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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.

We welcome to our public gallery today representatives from Special Olympics Newfoundland and Labrador, Trish Williams, executive director, and Natelle Tulk, sport coordinator.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we have the Members for the Districts of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, Torngat Mountains, Stephenville – Port au Port, and Terra Nova.

The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

I rise today to recognize five women who are improving the lives of residents at the Harbourview Manor in Mary's Harbour.

In February 2014, Isobel Rumbolt, Verna Pye, Ella Simms, Olive Rumbolt, Georgina Lunnen, Jean Rumbolt and Muriel Poole, after seeing the financial trouble the manor faced, decided to see if there was anything they could do to help.

They formed the Knifty Knitters, and each week this group meets for lunch and knits up a storm. They create hats, socks, mittens and towels, and each stitch is knitted with love and kindness. The knitters then sell their products, with all proceeds going to the Manor. Since starting this project in 2014 they have raised more than \$10,000, and their efforts have helped the Manor with such initiatives as updating their kitchen,

purchasing new curtains, maintaining their bus and repairing their heating system.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in commending this group of extraordinary women, who are playing a big role in improving life in their little corner of Labrador, one stitch at a time.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier this month, high school students from Nunatsiavut and Natuashish travelled to Postville to take part in the Winter Sports Meet.

Despite some issues with the weather, everyone in attendance had a warm experience in the host community of Postville. Coaches, volunteers and athletes alike were able to make the best of the situation and take part in a number of competitions.

The students participated in native games, soccer, cross-country skiing, ball hockey and badminton. The winning teams in ball hockey and badminton will have the opportunity to travel on to participate in the regional competitions for those sports, and with a little luck, the provincial competitions as well.

I would like to take a moment to say a big thank you to the host community of Postville and the dedicated volunteers for their assistance in making the 2017 Winter Sports Meet a huge success.

Congratulations to the Nain Huskies on winning first place overall. Please join me in celebrating the success of this important community event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This past Sunday, March 26, the Bay St. George Sick Children's Foundation held its 22nd annual telethon at the College of the North Atlantic in Stephenville. Formed in 1995, their mandate is to lessen the financial burden on families with children that need to travel outside the Bay St. George region for medical appointments.

During the past 10 years, the Bay St. George Sick Children's Foundation has assisted more than 420 families paying for over 800 trips, including 3,200 nights of accommodations, costing just over \$635,000.

This year's telethon raised \$57,749 over a nine-hour period as a direct result of the generosity from individuals and businesses throughout the Bay St. George region, as well as those who made pledges from all across the country.

I wish to say a sincere thank you to the Foundation's Chair, Marsha McInnis, her amazing board of directors as well as the College of the North Atlantic, Eastlink, and the over 60 community volunteers who gave freely of their time to make this a success.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating the Bay St. George Sick Children's Foundation on their successful telethon and applaud them for their ongoing efforts in assisting families in need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HOLLOWAY: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pride to rise in this hon. House today and recognize the accomplishments of a courageous, young woman.

On March 11, Caitlin Hoskins, who lives on Random Island, was chosen as the Children's Wish Foundation's Ambassador for 2017.

The Children's Wish Foundation has been granting wishes to children with life-threatening,

complex genetic or neurological illnesses for 30 years; reaching more than 25,000 children.

Caitlin, who is 18 years of age, was born with a condition called True Venous Vascular Malformation. This is potentially a life-threatening condition which presents with extra blood vessels on the eyes, nose and throat and mouth areas.

Caitlin has made 40 trips to Montreal for treatment over the last 16 years; one of which in 2014 was nearly life threatening when her tongue swelled to the size of a tennis ball.

Caitlin became a Wish Child in August 2015. To honour her brother, Gregory, for all the attention she took from him because of her medical condition, Caitlin chose a trip to Jamaica so Gregory could swim with the dolphins.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Caitlin Hoskins for her courage and compassion for her brother and her family.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statement by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in the hon. House today to remember Mr. Bill Rompkey, who passed away on March 21. Since his death, flags have been half-mast at Confederation Building.

While Mr. Rompkey was born in Belleoram, Fortune Bay, he became closely tied to Labrador after he and his wife moved there in 1963 to teach and where he ultimately became principal of the Yale School in North West River. Mr. Rompkey was also the first superintendent of Education with the Labrador East Integrated School Board. His love of Labrador is on clear display in The Story of Labrador, one of his several books.

Despite his 40 years in politics, Mr. Rompkey's teaching career meant a lot to him and he considered himself first and foremost an

educator. In 1980, he was named Memorial University alumnus of the year and later received an honorary doctorate.

Mr. Rompkey entered politics in 1972 when he was first elected to the House of Commons as the Liberal MP for Labrador – a position which he held for some 23 years after winning six elections. He served in the cabinets of Prime Minister Trudeau and Prime Minister Turner and was appointed to the Senate in 1995 by then Prime Minister Jean Chretien. Mr. Rompkey was regarded as a true bipartisan parliamentarian and was universally admired by his colleagues, regardless of political stripe.

As a parliamentarian, Mr. Rompkey was quite involved in issues of national defence and security, chairing the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs and, in 1993, co-chairing the Special Joint Committee on Canada's Defence Policy. Prior to that, he was a very active member of the Naval Officers Association of Canada and the Crow's Nest, and was honoured by the Navy League of Canada for his efforts.

On behalf of the people of Newfoundland, and especially Labrador, I offer my deepest condolences to Mr. Rompkey's wife, Carolyn, his children Hillary and Peter, his grandchildren Max and Ana, and to all his large circle of family and friends. I ask my colleagues to join me in a moment of silence in honour of Mr. Rompkey.

(Moment of silence.)

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

The hon. the Member for the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement. We join with the Premier and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in offering our most sincere condolences on the passing of Mr. Bill Rompkey.

As the MHA for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune I am very inspired by Mr. Rompkey's legacy and reputation in my region, our province,

particularly Labrador and, indeed, throughout our country.

Rompkey spent 40 years in politics as MP, minister and, finally, a senator. During that long career, he was highly respected and always considered one of the good guys. As parliamentarians, we should all strive to hold ourselves to a higher standard, a standard of decency and integrity – a standard Mr. Rompkey applied to his life, not only as a politician but just as importantly as a human being.

Again, I offer my condolences and, ultimately, my thanks to Mr. Rompkey, his family and his home community of Belleoram, who so proudly claim him as their own. He will be missed, but never forgotten.

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 on behalf of our caucus to stand and to recognize Bill Rompkey and to join with the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition and his caucus in recognizing the wonderful man that he was and offering condolences to his family and friends.

While I never interacted with Mr. Rompkey as a politician during the years he was MP, I certainly had the opportunity as a community activist to interact with him and always found him to be, what we're recognizing here today, a politician and a person of integrity who deserved the respect that he got.

I certainly felt respect for him, and every time I met him it was a time of being very pleasant with him because I really did like him as a person and recognized the great work that he did for the people he represented in Labrador and how he represented them in Ottawa.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Finance, President of Treasury Board and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to provide some highlights of my recent trip to New York as a representative of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

One of the reasons for this trip, Mr. Speaker, was to complete investor relations work as our government looks to expand our borrowing program outside the domestic market. We received very positive feedback on the transparency of information we have provided potential investors through our investor relations work. We are exploring all options that may result in lowering borrowing costs for this province.

Being able to inform and establish positive relationships with potential investors is essential as we look at the strong long-term potential and financial prospects of Newfoundland and Labrador. I feel confident, Mr. Speaker, in our ability to meet borrowing targets and achieve our seven-year plan to return to surplus.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also very fortunate to be part of the Canadian delegation to attend the 61st Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. I had the opportunity to meet with community groups, stakeholders and government officials from all over the world to discuss key issues affecting the economic and social well-being of women and girls as well as matters related to violence prevention.

Some of the events that I took part in included: Empowerment as an instrument to eradicate all forms of violence against indigenous women and girls; sexism, harassment and violence against women MPs; and, young women, economic empowerment and leadership in a changing work world. I also had the opportunity to engage in discussions with the federal Status of Women Minister Maryam Monsef as well as colleagues from across the country.

Mr. Speaker, my attendance at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was a very humbling experience, one that will be shaping my work as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women for Newfoundland and Labrador. These events and the discussions that took place fostered ideas and generated relationships at an international level for the betterment of women and girls here in our province and around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the minister is talking about her responsibilities as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women while there are questions being raised about the future of the Violence Prevention Initiative. I urge the minister to ensure that there is a solid commitment to this program in next week's budget. I also hope the minister will include other initiatives in the budget which focus on empowering and supporting women business leaders, which focus on promoting stimulated careers to our province's young women, and also initiatives which build on the recent focus of the Daughters of the Vote campaign which taught many young women that they can do anything they put their mind to.

Mr. Speaker, it is not simply good enough to talk about women's issues, the Liberal government opposite must take action to ensure that the issues are addressed.

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.

And I thank the minister. The main common issue this year at the UN Commission on the

Status of Women was the growing wage gap for women and the urgent need for rigorous legislation on pay equity. Without economic security, women will continue to live in poverty, always vulnerable to violence.

If the minister is committed to improving the Status of Women here, she must move quickly and decisively on developing and enacting pay equity legislation for the women of Newfoundland and Labrador. That, Mr. Speaker, would be empowerment for our women.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister Responsible for Children, Seniors and Social Development.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Today, I am honoured to recognize four athletes from this province who recently competed with Team Canada at the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Austria: Justin Dodge of Grand Bank, Floressa Harris of Gander, Sandra Smith of Carbonear, and Crystal Young of Harbour Grace.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand in this House today to recognize these outstanding athletes, each of whom are proudly bringing home medals in snowshoeing events.

Being chosen to represent Canada on the world stage is a huge accomplishment. With close to 3,000 athletes from 107 nations competing at the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games, this experience is something these athletes soon won't forget.

Mr. Speaker, getting to this level of sport takes an incredible amount of determination, skill and perseverance, and I commend our athletes for their hard work and enthusiasm.

Sporting and recreation activities can have a profound impact on the individuals who participate and contribute to the development of stronger social networks. They not only provide opportunities for engagement, but also help

build communities through social inclusion and a sense of connection.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud Justin, Floressa, Sandra and Crystal for their outstanding achievements, including nine medal wins – five gold, three silver and one bronze – they bring home for Team Canada. We look forward to hosting them soon at Confederation Building to honour their achievements.

I ask my hon. colleagues to join me in extending our sincerest congratulations.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. On behalf of my colleagues on this side of the House, we too join in congratulating these four amazing athletes who have represented our province and our country at the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Austria. Justin Dodge, Floressa Harris, Sandra Smith and Crystal Young have filled their communities and our province with a great sense of pride. I offer my heartfelt congratulations to each of these and look forward to celebrating their accomplishments with them in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the accomplishments of these individuals will inspire all athletes in our province, including the many athletes who participate in Special Olympics competitions on a regular basis.

As all of our Special Olympians prepare for the provincial Summer Games taking place in July of this year in the metro area, we wish them the very best of luck and every success in their future competitions.

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.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. How proud are we all of our wonderful athletes in the Special Olympics World Winter Games. And how very proud are we of Sandra Smith, Justin Dodge, Crystal Young and Floressa Harris. Their hard work, dedication, courage, passion and compassion are an example for us all. How exciting to compete and know you've done your best.

Bravo Sandra, Justin, Crystal, Floressa and all our Special Olympians! Thanks for such a good job. Bravo, once again!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, last year the Liberal government doubled the gas tax and promised it would be a temporary measure.

So I ask the Premier: Can people of the province expect this tax to be reduced or eliminated in your budget next week, easing the financial burden on so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, coming into government in late 2015, of course, what happened then was a consideration financial mess that this province inherited. What we've done since *The Way Forward*, we've announced last year to actually secure the footing for Newfoundlander and Labradorians,

Mr. Speaker. We've been able to make considerable headway in advancing and securing the financial foundation of our province.

Last year's temporary gas tax was one of the measures that we had to take to actually help secure the financial footing. On April 6, we will stand in this House, through the minister, and the budget will be read. I'll assure you, as I said many time this week, this province is in much better shape this year than it was last year. On budget day, April 6, we will be happy to outline what the future looks like for Newfoundland and Labrador with budget 2017-18.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, doubling a gas tax combined with tax hikes and fees, like we've never seen before, in last year's budget has drove Newfoundland and Labrador's inflation rates through the roof. So while they're securing the footing for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador, the inflation rate in our province is almost 3 per cent higher than the Canadian average.

So I ask the Premier: What will this budget do to address this escalating cost at a time when Newfoundlanders and Labradorians simply can't afford it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm really happy to address and respond to the question from the Leader of the Opposition, the former premier of the province, who basically didn't watch the finances of the province; wouldn't even let the public know, through Public Accounts – talking about accountability; didn't even want to let the people know that in the budget documents of 2015 that they were actually doubled, Mr. Speaker.

So, speaking about accountability, we've seen none from the previous administration. What

you seem to be very happy to do, listening to his comments earlier this week, was to put in place a deficit of \$2.7 billion. He told everyone, with the applause of his Members opposite, that a \$2.71 billion deficit was something that he had as part of his plan and he stood by his plan, which included a \$2.71 billion deficit for this year.

He also is obviously not watching oil markets because his plan meant \$80 a barrel of oil. So clearly, they had no plan for the future of our province. We took some measures last year to secure our footing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

All I asked was what is he going to do to alleviate the escalating costs to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and that's the response that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians quite regularly get, and have come to expect from this Premier, Mr. Speaker.

I'll ask the Premier: On top of the 93 jobs lost in health care yesterday, how many people who were employed in core government also lost their jobs and were shown the door yesterday?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the Member opposite is referring to the decisions and the conclusion of the competitions that were held as part of the Leaner, Flatter Management announcement that we made several weeks ago. It's been a very difficult week for those individuals that have been impacted.

The Member opposite suggests that yesterday was the day – I would correct him and say that the decisions that departments were making to conclude the competition as directed by the Public Service Commission through the Human Resource Secretariat concluded at a variety of stages, and we certainly have empathy for those employees who've experienced a very difficult time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thought my question was quite clear. Yesterday, the government talked about 93 job losses in health care. My question was: Many other job losses were done yesterday? How many people were shown the door?

That was my question, but a couple of weeks ago the Minister of Finance tabled a list of jobs impacted here in the House of Assembly and provided the Opposition – we greatly appreciated that.

I'm asking now if the minister can provide a table showing an up-to-date list of positions, not names or people, but a list of positions in core government that have been eliminated since they took office.

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, as the Member opposite referred, the question he asked me that I answered was about any core government changes that happened yesterday. Any changes in core government positions that happened this week at the management level were the conclusion of the process that we announced and were transparent with this House.

I answered questions many times in the House about the flatter, leaner process and the conclusion of that happened this week. Depending on the operational decisions that deputy ministers made, when they wanted to communicate that to employees, it happened this week.

The question about the consolidated number for overall government, Mr. Speaker, I can certainly provide the Member opposite an answer to the question that they've tabled and will do that in due course.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I hope that due course is sooner, rather than later. But the minister did provide it before and we appreciated it. We look forward to the same, a list and update and a list of all job losses.

Mr. Speaker, there's a very human side to the Liberal layoffs that are taking place in core government and also in agencies, boards and commissions. People and families are impacted.

I ask the minister: Are services being made available for employees and their families who have lost their jobs?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member opposite for providing me the opportunity to answer this question. One of the first things I did as a minister, particularly for the Public Service Commission, was to meet with the officials in the EAP, the Employee Assistance Program, and had the opportunity to understand how that program works.

As part of the decisions that were made in core government last year, in last year's budget, and certainly in the most recent decisions that we made, the EAP, the Employee Assistance Program, is offered to employees and their families, as needed, and it is something that we take responsibility for, as an employer, very seriously. These are very difficult decisions and our responsibility as an employer will always come first.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I appreciate the answer from the minister and I'd like to ask the minister – it's really a two-part question – one is: How are those services being provided to individuals? Are they simply to be given a phone number or is there actually a

process to connect to the EAP? Secondly, with hundreds of people losing their jobs over a very short period of time, does EAP have the resources to respond to the needs of these impacted employees and their families?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member opposite again for the privilege of being able to provide more information to this House.

As part of the work that the Human Resource Secretariat did in conjunction with other departments, we have human resource specialists in our department who support deputy ministers and managers throughout core government who are discussing and informing employees and working with employees around these very difficult decisions.

Those human resource professionals have the information, access to the Employee Assistance Program, and we are provided that information, and making those assessments in the meetings, but I can assure the Member opposite that every single employee who needs to avail of the Employee Assistance Program is able to do that.

As for the finances, I can let the Member opposite know that Treasury Board approved additional supports to make sure that happened.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said he will be forcing all provinces to implement a price on carbon in 2018. A made in Newfoundland and Labrador approach for carbon pricing was developed in this House last year.

I ask the Minister Responsible for Climate Change: Does he prefer a made in Ottawa approach?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

I guess as we've had on a number of occasions back and forth with my critic on this matter, I've indicated that the made in Newfoundland and Labrador solution will be one that supports industry, one that recognizes the competitive challenges that we have in our province; and, frankly, it will be one that supports residents, industry, all walks of life. It has to be unique to our province.

I guess if I have a few seconds left, I'd like to also add that the strategy we have invoked on, the Bill 34, is one that's going to be six to 10 times less expensive and twice as effective at reducing those emissions. That's what the issue is, reducing pollution that goes into the sky and is contributing to climate change. So I'd suggest we're on the right track, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Given the Prime Minister's imposed timelines for carbon pricing, is the *Management of Greenhouse Gas Act* legislation that was passed, as the minister just said, in this House last summer, now irrelevant?

Will the made in Newfoundland option now be replaced by the made in Ottawa one?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In response to the question, we recently, through our office, gazetted the regulations pertaining to that act. It's our intention to continue and proceed with this. So heavy industry will be – these are reporting requirements. It is our intention to proceed with our strategy for heavy industry in this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The *Management of Greenhouse Gas Act* address reducing greenhouse gases from large industry only. At that time it covered five facilities. It did not cover industry or citizens.

How do you plan to set a price and tax other industries and citizens?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: As part of *The Way Forward* government will be releasing an action plan addressing how we are going to approach this very important issue on climate change. Inside that will be strategies relating, not just to the heavy industry that we've been talking about these last few minutes, but the offshore, building energy efficiency and so on. So it'll be very comprehensive and, as I said, it will be one that will be sensitive to industry but also sensitive to the residents of this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In January, the minister said the province is still working out a plan to meet Ottawa's carbon pricing demands. He said one option being considered is to continue the so-called temporary gas tax of 16.5 cents per litre.

Is this government seriously thinking about converting the temporary gas tax to a permanent one?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: As the Premier indicated a few minutes ago, Mr. Speaker, the pressure that government faced itself when we came into office back in 2015 and the actions we had to take as part of the Budget of 2016-17 was that items like the temporary gas tax, unfortunately, were required. It is not our intention to continue with that on into the future. We used the term temporary, and as soon as we can make a decision on that, we will, but of course we have a lot of fiscal pressures and so on. One thing that we won't do is allow a carbon tax to be placed on top of a temporary gas tax.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: That's good to know. I'm going to reaffirm it, though. I'm going to reaffirm it because that was my next question, but I'm going to ask it anyway to be on record.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: Yeah. Well, I want to hear it again.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are paying the most in Canada for gasoline because of the taxes introduced by this government.

Will the minister commit that there won't be a carbon tax added to the gasoline and home heating fuels?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: Mr. Speaker, besides being a fortune teller and anticipating questions, I do like to be very transparent in my answers. I can assure the Member opposite that strategies we are going to invoke, whether it be the federal carbon tax, which is frankly – it's ultimately been described as a backstop where governments are not taking action on any aspect of their economy. We're weighing all these considerations.

Again, I'm very proud to be part of a very strong team in the Office of Climate Change. We are working at this diligently on a daily basis, and I look forward to releasing the action plan on what Newfoundland and Labrador is going to do to combat this very important problem.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think he needs to answer questions for a few other ministers because he's pretty good. He answered – he's pretty clear in his responses, I compliment him.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Yeah, I give him credit.

AN HON. MEMBER: We need more.

MR. PETTEN: Yeah, we need more of that.

I'm going to try him on one more now, Mr. Speaker.

We're hearing new reports that the carbon tax will have a significant impact on Canadian families. Has your government done an assessment on what the impact the federal carbon tax will have on the average Newfoundlander and Labradorian?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: Yes.

No, in seriousness, if I may add; what we need to do again is to find a strategy that is going to deal with our commitments that we've made in terms of reducing emissions but also respecting both industry and the residents of this province to ensure that the genuine approach that we take to tackling climate change is one that works for

everyone and gets to the bottom of the pollution that's going to the sky.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

On Tuesday, Liberal MP Nick Whalen, who was part of the fishery fund announcement, provided some details on the fund. He said the Premier pegged it at \$100 million but it could be less.

So I ask the Premier: Why would MP Whalen say the fisheries fund could be less?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I should first start off by thanking MP Whalen for giving the Opposition two days questions.

Mr. Speaker, since our announcement a number of weeks ago, the Premier and I met with Minister LeBlanc in Boston, and I can assure the Members opposite that we will be working on a fisheries fund in this province of \$100 million or more, with more to come.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: I suggest to the minister that he not thank Mr. Whalen but he advise Mr. Whalen on what's happening in the fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I also want to ask the minister: What assurances can he give the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that the

Atlantic Fishery Fund will flow in this province this year?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, to that question, the Premier was quite clear a day or two after the announcement that we will do everything we can, and we have a commitment from the federal government that the fisheries fund will flow this year in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, this fisheries fund is very important for this province at this critical juncture. The Member asked a question yesterday afternoon, a good question regarding marketing and cod quality, and one of the things we have to ensure that our harvesters are equipped with as we move forward is the technology and the capabilities to ensure that the product that we're landing is a world-class product.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I remind the minister that plant workers play a very important role in our fishery. Can he tell me where they fit into the fishery fund?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely, plant workers are a very important part of the fishery in this province, an extremely important part. Mr. Speaker, myself, I have approximately 1,000 fish plant workers in my own district, and I can assure the Member that this fisheries fund will help our plants become some of the most productive, profitable so that we can have employment around the province

with new technologies, new techniques to ensure that we have the best processing industry in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: I remind the minister also that the crab fishery is about to start within weeks and the ground fishery is not far behind. Plant workers are very concerned about the future of their jobs and the industry in the whole.

I want to ask the minister, he referenced on March 14 that there were 22 new fishery scientists at DFO. I wonder how many of these scientists have been hired.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I can certainly get that number for the Member opposite and provide it. The last time I spoke to the federal minister, or one of his staff, I think the number was somewhere around 12, but I will certainly get that number and provide it to the Member.

Mr. Speaker, but we do – I do agree with the Member opposite, that science is going to be extremely important as we go forward. The federal Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans released a report last week calling for an annual assessment of cod and capelin, Mr. Speaker, and we as a government have also been encouraging DFO to provide an annual assessment of cod and capelin in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: I also suggest to the minister that we need to get those scientists in

place immediately because, again, I stated that the fishery is about to start in weeks.

I ask the minister: How many of these scientists will be working out of Newfoundland and Labrador DFO offices?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that all 22 will be working in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: I also want to know, Mr. Speaker, how many of these scientists will be researching the Newfoundland and Labrador ground fishery and what aspects of the fishery will they be studying?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the Member opposite if he would reach out to DFO and ask for a technical briefing.

Mr. Speaker, I know some of these scientists are working on capelin; some will be working on cod. For the first time in five years we see DFO doing a study on seals again, Mr. Speaker, because when you look at all the components of our fishery, we cannot deny the effect that seals have on our, not only our ground fishery but our crab fishery. We've seen pictures just a week, a week-and-a-half ago of adult seals consuming female crab.

Mr. Speaker, we need to get this science right. It was their cousins in Ottawa, the federal Conservative Party that cut the guts out of science in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the protection.

Minister, it was your government and it's your responsibility to know what these scientists are doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Our administration chartered the *Celtic Explorer* to go to the fishing grounds and research ground stocks, in particular, the Northern cod. We charted our own course in the fisheries science research.

Can the minister tell us where you're getting your data from?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, the data that's being collected now comes from DFO, CFER, and most importantly, and one of the aspects where I think DFO and science has to be listened to is our fish harvesters. Because when we look around the province in lots of cases we're hearing different things from fish harvesters in some cases than we're hearing from the science. One of the very important components when it comes to information with regard to science and allowable catches needs to come from our fish harvesters.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, while Quebec balances their budget for the third straight year and provides tax cuts to residents, Ottawa will provide over

\$10 billion to that province in equalization payments.

While the Premier often says, and the Finance Minister, there are obviously challenges facing the province: Is the Premier okay with accepting zero dollars from Ottawa in equalization payments?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, as the Members opposite would know, that equalization is a federal program worth nearly \$18 billion, and currently in Canada right now we have Quebec that gets over \$10 billion of that, we have Nova Scotia getting \$1.7 billion, New Brunswick getting \$1.7 billion and so on, on and on it goes, Mr. Speaker.

The question is actually a timely one, timely today if you're in Opposition, but it really wasn't timely for them when they were in government, because what they didn't do in 2009 was put any concerted effort in place to actually have an impact on equalization. In 2014, they did very little, Mr. Speaker. Equalization wasn't on their radar then. They did not want to take part in any meaningful negotiations with the federal government. They ignored it because they were addicted to oil, Mr. Speaker. They still believe today oil is at \$80 a barrel.

We will be involved in equalization discussions, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: I remind the Premier and those on that side, they got elected 15 months ago. They're the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, on October 27, the Minister of Finance –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. HUTCHINGS: On October 27, the Minister of Finance recognized that Quebec announced a \$2 billion surplus and also received \$10 billion in equalization. The minister said she was disappointed to hear the information about Quebec and also acknowledged that Newfoundland would receive a zero.

I ask the minister: Are you satisfied with Newfoundlanders receiving zero equalization from the federal government?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, what the previous administration did in 2014 by not showing up or not taking part was actually agreeing to the formula, Mr. Speaker. It was a five-year commitment to the equalization program that they said they were okay with. They were okay with it. They were then in deficit, Mr. Speaker. They decided not to participate.

No, we are not satisfied. We will be participating in equalization, Mr. Speaker. It's a five-year – next year negotiations will start. Newfoundland and Labrador will be at the table, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We will be there. We will not ignore any opportunity to leverage federal financing for this province. Not like the crowd opposite that did when they were in government. They ignored the opportunities, some \$35 million to our communities, Mr. Speaker, and failed to get involved in equalization negotiations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the Grieg's aquaculture project will be the largest in Canadian history, creating much needed jobs for the region. A project this massive requires diligence to ensure success and benefits for the people of the province, the economy and the environment. Experts in the Department of Health, the Fish and Wildlife Division, and the federal DFO all ask the former Minister of Environment to undertake a full environmental impact statement.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: With the stakes this high, why did his government release this project from a full environmental impact statement against the recommendations of the minister's own assessment committee?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: I guess I have a very short answer to this one, Mr. Speaker. As the matter is before the courts today and tomorrow, there's not much more to say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that they had to go to court.

Given the significant environmental risk, I ask the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources: Would Norway's regulations permit Grieg to do in their home country what Grieg is proposing to do here?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

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

I thank the hon. Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, our aquaculture industry, as was mentioned here in this House yesterday, Northern Harvest Sea Foods is a four-star aquaculture company that operates aquaculture operations here and in New Brunswick.

Mr. Speaker, in 2017, aquaculture contributed \$274 million to this province, upwards of 1,000 jobs. Aquaculture is something that this government has identified as a priority, it will remain a priority, and I can assure the Member opposite we will ensure that aquaculture in this province is developed to the most environmentally sound principles, but also remember that this industry is a part of our *Way Forward*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. ROGERS: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, this is a potential growth area; very important to the province.

So I ask the minister: Will he do the right and responsible thing and impose a full EIS for Grieg's project to protect the people's investment and ensure this project is environmentally sustainable and will not harm our wild salmon stock?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: I guess, Mr. Speaker, as I just indicated in a previous response, the matter is before the courts today and tomorrow, and it is around the issue of this type of request.

I can assure the Members, as I have in this House though, that the previous review was many months in duration, it was very thorough and government felt very comfortable in the direction that was issued at the time when I was minister.

Thank you.

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

MS. ROGERS: It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the minister ignored his own experts.

I ask the Premier: If government is committed to a \$45 million investment in Grieg's operation – if so, is he planning to pay for it out of the

recently announced federal-provincial fisheries fund?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, what this government is committed to is revitalizing rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, that means investing in companies and investing in groups, even social enterprises, that can bring jobs to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, the Members opposite, just a few weeks ago, was talking about job creation, in particular in rural Newfoundland. Now they're telling us not to get involved with companies and organizations that would create employment in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Who is it that they're talking to?

I will assure you right now that we will work with companies, we will work with communities, we will work with organizations for the best interest of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We will not do it foolishly – we will not do it foolishly. We will take the evidence where the evidence leads us, Mr. Speaker. We are willing to invest in rural Newfoundland and Labrador – yes, we are.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And so are we committed to jobs, and this is a good job growth area.

I ask the minister: Why are smaller agricultural operations in the province required to go through a full environmental impact process but not this huge project with potential, unprecedented environmental problems?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker,

Well, once again, we take the Member opposite who is complaining now about trying to work with an industry – the industry themselves, we have worked very closely with Young Farmers; we have worked very closely with the Federation.

We have already, as matter of fact, carved out a fair amount of agricultural land that is for prime use so we can expedite this. And it's for a number of reasons. One is to create employment, in particular, in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and, in some cases, even in some of the larger areas. But it is also very important to us, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, that we address the food security which is an important issue for this province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We will work this province. We will work our rural communities and yes, agriculture is a major focus for us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I will ask one final time for the co-operation of Members. The Speaker is finding it difficult, at times, to hear individuals speaking and it will not be tolerated.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In accordance with the *Transparency and Accountability Act*, it is my pleasure to table the 2017-2019 activity plan for the Chicken Farmers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the requirements of section 5 of the *Transparency and Accountability Act*, I am pleased to table the 2017-2019 strategic plan of WorkplaceNL.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the requirements of section 5 of the *Transparency and Accountability Act*, I am pleased to table the 2017-2019 business plan for the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I see my colleague – in accordance with the requirements of section 10 of the *Architects Act*, I am pleased to table the seventh annual report of the Architects Licensing Board of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills

MR. BYRNE: I'm pleased, Mr. Speaker, to stand in accordance with the requirements of the *Transparency and Accountability Act* to table the new Private Training Corporation activity plan, which describes the corporation's activities for the three calendar years of 2017 to 2019. This corporation is one of the 12 public entities that report, through me, to the House of Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Pursuant to section 8 and section 10 of *Public Tender Act*, I hereby table the report of the *Public Tender Act* exemptions for November and December 2016, as presented by the chief

operating officer of the Government Purchasing Agency.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

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

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Remove Anomalies And Errors In The Statute Law, Bill 5.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: Mr. Speaker, in response to a question from the Member of the Third Party in this House on March 16, I rise today to table directives issued to the Come By Chance Oil Refinery in the year 2016, in addition to details on all inspections carried out at the refinery between 2014 and 2017.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further answer to questions for which notice has been given?

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

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 US Center for Disease Control now estimates that Autism Spectrum Disorder affects one in 68 children, which represents a 30 per cent increase from the estimate two years ago; and

WHEREAS early diagnosis of ASD is essential because there is a critical developmental period when early intervention is vital for future success of children with ASD; and

WHEREAS although *Budget 2014* announced that another developmental pediatrician would be recruited, more must be done to reduce the waitlist for a diagnosis so that children can get the early treatment they need; and

WHEREAS in other provinces an ASD diagnosis can be made by specialists certified and trained in ADOS;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to allow other specialists trained and certified with ADOS to make the Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis.

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

I'm very pleased to bring forward this petition, Mr. Speaker – sorry that I have to bring it forward because this has been an ongoing issue for a number of years with families of children with autism, children who are on the autism spectrum. It's very disturbing that we still do not see a major change in how things are going with regard to developmental assessments.

In the province, or not just in the province – I think it's probably a national standard – there is a standard that children should receive a diagnosis within six months. Currently in the province, at the Janeway for example, the waiting time for children is 10 months. What's really sad about that is that it has gone up from six months in January 2016. So a year later, the length of wait time has gone up by four months.

In Western, it's the same thing. In the Western Region, it's a 10-month wait also, but it's creeping up towards to a year-long wait. Central is doing better, it's a six-month wait, so that's within the time frame; and Labrador, it's 3½ months.

What it looks like, Mr. Speaker, is that where the population is greater, the wait times are longer. We obviously have a problem, with having enough people there, to be able to do the developmental assessments. I think that if we had more people involved, the times would be shorter.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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 government plans to remove the provincial point-of-sale tax rebate on books, which will raise the tax on books from 5 per cent to 15 per cent; and

WHEREAS an increase in the tax on books will reduce book sales to the detriment of local bookstores, publishers and authors, and the amount collected by government must be weighed against the loss in economic activity caused by higher book prices; and

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the lowest literacy rates in Canada and the other provinces do not tax books because they recognize the need to encourage reading and literacy; and

WHEREAS this province has many nationally and internationally known storytellers, but we will be the only people in Canada who will have to pay our provincial government a tax to read the books of our own writers;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the

House of Assembly to urge government not to impose a provincial sales tax on books.

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

Mr. Speaker, I was at a panel last night, sponsored by the economic department at Memorial University, and the panel was on academics and social policy. It was very interesting. Lisa Moore, who is one of our internationally award-winning and celebrated authors, spoke about culture and social policy. She specifically talked about the issue of the taxation on books.

This can't have come from any kind of social policy – it can't have. Because if it did, what social policy could it have ever fit into? We have the highest illiteracy rate, meaning the lowest literacy rate in the whole country. We know that books are the very basis for literacy.

Lisa talked about the fact that literacy isn't just about whether or not you can read a tax form or whether or not you can read a menu in a restaurant; literacy is about whether or not you can grasp complex ideas, whether you can see yourself in complex ideas.

Mr. Speaker, taxing books and making books more difficult to access is one of the most regressive things government can do. So did this come from a policy where government is saying we're going to hit our people as hard as we possibly can to make them suffer for an economic disaster that they themselves did not create? Then when we look at the cutbacks to adult basic education, where it's no longer provided by our public institutions that have all kinds of wraparound services to help people complete their basic education. The cuts have been absolutely detrimental to the health of our communities, to the health and strengthening of our people and, consequently, our economy. As a matter of fact, these kinds of cuts and measures don't strengthen our economy; it has the opposite effect.

It was very interesting to hear Lisa talk about what does it mean for us to live here in Newfoundland and Labrador, For many of us, it's where we want to be. Many of us have come from here; many of us have not come from here.

There are many people who have not started off their lives in Newfoundland and Labrador but who have come here for jobs, who have come here for school and who want to be here.

And it's our culture. Our culture is enriched by our writers and then ever more so enriched by people having access to the writings of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is an unnecessary, detrimental block and barrier to achieving that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: 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 of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth;

WHEREAS smaller class sizes, adequate learning environments and effective curriculums are paramount to success of our youth; and

WHEREAS recent budget decisions have negatively impacted student supports, educational resources and teacher allocations; and

WHEREAS the provincial education system should ensure that each child has the ability to reach his or her full potential;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to enhance the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador; introduce initiatives which ensure smaller class sizes, which will provide more sufficient personal space per child and allow more individual learning opportunities; develop effective curriculums which enable youth to develop both life skills and optimal academic achievements; provide resources to ensure a fully beneficial inclusive model is in place; and to ensure all children in our province have equal standards of education in their learning environment.

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

Mr. Speaker, as you've noticed over the last year, there's been a big discussion and big influx of parents, educators, community leaders, organizers of non-for-profit organizations, leaders of agencies that represent those who have a stake in the education system, coming out and saying we need to be cognizant of the cuts to education.

Last year's cuts were devastating enough. We're seeing indication that not only are there going to be enhancements in the education system, but we're seeing indications there is going to be additional cuts. We're seeing it with the increased class size and we're hearing rumours that larger schools will go from 27 to 29 on their cap sizes and end up losing more teacher units within that.

We talked about yesterday – we had a three-hour debate around inclusive education and all the impacts there. So we're asking to still continue the inclusive education and the Department of Education and the school boards are saying no, this is part of our policy and our philosophy, but we're not going to put the resources there.

We've got parents from all over the province – this is a group now who've taken it upon themselves to petition the people of this province and they've got hundreds and, no doubt, within the next few weeks they'll have thousands. Some of the names on this are in the Clarendville area. I've got a number from there that go to the West Coast. They go from the Northern Peninsula. I even got some from Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, the issues around education it's not isolated to one particular region or one particular school, or one particular grade area or a particular need in a certain subject area. This is about a holistic, inclusive process of education. It's about ensuring those who have some challenges are taken care of; those who need some additional supports in the midstream and those who are high achievers all have an ability to have adequate education and not be stressed, but let's also add in to the people who provide that. They've gone out, got a proper education, have taken this as their vocation to come in and

enhance the minds and the ability for our young people to be productive citizens in the future and move on to post-secondary.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll have an opportunity to present this petition and many more around improving our education system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I rise in the hon. House to present this petition today:

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 fisheries policy regulations link harvesting quotas to vessel length for several species; and

WHEREAS many harvesters own fishing vessels of various sizes, but because of policy regulations are restricted to using smaller vessels, often putting their crews at risk;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to make representation to the federal government and encourage change in policy to ensuring safety of fish harvesters in the province.

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

Mr. Speaker, I really wanted to present this petition today, because as I mentioned today in Question Period, and I know quite well because I had family members yesterday that put their crab pots on their boats, and I know that in the next couple of weeks and this time of year it's very difficult, as we see the weather coming today. It's not a real good time of the year to be on the water, it's pretty rough out there.

So what I want to do today is just to say to our harvesters that are out there on the water, to be safe. It's important for them to be able to catch their catch, we understand, and understand what's happening in the fishery today. There is a major decline in shrimp, a major decline in crab. While the cod stocks are showing coming back, but they're not coming back as much as we want.

I think the main thing I want to emphasize to harvesters in this province is to be safe on the water. Too often we see Newfoundlanders and Labradorians take risks, and risks that I can understand why they're doing it, but risks that I don't want to see any family members have to go through what we normally go through on a regular basis, and that's tragedy at sea.

My entire message today is be safe. We know the crab fishery will start in the next couple of weeks, and the other fisheries will follow after. I just hope and pray that all fishermen and harvesters in this province will come home safe.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Orders of the Day, Address in Reply, number 1.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand in this hon. House today to thank the residents of the District of Placentia – St. Mary's, my committed team of volunteers and

my family, especially my husband Jud, for working alongside me through a two-year campaign leading up to the election of 2015.

I was born at the cottage hospital in Placentia in 1967 to Marina Power and Patrick Gambin, and I am the older of two. My brother Sean is one year and four days younger. Sean is a retired navy officer.

I am the mother of two children, Victoria and Craig. My older, Victoria, who was on the Dean's list for most of her academic days, graduated from Memorial University in the spring of 2016 and is presently endeavouring to further her education. My younger child, Craig, will be dependent on us for many years to come. I have no doubt that it is the lessons I have learned in raising Craig that has fueled my passion for politics.

I strongly believe that everything happens for a reason and at a very young age I embraced all opportunities and challenges that came before me. I was a lucky child, raised by two parents and four grandparents. My grandparents John and Jane Gambin, John and Aggie Power had a significant influence on my life. Born the first grandchild to my grandparents Gambin and the only granddaughter for nine years, I could do no wrong.

Born the second grandchild to my grandparents Power, and a grandchild that spent many weekends and summer holidays with them, I was given the opportunity in life that many do not get. The value of growing up listening to stories, poetry and the advice of these four seniors cannot be measured.

My grandmother Gambin was a strong supporter of the hon. Joseph R. Smallwood. She had to leave school at the age of nine years old in outport Davis Cove to care for her four siblings after her mother died, and she often told me a story about her belief that Joey Smallwood helped take people out of poverty. Both Mr. Smallwood's and the Pope's pictures hung on her living room wall and we children were permitted to look but never to touch. That picture of Joseph R. Smallwood was passed on to me by my father and it sits on the mantel in my home office.

Both my grandfathers were quiet, unassuming men. My grandmother Power loved to read and was well versed in the wonders of the world. She was a very open-minded and compassionate woman. As a teenager, during my summer holidays, I would often wake to my grandmother serving breakfast to people who were complete strangers to me. My grandmother often said that kindness and compassion for your fellow neighbour were free. I will say it again – I was a lucky child.

It is fitting that today I hold the title as the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development. I'm not the first person in my family to be a member of government. My great, great, great Uncle John W. English from Branch, St. Mary's Bay, was a member of the Colonial Parliament.

My path to this hon. House was a lengthy one. I graduated from the General Hospital School of Nursing in 1990 and spent my nursing career as a neonatal nurse at the Charles A. Janeway in Pleasantville. My son, born in 1996, took me down the path of the world of autism. I educated myself in applied behavioral analysis to care for him. His diagnosis, in combination with a work-related injury, saw me at home with him for 10 years.

In 2010, I found myself with an opportunity I could not refuse. I returned to the workforce as a community inclusion coordinator and later became the executive director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living; an association that works for and on behalf of individuals with intellectual disabilities. I have never, in my life, worked at a job that I did not enjoy.

A volunteer is a person who donates his or her time or efforts for a cause or organization without being paid. I would argue from my experience as a volunteer in over 14 organizations that volunteers gain immensely from their experiences. On entering politics to balance this life with my home commitments, this is the first time since I was five years old that I'm not engaged as a volunteer and I can assure you that I plan on returning to that role someday.

I have mentioned my son twice so far, thus I find it fitting to tell you why. I'm somewhat certain that without the advocacy skills that I gained in fighting for his right to an inclusive education to the best of his ability that I would not be here in this House. My son was diagnosed with classic autism just before his third birthday and is the oldest child in the province to have gone through the government funded ABA – Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy program. We worked with Dr. Philip Zelazo out of Montreal, and Dr. Carryl Navalta out of Boston.

We will be forever grateful to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for allowing us that opportunity. Our hope and plan is to assist him to move to St. John's with supports where he can continue to enjoy the skills he has acquired. He is a strong swimmer and loves music therapy. His memory to detail is amazing, and time spent with him is as good as any therapy. Time spent with him confirms what is truly important in life.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: The District of Placentia – St. Mary's and Trinity South is almost 4,000 kilometres in size, with homes and cabins almost everywhere you turn. It boasts the richness of rural Newfoundland and Labrador on the doorsteps of urban St. John's.

I will take you through a very quick tour of my district by starting you on the beach in St. Vincent's watching the whales, travelling up through Riverhead past the Father Val Power Centre and on to the Salmonier Nature Park, where you will find wild animals in need of rehabilitation. Next, we have Father Duffy's Well, turn back towards Colinet where Rocky River boasts a beautiful waterfall, as you continue on to my mother's hometown of Branch and to Cape St. Mary's.

Placentia, my hometown, has many features that make it a popular tourist attraction. It has a brand new unique lift bridge. There are many archeological sites, several excellent examples of late 19th century Newfoundland architecture, three museums, a national historic park and one of the two Marine Atlantic ferry links from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia via Argentia.

Argentia, originally settled by the French in 1630 is today a commercial seaport, and one of the fastest growing industrial areas in Newfoundland and Labrador. From Argentia, we pass through a number of communities to arrive at the fishing village of Ship Harbour where, on a warship in this very harbour, the concept of the United Nations originated when a meeting was held between United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in August of 1941.

On to Markland, a growing farming community, and in Whitbourne, a vibrant regional service centre; cross over the Trans-Canada Highway to the new area of the District of Placentia – St. Mary's, Trinity South. The Trinity South portion of the district boasts nine communities rich in history and, today, in tourism. The Dildo area has a long history going back when Maritime indigenous people resided at Anderson's Cove. New Harbour, in the past, was a major shipbuilding centre and Green's Harbour, today, is home to the beautiful Doctor's House Inn & Spa.

So as you can see, there is diversity in the District of Placentia – St. Mary's, but the fishery has been and remains one of the solid sources of income in all three bays that make up this district. However, we are not without our concerns and our issues. The roads, and all things connected to the roads in the district, have been a great concern for me as the MHA. We need good infrastructure for residents and tourists. I look forward to *The Way Forward* as we work as a government and with our federal partners to improve road infrastructure throughout this great province.

There is a strong group of individuals advocating for a dialysis unit in Placentia. As their MHA, I will continue to support them in their quest. Previously as executive director for community living and, more recently, since becoming the MHA, I have met with many aging parents in my district who are caring for their sons and daughters with disabilities. As this government moves towards individualized support funding and supported decision making, I hope we can help them plan for their sons' and daughters' future.

I am thankful and humbled for this opportunity in life and, once again, I wish to thank my family and friends for their support, and to the residents of the District of Placentia – St. Mary’s for their faith in me during these difficult times. I strongly believe we can work together for the betterment of our district. As Helen Keller said: “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would certainly like to say a big thank you to my colleague for that very passionate response. Many of us throughout life always face some difficulties and being able to acknowledge that, in itself, is an accomplishment, to be able to express that, particularly in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I am just trying to make a few remarks today in reply to the Speech from the Throne. I’m representing a great District of Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans, which of course includes Grand Falls-Windsor, Badger, Buchans, Millertown and Buchans Junction.

AN HON. MEMBER: Perfectly centred.

MR. HAWKINS: Perfectly centred.

Mr. Speaker, I always count it an honour to be recognized by being elected – and this is the second time – as a municipal politician and then, of course, now being elected as a provincial politician. It is certainly a great pleasure.

In 2009, Mr. Speaker, I entered an election at, I guess, probably one of the most difficult times in the history of our community. Of course, in my district, Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans, most of the communities have been built around either a renewable or a non-renewable resource.

Madam Speaker, we know what happens when we deal with a non-renewable resource. The ore that’s in the ground just doesn’t make baby ore. Nor the oil that’s in the ground doesn’t make

baby oil. Once it’s out, once it’s extracted, it’s gone.

Many of the communities, Madam Speaker, that are built around that – and, of course, my colleague for Labrador City knows quite well what I’m talking about. When we extract the ore from the ground and we have a period of time when everything seems to be doing great, lots of employment, lots of opportunities and then when that ore is gone, we always see that downturn.

In 2009, when I was elected mayor of Grand Falls-Windsor, at that time I was also, at that particular council, blessed with gender equity. The same number of gender equity within the council which gave me a great opportunity to share and understand needs from different perspectives.

Grand Falls-Windsor depended for over 100 years on the renewable resource: the forest industry. With the downturn in the markets and in the downturn with paper production, all of a sudden we were faced, in 2009, with a situation that we never ever thought would have happened.

Grand Falls-Windsor – first, Grand Falls – over 100 years ago, was the first industrialized area in the province. For the first time in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, the majority of people were finally earning a wage. Most of them at that time were operating in a barter system. You sell your fish; hopefully, you get some goods back.

Many people from the coastal areas of the province, for the first time, moved into the inland and now were receiving wages. That, Madam Speaker, lasted for over 100 years. So in 2009, people were saying this is an absolutely desperate situation, over 700 people losing employment – where are we going to be going? Well, there are two options in life. We can look at the glass as half empty, or we look at the glass as being half filled.

So, in 2009, my council embarked upon putting together a plan. We were not looking at what will happen tomorrow; we were looking at what will happen and what are your potentials for the future.

Part of that plan, Madam Speaker, was to do things differently. The status quo was no longer accepted. It's not my intention today to stand here and place blame on what has happened. I believe we learned from what has happened in the past, but I think it's important for us to look forward and to look ahead. I think it's important for us to do that.

As in 2009, in 2015 when we as a government took over, we were facing a desperate situation, and we had two choices. We look at this as a glass half empty or a glass half full and then start building on that. I believe very firmly, Madam Speaker, that this is really what this government is doing.

I go back to 2009, when as a town we could no longer look at the fact that – very, very weak markets when it came to paper production. Obviously, not what we would consider to be a bright opportunity with antiquated equipment that was in the mill, that that was going to be a future for the people of our town and our district.

So, Madam Speaker, it was important for us to put together a plan to look at other opportunities. We engaged with a number of partners within the community to build upon opportunities. One of the biggest areas of opportunities that we looked at in Central Newfoundland, in Grand Falls-Windsor, was looking at getting into research and development, getting into looking at opportunities in the business of health care, working with partnerships.

Killick Services, for example, a model for the province in Grand Falls-Windsor, where physicians have all of the multi skills that are possible to deliver services. We worked very closely with these partners to put together a plan for our future, a plan whereby we'll look at, what opportunities can we find and how can we build our economy around something other than what we had done for over a hundred years? That's not an easy task, and it wasn't an easy task. The task is not completed, nor is it finished. We are continuing to look at building on what we've had.

Madam Speaker, through that strategic planning and through looking at opportunities, we, as I said, not only looked at partnerships within the

province but also looked at partnerships outside the province. We worked very closely with people such as Dr. Terry Young in research and development. We work with Memorial University and looking at research opportunities and actually have had a tremendous amount of success in building on these opportunities. We feel there's actually a very bright future when it comes to developing and looking at other opportunities.

So, Madam Speaker, that gets me to where we as a government are starting to look. We have to recognize – and we're looking at the centre in Wooddale, for example, it's included in our *Way Forward*. We have a tremendous infrastructure at Wooddale. So even though Wooddale is not in my district, but in the district of my colleague for Exploits, it's still attached to Grand Falls-Windsor.

What we're doing, we are going to be building a centre of agriculture and forestry in Wooddale and looking at that as a centerpiece for opportunities. We have the infrastructure there as we – I want to use this loosely, as we grow forward, no pun intended. There are opportunities within that centre. So I think, Madam Speaker, that is an excellent opportunity for us to build on that.

The other piece that was in the Speech from the Throne, Madam Speaker, that's encouraging to us in Central Newfoundland, is the commitment as we continue to look at long-term care. We all know that long-term care is a concern for all of us. Particularly, we in this province, where we're having an aging demographic, and particularly in the Grand Falls-Windsor area where a lot of our population – we're looking at an aging demographic and the pressures that our acute care facilities are facing because we have to look at trying to provide adequate resources and adequate facilities that are outside of the acute care facility.

Madam Speaker, our government has made commitments. We have already made announcements for Western Newfoundland, the long-term care facilities in Western Newfoundland and also the acute care for Corner Brook.

Continuing on that same thought and looking at that same investment, Madam Speaker, we've made that commitment to long-term care in Central Newfoundland. So this year, and in subsequent years, we will be putting all the details together and we will make an official announcement on that very shortly with regard to the number of beds and what will be adequate for that area. So when we look at these pressures we're facing, we have to do things differently.

Madam Speaker, I remember one of my first meetings with my senior staff when I became minister was that at no point in my tenure, however long that will be – that's the Premier's prerogative for that – but I never want to get to a point where I am not listening to people, whether it's people on this side of the House or whether it's my colleagues on the other side of the House. I never want to get to that point where I don't listen if people have ideas, if people have ways in which we can improve, if we can look at things differently and do things differently. So my staff are very, very aware of that.

The other thing, Madam Speaker, I made very, very clear to my staff was that going forward we no longer will be accepting status quo. We are no longer going to be – an acceptable answer to me, if a question is asked, or a proposal is put forward, no longer will it be acceptable to say: well, we've always done it this way. That has to change.

We have to look at different ways in which we can do things differently. We have to look at efficiencies, look at opportunities. What we did 20 years ago, what we did 10 years ago, what we did five years ago are no longer acceptable unless it's working. So we have to look at better ways of doing things and getting better results.

It's pointless, Madam Speaker, for us to continually invest money into areas if we're not going to get a return on the investment. If I was a business person and I made investments, and after a year or two years I continued to make investments within a certain portfolio and I was getting no return on my investment, I don't think I would continue to do that. I would either look at a different portfolio; I would look at a different opportunity.

So we cannot continually do things as we've always done it. As a result of that, Madam Speaker, it was important for us and important for me as the minister to say going forward, planning for one year is no longer acceptable. It's not something you make good judgements on. It's not something that you can really say we have long-term planning.

So, Madam Speaker, one of the other things that I try to do as minister, and I hope that it will be successful – and no matter whatever we look at in life, there are always challenges that we face and there are always some growing pains. But one of the things that I wanted to implement and I wanted to make sure is that whenever we make decisions going forward, I, as a minister, am not interested in making decisions politically; I'm interested in making decisions that are based on evidence.

I think I've been very, very clear when I stood in this House and when I've talked to my colleagues across the way and when I talk to my colleagues within government, I'm interested in making decisions that are based on evidence – evidence that will tell me that this is the right way to go and this is the right thing to do. I hope, Madam Speaker, that as I continue in this role that I will be able to do that. It's always a challenge sometimes, but I just hope that I'll be able to do that.

The other thing that I wanted to do is look at how we can do our planning over a five-year period. I thought it was important for us – and this year, already, we're finding results. Every single one of our tenders for roadwork is out; most of them are back. The first set that we put out at the end of January has been awarded. The second set we put out in February is now going through the process. The third set, some of them are coming back and we're looking at those.

This gives everyone a degree of confidence – a degree of confidence in knowing that they can plan and they can plan effectively. We can have our resources in place to make sure the work will be done and will be done in this construction season.

No longer am I interested in the fact that well, we had too much work to do this summer, we can't do it and it's going to be carried over to the

next year. That no longer is acceptable for me as minister, and we will address that situation if, in fact, it arises.

So my message, and my message that I talked to the Heavy Civil, is that if we have work that's awarded, the whole idea of getting the work out early is to know how much work you will have during this construction season to make sure that work is completed.

Madam Speaker, the five-year roadwork plan has been out and then we looked at the multi-year infrastructure plan that we had. So we said we'll look at a five-year plan, model it after our five-year roadwork plan with our infrastructure. Now we know that over the next five years, Madam Speaker, we are investing \$3 billion into infrastructure. We're looking at, this year, over \$500 million invested in infrastructure; 4,900 person years for the next five years of employment – significant.

When I say significant, Madam Speaker, significant particularly in the fiscal situation we're finding ourselves in. But while we have fiscal difficulties, fiscal challenges, we also need to have stimulus. We need to make sure that we're making investments in the infrastructure and making sure that we're still being prudent in the way in which we're moving forward. So that's that plan for the infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, I guess this is the first time that we've ever done a five-year marine strategy; \$28 million over the next five years; \$8 million frontloaded, this year, to give us an opportunity to address some of the complaints that we've been getting from tourists and from people that are using our ferries. Some of our terminals, we know, are in deplorable condition. We have to make significant improvements. If we want to have facilities that people can have some degree of comfort, then we have to make some changes. So, Madam Speaker, we have made a commitment to do that.

Over the next five years within just those three plans that we have, we are building on an opportunity for us to do things better, to plan effectively, to ensure that the work is completed and to look at other ways of doing business. Part of that, of course, is involving the private sector, and that's an area that we're looking at. When

we look at the model we have for the Western Memorial Hospital and the long-term care facility, that's just one procurement method. There are dozens of procurement methods out there. This is just one. Will that method of private partnership be the same for every project going forward? Not necessarily.

Every time that we engage in a private partnership or look at opportunities, we will go through a value for money, which will tell us if we're going to get a return on our investment. If, in fact, it makes sense, Madam Speaker, then that's an avenue which we can look at because not only will it be beneficial for us as a government, it will be beneficial for the residents of the province and it will be a better return on the tax dollar.

So, Madam Speaker, I can't believe my 20 minutes are gone already. Time goes fast –

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

MR. HAWKINS: Leave.

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): Order, please!

MR. HAWKINS: I can go on for another hour, but anyway. It's –

MADAM SPEAKER: I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Thank you so much,

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Unlike my colleague, I rarely run the time allotted.

It's an honour today to rise in Address in Reply to the Throne Speech, Madam Speaker. First of all, before I begin, I too would like to rise today and pay tribute to the late Senator Rompkey.

Madam Speaker, I don't think I rise on behalf alone, but I rise on behalf of yourself, the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, the Member for Lake Melville and the Member for Labrador West. In fact, Madam Speaker, I think I rise on behalf of all hon. Members today to pay tribute to Senator Rompkey.

I've known Senator Rompkey a long time. As I was growing up as a kid to 2011, when I ran for election in the House of Assembly for the first time, I did have the opportunity to sit down with Mr. Rompkey and to ask him a lot of questions about the history and about politics. He did give me a lot of insight into what was ahead of me. Over the years I continued to ask him questions, and he did continue to provide a lot of insight and a lot of motivation to me, Madam Speaker.

I think Senator Rompkey gained a lot of insight in Labrador when he was principal of Yale School in North West River, because a lot of times there was a lot of students from the district that I represent. They went out and took part in residential schooling, and certainly we all know some of the shortcomings of that dark chapter in our history, but I think Senator Rompkey gained a lot of insight from the students there.

In 1972, he went on to run for the District of – I believe it was Grand Falls – White Bay – Labrador, and he ran for that district until the name changed in 1988. He then ran for the District of Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. EDMUNDS: He did a good job. To use your own words, Madam Speaker, Mr. Rompkey was good to Labrador, and Labrador was good to Mr. Rompkey.

As the Premier said in his statement earlier today, Madam Speaker, he spent 40 years representing us and he never once forgot the indigenous people of Labrador who, for so long, looked to him for help and support. This was portrayed throughout his terms as the MP for Grand Falls – White Bay – Labrador, and later on Labrador.

So, Madam Speaker, he shall be ever remembered as the shining example of what it means to be a servant of the people. I, too,

certainly share on behalf of all my hon. colleagues in this House, our regrets to the family and a tribute to the life of Senator William Rompkey.

Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour, Lieutenant Governor Fagan. I think it was in 2015, I had the opportunity of touring my district with Their Honours. There was a little bit of a difference, Madam Speaker, they were onboard the *HMCS Charlottetown*, which is a Canadian war ship, and I was in a 20-foot speedboat, but we did connect in four of the six communities in my district. Two I couldn't go to because it meant travelling at night and I chose not to do it.

The time I had from Nain to Natuashish, to Hopedale, to Postville, to Makkovik, Madam Speaker, I actually remember talking to the commanding officer of the *HMCS Charlottetown* and informing him that I would show up at any time, at any place. So it was a little bit interesting playing cat and mouse with a war ship, but I really enjoyed it. It was certainly good to go around with Their Honours in the communities and provide some insight into the history, the geography and the people of the District of Torngat Mountains. So I wish them well and I said that I would hope to do it again with them.

When we look at the Throne Speech, Madam Speaker, and copies that have sent out, there are a few things that kind of jumped out through His Honour's words. Going through parts of the Throne Speech that His Honour read just a few days ago, it quotes here that, "Our government inherited a deep rooted reliance on oil, and with it, a culture of overspending. Our fiscal problem was not caused by a drop in oil prices, but rather this decline in oil prices exposed the culture of overspending."

Madam Speaker, the former administration does not like to hear this, but I think it has to be stated because when you look the reason why we are here, the reason why we are here in this financial shortcoming, to put it very mildly, is because of 12 years of overspending, and that with \$25 billion in revenue.

Now if you look at some of the things that were settling up to 2015, the PC government at the time informed the people of this province that even with \$25 billion of revenue, oil prices at the max, we still had a \$1.1 billion deficit. Now, Madam Speaker, \$1.1 billion is a lot of money. We made our commitment to the people that was based on \$1.1 billion –

AN HON. MEMBER: Billion.

MR. EDMUNDS: Sorry, \$1.1 billion.

Madam Speaker, when we opened the books, the reality showed that the deficit was double; it was \$2.2 billion. Now, to me, that's a game changer. It is a game changer. You have to take a second look at what you're doing. You have to look at how you can come up with a short-term plan, you do have to take a look at how you can come up with a mid-term plan, and you have to come up with a way that you can look at the long-term plan.

I think we've done that. In addition to a \$2.2 billion deficit, we've had – to use the words of the Member for Mount Pearl North – a bloated workforce, I think, is the correct word – a bloated workforce, meaning that they admit that they spent like drunken sailors. Rather than address the problem, they threw money at it and the problem didn't go away.

To go back to His Honour in the Throne Speech, he said: But rather, this decline in oil prices exposed the culture of overspending. That's what came out after 2015 when we had a chance, as a government, to open up the books and look at the financial mess that we are in.

Now, Madam Speaker, we had to come to terms, as His Honour said, with an unprecedented fiscal situation before us, and it has not been easy. I go back to some of the comments made by some of the Members opposite in former Blue Book promises that talk about having to put a check on spending, having to spend wisely, having to address the financial situation the province is in. This was in 2007, and it was again in 2011. Now, if they had followed their Blue Book, maybe, just maybe, we would not be in the mess we're in now.

When you come into government and you have to do the checks and credits and you're being put on a negative level with some of the funding agencies, it causes concern. In the last budget, we had to take that concern head-on, and we had to work with whatever we had to try and right the ship, try to straighten the list out of the ship. You look at some of announcements that have been made over the year, we have started that job. By no means is it easy; it takes a lot of work.

We do have innovation. We do have motivation. We do have commitment. Now, we can't clear a path to a secure financial future based on the plan that the previous government used. Because if we do that, in 12 years we could very well be \$4.4 billion in the red, if we follow the plan that the PC government used to get us where we are.

We would have liked to start with a clean slate, but unfortunately in the governance of the day, a government coming in, a new government, don't get to start with a new slate. Unfortunately, we've had to pick up the pieces from the former administration, and we're doing that.

I've heard the Third Party say that we don't have a plan. I've heard the Opposition –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. EDMUNDS: – say we don't have a plan. I think, Madam Speaker, we've got three plans. We have a short-term plan under *The Way Forward*, and we've already met most of those goals. We've set high challenges for ourselves, because we cannot accept challenges from over there, and they've already proven that.

We have a short-term plan, we have a mid-term plan and we have a long-term plan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. EDMUNDS: We talk about a way forward and it's a tough one, it's a tough way forward, but we don't have a choice. We don't have a choice except to right the ship through whatever measures we have at our disposal. The PC government never left us very many options and

the Third Party does not agree with anything that anyone says in this hon. House.

We simply cannot follow the plan that the PC government followed over the last 12 years that they were in government. This is a government that had promises through their Blue Books – and I've read through them and my question is: Why did they not follow their plan in 2003? Why did they not follow their plan in 2007? Why did they not follow their plan in 2011? Why did they hide the truth from the people of the province?

Madam Speaker, I'd also like to talk a little bit about some of our resources that we have. I represent the district – I think it was last Friday; I drove for nine hours on a snowmobile and I covered just over one-quarter of my district. In Northern Labrador, we do have a national park. My hon. colleague for Lake Melville, we are about to have another national park. So the tourism potential in Labrador is on par or ahead –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. EDMUNDS: – of the rest of the province.

Tourism brings \$1 billion a year in royalties, and it is one of the plans in *The Way Forward*. It's one there where you don't have to build your resources. Newfoundland and Labrador have their resources already at their doorstep. Our job is to harness those resources, Madam Speaker.

I think we're on the right track. We're going to go ahead with the tourism initiatives because we have the resources. There are countries and there are other provinces that have to go out and build their resources. We don't have that; we've just got to harness our potential. Like I said, we cannot follow our plan based on what the previous administration did. It obviously doesn't work.

So, Madam Speaker, with that, I think I'm going to clue up and say that it's important to look at where we've come from as a government of Newfoundland and Labrador. We've come from 12 years of abuse, 12 years of overspending and \$2.2 billion in deficit. It is important to build your future based on where you've come from.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition side now have stated that they've made mistakes. They're saying the civil service is too large.

AN HON. MEMBER: Bloated.

MR. EDMUNDS: Bloated. Yeah, bloated is the word.

Madam Speaker, I'm not saying the road ahead is easy for us. The road ahead is very difficult, but we've set our own challenges. They are demanding challenges and we're going to meet them. We're going to right the ship, Madam Speaker, and the job has already started.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm going to switch it up now. I'd like to move, seconded by the Minister of Service NL and Climate Change, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting An Independent Court of Appeal In The Province, Bill 3, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MADAM SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill, Bill 3, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MADAM SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to introduce a bill, "An Act Respecting An Independent Court Of Appeal In The Province," carried. (Bill 3)

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act Respecting An Independent Court Of Appeal In The Province. (Bill 3)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

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

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Madam Speaker, I'd like to call from the Order Paper, Order 3, second reading of Bill 2.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Service NL and Climate Change, that Bill 2, An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act, be now read a second time.

MADAM SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 2, An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act." (Bill 2)

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

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

Going right now to speak to Bill 2 which, as I've mentioned previously, is An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act.

The bill itself is not huge in terms of size but it does present some change to the administration

of this House of Assembly and puts into place legislative change that's brought about by the decisions of the Management Commission of the House of Assembly.

To provide some background on this, even though this piece of legislation, the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act sounds long, when in many cases this is what many would refer to as the Green act, the Green legislation stemming from the Green report that was a very significant report that came from this House back in the mid-2000s. I won't belabour it much. I know the Member opposite, the House Leader of the Third Party may have been one of two current sitting Members that were present in this House at this time. So I think she, if she chooses during her time, can provide some background.

I know every time I've stood up in this House or listened in this House when we've talked about this bill, we've provided some background. I don't want to belabour it. Basically, the long and short of it is that the Green act and the Green report has brought about significant change to the administration of this House that makes it more transparent, that makes it more accountable.

We have a Management Commission that is made up of Members of all parties in the House that sit here and make decisions as it relates to the expenditure of funds. Again, we have a number of meetings. I sit on the Management Commission. My colleagues opposite, the Opposition Leader, as well as the Opposition House Leader sits on it. My colleague, the House Leader for the NDP sits on it, as well as my colleague the Deputy Government House Leader and the Member for –

MR. BROWNE: Placentia West – Bellevue.

MR. A. PARSONS: – Placentia West – Bellevue. I get it confused sometimes. We all sit on this, and we have to make certain decisions based on the House of Assembly and the – not the conduct of Members, but certainly the expenditure of funds.

One of the things we deal with is the reports that are done after every election. Basically, what we're doing here now is we're changing

legislation. This bill basically puts into effect recommendations from the Members' Compensation Review Committee. For the sake of clarity, and for maybe saving myself some words, from here on in I may use the acronym MCRC to refer to this rather than saying Members' Compensation Review Committee every time.

What we're doing is we're dealing with recommendations one to three, and four to nine of the Committee work. If I may go through these; clause 1 of this bill contains two changes to section 11 of the act. The proposed section – then again, I'll say this right off the top, I don't anticipate any significant consternation to this. I think the Members opposite will certainly speak to this but I think this is something that will be supported by all Members of the House. I don't think this is a contentious piece of legislation by any means.

This one was a different one, because one of the issues that always come up is when you talk about the salaries of Members. That's a tough one. That's a very tough one because in the past it's been very hard – and I don't think it's just Members in this House. I think it's politicians of a provincial level, a federal level, a municipal level. When you talk about pay for Members, it's very tough to look at it and deal with the pay for yourself. In fact, I don't think the pay for Members has risen at all. I think it was frozen for a long time and certainly hasn't been raised in some time.

There's always hesitation for politicians to sit here and to look at the pay. Should it be more, should it be less? Depending on who you listen to, you'll get a different viewpoint. So what this – and this MCRC heard from Members, they heard from the public, and this was probably one of the concerns that was brought to them.

What this recommendation does is provides a mechanism for adjusting Members' salaries going forward. It's not to deal with previous salaries but going forward. Under this, annual salaries will be adjusted by averaging the collective agreement percentage adjustments of four groups. Number one, the General Service Collective Agreement; number two, the Health Professionals Collective Agreement; number three, the Registered Nurses' Union of

Newfoundland and Labrador Collective Agreement; and, four, the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary Collective Agreement.

For the past several years there's been no legislated means of making such an adjustment. This provision provides some predictability to Members' salary adjustments. Again, I would point out that this is a recommendation that is made by the MCRC which was comprised of members of the public who are independent of the House, took the time to do this work and feel that this is the right move.

I know this issue has been difficult in the past because whether – again, it's a tough issue when you talk about political salaries. It's tough when times are good and it's even tougher when times are not good. It's a difficult thing. This provides some predictability and a mechanism now to avoid – it's not about avoidance per se, but it's about having some predictability here and an ability to have a proper and fair wage for the people that do this. It's just not about the people that sit here now, because many of us could be gone. We could be gone, it could be tomorrow. That's how this thing works. It's certainly – people have this opportunity. So it's about going forward as well. I think that's what's so important about this.

The second proposed subsection 11(1.2) is in accordance with Recommendation 2 of the MCRC and it allows for a salary adjustment for Members within 30 days after the date of the last agreement reached amongst the groups just referred to. So again, if there is collective bargaining ongoing, if there's a decision or an agreement that's reached that adjusts the salaries of the groups referred to herein, this allows for the salaries here to be adjusted as well without having to wait until after the next session. It's about doing things proactively and doing things consistently, and making sure that it's done in accordance with the well-recognized mechanism that's laid out legislatively for all to see.

Proposed subsection 11(1.3) is required to indicate the manner in which compensation is paid out, and I would point out that this is exactly the same for all public servants. There's another codification here that's necessary based on the recommendations of this body. It

provides some consistency here and treats it the same as it does for public servants.

Clause 2 of the bill is in accordance with the MCRC Recommendation 4. What it does, it amends section 12 of the act to adjust downward the salaries for the various offices held by Members in relation to duties for this House. For example, the positions of Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Leader of the Official Opposition are among those positions that have been affected. The salaries have gone down.

Now, people will note that last during the budget it was announced that members of the Executive Council and Members of Cabinet all had pay decreased. There was a decrease in pay, voluntary, that was taken by Members of Cabinet, including the Premier. The Premier, aside from this, indicated back when he was in Opposition and made this happen since taking government when we talk about the salaries for parliamentary secretaries, which was also eliminated, to put it in accordance with other Atlantic provinces especially.

MCRC now has changed the salaries, I think, for the Speaker, Deputy Speaker and the Leader of the Official Opposition. So that is reflected here in clause 2, which was an MCRC recommendation.

In addition, the positions of Deputy Chair of Committees, Deputy Opposition House Leader, Party Whip and Caucus Chairperson will also no longer receive any extra remuneration for their roles. Again, another step that was taken by the committee, a recommendation that was made that was accepted by the Management Commission, and we have that subsequent removal of extra remuneration.

Finally, still going according to clause 2, there was a change here to the Third Party House Leader. That position which did not, I guess, legislatively exist before has now been added. This would have been in Recommendation 5 and 6, and there is a salary that is adjusted to that and has been added to that. So those are the changes to the legislative positions that are within this House of Assembly.

In accordance with Recommendation 7 through 9 of the MCRC, the proposed subsections 12(3)

and (4) remove the current \$200 per diem for Members of a committee who must attend committee meetings when the House is not sitting. Expenses for travel and attendance at a committee meeting when the House is not sitting will still be permitted.

So basically there's been a recognition that Members have to be here and when Members are here in the House when the House is in session and there's a committee meeting, they should not be getting the per diem that had previously been afforded. Again, another reduction in the monetary remuneration that has been provided to Members previously; this is another change.

That money has been removed because I believe the logic to be that if we're sitting here in the House, you're in St. John's, you're available to attend these committees. Members do, on all sides, attend a number of committee meetings. However, there are times when the House is not in session that Members are forced to travel and if that's the case, the expenses for travel and attendance to attend those meetings is still permitted, obviously. You're attending work on behalf of the House of Assembly, the cost of getting to said work should be covered as it is for everything else.

Proposed subsection 12(5) is required due to changes in subsection 12(1). Because there is no longer extra remuneration for the Deputy Chair of Committees, the name of that office was removed from the section – this is just what they call a consequential amendment. It's a change that's required due to another change.

These provisions respecting salaries were recommended to come into force on April 1 of this year. Consequently, under clause 3 of the bill, it will be deemed to have commenced on that date. This retroactivity is necessary because the bill will not pass all the stages by the 1st, I believe, because that may fall on a Saturday. That's my understanding. There is wording there to ensure that things go as they were intended to go.

These are all the changes now. There may be more in the future. This is a piece of legislation that really is changed on an ongoing basis.

If I may take some liberty with some of the time that I have here – I'm not speaking to the bill per se, but I'm speaking to the legislative process and this is more of a thank you. One thing that's often not recognized I think even sometimes by Members of this House, and certainly by people outside, is that this legislation, it's substantive legislation. We have a tremendous number of pieces of legislation and regulations in this province, as every province does. We have a number. The fact is there's a significant amount of work that goes into reviewing this, to making these changes. It is hard work, because it's very dry, it's very time consuming going through this. It's very easy to overlook something, to maybe miss something.

I want to thank all the individuals, and in this case, our House of Assembly staff that is sitting right here play a large role in this legislation. They play a large role, obviously, in the operation of this House. So I want to thank them for their time here, because this is important work for the people in this House, the Members, but it's also important work because we are talking right now about taxpayer dollars. We're talking about the reason that we are, in many ways, elected here is to talk about the legislative process.

I want to thank these individuals for their work. I want to thank legislative counsel. I have a number of people that work with me, both in the Department of Justice and as Government House Leader, that do a tremendous amount of work, and we sit down and have meetings every single day to talk about the legislative process, to talk about legislation, and they're often overlooked. They're not recognized for what they do. I want to thank them again – and again, just staff within the different departments that do this.

Finally, I want to thank someone who has been helping me for some time – I know the Members opposite are familiar – and it's a gentleman named Mark Fleming. Mark is my legislative assistant, and the work that he has to do on a day-to-day basis is absolutely tremendous. I mean, he really does make the trains go on time, as it relates to the House of Assembly. He works very closely with the other parties to make sure that they're prepared, whether it's lining up briefings, whether it's dealing with the legislative things in this House – all behind-the-

scenes stuff that many people have no idea happens. Mark Fleming has been doing this very well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: I can honestly say that when I sat on the other side we were – and again, not trying to go in the past, and I'm sure the House Leader for the Third Party will agree, there were times when sometimes we weren't given all the notice that we wanted. It can be tough. It's a tough process anyway, because it's so busy and there are so many wheels turning.

We've tried, since we've been here, to make the legislative process smoother. We try our best to work with the other parties, and we keep that relationship going. This legislation is about everybody. But again, to make that work happen it requires the work and the diligence and the perseverance of people like Mark Fleming. So I just want to thank him for everything that he's done in this process. Every day he's down here working. He's often not thanked, and I want to make sure that he's thanked, because we can't do this without him and all the other players that make this happen so we can stand here and debate it.

At this time, I will sit down and I'll allow my colleagues on the other side to pass their comments on. If there are any questions, I will steer them all to the members sitting in the centre of the room. They're much more equipped to answer than me. In all seriousness, I appreciate the time to stand in this House to speak. I look forward to the debate on this as we move forward into the Committee stage.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Thank you for recognizing me this afternoon, giving me an opportunity to rise and to speak to this bill, Bill 2. For people just tuning in, Bill 2 is an amendment to the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*.

I'm going to try not to repeat too much of what my colleagues said yesterday. We've been discussing these matters for some time. But I think it's important to provide some context to the act and the history of the act. The hon. Member opposite, the hon. minister, has done some of that today. I think it's very important to look back in history a little bit and to consider why this is here now and how this got here.

Mr. Speaker, back in the 1990s, early 2000s, the level of scrutiny available to the House of Assembly was very low. The level of openness and transparency was very low. It was quite well known back in those days that MHAs sometimes – and I'll talk about how this became known – were seen to be making their own rules around remuneration, and we all know what the consequences were of that.

We know that after the election in 2003, the PC party came into power and the premier that day, Premier Williams, saw fit to call in the Auditor General to do a review on the operations of the House of Assembly and to look into expenditures and how that was happening.

Subsequent to the Auditor General's review, Chief Justice Derek Green was asked to recommend ways to overhaul how the House of Assembly operates. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, many people, remember those days back in the 2000s, and it seemed like every few months, or every so often, there was new information coming out about wrongdoing, mishandling of affairs within the House of Assembly, and Members not conducting themselves appropriately.

By far, it was not all Members. It was a small number of Members in the House, and they've been all dealt with very publically by the House of Assembly, but also by justice processes here in our province. It was identified by our Auditor General we need to overhaul how the House of Assembly operates. Justice Green was very clear that one of the significant factors of his report – very, very clear – was that he wanted an independent body to take control of decisions about MHAs' compensation and benefits, and MHA spending, because sometimes MHA spending could be seen as a benefit, or it was a concern that it could be used for benefit.

So Justice Green was very, very clear that there had to be and needed to be an independent process in how that would operate. In Justice Green's very extensive, very comprehensive report he referred to the Morgan Commission throughout his report and talked about compensation for MHAs. It talks about the role of MHAs, how their work is done. Quite often people perceive – and he referred to this in his report – the job of an MHA is what they see here in the House of Assembly when the House is open. He also went on to say how the work, extensively for MHAs, goes way beyond the boundaries of the House of Assembly and is done with their constituents in their individual districts throughout the province.

Justice Green said if we want good and effective government and decisions that affect our daily lives to be made by competent and well-qualified men and women, then we must be prepared to pay for that. So he reflected that. He went on to talk about the Morgan Commission of 1989. The results of the Morgan Commission was an amendment to the *Internal Economy Commission Act* in 1988 that made provisions for mandatory appointments by the Speaker within 60 days after a general election of an independent commission to inquire into and report on the indemnities, allowances and salaries to be paid to Members of the House of Assembly.

He had outlined recommendations resulting from that. At the time, they were meant to be, and I quote, final and binding. Justice Green alluded to that and alluded to the Morgan Commission. What had happened over a period of time is what the Morgan Commission had reported on as final and binding, amendments had changed the processes of the House, so they were no longer final and binding. He changed the rules and the Houses of the day changed. And maybe, some thought, for good reason at the time and they made amendments to the act.

So Justice Green, in his work, actually wrote the *House of Assembly Accountably, Integrity and Administration Act*, and that new legislation, the one that we're amending today, his legislation created what is known now as the Management Commission. My colleague across the House, the Government House Leader, referred to the Management Commission. There are

representatives from all parties of the House that sit on the Management Commission. The work of the Management Commission is done in a way that it's intended to be non-partisan, that we come in to talk about the management of the House of Assembly from a non-partisan view. Sometimes it's hard to do that, Mr. Speaker, but that's the way that Justice Green intended it to be.

Let's not forget and let's not ignore it's important to reflect upon why Justice Green wrote this legislation and why he created the Management Commission. On page 3-62 of his report on the legislation Justice Green described the very thing that concerned him. I say think about this, he said: "It appears that, with the changes in the *Internal Economy Commission Act* in May 1999 and May 2000, the concept of parliamentary autonomy in Newfoundland and Labrador attained a new level: The IEC had been freed from the constraint of being bound by the recommendations of an independent commission in relation to MHA compensation and allowances. Through legislative change, such recommendations were no longer binding on the House."

That was what I just alluded to a few moments ago that Justice Green talked about. Through changes that have happened, those directions and those intentions of the IEC were no longer binding on the House.

On page 4-49, he said: "The requirement that the recommendations of an independent commission be binding has been repealed. The IEC now has the power to amend the recommendations of an independent commission as it sees fit." Justice Green was very clear to say that is not what should happen. He was clear to talk about independence and he was bothered by this. He was bothered by this and he said he felt it was very important.

On page 9-44, he said; "It is time to return to a more principle-based system. The need to rebuild public confidence requires it." Let's talk about that for a few minutes, if I may, for a moment. There's always a challenge in societies, not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador but in democratic societies that people need and want to have confidence in their elected officials and it can turn very, very quickly so that they lose

confidence in their elected officials. One of the things that Justice Green is alluding to here on 9-44 is a principle-based system, with an attempt to rebuild the public confidence.

"As has been stressed many times throughout" – and this is Justice Green again – "this report, transparency and accountability are essential to the maintenance of public confidence. A compensation-setting process that is engaged in under a veil of secrecy, by people who make the decision in the context of a conflict of self-interest and public duty, will not passed muster." He's referring to House Members making decisions that were not independent.

"An independent review process that takes place in the light of public scrutiny is the least that is required." Mr. Speaker, let me say that again, and I'm quoting again from Green: "An independent review process that takes place in the light of public scrutiny is the least that is required."

Mr. Speaker, I should point out that some of these comments are similar to what I pointed out to Management Commission recently. I'm using from the same basic notes, but I'm adding some commentary to it from what was talked about in the Management Commission. I think that I can't overstate what Justice Green is saying here. He is saying the very least is an independent process.

As matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, during Justice Green's report the word "independent" is used well over a 100 times in his report. It was so important to Justice Green that the House of Assembly remain and stick to that independent process, it's mentioned over a 100 times.

Section 16 of Judge Green's bill required the appointment of an independent committee. In his words, he called it, Members' Compensation Review Committee, as my colleague referred to today, MCRC. That's the MCRC that the Government House Leader referred to: Members' Compensation Review Committee. He said to spend up to a 120 days preparing a report regarding compensation and benefits for Members, among other things.

The operative word here again was "independent," as we've seen throughout his

report. If you take a look at his report, it's not hard to find "independent." He intended for a remuneration of all kinds, compensation and benefits, to be dictated not by us as Members of the House of Assembly, but for it to be done by that independent body. That's what Justice Green very clearly reflects throughout his report.

Now, Mr. Speaker, back in December, we all remember there was a Management Commission meeting where a decision was made and the public knew the decision was wrong. We knew the decision was wrong. People told us the decision was wrong and, our first opportunity, we made an effort to change that. I have reflected at some length on the decision that we made at that point in time. I stand here today and I say to you, Mr. Speaker, to all Members of the House, the people of the province, we shouldn't have made decision that we made back in December. And we made efforts to change it.

What we're doing here today is to accept recommendations of the MCRC – Members' Compensation Review Committee – which I believe is the right approach for us as MHAs.

Also, it is very interesting to point out that Justice Green has said that an MCRC, Members' Compensation Review Committee, has to be convened at least one time for a General Assembly. An MCRC can be engaged a second time during a single session of the House, or during a single General Assembly. I say that because if Members of the House decide they want to revisit a matter or recommendation by an MCRC, the Management Commission, considering advice from Members of the House, can establish a new MCRC or a second MCRC within one General Assembly.

So that is an option available to Members in the House, to accept the recommendations of the MCRC and, if they so desire, ask a new MCRC to consider a particular issue; but, it can also, within time constraints, allow for the original MCRC to revisit an issue as well. That, I believe, would be the right process when anyone brings forward or suggests an amendment to an MCRC recommendation. The Members' Compensation Review Committee was created to take the politics out of these matters. To remove the conflict of self-interest that Justice Green reported in his report, as he said a conflict

of self-interest and public duty – conflict will not pass muster. It's not acceptable, is what he's saying.

So the review committee was created to take the politics out of the matters. And to do anything other than accept recommendations of the independent committee, I believe, would be wrong – and we've done that as a Management Commission already. We've gone back to the MCRC on matters contained in their report when we've talked about taking their report recommendations and then to operationalize, if I can use that, the recommendations.

We've had the MCRC come into the Management Commission and we've said, what is your intention here, or here is a concern that's been raised – one is about accommodations. We've asked the MCRC to reflect on some challenges that we felt were in accommodations for Members who had to travel here for the House of Assembly. It doesn't apply to me, but it applies to rural Members who have to travel to the area with the Confederation Building, look for temporary or private accommodations, or commercial hotels, that type of thing, and how that process works.

So we revisited that with the MCRC, and I think that's the right process to go. What we're asking here today and what's come to the House, the Government House Leader has introduced here today, is Bill 2 – Bill 2 deals with some of the recommendations of the MCRC, as the Government House Leader has alluded to.

I expect there's going to be further changes to the potential amendments in the future. The amendments are clearly laid out in the bill. It talks about, as the Government House Leader has referenced, compensation, and the MCRC has made a recommendation on adjusting Members' annual salaries by a percentage that is the average percentage adjustment of collective agreements, and they've listed four: general service, health professions, registered nurses and the RNC collective agreement. To adjust them and made some commentary on how they'll be adjusted. First, within 30 days after the date that the last of the agreements referred to are finalized and coming into force. After that, within 30 days after the date that the last

collective agreement referred to is finalized from time to time.

So they have referred to that. They have also mentioned salaries for Members of the House, and there's been a reduction for most all of them, with one exception, and some were actually eliminated on recommendation of the MCRC – some salaries. These were not MHA salaries; these were salaries for additional duties and responsibilities that quite often will take MHAs out of their districts and back to the House of Assembly while the House is not in session, or provide extra responsibilities and extra workloads while the House is in session. So some of those were removed and reduced. All were reduced except for one, and some were completely eliminated.

That's what the bill is about. There's some housekeeping as well, Mr. Speaker, referring to how payments are made: 26 equal installments. It also says if a Member sits on a committee of the House of Assembly, the commission or committee of the commission shall not be paid for attending a meeting. That's clarified here. "A Member who sits on the committee of the House of Assembly, the commission or committee of the commission may be reimbursed reasonable expenses in relation to attendance at meetings when the House is not in session.

"Where a member who holds a position referred to in paragraph (1)(a) and (1)(b) is," – which refers to their salaries and members' compensation – "due to illness or disability, absent and unable to carry out the duties of his or her position for a period of more than 10 consecutive sitting days of the House, (a) a member referred to in paragraph (1)(b) who carries out the duties of a member referred to in paragraph (1)(a); or another member appointed to carry out the duties of a member referred to in paragraph (1)(b)." Again, a lot of this is housekeeping. Then the Member can be substituted and it also refers to the entitlement of salary after the absence of 10 days.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we have here, to sum this up, we have an amendment to the bill to amend the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*. The *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*

was written by Justice Green, after a full review of the operations of the House took place.

Justice Green submitted a report and also wrote the legislation. He strongly stressed that items involving compensation and benefits for Members of the House of Assembly be reviewed by an MCRC, Members' Compensation Review Committee, at least once for every General Assembly and that that independent body – he talked about the need for independence – would make those recommendations. Based on his report, based on what he's writing here, we should accept the recommendations of the MCRC, and that's what this bill is about today.

There's one other comment that I would add. My colleague opposite referred to the act and briefly mentioned conduct. While the amendment is not about conduct, the act written by Justice Green, *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* does also deal with conduct of Members. Part V talks about ethics and accountability; section 35 deals with establishment of codes of conduct; and section 36 and subsequent sections also refers to how one Member can file a complaint on another Member, but it talks about how that accountability should happen. That's so important in the House that we have a level of accountability, that we have a level of standard.

When a Member of the House of Assembly doesn't act appropriately, it can wear on all of us – we all wear that. When people are not happy with the government of the day, quite often it has an impact on how people feel about elected Members, overall, all Members of the House, no matter what party you sit on or what side of the House you sit on. Sometimes the actions or performance here in the House, words spoken, decisions made, actions of Members of the House outside the House, quite often has an impact on all Members.

That is one of the important parts of the *Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*. So it's an independent group, the MCRC, who's made recommendations to make amendments on compensation for Members; that's what before the House today, Mr. Speaker.

I know I have used much more time than I intended to. We will be supporting the bill, but I took the time and I think it was important to lay out the history of the act, the amendment to the act and the importance of an independent body making those decisions, not MHAs.

Thank you.

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 am glad to stand today and speak to this bill, especially because we have worked on this now for a long time. The Members of the Management Commission have dealt with the report and the recommendations of the Members' Compensation Review Committee that the Government House Leader has referred to, and I too will refer to it from here on in as the MCRC; it just makes it simpler.

I thank the Government House Leader for going through the whole bill piece by piece. I'm not going to do that since he did it. One thing he didn't do, and he explained why, is sort of go through a bit of the history, but he did make reference to the fact that I probably have been part of that history right from the beginning, so I'd like to make reference to it.

In 2006, I was elected in a by-election, my first time being elected, to the House of Assembly. During the summer of 2006, Chief Justice Derek Green was doing his work as the Commissioner in studying the whole situation of the House of Assembly. Unfortunately, following up on what had been a very black time, I think, dark time for us here in the province. I was privileged to actually be interviewed by him, even though I had not been elected yet in the by-election. I had been elected by my party as the leader of the party. Chief Justice Green showed, I think, a lot about who he is, of the respect that he had, because he did want to hear my opinion as well as somebody who he was assuming was probably going to end up in the House of Assembly.

So I certainly had a very personal interest in everything right from the beginning. By the time his report was presented to government, I was sitting in the Assembly and very well remember the day that we unanimously passed the legislation that was part of his report, and that is, of course, our accountability and integrity act.

I think we all understood at the time that this was an enormous piece of work that he and the people who worked with him had done. We respected, highly, his report and did make that decision at that time to accept even the legislation that had been written. A lot of work has happened since 2007. There've been changes to that legislation, good changes, some changes that were needed, that looked at the reality of who we are, but there hasn't been any change that's been made that all three parties have not been involved in because all three parties are Members of the House of Assembly Management Commission.

There were two things, I think, that really struck me about Chief Justice Green's report. One was his realization that everybody who was in the House, both MHAs as individuals and parties in the House, all were here with the same responsibility, that we all were here with the same goals and there had to be fair and equal treatment of individuals as well as of parties.

I think that spirit was really, really important because there had been not exactly fairness in the House of Assembly. So, for example, there was a committee, the Internal Economy Committee, which made the decisions around things like salaries for MHAs and pensions for MHAs and those things. Even though there were three parties represented in the House of Assembly, only two parties sat on the that committee and Chief Justice Green recognized that.

So wanting to recognize that everybody in the House of Assembly was here on an equal footing, as I said, both as individuals and as parties, was very, very important to him, and it really stands out in his report. You find it there in the report in so many different ways.

He also recognized the professionalism of MHAs, that we need to look at MHAs as professionals and treat MHAs as such. That's

not something that MHAs asked for themselves, they didn't come out saying that, but it was what Chief Justice Green said back to the people of the province in his report.

So his report was the beginning of everything. What you'll find both with the MCRC, who just finished their work in the fall, and the two prior committees before them, that they also recognize that Chief Justice Green's report is the basis for the work that they do. What they do is so important because they are an external body with no connection to government whatsoever. They sit down, at least once every general session, and they review everything that has to do with Members and the compensation to Members. They do it objectively. They do it thoroughly.

So it takes a real pressure, I believe, off MHAs. I certainly wouldn't want to be making the decision and the recommendations around our compensation, but having a review committee that goes out there and gets information from the public, whether they do it by person, or electronically or by written documentation, they listen to the public, they listen to MHAs and then they do a review, they look at practices around the country and if they see the need for changes, it doesn't mean there have to be changes every year, every general session, but if they see the need for the changes, they make recommendations to the House of Assembly.

It's interesting that even though we do not have to accept the recommendations, I think we all recognize that we do have to accept the recommendations, because the recommendations come from this external body. One of the things that is in our legislation is that unless a recommended change by the House of Assembly Management Commission, unless it is going a bit lower than a recommendation from the MCRC – we cannot, for example, take their recommendations and make them richer for ourselves.

I think this really is good; it's excellent. As I said, it takes a real pressure off us and we should be happy about that. I still find it really hard to believe that the Internal Economy committee that existed would meet in private, just two parties represented. It grew to a point where their decisions weren't made public; nobody

knew how the decisions were made. When you think about that, boy, that really is frightening.

We should be proud of what's happened here. It took an awful scandal in order for us to get to where we are, but we have one of the best – I don't want to say situations – systems in the country now when it comes to how we operate as a legislature. I could be wrong, and I'm up for being corrected on this, but I think we are the only legislature who's the equivalent – we are not called the Internal Economy committee anymore; it's the House of Assembly Management Commission. We are the only body that carries on its work publicly. People can watch us on television; they can see the decisions that are being made. I think we should be really proud of that.

I don't think any of the others have yet caught up with us with regard to being public. I really don't think they have. I'm pretty sure I'm up to date on that. I know at one point the other legislatures weren't, and I still think I'm correct on that. So we should be proud of it, where we are – and I am proud that we can come here today and we can look at this bill which has to do with changes recommended by the external body, by the MCRC, and to say we didn't come up with any of this. It was the MCRC who came up with this and we are now going to take what's here and we are going to pass it. Because nothing can be done to our act, no adjustments can be made to the accountability and integrity act unless it comes here to this House and it is done publicly.

It is something that's in our act; it's an important clause – and I want to read this because I think the public needs to hear this clause. Section 15 from the accountability and integrity act: “An adjustment to salaries under subsections 11 (1) and 12 (1) shall not be made and an additional non-accountable allowance shall not be created or provided for except (a) in response to a recommendation of a members' compensation review committee constituted under section 16; and (b) by introduction of an amending Bill in the House of Assembly with votes on first, second and third readings being taken on separate days.”

The care and thought that went into the piece of legislation that governs what we're doing here

today is quite remarkable, and that's why I'm pointing it out. We no longer have the right, as legislatures, to come up with any suggestions or any pieces of legislation around allowance of any kind and bring it into the House. We don't have the right to do that, unless it's something that has been recommended by a Members' Compensation Review Committee.

So this is extremely important. When, as I said, the legislation was recommended by Chief Justice Green, all of this was passed; everything that was in his report in the legislation was passed. We can be proud that happened – we can be proud.

I do think that in 2007, when we did that, we were still reeling from what had happened here in the province, and we all wanted to do the right thing. We all wanted to be accountable and we all wanted what we do here in the House of Assembly to be transparent. I think it's incumbent upon us to continue with that spirit, and I think we do. I think we all believe that.

I'm not going to take longer, Mr. Speaker, except I would like to echo what the Government House Leader said. People see this bill and they don't realize the amount of work that has to go into the detail of making these kinds of changes. For example, with every recommendation of the MCRC, some of them will affect the accountability and integrity act and some will affect other acts and some will affect regulations, which don't even come into the House, except when we – we will have actually a motion today – I think it's going to be today; it could be tomorrow – which has to do with changes to regulations.

So there is a tremendous amount of work that has to be done. Our Table Officers and the staff who work with our Table Officers have to go to all those pieces of legislation. I'm sure the Department of Justice is probably involved in that as well. They have to go through every line and see what changes have to be made to comply with the changes that have been recommended by the MCRC and that we accept here in this House.

I do want to thank the Clerk and everybody who works with the Clerk and the Department of Justice for the work that does have to be done

for this. It may look simple, but it's not simple. I also want to thank the members of the MCRC. We have done it publically before, when we accepted their report, but again today because of the thought that they put into these three pages or two pages of amendments, because of the work they did and did so diligently and with such commitment, we wouldn't be here today either.

Having said all that, Mr. Speaker, naturally, I am ready to pass the bill. We all have worked on this together, but it is really important that people see what we're doing and people understand what we're passing here today in the House.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to take a couple of moments, for the record, just to say, first of all, that I do support Bill 2. Mr. Speaker, this speaks to – obviously, as has been said, I'm not going to repeat it all, regurgitate it all. Generally, we're talking compensation for Members of the House of Assembly. I think of the phrase sometimes – I don't know if you've heard the phrase: One day you're top dog and the next day you're the hydrant.

Quite often, as politicians, more often than not, I think, as far as the general public are concerned, we are the hydrant. We don't necessarily always receive accolades from everybody because, quite frankly, you're taking positions on different issues, there are going to be disagreements, there are going to be things that people like, things people don't like, people will never always agree on everything that you do, for sure, but you do the best you can. I know everybody does the best they can in the House of Assembly regardless what party they're with, or if they're with a party at all.

So it's always a little bit of touchy subject, I suppose, publicly, when you get up and you speak to a bill that's dealing with your own remuneration and so on. The good news, as has been said – and something we should all be very

happy with – is that we do have an independent process in place; we have a very transparent process in place.

Transparent in that the Management Committee meetings are done publicly so the people can hear the Members that are represented, have their say on the various issues around these things, and we also debate them and we discuss them here in the House of Assembly which is also public. So everything is there; everything is out in the open. Remuneration is all posted online and so on for anyone who wants to look. For that part, I think we should all be pleased that we do have a fair, open, transparent system in that regard.

Obviously, as part of the process, if you will, from a legislative point of view, every four years, I think it is, there's an independent committee which is appointed of citizens who basically will review the Members' compensation, all aspects of it, whether that be their salaries, their benefits they receive, their pensions, their accommodations, mileage, and so on, all those things. They review it every four years to ensure that it is current, that it is reasonable, that it is fair and just, if you will.

If there are things that need to be adjusted or changed, either upward or to adjust it downward, depending on the circumstance, depending on things of change and so on, then they make those recommendations. They do so with feedback from the MHAs, feedback from the general public. It's a very open process in that regard. They make recommendations. The recommendations are made public. As I've said, they are debated and discussed by the committee, the House of Assembly Management committee, which is done, again, publically, and then it comes here. So that's all a good thing.

Basically, as a result of going through that process, we know that the independent commission have made a number of recommendations for change. All of those recommendations are not contained in this bill today. My understanding is that, in the future, there will be another bill, which is going to make an amendment to this particular piece of legislation. There's also going to be another bill as well, I believe, that will deal with pensions for MHAs, at some point in time, and that falls

under a different piece of legislation than this. It falls under the pensions act or MHA pensions act, whatever it's called. It's a different piece of legislation. That recommendation will come forward at some point in time to deal with that.

I think it is incumbent upon all of us, we put that process in place, an independent process, and if those people make recommendations, then we have to be prepared to – we all had an opportunity for our input, and now they've made that decision and we all have to be prepared to accept those recommendations, good or bad, whether we like them or we don't and so on.

There will be, I'm sure, many people who will applaud some of the changes being made here today. There will be people out there in the public, as I said, who without doubt would say it doesn't go far enough. I've talked to people who figure you should be doing it for minimum wage. You'll never change that, and that's why it's not for us to be the arbitrators of that. That's why we leave it to an independent body to make that decision based on what's fair and what's realistic.

As I've said, that's what has been done. These are some of the recommendations that have been made. As I've said, I think it incumbent upon all Members to support the recommendations that have been made independently, using a process that we all agree with, in an open and transparent way.

So, with that said, I will be supporting Bill 2.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety speaks now, he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I'd like to thank my colleagues for their contribution to this debate. I don't plan on belabouring the debate any further. I will be going into the Committee stage if there are any questions. Again, we're all, I think, on the same page as it relates to this piece of legislation, the

changes that are made, the process that led to this. I am happy to stand here and be able to speak and look forward to it moving forward.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 2 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act. (Bill 2)

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 2)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 2.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to

resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider the said bill.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dempster): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 2, An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act." (Bill 2)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 and 3 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 and 3 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 3 carried.

CLERK: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 2 carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill without amendment, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Madam Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 2.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee do rise and report Bill 2.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, the Speaker returned to the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): The hon. the Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 2 carried without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed her to report Bill 2 carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, from the Order Paper I would call Motion 2.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the Order Paper here, and I don't know if it's absolutely necessary that I read the entire resolution that's been put forward again. I read it. I know the Members opposite are just dying for me to stand up and read the whole thing out again, but it is on the Order Paper.

Basically, what we have here is a resolution that comes from the Management Commission of the House of Assembly regarding the recommendations that have been approved by the Management Commission that came from the Management Commission Review Committee, the MCRC. Again, it's written out here.

For those that are watching, this is on the Order Paper. It can be found online. So anybody that is actually interested in finding out the resolution that was put forward in this House yesterday can find it online, or feel free to email me and I'll certainly forward you the link to this, all for the sake of me not reading out this entire resolution.

Basically, it relates, obviously, very similarly to what we just discussed in this House which was Bill 2, which was An Act to Amend the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act. This resolution that we're dealing with also comes from recommendations from the MCRC, the independent group, the Members' Compensation Review Committee that was appointed and have made a number of recommendations.

Specifically, this resolution deals with number 21 and number 27. They provide for a change to allowances permitted for Members of this House, and because of this, section 20(7) of that same act, the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, the Green act as it's commonly referred to, these proposed changes must come to the House as a resolution to be voted on by this House prior to them going to Legislative Counsel to be

drafted and to be published in the Newfoundland and Labrador Gazette.

So that's why we are here with this resolution today that I entered into the House that Members opposite will have an opportunity to speak to as well. All members of the Management Commission have had a chance to sit down and to talk about – also done in a public forum, done in this House, done on TV, which shows the transparency that this process should have. These things are not done behind closed doors. These things are done live for anybody that's interested. Again, it's done in the best interest of the taxpayers and constituents of this province.

The principles of both of these recommendations were approved by the Management Commission on December 7, 2016, and also on March 15, I believe it was. I may have that date wrong. Again, these would have been meetings that were done in the House and the minutes for those can also be found online as well. These meetings are also screened.

The amendments required to put the recommendations for the resources and allowances rules were approved. So the Management Commission did approve this, and then it's subject to final wording by the Office of the Legislative Counsel.

So there are two parts to this, Mr. Speaker. Recommendation 21 of the MCRC allows a Member to opt for a lump sum payment to offset the cost of rental accommodation in the capital region instead of using other forms of nightly accommodation such as hotels. This lump sum must be requested for a fiscal year and is a taxable benefit.

Recommendation 21 also provides a means of calculating the lump sum based upon the average number of sitting days in the previous eight years times the average cost of each night based upon a request for proposals to be requested from the hotel and accommodation community.

There was a lot of work done by House of Assembly staff when it comes to this specific recommendation. They've consulted with government personnel who deal with tendering and it was determined that, okay, there was an

RFP process that was brought out. I guess, maybe as I'm going forward I need to first go backwards just a little bit to explain the process.

Every Member of this House has to come to this House, which is in the capital region, which is in St. John's to work. Many Members represent constituencies that are in the St. John's area, or in the very close proximity. Many Members represent other areas but actually still can live here. Many others, such as myself, represent rural constituencies; live in rural constituencies and have to travel and live here and stay in other accommodations that are not your home. Many stay in hotels or other arrangements like that.

What this does is it allowed for another option, because previously there wasn't an option that allowed for you to stay, say, in an apartment. The way that it worked out, it actually wasn't much of a – it certainly wasn't a benefit. In fact, it would cost; whereas a Member can stay in a hotel, and the exact cost of that hotel is reimbursed whether you're staying at any hotel in the city. They're all within the same range. It's part of the cost of having to come here and do this job.

So what this did was allow for the fact that we could have a taxable benefit provided to Members should they want to stay here in the capital region and stay in an apartment setting. So that was one of the things, I think, that was communicated to the Members during this process. I'm glad to see I have the rapt attention of all Members of this House of Assembly as I speak to this.

I'm happy because standing up and speaking to this is very important, and I love the fact that I get to do this on behalf of many Members of this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: It's a pleasure at all times, Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee you.

This was a recommendation that was provided by the Management Commission Review Committee and it dealt with one of the facts that sometimes staying in these hotel accommodations can be difficult, and many want to stay in a more permanent setting where

you're not constantly moving back and forth, back and forth. Certainly it can be a grind, and in many cases it takes a significant amount of time away from your work when you're actually in the process of packing and unpacking, and moving.

This was something that was come up with and it was suggested there be an RFP process that was put forward, going through the government tendering process where we talk about the different accommodations and trying to figure out a way to have this so that we have a range. The problem was that there were some concerns that were expressed by Members, especially when it came to the transparency side where the thought of people knowing where you stay, that presents a security risk. I had that expressed by Members to me. It wasn't something I thought of myself and then I had it brought to me, and I said that's very valid.

The second part is that sometimes being forced to stay – having no choice in staying somewhere can be very difficult as well. The main thing, we're all on the same page, though, is that there's roughly an average cost here. It's no different than any government employee that has to travel for their work. There is some choice there, but obviously the range that's used is very similar across the board.

So this was something that was come up with, but the problem was that the RFP process that was suggested presented a lot of challenges in abiding by tendering legislation. There were a lot of challenges there.

After going back and speaking with members of MCRC, it was agreed that it wasn't something that had been considered. We can do something else here that accomplishes the same goal and, again, keeps this to a point where we have this taxable benefit so that people can use that instead of using what had been done previously.

The other thing that we've done here, and this is not a part of the MCRC or the Management Commission, but something that our Standing Orders Committee has worked on, this is the first time that we've actually had a House calendar put in place where people know when the House is going to sit. They have a very good idea for the next year. So it allows for a better

idea for the calculation of the cost over that next year.

That was something that we put forward so this year everybody knew well in advance when the House would sit. They know, roughly, when the House will end. They know when the House should, hopefully, sit again in the fall and the same thing at the end of the fall session.

That's something that is done not just for Members; it's for the general public to know when your Legislature is going to sit. It's for the House staff and for all the people that work here. When this House is called, many people are engaged here and the fact is they have an idea and can have a sensible work life balance around that. So it's not just Members, it's everybody associated with this House, with caucuses, with the different departments, with House staff, with security – you name it.

There has been a change to the Standing Orders to provide for a fixed sitting calendar. The MCRC was consulted and it was agreed that the calculation should be based on the number of days in the parliamentary calendar, times the average accommodation cost for the previous year. Whereas before, they would take an average number of days – that was the thought process, which made sense based on what they had known at the time. Now that we have a calendar, you can base it on that.

Variation was agreed upon by Management Commission, February 27, and their proposed Rule 40.1 of the Members' Resources and Allowances Rules approved by the Management Commission on March 15 and contained in the resolution is the result. Again, this is not a case of increasing a benefit. It's certainly not that case.

In this case, it's about having a better idea of what that cost will be and making this change. So that's why the recommendation was able to be changed easily. It wasn't trying to increase the benefit. This was something when we all looked at it, again in a non-partisan fashion and working with these people, we allowed for this change which is for the betterment in my opinion.

Recommendation 27 of the MCRC, which was approved in December, allows Members in the capital region and Corner Brook to opt for a monthly \$200 vehicle allowance in lieu of claiming vehicle mileage expenses. The recommendation does not increase the amount of the allowance from which a Member may draw for this purpose. It's simply an alternative means of covering the cost of travel within a Member's district, or when going from one district to another, for Members who travel many short distances, in order to carry out their constituency work.

It is not something that I have to deal with on a daily basis; my commute is a significant amount longer. Members in the capital region also travel significant distances. There are probably a lot more trips of shorter duration, but it adds up. This was something that was reflected in the comments to the MCRC that they took into account. They made the suggestion and Management Commission looked at it and brought it in here. And again, this will be a resolution that can be talked about. I'm sure Members of all caucuses have looked at this and discussed it.

It is also a taxable benefit to the Member. The proposed amendment to section 38(2.1) of the Members' Resources and Allowances Rules contained in this resolution reflects the MCRC Recommendation 27 approved by the Management Commission.

This is a resolution that has to be brought here. It was something discussed by the Management Commission and has to be voted on by all Members of the House. It's something that we've seen before; we will see again. It's done here in the open. So again, coming back to the process that I referenced earlier, and certainly was referenced by my colleagues across the way, it allows for that transparency that when we're dealing with taxpayer dollars there is a significant cost to doing this work, to anybody that has to sit in these chairs and do this job. But the money is all spent very publicly and in a way that it's all accounted for.

There have been troubles in the past, but in fact I think we've gone from having a system now that is perhaps amongst the best in Canada. It certainly can be very onerous at times, but that's

needed. When you go from what was experienced here to what we have now, it was necessary and I don't think there's any Member in this House who will disagree with it. We appreciate the work that's done by the staff that deal with this.

On that note, I'm going to take my seat, allow my colleagues across the way – who are also Members of the Management Commission – to have their say and speak to this resolution.

Thank you.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly glad to rise today to speak to this resolution. The minister has gone through and given somewhat of a detailed explanation in regard to the contents of the motion. As we spoke of earlier in regard to Bill 2 and what we've debated here today in the recommendations of the MCRC and adopting those recommendations based on the process that had gone before us where it was brought to the Management Commission and those recommendations were adopted.

As has been discussed earlier today, that's certainly a means that has been set aside through the Green report, and to the act which now governs the activities of the House of Assembly, which gives the legislative authority, which derives the review that's done on issues of compensation after a general election, with the MCRC that's appointed, and then brought to the Management Commission. Then, in some instances as well, brought here to the House for discussion and for openness and transparency, to be understood and the public can see exactly what it is and the recommendations that are being made.

As well it goes through the Management Commission process as the minister indicated earlier. Certainly that's an open and transparent process as well. It's where the public can view; certainly attend here to see the operations and what is going on.

All of this derived, as I said, from the Green report and openness and transparency in the 2000s when that took place to make sure that it was applicable to our province and it was open to the public.

This particular motion looks at a couple of aspects in regard to changes, particularly with the Management Commission, in regard to Recommendation 27 of the Management Commission Review Committee. The minister has already gone through this; one looks at the taxable allowance in lieu of mileage, specifically in Corner Brook and the capital region. It also looks to taxable allowance in lieu of mileage.

As well, it looks at Recommendation 21 of the Management Commission Review Committee referencing a lump sum taxable allowance for accommodations. The actual applicability of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* section 20(7) provides the legislative direction in regard to directing it back here to the House of Assembly and the floor here when it states: "A change shall not be made to the level of amounts of allowances and resources provided to members except in accordance with a rule and, notwithstanding section 64, that rule shall not be effective unless first laid before the House of Assembly and a resolution adopting it has been passed."

So that's why we find ourselves here today in regard to the resolution and outlining the particular amendments that are put before us today.

The motion goes on to say: "THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Honorable House of Assembly adopt the amendments to the *Members' Resources and Allowances Rules* approved by the Management Commission of the House of Assembly on March 15, 2017"

As has been outlined by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and with the discussions we had earlier today on Bill 2, recognizing the legislative authority that was granted under the Green report, and the functioning now of the MCRC and directing it back to the Management committee, and then through that process it comes here to the floor. This is a process that is open and transparent. It's available to the public and certainly allows everything to be available

to the public in regard to changes through remuneration, salaries and compensation.

So we certainly support this motion, and we will be moving it forward after debate and we hear from other Members here in the Chamber.

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 happy to join my colleagues from the House of Assembly Management Commission, the Government House Leader and the House Leader for the Official Opposition in speaking to this motion which in effect – why it's a motion and not a bill per se is because we are dealing with changes to regulations, not changes to legislation. As has been pointed out by both of my colleagues, this is all based on the recommendations that have been made by the MCRC. Where there has been an amendment – the Government House Leader pointed it out but I would like to strengthen that, is that even the amendment that was made with regard to accommodations in the capital city and how that will happen, those amendments were made in consultation with the MCRC.

After we received the report from the MCRC – we received that publicly and had discussions on it publicly – the Chair of the MCRC came to all the meetings where we discussed the report of the MCRC, and we were able to converse with Ms. Burke. If there were clarifications, we wanted to make things clear, and when we saw an amendment that we thought was more practical for the reasons that had been pointed out by the Government House Leader, especially the one about accommodations in the capital city and the concerns that have been raised with regard to the need for MHAs to have privacy with regard to where they stay in the city, that was talked over with the Chair of the MCRC.

There were some other – not that we're talking about today, but some other slight amendments we have made and some of those will come to

the House through other recommendations from the MCRC, but they were amendments that were made in consultation with the Chair, with Ms. Burke, to make sure we were still within the spirit of the discussion of the MCRC and its report. So I feel very confident that we have been open and transparent.

I'd also like to point out, that any of the benefits that are here today – for example, the \$200 per month for the car allowance that an MHA in St. John's or Corner Brook can choose to get is a taxable benefit. So it's \$200, but it's taxable. Then the same way – no, I guess that's it. That's the main point with regard to any benefits that come they are taxable.

There was a time in the province, prior to Chief Justice Derek Green's work in his report, when there were parts of the income an MHA received that was non-taxable. That all ended with Chief Justice Green's report. Whether we're talking about the salary for the MHAs or benefits, such as the car allowance, all of that income is taxable. I think that's an important point to make for the public, so they would know that.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's anything else for me to add. We're happy to be doing what we're doing, to be doing what legislation says we should be doing. Of course I will join with my colleagues in voting for this, as will my colleague.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to take very long. I guess I'll just sort of echo the remarks I made on the last bill because it's really the same thing we're talking about. It's just another aspect of compensation for MHAs. It has gone through the independent process. Recommendations have been made, and those recommendations of course were adopted by the House of Assembly Management Commission.

I will say, just for the record I guess, if nothing else, that when I heard the Member for St. John's – Quidi Vidi on a couple of occasions

talk about the fact it went through the House of Assembly Management Commission that everybody was involved and had their input; just for the record, as an independent member I had no input because I'm not part of that Commission. Perhaps at some future time that's something we need to look at as it relates to all these processes, particularly as times goes on, because nobody knows what's going to happen the next time around when there could be a whole bunch of people running independently. It'll be something that will have to be addressed then for sure.

Anyway, with that being said, the recommendation has been made, been done independently, transparent, above board and I support it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Given the hour of the day and that we have a storm approaching, and many Members who I'm hoping to – that would be driving safely and getting home safely, I would move, seconded by the Member for Burin – Grand Bank, that the House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

This House now stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 in the afternoon.

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