice now and I have been speaking less than eight minutes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. S. COLLINS: I have been interrupted by the Leader of the Opposition. I have been interrupted by the Opposition House Leader,

both trying to prove their point. Mr. Speaker, you do not have to try to prove it to me. Prove it to the people. It has been out there in the media. Everyone has been taking about it, how they flip-flop. I was thinking it is awful cold for flip-flops in January, but the Liberals do not think it is. That is fine.

What has not changed is the consistency and the messaging on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, the reasons why we are doing it, the reasons why we will do it. It has not changed. So, while it is a developing story on the other side, it has been nothing but consistency here.

Mr. Speaker, if I could quote the Leader of the Opposition, if they would so indulge me, in the scrum following the Premier's announcement, I believe. The Leader of the Opposition says: Yes, and that is kind of – you know, we have had that in the past where, you know, they kind of give the number in order to actually set the boundaries and, you know, establish where boundaries would be. So that is not really an unusual process. If the Premier wants this to be at thirty-eight and, you know, he feels that it is the number, well yes, of course, I have no problem with that.

Now, I challenge him to stand to his feet and challenge that because I quoted him. Did I misread it? I would ask if he wants ten minutes to stand up and tell me how I misread that, he has the floor, but I did not misread it. He did change his opinion and why he did it, I do not know, but I did like the leader at 3:30 p.m. more so than 7:00 p.m.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand with a government, I am proud to stand with a Premier, who has been consistent, who not only talks the talk – because do you know what? We all say this and it was mentioned across the way: politicians sometimes get a bad rap because of course we do a lot of talking. Everyone says we do a lot of talking but not a lot of action. Not only does our Premier talk the talk, he is walking the walk and that is what the people of the Province see.

I spent the weekend in my district. I, like many people, go out and about. You talk to people whether it is over a coffee at the Irving or you are gone down to a Lions Club or a Legion. I

have talked to people. People generally – and I say generally because it is never 100 per cent of everyone. People generally really like this. They said it is about time.

We talk about former governments, former Premiers, both Liberal and PC. This has nothing to do with partisan stripe. When you look at looming deficits and crisis and things you have to do and things you have to deal with, who did they look at? Who have they looked at in the past? I will not mention Administrations. Whether it be the Tobin Administration or the Wells Administration, it does not matter. Who do they look at? They look at public servants first? Who are the first they cut? Public servants. You have your nurses, you have your doctors, you have your teachers, you have your police officers, you have your maintenance persons, and those are the people who feel it first.

What did our Premier say? We are heading into very difficult times but where are we going to look first? Right here, Mr. Speaker – right here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. S. COLLINS: Mr. Speaker, I hear the Opposition; they are riled up, and I understand that because I do not know how they can get to their feet and argue this point with the people of the Province looking at them. I do not know why they are scared to death, but they are scared to death. Change is not bad. Change will happen, change will continue to happen, but as long as you make changes –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. S. COLLINS: If I could, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. S. COLLINS: As long as you make changes with the right intention – and I think that is what this is about. Mr. Speaker, like I said, obviously we talk about the deficit, the looming deficit – the Minister of Finance actually pointed it out earlier with regard to the numbers and how we looked at other jurisdictions and representation.

As Member for Terra Nova, I have just over 10,000 constituents in my district. I am incredibly busy, and I would argue every member here could be as busy as they want in their district because there is always something to do, there is always someone to help, and there is always something to attend. I am the type of person I am district-focused, as many people are here. It is something I am very proud of and I try to get out to everything I can. I try to help whoever I can, but do you know what? If I am fortunate enough to be re-elected in the next election, if I am fortunate enough to be given another 2,000 or 3,000 people, whatever the case may be, I will serve them just as good.

I do not have to look any further than other jurisdictions. I have a good friend who is actually the MLA in Ottawa, I think is her riding. She has the largest riding in Ontario, Lisa MacLeod – she is actually running for the PC leadership now in Ontario. She has the largest district in Ontario, over 100,000 people. Do you know what? The grassroots connection that she has with her district and the connection that she has with her constituents are amazing; it is second to none. She has 100,000 people. Not to argue we should have that, and obviously it is a much different game in Ontario, but I am saying she can do her job effectively, so how can we argue that we cannot do our job effectively if we are looking at numbers in the range of 15,000 or 16,000. It is ridiculous, Mr. Speaker.

I tell you, like I said, I work hard each and every day and if the demands grow, which they will undoubtedly, I will work even harder. I think when we sign up, when we put our names forward for an election that is what we are signing up for; that is what it is. So if you have a problem with that, I would suggest you take your name off the ballot next time around; and if you are willing to work at, you are willing to work for the people of the Province and the taxpayers of the Province, sign up, and I would hope to see you here next time.

Mr. Speaker, I will not belabour much more. I just want to get a few points out. I have had strong opinions of this from the very first time I have heard it. It is a bold move. It is something I certainly appreciate. Like I said, I have heard it talked about, whether it be in my political

science classes at Memorial University or whether I was an executive assistant way back in the day in the Williams Administration. I heard rumblings of it then, even when oil was at \$139 a barrel.

It takes someone to pull the trigger, it takes someone to want to do it, and that is what we have here. We have someone with the courage, who said it is a tough decision, but I am willing to make it. I appreciate that not only as an MHA who stands in this House of Assembly, not only as a Progressive Conservative in Newfoundland and Labrador, but I appreciate it as a resident. I appreciate it as a parent. I appreciate it, because we have not seen it in the past.

You know what people say: Why have you not done this before? The Leader of the Opposition was up yesterday. Where was the minister three years ago? He was not in the Premier's chair, I would say. How long has he been in the Premier's chair? Mere months. How long did it take him to do this? Mere months. That is what I call action. Enough talk. Let's get it over with. Let's do the action.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: That is why I stand proudly behind this Premier. I support his actions. I can tell you I have a good relationship with my district. I can tell you overwhelmingly, the folks that I have talked to appreciate him as well. They appreciate the courage and the bravery it takes to make a decision like this.

I know we are not going to have everyone. Perhaps the NDP would like to have a filibuster. That is fine. I would love to spend the evening with you folks. If we want to do that, it is completely fine. As I said, when I am in St. John's, I would as soon be in the House of Assembly earning my money than I would be at home sleeping. If that is what it is going to take, let's do it.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I just want to touch on a couple of more things. Before I got up here I said I do not know really what I am going to talk

about, I have a few things I want to get off my chest. There are a few things that have come up just recently. A couple of things have been brought to my attention, so I want to talk about it.

I spent two-and-a-half years as a Parliamentary Secretary under –I am glad the opposition members are laughing. I spent two-and-a-half years, and I could talk about the role I played and the great work that was done in the Department of Health.

It is interesting that the Opposition House Leader was up tonight saying lead by example, cut your Parliamentary Secretaries, cut this, cut that. The Opposition House Leader makes the equivalent to a Parliamentary Secretary, \$27,000 on top of his base MHA pay, and he is up criticizing us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. S. COLLINS: Mr. Speaker, when I talk about how proud I am of our Premier and of our government of looking in before looking out, I would say to the Opposition House Leader, why do you not start looking in before you start preaching out?

MR. JOYCE: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands on a point of order.

MR. JOYCE: I want to remind the minister this man here is elected, unlike the Minister of Justice, who is not elected.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is not point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

MR. S. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Bay of Islands is obviously still bitter from the time he had to step out of

government and become an office official with the former Premier. That is fine. I do not know what he got paid, but I have heard different stories on what it took to get him out of that position. Anyway we will leave that where it is.

MR. JOYCE: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for Bay of Islands on a point of order.

MR. JOYCE: The minister is making a statement which is factually incorrect. When I stepped aside for Clyde Wells I offered my seat, Mr. Speaker, pension and pay with it. You are factually incorrect.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

MR. S. COLLINS: Mr. Speaker, I am factually correct. That is why it hurts so much to hear, but that is fine. I am going to leave that where it is.

I have three minutes left and I do not want to put all the attention to the Liberals. I also want to talk about the NDP because of course they get on their high horse a lot and talk about you have to do this, you have to do that.

Do you know, Mr. Speaker – and this is very interesting, it was just something pointed out today. I should have known, but now I do, and now I want to share it with the rest of the House. In a party of three, there is a caucus Whip getting paid \$13,000 on top of their base MHA pay.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know, I am not a Whip, and I have never been. Maybe I can consult with my Whip, I do not know.

MR. A. PARSONS: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

MR. A. PARSONS: I would suggest that if the minister is going to plagiarize James McLeod, he should at least give him credit for the information.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. S. COLLINS: Again, Mr. Speaker, it was James McLeod and myself who had the original conversation about the Opposition House Leader getting the extra \$27,000, but that is fine. We are talking about a party of three that has a Whip.

MS MICHAEL: A point of order.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Signal Hill –Quidi Vidi on a point of order.

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the speaker is not speaking to the bill, number one; and number two, if he has a criticism of the legislation that rules this House, then make the criticism of the legislation, not of the parties in the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order, but I would remind the minister to conclude his topics.

MR. S. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My point, Mr. Speaker, is we are talking about efficiencies in the House of Assembly, efficiencies in the people's House, and efficiencies with taxpayer's dollars. Before you preach, look within. That is why I stood on my feet tonight and that is why I am so proud of this Premier because he has done that. Before he has looked outward he has looked inward. I can appreciate it and I respect it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. It has been an absolute pleasure to stand on my feet in the people's House and speak for nineteen minutes. Hopefully I may get an opportunity to get up again.

It is a learning experience for me as well, because I have learned already so much tonight, whether it be from James McLeod or whether it be from the papers that I read, whatever the case. I hope to be able to share that with the House of Assembly, and as well the people watching at home because it is very important.

The Member for Bay of Islands has not stopped the whole time I have been here. I will say that I got a chainsaw for my birthday so I am used to that noise in my ear all the time. That is sort of what it is, all the time, which is disrespectful. That is fine. That is absolutely fine.

Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat now, and I really appreciate –

MR. JOYCE: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands on a point of order.

MR. JOYCE: He might have pins in his ears, but he did not have it from the people of the West Coast who asked him to come out for a public meeting on the hospital when he did not have the intestinal fortitude to go out there, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

MR. S. COLLINS: I wish to use up my last twenty seconds, Mr. Speaker. It is ironic that they talk about – well, let us talk more specific to the bill, when the member is up talking about the West Coast hospital.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, it has been an absolute pleasure to speak to this. It is an important piece of legislation. I think we are standing on the right side of the decision and I hope the others would do the same.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I remind the minister his time has concluded.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I recognize the hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

From time to time over the last three years I have listened to the hon. Minister of Education, and the Member for Port au Port, Mr. Speaker, so I would like to say a few words.

Illitanganituinaaluinikkua. Tan Atin ego.

The reason I said that, Mr. Speaker, is that the Member for Exploits said there is nothing unique about Labrador. I call upon him on a point of order to stand up and translate what I just said.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. EDMUNDS: I do not know about the Member for Lake Melville and the Member for Labrador West, to listen to the Member for Exploits say there is nothing unique about Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

I also listened to the Minister of CYFS. He said let us remove the politics from the legislation. Maybe we should, and if we did, do you know what? I dare say we would be into an election right now. If you remove the politics from the legislation, we would be into an election. What is the real reason for this legislation?

I would like to talk a few minutes about the four seats in Labrador, Mr. Speaker. I listened to my hon. colleague. The Member for Gander talked about the advancements in technology. Maybe I will suggest to the Member for Exploits the next time we add FaceTime legislation. Maybe we ought to go on some other forum.

Advances since 2003 – well, let's talk about transportation. Guess what? In some areas of this Province transportation has gone back to the 1970s. It has gone backwards since 2003 when some government took over.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the comments from the Minister of Finance earlier today. What were the words? I do not know about Labrador. Those were his words. You can check Hansard I am sure. I do not know about Labrador. This is a government we are trusting for four seats in Labrador. We have a bigger problem in Labrador. We trust this person with our finances and he does not know about Labrador? I think we have a big problem.

Mr. Speaker, we talked about logistics. My colleague, the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, talked about the challenges travelling in her district about driving. The Member for Lab West, like I said today, has to fly 1,800 kilometres to get home. If he had to drive it would take him thirty-one hours straight. The Member for Lake Melville would have to drive for eighteen hours, and that is if he is lucky.

For me to drive from St. John's to Nain, I would have to drive just under forty hours, by car or truck, by boat, and by snowmobile. Mr. Speaker, I can do it, but I do not know how many more people in this hon. House can actually do it. It would take me forty hours. I can leave here and go to Cuba in four-and-a-half hours. It takes me two days to get home.

Let me talk about some expansion. Two years ago I left Makkovik on a caribou hunting trip, when it was still legal. I drove up to Hopedale; I went up the Adlatok River. The Member for Gander is well aware of it. I stopped for the night and I drove west the next day. I drove west, Mr. Speaker. When I turned around I was closer to the Smallwood Reservoir than I was to my own home. I was not even close to the Minister for Lab West's district. That is how big Labrador is.

If you want to talk about the size of Labrador, as my colleague mentioned, you can fit the Island portion in it twice. Currently, we have 8.3 per cent of the total complement of seats, as I said earlier today – 8.3 per cent. If we reduce the number of seats – and I have no problem with that, we do not have a problem with seat reduction. What we are saying is that there is uniqueness in Labrador; let it stay at four.

Four of thirty-eight is 11 per cent. We would have a whopping 11 per cent of the seats in the

Province. With all of the challenges we have, we are increasing our representation in this House by 2.7 per cent. Amazing, maybe we ought to set the boundaries by size.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. EDMUNDS: Thirty-eight? You would have twenty-five from Labrador, the rest from the Island. That would be unfair. I would even agree with that being unfair, Mr. Speaker. Is it too much to ask that the decisions that have been made since 1979 say that Labrador have four electoral districts?

If you want to talk about reducing, some of the terminology I would use would be the sense of alienation, isolation, frustration, and disempowerment. These are things we are hearing in our district. I know for a fact, and I know the Member for Lake Melville, as well as the Member for Lab West – actually, the representation from Lab West came out publicly and said they do not agree with it.

I cannot fathom the backlash if there is a reduction of seats in Labrador. Believe me, I live there, and unlike the Minister of Finance, I know about Labrador. Unlike the Member for Exploits, the people in Labrador know there is uniqueness. They know there is a cultural difference. There are cultural differences in the Conne River area. There are cultural differences on the West Coast. I acknowledge that. There is uniqueness. There is also uniqueness in Labrador. In one district in Labrador we have three of the four Aboriginal groups represented – three of them.

We talk about the South Coast of Labrador. We talk about NunatuKavut. That is their homeland. We talk about the Innu from Sheshatshiu. One time there was an organization called NMIA, referred to both the Innu groups in Labrador as the Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association. They have since changed.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am going to stop my commentary right there. I am hoping to get a chance to speak on it later on because I think it is a very important issue. It is not like we are asking for sixteen of thirty-eight seats. We are asking that the four in Labrador remain the same.

Overall, we do support that. Yes, maybe there is a need for a reduction but the commission should decide – not to be dictated by the Premier. That does not smell of democracy. To me, that is more leaning towards being told what to do, and that is not democracy, Mr. Speaker.

Right now, I would like to stop my commentary and introduce a raised amendment on the protection for the four Labrador seats. That all words after the word “That” be deleted and the following substituted therefore:

This House declines to give second reading to Bill 42, An Act To Amend The Electoral Boundaries Act because it does not offer protection for the special status for the four seats for the regions of Labrador.

Seconded by the Member for Cartwright – L’Anse au Clair.

MR. CROSS: (Inaudible) Mr. Speaker, seconded by the Member for St. John’s North.

MR. SPEAKER: The House will stand in recess to look over this amendment and see if it is in order.

Recess

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

We have reviewed the proposed amendment and the amendment is not in order.

I recognize the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am disappointed nevertheless, but I do have a few minutes to carry on.

I would like to talk of some of the challenges. If you look at proposed legislation based on population, I guess if you are on the Avalon Peninsula it is good to see the majority of the seats in one place. It certainly speaks volumes for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. I would say the proposal to reduce the number of seats has a lot more damaging effect over there, Mr. Speaker, than over here. I just wanted you to know that.

Speaking on Labrador, Mr. Speaker, and I know my colleagues will speak on the other issues that our leader has put forward in terms of amendments. I would like to talk about the resources and the difference in resources in some more rural areas and some of the more centralized areas. Government Service Centres, I would say in most major centres across this Province, Mr. Speaker, even as far as, say – Happy Valley-Goose Bay is one of them, Lab West is probably another one, service centres. Someone who has an issue that requires the services of either the federal government or the provincial government can walk right into a service centre and say I need help.

Mr. Speaker, in Natuashish and in Hopedale, they do not have that benefit. Guess who they call? Over the last few years my hon. colleagues and throughout the rural parts of this Province – you may reference my colleague from Cartwright – L’Anse au Clair. How many calls did we get regarding birth certificates, regarding marriage certificates, regarding unemployment insurance benefit inquiries, job searches? How many lists do we have of people in our districts who are looking for work but cannot get work at projects like Muskrat Falls, which I will get into now in a few minutes. I certainly have some issues around Labrador’s contribution to the finance of this great Province.

Staying on services, people have called for licensing, vital statistics, CYFS issues, community issues, regional issues, and provincial issues. Mr. Speaker, more often than not an individual who comes to me – I have to get authorization from them, send it out, wait for the agency to contact me to find out what can be done. This happens on a daily basis.

We talk about assistants for our offices. Mr. Speaker, I could use another assistant. I am sure the Member for Cartwright – L’Anse au Clair could use another assistant. The Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace can use another assistant. I am sure there are members across the way who live in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, who could use more assistants.

It is not an easy job we do. We live by, more often than not, public opinion. We are criticized, we are praised, and we are stretched from one end of our district to the other. I tell

you in my district that is a lot of stretching. I may have the smallest populated district in the Province, Mr. Speaker, but you can fit three-quarters of the Island portion of the Province into my district.

If I were to travel doing constituent business in my district, it would take me six days. I could drive from here to Clarendville, to Carbonear, how many districts would I pass through in an hour and a half? More than one; 1.8 kilometres you can drive through a district. I will reiterate, the Member for Labrador West has to drive 1,800 kilometres of travel to get home. He can do it by airplane, and it takes a while.

The request for protection of four seats in Labrador is not coming from my district, because according to legislation the District of Torngat Mountains is okay. There are not going to be any changes. For valid reasons, government accepts that. It does not talk about the uniqueness of the three other remaining districts and what damage is going to be done to the people who live there if they are going to take a seat away to go from four to three.

Today the Speaker recognized the Mayor of Wabush as being in the gallery. This is a person from Labrador. He lives in the District of Labrador West. He does not want the seat taken away. Mr. Speaker, he would like to see four seats.

We have had petitions from Lake Melville. There are petitions from Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. They are saying we want to see changes, but we would like to see protection.

I think there are three petitions that have been tabled so far, all from Lake Melville. They are saying we do not want to see the number of seats in Labrador, which has a great big total of four out of forty-eight, being reduced. What impact is that going to have other than impact on services that members can provide? It will be adding to an already over increased workload.

I will reference the Member for Lake Melville, who is a minister. He has a lot of staff, he has a lot of issues. I will say it again, he has a lot of staff. Some of us do not have a lot of staff, Mr. Speaker, but we do have a lot of issues. I have talked to the minister and I am sure he

understands and he can appreciate, and I certainly hope he agrees that the number of seats in Labrador remain at four. I dearly hope he thinks so, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to his commentary when it is his turn to speak.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about what Labrador gives back to this Province. What does Labrador give back to this Province? The former Premier said that we own Labrador – we own it. People talk about Labrador as a warehouse, it is just our shed. When you want something, you go out in the shed and get it.

Let's talk about the Iron Ore Company in Labrador West: a major contributor, a major employer. It has its ups and downs, but where is it located, Mr. Speaker? The last time I checked it was in Labrador, Labrador West. There is another big project, Mr. Speaker, Churchill Falls, the Upper Churchill Falls, supplying the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Where is that? The last time I checked it was in the Lake Melville district, Labrador.

About fifteen years ago there was a discovery in a place called Voisey's Bay. I actually worked there, Mr. Speaker, at one point. I was a monitor. I was there through two protests because the people who lived there said this is not happening, not this time. We are going to benefit from this. It caused a lot of commotion, but the Inuit people up there and the Innu people said no, you are not taking this from us unless we get a piece of it. Where was that? That was in the Torngat Mountains district in Labrador.

We have a new link coming in through Labrador. You have to take a ferry from St. Barbe to Blanc Sablon then you can drive. Albeit, not all the time you can do that, given the situation and the state of that highway, but that link is there. It is not finished. There is lots of work to be done on it, but where is that? The last time I checked, Mr. Speaker, it was in Labrador.

This government by all indications wants to reduce the representation from up there. That is another case of opening the shed door and taking what we want and the hell with the people who live up there. This is the attitude that we again – and you wonder why there are issues up there – with isolation, with alienation, with frustration,

with disempowerment. You wonder why people up there feel like that from time to time. Well, that is why. This is the exact reason why the people up there feel the way they do.

They are not asking for a majority of the number of seats in this Province. They are not asking for 50 per cent plus one. They are asking to stay at 8.3 per cent. If the number goes to thirty-eight like the Premier is pushing for, have that 2.7 per cent increase, have that increase of 11 per cent in the provincial Legislature – let's have it. Let them have it. Let us have it. Are we going to overrule anything that is contentious at 11 per cent? When I was in school, they did not work that way; but it still leaves that representation from the Labrador portion of this great Province in the hands of four MHAs who will bring their voices to the provincial Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

We support that, we support reductions, of course, but out of thirty-eight seats is there a great problem with this government protecting four seats? Are we asking for a lot? I think not. We are asking for between 8.3 per cent and 11 per cent representation at this provincial Legislature.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

MR. S. COLLINS: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, on a point of order.

MR. S. COLLINS: Earlier when I was speaking, Mr. Speaker, I made some comments regarding the Member for Bay of Islands, and while I did not mean to insinuate any untoward action that he had in his past dealings with any jobs or past Premiers, if I did insinuate, I apologize. So, while I made a lot of good points while I was up, I certainly take back any comments I made about the Bay of Islands member.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands, speaking to the point of order.

MR. JOYCE: I thank the minister. It takes a lot of courage to do that.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

This House now stands adjourned until 2:00 p.m. tomorrow, Private Members' Day.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2:00 p.m.