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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we start today's proceedings, I would like to welcome and recognize Mary Hodder in the gallery. Ms. Hodder is a former MHA and the first female Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I have consulted with the House Leaders of the three parties and with the consent of the hon. Members, starting today, the House will introduce a temporary proceeding immediately after Statements by Members entitled Honour 100, to remain in effect for the duration of the commemoration of the First World War and Battle of Beaumont-Hamel by the House of Assembly.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: We have Members' statements today by the Member for the District of Exploits, Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, Stephenville – Port au Port, Burin – Grand Bank, Terra Nova and Labrador West.

I recognize the Member for the District of Exploits.

MR. DEAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the efforts of the Seaport Skaters Club of Botwood. Between February 26 and 28, the Seaport Skaters hosted the Skate Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Skating Championships, the pinnacle event of the provincial skating calendar.

This year's competition saw over 225 participants, approximately 40 coaches and 25 officials travel to Botwood. Along with the members of the Skate NL Board, family, friends and local residents, it's estimated that some 1,200 people visited the Harry Ivany Arena to see our best skaters in competition.

An event like this is only made possible through the dedication and hard work of many people. Over 75 volunteers including parents, grandparents, club alumni and organizing committee members contributed to help make the competition an overwhelming success.

As the former Mayor of Botwood and a past president of the club, I am so proud of my community and our skating club. This was an impressive accomplishment for a community of our size and a skating club with less than 90 members – typical of our can-do attitude.

I ask all hon. Members to join with me in congratulating the Seaport skating club of Botwood on a job well done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair and Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Famous footballer, Alex Karras, once said, "Toughness is in the soul and spirit, not in muscles."

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to pay tribute to one very tough constituent of mine, one who has shown true strength in the face of steep adversity, an individual who, like many others, battled cancer and after an intense and difficult journey won.

Since 2009, Yvonne Jones of Mary's Harbour has waged war against breast cancer. She underwent two surgeries, endless rounds of chemotherapy and radiation, and after four years of oral prescription, she has won the war.

Last week, Yvonne was granted the privilege of ringing the bell to signify that she is now cancer free. Mr. Speaker, throughout her journey, sometimes at her lowest points, I marvelled at how she continued to reach out to others.

Yvonne has been involved in numerous initiatives to raise awareness of breast cancer and to raise funds for individuals travelling from Labrador for treatments. An excellent example is

Air Daffodil, a program that's provided over 300 flights for Labrador cancer patients to date.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in celebrating Yvonne's good health and her continuing contribution to other people. She is an inspiration to us all.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Stephenville – Port au Port.

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it was wonderful to see you yesterday acknowledge the athletes who competed in the Special Olympics visiting this House.

It is with great pleasure that I rise today to acknowledge a phenomenal athlete and fine young man from the beautiful District of Stephenville – Port au Port. Twenty-six-year-old Christopher Dugas of Kippens took home a silver medal in the 100-metre snowshoe race and a bronze in the 200-metre race.

As a seasoned competitor, Christopher is no stranger to the award podium. In 2012, he took home a gold medal in the 800-metre race, and in 2014 in the Summer Olympics he received two gold medals while also setting a new Canadian record. Christopher credits his success to his rigorous training and coach Rosie Ryan Forsey. Rosie, who has been coaching athletes for over 30 years, was also a co-founder of the Bay St. George Special Olympics chapter in 2008.

I ask the Members of this House to join me in congratulating both Chris and his coach Rosie as their achievement proves that the road to success is paved with hard work and dedication.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Burin – Grand Bank.

MS. HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Leon Slaney of St. Lawrence in my District of Burin – Grand Bank.

In February of this year, Mr. Slaney and his friend, Mike Edwards, were crossing a local pond on their way ice fishing when the ATV on which Mr. Edwards was travelling broke through the ice, immersing him in the frigid waters.

Although Mr. Slaney had no rope at his disposal, through quick thinking he retrieved a set of booster cables from his ATV, and carefully approaching Mr. Edwards on the ice, used the cables to pull him from almost certain death, Mr. Speaker.

With Mr. Edwards facing hypothermia, Mr. Slaney gave him his dry snow pants, built a fire and called the local fire department, which had members on the scene with dry clothing within an hour. Mr. Edwards was then transported to the US Memorial Health Centre where he was treated for low blood pressure from being in the cold water, and a shoulder injury. He was released later that day.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members in this House to join me in thanking Leon Slaney for his quick thinking and courageous actions in ensuring a potentially disastrous outcome was averted.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Terra Nova.

MR. HOLLOWAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the Clarenville Area Chamber of Commerce.

Formed in the 1960s, the Chamber of Commerce has become a business and economic development voice for the region, and it includes a membership of more than 140 individuals, businesses and organizations.

Each year, the chamber board hosts three signature events, including its Newfoundland and Labrador Christmas Ornament Project, the

Annual Craft and Home Trade Show and the Annual Business Excellence Awards Ceremony.

In 2007, the chamber's board of directors introduced the Business Excellence Awards Program to promote and recognize the exceptional achievements of its members. There are four award categories.

For the year 2015-2016, the award recipients are: Business of the Year, Eastlink; Small Business of the Year, Community Vet Hospital; Corwin Mills Community Cares Award went to Habitat of Humanity Clarenville; and Mr. Owen Blundon was inducted into the Business Hall of Fame.

The Clarenville Area Chamber of Commerce has provided great business leadership to the community for more than 55 years.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating this year's award recipients and the Clarenville Area Chamber of Commerce for its outstanding contributions to the business community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Labrador West.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize a pioneer of Labrador West who celebrated her 90th birthday on March 5.

Mrs. Joan Stamp moved to Labrador West in 1963 and continues to make Labrador City her home.

On Saturday, I had the privilege of attending a celebration with her family and friends where she was showered with congratulations from the Premier, Prime Minister, the Governor General, Lieutenant Governor and, yes, even a papal blessing from Pope Francis.

Mrs. Stamp has been deeply involved in Labrador West over the past 50-plus years and continues to be an active member of the Twin Cities Seniors Club and the Seniors Resource

Centre in St. John's. She has truly left her mark on the region.

For her volunteerism, Joan was awarded Woman of the Year, the Provincial Outstanding Volunteer Award and the Town of Labrador City Builder's Award.

I ask all hon. Members to join me with this birthday wish for Joan. We know the road has been long, with many unexpected twists and turns, but we hope that the rest of your journey is a walk in the park on a beautiful, sunny day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

The Commemoration of the First World War and the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel

MR. SPEAKER: Today, we start the Commemoration of the First World War and the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel in the House. It's going to take 35 or 40 minutes today, followed by the reading of names each day until all names are read; but I believe all hon. Members will agree that, while this is unprecedented to spend this much time in recognition of these events, these events are very important to the people of the province.

As the Speaker of the House of Assembly, it is an honour and a privilege for me to rise today and speak to a significant and noteworthy piece of history of Newfoundland and Labrador. I would like to recognize Andrea Hyde of the Legislative Library and Marie Keefe in my office, who has spent countless hours doing research, in collaboration with some other individuals that I will recognize today in the Speaker's gallery as well.

2014 to 2018 marks the centennial of the First World War and this year, 2016, marks the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel.

Throughout the First World War, the sons and daughters of the Dominion of Newfoundland, now Newfoundland and Labrador, sacrificed and served bravely in: the Royal Newfoundland Regiment; the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve; the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine; the Newfoundland Forestry Corps; members of

the Nursing Sisters and the Volunteer Aid Detachments; as well as other units of the Allied War Effort.

I believe it is incumbent upon this House, and all of us sitting here as Members and representatives of the people of our province, to give due recognition to those who lost their lives during the First World War.

We must ensure that the names and deeds of these heroes are forever remembered and celebrated not only by our present generation, but by all future generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

At this time, I would like to recognize and welcome the following guests joining us in the Speaker's gallery for this occasion: Mr. Frank Sullivan, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Command of the Royal Canadian Legion; Mr. Frank Gogos, Chair of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment Museum and Public Relations Officer, Newfoundland & Labrador Command, the Royal Canadian Legion; Mr. Dean Brinton, CEO of The Rooms Corporation; Mr. Greg Walsh, Director, Archives Division, The Rooms; Mr. Larry Dohey, Manager of Collections and Projects, The Rooms Provincial Archives; Mr. Gary F. Browne, author/historian, former Spokesperson for the Royal Canadian Legion NL Command, and former Chair of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment Advisory Council; and Jesse Wilkins, a Canadian peacekeeper.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: During the period from 1914 to 1918, this Legislature referenced the significance of the First World War on several occasions. I think it's important to highlight what was said 100 years ago; it is just as valid today.

On May 24, 1917, His Excellency, Sir W. E. Davidson, Governor of Newfoundland reported, "Honours, Awards and Distinctions have come to the Regiment in extraordinary profusion. Perhaps no other Battalion on the battlefield has been so abundantly recognised for its valour, its steadfastness and its resourcefulness."

The 1917 report to this Legislature identifies three outstanding occasions on which the Regiment has won renown: "1. The campaign in Gallipoli, including the winning and defending of Caribou Hill; the stout-hearted endurance through the blizzard in November 1915; the patient struggle against the ravages of enteric fever and dysentery; and the honoured place of the Regiment in the rearguard at the evacuation of Suvla Bay and of Cape Helles.

"2. The re-making of the Regiment after Gallipoli on the sands of the desert of Suez, when Colonel Hadow laid the foundations for the disciplined success in France.

"3. The charge on 1st July, 1916, in the frontal attack on the defences of Beaumont Hamel, when the Regiment moved out and faced death. That was the fateful day which first won for the name of Newfoundland the honour of the world. Sir Douglas Haig telegraphed: 'The heroism and devotion to duty they displayed on 1st July has never been surpassed.' " I believe that is still true today.

Part of what was said, and I quote from the Throne Speech of May 30, 1917: "It must be a source of intense pride to every Newfoundlander that the participation by this country in the struggle, through its gallant sailors and soldiers, has earned for them undying glory and the recognition by their Sovereign, their commanders and the British public."

Again in the Throne Speech of April 2, 1919, our survivors were welcomed home, and I quote: "I avail myself of this opportunity to extend a hearty welcome home to our sailors and soldiers who have represented Newfoundland so valiantly and well during the past four years amid the changing fortunes and bitter hardships of war. Mere words cannot express our feelings of appreciation and admiration of their wonderful work. Their deeds are eloquent and pass to judgment before them. On sea and land and in the air their worth has been proven and their fame has spread far and wide."

That same Throne Speech paid tribute to our fallen heroes, and again I quote: "Those who have died for the Right have bequeathed us a precious legacy – the undying memory of duty performed even to the death, and the eternal

fragrance of that love which exceeds all others – that a man lay down his life for his friends. Their loss to the country can never be fully estimated because it is impossible to compute the value of the chivalry, honor, self-sacrifice and devotion to duty which these men possessed in the highest degree. We can only endeavor to prove worthy of the glorious heritage which they have purchased for us at such a cost.”

Now a century later we will honour this heritage once again and recognize this significant piece of our history, by entering into the official record of our Legislature the names of those from the Dominion of Newfoundland who lost their lives.

The names are compiled from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records, which are believed to be the most accurate and complete listings available.

During 2016, the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel, special attention will be given to the bravery, suffering and loss our people experienced on July 1, 1916 – the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

On July 1, 2016, The Rooms will open the Royal Newfoundland Regiment Gallery and the Fortis Courtyard and Amphitheatre on the grounds of the former Fort Townshend, where the first Newfoundland Regiment was formed in 1795. These are the largest First World War centennial projects in all of Canada. The July 1 ceremony will be simulcast nationally by the CBC and will form part of Canada Day programming on Parliament Hill.

I encourage all of you to visit The Rooms and experience this display when it opens on July 1.

Today, some of you may have recognized or noticed, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment Museum has created a display here in our lobby of Confederation Building. I encourage all Members, employees and visitors to take a few moments and visit this display.

While I am mentioning specifically the 100th Anniversary of the tragic Battle of Beaumont-Hamel, we also honour the contributions of our people at all battles in the First World War.

Lieutenant Colonel (Padre) Thomas Nangle, who was the subject of a Member’s statement earlier this week, Chaplain to our Regiment during the First World War, who was most recently named by our federal government as “A Person of National Historic Significance,” summed it very appropriately when he said, and I quote, “Ours was a Regiment of Heroes.”

I must also recognize and mention the outstanding efforts of those on “The Home Front,” who too contributed and suffered so much throughout that time.

During the First World War, women from across Newfoundland volunteered their time, energy and expertise to help Allied forces overseas and to boost morale at home. They raised enormous sums of money; they made and shipped clothing, medical supplies and other goods to troops overseas; they visited families who had sons, brothers, fathers, or husbands on the front lines; and they volunteered in local hospitals. They were more than 15,000 strong, those women of the Women’s Patriotic Association (WPA).

Following the First World War, the Veterans’ Association asked the people of the Dominion of Newfoundland to adopt the delicate, but hardy, forget-me-not as an enduring symbol of the sacrifice made by those who served. Today, I am providing to each of the Members of the House of Assembly a forget-me-not lapel pin, very similar to those worn 100 years ago, to remember our heroes. After I’m finished my remarks, I will ask our Pages to deliver these forget-me-not pins to each of the Members.

To honour our fallen heroes from the First World War, on each regular sitting day a different Member will rise and read 40 names from the list of over 1,600 from the Dominion of Newfoundland who paid the ultimate sacrifice. This tribute will continue until all have been rightfully honoured by this House of Assembly.

To begin the Legislature’s commemoration of the First World War, we will now hear remarks from the Premier, followed by the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for St. John’s East – Quidi Vidi. Following these remarks, I will read 40 names into the record, again followed by the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for St. John’s East – Quidi Vidi.

Following that, we will have a moment of silence.

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I want to begin by thanking you for taking on this initiative. I want to welcome your guests to the galleries here today. Also to The Rooms for the great work that you are doing in preserving this proud time in the history of our province, what was then, of course, the Dominion of Newfoundland.

Honour 100 is a time for us to reflect and to pay homage to our brave soldiers who were lost in World War I. It represents our government's commitment to commemorating Newfoundland and Labrador's First World War story.

During World War I, over 35 per cent of the men from this province between the ages of 19 and 35 left for war. When you think about it, this is a staggering number. Many of those were lost in the various major World War I battles. Newfoundland and Labrador's role in World War I touched every community across our province, and has since influenced the very fabric of our culture and it has shaped our history.

The people of this province answered the call, both at home and abroad, doing what they could do for their allies and for each other. That's who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We answer the call, we rise to the challenge and we fight for what's right.

Honour 100 will ensure that the sacrifices made were not made in vain. I encourage everyone to come together as a community to commemorate those lives that were lost and the incredible role that this province played in an important part of our history.

I encourage you to please attend the various events, the anniversaries, and learn more about our role and share our stories. In a few moments I will have the privilege of reading in 40 names.

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I share in the sentiments of the Premier in acknowledging and commending you for paying this tribute, and to honour those who paid the supreme sacrifice. Some say it's difficult to try and imagine what it must have been like a century ago. I believe it's impossible for us to imagine fully what it would have been like when the call went out for volunteers to travel to Europe to fight alongside Britain in the Great War.

In communities, we all know, throughout our province, they volunteered by the hundreds. They marched proudly down the streets of St. John's to waiting ships and they embarked on a journey to the unknown. We know, Mr. Speaker, that far too many never returned.

It's also very difficult to imagine what it must have been like a century ago when the messages started rolling in about the devastation, the terrible losses of life, the horrific injuries. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have gone to great lengths since that time to keep the memories alive of those soldiers.

Sadly, it's not been easy to forget the horrors of war because there have been so many incidents since then that drive home the reality of war and its impact, not only on soldiers and families, communities, our province and our country. People recall far too well the horrors of the Second World War, the Korean conflict. All of us remember how we felt on hearing that yet another soldier had been killed.

In these and other conflicts, not only soldiers made sacrifices but nurses, medics, merchant mariners, foresters, police officers. Even today, Mr. Speaker, many people continue to sacrifice their lives, their physical health, their mental health to defend our families, our country and our friends, and defend our freedoms.

What an amazing thing it is that so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians continue to demonstrate the courage to step forward for what our forefathers did a century ago and to continue to do the legacy that they created. Many of those volunteers were just teenagers. Some of them were even prepared to pretend

they were old enough or met the requirements because they wanted to represent our country.

As we read the names we'll try to imagine some of who they were. We'll think of their families, their moms and dads, their brothers and sisters and friends. We'll try to imagine some of their personalities, things that made them happy, things that made them sad, and stories they knew or stories they told, dreams they may have had for the future. Perhaps it was looking forward to coming home to marry or settle down, have their children, to raise a family. Had so many of them not died, think of the great-grandchildren and families that would have come after them. Think about their neighbours, the impact on communities. What a tremendous loss. What a tremendous sacrifice.

We do owe it to them, not only to remember the price they paid, but also to make their sacrifice worthwhile by taking full advantage of the freedoms and opportunities that they won for us.

As our children travel to Europe to visit their local cenotaphs or spend a moment in silence to pay tribute to their heroes, I believe they really get it. Quite often when we visit our memorials and attend events, you can see it on their faces.

Just as we've taken the time to educate them, they will educate the generations that come after us. This Honour 100 project will give them the resources to do that.

I want to commend everyone, our guests that are here today and all those that are involved in the Honour 100 project and its value to us as a people. It really matters and I think it's a very fitting tribute to those who gave so much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I'm very pleased to join with you, the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition in welcoming our guests and in thanking all those

who worked on what we're doing here today. We will stand in this House over the next few weeks to read the names of the men from this province who were killed in the First World War.

It is important that we always remember the horrors of that war and of other wars, and that we all do everything we can to protect our people from other conflicts. Neville Chamberlain himself said, "In war, whichever side may call itself the victor, there are no winners, but all are losers."

For this province, the Great War proved the truth of that, hundreds and hundreds of men, some of them so young that today they would still be attending high school, died on the battlefields of Europe. Hundreds more were injured, many so severely that they never truly recovered. If they had the term in those days, we would know they were suffering post-traumatic stress disorder.

While I am honoured, Mr. Speaker, to stand with my colleagues and read the names of the men who were killed, I would also like, at this time, to do what you did, to recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by women, and those were many. Women, too, went to the front, as nurses mostly, but they were there. They contributed at home, too, knitting for soldiers in the trenches, adding the work the absent men would have done to their own heavy loads and taking on new roles in society. Of course, it was largely the women in the decades after the war who cared for the men, the husbands and sons who returned.

Mr. Speaker, when I stand and read the names of 40 men who died, I shall do so with the heartfelt wish that we will all work together to keep our young men and women from the horrors of war, that we will work for peace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I will now read into the record the following 40 names of those who lost their lives in the First World War in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Royal Newfoundland Naval Reserve or the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine.

Lest we forget: Arthur John Abbott, Eli Abbott, Fred Abbott, George Abbott, Stanley Abbott, John Thomas Adams, Otto Herbert Adams, William Adams, Augustus Alcock, Joseph Alexander, Walter Ernest Alexander, A. Alfsen, Israel Anderson, James Anderson, Joseph Andrews, Walter Andrews, Gilbert Antle, R. Gordon Armstrong, Chesley Gladstone Arnold, Archibald Ash, John Joseph Aspell, Arthur Atkinson, Michael Atkinson, George Attwood, Duncan Atwill, James Atwill, Hezekiah Avery, Alexander Ayles, Edward Alphonsus Ayre, Eric S. Ayre, Gerald Walter Ayre, Wilfred Douglas Ayre, William Thomas Babstock, Arthur Badcock, Arthur Baggs, Esau Baker, George Baker, Nero Baker, Gilbert Baldwin, Henry Herbert Baldwin.

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Lest we forget: Uriah Baldwin, Mathias Ball, Arthur George Ballam, Ralph Norman Balsom, Samuel Bambury, George Barbour, Horatio Barbour, Lester D. Barbour, Wilfred Hedley Barbour, Enos Barnes, Herbert Bramwell Barnes, John C. Barnes, Lawrence Barnes, Maxwell Barnes, William Edward Barnes, Harold George Barrett, James Barrett, Leonard Josiah Barrett, Frank Barron, James Barron, Daniel Barrow, Alexander Barter, a young woman Bertha Bartlett, Isaac Bartlett, Joseph Patrick Bartlett, Mac Bartlett, Rupert W. Bartlett, William Washer Bartlett, John Barton, Albert Chesley Bastow, Frederick Donald Bastow, Gordon Clarence Bastow, Herbert Belbin, Herbert John Belbin, Stewart Bellows, James Alexander Bendell, Rance Bengier, Charles Bennett, Chesley Bennett, Edward Bennett.

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I will also now read into the record 40 names of those who lost their lives in the First World War in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Royal Newfoundland Naval Reserve or the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine.

Hector Bennett, James Bennett, Leonard Joseph Bennett, Peter Francis Bennett, William Bennett, William Bennett, Peter Bennoit, Benjamin Benoit, James John Benoit, Joseph H. Benoit,

Peter Benoit, Victor Joseph Benoit, Walter Benoit, William J. Benson, Wilson Benson, John Thomas Berrigan, Patrick Beson, Frank Gordon Best, Edward Bewhey, Simeon Billard, Archibald Walter Bishop, Caleb Golding Bishop, George H. Bishop, Wilson Bishop, Herbert William Blackall, Edgar Blackmore, Thomas Blagdon, John Blake, Zachariah Blake, George Blandford, Allen Blundon, Michael John Blyde, Matthew Bobbett, Patrick J. Boland, George Edward Bollard, Joseph Boone, Stephen M. Boone, Stewart Malcolm Boone, John Booth, and Harry Hooper Bourden.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will now read into the record the following 40 names of those who lost their lives in the First World War in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Royal Newfoundland Naval Reserve or the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine.

Lest we forget: John W. Boutcher, Hugh Pierson Bowden, Walter Bowe, E. C. Bower, Charles Bowman, Alphonso Boyd, Albert Brace, William James Brace, Malcolm Bradbury, Wilfred Bradley, George Philip Bragg, George Edward Brake, John Breen, David Brent, Albert Brenton, George Brenton, John Brest, Duncan Briely, Lewis Brinson, Alison Brinston, Angus Brinston, Augustus Perry Brinston, George Brinston, Leslie Brinston, Thomas Brinton, George Augustus Brocklehurst, Michael Broderick, Bertram Brown, Edmond Brown, Edward John Brown, Ernest Brown, George Brown, Henry Brown, James G. Brown, James Michael Brown, John W. Brown, Louis Brown, Orlando Brown, Patrick Joseph Brown, William Brown.

MR. SPEAKER: A moment of silence.

(Moment of silence.)

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: I rise today in this hon. House to remember the Cougar Flight 491 tragedy, which happened seven years ago on March 12, 2009.

I, along with fellow Members of this House, offer my deepest sympathies to the families and friends of the 17 victims who were taken from us far too soon as a result of the crash.

Mr. Speaker, such a tragic event reminds us of the harsh environment and conditions faced everyday by the women and men working in our offshore.

Government and our partners have made major progress on implementing the Wells Report recommendations and we will continue to improve regulations. Safety must always be the first priority of government and of industry.

Mr. Speaker, we understand the risks and dangers associated with working in the offshore and we are working to ensure everyone is provided with the safest working conditions possible.

Thank you.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement. Certainly the 12th of March will forever be remembered as a dark day in Newfoundland and Labrador when Cougar Flight 491 went down some 55 kilometres southeast of St. John's. Our province was changed forever.

The helicopter, as we know, was destined for an offshore platform where so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians depend on for their livelihood. Saturday brings a sombre reminder that with all the bounty that comes from our sea, so, too, does heartache, tragedy and loss.

My District of Ferryland, as well as many districts here, lost a number of people to this tragedy. This weekend I will have the honour of attending a minor hockey atom tournament, which is in memory of those that lost their lives

from the Southern Shore. It will certainly be a pleasure for me to do so.

My colleagues on this side of the House, along with the government side, want to remember those that lost their lives on March 12, and send along heartfelt condolences to their families and always remember them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement, and offer my condolences to the loved ones of the men and woman who died that day. None of us will forget it.

I remind the minister, though, seven years later the key recommendation of the Wells report remains not done: the creation of an independent offshore safety authority. S-92 helicopters still do not have 30 minute run-dry capacity. I ask that government do everything to not allow risky night flights over the fears of the offshore workers if we really believe in health and safety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to recognize March as Pharmacist Awareness Month. This month is celebrated every year across Canada to recognize and raise awareness of the contributions that pharmacists make to the health care system.

The department participated in the Pharmacists' Association of Newfoundland and Labrador's kick-off event last week, held at the Hampton

Inn and Suites in St. John's. Attendees included Memorial University's School of Pharmacy, the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns and the Newfoundland and Labrador Pharmacy Board.

Newfoundland and Labrador has approximately 700 practising pharmacists. These highly-trained, capable professionals provide a wide range of front-line services on a daily basis.

I would like to acknowledge in the gallery Glenda Power, the executive director of the Pharmacists' Association of Newfoundland and Labrador; Dr. Carlo Marra, dean of the School of Pharmacy at Memorial University of Newfoundland; and Mr. Richard Coombs, past president of the Pharmacists' Association of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Allowing health care professionals such as pharmacists to work to their full scope of practice provides an opportunity to enhance a patient's access to care. We will conduct a thorough legislative review to identify ways to ensure all health care professionals work to their full scope of practice.

At its very core, being a pharmacist is about understanding the needs of residents. It is about offering support and guidance as people navigate the primary health care system.

Please join me in thanking our province's pharmacists. I encourage everyone to talk with their own pharmacist to learn more about the services they can provide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement today. We in the Official Opposition join with the government in recognizing Pharmacist Awareness Month, and thanking the approximately 700 highly trained professionals who live and provide services to

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians throughout our province.

We know in a recent survey released by the Canadian Pharmacy Association, it outlines and highlights the respect people have and the importance they put on pharmacists in Canada and in our province: 95 per cent of respondents had a positive impression of pharmacists; 83 per cent believe that allowing pharmacists to do more for patients will reduce the cost of health care; and 92 per cent believe that pharmacists have a key role to play in our health care system. Pharmacists throughout our province are highly respected. They are a vital spoke in the wheel of health care.

Mr. Speaker, our administration had recognized the role they play. We've expanded those roles. We believe it's a good example of private business contributing to health care and benefitting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We join with the government in acknowledging March as Pharmacist Awareness Month and offer our sincere congratulations and thanks to pharmacists throughout our province.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I am very pleased to recognize and thank pharmacists for the work they do. Their role is essential in areas such as drug interactions and counselling to clients, and now includes vaccination, which is so convenient for people, especially in communities without a doctor.

I remind the minister that as the scope of practice widens, these services must be covered by MCP. If not, we have a two-tier system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Here in the House of Assembly yesterday, I asked the Minister of Finance, and she stated without qualification, that their government has, since December, achieved \$100 million in savings from the reduction in discretionary spending and travel.

I ask the minister: Can she assure the House of Assembly today that her statement and answer given yesterday, that they've saved \$100 million since December, is accurate?

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

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have plenty of portfolios; thank you for not assigning another one.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to answer the Member for Topsail – Paradise's question. I'm proud to stand in this House of Assembly and confirm that, through the work of this government in just 88 days since taking office, we have identified more savings of \$97.5 million for 2015-16.

These savings, which include discretionary savings, have been realized through things like no reallocation of dropped balances or savings, the reduction of parliamentary assistant salaries, the reduction of political staff, restrictions placed on hiring, restrictions placed on consultants and the elimination of discretionary travel as per the directive our government issued back in December.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: I have the document here, Mr. Speaker, that I'm happy to table at your discretion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the Member yesterday said that it was roughly in the vicinity of \$100 million that's been saved since December. When being pressed by reporters outside the House yesterday, she went on to explain this \$100 million was annualized.

Mr. Speaker, annualized means year-over-year savings and I'm sure she can explain some of that. She talked about travel and discretionary spending, quite often, has to do with purchasing of furniture, such as a chair. If you purchase a chair or don't purchase a chair for \$200, you've saved \$200.

How do you annualize the savings of the purchase of such things as furniture? How does that become a year-over-year savings when once you've saved it and never made the purchase, you've saved it?

Can the minister explain that accounting to the House of Assembly?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, some of the furniture that was taken out were the seats in this House of Assembly. In response to the Member opposite's question, our measures go further than the previous government. We have realized more savings in a shorter period of time.

I remind the Members of this hon. House that the Member opposite announced on November 27, 2014, that measures they had undertaken in a full six-month period, I believe, they anticipated to save \$90 million. In the short time we've taken office we've found almost \$100 million, as I said yesterday, and we're not done yet.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And so they should save more, because the circumstances in the province are much worse than they were on November 30, on election day. As a matter of fact, the Premier himself is on the record as saying hundreds of millions – he said \$400 million at one point in time – worse than it was when they took office in December; \$400 million additional debt put on our province since they took over. So not buying shares and utilizing resources and abilities to cut is a good thing for them to do.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance one more time: How do you annualize a trip you didn't take? How does that get annualized year over year? She hasn't explained it. I will ask her again: Can she explain the accounting to us?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to answer the Member opposite's question.

Colleagues on this side of the House who participate in Treasury Board with me have been meeting continuously for the last several weeks with officials. We have met with every single department, the majority of agencies, boards and commissions, and we will continue to do our comprehensive line-by-line review of the budgets so that we will continue to realize these savings on a go-forward basis and find even more.

Mr. Speaker, these actions we are undertaking and the details of the things we found of where we can save money – like parliamentary assistants and political staff – I look forward to sharing with these hon. Members when we present our budget for 2016.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Again, yesterday in the House of Assembly I was asking questions regarding the very important matter of sterilization challenges that are being faced by Eastern Health. Yesterday the Premier said here in the House he's very proud of the work that's been done. He went on to say, Mr. Speaker, that all ORs are functioning and surgeries are proceeding.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we've learned that last Friday orthopaedic surgeons ran out of instruments and were not able to perform any further surgeries. In fact, they said, they declared it as a dangerous situation at the only trauma centre in the province, warning that potentially dire consequences could result.

So I ask the Minister of Health: Were you aware of this last Friday? When did you become aware of it, and when were you going to share this with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, what I said yesterday is about the communications and the work that the Minister of Health and Community Services has been doing in working with Eastern Health to get an answer to what is a very difficult and complex situation that we're facing. One thing that we will not do is compromise patient safety in this serious situation.

We know that there are many people impacted by delays in surgeries. Today, what we're seeing is that surgeries are continuing as scheduled. Yesterday, there were a few delays in surgeries; there's no doubt, where this situation is affecting multiple sites within Eastern Health. There's been even new equipment that's been put in that's been impacted.

This is not new or unique to Newfoundland and Labrador. We've seen similar circumstances in other jurisdictions and what we've done is reached out through the work of the Minister of Health and Community Services and his group, they've reached out and tried to learn from some of the lessons that other jurisdictions have found from this.

We're going to get to the bottom of this. It is a difficult situation impacting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I remind the Premier that patient safety was compromised. He said they want to protect patient safety and make sure it's not compromised. Well, it was compromised. It was compromised on Friday when they ran out of instruments. If there had of been an emergency surgery required, orthopedic surgery required, they couldn't complete it, Mr. Speaker. The manual handwashing process that's underway at Eastern Health has not kept up with the demand. Orthopedic surgeons, I can tell you, are not happy about this.

I again ask the Minister of Health: When did he become aware of this? When did he plan on sharing this with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At no time since the sterilizing issue arose has patient safety been compromised. The Chief of Surgery for Eastern Health quite clearly stated yesterday that Eastern Health always had equipment for emergency surgery. Even if they run into a situation where they might not have, they had contingency plans.

I would draw the Member opposite's attention to the fact that the operating rooms at St. Clare's are working at 100 per cent for elective and emergency surgery, and that no emergency surgeries have been cancelled at all during this entire exercise at the Health Sciences Centre.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it's a good thing there wasn't an emergency because they wouldn't have been able to do it. That's not what the minister said. If there had have been an emergency surgery, they couldn't complete it. That's what we're told, Mr. Speaker. That's what's being reported to us, that on Friday afternoon there were no instruments available should an emergency have resulted or had occurred at the province's only trauma centre.

I ask the minister once again: When did he become aware of this crisis on Friday afternoon that did jeopardize patient safety? When was he going to share that with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, I have been in contact with the CEO of Eastern Health and the surgeons at Eastern Health on a very regular basis. Had the gentleman opposite and his team done their research and read beyond the first 140 characters, they would have found the answer to that question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have to tell you this is a very serious matter and to have the arrogance coming from a new minister like this across the House, Mr. Speaker, is shameful. This is a very serious circumstance. We are told that surgeons did not have equipment available should an emergency have taken place. I have asked the minister several times. He is not going to give us an answer of when he became aware of this. He is not going to give us an answer and he won't admit that it is a risk to patients, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this has to do, quite often, I believe, with the processes. We know Eastern Health is working very, very hard to try and rectify this circumstance, but they have to resort now to manual handwashing to sterilize surgical equipment.

So I will ask the minister this: Can he assure Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that handwashing and sterilizing medical equipment, OR surgical equipment, thousands of pieces, has not compromised safety of patients in any way? Can he tell me – can he assure us – that these processes are protecting patients?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HAGGIE: Once again, Mr. Speaker, there has been no issue related to patient safety. The cleaning and sterilizing of surgical equipment is a very complicated exercise. Handwashing and manual sterilization may be an old technique, but it still works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On January 28, Marine Atlantic announced an increase to its passenger and vehicle rates by 2.6 per cent effective April 1 of this year. Mr. Speaker, over the past two decades, the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills has been an official watchdog for Marine Atlantic. At every opportunity the Member, while an MP, would take to the media. He would call the open line shows and lash out against rate increases and question service delivery. However, Mr. Speaker, to everyone's surprise, he is now silent on the issue and nowhere to be found.

So I ask the Premier, Mr. Speaker: Why has this minister's advocacy stopped? Is the issue no longer important to him and his West Coast constituents?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly a pleasure to answer the question for my colleague opposite. Marine Atlantic plays a very vital, important role when it comes to the transportation of consumer goods and to passenger traffic in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I've had engagement with my federal colleague, the counterpart of Small Business and Tourism, when she was here in the province just last week at the Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador Conference. We had a meeting and discussed Marine Atlantic, about how important it is to have competitive rates.

We're very pleased to see that Marine Atlantic has discounted its rates by 50 per cent passenger traffic for a period of time at the Port aux Basques ferry service. As well, they've decreased their surcharge from 21 per cent down to 15 per cent on this matter.

The Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development works with our federal counterparts to have dialogue on how we can improve the customer experience.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the Minister of Tourism acknowledges that Marine Atlantic is important, and that he had a discussion with the federal minister at the recent Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador Conference. The little sale that's now on is little comfort, I think, to people in the province.

Residents of this province expect action and, more importantly, they want the results they

were promised – promised by our new Premier. He sold the electorate on this cozy relationship with the new federal government.

Now I will ask the Premier: I'd like to know what specific actions that you, as Intergovernmental Affairs Minister, have taken to address the rising ferry rates issue beyond the Minister of Tourism having dinner with a federal minister at the HNL Conference.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the relationship that we have with our federal colleagues on this matter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: I've been minister for only 80-plus days and I've had the opportunity to meet with my federal colleagues. I wonder how many meetings the Members opposite would have had with Marine Atlantic on this particular matter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Last week, I did not have more than a discussion; I had a sit-down meeting with my counterpart. It was the Small Business and Tourism minister. I've had multiple meetings with my federal colleagues in Ottawa.

We have a very strong relationship when it comes to looking at how we can improve the services and delivery at Marine Atlantic because we see how important it is to the people and to the businesses of Newfoundland and Labrador and to the tourism industry. We're going to continue to work with our counterparts in Ottawa –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: – so that we can continue to have a strong economy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, lots of friendly chats and meetings and dinners and photo ops, but no action, no results and the ferry rates are still going up. This new relationship that the new government is promoting means that the provincial Liberal government will not rock the boat with their federal cousins under any circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister Trudeau is on record as saying his government would work to ensure Marine Atlantic remains affordable.

I ask the Premier: Are rate hikes affordable? Does the cozy federal-provincial Liberal coalition feel the recent Marine Atlantic rate hikes are affordable?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I made myself very clear that the rates at Marine Atlantic are going down by 50 per cent for the period of time at the Port aux Basques ferry, as well as the fuel surcharge has been dropped from 21 to 15 per cent, which means the difference of about a dollar in the fare overall. What we're doing is we're continuing to work with Marine Atlantic and working with the federal government, as our department has been doing over the last number of weeks, to improve customer service and make sure we're enhancing the experience.

We have a productive relationship with Marine Atlantic, as well as with the federal government, and we'll continue to do everything we can to make sure that experience is enhanced and we

can add to the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: The cozy relationship between the provincial and federal government, Mr. Speaker, is leading to higher ferry rates for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. So he's happy to accept higher rates in order to keep the peace with the Trudeau Liberals.

The Throne Speech earlier this week stated that we all have to make sacrifices, Mr. Speaker. Are rising Marine Atlantic rates one of the sacrifices the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have to make because of our government's warm and fuzzy relationship with the federal government?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, one of the things in speaking of the relationship with Ottawa, I'm not so sure the group opposite, in particular the former deputy premier, could actually speak to what that relationship in any way could be, because all we've seen from at least reports in any of the successes they would have had has been really a goose egg. That's what we've seen with the relationship they had.

So we're very proud. It's been just a few weeks into this. When we get into March 22 and the budget, of course, there will be things for Newfoundland and Labrador that will be included in that. The doors in Ottawa right now are certainly open. There has been lots of engagement and lots of very productive meetings will occur. It usually starts with very productive meetings. The former deputy premier would not be used to that, of course, in Ottawa, as he would prefer to do his meetings over Twitter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign last year, and in the Liberal red book, it stated that a new Liberal government will establish an Independent Appointments Commission to take the politics out of government appointments.

Well, yesterday the government tabled the *Independent Appointments Commission Act*, Bill 1, which I can tell you is a non-binding commission. They can't make appointments. They can make non-binding recommendations to government, so government can secretly select from a pool of candidates who they want to appoint to commissions.

I ask the Premier: How does this take the politics out of appointments?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very proud to answer that question from the former premier because if there's anyone in this room who would have experience in putting politics into political appointments, it would be the former premier. He had his share of them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: I would not have any experience in that, and I will not. Because what we will put in place, and very proud to be able to bring legislation in place – I'm taking from what the former premier is saying that he's not going to support this because he would not see this as an improvement over the process that he was used to.

I believe it is a big improvement. We're going to see highly skilled Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who will volunteer their time to make sure that the politics are taken out of government appointments. We will see people who have the technical skills and the abilities to actually do their jobs. This is exactly what

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are looking for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will remind the Premier that his signature bill that he's brought to the floor of the House of Assembly has sections in it, such as section 9, which enables Cabinet to completely sidestep the commission and make their own appointments.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, under Schedule C there are six pages of entities where appointments can be made through this legislation that don't even go to the Independent Appointments Commission. It completely sidesteps the Independent Appointments Commission. The Public Service Commission makes a pool and it goes to the minister to hand-pick who they want.

How does that take the politics out of appointments?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you.

I look forward to the debate from the former premier as he defends his process and as we defend our process.

The Public Service Commission, first and foremost – contrary to what the former premier may feel, I value the work the Public Service Commission does. They do a great job. So for the former premier to ever question the integrity of that group is shameful, I say, Mr. Speaker. They do a great job. They will do the vetting, as part of the selection committee that will actually recommend names to Cabinet. The decision will then be made there.

I will guarantee you, if you ever saw a Cabinet that will actually dismiss this group of skilled, intelligent Newfoundlanders and Labradorians –

they will do what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians always do. They will reject that and they will stand up for us. That will not happen with this government, I say, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I'm on the record many times here speaking loudly and proudly of the great work that public servants do for Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: I'm not worried about the process they are going through. What worries me is when they create the pool of potential candidates for committees, commissions and entities and they send it over to the secret Cabinet decision, Mr. Speaker, because this bill here legitimizes the secrecy around decisions.

In fact, the Premier said today that if they sent three names over for senior positions in government, they don't have to say who those three names are. They don't have to say if they picked one of the three names and they don't have to say who the two are that weren't eligible.

It's a legitimate bill, certainly, Mr. Speaker. It's a bill that legitimizes the secrecy process of Cabinet. It gives them a pool to choose from and allows them to make their own choices so they can look after their friends when they campaigned last year.

I ask the Premier one more time: When the process leads to secret decisions by Cabinet, how does that take the politics out of this decision-making process?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at the selection process and when the former premier gets a chance to read

the legislation and as we debate it here, maybe there will be a better understanding of how this process works.

In the past, the pool was this. The pool was a list of names that Cabinet, or the Premier – that's the list, that was their pool. The Public Service Commission, an Independent Appointments Commission, no, they were all of that. The decision was made by the Premier primarily, or by Cabinet, or some Cabinet friends. That was the pool.

I will tell you right now that this Independent Appointments Commission is a huge, better way. This is a much better way of putting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, qualified Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, into key positions. The Independent Appointments Commission is volunteering their time to do this, and we look forward to working with them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It gives me great honour here today to stand up to be the official spokesperson for the fisheries department from the Official Opposition. Never before in our history have we seen – and we have seen in our history that the fishery has been so good to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It was never important like today, to make sure we have strong management and we maintain the control of our fishery.

On February 1 and February 2, the fisheries licensing board met to discuss the proposed transfer with Quin-Sea licence to Royal Greenland.

I ask the Minister of Fisheries: Have you received the recommendations from the board?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is my honour to stand here today as the Minister of Fisheries and take the question from the Member opposite.

Yes, we have received a recommendation from the board. We are continuing to do due diligence as a part of my role as the minister. A part of that due diligence, Mr. Speaker, has been listening to many groups, many different individuals, even in the expression of interest from the Official Opposition in their letter that they submitted to the licensing board. I'll let the hon. Member know that he can expect our decision in the very near future.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis, for a very short question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, Royal Greenland is not a Newfoundland company; it's not a Canadian company. In fact, it's a company owned by the Government of Denmark.

I ask the minister: Will allowing Royal Greenland to operate Quin-Sea go against long-standing principles of fleet separation and having control of our local fishery?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think there were two questions. The first one, Royal Greenland is not owned by the State of Denmark; it's owned by the self-government of Greenland. That's question number one.

MR. SPEAKER: Very quickly.

MR. CROCKER: As to the second part, the fleet separation, Royal Greenland will not have control of the quotas in Canadian waters if – if – their application is successful.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

It is my turn now to speak to the Premier. This government did promise they would be removing politics from the appointments process, yet Bill 1 stipulates that government retain the power to appoint anyone they want, despite the recommendations of the new Independent Appointments Committee.

I ask the Premier how this notwithstanding clause squares with his promise to take politics out of appointments. He's keeping it in his hands.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Two things – I think there's a step that the Leader of the Third Party didn't mention. There would be an activity report that would be reported to this House of Assembly. The IAC, the commission themselves, the five names would come to the floor of this House of Assembly. That's a very open process.

They will be given the opportunity to actually, through resolution, debate the selection of those five names. Then at the end of the year, which we will anticipate somewhere between 200 and 300 appointments – so it's going to be a very active commission, as you would tell – this activity report would make it to the floor of this House of Assembly as well.

The other option, of course, would be to stay and continue to do it the way things were. We are not satisfied with that. This is a big improvement, and no other province in the country right now is doing something like this. I'm looking forward to working with the IAC and the resolution on this floor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I'm asking the Premier, if Cabinet ignores recommendations of the IAC on a particular appointment, will they disclose the names of the

nominees and why they are refusing to accept the nominees?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: One of the things – and we've put considerable time into thinking about the three names, if there were three names that went to Cabinet as part of the selection process either through the PSC, then through the IAC as they vet this and then into Cabinet. It's really a three-step process here.

When you consider people that put their names and allow it to be vetted in this particular process, if there are three names there, two people would be rejected. Initially, I felt that maybe we should post the three names. In retrospect and thinking about it that people allow this – there will be two people rejected.

We thought for the protection of privacy of those individuals, the encouragement for them to get involved in other positions – it could even influence work-related positions that they might be looking for. We felt that it would be better to protect the names of those individuals that were rejected. Then at any time, if they so felt, they could actually make their names public themselves.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, on March 5 the English school board passed a notice of motion concerning closure of Holy Cross Junior High, one of the few remaining schools in centre city. While in Opposition the now Minister of Education said the current board is, quote, “ ‘Appointed trustees, hand-picked trustees, it really removes accountability. They are accountable to those who appointed them as opposed to accountable to those people that elected them.’ ”

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Will he honour his word and stop this process immediately, until a duly elected board of trustees, elected by the community, is re-established?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Whip of the two-person NDP caucus for the question. A little bit of a history lesson here. Back in 2013, the previous administration chose to amalgamate the four predecessor school districts: the Labrador School District, the Western School District, the Nova Central School District and the Eastern School District.

The previous administration said they would hold a school board election in 2014. Well, there was no school board election in 2014 and there was no school board in 2015.

Members of the Liberal caucus sat there repeatedly asking questions about the school board election. I'm delighted today to see now the NDP, after three years, has finally come around to our way of thinking. So I'm really delighted that you're joined up with us now in agreeing that we need to have a school board election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: How could he allow this appointed board, with no moral authority and accountability to the people of the community, to make these crucial decisions? When will he do the right thing and call an election of school board trustees?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it gives me great pleasure to know that now the NDP, after three years, has decided this is an important issue. I'm not sure if it's so they can make a bit of political hay about it at the expense of parents and students in the Member's constituency, but I'm glad they've come around to our way of thinking on this.

During the provincial election campaign last fall, we committed to holding a school board election within 12 months. After the election, the Premier wrote a letter to me, a mandate letter, suggesting we have the school board election within 12 months. That's exactly what we intend to do.

I've already met with the Chair and CEO of the English School District, of the French school district. We've reached out to the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils. Last week I had a meeting with the Chief Electoral Officer to find out how they could assist us in this process. We're going to have a school board election, we're just going to do it the right way and we're not going to rush it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Select Committee appointed to draft a reply to the speech from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I am pleased to present the report of the Select Committee, which reads as follows:

To His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Frank Fagan.

May it please Your Honour, we, the commons of Newfoundland and Labrador, in Legislative Session assembled, beg to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech to which Your Honour has addressed to this House.

MR. SPEAKER: When shall the report be received?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that the debate be deferred.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Further – I should ask, before I do that, if there are any further reports by standing or select committees?

Pursuant to section 16 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, a Members' Compensation Review Committee of not more than three individuals must be appointed at least once during each General Assembly to prepare a report respecting salaries, allowances, severance payments and pensions for Members of the House of Assembly. This report is presented to the Speaker, who brings the recommendation to the House of Assembly Management Commission for review.

I am now reporting to the House in accordance with subsection 16(2) of the same act that I have consulted with the Government House Leader, the Opposition House Leader and the Third Party on the appointments and on the terms of reference which will apply to the committee. Three well-respected individuals have been solicited to serve on the Assembly's Members' Compensation Review Committee, and I understand the Government House Leader will now be giving notice of a resolution for the appointments to this committee.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, as I referred to in Question Period and as I promised from

yesterday's Question Period, I'd like to table the two documents that I referenced today.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will tomorrow move the following resolution:

WHEREAS subsection 16(1) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* requires that an independent committee, called a Members' Compensation Review Committee, be appointed at least once during each General Assembly; and

WHEREAS in accordance with subsection 16(2) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, the Speaker has consulted with the Government House Leader, the Opposition House Leader and the Third Party on the appointment to the said committee; and

WHEREAS the Government House Leader, Opposition House Leader and Third Party have agreed with the introduction of this resolution; and

WHEREAS under subsection 16(4) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, a Members' Compensation Review Committee appointed under this resolution must report to the Speaker on its recommendations within 120 days of its appointment;

BE IT RESOLVED that Sandra Burke, Kathy LeGrow and Jeffrey Pardy are appointed to the Members' Compensation Review Committee, with the appointment to be effective on July 7, 2016; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in accordance with section 16 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* the Members' Compensation Review Committee shall inquire into and prepare a report respecting the salaries, allowances, severance payments and pensions to be paid to the Members of the House of Assembly and in particular the Committee shall:

(1) Recommend the annual salary for Members of the House of Assembly; (2) Review and make recommendations regarding the additional salary provisions for positions identified in subsection 12(1) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*; (3) Recommend a formula or means for making annual salary adjustments for salary amounts referenced in clauses 2 and 3 above; (4) Review and make recommendations regarding the current severance pay policy for Members of the House of Assembly; (5) Review the current provisions for Members' pensions and provide recommendations for adjustments; (6) Review and make recommendations regarding the Intra-Constituency Allowance for each district establishing a schedule to the Member's Resources and Allowances Rules. This review should take into account the provision of services by Members as a result of the increase in the size of some districts, as a result of electoral boundary reform in 2015; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Members' Compensation Review Committee, as part of its inquires, consult with appropriate persons who can assist the committee with respect to its required duties and shall;

(7) Consult with Members of the House of Assembly, review and make recommendations with respect to the Members' Resources and Allowances Rules, including but not limited to: current accommodation provisions for Members and whether other alternatives are available from a cost-benefit perspective; travel and living cost for training and orientation of Members following general elections and by-elections; clarification of the parameters regarding usage of the constituency allowance; and clarification of the parameters for the use of rental cars.

(8) Consult with the House of Assembly Service regarding issues in administering the current regime as well as impacts, legislative and otherwise, of proposed recommendations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that research and administrative support to the Members' Compensation Review Committee will be provided by or arranged by the House of Assembly Service; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Members' Compensation Review Committee deliver its report to the Speaker on or before November 4, 2016; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House of Assembly Service shall conclude the contractual arrangements required to carry out the intent of this resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. PETTEN: To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the federal government should be reducing, not increasing, Marine Atlantic ferry rates to drive tourism growth and stimulate the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to press the province's federal Members of Parliament, the federal government, to reduce marine ferry rates.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

As my colleague just spoke in Question Period, the Marine Atlantic rate increase has a great impact on tourism, Mr. Speaker, on the rubber tire traffic, the travelling public of the province who travel outside the province for vacations or just to get off the Island. It's such a vital link.

It also has an impact on our grocery shelves and many other services we as Newfoundlanders and

Labradorians expect to receive. By these rate increases, it's unfair with such a vital link. We do want the government to press the federal Members to get those rates reduced.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This petition is to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have an interest in participating in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to press the Government of Canada to schedule both preparatory consultations and inquiry sessions in communities in Newfoundland and Labrador in which grieving Aboriginal families live.

Mr. Speaker, as a resident of Newfoundland and Labrador, like so many of us, I've often been very frustrated at the fact that sometimes Upper Canada seems to think the country stops at Nova Scotia. I think there are a lot of people in this province who had high expectations, given the cozy relationship, this would no longer happen. Mr. Speaker, we see evidence of it continuing to happen today, despite the cozy relationship.

Newfoundland and Labrador has been left off the list of meetings to seek public input on the design and scope of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We are part of this nation, Mr. Speaker, and our indigenous people are just as important as any other person across this country.

A primary reason for holding this inquiry is to shine a spotlight on the tragedies, the people and the communities that have for far too long been ignored, so that justice could be served. It is inexcusable that the schedule of meetings

ignores our province where so many of these tragedies have occurred.

Indeed, the oversight is all the more difficult to understand, Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that the late Loretta Saunders, whose tragic death was the galvanizing event that triggered this inquiry, was an indigenous woman who called Newfoundland and Labrador her home. A significant portion of Newfoundland and Labrador's people identify as indigenous, and they have an interest and a right to be part of the process of designing and scoping this inquiry.

Many of Canada's indigenous peoples live in rural communities and many of these communities in our province are particularly remote. To be effective, the inquiry must go to places where people live. The people of these rural communities will surely tell you this and explain why, if they are given the opportunity to be heard in their communities during the inquiry's development phase.

Mr. Speaker, our leader has written to Carolyn Bennett, federal Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, expressing disappointment on this matter. As the critic for women's policy and an MHA who represents many Aboriginal constituents, I express my disappointment as well, and urge the provincial government to call on Ottawa to include Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the English School Board trustees propose to close down Holy Cross Junior High school and send students to a distant school; and

WHEREAS the board has arbitrarily and without consultation reduced the Holy Cross

Junior High school catchment area and students will have to be bused to a far more distant school; and

WHEREAS Holy Cross Junior High is an important neighbourhood school with programs, community partnerships and extracurricular activities designed to meet the particular needs of the inner-city students who attend it; and

WHEREAS the English School Board trustees are an appointed body and no longer accountable to the people who elected them; and

WHEREAS the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to ensure that Holy Cross Junior High school remains open and to immediately arrange for a democratically elected English School Board.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will every pray.

Mr. Speaker, I was absolutely astounded by the Minister of Education's response to my questions in Question Period. This is a very serious, critical issue. And the minister, while in Opposition, a number of times berated government by the fact that the trustees of the school board, the amalgamated school boards, were – these are his words, Mr. Speaker, his very words – “ ‘Appointed trustees, hand-picked trustees, it really removes accountability. They are accountable to those who appointed them as opposed to accountable to those people that elected them.’ ”

This government, Mr. Speaker, keeps talking about accountability and transparency, yet this is a very clear issue. For the minister to just flick this off and think he was funny and entertaining in the House when this affects the lives of students and their families at Holy Cross Junior High.

Now, as well, Mr. Speaker, it means that almost every single student at Holy Cross Junior High will have to be bused. There are no students right now being bused in Holy Cross Junior High. I'm sure the current Minister of Education is aware of the book *Boston Against Busing*. And we know that busing is not good for children, that it is a last resort.

This minister is going back on his word when he so vehemently opposed the fact that there is now a board of trustees who are appointed. Their term had expired, yet he is doing nothing about this. He is letting them make the most crucial decisions that a school board of trustees can make, and that's about the closure of schools in our community, neighbourhood schools.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: To the House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the federal government cannot justify discriminating Newfoundland and Labrador when determining the dates of the recreational ground fishery;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to be vocal in calling for the Government of Canada to extend the recreational ground fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador to promote fairness, safety and tourism to our province.

Mr. Speaker, this really goes to the heart of who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We settled here to be able to catch a few fish, and that is what we have done for years and years and years. It is very important. It is one of the things that I think I enjoy most in life, going out and being able to catch a cod, because it is what we are as people.

I come from a fishing community, grew up all of my life around the fishery. I cut out cod tongues. My father used to fight with me because I wanted to go to the cod trap and haul traps with him when I was so young. Just to be around the fishery was important to me. But it is important to so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I know down in Flatrock I have people who come down and want to go out to the fishery. It is something that they really, really enjoy. It is part of who we are.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we look at the way today is and tourism is a very important part of Newfoundland and Labrador. For people to be able to come here and catch a cod is so important. But more so than anything else, Mr. Speaker, I watched several times now when I'd see people go out in small fishing boats and risk their lives because the recreation fishery is based on a three-week fishery. It is unbelievable. People want to go out and catch a cod; they feel it's their right. But do you know what? There are times when it is very, very rough.

I know the wind was blowing last year and I watched a boat go out the harbour in Flatrock and I said, oh, my God, I hope he don't go. He did turn around and come back. But we should never be put in that position. We should never be put in a position where people lose their lives to go catch a few cod fish that is our God-given right.

I believe we really have to push it to the federal government and make sure that the cod fishery is fair to us here in Newfoundland and Labrador, that the dates are changed, that people have the right to go out and catch the fish when it is a safe time to do so.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A day of firsts: a first question in Question Period and now my first petition in this hon. House.

To the hon. House of Assembly in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS greater food security ought to be a priority for Newfoundland and Labrador;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to set targets for improving the food security of Newfoundland and Labrador by promoting the

growing in this province of more of the food that we consume.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, food security has to be a high priority for any government. As it was for our government, I'm sure it will be for the new government as well. We all know that we have a province that relies heavily on outside food sources, and we need communities and families in our province to have access to fresh and nutritious foods. Despite the fact that a lot of effort has been made to improve the conditions in this province in that regard, there's still a lot of work to do.

Many families struggle with the cost of purchasing healthy food. There's an ever-growing reliance on processed as well as fast foods that are due in part to the rising costs of imported foods. There has been lots of controversy recently about the cost of fruits and produce, for instance.

The drop in value of the Canadian dollar has resulted in the skyrocketing costs of nutritious foods. We also know – and I know Members on both sides of the House would acknowledge – that we have many health challenges in this province: diabetes, heart issues, obesity. The government often has talked about, in recent months, proactive measures. I think all Members of this House have an obligation to our people to actually put those words into action.

We have lots of tradition in this province. When you think about the traditional way of living in Newfoundland and Labrador, we've made a living from the land and from the sea.

Historically, we've grown our own fresh food and we've eaten our wild protein from fishing and hunting. We don't do a lot of that in Mount Pearl, but some of my constituents are taking those activities outside of the geographical confines of the District of Mount Pearl North.

This historical foundation is something that we can capitalize on. I urge the government to put into place a local farm-to-table approach via our agrifoods industry. That will reduce our reliance upon imported foods and fatty fast foods.

I know government has committed in its Throne Speech to a new strategy for agriculture. I look forward to supporting that effort because this is an issue that desperately needs to be further addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Orders of the Day

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Parliamentary Assistant Act And The Parliamentary Secretaries Act, Bill 3, and I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services have leave to introduce a bill, an act entitled, An Act To Amend The Parliamentary Assistant Act And The Parliamentary Secretaries Act, Bill 3, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the minister have leave to introduce Bill 3 and that the said bill be now read a first time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Government House Leader to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Parliamentary Assistant Act And The Parliamentary Secretaries Act," carried. (Bill 3)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Parliamentary Assistant Act And The Parliamentary Secretaries Act. (Bill 3)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 3 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act, Bill 4, and I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. the Government House Leader that he shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the minister shall have leave to introduce Bill 4 and that the bill shall now be read a first time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act," carried. (Bill 4)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act. (Bill 4)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 4 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Interprovincial Subpoena Act, Bill 5, and I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. the Government House Leader that he shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Interprovincial Subpoena Act, Bill 5, and that the said bill shall now be read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the minister shall have leave to introduce Bill 5 and that the said bill now be read a first time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Interprovincial Subpoena Act," carried. (Bill 5)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Interprovincial Subpoena Act. (Bill 5)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 5 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act, Bill 6, and I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. the Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act, Bill 6, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the minister shall have leave to introduce Bill 6 and that the said bill shall now be read a first time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act," carried. (Bill 6)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Professional Fish Harvesters Act. (Bill 6)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 6 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call Order 1, second reading of Bill 1.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 1, An Act To Establish An Independent Appointments Commission And To Require A Merit-Based Process For Various Appointments, be now read the second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 1, An Act To Establish An Independent Appointments Commission And To Require A Merit-Based Process For Various Appointments, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act To Establish An Independent Appointments Commission And To Require A Merit-Based Process For Various Appointments.” (Bill 1)

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To say that I am very pleased today to stand in this hon. House to introduce Bill 1, I would say this is something we have been thinking about and we have had on our agenda for quite some time. It’s gotten considerable discussion on the election campaign. The feedback has been very positive.

Essentially what it is, it is an Independent Appointments Commission and it will require a merit-based process before appointments. Why is this important, I guess, some people would ask? But if you think about in Newfoundland and Labrador, our agencies, our boards and commissions, they actually make up 43 per cent of the total of government’s expenditures. That is 75 per cent of the total public sector employment. So that is a considerable piece of the activities and the action that goes on within our province.

To consider that these appointments to those boards, commissions and agencies should be done in an independent and based on merit is

something that is extremely important to us as a government, because these associations and these organizations play an essential role in delivering a wide range of programs and services, including things like health care, education and housing, and a lot of the services that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians use on a day-to-day basis.

So to support the work of these agencies, the boards and the commissions, what we’re looking for and what this bill will do is it will give a consistent, inclusive process, making sure that it’s essential to ensure that the making of the decisions – the decision-making process – that impacts the people of our province is done in a very best and a very open and transparent way, and it’s done by individuals who are the most qualified and experienced people that we have available to us to fill those roles. So it really raises the concern and raises the level of accountability within our province.

As I said, we made this commitment during the election of 2015. Today, we are fulfilling that commitment by taking the necessary steps that are needed for government to modernize the current process for all those agencies, boards and commissions. As I said, they take a very active role in our society and an active role in what they do within our government and within our province.

We are focused. Our focus is to ensure that the appointments process is one that is based on merit and appointing the most qualified Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that are available to us.

I believe that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians support this approach. I also believe – because this is something that you really do not see in other provinces and within other jurisdictions – this is something you will see other provinces and other areas do something similar by nature, because this piece of legislation is not something that you could go in and research and pull off the shelf. It has really not been done to the extent that we are doing this in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Last fall, as we travelled the province and over the last four years, I would argue, many people have approached me as we talked often about

this and talked about working on their behalf. They made it very clear to me that those appointments should be merit based, not political based, not done with a political bias or through a political lens. This here indeed would be a much better way to attract the most qualified Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who can do the work.

This is why we made the commitment and our government will change what has become a very tired practice of placing politics before qualifications. In the past, what we've had is a process that allowed for entitlements. It allowed for people to actually do favours for their friends, do favours, in some cases, for their family members. It really was not done on the merit-based process that it should be where we could get better decision-making processes within those boards and agencies.

So I am pleased today to announce we are launching this process. This essentially is step one in clearing a path that we would attract the most qualified people. They would be encouraged to apply and considered and then selected based on their merits and their experience.

Today in the House of Assembly we have brought in, and I am speaking now, to Bill 1. This is a fundamental piece of my work as a government. Now, there have been some people that have looked at this process that we've outlined today and they have argued and said we could go further and on and on it goes. It's like most legislation you see within any government. You start with a piece of legislation, which is groundbreaking, I would suggest – and of course you could argue, and some will probably argue, that the best thing to do is go back to the old way of doing things.

As a matter of fact, we had the former premier today actually suggest this is not the best way of doing things. Well, I would say if you compare the former administration, their way of doing things, their practice, based on what we are suggesting here and we would hope to do, I think this is quite different. This is a much better process. This is a process all other previous administrations had the opportunity to implement. Often people talked about it, but there was no action on this until today.

We have made this a priority and we have expressed to Cabinet we would like to see this move swiftly. This is important. There are some big decisions to be made in this province. And as fast as we can get this process established, it is then we will get the people in place to represent us on those boards and agencies that can do the best job, based on merit, based on the experience, based on their technical abilities to make decisions and to help inform Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

What will happen is, upon passing of this legislation, we will set the wheels in motion to have this independent commission in place. Once it is in place, Newfoundland and Labrador, as I said, will be the first Canadian province to establish a legislated, merit-based appointments process. This will be a fully accountable and transparent process, which is the bedrock of my government and guides us in our actions. This legislation and the accompanying work reflect on that commitment.

As part of this legislation what you will see is this: you will see a five-person, non-partisan, Independent Appointments Commission to be created. So a question would be: Why is it five people, and how do we get to the start line with those first five people? Well, once we identify who those suitable candidates will be, those five individuals, we will bring their names forward to this House of Assembly where there will be a vote among all Members. This team will review candidates and recommend the three most qualified individuals, adding a level of independent review to the government appointment process.

Once we bring the five names to this floor, each and every single Member in this House of Assembly will have an opportunity to say aye or nay to support those individuals or not. This will be the opportunity because this will give you your say in the selection of the Independent Appointments Commission.

There are five people, five names that will be brought forward. From that, the chair of this commission will then use three people as part of the selection committee for the individuals that would be considered or screened through this. The Public Service Commission, of course, will play a huge role as well.

I have insisted that the members of the commission be accountable, have the necessary qualifications and use their experience and adhere to the objective to uphold the principle of a non-partisan, merit-based appointment process.

You could find yourself at some point where you have five individuals in what is relatively a small province and people know each other. If at any time any of those five individuals feel that they would be in a conflict or should not be part of this selection process, well, then they would declare that conflict and exclude themselves from that.

So you will see three people that would be included: the chair and two others. Even at some point the chair might decide that he's not appropriately placed to it. So they have the flexibility, two extra people, two extra commissioners, that we would use those three people then.

The first step would be that the Public Service Commission would screen out the list of candidates. There will be a website that we put in place for people to put their own names forward, based on the criteria and the skills and the technical needs that this would be developed and put in place by the various departments. The departments will look at the positions that will need to be filled. They will put the necessary skills, what you would need to do the job, at this particular board, agency or commission. You could actually then self-nominate. That would be put into the selection process.

The Public Service Commission would be the first point of entry. Then any names that would come out of this would be given to the Independent Appointments Commission and they would do further screening, further vetting and then there would be up to three names that would go to Cabinet as a recommendation.

Added to this, they will also recommend individuals for the head of the province's statutory offices. These are people like the Child and Youth Advocate, the Privacy Commissioner, the Consumer Advocate and so on. These are people, too, that we will add to this process, once again taking the politics out of some of those appointments.

That's not to say, Mr. Speaker, that we do not have some good people already in those positions. We have Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have done a great job for many years, but it's been through a very different process. I think this particular process we are outlining today adds a very unique touch to this and it's one that we are very proud of.

The agencies, the boards and commissions, it will be tier one. When you think about that there are about 1,200 board members that could be affected here or that would be affected here and well over 200 every year. So you can tell there are quite a few people who are impacted by this.

As I said, they represent a large part of the work that has happened within government; 43 per cent of the total expenditures and 75 per cent of our total public employment. So it is a big task when you look at the numbers of boards and commissions and agencies that we will be filling those positions on. These are the tier one agencies. So you say really what is tier one? How do you define a tier one? What makes tier one different than, let's say, a tier two or so on?

Well, these would be the boards that would actually handle quite a bit of money. They would have big influence on the affairs and the future of our province. They handle quite a bit of the activity, as I say. They would be boards like Nalcor, like NLC, like Housing and so on, many, many boards and they are listed in this piece of legislation.

They are chosen to be tier one. It's based on a number of factors, as I said, including their authority to make decisions. We have empowered many of those individuals to make some very important decisions on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and they impact the public. Their decisions impact the public in a significant way.

Some examples, as I just mentioned, that being Nalcor, Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, the Liquor Corporation, MMSB, the College of the North Atlantic, Regional Health Authorities and so on. So you can tell just by the magnitude of the boards I just mentioned the number of people in Newfoundland and Labrador they impact.

For these organizations, the Public Service Commission will provide a list of individuals to the Independent Appointments Commission. What would happen is if you were interested in being a chair of a health authority or so on, you would submit your name, self-nominate. There would be people, I'm sure – I would expect Members in this House would do their own and encourage people and recommend individuals within our province to think about putting their name forward.

The names would be recommended. You would put your name forward to the Public Service Commission. The first step vetted there. Once you identify the group that would have the technical experience, merit based, to move on to the Independent Appointments Commission, well that would be step one, and the Independent Appointments Commission would be step two.

Once the Independent Appointments Commission has made their decision, they would make their recommendations to Cabinet. The final decision would be made there with the authority on these decisions. We've been receiving some questions today such as why won't you just not let Cabinet make any of those decisions? The recommendations would go up and the Independent Appointments Commission would not really appoint three at all; they would just appoint those individuals.

Mr. Speaker, we go through an elections in our province right now and the authority – and I heard it just yesterday in this House here when many Members opposite said get on, govern, do the job of government, do your job. Well, part of doing your job is making sure that you have the right people in place.

The selection committee – through a two-step selection committee, one through the Public Service Commission, then into the Independent Appointments Commission and they make the recommendations to Cabinet. So then they would say the Cabinet has the last say. They're just going to give people the boot. They're not going to accept the list from the group that we had a discussion for in this House of Assembly.

You think about the message that would send to those people who volunteered, those five people, not paid, as I said, not compensated for the work

they do. I can tell you, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that I know, they will tell that Cabinet where to go because this is where they would be going after putting in hours and hours of volunteer work, making recommendations to a Cabinet. If at any time Cabinet was repeatedly rejecting those names, well, I'll guarantee you, I'm willing to bet now that those people would not stay there. That would ruin the integrity.

The people that I know on this side of the House, this is not where they're going. This is not where we're going with this. It would be, if at all, a very rare occurrence when you would see names that would be selected from the IAC, that those names would be rejected.

The objective here is to help us with a selection committee so that we can put the best people in place to help inform Cabinet, so Cabinet Members, like we've seen in the past, cannot go out and tap on the shoulders of their friends, call up their buddies, call up their family members in some cases, and say, come on, I've got a little job here, you're entitled to it because you've helped on my campaign, or you've done this here, or you've done something for us so it's now my time to give back to you. This selection process here takes all of that out of the way.

AN HON. MEMBER: Merit based.

PREMIER BALL: It is merit based.

Our objective here is to give Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the confidence in the actions of their government. It is now time to take the politics out of these government appointments. It ensures accountability, it ensures transparency and there will be an open communication process.

What happens there is on an annual basis. What you will see is an activity report that will come to the floor of this House of Assembly that will give us some idea of the work this commission has done. It will be here on this floor that that report would be submitted.

Following the Cabinet and ministerial appointments, the names of the individuals then would be posted on the website. An Order in Council would also be issued for appointments made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council

which are available for the public online. These names will then be made public once the recommendations and the selection has been made.

These appointments will be fully public. There will also be an activity report, as I just mentioned, in accordance with the *Transparency and Accountability Act*.

A review of the Independent Appointments Commission; there would be an automatic review of the Independent Appointments Commission after five years. So let's not lose sight of that. On an annual basis you get your activity report, and then there's an automatic review of the Independent Appointments Commission after three years.

They are appointed for three years. So the first appointment you would see – Independent Appointments Commission, their names would come here for a debate on this floor. So your first commission gets put in place. Subsequent commissions would be this – or if somebody resigned for some reason or had to move on, which will happen over time. What will happen is you can be reappointed for a second three years but any new Independent Appointments Commission will go through the Independent Appointments Commission process themselves. So there are lots and lots of belts and braces, as they say, here to be open and accountable to the people of our province.

When I talk about how we would see vacancies, of course this will happen over time, if indeed through the Independent Appointments Commission. So this actually closes the gap and provides a process for even that to occur.

To support the Independent Appointments Commission, there's a group that I really want to spend some time talking about because they've done a great job providing a very great service for the people of our province and that's the Public Service Commission. They will serve as the secretariat and will work with government departments to develop skill and qualification processes for each agency, board and commission.

What this group will do, they have the knowledge of all our boards, all our

commissions and our agencies. They will develop a profile so that anyone who's interested in giving back to their province in a volunteer capacity, or in some cases serving on those boards, what they would do is put their name forward along with their resume, as an example. It is there, then, that the Public Service Commission will do the job that they have been doing for years, and will do a very good job in making sure those people have the right skills, merit based, for this appointment.

By availing of the experience of the Public Service Commission we are creating an independent commission process that won't incur costs associated with recruiting additional employees, finding office space or purchasing equipment. What we did not want to do in all of this was put a layer of expense on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We used what's working for us already: the Public Service Commission. It is working; it has the resources within that to be the secretariat for this Independent Appointments Commission.

We will use the expertise, the equipment and the people who are already there, rather than go out and set up a layer of bureaucracy. It is something that we did not want to do. This is a very cost-efficient way to do this and we still have the independency of the Public Service Commission. I would say it's not a very popular room to be in, if you had someone on this side of the House suggesting we should spend more money. I assure you that the current Minister of Finance would be clamping down on that anyway.

The Public Service Commission Act – they protect the merit principle in all appointments. They do this already. There is legislation in place for them to do this. They protect the merit principle in all appointments and promotions within the public service and are, therefore, already well positioned to take on the additional role in this process that we are suggesting here today.

Departments and agencies are required to adhere to standards and procedures. We already know that. These procedures are outlined and in many cases it is already publicly known. The Public Service Commission will hold an open call for applications through its website and social

media to seek qualified candidates. As we know right now – and we see this with the Government Renewal Initiative – we are seeing many, many people reaching out on our Dialogue App, through email, through our website and engaging in the work of government these days, putting forward many ideas.

What we would see here, in an electronic sense, is a website where people can bring their resumes forward. You'd create that library of people, those long lists of names; people who are interested in giving back and feel qualified to give back to their province so that we can get better informed, better people making the decisions that impact the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The Public Service Commission, as I said, will hold this open call. This is ongoing because what we see at various times in boards and agencies, the board members expire at different times in different years and different times of the year, as an example. So all the information based on when terms expire, what is required for individuals to serve in these capacities – all that information would be available on the website.

You could also look at using platforms, of course, within our own communities and within our own business and labour organizations. What happens is many of those boards and agencies impact the business community. They impact organizations that advocate for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and our communities there as well. It is important they be part of all of this as well.

Through them, and links through their own websites, as an example, we can actually broaden the reach substantially by adding to the networks that already exist within our province. Mr. Speaker, the boards and agencies such as I mentioned earlier, many of the groups that work and provide services such as advisory councils – well, just as an example – and disciplinary boards, they also go through the Public Service Commission that we are seeing right now.

I've talked a bit about tier one. Then we have another group which would be tier two. There is a long list. If you go through the legislation you would see various pieces of legislation that actually connect to the boards and agencies

within our province. These lists are extremely long. Appointment to the tier-two bodies will be subject to the Public Service Commission as well, who will then make recommendations to the respective minister for his or her approval.

As mentioned earlier, the process for tier-two agencies, boards and commissions will also be based on merit, but I want to be very clear tier two will not go to the Independent Appointments Commission. The reason for that is just really the magnitude of people and the number of names, and based on the level of budgeting process, as I said. I mentioned earlier the impact our tier-one agencies have. Tier-two agencies are extremely important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They do a great job. In many cases, volunteering as well.

The tier-two process will be through the Public Service Commission where they will be screened there. It would be literally impossible to put all tier-one and tier-two appointments through the Independent Appointments Commission at this time without adding significant, significant resources – financial resources as well as human resources – to this process, I say, Madam Speaker.

In addition to building a skill and credential profile for appointments under this process, the Public Service Commission will be expected to conduct all necessary background checks for recommended appointees. They will also put in place a process to report any conflicts of interest. As I said, there are more than 1,200 positions based on the previous years. We expect about 250 appointments annually, and that's to tier-one boards. You can imagine what it would be with tier-two boards added to this.

Madam Speaker, you can tell that this is a very extensive process, one that we are very proud of here, very proud to introduce. I would say that this is really step one. Like any legislation we would see that makes it to the floor of this House of Assembly, this is, indeed, a groundbreaking piece of legislation.

I would imagine, over time, legislation evolves. Once you get a chance, as I said in the interview today, to test drive it, there may be ways that over time it will change and evolve and be improved upon. Right now we are very pleased

that we are to the start line, which is something that has never been done by any other administration in the history of our province.

We have now taken the steps to take the politics out of political appointments. It is fair. It is a measured process, one that will provide this. It will provide greater consistency, greater transparency, improve organizational performance. You will have better people who are more experienced, merit based and the technical experience to make the decisions that are so important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I also believe that it will enhance the quality of public services and the public confidence. I believe that we will see – simply because people now understand that they have a chance to serve Newfoundland and Labrador, people that have often felt because they were not of a particular political stripe, that they had no chance. This here opens the door.

This process opens the door for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to be engaged, to have their say and be able to use their ability and the experience that they would have, no matter where they live, and give them the opportunity to do their job and return some service back to our province.

I believe it provides a meaningful experience for our appointees. The process will be a good one. Through the debate – and I look forward to the debate and the questions that we will see in this House of Assembly, Madam Speaker.

So debate, I guess, will continue and the decision will be made. We have some important decisions that will need to be made impacting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I look forward to the debate on Bill 1.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 1, which, in a new session of the Legislature, tends to be the administration's flagship piece of legislation. It sets the tone for the administration and for the session of the House of Assembly. The Premier and several ministers this morning acknowledged that this was legislation that they're really proud of and it will be one of the hallmarks of their government.

We were briefed on the bill this morning, and I want to thank those from Executive Council and from the Public Service Commission who provided us with a briefing on the bill. Several Members of our caucus also had an opportunity to attend a news conference that the Premier held earlier today where he and his ministers outlined this bill and the reasons for it.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, while I understand the new government is very proud of this piece of legislation, we do have some major concerns about the bill in its present form. The beauty of this legislative process is that there'll be lots of opportunity for debate and discussion and ideas, and perhaps we'll even be able to amend the bill to make it work. We're not standing today to say that we're opposed – I'm not standing today to say that I'm opposed to some kind of independent appointments process.

The concept is an interesting concept; I'm all for openness and greater transparency. I'm a big believer in open government, despite the fact that it's seemingly not a priority for the new government, as the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement has acknowledged.

I think a new name for this bill is actually in order, Madam Speaker. It will be ruled out of order, but in my mind it's in order. An act to justify Liberal political and patronage appointments seems like the more appropriate name for the piece of legislation.

What was most frightening about what I heard this morning –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KENT: And despite the heckling, I'll make some general comments about what I

observed about the legislation and then I'll go into more detail during my time today –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: So when somebody submits to the Public Service Commission and says, I want to get involved in one of these agencies or boards or commissions, beyond the point of submitting their application, there's absolutely nothing that's public or transparent about the process. Beyond that, it's a secret, confidential process. That immediately, from our perspective, sounded the alarm bells.

What we're going to have is a five-person commission that's basically made up of political appointees. So those five people will be identified by Cabinet and then we'll get to rubberstamp it in the House, but government, of course, has a strong mandate and they decide what bills get passed in this House. And they have a majority, which allows them that right, so it's really a formality that we would have a debate on those appointments in this House of Assembly.

I'm just going to highlight some of the things that are most alarming about the bill. Then if time permits today, I'll hopefully get to go into some further detail. I would encourage hon. Members to have a look at the *Public Service Commission Act* as well, because this Bill 1 makes major changes to the *Public Service Commission Act*. In fact, section 19 onward in this bill is all about changes to the *Public Service Commission Act*.

What's really concerning, though, is that buried in this piece of legislation is a very large schedule called Schedule C. It lists something like 130 agencies, 130 boards, 130 commissions, 130 committees that will be exempt from the new Independent Appointments Commission that the government is creating.

The Public Service Commission will play a role. Granted, the Premier acknowledged that today, but this wonderful, new, supposedly Independent Appointments Commission will not have anything to do with 130 appointments related to agencies, boards and commissions.

The appointments for those 130 agencies, boards and commissions will not be subject to this new Independent Appointments Commission. That's a real concern.

For that select group of tier one – as the Premier describes – those tier-one positions that will go to this supposedly Independent Appointments Commission, it's not about making sure we get the best person for the job. It's not ultimately about the merit-based process that the government is suggesting. If you wanted the best person for the job, you'd have a process that identified the best person for the job, but instead the Independent Appointments Commission will recommend three names. They won't rank them. They won't prioritize them. They'll simply submit those names to Cabinet.

Cabinet ministers and the Premier made it clear today that there will be no disclosure of who those three names are or what process Cabinet goes through to pick among the three, which despite the extensive process by this Independent Appointments Commission – made up of, I'm sure, well-intentioned volunteers who are going to do their best to do a good job – despite that whole process, at the end of the day nothing is really changing, Madam Speaker. The government, the Cabinet, behind closed doors, will make the appointments.

If you really wanted the best person for the job, wouldn't you ensure you had a process that identified the best person for the job? So you're going to get three, presumably, qualified people. Because I'm sure the commission would do a good job of identifying good people; let's assume that much. But at the end of the day, the decision about who gets appointed among those people that are submitted on the list – well, the list is a secret. The process for selecting the person from that list is a secret. At the end of the day there will be no transparency around that and we cannot at all have assurance that the best person has been selected. If we were truly committed to a merit-based process that identified the best person for the job, why wouldn't we have a process that identified the best person for the job, as opposed to a list of names that Cabinet can secretly pick from?

Again, I need to make it clear that we're talking about two lists of agencies, boards and

commissions. The ones that were described today as tier one, the Independent Appointments Commission will touch those and will make a recommendation of three names, not ranked. They'll present three names and then there will be a secret process by Cabinet to determine who they appoint. We'll never know what the recommendation was, but we will know ultimately who gets appointed, of course.

Then the real concern is that there's a tier-two list of 130 agencies, boards and commissions where the Public Service Commission will just provide, at a minister's request, a long list of people that are recommendable – not recommended, but recommendable. A minister will probably encourage people to apply, logically. They will go to the Public Service Commission and say, give us a list of everybody who is recommendable, who the Public Service Commission has deemed appropriate, and then they'll pick whoever they want.

What was also suggested in the briefing this morning is that many of those appointments, Madam Speaker, will not be subject to any Cabinet process whatsoever. Individual ministers will simply make those appointments at will. Some specifically have to be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, so those presumably would continue to go to Cabinet. For many other appointments that are of a routine nature, it's quite likely that ministers will simply do their own thing, get the long list from the Public Service Commission and make an appointment.

How is that independent? How is that merit based? How has that done anything to actually improve the process? I respectfully suggest, Madam Speaker, that it doesn't improve the process at all. I think the attempt to create an independent process is a good thing. The attempt to make sure that the process is as open and transparent and as inclusive as possible is a good thing, but this bill falls short in so many ways.

The Premier today accused – I don't know – someone on this side of questioning the integrity of the Public Service Commission. I can assure you that Members in our caucus have great respect and a good understanding of the work of the Public Service Commission, given some of

us have been around government and around the various government departments for a while.

The Public Service Commission does good work; there's no doubt about that. But what we're opening the door to is the risk of political interference in a process that has been very respected and respectable to date. I don't think any political involvement in the Public Service Commission is a good thing, and I'm surprised Members would suggest it is.

Another major, major concern with this piece of legislation is the non-binding nature of the whole thing. At the end of the day, despite the smoke and mirrors and despite the illusion of something that's non-political and independent, we've got a process that in every respect is entirely non-binding. So for tier-one appointments that actually do go through the Independent Appointments Commission – unlike the 130 agencies and boards and commissions that won't – for those that do, at the end of the day there's nothing binding.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KENT: Obviously my criticism is upsetting Members opposite. But to see the Premier and Members on his front bench heckling during this debate on his flagship piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, I think it highlights some of the concerns that we do have.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

Order, please!

MR. KENT: The Premier went as far today, twice in his news conference today, to suggest we should rush this through the House of Assembly. At two different points in the news conference today, and perhaps the New Democratic Party made the same observation – I know they were well represented at the news conference as well – it was suggested it would be up to us to move this through the House quickly because government wants to get on with it. I think that's very concerning. I think the attitude that seems to be expressed here today from across the House is very concerning.

The fact that every aspect of this will be non-binding and at the end of the day Cabinet or ministers can do as they please means there is nothing independent about it, Madam Speaker. There's nothing non-political about it, and there's nothing merit based about it at the end of the day if Cabinet can do what it wants. I respect the fact government is elected to govern and Cabinet has to make decisions about who to appoint to different offices and roles. I respect that.

There are all kinds of reasons why you would appoint or not appoint somebody to a specific role. That is the right and the prerogative of government; I acknowledge that. But I do think the concept of an independent process for appointments and opening it up is a good thing as well. This bill does absolutely nothing, Madam Speaker, absolutely nothing, to take the politics out of appointments.

This new Independent Appointments Commission, or IAC as I'm sure during this debate it will become known – we have lots of acronyms in the House of Assembly and throughout government. This new Independent Appointments Commission isn't at all independent. Government controls who's on it. Beyond that, at the end of the day they have no teeth.

Any of the recommendations they make are non-binding. They have zero authority to make appointments. So isn't it incredibly ironic that the flagship piece of legislation, Bill 1 of the new administration, the very first campaign promise that was made by our new government was about creating something that was independent and would take the politics out of appointments.

Well, Bill 1 ensures that politics always, always, always trumps process and trumps any kind of independent process, Madam Speaker. Bill 1 ensures there will always be – it actually puts into legislation a process that ensures the decisions will be political at the end of the day, and politicians behind closed doors in the Cabinet room or ministers in their own offices by themselves will make appointments.

I suspect that like the Premier did at length today – will say previous governments have done

badly and we're going to improve the process. The problem with that argument, Madam Speaker –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker is having trouble hearing the Member.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm having trouble hearing myself because of the noise, laughter and heckling opposite, which, I guess, sets the tone for this new administration that was supposed to take a new approach to the Legislature and how business would be done, and to appointments. Unfortunately, at the end of the day we now have a bill that will ensure politics always trumps process. That's really, really unfortunate.

I think, Madam Speaker, during the course of debate, and perhaps because they're so upset, I've struck a nerve. I think during the course of this debate we will discover, and people in the province will conclude, that this is smoke and mirrors. There's nothing non-partisan about it. There's nothing non-political about it. There's nothing independent about it.

Madam Speaker, what is non-partisan –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

What is non-partisan about allowing Cabinet and individual Cabinet ministers, in the case of the big tier-two list, to hand pick from a list of candidates? How is that non-partisan if politicians are making those decisions at the end of the day behind closed doors? How is that independent? Why bother, if, at the end of the day, nothing is really changing?

It was interesting today to hear ministers and the Premier talk about the need for an exhaustive communications process around this bill. I suspect they're going to have some really careful communication stickhandling to do on this piece of legislation.

On one hand, there is a need for extensive communications; yet, on the other hand, the

Premier of the province on Bill 1, on the flagship piece of legislation, asked the Opposition Parties in this House – on two occasions today in his news conference – to rush the process, to actually ensure that this debate doesn't take a long time because they want to get on with it.

It is what it is. Well, from our perspective that's not good enough. It isn't what it is. We have to challenge. We have to ask questions. I'm all for making our processes better, but this bill really falls short in so many ways.

The Premier and ministers were challenged repeatedly today about the fact that Cabinet can simply make appointments. Even though we're establishing legislation, amending the Public Service Commission Act and going through a process in this House where these commissioners will be formally appointed, at the end of the day Cabinet can still do what it wants. That is outlined in the legislation.

Do you know what the government's response to that was over and over again this morning, Madam Speaker? They said we don't expect it to be a regular occurrence. So it will happen, it is bound to happen, but we are not going to do it too often. Just trust us and we'll make the decisions, follow the process and at the end of the day still appoint who we want when we do follow the process.

The Finance Minister described this bill as significant change. The challenge at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, is that there's no evidence to suggest that this is any kind of real change at all. If at the end of the day the decisions are still going to be made behind closed doors, in secret by Cabinet, and none of the work that this new commission is going to do is binding – and there are going to be 130 agencies, boards and commissions in this province that aren't even subject to that process – I don't consider that to be significant change.

For a government that claims to be open and says that they're going to change the way government does business, even though they've placed the Open Government Initiative on hold, the list of three names that's going to be put forward by the Independent Appointments Commission for those tier-one groups that are

listed at the back of the bill, they're not going to be made public. Unless the individual candidates themselves decide to disclose that they were shortlisted and put forward by the independent commission, we'll have no way to know what names were considered and what process was followed, if any process was followed, to select the successful candidate. We won't even know if one of those three people has been selected. Cabinet can still choose to ignore that process, and there's no mechanism for that to be disclosed.

I do feel this is an important point, Madam Speaker. If Cabinet chooses to ignore the three names and just go its own way, it rejects all three, appoints somebody else, throws out the recommendation, whatever the case may be, there is absolutely no mechanism in this piece of legislation for that to be disclosed. We will never know.

The Premier's response should concern every Member of this House. The Premier's response should concern the public as well. His solution to that gaping hole that was identified after a quick review of the legislation for the first time this morning, the Premier of the province said this morning he expects the independent appointment commissioners to complain, to make noise publicly, or to resign if Cabinet doesn't respect their wishes. So he expects that will happen rarely. He expects it would be rare, but he expects the Independent Appointments Commission that will ultimately be rubber-stamped by this very Legislature, should resign or make noise publicly if the process isn't respected. Now, that doesn't seem like a logical, or a fair, or a reasonable or a respectful solution, Madam Speaker.

The bill, Bill 1 – and I encourage members of the public to go online and read the bill – we have it in front of us, hopefully. I would encourage the public to read the language in the bill. There are two instances in the bill itself in the language of the legislation that clearly states Cabinet can ignore the recommendations. So this is independent and open and non-political, but twice in the piece of legislation it says Cabinet can do what it wants.

I'd encourage people to have a close look at the language that is suggested. Some of the

arguments against this bill are actually just written in the bill. That's a perfect example where in two instances it says Cabinet can just do what it wants. That would suggest, Madam Speaker – and I hate to have to suggest it, in all honesty, but that would suggest this is simply window dressing, that this simply is smoke and mirrors.

Really, this is a bill that's shrouded in Cabinet control and secrecy. Again, I respect the fact government is elected to govern, and this government has a very strong, clear mandate from the people of the province. We respect that. But you cannot argue this is non-political and independent if it's still all about Cabinet control and a secret process.

When questioned this morning in the news conference, and hopefully – based on how the news conference went, I doubt the full thing will be posted online for people to see. I hope it is, because the Premier's response to that question for media about Cabinet control and secrecy was: that's the way things work. I'm quoting the Premier of the province, Madam Speaker – that's the way things work.

There was an impressive lineup this morning. Clearly, government is committed to this piece of legislation. The Finance Minister, who is responsible for the Public Service Commission, as well as the Government House Leader, answered questions and gave a detailed presentation with the Premier this morning.

The Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement was noticeably absent from the news conference. I recognize that given the size of Cabinet and the reduced number of Members in this House, Cabinet ministers have quite a burden. They're carrying multiple departments in some cases and it's undoubtedly a heavy load. For something that's supposed to be about openness and transparency and changing the way government does business, this feels like it could be a really good Open Government Initiative.

Unfortunately, the Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement was absent. In fact, I'm told that the only thing going on in the Office of Public Engagement these days is the Government Renewal Initiative consultation

process. I think we've got 13 or 14 more months to go of that process, so very concerning and I think worth noting.

Madam Speaker, how can you say that you're taking politics out of a process, if, at the end of the day, as outlined in several places in this legislation, Cabinet can simply do what it wants. I don't think you're taking politics out of anything, if, at the end of the day, Cabinet ministers are going to make decisions behind closed doors from a list of people that's not even ranked by this independent process.

What I saw this morning was rather concerning. The government is setting the stage already to make exceptions and to set up circumstances whereby they can simply bypass this process or throw out the recommendations. Repeatedly, we heard language like extraordinary circumstances and rare occurrences and exceptions will be very rare. It was said in this hon. House. It was said in the news conference today. We even heard that kind of talk in our briefing this morning.

It's great that government wants to get on with it and wants to rush the debate on this bill, but that should be cause for concern as well, Madam Speaker. The fact that the Premier of the province would suggest twice in a news conference that we should simply get on with it and move this process quickly, should cause people to reflect on why that would be.

Madam Speaker, if all decisions, as a result of this new process that's not really that new or different – if all those decisions come down to politicians behind closed doors, how can you ever claim that that's non-political?

Madam Speaker, again the Premier kept saying that the members of this commission should resign if Cabinet doesn't respect the process. That's yet another red flag. So on one hand we should rush this, on another hand we're hearing lots about rare occurrences and exceptional circumstances. There's nothing binding about the legislation. The Premier says, well, the members of the commission should just resign if the process is not respected. If you don't like our decisions you can resign. That doesn't feel like a non-political process and independence to me.

Relying on commissioners resigning to ensure the integrity of the process, that's what the Premier is suggesting we do, Madam Speaker, and I find it offensive to be honest. You can't possibly say that anything about this is independent. You can't possibly say that anything about this is non-political.

Cabinet gets to pick names from a secret list. One of the ministers this morning, I believe it was the Finance Minister, and the Premier said it in debate today, talked about how proud they were of this piece of work, the Finance Minister said. Well, Madam Speaker, I'd suggest this is a piece of work, and there's a lot more work to be done before this bill should ever pass in this House of Assembly. There are some major concerns and major holes that I think need to be addressed, one of the biggest being that there's 130 agencies and boards that are exempt from the process.

One of the questions the media asked today, I think for good reason, is: Can we expect that not a single high-profile Liberal will be appointed to this five member commission? Unfortunately, the Premier wouldn't answer that question. He did make a comment about looking for the best people to serve, but there was no commitment to not appoint high-profile Liberals.

Maybe there are some high-profile Liberals that are perfectly qualified to do this work. I'm not sure one should suggest that they should be exempt from being part of the process just because of a past or present political affiliation. We live in a relatively small place, and we have lots of examples even in this hon. House of people wearing multiple political stripes. I'm not sure of the fact that somebody was once or is currently associated with a political party be a reason to completely disqualify them from being appointed either. That doesn't make a lot of sense, Madam Speaker.

One of the questions that was also asked by the media today was: Can you tell us what agencies and boards and commissions are not covered by this legislation? There's a long list at the back of tier-one agencies, boards and commissions. In the big Schedule C, in the middle of the bill, there's a whole bunch of other committees and boards and commissions and agencies, but we could not get an answer from government in the

news conference today. The media could not get an answer around which agencies, boards and commissions would not be covered.

It was certainly our sense from talking to officials in the briefing that it was the intention to capture them all. So I respect that and I accept that at face value. I just thought it was interesting that the question wasn't answered at the news conference today.

One of the things that trumped this morning was that this will all be no cost. We are not going to pay people to do this work. These five people will appoint hundreds – they won't appoint anybody. I am sorry, Madam Speaker; I misspoke. They won't appoint anybody. They will make lots of recommendations that may or may not be accepted. They will do it out of the goodness of their hearts. They might get their gas covered or hotel nights, if required, or meals, but they won't be compensated for their time in any way, shape or form.

I get that there is limited cost then to those folks doing that work. But is government suggesting that now the Public Service Commission is going to be involved in potentially thousands of appointments? If you look at the list of hundreds of committees, agencies, boards, councils and commissions, they are going to be involved in screening potentially hundreds if not thousands of applicants. There is going to be – I would say on a monthly basis looking at that list – dozens and dozens of appointments and processes. Are we suggesting, are Members opposite suggesting, is the Finance Minister suggesting that the Public Service Commission already has that much extra capacity that there are no additional resources required to administer something like this? That is cause for concern as well, Madam Speaker.

From what I can recall, the Public Service Commission, which does really good work, doesn't have a lot of people sitting around looking for work to do. There is plenty of work. With the upcoming layoffs, perhaps the Public Service Commission won't be as busy. Maybe they'll be involved in supporting some of that process with the Human Resource Secretariat. But to suggest that the Public Service Commission has the capacity to all of this work with no added cost, I find that hard to believe,

Madam Speaker. We are talking about thousands of appointments. What is suggested if there is no added cost, no additional burden, then that can all be done with existing resources. I think some more questions need to be asked about that as well.

Madam Speaker, I was disappointed that the Premier would accuse us of questioning the integrity of the Public Service Commission. It is not the Public Service Commission that we are worried about; it is the fact that this is really just a facade and the end of the day the decisions will be made by politicians behind closed doors

The Premier today in the debate in second reading, less than an hour ago, suggested that previous governments – in fairness, he wasn't specific about the most recent previous government, but he did say the previous governments probably appointed family members to some of these roles.

Now, Madam Speaker, I recognize that governments over time have appointed people who have been involved maybe in the political party, maybe they've been supporters of a given administration, and like I said somebody shouldn't be disqualified from a process because of their political affiliation. I think that would fly in the face of a process that's independent, but to suggest that previous governments appointed family members, for the Premier of the province to make that kind of statement in debate today is disturbing – like lots of aspects of what we've heard so far today.

This legislation was described by, I believe, the Premier as being groundbreaking. I'm not sure, Madam Speaker. I would suggest that we're not on solid ground at all with this piece of legislation and that much debate is going to be required in this hon. House. Perhaps we can fix the bill. Perhaps if we're truly committed to being non-partisan and non-political, perhaps we can work together in this House and come up with a bill that does establish a process that's objective and independent and transparent, and reduces the amount of political involvement and even interference.

It seems like a great opportunity to take the politics out of that process. Why couldn't we work together? If we want those five

commissioners to be independent, why couldn't all parties play a role in identifying who those commissioners should be, as opposed to simply rubber-stamping the government decision in this House? Wouldn't this be a great piece of legislation to send to a committee?

I know in the Liberal election platform there was a real strong commitment made to improving how this House does business and ensuring that there are effective legislative committees so that all Members of this House, people who have lots of passion and energy and skills and perspective and experience, can all play a meaningful role in advancing legislation and crafting legislation and making changes to legislation that comes before this House.

So wouldn't this be a great opportunity to strike a committee of this Legislature to look at this legislation? If we are actually committed to making it non-political and non-partisan, then why not have Members of the governing party who would logically have a majority on the committee anyway – it makes sense; they've been elected to govern. Why not have representation from the Progressive Conservative caucus and the New Democratic caucus to actually make some changes to this bill and maybe get it to a point where we could unanimously support it?

It's early days. We only saw the bill late yesterday. We received a briefing several hours ago. We attended a news conference at 12:30 today. So we need to take some more time to analyze this bill, which is another reason why the suggestion that we should rush it through the House is kind of bizarre.

Let's consider the possibility of striking a committee to take a close look at this. Government can control the committee. Government sets the legislative agenda. Government can have the majority of Members on the committee. But why not involve Members of the Opposition caucuses in reviewing this bill and trying to make it work? I think the concept is commendable. I have no problem with exploring some kind of independent non-partisan process for appointments, but I think this bill falls short in many ways.

I'd like to go in a little more detail, Madam Speaker. Given the sentiments expressed by the Premier that this process will be rushed I want to take advantage of the time I do have, my only opportunity in second reading, to speak to this legislation.

MR. A. PARSONS: (Inaudible.)

MR. KENT: Yes, the House Leader acknowledges that we will have time in Committee. I look forward to that. That, as he well acknowledges, I'm sure he will acknowledge, is a great part of the process because it does allow us to get into the nitty-gritty.

Maybe we can make the bill better. Maybe we can address some of the concerns that I've raised. Maybe Members opposite will be willing to speak to some of those concerns we've raised and maybe work with us to find solutions when we get to the Committee stage, so I do look forward to that. We will take time to analyze the bill and figure out if there is any way to make it work, but some of the concerns that have been identified are quite significant.

All the bill does – it does not ensure independent appointments. It's a bill that serves to create a commission that will make recommendations. They're not ranked. They're not binding. They're not even going to be publicly disclosed. Ultimately, the decisions will still be made at the Cabinet table.

If the Liberal government was serious about taking politics out of appointments, which is something they campaigned heavily on, promised to do – they said they were going to make sure that happened and politicians would be removed from the process – why wouldn't they take the politicians out of the process altogether perhaps? Maybe we can come up with a process that ensures an Independent Appointments Commission that actually gets to make appointments and not just recommendations that can be ignored by Cabinet. It doesn't take the politics out of appointments as promised.

I said smoke and mirrors earlier, Madam Speaker, and I really believe that what we're dealing with here is smoke and mirrors. I think

this is legislation that now they want to rush through the House, but I think it was probably rushed in its creation as well. I think it's legislation for the sake of fulfilling an election promise. It doesn't do anything to alter who makes appointments at the end of the day. It doesn't do anything to alter who makes the ultimate decisions. It doesn't do anything to alter the level of transparency around those decisions as well.

This is another example of government saying they're going to do something, promising action and then doing something different. That's disappointing. This legislation doesn't have any teeth, which is perhaps our greatest concern with the legislation after having the chance to review it this morning. It's inactive legislation, and maybe that's a reflection on the new administration.

Let's talk for a little bit in the time I have left about how key appointments are usually made. Cabinet has traditionally retained the power to make appointments to key positions. That makes sense because the First Minister, the Premier, and the other Cabinet ministers are collectively responsible for leading the provincial government. They set the direction for policy. They're accountable to the people in this House. They're accountable to the people of the province during election campaigns when government is either elected or not elected, and we know all about that.

Every Cabinet has to ensure that people in leadership roles at agencies, commissions and Crown corporations and so on, people throughout government are not just qualified and they're not just skilled, experienced and proven, but they also have to be trustworthy and they have to work collaboratively with the government. There is good logic for Cabinet playing a role in appointments, as it traditionally has, but don't say that you're taking politics out of appointments and creating an independent process when you have no intention whatsoever of doing so. It's just not true.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: There are roles, though, where you do want antagonists, people who will be truly independent and hold the government up for

scrutiny and for criticism. Think about the appointments we make in this House. Again, they're driven by government, but they're formally approved and debated in this House and there's an opportunity for Members of this House to challenge that. While we can't stop government from passing whatever motion it wants, we can certainly challenge and raise questions.

The Auditor General, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Citizens' Representative, soon the seniors' advocate and we would argue there should be a veterans' advocate as well – having people that are truly, truly independent and who shouldn't be looking over their shoulder to see if they're pleasing their political masters in government, that's why those roles exist and are appointed by this House. They do need to be critical of government, as they often are. That's part of their job.

Let's keep in mind, as we get into this debate, that the Crown corporations and the boards, agencies and commissions we're talking about are entities that do the work of government. They work on behalf of government. They're part of the team that's running the affairs of the province. They do have to work collaboratively with whatever administration is in power. They have to implement the administration's policies and achieve the goals of the administration with good governance and sound management.

So along those lines, Madam Speaker, I'd suggest that obviously it's not in any Cabinet's interest to appoint political friends who aren't qualified to do the job. Cabinet does have a responsibility, as the Minister of Finance eloquently stated in the news conference today. They have to get the work done, they have to do it effectively and they have to shoulder that responsibility. Why would people in Cabinet make decisions and appoint friends who aren't qualified to do the job.

We live in a small place. Sometimes we have friends that may very well be qualified. They may go through a process, win the process and be the best person for the job. But this, Madam Speaker, is not about the best person for the job. This is about a list that will be provided and Cabinet will at the end of the day appoint who it wants.

Again, we shouldn't disqualify people because of some affiliation with a certain administration. I don't think that's what's intended here. That would defy logic. Those people that have been appointed by our government, by previous Liberal governments, recent appointments by the current government – just because they've been what's considered a political appointment doesn't mean they're not capable. It doesn't mean that they're not qualified to do the job. Why would any government appoint people that aren't going to get the work done that needs to be done on behalf of the government. It wouldn't make sense.

We've seen lots of people who have been appointed by our government, and Liberal governments before our time, that did a good job. Their work benefited the people of the province immensely. I think we should show them respect and gratitude for the work they've done serving the people of the province, often in positions of heavy responsibility and often without compensation.

Many of those boards, agencies and commissions that are referenced in this legislation, either on the exclusive tier-one list or the big tier-two list of 130 organizations, many of those people have done that work for free. They've given their time and they've contributed their energy and their talent to do good work on behalf of the province. So whether they're Tory or Liberal or even New Democrats, I would suggest that people are –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: I would suggest that those people are doing that work on behalf of whatever government happens to be in office because they want to do good and they want to contribute. It's not about political stripe.

In fact, when I think about some of the appointments that were made by the former administration, there are some really stark reminders, Madam Speaker. All I have to do is look at the front bench of the House of Assembly on the government side to see some of our PC political appointments.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: I believe the Minister of Finance did a good job working on the board of Nalcor, appointed by the previous Tory administration.

AN HON. MEMBER: Are you saying she was a political appointment?

MR. KENT: I think so.

You have the former Mayor of Grand Falls-Windsor who is now the Minister of Transportation and Works who was, I believe, what would be defined as a political appointment. That doesn't mean, Madam Speaker, that either hon. minister didn't do a good job. They have lots of skills. They have lots of experience. They wouldn't be sitting on the front bench of the House of Assembly on the government side if they weren't qualified and if they didn't have skills, experience and talents that were worth sharing.

It's not about whether they were Tory or whether they're now Liberal – and we have some recovering New Democrats on the front bench as well. It's not about political stripe. Just because a government made the decision to make an appointment, it is not because the Minister of Finance was a loyal Tory or the Minister of Transportation and Works was a loyal Tory. They clearly were not.

We kind of missed that, but I digress, Madam Speaker. I won't force you to rise and call me out of order. I will get back to the matter at hand.

MR. CROCKER: (Inaudible.)

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: We'll talk about that later, I say to the Minister of Fisheries.

We shouldn't disqualify people just because they were closely tied to an administration. Lots of people have done good work regardless of their political stripe. I appreciate the opportunity to have a little bit of fun during what is a rather serious debate this afternoon.

We weren't afraid to reach across the aisle and find people to serve. In some cases, we thought those people were maybe on our side of the aisle, but, you know, that's politics in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are so many instances of people changing political stripes. It's not always about ideology. We sometimes are very quick to give people a partisan label and it may not even be fair or just.

Maybe people who serve, who are appointed by government, shouldn't be labeled by their stripe at all but by their performance. We shouldn't look down on anybody who steps forward to serve their province within a particular administration. It doesn't matter what political party you belonged to or belong to.

There is nothing shameful about public service, Madam Speaker. We ought to be encouraging it and not finding ways to smear people unfairly, which I have no doubt, based on the heckling I've seen so far this afternoon, that kind of smearing will undoubtedly happen during the debate on Bill 1. We're hearing the catcalls already this afternoon.

Let's keep in mind that it's the new Liberal government that has raised expectations, Madam Speaker. This debate is not about who we appointed in the past or even who previous Liberal administrations appointed in the past. It's not about what we did or what any other administration did; this is the flagship piece of legislation for a new government with a strong mandate.

This debate has to be about what the Liberals have said they would do differently in the platform that they were elected on that was released in the final days of the election campaign. It's the Liberals who have said they'll change the way things are done, and Bill 1, Madam Speaker, does not reflect any kind of real change whatsoever.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: In fact, it justifies political appointments and actually enshrines it in legislation, which is rather bizarre. They did attempt to raise the bar. The onus is therefore on the new government to rise to that challenge. If

they fail to do so, then it is just smoke and mirrors and there is no real change.

Their commitment, which was outlined in the election campaign and rehashed in the Throne Speech earlier this week, really wouldn't be worth the paper it's written on if they're not going to do what they said they were going to do. That's not something I would think they'd want to be the case with their very first piece of legislation in this House.

Let's keep in mind, if you refer back to the Liberal platform or to even the Throne Speech this week, this was not a minor commitment. It was about as major a commitment as a commitment could be. It was the very first plank of the platform in the 2015 red book, the very first item in the very first section of the red book. Yes, I did read some of the red book.

Do you know what? There are some reasonable ideas in there, too. It's not all bad. I think you'll sense from our Opposition caucus that we won't be afraid to stand and say when something is good. In fact, it's probably already occurred at least in the media, if not in this House, in recent days.

This is a high priority, the very first piece of legislation, the first bill of the mandate. Traditionally, Bill 1 is the flagship bill that would define them. It's something they should expect their administration to be judged by. So having set the expectations exceptionally high, they can't fault us or fault the media, which we saw yesterday and also today. They can't fault the public for demanding that the bill live up to the expectations they have raised.

I was reading the paper this morning. The headline was: Ball ducks questions. Despite promises of transparency, "Cabinet can ignore 'independent' appointment recommendations."

MR. A. PARSONS: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: I just want to point out the Standing Orders say that you must refer to Members by their position, even when quoting, I'm sure.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I apologize, and I thank the Government House Leader for reminding me, even when quoting, that the Member's name should not be referenced.

The Premier ducks questions. Despite promises of transparency, "Cabinet can ignore 'independent' appointment recommendations."

So Members opposite will rise during second reading debate – well, probably not many of them because they want to rush this through, as the Premier has stated – and say that all these things I'm saying aren't true and our concerns are unfounded. But already, before second reading debate even started in the House of Assembly, the headline in today's daily paper is that the Premier won't answer questions and the big concern with this piece of legislation is despite the promises in the red book, despite the promises in the Throne Speech, "Cabinet can ignore 'independent' appointment recommendations."

I encourage you to read the article. I'm not encouraging you to buy Telegram James's book, but I am encouraging you to – it is an interesting read. I'm not suggesting you don't either, but I am suggesting that you read his article on page 1 of *The Telegram* today.

This bill, Madam Speaker, is one that the administration should be judged by. They have set expectations very high, and the media, the Opposition and the public should hold them accountable. Let's see if their legislation does indeed rise to the standard that they've set.

So we have the keystone piece of legislation, first session in office. It's a big election promise. Let's look at that in more detail, and without mentioning any premiers' or ministers' names. The 2015 red book commitment reads as follows: Restoring Openness, Transparency and Accountability. "Liberals strongly believe that government must be open, transparent, and accountable. The people of the province deserve to know how and why government decisions are

made,” which is really ironic considering the process that is proposed here in Bill 1.

They will restore openness, transparency and accountability through the following actions: 1.1 Take Politics Out Of Government Appointments. “Government is responsible for appointing senior positions at Crown corporations, public commissions, and other public agencies. Liberals believe that these positions should be filled based on merit, not politics.” Here’s the real kicker: “It’s simply a matter of making sure the most qualified person gets the job.”

Why would you have a process that doesn’t ensure that? Why would you have a process that doesn’t even recommend the most qualified person for the job?

I’ll just go on a little further. “A New Liberal Government will establish an Independent Appointments Commission to take politics out of government appointments.” Bill 1 comes nowhere close to achieving that. In fact, it ensures political appointments. It justifies political appointments. It justifies a process that’s not independent and it justifies patronage appointments – so very, very concerning.

The implication is clear. The appointments process will be – the idea of suggesting politics be taken out of the process would be that it would be completely oblivious to political associations, blindfolded to political links. Just like the blindfolded statutes in front of some of the top courts around the world. Even the red book commitment, Madam Speaker, ends a little weakly.

If you really want to make sure the most qualified person gets the job, then wouldn’t you expect the independence commission to do a lot more than provide a list of people without even suggesting who the most qualified person is? Wouldn’t you expect that an Independent Appointments Commission could actually appoint, would actually have the power to appoint somebody to something?

What we’re talking about is an Independent Appointments Commission that has no power to appoint anybody to anything. In fact, for 130 boards and agencies and committees and

councils they will have no involvement whatsoever. This is about making recommendations. It does nothing to take politics out of appointments.

So wouldn’t you expect the commission and the commissioners to have the power to weed out unqualified applicants? Yes, and they probably will do so and then rank remaining applicants. Maybe even actually make the appointment of the most qualified person, but they’re not even allowed to identify the most qualified person, Madam Speaker.

The new government, despite making some pretty bold commitments, is not prepared to give up that power. They’re not prepared to change how they do business but they are going to put forward this bill for the sake of meeting an election promise that certainly falls short.

They want to have the final say. I respect that, but be honest about it. They want to make sure they have somebody who’s qualified but can also work well with them. So I understand why there may be appointments they do not want to give up control over. I think there’s actually some merit to that, but don’t say you’re going to do it if you have no intention of doing it.

Again, as the Minister of Finance touched on in the news conference this morning, Cabinet can’t relinquish its responsibilities or abdicate its obligations. Because the commission is not elected, the commission does not have a mandate from the people of the province; the government does, and I respect that.

We didn’t relinquish our obligations and our responsibilities, and I wouldn’t expect any government to do that. We made appointments and we were prepared to defend them. We defended them in this House. We defended them in the media. We defended them on doorsteps. I would like to think we could go back in time through various administrations and identify good people that were appointed for whatever reason, who were qualified and capable and did good service.

It’s the Liberals who said that the old process was wrong and who set new expectations. It’s the Liberals who said that there must be an independent, merit-based, politically neutral

appointments process. So now they have to deliver on that, Madam Speaker, and they can't have it both ways. Just like you can't be Mr. Speaker and Madam Speaker when you are right there, and you are clearly Madam Speaker, either it is independent or it's not. It's either meaningful or it's not. And if it's not, then what is it but a sham, Madam Speaker.

So there are two separate issues that I want to highlight and I only have a few minutes left, unfortunately, but as the House Leader acknowledged we'll have lots of time in Committee to further discuss this bill. If we want truly independent appointments, then there are two separate issues that I would encourage Members of this House and members of the public to consider. As this debate unfolds, think about how independent the commission gatekeepers will actually be, and think about how much power those commission appointees, those gatekeepers, will actually have. Will they be truly independent and non-partisan? That first issue is critical.

How will we ensure that the gatekeepers are indeed truly independent, neutral and qualified to make good decisions about the qualifications of candidates for leadership posts in the province? That depends on who will be on the commission. Hopefully, government will choose to recommend some good people to serve in that capacity. But how will they be appointed beyond the rubber-stamping that inevitably occurs here, and how will their independence be assured? I think it's a question that warrants some consideration.

Section 6 in this legislation – and in the couple of minutes I have left, I am not going to delve too deeply into the clauses. We will have lots of opportunity for that, but I do want to point out that section 6 is the authority under which the commission will be established. It outlines how the commission will be established. It says, “The commission shall consist of 5 members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council on resolution of the House of Assembly.”

So Cabinet will choose five people. Caucus will be, I would suggest, strongly encouraged to support that motion when it comes forward. There will be a resolution in this House and

government, obviously, holds a clear majority. Then government passes the resolution, and the point I am trying to make, Madam Speaker, is that ultimately it is Cabinet that will make those appointments. It may get ratified in this House, but it is Cabinet who will select the five people and bring those names forward to the House. So that is interesting.

How can they say that the commission itself will be non-partisan if Cabinet selects them and uses its majority to hire them but, like parliamentary secretaries, not pay them? If the gatekeepers themselves are political appointees, then how is that process non-partisan? If we are going to move ahead with that – and clearly it's the will and intent of government, and I respect that – why not involve both sides of the House of Assembly in selecting those five people?

Why couldn't we all have a say in who those people are and put forward names? I'm sure the Third Party can identify good, capable, qualified, reputable people to serve. I'm sure we can as well, and I have no doubt that Members opposite will do the same – no doubt at all. Why not look at some kind of process like that, and maybe even refer this bill to a committee of the Legislature to explore that further?

I will run out of time, but another point I want to make today in second reading is that Cabinet can fill vacancies without really consulting with anybody. If a commission vacancy occurs while the House is not in session – and the House is not always in session – there's a clause in this bill that says, “Where the House of Assembly is not sitting and a commissioner cannot act due to accident, illness, incapacity or death, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council may appoint a person to act in his or her place,” and that will be confirmed by a resolution of the House of Assembly once the House next sits.

The House can go for several months without sitting, of course, so Cabinet can appoint somebody as long as when we get back together in the Legislature a motion is then passed. It's worth highlighting that even the five-member commission is not, in any stretch, non-political or free from political involvement given it is Cabinet making the appointments.

For those appointments, though, let's assume we get the right people, they're appointed for the right reasons and they do a good job. If we don't like a Cabinet appointment we can question Cabinet ministers – anybody can. From now on, Cabinet will simply say, well, the commission recommended the person. Do you know what the Premier said repeatedly today? If they don't like it, if they don't like exceptions we make or decisions we make as a Cabinet, those five members can resign. If a member has a concern, they can resign.

Madam Speaker, there's lots of concerns to consider. I'm down to my final few seconds. Does this bill meet the test of the promise in the 2015 red book? Does it take the politics out of appointments? Of course it doesn't. Does it make sure that the most qualified person gets the job? Absolutely not. It makes sure of nothing. It doesn't take the politics out of anything. It changes nothing. That's where this bill fails.

It's not good enough for this administration to simply be no different from any other government in our history, regardless of political stripe. They raised expectations in the red book. They said that they would do things differently and they brought in this legislation. This initiative falls short –

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: – and won't result in any meaningful change, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the Member his time has expired.

MR. KENT: Thank you for the opportunity to participate in second reading debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I'm delighted to have the opportunity today to speak to Bill 1, a bill that we've heard the

Premier speak to and the Member for Mount Pearl North from the Official Opposition. It's a very interesting bill that we have here in front of us.

The Liberal government has been promising this for a long time. It was part of their platform in the general election where they said that they were going to create a commission to take politics out of government appointments. I hope the government side is not going to get sick and tired of hearing it, but we have to talk about this promise that they made, this bill – this bill – this bill, that is a good one – that they put on the table for us to look at. They're probably going to get sick and tired of hearing is the politics really being taken out of government appointments.

They're the ones who started that. They're the ones who started with their commitment in their platform. And they repeated it again in the Speech from the Throne which said that this commission will be the first of its kind in Newfoundland and Labrador – note, at least the Speech from the Throne had it correct. It might be the first of its kind in Newfoundland and Labrador, but dealing with taking politics out of appointments is not new in the country. I have to point that out.

The Speech from the Throne said: “This commission will be the first of its kind in Newfoundland and Labrador, taking the politics out of government appointments. We believe that appointments to our agencies, boards and commissions should be merit based, not politically motivated, as in the past.”

We firmly stand behind being merit based. One would want to think that the people who are being appointed to our boards and to our agencies and to our public bodies are people who have the experience and skills that are needed. Now, do we need a whole commission put in place to make that happen? I find it very interesting that when we look around the country we see some very good examples of governments, of provinces – not governments in the terms of a particular colour government, but provinces also wanting to have a process that takes the politics out, a process that appoints on merit.

Ontario has what they call their Public Appointments Secretariat. It's not a separate body; it's within the government structure, but recognizing that they wanted a merit-based appointment system with nominations made to the government. British Columbia has what they call the Board Resourcing and Development Office and they have the same concern. They, too, are a body that establishes guidelines for all provincial appointments to agencies. They ensure all provincial appointments are made on the basis of merit following an open, transparent and consistent appointment process. That's what they've done in Ontario and BC. They've set up bodies within government that makes sure appointments are merit based and makes sure that it's an open, transparent process.

I think this government has put itself into a real conundrum. They're not going to say that, Mr. Speaker. They're not going to admit that. One of the realities is that, ultimately, it is government's responsibility to do the final appointing – ultimately, it is. Ultimately, the Lieutenant Governor in Council and the ministers have to make final appointments. That's part of their responsibility. That's what they're elected for.

What the people of the province want, and certainly what we want as a party is an open and transparent process that also recognizes government's responsibility. How do we do that? That is what's been lacking in the past in this province, is an open and transparent process.

I'm going to start where my colleague for Mount Pearl North left off. He and I don't agree often on a lot of stuff, but we agree on this one, and that is the starting point for the whole process is the actual commission itself. That's the starting point. What is this government doing? What does the bill say? The bill says a motion will be brought into the House and we will get to approve the five people who are on the IAC.

The Premier stood today and said the same thing. He pointed that out as that was going to be the process of consultation. We would have the opportunity to speak to the five people who were going to be appointed by government, by the Lieutenant Governor in Council here in this House.

Well, where we agree, not with the government but with what the Member for Mount Pearl North said – and I totally agree, it was in my notes and I'm bringing it forward – is that you, the government, should be asking all of us in this House to name people as the possible people to be on that commission.

AN HON. MEMBER: We are.

MS. MICHAEL: No, you're not doing that I point out, Mr. Speaker. They are not doing that.

What they're doing is they're going to be bringing five names in here and saying, okay, approve them. They're the majority. No matter what we say or do they're the majority.

The Premier said that he would not – for example, when it comes to nominees who are brought forward to the Cabinet – want to make those names public because he wouldn't want to embarrass people if they didn't get chosen. However, what they are going to do is decide on five people who are going to be on that IAC, bring those names in here and then say to us, okay, if you want to tear them apart, tear them apart.

They're going to ask us here publicly in this House to have an open discussion about the five names that are brought forward. That's a discussion that should happen prior. That's the discussion that should happen where we can really sit down together, as people with responsibility, and put the IAC together, the appointments commission together.

What happens here in the House – and we all know that and the public knows it as well. When names like that get brought to the House we are rubber stamping at that point. We're not going to be saying, why did Ms. J. B. of those five – why do you have her? Why are you bringing her into the House? Why do you think she is a good person? We're not going to do that here in this House. That's not the kind of thing you do.

So the actual appointment of the IAC is in their hands. It will come in here and we'll rubber stamp it. That's what is going to happen. The public knows that's what is going to happen and they know that's what is going to happen. There

is the first flaw. The first flaw is they ultimately name the IAC.

If they really wanted an open process, tell us. Tell us during this debate that they are going to ask the two Opposition Parties to nominate people, along with people they nominate, and we'll look at all of them together. Then, we will get a variety of people, maybe, of political stripes. I think the big important thing will be a variety of people with their experience.

One of the things, for example, that is noted in the Ontario secretariat in their guidelines – it is one of the principles governing the Ontario Public Appointments Secretariat: “Persons selected to serve must reflect the true face of Ontario in terms of diversity and regional representation.” When I asked this morning in our technical briefing what was going to happen inside the PSC with regard to gender diversity – I took one piece of diversity, gender diversity, in putting the list together for government – the answer was it's merit based. That was the only thing. We will be giving names forward –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The answer during the technical briefing was it will be merit based. That's the only thing that the PSC will be using is merit based. There is nothing in here that talks about the people who get appointed reflecting, in terms of diversity on regional representation, the true face of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So we are dealing with something very complicated because government has a responsibility, with regard to diversity, in the appointments that it does. It's not nice and clean in saying PSC passes us a list of names. What if the Public Service Commission passes the government a list of names that is just five of one gender, five men, no Aboriginal people, all from the Burin Peninsula? What if that happens? Government has a responsibility.

What they've put in place is not going to help the process at all of what we need here in this province. Yes, government has to do

appointments and we need an open and transparent process. I don't think that a government-appointed five-person commission is going to give us an open and transparent process. That's the basic flaw. The very first thing is the basic flaw with this bill.

I put that out to government. I have to ask, how much real thinking through did this government do when they came up with this idea of the commission? What real thinking did they put into that? Right now, they started saying they want something that was not politically motivated, that politics are being taken out. They put in place something that ultimately has to say – it has to have the notwithstanding clause because ultimately it is government's responsibility to appoint. Then they have the five- person commission that they will appoint and bring to us for rubber stamping. So they haven't taken the politics out. They have not done that.

This seems to be a habit of theirs right now, the flip-flopping that they've been doing and continue to do. For example, we had heard all during the general election that there were going to be no job cuts. They had not only their leader saying it, not only was it being said by him, they had key people who were running for them out saying it as well. It was one of the things they got elected on, I am positive. Yet what's the first thing they're flip-flopping on once we're here and we're finally all three elected and we're back working again? It's on the table. Everything is on the table. Job cuts are on the table.

Why? Because they knew, I think what they were thinking – and if they didn't know what they were thinking, that's even worse. So it flip-flopped, the same way with the HST. No, the HST is not going up. Now that's on the table, too. Why is that on the table, too? Because they didn't think; all they were doing was making political promises and not thinking the political promises through.

Now here they are with a bill that everybody is going to recognize. I, too, invite the general public to go into the government website and into the House of Assembly inside of that website and find the bill and read it. They, too, will see that they aren't keeping the promise

they talked about, the promise of taking politics out of appointments. If they really meant it, if they want this process, the process of having the commission – and I don't think they need that process. I think it's an extra level of work.

All of this goes on anyway. The Public Service Commission does the job of keeping the lists of people and people who are qualified, and people with merit, et cetera. It could be broadened. What they do could be broadened.

Already, government takes nominations and government appoints. What happens right now, especially with the things where government does not relate to the Public Service Commission is all private, we have no idea. Nobody knows what openings there are. Nobody knows how they can apply for openings. Nobody knows how they can nominate people.

An open and transparent process, as they have in Ontario and BC, could be put in place without having this commission. This commission really is smoke and mirrors, I agree. That's the only thing I can use for it as well is smoke and mirrors, trying to make people think that something different is happening. Nothing different is happening, Mr. Speaker.

If they really meant it – and I'm going to repeat it – they would have all three parties together. I'm trying to remember which place in particular where they say that. They talk about it. It might be in the Speech from the Throne; I don't want to say exactly where. This government has talked about the all-party committee structure. It has said that they would use the all-party committee structure to talk about legislation.

If there's a piece of legislation where an all-party committee should be talking about the legislation, it's this piece of legislation. An all-party committee is not happening here on the floor of the House. An all-party committee meets outside of the legislative structure. It sits down and works through the legislation.

That is where we should be doing the work. It's in an all-party committee structure that names should be coming forward, that ideas should be being put out on the table. Then we might see the politics being taken out of the structure. Because if the names were coming and there

was mutual agreement happening on a committee level with regard to the people who were going to be on the commission, then I'd say the politics were being taken out of it. It's not being taken out of it now.

It's still ultimately – we have the open process with the Public Service Commission. They will make sure the availability of positions is put out publicly. They will make people know in an open way they can make an application and they can put their names in. From then on, there really is nothing open about it. From then on there isn't, and it's all in government's hands.

We have to recognize that this government needs to call this what it is. It is another new structure which is outside of the government system. But being outside of the government system, the commission itself, doesn't mean it's non-political, because it is still political.

Government being responsible for making appointments does not have to be partisan. You see, that's the word that's not being used. We're saying taking politics out. It's taking partisanship out. It's taking out making decisions and finding people based on what is the political colour of that person. Is that somebody who we need to pay back for the work they did for us in the campaign? That's the kind of thing that has happened here in this province, and that's what we want to end. We all know that; that's been part of our history, way too much. We don't need to name examples, and I won't, but we all know them. And that's what we want to get away from. We want to get away from the partisanship.

Can you get away from government maintaining its responsibility? No, you can't. Government has to maintain its responsibility. You will always find a notwithstanding clause in legislation. You will always find a notwithstanding clause even in the contract, because ultimately there are things that have to happen and ultimately it is government's responsibility. That's why we are elected; that's why we have a party that forms the governance of the Assembly. It's the responsibility to make good decisions, but the good decisions need to be made, all the parties together – and when those five names come in here, that's not the point at which we can really discuss who should

be on that commission. That's the point at which you say: Okay, well, that's who it is.

We're not going to sit here, when those five names come in, and drag those names through the mud. If I know somebody of those five names – my gosh, I can't believe that person is being appointed. I'm not going to say that here publicly here in the House. Of course I'm not. My colleagues across the way are looking at me and some of them are almost nodding because they know we can't do that. All we can do when those names come in here to the House is approve them.

We have to learn what consultation means. We have in a number of appointments right now that have been made by government – it says government is supposed to consult. Well, I remember one time quarter to 11 on a Sunday evening, getting a call from an executive assistant saying the premier wants me to call you to tell you that tomorrow we're naming so and so for this position. That was the consultation – quarter to 11 on a Sunday evening.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who did that?

MS. MICHAEL: Well, I don't think the Liberals were in government since I came in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS. MICHAEL: However, I do not put it past them. You're doing the same thing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: In this bill there is no word even about consulting with regard to those five people. That's the point I wanted to get to. It doesn't even say that the government will consult with the rest of the MHAs in the House. It will not consult with the Opposition with regard to naming the five people. So that's why I know it's even worse. I won't even get a phone call quarter to 12 or quarter to 11 on a Sunday evening, because you're not even saying that you have to consult.

Mr. Speaker, it isn't taking the politics out. It isn't doing what they've promised. I really think this bill is a sham.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It's certainly an honour to be able to stand in my place in this House of Assembly to speak to issues that are important to the people of this province. Whether it's legislation, whether it's pressing issues, these are the things that we're put here to do. So it's certainly an honour to stand here in this House and speak to this.

It's an even bigger honour to be able to stand here and speak to Bill 1 for this new government. Bill 1, an Independent Appointments Commission, something that we talked about when we were in Opposition, we put it in our election platform, and right now we have it here on the floor of the House of Assembly being debated by all parties. That shows you that again it was a promise that was made and right now it's a promise that's being kept. Bill 1, the flagship piece of legislation, is being put forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: I appreciate the commentary from the Members opposite. Again, I know quite well what it's like to stand up on the other side and speak to legislation and to hold government accountable for legislation. I appreciate and respect the comments that they make to this. That is their job.

Do you know what? I can remember Members in government saying, oh, you're in Opposition and you have to disagree just for the sake of disagreeing, and Opposition is an easy job. I will say to you, you'll never hear that from me, because I worked extremely hard in Opposition. I worked extremely hard.

I'm sure that Members opposite who were on this side and are on this side will learn that it is an extremely hard job if you want to do a very good job of ensuring that government is accountable to the people of this province, which is the job of the Opposition. Whether you're a Member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition or you're a Member of the NDP, it doesn't matter, your job is to hold government accountable, and we welcome that.

Now, I'm going to speak to Bill 1, the Independent Appointments Commission. Tuesday was our first day in the House, with a Throne Speech for a new government. We announced it that day that this was Bill 1. Yesterday the bill was put out there for people to see, to debate, to discuss. Today there was a briefing on it, there was a press conference on it, and we're here debating it.

The good news is this is just the first day of it, the first day of this debate. I'm sure there will be plenty more, as there should be on any piece of important legislation. There should be as much debate as people need to ensure that they get their points across, and I welcome that.

Contrary to what the Member for Mount Pearl North said – he said government is trying to rush this through – I can say, Mr. Speaker, with all certainty, we're not going to be trying to rush this through like some of the pieces of legislation that that government rushed through right here in this House.

I remember one that they invoked closure on, but again I'm going to follow the Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to be relevant. I'm going to speak to this bill which is here. We have all the time in the world.

I think the Member opposite misconstrued what our Premier said when he said we want to get this done. We want to get it done quickly. The reason is, as the Premier stated, there are hundreds of positions on these various boards, tier one, tier two, you name it, they're open. They have not been filled. Many of these groups are calling and writing and saying please fill this position, which has been vacant for months and years, so we can do our job.

That's what they're doing. They're calling us. I've had those letters myself in my department for the various boards that fall under the mandate of the Department of Justice. They're saying this has been vacant, I wrote the minister before you, and the minister before that, and the minister before that and they're not filled. Please fill it so we can do our job. That's what we want to do.

We realize that you can't rush it; you have to debate it. This is just the first part. We're debating the legislation. For the benefit of those that may not have sat through this, second reading is where you get to talk about the bill, maybe, more generally. We'll go into Committee and that's when we'll get into, hopefully, the questions, suggestions and the points.

I can tell you, I'm certainly open to listening to what Members opposite have to suggest. Obviously we're going to listen to hear what they have to say if it has some merit, which again is the whole point of this commission: to have merit. If there's merit to the suggestions, then we will listen.

That being said, just because they say something doesn't mean that we are going to listen if it has no merit. The other thing is that our mandate is to govern. That's going to be brought up again now shortly when I go back to some of the points that have been made by Members on the other side.

An Independent Appointments Commission – one would say, what does it do? What we're trying to do is we're trying to put a process in place where there has never been one before. I guess you could say it has different tiers depending on it.

There is a Public Service Commission. It exists right now; it is there. What is going to happen is that people that want – actually I'm getting ahead of myself. I'm going to go back to the IAC. It's going to be a five-member Independent Appointments Commission. Those names will be brought forward by us as a government. Do you know what? If there were names to be suggested, I'd say suggest them. Put them out there. What harm is there in suggesting it?

At the end of the day you have to start somewhere and this government will select those names. I'm pretty sure, I'm willing to bet that the people that come forward to do this extremely important task are going to be qualified, they're going to be experienced, and they're going to be leaders. Their job is to ensure that the right people are getting in the right positions because at the end of the day, the jobs that we're filling handle taxpayer money and responsibility. That is what we're trying to protect, to make sure we have the right people in the right jobs.

It's a case of having the right people not knowing the right people. We've had some of that in the past. Do you know what? I'm just going to say in the past we've seen that. I don't need to get into the places where that's happened right yet.

We have this IAC. That resolution when these names come forward, this is not just names that are forced on this; that is going to be in a resolution that is brought here to the House and debated. If Members on the other side have an issue with those individuals, they'll have a chance to put that out there and debate it. Tell us why these individuals are or are not qualified to hold this. Tell us why they should not be there.

Again, we will have the full debate. That is what we have to have, but we want to get that done. Don't get me wrong; we want to get that done to get this moving because the taxpayers' money is at risk here and some of these positions need governance. Some of these boards need governance and they need people there now.

I am going to say there are some that obviously have more at stake than others. There are some that are very high in terms of expense, in terms of responsibility and the mandate that they handle, and there are some on the lower end. Again, it is interesting to note the people who come forward to do this will be volunteers; they are just going to be remunerated for the expenses they incur in doing the job. This is not even a paid position. These people will do this out of a sense of duty to this province. The same reason I would note that everybody here – the reason we are here is because we all feel that sense to serve.

Again, going forward, it is a three-year term and any further members of the IAC will go through this same independent process. They are going to go through that, but you have to start somewhere. Once the IAC is in place what is going to happen is that individuals who are interested in one of the various positions, which are going to be posted – they are going to be put out there so that the public can express interest in this. It is going to go through the Public Service Commission, a non-partisan organization.

Again, I'm not going to say anything bad about it. I know there are some comments on the other side that indicated – I am not going to say on the other side because that implies both sides; I am going to say from the previous Member of the Official Opposition who spoke, he seemed to indicate he wasn't sure if he could trust them. Now, he will get an opportunity to say whether that is true or not, but I have trust in the Public Service Commission to ensure that the right people are getting in the right spot. I have that faith.

They are going to suggest names to the IAC. So that is one independent process there that never existed before, and now it is going to go to this five-person, non-partisan commission that never existed, for consideration. I can't tell you what their process will entail. I am sure they'll put it through any similar process that one goes through to get a job. There could be an interview, there are resumes, there are probably references and there is a whole number of things, probably, depending on the position. They are going to suggest three individuals. Three individuals will be suggested.

Here lies one of the points, I guess, that the other side is having some issue with: Well, why is that going to Cabinet? Some Members on the other side have said – and the Premier spoke about this. At the beginning it was, you're there to govern, so govern. Now when we're going to govern they're saying, hang on a second, don't do that. You can't have it both ways. At the end of the day, the law states that it's Cabinet's duty. We cannot abrogate our duty to make decisions for the best interests of this province. I'm not prepared to do that.

It's going to come to Cabinet and Cabinet will make a decision of the three people that went through a two-tier process of independent people. I would point out for the record it's never existed before in this province ever – ever. Anybody before that went in certain positions here; I don't know how they were appointed. I never saw any process that they went through. Usually, they just showed up. Certain positions, the way that they got in you might be able to question them.

There are lots of names that have been suggested and we'll bring those up at some point. I want to talk about what we're trying to get done here. It comes to Cabinet and Cabinet is going to make that decision because it's Cabinet prerogative, it's Cabinet's job and it's Cabinet's duty to pick the individual. All of this is going to be posted online. This individual will be posted online as well.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know, I'm not quite sure – I know that, especially the Member for Mount Pearl North, he used words –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

I know Members opposite, especially the Member for Mount Pearl North – he said he has a lot of concerns about this. I'm willing to bet –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

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

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

I'm glad to see the other side is interested in what I have to say here.

They're expressing their concern. That's their job, is to question legislation. Do you know what? At the end of the day I think they're going to support this because it's drastically improved over the process you had, which was nothing. You had nothing.

That being said, the Member opposite is going to get plenty of opportunity – and I will certainly listen. He's going to get opportunity to make suggestions on how to improve the process. By all means, I suggest you do it. That being said, the question will be asked back, why didn't you do that when you were there? Why didn't you do it?

I ask the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune: What did you do? If you have suggestions you'll get plenty of opportunity to make them. You've got plenty of opportunity, and I promise I won't interrupt you while you speak. I promise I won't interrupt the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune when she has a turn to speak to this and offer her constructive suggestions as to how to improve this groundbreaking legislation this government promised and is now delivering.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: She's going to have her say on this at some point.

The other thing I would like to know – and I think this is important, and it's something that's been discussed in this House of Assembly. One thing that's going to be applied during this entire independent process, and I think it's necessary, is a gender lens to ensure we're getting both women and men, capable women and men qualified to be examined for these positions. That's what we need. I don't think anybody is going to disagree with having that sort of lens apply here.

We've talked about it here in the House of Assembly, how we need more females in this House of Assembly, and I think everybody agrees. Well, I think we also need more women to be going through this process, and they are going to be given every opportunity. That's part of this two-tier process of Independent Appointments Commission. That's there, and I don't think I'll get any disagreement from the other side on that.

My time is starting to run out here. I have to suggest that – and I have to commend our Premier. Our Premier, back when he was on the other side, spoke about this. He questioned this when he was in Opposition and said, look – and again, do you know what? We've got some

people in these positions. It's not the appointment process; it's the ability to do their job. Many of these people are good people. They are qualified people. This is not saying they're not qualified or they shouldn't be there. This is questioning the process.

The Premier said on the campaign trail he heard this. I can back that up because I heard it. People question, how do certain people get these positions? Are they qualified? I have to tell you, we've seen it in the past with one particular organization where their chairperson used to take vacation time to go run a political campaign, and after the campaign he would come back to that publicly appointed position. That didn't just happen once; that happened twice. So please explain to me how that is an appropriate process. Please explain to me.

I would suggest, and I invite questions as to this. That's the whole point of this. As the minister said, this is our flagship legislation. This is our Bill 1 – it is. I will recall that the flagship legislation in the last session, Bill 1 for the other side, died on the Order Paper.

AN HON. MEMBER: What was it?

MR. A. PARSONS: Public procurement. It died on the Order Paper.

MR. JOYCE: The Leader of the Opposition was the minister.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes.

This piece of legislation is important to us. We're going to ensure that it happens because it's in the best interests of the people of this province. Do you know what? I know people on the other side are going to question it, as they should. There's going to be plenty of opportunity, as we go through this legislative process, to deal with this.

I don't think there's any need to refer to prior practice because I explained that the prior practice was just ad hoc. Who's there? Who do we need to put in the position? That's not how it works. That's not how it should work. I know there are people out there in these positions now. I've talked to them and they say this is the right thing. This is the right thing to do. They

recognize that. They want this. I think this is a good thing.

I know the minister opposite or Member opposite, sorry, was questioning – former minister.

MR. KENT: Thank you for the painful reminder.

MR. A. PARSONS: Not intentional there, sorry.

The Member opposite pointed out that it's non-binding. Well, at the end of the day Cabinet has to provide the direction to go. We cannot abrogate our responsibility. The funny thing is if that did happen, I can guarantee the other side would say they don't want to make decisions. I know that would happen because they've done it already, say they don't want to make decisions. Well, you know, we are making a decision here.

When you question the process – when it's all said and done, when we see how this transpires, when we see how it gets debated, when we see the individuals that make up the IAC, when we see the process that leads to qualified individuals going into this, I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that at the end of the day people are going to say it was the right thing to do. I am confident of that, Mr. Speaker.

Given the fact that my time is running out, I think I've made my point. I will have an opportunity during Committee stage to stand and respond to questions during the back and forth and certainly answer questions from Members opposite when they have them. I look forward to that as we continue through this process.

At this time, I would move that the debate on Bill 1 now be adjourned.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the debate be adjourned.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, debate adjourned.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, that the House do now adjourn.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The House now stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday – Monday being a holiday.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.