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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

Wednesday

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The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, second reading of Motion 8, Bill 10.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that Bill 10, 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 10)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Mr. Speaker, I’ll take an opportunity, briefly this morning, to speak to this bill. This bill will amend the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* to remove the requirement to adjust Members’ salaries by a percentage that is the average of the percentage of adjustment under prescribed collective agreements.

Mr. Speaker, this goes back to the 2017 Members’ review commission. I think, given the light of today’s fiscal climate, an increase that would be higher than the increase for the general

public service, due to the way this formula was, doesn’t fit our fiscal climate at this time. It is a continuation of a 13-year wage freeze. MHAs have not had a wage increase since 2008, but it’s important that under the current fiscal situation we’re in that we continue this at this time.

It’s also important to note that we, as Members of this House, lead when it comes to these types of matters. Back in 2016, the Cabinet of the day actually did a wage rollback of 10 per cent to the Cabinet at that time. So there has been significant sacrifice here by MHAs over the last number of years, but I think at this time it’s important that we continue to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Following up on the Government House Leader’s comments on Bill 10, I guess the first thing that comes to mind for me, probably, is I don’t really know if anyone in this Chamber has any business to be discussing what we’re discussing here. I say that due to the fact that the general public has a perception out there about MHAs’ pay raises, what they make and whatever. It’s a false expectation and it’s false information most times, but that’s not the issue. The public opinion is the public opinion and we’re not here to debate that.

There’s a Members’ Compensation Review Committee that’s struck every four years after each election, to review all Members’ salaries, compensation, benefits and what have you, for the simple reason of removing everyone in this Chamber from the process. You can go in, you sit down, you discuss it with them, express your concerns and whether you think this is right, that’s right, what fits and what doesn’t fit.

Back in early 2016, I know me and some of my colleagues here, our leader – me and him, in particular, and there were probably a couple of others who are not here anymore that went through that process. I’m sure for Members opposite it’s the same thing. It was a new process to me at the time. You went in and you didn’t know, really, what you were defending,

but you were asked questions and you offered opinions. You were new to the game anyways so you really didn't have that great depth of experience. I know our leader did; he was well experienced. He spent a fair bit of time up there, so much so that I think he told me that they told him he had to leave because he was there too long.

At the end of the day, people might not realize that they made huge adjustments to pensions – reductions and a lot of changes to pensions. Salaries in this House used to be the salary for all positions, whether it was Whip or caucus Chairs, or the Deputy House Leaders on the Opposition side and whatever. That was all removed. There was a big adjustment made. I know the premier of the day on a separate issue removed all salaries for parliamentary secretaries as a part of doing a fiscal – whatever.

It happens. You remove it. There's not so much as a peep in the public about it, but if you go the other way, there's a public outcry. If politicians were to give themselves 5 cents extra, there would be an outcry in the streets. I get that. Is it right? Probably not, but it is what it is. We're not arguing that point. I think it's an issue that appears that people are afraid to discuss because of fear of repercussion.

I know in 2016, the pensions were an issue. There was a motion and there was some consideration given to grandfather in the Members elected in 2015 to the old pension plan. There was an outcry. I won't get into the logistics of what happened, how that ended up going back to where it is now, but it did. It affected me, of course, and it affected a lot of you Members as well across the way, but this is what you're dealing with. You're dealing with a very sensitive issue and the public – for some reason, it's a no-no.

If you look at salaries as a whole, you look at salaries in positions through government, there's a major imbalance to what elected officials make decisions on and actually make decisions on the salaries of people that are making a lot more money than most elected officials. It's a kind of the tail-wagging-the-dog effect.

I sit on the Management Commission and I've been there for a while now. We approved

salaries, one time in particular – and I know the Member opposite was on the Committee with me and made reference that we're approving a salary, that the person was making more than the premier. Something about that doesn't seem right.

You remove us from our Parliament – you go down to the United States and the president of the United States. If you have an official within the ranks making more than the president of the United States, people would be outraged. Yet, we're here in our Parliaments and we're approving salaries as elected officials. We have the ability, we have the duty – that's our responsibility – to say yay or nay to the salary increases and we're paying more than the head of government.

Again, there's no sympathy out there for politicians. We're at the raw end of everything. People say you're paid good money. Yeah, no doubt, no one is disputing any of that; it's just the overall concept of taboo. You're entitled to a raise. This raise you're entitled to was done by an independent Committee, the Members' Compensation Review Committee. Done so to remove politicians from this process, which is what I started out saying. I don't know if we should even be discussing this here, but it was brought here and it was brought by government, so that's their prerogative – and the Premier, whatever. I will discuss it, but that was done independently for this reason – hands off.

Back in 2016, this same Committee reviewed to take pensions and make drastic reductions in pensions. It affected a lot of Members in this House. There was some talk about grandfathering in the old clause and there was public outcry and went hands off. That's the MCRC. We have no right to do that. We removed ourselves, we got in this House and we approved it. A lot of Members opposite sat here; they were a part of that process. But now we're doing a reversal. Now, there's something in the MCRC may benefit – when it hurt us, everyone was like, yah. But when it would benefit you, the optics are not good. It's not in line with public service raises. I get all that, by the way. I get it and I am not arguing that.

I think it's irresponsible not to discuss it, to keep it hidden, but I think there's a misconception out

there. There's a total misconception out there of what MHAs actually make for what they do. I'm not disputing the wage. The wage is a good wage. My point is, in comparison with what decisions you make, responsibilities you're given, the job that it entails, the responsibilities. You just went through a three-month election, everyone should know, you're living in a fishbowl in Newfoundland, you're not in the big suburbs, big city, big place where you're hid away. We're under the microscope.

You go to Sobeys for a loaf of bread, look out for two hours. We all accept that, that comes with the territory. Everywhere you go people know you're there, people know you're – I go to Costco for God sake and you're running in – it's just no matter where you go you can't avoid it. We all accept that. Dare give any benefits to it, any monies or anything of that sort, but it's okay throughout governments and other places to pay \$120,000, \$140,000, \$150,000, \$160,000 or \$180,000 – more salaries than the Premier gets. No one seems to care about that.

We have 40 Members here, they make all those decisions, affect all of those positions, all this government, every person in here, but it's a terrible thing to give any benefit to them.

There'll be no crying on the street for what I'm saying here now. There'll be no sympathy and that's fine, but having the courage to say that this bill here – I know why it's being done. I know exactly why it's being done, because it's more than the public service, we're faced with a fiscal situation, I get all that and we're not going voting against it. We'd be crazy to vote against it, but we're crazy not to speak about it.

I don't say there's a Member in this House disagrees with what I'm saying here. How do you address it? What do you do?

This MCRC was meant to be totally independent – totally independent of anyone in this House and here we are discussing the wages. It makes you feel uncomfortable for one. I don't think it's appropriate, but how do we fix this?

It's fine tomorrow if the MCRC came in and said we're going to take every other benefit away from Members, ministers – they can't touch ministers – going to cut MHAs salaries in

half. The public would be out on the street. They would be clapping and clapping. If we come in this House and try to revoke what the MCRC did, what they are doing now, we would have protests on the front steps. Anyone arguing with me on that, I can put money on it. That's exactly what would happen. That's where we live. That's the reality we're faced with.

Do we go with an MCRC again? We're picking these Members' Compensation Review Committees to be independent, to make decisions – good or bad, indifferent – and we have to live with it. But if we're going to pick and choose and cherry-pick off that MCRC, why are we having an MCRC? We just went through an election. We're going to set the Management Commission; we're going to appoint the independent committee to come in and review our salaries and benefits. I'll throw it out there now: Should we not try another process?

If that's not independent enough, what is? Because, realistically, I'm not staying here forever. I know most of us are not. We're not going to be here forever. The wages may never change while I'm MHA; I'm okay. I'll survive. It's not about me; it's about the process. As elected officials, how are we going to get people to come into elected office? Why are we having so much trouble as parties attracting candidates? There's a simple answer to that. I have Members here under my own caucus that cut their salaries in half to be an MHA. They took a 50 per cent reduction to be an MHA. Their workload is doubled and tripled. Nobody cares about that, but don't give them any benefit. Don't dare give a benefit to an MHA.

You hear the public's scourge about what they think about politicians. It's outrageous. We don't help ourselves a lot of times, but a lot of times it's unfounded. We come in and do that. I can see what travels through. I've been on the other side; I know the way stuff travels through. That got up in the Premier's office and they went: Oh my God, a 5.7 per cent raise. We can't do that. No, no, no, not in these times. That won't be accepted. And they're right. But why is it not being accepted? Is it being explained properly? Is it being told properly?

We have no business to be giving that raise. The House Leader across the way, we were here; we

didn't have any input into that raise. We were told by the head of the MCRC in 2016: This is what you're getting. We didn't know what it was going to be then; it was an average. We wouldn't touch that. Okay, that's fine. But you lost a lot of things in that last time around, but we could not go there. We could not go there. The former government House leader, when he was on the Management Commission, tried to bring forward a motion to keep grandfathered in the old pensions. There was outcry. There were scums out in the Chamber. I was in the middle of scums out there. It was a terrible thing. You were going to leave pensions alone; you weren't going to affect people's pensions.

Was it wrong? Maybe, I don't know. I never benefited from it, obviously, but we said: No, no, you go with the MCRC. That is the crux of the problem, is the cherry-picking event there.

The optics are not good. You approve this, you approve a raise, word gets out we got a raise and it will be – again, I repeat, we are not voting against this, but it annoys me, as a politician, but it annoys me as a person. No one in this Chamber are bad people. I think everyone in this Chamber works for their money. They make decent money, there's no doubt about it. But if you're entitled to a raise, why is it a bad thing to give a politician a raise but it's alright to give an ADM or a DM or a director or a executive director raises higher than the Premier? Is that fine? No one says that's all fine, you earned your money, good for you.

I think we all need to take a sober look. Again, this will be done, but I think that's something that we all need to look at and take a deep breath and whoever wants to listen, draw opinions, they can come to me, I have no problem, I'll defend myself any day. That's what's wrong with this system. That's what annoys me about being a politician. It's this stereotype: you're greedy.

That's why this is a wrong approach here. I throw criticism across the way to the government opposite for bringing this to the floor of the House of Assembly. I think it would have been better to bring this to the new MCRC, new Members' Compensation Review Committee and have them discuss it. We should not be discussing this. But does it make my blood boil? Yes, it does because I think

everyone here earns their money. Are they overpaid? No. Are they underpaid? No. But get what you rightfully deserve.

When you go around, you can go through government and you can make decisions affecting all of these lives of people – check the sunshine list. I challenge anyone in the public, anyone watching, check the sunshine list. Find out how many MHAs are there. The ministers are there. Anyone who has probably an office position might be there; no MHAs there, not the one. Why is that? Well, look how many people are on that list; 3,200 people, not an MHA based on their salary. The ministers are there and that's fine. I'm not knocking that. But there's nothing wrong with having the courage to say that you don't agree with this, and have the courage to say you don't agree with the public opinion because that's the world we live in.

We had a case with judges, they were against the pay raise. I don't know if that ever got through. It was a big dispute in here; they were entitled to a raise. We voted against it, we pushed back on it. Even that wasn't given a lot of airplay. But give five cents extra to a politician – it's amazing, it's amazing. We feed into that because we keep bending into it. I'll say it again: We should not be here talking about this. I feel uncomfortable here talking about it. I don't mind speaking my mind on it because I have no problem speaking my view. People can agree, can disagree. That's fine; I have no issue with that.

This needs to be done in the proper avenue and it's not this way. Do you want to go and get a totally independent – someone to come in that is totally removed and say you're overpaid. Roll the dice that way. No one will criticize that, but dare go the other way. How does this change? In 10 years' time, do we say that MHAs are in a 23-year wage freeze? I tell you right now, the people who are going to sign up to come in and do this job – it's going to get a lot shorter because this is not an easy job. This is not nine-to-five; this is not Monday to Friday. There is nothing easy about this job.

I know newly elected Members there – obviously some took on minister roles too – they'll quickly learn. It depends on your district. I know the new Minister of Municipal and

Provincial Affairs is in a rural district. I'd say her plate is going to be quite full with constituent issues. Mine is and I'm in a metro area so I can only imagine. No one here doesn't deserve what they get, but no one here doesn't deserve to get an increase in life. It is just fundamentally wrong. I could have gotten up here 30 seconds after the Government House Leader and said, yeah, we support, we understand and sat down – I'm sitting anyway – but I couldn't let myself do it because I don't think it's right.

Am I going to support this bill? Sure, we are. We have no choice. We understand. If we never, it's going to pass too, but that's not the issue. The issue is why do we just accept the fact we can't accept this, we can't do this – no, no, we can't do that. If that was a cut and we were here today trying to stop that cut, the media would be lined up out in the scrum area waiting for us. They're not today. I'll just leave everyone with that thought.

I have nothing further to say. Those are my thoughts and I think I've expressed them loud and clear, and anyone else who are willing to rebut, agree or disagree.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Any other speakers?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to take long, but as is my practice, any matter that comes before this House – I was elected by the people of Mount Pearl - Southlands to have a voice and to cast a vote. I wanted to make sure that I'm clear this time as well.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to support the motion. I'm sure that the motion is going to be supported unanimously. A couple of things. First off, I have to admit that I didn't even know that we were due a raise, to be honest with you. I never even thought about it. This recommendation that was made four years ago or whatever it was, I

forgot all about it; didn't even know it was coming.

I look at it from the perspective that I just applied or I just reapplied for a job. I had my job interview and I got the job. Thank you to the people of Mount Pearl - Southlands. When I applied for that job I knew what the salary and what the benefits were, but I applied and I accepted it. I wasn't looking for more than what I'm getting now, so I will make that point.

Again, in good conscience, as the Member for Conception Bay South said, I could sit back and say nothing, I suppose, and not get in any kind of trouble whatsoever or criticism, but that's not my way either. My only point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, to kind of agree with the Member for Conception Bay South, is the fact that we have an independent process. It's not about the raise, it's not about recommendations have been made in the past or will be made in the future as it relates to pensions or benefits or any of that. That's not the issue for me. It's not about the extra money. Like I said, I'm happy with what I'm getting and I'm satisfied to get what I'm getting for the next four years. More than happy with the salary. That's not the issue.

We do have an independent process through the MCRC, as the Member has said. That was put in place so that we would not be put in this kind of position in the House of Assembly to be deciding on benefits and remuneration for Members. It would be a total conflict of interest, quite frankly, for us to sit down in this Chamber and decide our own salaries, our own benefits and so on. That's why it was removed. That's why there was an independent process put in place.

Regardless of this 5 per cent or whatever it is – and like I said, that's irrelevant to me – in terms of the process as we move forward, I have to agree that I don't see any value in having an MCRC and going through that process and any cost or anything else that might be associated to it. It's a total waste of time and it's a total waste of money if we're not going to abide by the recommendations and we're going to, as the Member said, just start cherry-picking – we'll accept this, we won't accept that.

I understand why the motion is coming before the House today. I absolutely get the fact where we are in tough financial times. I voted against the judges getting the salaries for that very reason, so I'd be a hypocrite to say it's okay for the judges, but it's not okay for me. I understand all that and that's why I will support the motion. The part I do want to agree with, with the Member for Conception Bay South, is the concept of the MCRC. What's the point of having it, an independent process, if we're going to be changing things here in the House of Assembly on a whim? Whether it be the right thing to do, whether it be the right political thing to do, whatever the motivation might be, this is really not the forum to be discussing this.

It should be done. I kind of liked the idea the Member for Conception Bay South said, actually, that it probably would've been more appropriate if we had taken this question of the 5 per cent or whatever it was, the averages that were recommended last time – probably would've been a better decision if we had given that to the new MCRC that will be set up and say, here's what was recommended but we want you to have a look at it based on today's fiscal circumstances. Based on what we did with the judges and everything else, have a look at it and you determine whether you think it should be 5 per cent. Maybe it should be the same 4 per cent that the public service received. Maybe it should be a lesser amount or maybe it should be deferred to a later time. Maybe we should not get it at all.

I think that would've been a better process and it wouldn't have put us in a conflict. To be honest with you, I feel like I'm in a conflict of interest right now even talking about it. I feel that we're all kind of in a conflict discussing our own benefits and salaries. It's a very uncomfortable conversation, like the Member for Conception Bay South said, I agree, but it's here before us on the floor so we really have no choice but discuss it.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I kind of concur with the idea that it should go to the new MCRC to determine. This is not necessarily the appropriate place. With that said, it's here, as I said. I'm satisfied with what I'm getting. I signed up for the current salary. I didn't even know about this increase. Like I said, I voted

against the judges getting their increase. I'm not going to be hypocritical and vote against this motion when I voted against the judges getting theirs.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks.

Thank you.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to be clear from the start, I will support this. I have some sympathy, certainly, towards what the Member for Conception Bay South is saying; certainly, the arguments with regard to attracting good people.

I can tell you that in my former job I was well compensated, but it was a 24-7 job, 365 days a year, as I used to say to people. I used to drive people up the wall when I would say that but that was it. As my communication's officer would say, obviously didn't have too much of an effect on me. I was no longer Jim Dinn, private citizen. I was always the president and any comment I made in the public – I couldn't call in to an *Open Line* show and voice my opinion as the private citizen because it was always going to be reflective on the association.

That's very much the same thing here, as an MHA. If you want to know just how exposing it can be, you can think of the recent example involving a federal Liberal MP who was inadvertently exposed and then shared. Now, I will say it was reprehensible for that to be done, but that tells you the level at which you are open to public scrutiny even for something that you did inadvertently. Every word is criticized, every decision, even your dress at time.

I understand that and I'm sympathetic towards many of the points he makes. It's also about attracting good people, because I can tell you there are a lot of people who, in the same breath, will criticize an MHA or a politician and at the other hand, in the very next breath, will say: I wouldn't want that job because it is relentless in many ways. I know just what comes into my

office in the form of calls that you're asked to deal with.

My district is small and I have a lot of sympathy, I guess, too, for MHAs who come from rural districts where they cover a very broad geographical area and they got not one – I don't even have a full city to answer to. I have part of a city, but to every council that comes along that wants you to show up – I remember I was speaking to the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay and talked about just the demands when he when he would get back to his district, the events he had lined up.

When I was first elected, I started to feel guilty, like I had nothing much to do, because the only time they would call me, which is often, is, hey, I have a problem with housing and so on and so forth. It's not always that they need the help of the MHA, because really a lot of the issues they deal with are going to be tied to the City of St. John's. I have that extra support, you might say.

But I will argue this, in many ways, there are benefits. I look at the pensions for the MHAs: far superior, far better than most other public servants or anyone else in the private sector. In many ways, I think we do get well compensated. I think there needs to be a look at the independent process, but I'll go on step further than the MCRC that's been referred to here because public sectors unions, and most other unions, negotiate. If you had offered to me, as a leader of the NLTA, hey, we're going to set up an independent commission and they're going to look at all the facts, no problem. But in negotiations, guess what? It's the government that has all the power, as much as they might claim otherwise, because they have legislative authority behind them.

In many ways, it would be an interesting process if, indeed, there was a committee representing MHAs and you had an independent committee representing the citizens of this province who engage in those negotiations and say: here's what we (inaudible), now we will go on strike, sure. But I think, in many ways, if you want an independent body, let's look at some sort of negotiations. Also, as far as I'm concerned, then maybe it needs to come into effect, not for the current group of MHAs but for the next people who will be elected.

Maybe there should be term limits on MHAs. Maybe we need to start looking at bringing new people in, if you want to really reform things and shake things up. Maybe there's a time limit, a best-before, an expiry date, and so we start bringing in other people and we start that engagement, that renewal.

Better yet, when it comes to the pension, maybe it should be like anyone else, it takes 30 years, 35 years or more before people can access their pension. If, indeed, they do retire after 10 years, it's deferred if they move on to another job. So there are plenty of ways if we want to look at making it more palatable to the general public. As I said, I'm sympathetic to the demands of this job, I felt them in my previous job.

Here's the other thing that's the issue for me, because I'm looking at my constituency assistant, and not just mine, but I'm assuming the work that my consistency assistant is doing is being done by every CA of every MHA in this House. I can tell you the amount of work that these people do for us is remarkable, and yet their salaries are pretty darn close to poverty, in many ways. The compensation is lacking.

I think in many ways I would dearly love that if we're going to talk – before salaries and compensation, before we start talking about ours, I think we need to start looking at compensating and re-evaluating the compensation for our constituency assistants. The ones who are on the front line, who take the phone calls first, who often shield us from some of the more irate comments, who probably soften the blow or whatever else, who do that work, who keep us on track and so on and so forth. They're invaluable. That's where, if I was going to put an increase, I would dearly love to see these people have that increase.

Secondly, I look at the cleaners in this building who are not a part of the compensation package, but are in a private company. They are not making near enough to, in many cases, earn a decent living.

I think in many ways we are sort of the front people, we are the public face of this House of Assembly, of government – we are. But it's the people behind us, the people that don't get the recognition, that don't get out in the public that

need to be recognized. Not only recognized but compensated and recognized for the work they do.

Yes, I do support this motion. Yes, I think in many ways take it out of here, because like I said, I'm sympathetic to what the Member for Conception Bay South has proposed, but I think there are others ahead of us who are really in need of compensation. I don't know if it is something, but I'm smelling something burning here.

I'll stop there, Mr. Speaker, and I'll leave it at that.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wasn't going to speak to this and I can very much appreciate all the sensitivities that my peers in this room have very eloquently expressed, but I think it is important, as my other independent colleague has just indicated, to weigh in and put our thoughts out there. I just want to put a couple of thoughts quickly out there.

I look back at my own professional experience and I look at other situations where an entity has signed up for a job and they've walked in to a situation, full expectations as to what the compensation was going to be, what the job was going to be and so on, and then you suddenly are put forward with the position where you have to somehow withdraw, retract, retreat from that. Then, understanding the public pressure and scrutiny that is on each and every one of us, yeah, this is a very awkward bill.

It's coming at a time when many of us, as my colleague for Conception Bay South indicated, we all remember those heady times of 2016 with the MCRC: that was not a gentle process. I think for those of us that were they will recall back to that situation where I would suggest some of us at that time were looking for so much more. I have always thought that when you step into a political life, it really can't be about the compensation; if it is, you are beholden to a

situation that is going to get you in a lot of trouble.

It can't be about the job or the responsibility: you have only a single responsibility, which is responding to the constituents within your district. I've focused on that and all the decisions I've made, that's been my priority. That said, I would also agree with my colleague for Mount Pearl - Southlands that I didn't know there was a raise coming; I didn't have a clue. In fact, when I go to fill out my income tax form every year I don't know what I make. I go and I look. My preoccupation is doing my job. I leave it to the MCRC to come up with a determination of what's fair for the work we do and I would rely on that body.

I'm finding myself very puzzled why this bill is here. I don't understand where it's coming from, why this situation – if an independent process and body has determined that there is in fact a percentage increase that should be allocated for all the good reasons that the lead speaker here for Conception Bay South indicated, then I'm not sure what the rationale is for pulling back on that.

I constantly hear, when there is an announcement of any kind in any district – and the critics and the criticism will come out: yeah, but what about this situation or what about them and so on? Well, you know what; there is a whole bunch of needs in this province. This province is facing challenges like we've never seen before, not in recent memory. As the Premier said and I am focused on his big three – and, as I said, I offered a fourth – there are big crises facing us. There's the fiscal situation, there's our demographic situation, we have a worldwide pandemic and we have this little situation called climate change.

We are going to need the best people in this province to step forward. If situations are such that someone says I don't know if I can take on that leadership job, I have a family, I have debts, I have bills, but I'm also I'm walking into a situation where the compensation may be limiting to the point that I can't put my name forward, I think that's a shame for the entire province.

I just wanted to put that out there. I wanted to say this is an incredibly awkward situation. I'm also just contemplating in my mind – and perhaps this is a very transparent thought, but I don't know if there's even a point of privilege here in terms of how this proceeding and ruling is affecting our ability to do our job and, more importantly, for me, for the generations that will come to sit in these seats because, again, as my colleague said, we won't be here forever. As tough as this job is, we need to make sure that those financial constraints are not going to be limiting to attracting the best to tackle the worst that is before our province at this time.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to speak a few minutes on this. I heard the Member for Lake Melville speak and a few others earlier. This is a very awkward situation, as the Member for Lake Melville mentioned. We go out and get an independent review – report – and then you come back now and s because of the financial situation in this province we're just going to take it and throw it out through the window. I remember back in 2016 when the Cabinet took a reduction. Do you know what the sentiment was around when it was put out in the public that we voluntarily took a reduction? They're getting paid too much anyway. That was the comment.

If we are, if we're not, that's a different debate, but if you notice that except for the Cabinet ministers and people who have positions – and, of course, it's an awkward situation that you're talking about yourself and we're all going to survive. But do you know, except for people in the Cabinet positions here and Speaker and Deputy Speaker, there is not a person in this House on the sunshine list? Do you realize that? Every time something happens, we want to put ourselves out as the martyrs, saying that we're going to start the change.

I have to ask the question, and this is to the government: By taking this report – which we all agreed to, went out and came back – are we going to make any more substantial changes this

year in government, or are we just going to say, here's what we did. We heard: Well, we're not going to make any big changes this year – with a deficit of over \$2 billion and we're not going to make any changes. What we're going to do now is government introduces – okay, we're going to slice this to show what we're doing, but it's just like putting your hand in the water. That's what this is going to be.

Me, personally, I think it's just symbolic to say out to the general public, here's what we did. We're not going to allow the politicians to have the 3 or 4 per cent raise, yet we're not going to do anything about the structural deficit that we have in this province. If you ever want to look at smoke and mirrors, if you ever want to look at the ideas of how we're going to tackle the deficit in this province, what we should be doing is saying bring something substantial to this House on how we're going to reduce this deficit. I said it before.

I know the minister is bringing it in later about bonuses, but for four years now, five years – and I know we stopped it for a while – that we're going to bring agencies, boards and commissions in line with government, but we're not doing it. What are we doing? Symbolically, we're going to go out and tell the people we didn't give them a 1, 2, 3, or 4 per cent raise. Of course, this is going to pass anyway.

Then, of course, with politicians, what you do – and I said this before and I'll say it again – as politicians, if we're on the front lines making the decisions of what's going to happen and when you always say – and this is a prime example, where an independent body came back and said: Look, here's what we all agreed to, and it's done. Then once you keep selling yourself short, what happens? Mark my words, what happens is that people in this province lose respect.

Because if we keep selling ourselves short, if we keep saying to ourselves that we're not worth this, we're not worth what this person recommended, what are people going to think? It's not about the money, because if this government brought in some substantial initiative to reduce the deficit, I'd say every Member in this House would say: Yeah, we're doing this, we're going to try to bring the province back in line and back in shape,

financially. But by taking this little thing, putting us all up and saying we're going to be the martyrs, yet not attacking the structural deficit of this province, this is just symbolic. That's all that this is.

What's going to happen? Some people are going to go out in the media and say: Oh, we turned it down. People are going to start right away: Well, they're getting too much anyway. They don't do anything anyway. When the House is not open everybody has the impression that politicians don't do anything anyway. We, as politicians, did it back in 2016 and it wasn't even mentioned, no one even knew, no one even cared. That's exactly what's happening again today.

I heard a few people speak: Well, why do we even have the Committee? When we vote today not to do this, we should vote to disband the Committee. Why have the Committee?

I'll give you a good example. If the government appoints a commission to bring in a report, the next time the commission brings in a report, let's take it and throw it out the window. That's exactly what's happening here now. Why are we using this Committee to bring in a report when we're saying we're just going to go against your Committee? This here is just to ban the Committee, just throw the Committee out through the window, because what it is, is that we're almost embarrassing them for doing the work.

We set up a process that was going to happen, we're selling ourselves short, and above all – above all – I have to put this on the record, there's nothing substantial coming in here for the structural deficit. This is symbolic of what's going to happen to this province. As we heard, there are going to be no major changes in this year's budget, no major changes in this year's budget, yet here we are again.

Let's bring something into this House of Assembly that's substantial. Let's bring things in here of how we can make changes to this province. When we are paying down on the debt, the second or third highest amount in this province that we're paying on and we're coming in now here and saying: Okay, b'ys, we're going to make you all – because we want to make

ourselves look good out in the public without doing substantial changes. This is where I have a problem with it. I actually have a problem with it. Once we keep putting ourselves down as politicians, people are going to be looking at the same thing. That's just the way it is. This is not fighting over a few dollars here or there, this is the process that's in place, this is respect, and I'll say again, until we get things moving.

I'll close on that note, Mr. Speaker. I urge the government, you're going to have two four months' Interim Supply, I urge the government, when you bring in that budget, let's have something substantial in the budget that we're going to reduce the deficit in this province and get this province back on the right track instead of coming in here in this House on a Wednesday morning and doing something just symbolic that's not going to make any major changes to the deficit of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, or they're just going to say: Okay, we're just going to do something to ourselves.

This will get approved today. When this is approved today, I would like for the Government House Leader to make a motion to disband the Committee and the process that we put in place. Because if we're going to keep doing that every time there's a process put in place, throw it out, so the next time that the government brings in a committee or sets up some functional committee to bring something to the House of Assembly, hopefully when one of us stands up and say we should throw it out, you're going to agree, because that's what you're doing today. That's what you're doing today.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close my few words. I look forward to the budget and, hopefully, there'll be something substantial in the budget.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the hon. the Government House Leader speaks now he will close debate.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

First and foremost, thank you to everybody for the input this morning. I have more than a page of notes, but I won't go into them all. There are a couple of quick things I think are important that I take a moment to point out.

First and foremost, I've asked for it and I'm not going to have time to get it, because I didn't realize debate. I asked for *Hansard* from when we had the very similar debate a few months ago when it came to judges. If I could have gotten the *Hansard* here in time for my closing argument I would have talked about the things that the Members opposite said about an independent process back a few months ago when it came to judges, very similar process. It was recommended by a tribunal. It came into this House and I can remember the previous Leader of the Opposition standing up and saying this is not the time.

That was repeated literally dozens of times and maybe in my budget speeches in the days to come I'll actually bring that *Hansard* in as a reminder of some of the things that were said in that debate about an independent tribunal just a few months ago about the level of independence of that.

I know the former Minister of Justice sat through that in a role that he had to take that day that was very, very uncomfortable for him as well. As we said that day, that actually led to court action. Maybe I'll keep that for a budget debate somewhere down the road.

But on a more positive note, the Member for CBS raised the idea, this discussion needs to continue into the new Management Commission as we set directions for the new MCRC. I look forward to those discussions.

The Member for St. John's Centre raised an important issue about constituency assistants. I think that's something that we all agree on here in this House. It's something that the Management Commission and the Speaker's office did some work on in the 49th session and I think it will be very much – I know from discussions I've already had with the Opposition House Leaders – something that we will be bringing back to the table very quickly when we get back to the Management Commission table.

Again, thank you everybody for your contribution to the debate this morning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 10 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act. (Bill 10)

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

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

S. CROCKER: Presently.

SPEAKER: Presently.

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 10)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 4.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader the following resolution:

That notwithstanding Standing Order 9, this House shall not adjourn at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, April 21, 2021, but shall continue to sit and conduct government business and if not earlier adjourned the Speaker shall adjourn the House at midnight.

SPEAKER: Any speakers to the motion?

We can put this to question?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 3.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That notwithstanding Standing Order 8 and the Parliamentary Calendar previously established for 2021, the Parliamentary Calendar for 2021 shall be revised as follows:

That this House will adjourn on April 22, 2021, and resume sitting on May 31, 2021;

That this House will sit from May 31, 2021, until June 30, 2021, and that no constituency week shall be taken during that sitting time;

That this House shall resume sitting on October 18, 2021;

That a constituency week shall be taken the week of November 8, 2021;

And that this House shall adjourn on November 18, 2021.

SPEAKER: Any speakers?

The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The only concern I have with that is I'm from a rural area: a lot of times where we're sitting here for five weeks, we always had a constituency week in between. Now, we're going for five straights weeks and there are a lot of times you want to go meet a lot of councils and discuss the roads, water and sewer. I don't know why we have to go for five straight weeks; we're shutting down now for five weeks, come back and go five straight week.

I just want to put that out as the Member from a rural district. A lot of times in the summertime, that's when you meet councils and you do a lot of different things with the roadwork and different things around. It is easier, I guess, if you are in here but when you're out and things pile up during the summer, it is a bit more difficult. Then you have to drive across – you won't get home until Friday and you're back again Sunday.

I don't know the rationale of shutting down for five weeks and coming back for five weeks straight. I just want to put that on the record as a Member from a rural district, when there are a lot of things to be done.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers.

Is the House ready for the question?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper, second reading of Bill 9.

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, that An Act To Amend The Energy Corporation Act And The Hydro Corporation Act, 2007, Bill 9, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 9, An Act To Amend The Energy Corporation Act And The Hydro Corporation Act, 2007, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act To Amend The Energy Corporation Act And The Hydro Corporation Act, 2007.” (Bill 9)

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, we are here regarding proposed amendments to the *Energy Corporation Act* and the *Hydro Corporation Act, 2007*. I do have some prepared remarks that normally I don't refer to, but I want to ensure that what I say is clear and understood, and not garbled. Again, I will do that, although I'll have plenty of time during this debate to listen to all points of view from around this Chamber, making notes and also try to provide some context as to the origin of this, just today and yesterday, what has gone on.

What I can say is that yesterday this bill was tabled in the House. This morning there was a media availability. Yesterday, there were availabilities for all Members of the House of Assembly to be briefed on the content of the bill. We're here today for second reading and, hopefully, Committee. Hopefully, we will move on with swift passage of this piece of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the payment of bonuses at Nalcor and its subsidiaries has and continues to be an issue of public concern, especially given our fiscal situation. I think everybody will recall last year when we had the release of the public sector Compensation Disclosure listing, we committed to eliminating bonuses for these

positions. At that time, I did follow up and notify Nalcor in writing of my intention and stated then, I quote: “In light of the unprecedented economic challenges facing this province and the devastating impact of the Muskrat Falls project delays and cost overruns, the people of this province as shareholder of Nalcor Energy cannot afford to make sure unnecessarily generous payments.”

On December 10 of last year, we introduced a motion to seek leave, the same one that we are now. Obviously, we had to re-enter it due to the House being dissolved and there being a general election. I would note and, I think it is noteworthy, that we are on our third, basically, official day of business and we are here in second reading. I would say that we have moved quickly on bringing this piece of legislation back into the House for debate and passage.

Today, we continue on. Mr. Speaker, the *Energy Corporation Act* or the ECA governs Nalcor and the activities of its subsidiaries except for Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro with respect to oil and gas, Lower Churchill development. When Nalcor was first established in 2007 the *Hydro Corporation Act, 2007*, which governs Hydro, was amended and their shares were then vested into Nalcor.

Nalcor has 12 subsidiaries: Hydro, CF(L)Co, Twin Falls Power Corporation, Nalcor Energy - Oil and Gas Inc., Nalcor Energy Marketing Corporation, Muskrat Falls Corporation, Labrador Transmission Corporation, Labrador-Island Link Operating Corporation, Lower Churchill Management Corporation, Labrador-Island Link General Partner Corporation, Labrador-Island Link Holding Corporation and the Labrador-Island Limited Link Partnership.

These bills provide the board of directors of each company with the authority to set the terms of service and the remuneration of their respective employees.

Now, the amendments that we are bringing forward for consideration are to (a) clarify that Nalcor must act in accordance with the priorities of the provincial government in carrying out its objects; (b) to provide broad authority for the Lieutenant-Governor in Council to give direction to the boards of Nalcor and Hydro

related to remuneration and terms of service for non-bargaining unit employees; (c) state that direction given by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council does not constitute constructive dismissal or a breach of contract nor a claim for compensation; state that no cause of action or other proceedings shall arise from any direction given by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council; and, finally, state that there will be no entitlement to compensation as a result from any direction given by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council.

The boards of directors of Nalcor and Hydro, as well, as the boards of each subsidiary, currently have the exclusive authority under their respective enabling legislation to hire employees and establish the terms and conditions of their remuneration and their employment. I believe it's actually subsection 12(1) of the ECA; subsection 11(1) of the HCA.

In order to override this power, we need to explicitly amend to allow for this. This gives the LGIC the broad authority to issue a unanimous shareholder agreement pursuant to the *Corporations Act*, which will provide direction to the above noted boards to alter the terms of services of employment, including remuneration and bonuses.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that the purpose of these amendments we are bringing today is not to target individual employees. We are doing what is in the best interests of Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly during these fiscal times that we face. I do hope that we will have support from all corners of this House, given that there has been a significant amount of media and commentary from various parties on this issue, especially during the last number of months.

Again, we've heard a lot of different things said talking about termination and things like that. This bill is not that. This bill is providing authority for us to set direction and to allow for the change to remuneration and bonuses. They are enabling in nature, Mr. Speaker. This bill does accomplish that act on its own. This bill allows for the ability to enable us to take the actions that are necessary.

Following approval of this legislation, there has to be a further process to determine details on the next steps. I will point out that this type of legislation has been brought in other jurisdictions, the same process; you bring the enabling legislation and then you do the necessary work behind the scenes. We don't have all of the information that we need to allow for the proper determination of what action has to be taken. We have that broad information right now, but we need to dig deep and find this information. This legislation will allow us to do that.

What I can say is that I've guaranteed on numerous occasions that work starts immediately, but we need to get this bill done first. It's our intention to proceed in a timely manner once the appropriate work is done, but we're going to be moving quickly and swiftly on this. These amendments follow a commitment by our government to reduce costs at Nalcor and Newfoundland Hydro.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, there will be more to say. I'll have another opportunity to speak to this bill later on in second reading and obviously during the Committee stage. At this point, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak on this very important piece of legislation and I will take my place.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's good to have the opportunity to speak to this bill. It's a very important piece of legislation, which I would argue is long overdue; it hasn't moved swift enough.

As I see it, this bill makes four changes to the *Energy Corporation Act*. It modifies the language to clarify and specify the objectives of Nalcor. The new language, which is added to the *Energy Corporation Act*, reads: "... in accordance with the priorities of the government of the province" It allows Cabinet to give direction to the board of Nalcor on matters of

remuneration and terms of service and Nalcor must comply with the direction given by Cabinet.

It provides protection to the Government of Newfoundland from civil lawsuits regarding the directions given to the Nalcor board, and it specifies that directions given to the board do not constitute a constructive dismissal or breach of contract. Individuals who have contracts changed are not entitled to any compensation.

Like the Minister said, I agree that there has been an overwhelming public concern about the bonuses paid to Nalcor, not just in this past year but in the past six years and possibly before that. I think this is a very smart move going forward, certainly given our current fiscal situation. It addresses one of the concerns very quickly, hopefully, once we get past this stage into the second stage.

Nalcor is a huge entity in Newfoundland and Labrador and I don't think most of the public realizes the sheer size of it. I thank the minister for listing out the 12 subsidiaries because I believe the general public looks at Nalcor as a single entity and doesn't realize the scope and breadth of their power.

The fact that the board has had direct authority over pay, remuneration and bonuses, without input from government, have always been a concern of not only the general public, but probably some members inside of Nalcor. I think that this bill could go further and allow the public and the government to ATIPP Nalcor: I think that is long overdue and needs to happen. It should be a part of this. It's not in here.

The fact that the minister has indicated that this is not targeted at specific employees I think goes a long way to putting people's minds at rest. This is not a witch hunt. I think it is a much-needed move of authority to give government the powers that they need to have, especially, like I said, during these difficult financial times.

It doesn't affect unionized workers, which I think is very important to highlight; it's for non-unionized management positions. We've all seen the size of some of these bonuses. It's funny that we talked this morning about MHAs' compensation. We look to these bonuses and see

that some of these bonuses are much larger than what MHAs make in here annually and they receive it as a bonus.

It is a first step, like the minister said. I do believe that we need to act on this more swiftly. There is an urgency to this, I believe, given our current financial situation, not only from a public-perspective standpoint, but from the reality of money that's paid out to the individuals that receive these large bonuses.

I would like to understand at some point – and I'm sure this will come up in debate a little further – how we come to the decisions on what these rollbacks will be, if there are rollbacks, if they affect everyone, if they're just based on individuals and if it's performance oriented. There are a lot of things that we need to consider when we go to do this.

I do believe this is a strong effort so government doesn't have to face lawsuits after this comes into effect, which also shelters us. Questions as to whether or not it affects new employees or new hires, versus people who've been employed there for a long time, I think it raises a lot more questions than it answers right now.

Mr. Speaker, make no mistake, Nalcor is an entity in Newfoundland that employs a lot of people. It's a big part of what we do as a province. Certainly, after the split with OilCo, it's a different entity. Nalcor has existed for quite some time and there has been a lot of good work that's gone on, not everything is bad. So it's important that we look at this with a microscope and make sure that we're making the right decisions.

I believe this is a great first step. I encourage the minister to put the secondary legislation to the Table as quickly as he can. We will be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to reiterate this is something that was a long time coming. We've seen every time the list would be published the outcry from the general public on remuneration and bonuses paid there, more so after we started to see stuff come down from Muskrat Falls. It seemed that the general public did not have an appetite for that kind of a bonus system.

It's harder for the general public to watch, because Nalcor is technically owned by the people of this province; it's our company as a whole. To see that we don't have a say or anything like that, when it comes to this kind of behaviour, especially after everything we've seen with Muskrat Falls and with everything that's written in the Muskrat Falls report.

Seeing that we will start to correct these wrongs is a good step forward. Like the minister said, this is just an enabling thing. It's important that we keep down that path because he said there's more stuff that has to be found afterwards. A first step that we need to be moving towards is accountability: accountability for people's actions, accountability for projects and accountability of something that belongs as an asset to this province. Accountability is really important with this.

To see that this was never put into the initial stages of Nalcor was also worrying. To think that the mechanisms were there to do such large payouts for bonuses and then projects not receiving the right timelines, deadlines and things like that, but yet still individuals did get bonuses for it.

When we do more like this – because this is not the only Crown corporation belonging to this province as well – we also have to look at other Crown corporations and stuff that we have. Do we have similar policies in place right now? Are we required to do something like this at other Crown agencies? Maybe it's a broad scope that we look at everything, any asset that belongs to this province be treated with the same thing. They all belong to the people of this province and they have to be accountable to the people of the province.

I do support this, me and my colleague here. We are hopeful that maybe we will see more things when it comes to Crown corporations, agencies

and boards, that they continue to be accountable to the general public of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm only going to spend a minute on this also.

I have to commend the minister for bringing this in. This is something that has been a sore thumb for a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador over the years. I know even the minister himself, at times, made a commitment – I think it was a year ago, a year and a half ago – that this would be brought in and this is the first step of it. I commend the minister for taking this action.

Also, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands has been raising this for a nice while. I can tell you his bringing this up has been ringing in my ears for a nice while, about the compensation at Nalcor. I have to commend him for keeping this issue alive also.

To the government itself, in the bigger part, this is a great first step. I remember back in 2017, 2018, we were going to bring all the boards, agencies and commissions in line with government. From the reports that we saw then, that would save hundreds of millions of dollars. I know this is a first step and this is part of the accountability for Nalcor. It gives government the opportunity to insist that everybody is treated equally. As was mentioned by the Member for Terra Nova, this doesn't go after the union workers; this is the non-union. That was a great point also.

I urge government, once this starts and the process, to look at all agencies, boards and commissions. This is just one because this is the one out in the public all the time. The reviews that we've seen with many more agencies, boards and commissions of the government are an opportunity to save a lot of funds, a lot of money. I'll look forward to the next step and the legislation, but I have to commend the government and the minister for bringing this forth.

This has always been out in the general public. When you sit down and you see people, like in the pandemic, people losing their jobs and people getting these huge bonuses, we all sit down and say, jeeppers. Even people in this Legislature in our private chats: Man, how did this happen?

It's a great initiative, a great first step. It will bring accountability to the government because at the end of the day, whoever it is, the Liberals, PC, NDP – whoever is in government are the ones that have to be accountable to the public over this. It is the general revenue funds of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and now you're taking the accountability and putting it back into the hands of where it should be, in government, to ensure that the general purse of the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are going to be looked at and disbursed in a proper manner.

I will be supporting this bill. I look forward to further discussions on it. I look forward to when the legislation is put in place so that we can sit down and dissect the legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to take more than a couple of minutes because this is a subject that's near and dear to my heart. First of all, I just want to again acknowledge and thank the minister for taking this initiative. I certainly will be supporting this bill 100 per cent – no, 1,000 per cent – on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador because it's definitely been a source of outrage for many people throughout this province. For me, bonuses are one side of it; we must remember bonuses are not something that happens just at Nalcor. There are lots of private industries that have bonuses.

In my former life, before getting in as an MHA, I had a bonus program. Certainly nowhere near the amounts that we're talking about here, but it was a small bonus program. You had your goals and objectives set for the year and you do your review. If you met those goals and objectives or

exceeded them, then it tied into a bonus. It even tied into the annual raise in my case; it was sort of a dual thing.

It's not something that you don't see. Perhaps the scale is what outrages people the most. One of the most offensive pieces around the bonuses, at least for me, I go back to DarkNL and the Liberty report. It's one thing for people to get a performance bonus based on their performance, but when we had DarkNL and the Liberty report came out, the Liberty report said that the reason for DarkNL was that basic maintenance wasn't being done at Holyrood. It was not some extraordinary circumstance. Basic maintenance that you would do anywhere in any industry on any kind of equipment. That's just a normal day-to-day program that you would have.

They weren't even doing basic maintenance. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians were out in the dark and the cold for – I can't remember how long it was now, but it was a substantial period of time. Seniors had to be taken out of, I think it was Maplewood apartments, in the Minister of Education's district – or it was his district. I don't know. It might be changed now. At the time, in Maplewood apartments they were taking seniors out of there. I believe the roof collapsed on the Village Mall and there were people who were put out of work.

I had a gentleman in my district who actually died as a result of DarkNL because of the generator in his shed, carbon monoxide poisoning. There were all kinds of horrific stories. On the heels of that, these big bonuses were handed out by Nalcor. When the \$6-million man was asked how could you justify these bonuses? He said we had a good safety record.

Are you kidding me? Their one function was to keep the lights on. That was their job. That's their core mandate, is to keep the lights on, keep the heat on. They failed in that because of a failure to do basic maintenance, and all the bigwigs get the big corporate bonuses because we had a good safety record. I mean, you wonder why people were outraged. It's no wonder.

Of course, now, as we move on from that into the Muskrat Falls inquiry and the scathing report

that came out of that with some of these guys who were fudging numbers, presenting false information and hiding risk reports – everyone saw the inquiry and what came out of it. Some of those characters are still roaming the halls, still getting huge salaries and still getting bonuses.

So this is a start, and I commend the minister for this start. But I want to emphasize the fact that in my opinion, at least, this should only be a start. There still has to be accountability. We've still seen zero accountability, as far as I'm concerned, for some of the people who were named in the Muskrat Falls inquiry. They still have not been held accountable and that needs to happen as well.

I will say that I understand that this is an enabling legislation, which is fine, and I'm sure it's not the minister's intent, as he said, to target anybody. First of all, it's been said this is not affecting the unionized employees, which is good. Also, there are a lot of people who are non-bargaining unit employees who are not necessarily the controlling minds of Nalcor and NL Hydro; there are support staff and so on.

I'm sure that this is not meant to target them. No different than anybody else, if these people signed up for a job and they've been working there for a number of years and working hard, as the vast majority, I'm sure, do, and they're earning a salary, I'm certainly not supporting that we're just going to rip those salaries from beneath them and all of a sudden say: We're going to give everybody now a 20 or a 30 per cent cut. If that's what this is all about, I'm certainly not supporting that and I'm sure that that's not the intent here. We just have to be mindful of where this is being applied and how it's being applied.

I would say to the minister, one of the things that may help in the deliberations, perhaps, is the fact that – I wish I had the dates in front of me now, but back when Terry Paddon was the Auditor General, I first wrote him back in – I'm not sure if it's 2016, 2017. I wrote him two or three times. We had two or three telephone conversations. We had a couple of in-person meetings about trying to get him into Nalcor. There was a bit of resistance at first, but eventually he agreed and he had his press

conference, my God, back about five years ago now, I suppose, four years, over on Pippy Place.

I was there sat at the boardroom table when he was making the announcement that he was going into Nalcor, finally. They did go in, but there were delays. They went in; they came out and so on. He left. Ms. Mullaley came into place as the Auditor General. I met with her two or three times, called her. She said: We're still working on it and so on and the report will be out this fall. Then the fall came and, well, it got delayed. It will be the spring and then it will be the fall again.

The last conversation I had I guess is about a year ago now – well, right after Ms. Mullaley left – with the acting Auditor General. She said: Oh, yes, the report is done and whatever. It just has to be finalized. I said: Well, when are you going to release it? I've been waiting now for like five years. She indicated it was ready to go, but now COVID came, I suppose, and I don't know when the report is ready. I'm sure it's just in there, sat on a desk at this point. I intend on meeting with Ms. Hanrahan at the earliest opportunity. Hopefully –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: And I'm sure she looks forward to it as well, as the minister says, but I will, and hopefully we're going to see that report.

Unfortunately, they didn't look at all the things I wanted them to look at because there were a number of issues that I had that I thought should have been looked at. One of them being the fact that I can remember in the budget of 2016 and after the then minister of Finance gave her speech and all the boys just left en masse, the board of directors, they all quit.

On the way out the door, there was a story on CBC about people being in conflicts of interest and so on; board members had been in conflicts of interest: load the guns I believe was the headline or talked about it. That never did get investigated as to what conflicts of interest the board members were in; makes me wonder. But anyway, the Auditor General wouldn't go down that road, but the Auditor General did agree to go and look at the salaries, remuneration,

bonuses and all that kind of stuff and that structure.

All that is suppose to be in the report, I'm told, as well as looking into whether there's a conflict of interest existing between the existing CEO of Nalcor owning shares in Fortis, which I have a problem with that, too. Anyway, we'll see, that should come out soon. Hopefully, that will help inform some of the decisions that may be made under this legislation.

One of the bigger pieces though and I'm sure the government is looking at this, I would imagine they are, but I throw it out there is that this is one piece, but I think the bigger piece we have to look at is perhaps the restructuring of Nalcor. Because I think in these fiscal times – I'm just looking at it from sort of the outside looking in here, not having in-depth knowledge as the minister would have, perhaps, his department, his portfolio, but we've got now, Muskrat Falls is, for all intents and purposes, complete, pretty much done, so that's off the books. You got Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro as a subsidiary that maintains the hydro assets and so on, runs the hydro assets. We created OilCo, took the oil and gas out of there, so I'm not sure what's left. It seems to me like there's perhaps a lot of redundancy and duplication and so on there and efficiencies to be found.

I wonder, given the fact that Muskrat is going to be complete, and I guess that would fall under Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, do we really need a Hydro plus a Nalcor plus an OilCo, plus the department? Do we need four entities, basically, looking after these assets, or can that be reduced down to three or two or whatever the case might be? Is there duplication? Are there efficiencies that can be found? Because unless there's something else I'm missing, there are other pieces to come that we're not aware of, you've got to question whether we need all of these positions and whether we need all this duplication. I would hope that's something the minister will be looking at.

The other bigger piece which has been sort of referenced by a couple of my colleagues – the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands referenced it and I believe the Member for Labrador West – is the fact that this is just one government entity, but we have many. I would hope that

government is going to be looking into all of the agencies, boards, commissions and so on.

One of the things I've raised in the House of Assembly during the last sitting of the House – and I'll raise it again now because it was mentioned – is as a Legislature, ultimately we have the responsibility to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for managing the province and managing government and managing all the people's money. Under the structure we have with all these agencies, boards and commissions and so on, if you look at our budget – we're going to go into the budget process this year, as we do every year. We're going to go into Estimates process, and I just use as one example from last year, when you go into the Department of Health and Community Services and you'll have the minister and his officials over here when we're in the Estimates process, you're doing a line by line.

There are not a whole lot of lines because even though that department has \$3 billion or \$4 billion, whatever it is, under it, most of that money in the budgetary process is one line that says: transfer to health authorities, \$2 billion or \$3 billion or whatever it is. So all that money, all we're seeing is one subhead of \$2 billion or \$3 billion going into the health authorities. We're not having any opportunity to see any kind of a breakdown of how that money is being spent and be able to question how any of that money is being spent.

The same thing with Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation. I guess there's a line, I think that's under Finance, I could be wrong, but I think that falls under Finance. There's a line in the budget about the NLC, but we're counting pencils, so to speak, up in the minister's office, photocopying and all this kind of stuff: How come your photocopying costs went up by \$300 last year? But here is a line for NLC of so many million dollars – or tens of millions of dollars or whatever it is – and we can't ask any questions about that because we don't even know what it is, it's just like one line. The same thing could go for Nalcor and the same thing could go for all these agencies, boards and commissions.

I think we should have a process like we have with the Estimates. That doesn't mean we're

going to go through every ABC every year. Perhaps we just pick two or three this year and two or three next year, whatever. But I would like to see a process put in place where Members of the Legislature can have a line-by-line breakdown, no different than we do for Estimates, for these ABCs. We can question the CEOs and the people of these ABCs; we can question those people as to how they're spending the people's money in the same way we do everything else.

When you think about it, it is a bit of a joke in a sense. You go through that budget process, as I say, and I'm looking at the minister's office and I'm talking about photocopying costs. Then there is a line here for \$2 billion or \$3 billion for health care authorities or school boards or whatever. That's where all the money is at and we're not questioning any of that. We don't have a clue how that's being spent; we're just taking it for granted that everything is fine.

I know that we have boards in place to manage, but those people weren't elected. None of those people were elected by the people to manage it, we were. We are ultimately responsible when things go wrong. So I would like to see that applied as well.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I think, as I said, it's a good start. I applaud the minister. I am sure this is only the beginning. I'm sure a lot of the things that I am saying here – I'm sure he agrees that there is a lot more to have to be done. We all know that. Like the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands talked about substantive initiatives coming before this House, that's what we need to see. We need to see substantive issues that are really going to help to get our fiscal House in order.

I think there is a lot of money that can be found and efficiencies that can be found through the agencies, boards and commissions and entities like Nalcor. We've done a lot of reviews of the departments. I know there was a review done a couple of years back where they cut a number of ADM positions and stuff like that. You had a name on it; I forget what you called it at the time, some review, anyway.

I think many might argue that in terms of the line departments here in the Confederation

Building, many of those departments have kind of been cut as much as they can be cut and still operate efficiently. It seems like there's not a whole lot of attention gone to the ABCs and to these huge entities like Nalcor and all of its subsidiaries. I think that's where we need to start paying more attention, so this is a start.

I just want to say, once again, that I approve this bill 100 per cent. I agree with the premise of some of these huge bonuses and people having to actually earn them, for sure. Again, if there are people who are non-bargaining unit but they are support staff and so on, I wouldn't want to see this used to all of a sudden come in and say to somebody: Hey, Joe, just as an FYI, as of next week we're going to cut your salary by 20 per cent. I'm sure that's not the intent. I want to say for the record it's not my intent and I would not be supportive of doing that to people.

Certainly, as we move forward and new people are hired in particular, salaries can be adjusted downward and we can deal with the bonuses and stuff like that. That's fair enough. At least people, when they sign up for a job, know what they're getting and can expect it. I'm not here for hauling the mat out from people's feet and leaving them in financial distress either, so we have to be fair in how we do it. I'm sure that's the minister's intent. That's all I have to say about it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers, if the hon. Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology speaks now he shall close the bill.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank my colleagues for their commentary and comments on this particular piece of legislation. I appreciate the support that they've shown. I'll try my best to keep this brief and just try and maybe to respond to a couple of the comments that were heard.

One of the things I would point out – and I'm not sure if there's any confusion here, but I'll just try to clarify – this particular legislation is the only legislation that will be passed on this particular issue. The remaining work that has to be done will not need legislative action; it can be

done in the form of directives or other correspondence and action like that. It will not require legislative action, but that will start extremely soon.

A couple of things I would point out here. I think there was an ATIPP review mentioned or the possibility of. There are a couple of things. We are still in the process of implementing the Muskrat Falls inquiry recommendations, so a lot of things that have been talked about by various Members are ongoing. Some are complete, some are in the review stage and the implementation stage, but there is a lot of work that's being done. There's also an ATIPP review. That's coming soon with retired Supreme Court Chief Justice Orsborn that's being done. I'm sure that's one of the issues that will be considered there.

I won't get into the ABCs. That's a consideration that's always on the mind of government, but I will stick to this. What I will point out though, is that even when you're doing something like this, it is contingent that we still work with the boards that we're talking about here, that we're still working with the Crown corporations because we need to ensure we are aligned with the progress of their projects and the work that they're doing.

As the Member mentioned, these entities are made up of a lot of people. We need to work together to ensure that we get these projects completed and on track, and all the other work that goes on, on a day-to-day basis. We will continue to have a close relationship with them and work with them.

I heard comment about swift action. I appreciate that. Actions are never as quick as people want it to be. But what I will say, having been in this role and in other roles in decision-making processes, especially in government, is that sometimes taking a little bit of time can prove to be safer in the long run than taking that immediate action that you want to take or maybe that the public demands.

That being said, I think we've moved fairly quickly here, given that this raised its head back in late 2020 and the work that was done leading up to that. There's a lot of work done behind the scenes leading up to that. I'll throw a bouquet to

my colleague, the current Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, who ran this department for some time and has had a lot of work over the years. Certainly having been there not even close to as long a time as she has, I have empathy for the work that she's had to put into this process. I appreciate all the guidance that she has provided in this process as well.

Again, when we talk about the future, what I would say is, I'm always willing to look at structural change, change for the betterment. It won't be a part of this legislation, but we're always willing to look at things to make sure that things are being done right and for the interests of the people of this province who we all represent.

On that note, I will take my seat again. I will conclude my comments and wait for the Committee stage of this process.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 9 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.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Energy Corporation Act And The Hydro Corporation Act, 2007 (Bill 9)

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

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

S. CROCKER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act To Amend The Energy Corporation Act And The Hydro Corporation Act, 2007,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole presently, by leave. (Bill 9)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 9.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 9.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 9, An Act To Amend The Energy Corporation Act And The Hydro Corporation Act, 2007.

A bill, “An Act To Amend The Energy Corporation Act And The Hydro Corporation Act, 2007.” (Bill 9)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When will these legislative changes come into effect?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology.

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I’m assuming that this particular piece of legislation, hopefully, we have Committee done today, third done tomorrow and, hopefully, we have it down to the LG’s house by the end of the night.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A little overwhelmed by the speed there.

This legislation makes changes to some individuals’ employment. Will current executive employees be covered under this legislation, or is it just for future employees?

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

A. PARSONS: It will be current and future.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Have employees of the corporation been made aware of these changes or proposed changes?

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

A. PARSONS: I’ve had numerous conversations with the boards of both entities, as well as the executive management of the entities. I would also suggest that this has been a conversation topic that has been in the public eye for some time. The fact is, also, that it does not affect a certain segment, the non-bargaining units will not be affected. We’ve had numerous conversations. I don’t think this would be a surprise to anyone.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Is there any fear of repercussions, or loss of desired or required skill sets as a result of this?

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

A. PARSONS: I could say that's always the possibility when you make changes like that; although, it has not been expressed to me in any specific manner, whatsoever. I would suggest that has been one of the questions that have been asked over time, but, right now, that's not the fear that has been brought to my attention.

I do think, overall, this is still in the best interest moving forward. It's a step that we need to take and that we all unanimously support.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: This legislation is going to give Cabinet the ability to make directives to Nalcor and Hydro regarding executive compensation. Is the intention to bring their compensation in line with Treasury Board guidelines?

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

A. PARSONS: The legislation is crafted to give broad authority to be able to do a number of things, but what would I state at this point is that we are looking at the bonuses, per se. That has been the primary issue and, I guess, cause of consternation. It would provide broad authority to look at a number of things, but there's still a lot of work that has to be done, just looking at the contracts that are there, the contractual nature here and figuring out what we're looking at. Right now, I would suggest that we are just dealing with bonuses.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's my understanding, basically, that this new legislation doesn't rule out bonuses, it just means that government has to approve them. Is that correct?

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

A. PARSONS: Absolutely. This bill, what it does is it provides government with the ability to provide direction to Nalcor and to have input on the remuneration and salary as it relates to all employees. You could give out extremely large bonuses if you want or no bonuses, or have a whole number of inputs on different salary factors. Right now, this just gives government the authority to provide the direction, with the specific intent that we've indicated here, which is that we are going to be dealing with bonuses.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Does it give the government the authority to cancel the bonuses?

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

A. PARSONS: What I would suggest is that it is dealing with current and forward facing. It does not allow you the ability to go back in time or retroactivity. That would not be – well, you could do that, but I think you would open yourself up to different legal challenges than this would present.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: I was thinking more of the future and the fact that if they do come forward, that you have the ability to say no.

The other thing is there are a number of employees that are non-bargaining – other management employees of Nalcor that are not of the executive level but are simply management employees. Does this legislation mean that their salaries or their negotiations would have to come through government as well?

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

A. PARSONS: There is a significant amount of work that will have to be done. What I would suggest is that right now our concentration is on bonuses at the executive level. We are going to

have to be doing a thorough examination here, but I wouldn't suggest that everybody needs to worry: this is forward facing, it is going to be sometime down the road.

It is not even, per se, about government wanting to take control of those contractual negotiations: it is about government being able to provide direction when it comes to issues that we find are not in line with the best interests of the province.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for his answers and I would say that I fully support this legislation because when I read the first part of it – any legislation that has somebody actually reflect the priorities of government is good legislation.

Thank you.

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

J. DINN: (Inaudible) the, I guess, savings of, lets say, if we were to cancel executive bonuses: I'm just looking at the financial benefit to the province.

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

A. PARSONS: What I would suggest is that we do not have an accurate picture of what the entirety or the cumulative amount would be. Right now, I think the bonuses range anywhere from roughly \$30-odd thousand to \$315,000, that's just the range. Right now, we still had the work to do to figure out what this looks like specifically going forward.

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

J. DINN: I commend the minister on that and I would look forward to just have the total amount to see what we are talking about in the long run.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Further speakers?

Shall the 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 through 5 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 5 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 5 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 Energy Corporation Act And The Hydro Corporation Act, 2007.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 9.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 9.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

B. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 9 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 9 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

S. CROCKER: Now.

SPEAKER: When shall the said bill be read a third time?

S. CROCKER: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now recess.

SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do recess until 2 p.m. this afternoon.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Admit strangers.

Order, please!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of Mount Pearl - Southlands, Stephenville - Port au Port, Bonavista, Terra Nova, Cape St. Francis and Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, with leave.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I pay tribute to Mike Tobin, councillor, community volunteer and a good guy. Mike, though born in Joe Batt's Arm, was a proud resident of Stephenville for 44 years where he raised a family. Mike was the consummate volunteer, giving freely of his time to many activities, but best known for his 24 years of

service on town council and his deep involvement with the Knights of Columbus on all levels.

Mike's passion and dedication for the Knights of Columbus was well known within the region and the province. He served in various positions with Our Lady of Perpetual Help Council, reaching the highest honour of grand knight. He was district deputy and served on the provincial council, serving as state program director.

Mike's service to his community was highlighted by his 24 years on town council. In this capacity, Mike's endless work ethic helped see the town through floods, the downsizing of the town's airport and the building of significant infrastructure such as the hospital, pool and arena. Mike's contribution was immeasurable and was recognized by Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador on several occasions for his years of service.

Mike was a proud Newfoundlander and Labradorian and will be missed by many throughout the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The City of Mount Pearl has long been known for its amazing community spirit, its top-notch service delivery and well-maintained infrastructure. This did not just happen; it was arrived at through the vision and determination of amazing community builders.

When thinking of community builders in Mount Pearl, the first name that comes to mind is the late Neil Windsor. Neil became town engineer in 1972 and played an instrumental role in building our community, including construction of Smallwood Arena and the Park Avenue swimming pool. He became MHA for Mount Pearl South in 1975 and played a significant role in Mount Pearl achieving city status. He was one of the founders of the Mount Pearl Minor

Hockey Association as well as the Mount Pearl Frosty Festival.

He's also credited for securing Mount Pearl's largest economic driver, Donovans Business Park for the city. On Sunday, March 28 at the age of 75 years, the hon. H. Neil Windsor passed peacefully away with his loving wife, Anne, by his side. This larger-than-life individual will forever be remembered and respected by the people of Mount Pearl for his significant contribution to our community.

May he rest in peace.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tomorrow in King's Cove, a dedicated community leader will be laid to rest. Hayward Dobbin came to King's Cove as a teacher and quickly became very involved in community service. He started the King's Cove and area volunteer fire department and served as its first chief.

He was the founding grand knight of Msgr. William Williams King's Cove Knights of Columbus Council and later became the district deputy. Up until the time of his passing, he continued to serve as grand knight.

He served many years on the health care board of Golden Heights Manor, the Bonavista hospital and the peninsula's health care board. For 40-plus years, he was an elected Member of the King's Cove town council and was their deputy mayor at the time of his passing. In addition, he was also a member of the local area ground search and rescue.

During his educational career, he was principal for St. Aidan's Elementary in Plate Cove East, St. Mark's School in King's Cove and also served on the local branch of the NLTA and the King's Cove Historical Society.

I ask for the House's recognition of an outstanding community volunteer, Mr. Hayward Dobbin.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to speak on a 50-plus group in the District of Terra Nova that has gone over and above during COVID. The New Horizons Random Fifty-Plus Club of Hillview has 137 active and engaged members from 13 communities, ranging from Shoal Harbour to Southport. They have had to cancel many meetings, gatherings and meals, but they have remained active, committed and engaged to their members and the communities.

This group has completed many projects since COVID came upon us, completing and delivering kits containing surgical masks, rubber gloves, disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizers and food hampers. In May 2020, 140 kits were delivered; 91 to seniors who live alone in the Southwest Arm area, with small food baskets. On July 23, 2020, they provided an additional 140 seniors with essential kits. In December 2020, a total of 158 seniors received packages containing PPE and small grocery hampers. In March 2021, an additional 166 seniors were contacted. A total of 464 kits were completed and delivered.

This act of kindness deserves congratulations and a huge thank you to the New Horizons Random Fifty-Plus Club in my district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I recognize a constituent who is well known to this House of Assembly and a friend to all. I speak of Kevin Parsons of Flatrock.

Kevin served as mayor of his hometown for three years prior to being elected as MHA for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, a position that he held for over 12 years. A great constituency person, Kevin was active throughout each town at many events, worked

tirelessly to address the needs of the residents and worked collaboratively with the five town councils to ensure that all municipal needs were met.

Always there to lend a hand, helping to renovate a constituent's home, filling in potholes, selling tickets at the Regatta or delivering a meal of fish to a senior, Kevin has never shied away from the work that had to be done. Having a soft spot in his heart for seniors, Kevin went above and beyond to assist those who needed his help, oftentimes sitting at their kitchen tables helping them with forms that had to be completed.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking Kevin Parsons for his service and dedication to the people of the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

Happy retirement, my friend.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, with leave?

L. DEMPSTER: With leave, Mr. Speaker?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I once read "It's not what you take when you leave this world behind. It's what you leave behind when you go."

I pay tribute to the life of a dear friend and fellow Labradorian who left much behind, in how he loved, lived and gave back.

Born and raised in Mary's Harbour, Keith made his home with his wife and two children in Lodge Bay. A community leader, volunteer firefighter and long-time mayor, Keith was a fierce advocate for Labrador.

Keith's career with the Labrador Fishermen's Union Shrimp Company spanned more than

three decades. He took tremendous pride, both in his work and the company that he was a part of. His ability to care for boat trawls was impeccable.

Keith was a master navigator, a skilled hunter and the happiest moments of his life were spent doing the things he loved with the people he loved.

He was a true son of Labrador, proud of his homeland and the communities he served. His untimely passing on February 7 impacted many lives.

With deepest respect for his family, I ask all hon. Members to join me in reflecting on the life of Keith Thomas Rumbolt, a man who meant so much to so many.

Wishing you fair winds and tide, my friend, as the sailor heads home after a lifetime on the sea.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, today I am happy to highlight some of the recent success in the mining sector in Newfoundland and Labrador. Despite challenging times due to COVID-19, our mining sector continues to produce impressive results.

In fact, mineral exploration activity for 2020 in Newfoundland and Labrador was the highest it has been over the past five years with 389 mineral exploration applications processed.

The price of gold remained high throughout the pandemic and Newfoundland and Labrador's strong gold potential, with projects that are either operating, under environmental assessment or in active exploration, coupled with some world-class deposits have been the main drivers of this year's thriving exploration activity.

This has driven positive results for the 2020 Fraser Institute's Annual Survey of Mining Companies, which shows our province rising to third nationally and eighth globally in overall Investment Attractiveness. We also have competitive regulatory and policy structures that rank our province first in Canada and eighth globally and for Policy Perception.

Mr. Speaker, we provide publicly funded and available research undertaken by the Geological Survey of Newfoundland and Labrador that offers baseline geological information, helping to support exploration efforts and offer our Junior Exploration Assistance Program, which enhances Newfoundlander and Labrador's competitiveness through advancing mineral discoveries and exploration.

Mining, mineral exploration and quarrying are important industries and offer incredible future potential for this province. Almost \$4 billion in mineral shipments, \$82.6 million in exploration expenditures, and employment of about 7,700 person years are projected for this year.

The province's mineral industry continues to be a key economic driver for our province and a focus for investment attraction efforts. These exploration companies and mine operators are located in rural areas of our province, create opportunities for local businesses, and increase the ability to invest in programs, infrastructure, education and health care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I join with the minister in expressing my support for the mining industry in this province. The publicly available research included in the Geological Survey and the Junior Exploration Assistance Program are key supports in the province for establishing new mining developments; however, I do believe that more needs to be done to support the industry.

Our *Mineral Act* and *Mining Act* are both in need of review and legislative updates. The royalty and taxation regimes should also be reviewed to ensure that we are competitive and attractive to companies who want to invest in our new mining developments.

Mining is an international industry and mining companies will make investment decisions based on how our province compares to other jurisdictions. We have quality mineral deposits in this province, but we must make sure we have an attractive development regime.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The people of my constituency have built their entire lives around the mining industry and I'm excited to hear the minister speak so adamantly about the future of mining. I look forward to working with the minister to help ensure the continued growth of existing mining operations in Labrador West and elsewhere in this province, and hope the government will continue to work with us to incentivize this industry to provide us with new and exciting opportunities as global markets continue to shift.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, in this hon. House, I would like to congratulate the 2021 winner of the BMO Winterset Award, Eva Crocker. Ms. Crocker has won the award for her book *All I Ask*.

All I Ask was one of 23 works by Newfoundland and Labrador authors submitted by publishers countrywide. The story is a bold and bracing exploration of what it is like to be young in a time when everything and nothing seems possible.

Mr. Speaker, the BMO Winterset Award celebrates excellence in Newfoundland and Labrador writing.

The award honours the memory of Sandra Fraser Gwyn – a St. John's-born social historian and prize-winning author who passionately promoted a national awareness of the province's arts.

Her husband, journalist and fellow author, Richard Gwyn, OC, established the award in 2000 and named it after the historic house Sandra grew up in on Winter Avenue in St. John's.

Considered one of Atlantic Canada's richest literary prizes, the annual award is \$12,500, while each of the finalist receives \$3,000.

The other two finalists for this year's award are Bridget Canning for *Some People's Children* and Andrea Procter for *A Long Journey: Residential Schools in Labrador and Newfoundland*.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all hon. Members in the House to join me in congratulating Eva Crocker on winning the BMO Winterset Award, as well as the finalists, Bridget Canning and Andrea Procter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the hon. minister for an advance copy of his statement. The Official Opposition joins the government in congratulating Ms. Eva Crocker on being the recipient of the BMO Winterset Award for 2020 for her book, *All I Ask*.

It is great to see that 23 works by Newfoundland and Labrador authors were submitted to publishers across the country. It goes to show that our unique culture and sense of history can be promoted nationwide and be successful. As time goes on, it remains important to continue our traditions by telling our stories. We must find more ways as a government to ensure that our tradition and culture lives on. We must continue to acknowledge the authors that have had success previously to this year as well.

The excellence in our arts community is quite evident in the District of Bonavista and across the province. It's great to see our arts community get the recognition that it deserves.

Congratulations once again to Ms. Crocker and to all the entrants into the 2020 BMO Winterset contest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I'm happy to see these talented authors recognized and rewarded for their hard work. Across the three finalists work, the lives and struggles of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are explored, be they Indigenous or settler, LGBTQ, urban or rural. The culture and identity of our province is always changing and these authors do us a great service by chronicling it.

Congratulations to Eva, Bridget and Andrea for their fine work. Hopefully, we'll continue to see the great works of other authors in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to speak today to recognize the historic number of women and gender-diverse

individuals who put their names forward during the 2021 provincial general election. While we would've liked to have seen more elected than the nine who were successful, having a larger, more diverse group run for office is a positive step toward having a Legislature that is representative of the people we serve.

Research tells us that much of the work to ensuring diversity in our candidates rests with political parties. However, we know there are steps government can take to facilitate diversity.

Our government led the way to amend the *Standing Orders* of the House of Assembly to allow infants on the floor of this hon. Chamber, we have implemented a Legislature-Specific Harassment Free Workplace Policy and we have introduced a bill to amend the *Elections Act, 1991*.

As well, the Office of Women and Gender Equality is working with the local chapter of Equal Voice on two exciting projects. A virtual campaign college will be offered next month and this fall we will be holding the second Daughters of the Vote for young women and gender-diverse individuals.

Mr. Speaker, today, I reiterate government's commitment to diversity in all sectors and to ensuring inclusion is a fundamental characteristic of our beautiful province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. I congratulate all of the individuals who put themselves forward for election during this most challenging recent campaign, and I extend a special congratulations to our women and gender-diverse candidates. Their voices surely enhanced our policy discussions and I sincerely hope to see them continue to participate in public debate.

As only nine women were elected, I pledge to do my part to support all women's groups in their efforts to recruit and support candidates in the future. With municipal elections on the horizon, we are given a unique opportunity to support women and gender-diverse candidates. I challenge all Members of the House to reach out to women and gender-diverse candidates and encourage them to run for public office in their areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for advance copy of her statement. I have been privileged myself to be part of organizations embracing diversity and join her in recognizing the historic number of women and gender-diverse individuals who ran in the recent election.

This and the *Standing Orders* allowing infants on the floor of the House of Assembly are important first steps, but we need more tangible measures to address inequality, Mr. Speaker. Fixed election dates, better funding mechanisms, a \$15 minimum wage now, benefits, paid sick leave: those are the true measures of equality and levelling the playing field.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Premier said that electricity rates must be settled before entering into discussions on the Atlantic Loop; however, it is clear from

our regional minister that the Atlantic Loop discussions are ongoing.

Can the Premier explain why the issue of rate mitigation has not been concluded?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that question.

The two topics are not mutually exclusive. What I did say was we need to solve Muskrat Falls and the Lower Churchill Projects prior to entering into a full partnership in the Atlantic Loop. That doesn't mean that discussions can't be ongoing in parallel, Mr. Speaker. They're not mutually exclusive, although, for us, the first step is solving the Lower Churchill Project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, while they're not mutually one in the same, there is a big need now to move forward with Muskrat Falls, particularly around rate mitigation. It needs to move as quickly as possible.

In April 2019, the premier of the day said that electricity rates would be 13.5 cents per kilowatt hour. Yesterday, the Premier said there's a difficult path forward without the federal government, and the minister hid behind the PUB.

Is the Liberal government walking away from their commitment of 13.5 cents per kilowatt hour?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

First of all, we wouldn't be in this situation if it weren't for the mismanagement by the Members opposite with respect to the Lower Churchill Project. It's terrible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER A. FUREY: We've been tasked with cleaning up and we will; however, with respect to the specific electricity rates, it was promised to be approximately 13.5 cents at commission. We're still heading towards commission. After that, the PUB sets electricity rates. We've been tasked with – and will – mitigate those rates, despite the irresponsible decisions by the government at the time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier continuously talks about collaboration and talking about looking forward, not backward. In this case, the Premier continues to bring out things from the past. You have a job to do. Please do it. Move forward for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: Now that the election is over, the Liberals are backpedalling on 13.5 cents for power rates. While the PUB does set electricity rates, government has ways to offset rates.

I ask the Premier: Please be open with the people of the province, what is the electricity rate you are targeting?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

First of all, we're not backpedalling. We wish we could backpedal on the whole Lower Churchill Project, but we can't.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER A. FUREY: We've been tasked with trying to keep rates affordable and we will. That involves renegotiating the fiscal framework of the Muskrat Falls deal with the federal government, which we are doing in earnest, to come up with gross sums of money to offset the

cost of this project so it's not borne by the ratepayers of this project, so that they can create sustainable opportunities for the future of this province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I remind the Premier that one of his target things around stimulating the economy is around the Atlantic Loop. The key asset for the Atlantic Loop is Muskrat Falls, the asset of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. If you're going to use that as a strategy and your asset, you need to have it, so let's move towards the future and not the past.

Yesterday, the Premier said we can be the battery for the Atlantic Loop. Muskrat Falls does not have excess power year-round.

I ask the Premier: Are you referring to Gull Island as part of the Atlantic Loop?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that question.

We are looking at the excess power in Muskrat Falls in terms of supplying it to the Atlantic Loop. There is some excess there that could be beneficial to our Atlantic neighbours when getting off non-renewable resources. We plan to deliver that in talks with our federal partners and, frankly, our Atlantic partners when developing this nation-building exercise, Mr. Speaker.

It's still a preliminary discussion at this particular moment in time. Does the Member opposite suggest that Newfoundland and Labrador does not have the capacity and the renewable resources to reach our full potential moving forward in a new, green economy, Mr. Speaker?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No, what the Opposition are saying is that we must be and deserve to be the key benefactors of whatever deal is put in play and using the asset of Muskrat Falls. The people of this province have a fair reason to be wary of any electricity deal, which includes Quebec.

Will the Premier commit to bringing the term sheet and details of the Atlantic Loop and/or Gull Island to this House for a full, public debate before signing any agreement?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

Of course, we will bring whatever term sheets are available, if that does include some of the suggestions of the Member opposite, to the House. It deserves a fulsome debate for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador so we don't fall into traps of the past.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's good to hear that the Premier is going to commit that the principal beneficiary of any new deals has to be the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Yesterday in this House, the minister said: "We'll see the report when we see the report"

Will the minister commit to making the Greene report public on the same day either her or the Premier receives it?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I think the Premier has been very clear that the report of the Premier's Economic Recovery task force is the people's document in that it will have full consultations; there will be debate about that report. Some of the avenues and paths forward for this province will be fully discussed and fully vetted.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, as soon as it is received, we will be putting it before the people of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tomorrow will be the last sitting of this House in April; we will not sit again until June. This means that the people's representatives will not have the ability to publicly debate the Greene report before the budget.

I ask the Premier: Will you reopen the House for a full debate on the Greene report before budget decisions are made?

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

S. COADY: It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that the Member opposite didn't hear what I had said yesterday about the budget coming up and the Premier's Economic Recovery task force report. As I said to him yesterday, the people's report – the Premier's Economic Recovery report will be placed for full consultation, discussion, debate and review. We will be moving into a budget, which will be required, as the people of this House know. It will be debated, discussed and reviewed in June.

There may be some discussion around some of the things that are already in the report. Who knows what's in the report, Mr. Speaker. We haven't received it yet. I can tell the people of the province, I can tell the Member opposite that the budget will be debated separately from the report and the report will be informed by consultations with everyone in the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, I hear her loud and clear. The Greene report will, obviously, not be part of the budget; it seems that's what she's been saying. The budget consultations will not take place before the Greene report has been received. The Premier has said on a number of occasions that he has had discussions with Moya Greene about the – quote – direction of the report.

I ask the Premier: Can you tell us some of the details of his discussions with Moya Greene?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I have repeated and repeated and repeated: the report that will be received within the next number of weeks, I am sure will be placed before the people of the province for open review, discussion and debate. Mr. Speaker, we will be having a budget within a few weeks' time; June is not that far away.

There may be some crossover of ideas because there have been things that are being talked about in the general public. Making sure, for example, that we have supports for COVID, making sure that we have supports for education and making sure that we have supports for poverty reduction: those things, Mr. Speaker, will be in the budget. That is important.

We will be bringing the Greene report to the people of the province for their consultation, review and debate. It's going to take a number of years, Mr. Speaker, to find our path forward and we will certainly take the people's direction promptly.

SPEAKER: Your time is up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Terms of Reference for Moya Greene by the Premier was to have the final report in the hands of the Premier by April 30. Is that still applicable?

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

S. COADY: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

I think everyone in the province recognizes that we had a second shutdown for COVID. If the report is received a few days or a few weeks following April 30, I think we all understand why that would be, Mr. Speaker. Everyone realizes we're in the middle of a global pandemic and there have been disruptions of things here in this province and then a lockdown in this province.

I can assure the people of the province that the report will be available very promptly, in due course. We'll have an open debate, discussion and review of what it contains to set a solid and sustaining path forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's too bad they didn't realize there was a global pandemic back in January when they called the election. That would have saved us a lot of frustration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

B. PETTEN: They enjoyed the humour, though. I have to give them credit. Good on them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker – see.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, given the Premier's irresponsible election and shutdown of government for over two months in a caretaker mode, when will the minister be able to table the updated five-year roads program?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

In terms of the election that we had, your previous leader said that you were ready to go to that election.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: That's just a side note. So if you're ready you're ready, but don't complain after the fact.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

A question was asked and I would like to hear the comment, please.

E. LOVELESS: In terms of the Five-Year Provincial Roads Plan – and I'm not using it as an excuse, Mr. Speaker; I've been in the department for a short period of time. I've had many discussions with Members on both sides in terms of priorities for roads, and I'm looking at the whole picture of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Hopefully, we will get some news out on roads plans very shortly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister needs to realize the former leader wasn't the Chief Electoral Officer or the Premier. We had to be ready because we had no choice.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

B. PETTEN: True words.

Mr. Speaker, we are almost through April and government has released few, if any, paving contracts. I personally have spoken to many contractors, Minister, and I know you might be behind, but they're unable to plan their season, order material and hire staff.

We're almost in May so when are you going to start getting some road tenders out the door?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The question is important because it's important to contractors and it's important to workers. I'll remind the Member that right now there are ongoing contracts that are out there in a value of \$56 million that's ongoing in this province right now. Will there be more? There will be more and I'll be excited to make those announcements.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

We can't have a conversation back and forth in the room.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our party committed 100 per cent reimbursement for medical travel in our province. During a campaign stop in Labrador, the Premier said that they were proposing changes to the MTAP. He said that medical travel could range between \$1,300 to \$1,500 per person.

I ask the Premier: When will the changes he promised during the campaign be implemented and what will the rate per person be for this travel?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

Medical transportation is under review on a regular basis. We have made several adaptations for residents of Labrador, including up to \$1,000 up front, as well as the ability now to bill for supporting people and travellers in personal accommodation or Airbnbs, and to claim a per diem for food, which was not the case before. We continue to look at that program and see what we can do within the fiscal envelope we have provided in the budget.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government allocated \$200,000 in *Budget 2020* for the pre-feasibility study for a road to the North Coast of Labrador.

I ask the Minister of Transportation: Can he provide an update on this study? When will it be completed and when will it be released to the public?

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

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

I cannot give her an update at this time because I don't have a current update. We will certainly look forward to providing that update at the earliest convenience.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

I've received many calls from constituents in my district regarding the quality of ambulance service on the Southern Shore, including the lack of essential equipment and long response times, which are crucial to the survival of patients.

I ask the minister: Will he commit to the review and take action to immediately address the issues with ambulance services on the Southern Shore to ensure that these residents have the highest quality service possible?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Prior to the election, this was an issue. My understanding is that Eastern Health have been in a position to address that. Response times vary depending on whether the location is rural. Our information in the department is that with one or two exceptions, each of which had different circumstances attached to it, our response times fit within those that are generally accepted across Canada for rural or remote locations, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Mr. Speaker, I hope something serious doesn't happen, and that the government decides and takes action on this. There are real people with real concerns. Hopefully, one of our family members or your family members or anybody's family member – to get these concerns addressed quickly. That's something that's very important.

Mr. Speaker, this government removed the dentures program from seniors. Seniors in my district are concerned about their health, and cannot even eat properly without dentures. We need to look at the vulnerable seniors in our communities.

I ask the minister responsible: Will this government commit to implementing a dentures program for seniors, yes or no?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I would take a little bit of an issue with the preamble to that question, which was kind of like a postscript to my previous answer. I think it's not appropriate for Members of this House to generate fear. If you need an ambulance wherever you are in this province, Mr. Speaker, and call 911, an ambulance will come and care will be provided. We have changed to an ACP-driven system across the province so that treatment begins in your kitchen. You do not have to wait to be ferried to a facility nearby. I think that needs to be said upfront.

With regard to dentures, there is a denture program. It supplies a set on a regular basis at the request of the individual and a dentist.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On November 26, 2020, the Premier states on VOCM's Health and Wellness Show that we need to invest in the future of our province's health. We agree – unfortunately, provided some uncomplimentary aspects of our demographics.

Can this government assure that existing schools in Newfoundland and Labrador without a playground or recreation field, like Heritage Collegiate in Lethbridge, will receive funding to complete?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: I'm not sure what the Member is asking for funding to complete. Is it the playgrounds, I ask the Member?

C. PARDY: Yes.

T. OSBORNE: He's saying yes.

Mr. Speaker, we'll certainly look into that. It's, obviously, important for the physical health of children that playgrounds throughout the province be equipped at schools and so on.

I know the English School District has been looking at playgrounds throughout the province. I've had some discussion with them. Where there are school-owned playgrounds, they're owned by the school districts. But I'll certainly look into it and determine the number of playgrounds to be upgraded this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: I thank the minister. In light of the Health Accord there's no doubt that we should not have a school now that does not have an outside play area or recreation for the children that are served.

The Bonavista hospital serves approximately 8,000 residents. Seniors like Maxine Paul in the Bonavista area, who need a medical procedure at the Clarenville hospital, have to spend a minimum of three hours travelling to and from Clarenville to get a COVID test a day or two prior to their procedure.

With the local hospital in Bonavista, why do seniors with no symptoms have to endure the expense and physical hardship of this travel?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I think the key here is to look at COVID in the context of protecting our vulnerable and protecting our health care employees from exposure where that is preventable. The importance of a preoperative test is established. It's advice from Public Health and we will continue to follow it.

With regard to the location and the collection of COVID specimens, that is by and large an operational issue with Eastern Health. If this is a problem for Bonavista, I'd be happy to take that

back to Eastern Health and see what they propose to do about it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Mr. Speaker, access to affordable lumber is an absolute necessity for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Many seniors and low-income individuals cannot afford to complete essential home repairs.

What will this government do to ensure the affordability of new housing and renovations?

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

D. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, I think that's a question that every one of us in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is dealing with right now: the high cost of lumber and building supplies throughout. COVID-19 has caused a shortage throughout this country, as I know. We have many mills shut down across Canada. For example, someone quoted me a price the other day on a sheet of 7/16th aspenite. It was close to \$75, which was \$12 to \$15 and as much as \$20 a year before.

So this is something a lot of people are going to struggle with this year. We have our local mills. Our local mills are certainly turning out some good lumber. Not that I'm trying to promote people to move away from the hardware stores, but if you're looking to do some renovations to your home and if a local mill can supply your material, by all means reach out to these guys as a better source for material.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Minister, in 2017 the current government unlocked 280,000 cubic metres for the Abitibi permits, yet small contractors are being denied cutting permits. There are currently another 240,000 cubic hectares in applications.

Why is government still tying up permits with no allowance for other local competition?

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

D. BRAGG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member opposite will be well aware, we have a great forestry management plan within this province that gets reviewed every three to five years, and it's usually up to interpretation throughout the year.

I'm always open to conversation when it comes to our department, so if he is aware of someone who is looking to access more timber, by all means reach out to us and we'll have a conversation. But unilaterally we are not just going to spread the wealth and just throw away our lumber resources so that in 10 years or 20 years down the road we have none. We are managing our forest industry, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: The former minister of lands announced a 90-day standard for Crown lands, yet we are still being bombarded with calls of Crown land delays in application approvals.

What steps are government taking to address this problem?

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

D. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, again, a great question because Crown lands affects everyone throughout the province and the abundance of Crown lands is pretty unusual in this province. You can almost go in any neck, or cove, or hill or valley in this province and you can get a piece of Crown land throughout this province.

Now, some Crown lands are easier applications than others; some you need many more people, many more proponents, the people you reach out to. For argument sake, if you get a piece of Crown land within a municipality, you need the municipality. Not only would you need the

municipality, you would need the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. Not only that, you would probably need Water Resources. It has to be feathered out.

Ninety days is an achievable goal. We're working very hard towards that. Will some go over that? By all means, Mr. Speaker, yes, because most times the applicant is also sometimes a little slack in coming back with information as well.

SPEAKER: Your time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A simple question today: Why did the Premier choose to ignore the Chief Electoral Officer's written advice in his letter of January 6 to hold a longer campaign so that Elections NL could process all special and mail-in ballots?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER A. FUREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question.

The Chief Electoral Officer provided several pieces of recommendations, none of which we're bound by. We did take some and not all. Instead of having a four-week election, we had 10. So I think there was plenty of opportunity for people to get their mail-in ballots in and address the Chief Electoral Officer's concerns.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the recent (inaudible) health report has shown a huge disproportion when it comes to health care delivery in Labrador. Today, 46 per cent of Labradorians do not have a family doctor. Also, if you go on the LG website, there are 92 unfilled health care positions. This is the sad part of this. This is not new news.

I ask the minister: Why has this government allowed this to continue?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Member opposite raises some interesting and important issues there. It is difficult to know who has a family doctor and who has not, simply because we have no formal mechanism of attaching one to the other.

What we do have, however, is access to primary care. That means that instead of necessarily seeing a family physician, an individual in need may see a nurse practitioner or an RN in a team setting. This is a far more efficient, effective and patient-centred way of dealing with primary care.

There are recruitment challenges across the province. Labrador has a variety of grants and bursaries and it is still a challenge, but we're working on that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, Labradorians can't wait much longer. Our health care system is stretched and actions are required.

There is brand new equipment in hospitals that is not even being used because there are not technicians to operate them. People are being sent to the Health Sciences in St. John's for basic tests at great expense to the province and individuals and causing unnecessary stress to patients and families.

When will this government stop treating the health of Labradorians as an afterthought?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services for a quick response.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The issue of rural health and access to services can be improved significantly by use of virtual technologies. COVID has shown us we can do that, and that is certainly where we intend to go over the course of this mandate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While there has been progress for early childhood education in Labrador in terms of affordability, creation of quality spaces and enhanced wage support for staff, the wait-list for a regulated space in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, for example, is still in the hundreds. More trained early childhood educators are needed; however, the distance-learning model offered for certification in Labrador is not working.

Will this government reinstate the in-person ECE Level 1 and 2 courses that were stopped in 2012?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member asks a good question. I know that through the federal bilateral agreement, we had created some additional 1,000 spaces in 2019. In terms of the training in Labrador, let me start by saying that this government is focused very heavily on early learning and child care, including the \$25-a-day child care announced by the Premier and myself just last year.

I recognize the need for education in Labrador; we have been working on that. We've been speaking with the College of the North Atlantic. I understand that there is distance learning, that there is a private college that is providing some education, but the only way to get additional ECEs into the system is to provide that additional capacity.

Based on the very positive announcement by the federal government in their budget, we have already started discussion with them. One of the components of that is making the industry more attractive for ECEs and providing additional benefits for ECE.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

For the last several years, boreal caribou in Southern Labrador have been subjected to illegal hunting to the point that most of the localized populations have been decimated. Wildlife enforcement officers are at risk trying to enforce regulations. Concerned residents from our province and Quebec are frustrated.

Will this government convene a meeting with all parties and levels of government to resolve this situation before these threatened caribou are gone from this area forever?

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

D. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, great question.

As we know, our wildlife in our province, on the Island and in Labrador, is very important to the subsistence for the people of the area. To see this endangered herd to be hunted the way it is – I saw photographs this year of hunting parties. Our helicopters were actually – everybody was afraid. They could see people waving tarps underneath the helicopter so the enforcement officers couldn't land. This happens in a remote area of the wilderness, Mr. Speaker, and it's very dangerous.

To answer the first part of the question, yes, I'm committed to meeting with the representatives from the Quebec North Shore and from the Indigenous groups in that area to discuss this. We cannot allow this to continue, Mr. Speaker, and extinct the full herd. We have to be responsible for our resources in our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to section 28(4)(e) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I'm tabling one order-in-council relating to the special warrant that provided interim funding for the period April 1 to May 31, 2021, while the House of Assembly was dissolved.

Thank you.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In accordance with section 10(2) of the *Architects Act, 2008*, I hereby table the 2019-2020 annual activity report and audited financial statements of the Architects Licensing Board.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Any other tabling of documents? If not, I do have a couple.

In accordance with section 35 of the *House of Assembly Act, Part II, Conflict of Interest*, I hereby table the 2020 Annual Report of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards.

Also, in accordance with section 10(3) of the *Elections Act, 1991*, I hereby table the *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on Part I Adaptations for the 51st General Election*.

Any other tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation, and Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting The Renaming Of Red Indian Lake, Bill 12.

SPEAKER: Any other notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The current Registry of Deeds is not mandatory and much of what gets registered has errors and ambiguities. Uncertainty abounds when registering interest in land, leading to impediments in the acquisition and transference, along with unnecessary additional costs to residents.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to establish a committee comprised of representatives involved in the land transfer process to investigate immediate improvements in policy, along with recommendations for legislative changes, to better protect the public's and Crown's interest.

As most people know we have two registries of interest for land in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have the Registry of Crown Titles for public lands and we have the Registry of Deeds for private lands. I would say that we have made good advances with the Registry of Crown Titles. We had the recommendations back in 2016, which were a big improvement. We have the Land Use Atlas, which is available for anybody looking to seek land, at our fingertips,

but one thing that was mentioned by my hon. colleague is that it takes so long.

The minister says he uses the term of 90 days and his predecessor, some time ago, used 90 days. I can safely say that there has been nobody in the District of Bonavista that I'm aware of ever came close to having Crown lands settled within 90 days. Not close, not less than a year.

The petition references Registry of Deeds. It's not mandatory and much of what gets registered has errors and ambiguities. Much of the land in the District of Bonavista, and mostly rural Newfoundland in particular, is private lands that have been granted or have been squatted upon. There are numerous forms of ownership and varying degrees of strength of ownership. Subsequent land transactions lead to uncertainty in title, and this uncertainty often leads to extra expenses by the residents looking at acquiring a piece of land.

I would ask the minister to consider establishing a committee to make it more seamless, to make it more productive, to spare the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador the additional cost because it is contingent on us to make sure that the Registry of Deeds is accurate.

Why not have them file the survey with the Registry of Deeds and the registration?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Registry of Deeds falls under Digital Government and Service NL. The Member is correct. At the moment, it's not mandatory for anyone to register a private deed when they're buying or selling a house, although when you get a mortgage, it is mandatory to register that deed.

I myself, as minister and as an MHA, have worked with constituents in terms of using the Registry. You can go online; actually, it's an online service that's offered. You can search the

registry; I think it's \$5 a search. Or if you wanted to make an appointment and go in person, we have reduced services at the moment as a result of COVID, but the registrar will be happy to make an appointment and help anyone find any land. It's a huge vault of really old books – it's very cool – in the Registry of Deeds here, just on Elizabeth Avenue.

I would be happy to chat with the Member further if they have recommendations or suggestions as to how we can improve that process for residents of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains for a very quick one. You only have one minute.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure that fairer electricity rates be provided to Torngat Mountains residents of the Northern Labrador Indigenous communities of Nain, Natuashish, Hopedale, Makkovik, Postville and Rigolet.

The rates charged to Northern Labrador residents are cost prohibitive to using electric heat; therefore, rates are cost prohibitive to adequate heating of their homes. The rationale for this petition is to bring electricity rates more in line with those our neighbouring residents of Lake Melville region pay.

For the first 1,000 kilowatt hours, Torngat Mountains residents are charged the same rate as the neighbouring residents of Lake Melville. However, above the ceiling rate of 1,000 kilowatt hours, Torngat Mountains' residents pay six times the rate of Lake Melville residents – six times the rate, jumping to 18.5 cents a kilowatt hour. The 1,000-kilowatt-hour ceiling prevents many residents from being able to afford to heat their homes with electric heat. Low-income families and households that don't have the manpower – I repeat, don't have the manpower – to haul wood are the greatest impacted.

Poorly heated houses often result in damage, creating expensive repairs for frozen pipelines, moisture damage and mould. Poorly heated houses also create social and mental health issues that can be long lasting. We strongly believe that changes to electricity rates need to be made for the Northern residents of Torngat Mountains.

Mr. Speaker, to support this petition, I notice that nobody on the other side has made steps to actually look at increasing the lifeline block, so I say that –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, I call now the Member for Conception Bay South to introduce the private Member's motion for the day.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move the following private Member's resolution. It will be seconded by the Member for Harbour Main.

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS it is imperative that the province's election legislation, policies and procedures be reformed properly so Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are never again denied their fundamental right to vote and deprived of the clear information they require to exercise their right; and

WHEREAS the most responsible way to determine which changes must be made is to first get a thorough, independent and unbiased analysis of what went wrong; and

WHEREAS it is not appropriate for the Chief Electoral Officer to conduct this review because an investigation of the 2021 election will place

under scrutiny the work of the CEO himself and his compliance with the *Elections Act, 1991* which requires the CEO "to exercise general direction and supervision over the administrative conduct of elections and to enforce on the part of election officers fairness, impartiality and compliance with this Act"; and

WHEREAS it is appropriate during such an investigation that the Chief Electoral Officer who oversaw the election be suspended; and

WHEREAS section 5.3 of the *Elections Act, 1991* titled, Removal or suspension states: "The Lieutenant-Governor in Council, on resolution of the House of Assembly passed by a majority vote of the members of the House of Assembly actually voting, may suspend or remove the Chief Electoral Officer from office because of an incapacity to act or for misconduct, cause or neglect of duty"; and

WHEREAS the House of Assembly on December 4, 2019, voted unanimously to establish a Select Committee on Democratic Reform, which serves as a model of the appropriate forum to collaborate on various election reform options before any amendments are brought to the House of Assembly;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that a respected, independent individual be appointed to review the conduct of the 2021 general election to determine what went wrong and to report the findings of this investigation to the House within 30 days; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Mr. Bruce Chaulk be suspended as the Chief Electoral Officer during this investigation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a Select Committee of the House of Assembly on Democratic Reform be struck to collaborate in developing recommendations to reform the province's election legislation, policies and procedures in light of the findings of the independent review.

Mr. Speaker, to start off, one of our wishes or one of our asks have already been – we read it in a 1 o'clock news release from the Minister of Justice: the forming of an all-party Committee to review the election. One of our requests that

have been asked has been responded to. It's unfortunate, as the Official Opposition, an hour before you bring in a private Member's resolution on the election, you find it in the media that they're forming this all-party Committee, yet we sat in the House this morning, we sat in the House yesterday and we sat in the House on Monday.

Yesterday, the Minister of Justice felt that there was maybe nothing that went wrong with the election. That was public knowledge; that was on the news. He didn't know (inaudible). He didn't really know if there was anything wrong with the election. It's somewhat disconcerting. It's somewhat, I suppose, insulting for Members of this House that we're talking about a serious situation.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: This is not about the PCs or the Liberals or the NDP or independents; this is about people's democratic right. It's a basic fundamental clause; it's our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. People died to have a right to vote. It's not about outcomes of elections; it's about an open and free process. I've campaigned. I've knocked on doors. I've helped Liberals get to the polling station because it's the right thing to do. I'm sure Members opposite have done the same thing, because I think everyone here has everyone's best interests at heart. I don't think I'm special, I think all of us do stuff like that because it's the right thing to do.

So if you're going to play ball with us – we want to play ball, we want to resolve this. Do I want to sit here today and read a motion out? It pains me to say it when I'm saying suspend the Chief Electoral Officer. I know the Chief Electoral Officer. That's not something that I take great pride in, but it's necessary. If you want to do an independent review, you have to have independents. You can't have us in here.

I said it this morning during another motion; it's not the place for it. It's not the place for the Minister of Justice and a Select Committee – I've sat on an all-party Committee before. I was on the Mental Health and Addictions Committee with the Minister of Health. A great Committee, but ultimately – and I get government controls these Committees, I'm not arguing with that

either. I was okay with that because a lot of our requests went through and that was fair game.

When you're thinking about elections – and there are so many aspects and so many angles to this election, it was just so wrong – you have to ask the questions. You have to find out what was discussed between Bruce Chaulk and the Premier. You have to get to the bottom of this. There is too much uncertainty.

As a candidate, you were sitting there day to day and the narrative was changing by the minute – not by the hour, by the minute. I was at my house and I had family in. It was a stressful affair; it was stressful enough as it was. We had company, mostly family. All of a sudden, we got wind that the Premier and Dr. Fitzgerald were having an emergency news conference Friday night. I didn't know what was going on; it was like what's happening here.

You're listening to the new strain was here. That was stressful enough and there was a lot of uncertainty and we're getting locked down again. The Chief Electoral Officer was on national TV shutting down in-person voting. Now, I'm only one of 40 districts, one of 120 or 130 candidates. Sweet God, could someone have told the parties? Could someone have told our three or four teams that this was happening? Did we not find out while they were on announcing about the B117 that he's on national television shutting down in-person voting?

Unless you run an election – I've run a few too. I've run a few and I've run in a few, as most Members here – colleagues in five elections. We've been around this stuff all our lives. There was no rulebook for this election. I look at the Member for Corner Brook. He's been in a lot more elections than probably all of us – him and the Member for Waterford Valley, the Minister of Education. They've been around this block a long time and there's no telling me that they knew the rules for this game – none of us did. This was uncharted waters.

I've had a lot of experience in elections; I've had people around me that had a lot of experience. We had to go back and sit down: how do you do this? I got a lot of the identified vote. I was comfortable; my identified vote was good. But how do I get them now to get a mail-in ballot to

get in there. First, he only gave us three days. Fair enough, they extended it. But then we spent the first three days – the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands rightly pointed out the other day the first three days they were deep cleaning, you couldn't get through on the phone.

How is that fair? You had three days lost on that, the systems were down; it's unbelievable, but to not want to get the answers, to not want to dig deep in this. We were then in the last few days – the phone call, that was evidence. I'm not making this stuff up; he even acknowledged he took four votes over the phone. Yet I had a 96-year-old lady and it was the first time in her life that she never got to vote. She applied, she called in and she spoke to the official. Somewhere along the line, they never hit the right button, they never took the right information and it was lost.

I'm not perfect. None of us is perfect; we make mistakes. I'm okay with that. But we made thousands of mistakes, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't one or two – thousands. I had hundreds of people who didn't get a chance to vote. My colleague, the Leader of the Opposition, was in the same boat; we talked about this regularly. It was frustrating.

My competition ran into the same problem. There is no doubt in my mind; they weren't all Tories that weren't voting. But when I went out – it is probably a telling tale to this election. That's why I'm not comfortable with any political party being involved in the investigation; it needs to be independent. We're going to push for that. I think that's where we all need to be and I think the public wants that too.

The media did an interview on the local candidates; they took one from each party up in the area. They asked me to represent the PCs. All of us – I think there was (inaudible) had a comment and NDP, but everyone had the same concerns: there were a lot of mistakes. Everyone was almost carbon copy. The Liberal candidate, I think my colleague for Topsail - Paradise: no problem; great process; it's wonderful. This is documented in the media. Read it. I'm reading going – and I know this person. What I'm reading, this can't be accurate. No, it's because he was with the Liberal Party.

There's another problem there too – if that was us over there, we'd probably run into the same problem – it illegitimizes their victory. For them to come out and say that this election was fraught with mistakes, it illegitimizes the win. I get that, I really do. I'm as big a political animal in this place as anybody else. I totally get that, I've gotten that from the beginning, but that doesn't mean the election needs to be overturned or thrown out. We need to find out what went wrong.

I think there are a lot of us here who won by enough margins that it wouldn't have mattered what election was run. I think 80 per cent or 90 per cent of the people in this House would still be sitting in this House. That's not the issue and I think that sometimes that gets lost in the shuffle by all of this stuff. It's not about overturning elections that most of these Members – I look across, a lot of these Members deserve to be in their seats, but it's about the right to vote.

That 96-year-old lady who never got to vote for me; I was winning without her vote, but that doesn't make her feel any better. Ironically, as recently as last weekend, I ran into her daughter and she said Mom is still upset over it. It wasn't about putting me over the finish line.

I look at the Government House Leader over there. He never needed an extra few votes that might have been lost; he won handily. It's not about that, but it's people in his district that wanted to vote for him or the competition that never got a right to vote. It's about your rights; it's about integrity of the system. This is a human rights issue, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, respectfully, the Justice Minister came out and said – and I get it, sometimes you get caught in your words. He didn't realize – he was going to do it, but he's not sure there was anything went wrong with the election. I know that he went home last night and watched the news and must have cringed, because I watched it and said, oh my God. Even if you didn't know, if you read the news at all, if you turned on the radio at all, something went wrong. Something went wrong – we don't know. How are we ever going to know if we don't expose it to an independent review? You have to remove it from this House.

You cannot investigate yourself, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Chaulk is an Officer of this House but the Premier is a Member of this House too. In December he quoted – he’s clearly on record; it was his decision. He had the final decision of the election – and he does; as Premier, he does – but you can’t have it both ways. If you want to show leadership and make the bold decisions that the Premier often says he wants to do, we’re with him.

We all realize we have a dilemma on our hands financially. We all realize that. If we don’t, we have our heads in the sand, but work with us. Don’t blindside me at 1 o’clock with you’re going to form an all-party Committee. The minister opposite there was looking at me all morning. He could have come over with a wink and a nod. I wasn’t going to run out and tell the media. I wasn’t going to call Michael Connors. I was going to sit here and wait for the time. I would have prepared my remarks.

As you can tell, I don’t really use a lot of remarks, but I would have prepared something. I would have refined it better and I’d be a bit more kind, probably, complimentary. An all-party Committee is what we’re asking for. We’re okay with that, but it’s the decisions, findings or recommendations of an independent review. It’s still not going to be independent. It’s going to be a Liberal-controlled all-party Committee that’s going to look at things. That’s not what we’re asking.

We want this exposed. We want questions asked: What conversations did you have with the Premier? What conversations did you have with anyone across the way? Maybe your staff did. We need to know the evidence. How did you make this decision? Why did you do that? It wasn’t from our conversations. I mean halfway through they stopped responding to most of us. I don’t know why. I had people in my district who wanted to vote and they couldn’t get their ballots so they decided they’re not going to respond to me. A lot of my colleagues – people here now and people who never made it – experienced that. Why were we ignored? Why were we pushed back?

These questions need to be answered. I have all the emails. I have some of the responses that I just still shake my head. I can’t believe I have

them, but I have them. We have evidence; we had people inside watching things happen. There were a lot of things that went wrong in this election, but to rely on an all-party Committee and not remove it to be independent, government will look much better, much bigger; we will look much better as a group, collaborative approach, if we do it independently. What do you have a fear of? There were mistakes made; let’s get it out in the open.

Again, I will repeat, I don’t think it would change the results. I truly don’t. I know people may have been touching on a minority, we were in a 22 – I don’t know but it got this close. Maybe it would have given them an extra couple. I don’t know. We will never know. The problem is, too, Mr. Speaker, you will never know if you don’t do it independently, because there will always be the taint of the Liberal’s control of this review.

It astounds me why they just wouldn’t want – what are you hiding? That’s what the public will say. If I’m not in this Chamber and I watch the news, I would say they must be hiding something. I hope they’re not, but you leave that out in the open if you get it independent. We’re not asking for anything out of the norm. None of us is happy with having to do what we’re doing. Trust you me, no one is more disturbed and bothered by asking for a Member of this House to be suspended – not a bit. No one over here takes pride in that – nobody.

Unfortunately, based on what just happened it was such a flawed system. The country was watching in dismay. We can never let this happen again, Mr. Speaker. It’s fine to say we’re never going to let it happen; we’re going to redo our legislation. We need to find out our mistakes. You can’t fix mistakes if you don’t know what they are. How can you make yourself better if you don’t know the mistakes you make? You learn through mistakes. If we don’t know the mistake, they’re under a rug, we will never know. How can you fix that? You just move forward. We’re not going to let that happen again.

I think you need to get to the root of the problem. The only way you’re going to get to the root of the problem is an independent

review, and then bring it back to an all-party Committee of the House to implement the recommendations. The next election will be a fair, honest election and people will have a right to vote.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

It's always a pleasure to speak in the same debate as the Member for CBS.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

S. CROCKER: Yeah. I'll go back to some of his comments shortly. He was very kind in his remarks.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, this is my first chance to really speak in debate, so I want to thank the people of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde for their vote of confidence in me in this election. I know there are different circumstances all throughout the province when it came to this election, but the reality in my district is – and this is my fourth election – this was actually an equal turnout to 2015. My general election in November, I think it was November 2015, would've had a very similar turnout to this one. It was actually the greatest margin that I've won by in my time in politics. We all know every election brings its challenges. I remember in the 2019 election how many people were in Florida on vacation, as an example. There are always challenges with an election; albeit, this one had its challenges.

The Member opposite refers to the level of independence. In our parliamentary system, we have three branches. We have us here in the House of Assembly; we have the Executive, which is Cabinet; and we have the judiciary. Right now, there are four cases in front of the judiciary and up to four different respected, appointed judges in this province will render independent decisions. Up to four, it could be four different judges. There are four cases, so it

could be four different judges. Four judges, four independently appointed judges, the highest honour, I guess, in the judiciary in this country.

We've seen it even in the US election, because some of the stuff I hear sometimes sort of reminds me of November and early January. But we're going to have judges that are going to rule on this and they're going to rule how they see, in the law, they're going to use law, and then that information can certainly be information that's brought into the Committee.

The Member opposite talks about Committees of the House. If you look at some of the successful Committees we've had in this House previously, and I'm going to look back for a minute because it was the previous administration, for example, that started the mental health Committee. The All-Party Committee on Mental Health, which had the same structure of the Committee that's proposed today. That Committee was a Committee of this House that was brought in under Premier Davis's administration. That Committee did tremendous work, and it continued from 2014 until – I guess the work of that Committee is still not –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

S. CROCKER: I'm having trouble, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Take the conversation outside.

Thank you.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's distracting sometimes when you're trying to make a point that's important to me, as an elected Member here, and to the people that are home listening to us.

The work of these Committees previously in the all-party Committee format – a similar format to what's proposed today – has been very successful. It was very successful with mental health, I think, and there's not a person in this House that wouldn't agree with that, I would think.

The other all-party Committee, which was one of the first all-party Committees – I was a staffer here, actually – the all-party Committee on LIFO. It was led by the former Member Hutchings, I think. We formed an all-party Committee to go to Ottawa to lobby about LIFO – last in, first out. Anybody that represents a rural district in this province would know exactly what it is I'm talking about.

We came together, as a House, and did that. We relied on expert advice. I actually chaired that Committee for a brief time when I was Fisheries minister. We relied on outside expertise. I'm certain, as we go forward, the Committee established today under the Minister of Justice will have the opportunity to do that. Some of the information that that Committee will have will be the information that comes from the independence of the courts. There's no more independence in our society.

When we lose faith in the independence of our courts, I think the fundamental pillars of our democracy are undermined the minute we lose faith in the judiciary. You think about the judiciary and you look south of the border where we have judges that are appointed because they're red or they're blue. We don't have that; we have judges in this country and in this province that are appointed on merit. They have the rule of law and they follow rule of law.

I think we will probably hear comments this afternoon around elections reform and democratic reform. I think the Member from CBS, in his private Member's motion today, he references democratic reform. I think there are two pieces of work here. One is election reform, which is a narrow scope of work, which is a piece of work built primarily around modernizing a 1991 act. If you think about 1991, long outdates Facebook and lots of other things. There are things here that we need to change. I always qualm long before this election with the idea of having these narrow windows on mail-in voting.

There was a ruling back in 2015, I think the fall of 2015 or '16 with regard to special ballots and we made some changes. But, again, that was expert advice from the courts. There was a court ruling into the 2011 election in, I think it was Burin - Grand Bank at the time. There was an

issue that came forth and there was a ruling from a judge that gave us an expert opinion that we had to come back into this Legislature and make those changes.

Let's see what comes out of the court system. I think that can really be a part of the work that this new Committee does.

I'm just going to deviate for a second over to democratic reform because, as I started to allude to earlier, I see the two separate. I see the Elections Act is an act, it's a piece of legislation in this House that we need to work on, absolutely – modernization. Democratic reform is a much bigger piece because in democratic reform we're going to talk about everything from voting age to reforms in financing, so many more things. I very much look forward to getting together with the Striking Committee in the coming days and formulating that Committee as well.

One of the steps taken today by the Minister of Justice is, for the first time, I think, and I stand to be corrected, in previous all-party Committees, at least the one struck on mental health and LIFO, we didn't invite independents in. It was three from us or four from us, two from the Opposition and one from the Third Party. These were Committees that were structured under the previous administration. I'm not taking away from them, I'm actually complimenting the previous administration and the way that they put together the all-party Committees in 2014, I guess, or '13 and '14 and '15.

These Committees were structured in a way similar to what we're seeing today, only we've went one-step further now because the importance that we've seen, the changes with the number of independents in the House, they're given a seat at the table, which is a first, I think, when it comes to all-party Committees that are formulated through a department.

When it comes to democratic reform, there's a lot of work to do, a lot of modernization. I guess we hear the buzz words around democratic reform – remember I'm off the Elections Act now and talking a little bit about democratic reform.

Democratic reform is a very, very large file to actually tame. I've had the opportunity to sit on the Democratic Reform Committee probably over the last two or three years and the former, former minister of Justice and Public Safety did a tremendous amount of work when he was Justice minister on democratic reform. I've heard criticisms in this House: Oh, there was nothing done. There were actually volumes and volumes and volumes of work done on that.

Lots of times the work that goes into a lot of these committees is not done by us, the politicians; it's done by people who actually are researchers and experts in the area. I think it's important, as we go forward, we continue on with that, not only modernizing the Elections Act, but modernizing democracy itself. I think it's important that we separate the two. The two are not the same. The Elections Act is a very neat piece of legislation that sits since 1991, and democratic reform is a much bigger piece. One of the things we've talked about on the Democratic Reform Committee throughout a couple of different iterations is the idea of taking small pieces as we restructure.

There are all kinds of operations here in the House of Assembly, and for the new Members, this is going on seven years now I've been here and I'm just getting my head around the role of the Management Commission and the role of different Committees, whether it's an all-party Committee or it's a Standing Committee of the House. It's very important that we find ways through to make sure that the work that's being done is the important work.

Again, back to reforming or modernizing the Elections Act to bring it up to 2021, we're talking 30 years, from 1991 to 2021. Maybe one of the mechanisms we need in a new Elections Act is a more broader regular review so that it's – because the Elections Act is a living document, but it's just been dormant it for a long time. Maybe we need a more regular scheduled review of the Elections Act, no different than we do with boundaries. In 2015, the Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission went out and did its work. That's going to happen again. I think late in this session, the 50th session, we will have the new boundaries reform. That's an opportunity that we change the boundaries to

reflect the times, to reflect population, and how we represent people.

Maybe one of the things we need to look in a new Elections Act is a regular review, whether it be similar to the electoral boundaries, every 10 years, or even the MCRC. The MCRC is triggered by an election, so right now we've just come through a general election, and one of the things that we have to do, as a government, within the next six months is, along with the Speaker and the Management Commission, formulate the next MCRC. We were having that conversation here this morning.

These are triggers. Maybe one of the things that we need for the Elections Act is some type of trigger that continues to modernize the document. I said earlier – and one that everybody can relate to – if you think about an act that – in 1991, the things that were contemplated weren't voting online or weren't – well, I guess voting by mail would have been there. The things in 1991 to where we are today really change the way we vote. I think both political parties have done this now, where we've actually elected leaders virtually. Now, that's easily said, but it brings a large piece of work, so it's going to be a living document. I look forward to the Elections Act review. I think that piece of work needs to be done rather expeditiously.

There were many challenges in the last election. I'm not trying to minimize those in any way, shape or form, because we all face them. I think the Member for CBS pointed it out. We all, no matter what colour you were in the last political election, the factors were the same; the challenges were the same, like any election. Like I said, in 2019 with a spring election, one of the challenges I faced was people were away. Obviously, we didn't have issue this time with a pandemic, but every election brings challenges, and I think every day we should work to modernize the Elections Act to eliminate as many of those challenges as possible.

I look forward to the work of the Minister of Justice. I look forward to working with the Minister of Justice on the Elections Act. I also look forward to working with Members of the House on democratic reform. That's something that I think, once we have an opportunity in the

coming days to meet as a Striking Committee, we will certainly get that Committee up and running as well and figure out how we want to do.

The work coming from the all-party Committee on the Elections Act or electoral reform may very well be a guiding document or have some guidance for democratic reform. One of the things that will come out of the Elections Act is some guidance for how democratic reform comes. If you look, democratic reform hasn't been overly successful in most jurisdictions. It's been totally challenging. British Columbia tried a recall law. It wasn't successful. A lot of the things that we see as ideal don't necessarily work when it comes to democratic reform, so I think we need to go and pick the things that work in jurisdictions and bring them back here.

Again, I have a greater confidence in our Legislature to develop an act or to do the reforms because I've seen it work previously. I've seen it work with mental health and I've seen it work in the fishery when it comes to LIFO and our lobbying of Ottawa.

So, Mr. Speaker, my time is pretty much up. It was a pleasure this afternoon to speak to the private Member's motion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I think that most people will agree that election 2021 was a disgrace, was an embarrassment. The whole country looked on in shock with respect to this election, probably classifying it as the worst-case scenario, an election not to follow. I think the most important thing, Mr. Speaker, is the impact that this election had on fellow Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and what they were subjected to in this election.

I could speak for a very long time, and I'm not going to recite every problem, error or

irregularity that occurred. I certainly wouldn't have enough time in 15 minutes to do that. That's not the purpose of my comments here today. But I am going to reference two examples of people that I know that were denied the right to vote, and this has troubled me because it's representative of so many people. These two individuals, one involved a dear senior citizen that I know, and another young oil and gas worker, both of whom desperately wanted to vote, but neither could do so.

The senior citizen I am referring to, I had to go and take pictures of her through the window. She was terribly afraid of the COVID variant, and despite her stress and anxiety that she had been experiencing with respect to the announcement of the variant, in the midst of all of that, she desperately wanted to exercise her right to vote. She asked that I help to do that, and I went to the window of her house and took pictures of her identification.

Another young oil and gas worker, he never did get to vote, unfortunately, as well, despite countless phone calls and emails to election officials. Many times I spoke with him, back-and-forth emails. He was so disappointed and upset that he was going to be denied this democratic right.

Mr. Speaker, these are just two examples but these cases, I have to say, troubled me and still trouble me today. As a human rights lawyer, to see people that truly want to exercise their right and are denied, that shakes me to my core. I wasn't the only one. My colleagues, and I'm sure the government MHAs and ministers, experienced it as well. So all of us should feel – I felt, I know, guilt when I went to the door. I felt guilt because I'm sorry that you have to go through this, but I know that we don't know really everything that happened.

That's the purpose of this private Member's resolution. The first clause is: Never again do we see our Newfoundlanders and Labradorians being denied their fundamental right to vote, and to be "deprived of that clear information they require to exercise their right" We have a responsibility, each one of us here, to ensure that this never happens again. How are we going to do it? We're going to do it through the most responsible way – and I implore the government

to do this – so that we get a thorough, independent and unbiased analysis of what went wrong. How do we do that? We do that through an external review by an independent, impartial and autonomous third party, and that is not the government or led by the Minister of Justice.

The reason I say that – this is not an attack on government. This is not to say that it's a partisan thing. This is not what this is about; this is about people having a right to know, people like my senior citizen and the oil and gas worker. What happened so that they could not get a right to vote? They need to know why they were not able to exercise that important, fundamental right.

Mr. Speaker, I am troubled, I have to admit, by comments that I heard with respect to the Minister of Justice. When I listened with concern – and I heard that the Minister of Justice replied in an interview on Monday to a reporter who asked him if he acknowledged that there were problems with the election. He replied: There may have been; there may not have been.

How is this possible, for the Minister of Justice to not acknowledge and to accept the fact that the election process had problems? That is so troubling on so many fronts. That is another reason why we need to have an external review. We need to have this independent analysis; it should not be the government leading this amending process. It is our responsibility to ensure that this never happens again and that this analysis be done right.

We absolutely must have an external review, someone impartial, not a government that is calling – first of all, called the election. That in itself puts it in suspect. Why not ensure that the people will have trust and confidence in this process. Again, that brings me to something so disturbing about this: the voter turnout was so low in this election. We want to encourage people to vote, we want to restore justice and we want to restore trust and confidence in our electoral process.

Mr. Speaker, voter turnout does matter. It was at record low but that matters whether an election can be held properly and people can vote. People need to have confidence in the process in order to have confidence in the outcome. This was

serious what happened. This goes to the heart of people's fundamental democratic rights.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: These are rights that people fought wars over to protect. Voters have very few opportunities to directly determine their future, but they do have that right and that opportunity through the election. It is the most important mechanism for giving citizens direct control over how and by whom they are governed. We all know, as elected Members of the House of Assembly, government decisions have such profound effects and impacts on people's lives; therefore, elections are critical.

The Minister of Justice is charged with reforming the elections legislation. The fact that he does not acknowledge what happened in the election of 2021 was problematic. That, I have serious concerns and grave concerns about. More importantly, how do we fix this problem, this mess?

We may have a by-election. We don't know when. We have to have this done quickly as well. What we're proposing in a private Member's resolution is we would have the external reviewer report back in 30 days. They would go through everything carefully and clearly scrutinize the problems that had occurred in that election. We can't fix the problem if we don't, first of all, admit that there is one and, secondly, if we don't examine everything. There has to be a robust examination. This is all the more reason to support this resolution that calls for an independent authority to examine the entire election impartially and determine what went wrong.

With reference to the Government House Leader's comments about the judiciary, yes, the judiciary has a role to play, no one denies that, but it needs to be stated that the judiciary looks at things from a different lens. There are specific plaintiffs that have brought allegations to the court. The court will assess those on a case-by-case basis, individual cases. What we need here for the House of Assembly, after an external reviewer looks at it – the people's House, the

people's House of Assembly are the ones truly to be assessing what went wrong here, because it was the people of the Province of Newfoundland who were ultimately deeply impacted by what happened in this election.

Another point to be made with respect to comments by the Government House Leader is that the courts, yes, are an avenue; it is a route. We have four applications that are before the court and that's great, but not every individual has the financial means to pursue the courts and go through that legal avenue. My two examples that I referenced certainly don't have that ability, that financial means to do that, yet the House of Assembly is the proper forum for that analysis to be done.

With respect to the other point of confidence, trust and accountability, these are all hopefully not buzzwords. We have to be transparent. If we have an independent auditor, an independent reviewer, analyzing and examining everything that happened, all of the mistakes, all of the irregularities, all of the omissions and the errors – they're independent. They're not partisan, they're not political, they're not PC, they're not Liberal, they're not NDP or independent; they are an independent, autonomous individual. It will be an individual, and that person will come back with their findings in 30 days and then from there we, the people in the House of Assembly, as representatives for the people, can then make recommendations through an all-party Committee.

If you agree – and I implore the government to accept this resolution – it will ensure accountability. It will dispel any mistrust if you do agree to this. It will restore the lack of trust that perhaps is out there now within our population, within the people, and restore confidence. That's what we need to do. We need to engage more people to want to vote again. This is all about democracy. These concepts of transparency and accountability are about democracy and protecting this institution.

In closing, I will just say that people deserve to know what went wrong. The best way to do that is through an external reviewer, an independent reviewer. We're asking the government to keep your promise about transparency. People like my senior citizen, or the young oil and gas worker

or the other hundreds of people that are out there want to understand why they didn't get to vote. What happened in the process? Where did it go wrong? How did it break down?

Again, you ask: Does this matter? Yes, it does. It certainly matters to the two people that I know that didn't get to vote. It will give them an understanding. They deserve to know the truth, and not from a government-controlled analysis, but from a free, open, independent, impartial, objective analysis by a reviewer of this legislation and of what happened in this election.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I would just like to say that I hope that the government will do the right thing and will support this resolution, not only in the interests of democracy, but in the public interest as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation, and the Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an interesting motion. Wednesday, as we know, is Private Members' Day and we're debating a motion today on the floor, Mr. Speaker, put forth by the Opposition calling for the province's election legislation policies and procedures to be reformed.

I want to start by tossing a bouquet to the new Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General for the move that he made today in "convening an All-Party Committee to identify means to enhance accessibility of voting in Newfoundland and Labrador

I think, Mr. Speaker, when I see all-party committee, the first place my mind goes back to is when I was invited to be a part of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. I did get some first-hand experience of working with all Members on all sides of this House. For about 18 months we travelled around the province, Mr. Speaker. We met with community groups; we met with doctors. Most powerful for me was the people we met with that

had lived experienced, and whether that was Nain in Northern Labrador or whether it was right in the downtown here in St. John's, we took that time.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, when we sat around those tables, there was no Liberal or PC or NDP; we sat and we listened and collectively we looked for solutions. We saw a report that came out of that All-Party Committee –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

We have several conversations going on and I can't hear the hon. Member speak.

Thank you.

L. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, we had a report, *Towards Recovery*. I believe that this particular administration has made tremendous strides toward improving the mental health and support systems in this province, improving access to mental health.

I remind Members of the House, that came about as an all-party Committee. That's just one example. I use that example, Mr. Speaker, because that is an all-party Committee that I was a part of. It did some very important work; worked collaboratively and came out with a report. Most, perhaps, of the recommendations have already been implemented and we're already well on our way to seeing a new mental health facility in this province right down here on Prince Philip Drive. It's hard to think about the structure that stands over Waterford Bridge Road, which has been around since the days of the Victorian era.

Mr. Speaker, yes, we have been living in a different time since March 18, 2020, when this province's first ever public health emergency was declared. We went through a different election. It was my fourth campaign and it was a different time. However, I often think about it, we were all sort of disadvantaged in the same way.

Now, when I look at the different extensions, I mean we think about Canada Post, whose service hasn't been the greatest, especially since

COVID, and when the first deadline came for getting ballots, once we moved to mail-in ballots, I thought there's no point because we won't get them back from Labrador. Then there was an extension and then there was another extension.

I guess I'm one of the people in the House that I had close to the same number of voters out that I would've had in the 2019 campaign. Most people, especially older people, take their vote very, very seriously, and we had people reaching out from all over the place, even if they were not in the district at the time, asking where they might be able to vote. It's very, very important.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the all-party Committee that will be put in place to modernize the Elections Act will review are the facts. The facts of the 2021 general election. That's really important, Mr. Speaker, because in this social media age, more so than ever before, people have a keyboard and there are a lot of things that get tossed out there. But I think it's very difficult to determine what's fact and what's not. In this motion today, there are some things here calling for an investigation. An investigation into what? Things have to be proven that they are wrong in order for us to know they are wrong.

The purpose of the all-party Committee will determine priorities related to election reform that may enhance accessibility for residents in Newfoundland and Labrador, including, but not limited to, Mr. Speaker, methods for public engagement and participation.

It's been talked about here this afternoon, the Elections Act has not been modernized since 1991. That's a long, long time ago. Thirty years ago, in my early 20s, I was in a different place and not really going out of my way to vote like I would today. But as a member of NunatuKavut Community Council, it was January of 2020; we had a very large Annual General Assembly in Goose Bay in the largest venue in that community, and they had to cut off people because we were overcapacity. Fast-forward a year later, there was a mechanism put in place for all of the members to vote for the board online, so that was sort of my first experience with something like that. The voting online, I thought it went very, very well. That's some of the things that we will consider going forward.

When you think about 30 years ago and where we were in terms of – well, I guess there were no cellphones on the Coast of Labrador back 30 years ago; if there were, people were only using them when they left a community because most of my communities have only gotten cell coverage within the last, maybe, year, Mr. Speaker.

Determining priorities related to election reform, changing or broadening methods to vote, I talked about online voting and that worked very well for me. But when I think about what I call my Aunt Nellies and Uncle Joes – and if there's one thing I'm going to be remembered for when I leave this Legislature at some point down the road, it's going to be that everything that I do, every paper I review, I'm looking through a lens of how does this impact Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe?

It's very common knowledge in this Legislature that we are the most rapidly aging province in the country. We have a lot of older people, some that may be comfortable with technology and some that may not. This is, again, a place where an all-party Committee that sits down collectively will say: If we move totally to online voting, does that work for everybody? Do we need a hybrid model where some people will vote online and maybe some people, Mr. Speaker, will still prefer to get to a ballot box?

My district is one that is a little bit different, I guess, than some of my colleagues here. Even in St. John's, for example, I have 18 communities, and I know you have more than double that, Mr. Speaker. So when we have advance-polling day, I have a box in Mary's Harbour, in Cartwright and in L'Anse au Loup, very spread out. Generally, most people who want to vote leading up to advance-polling day will vote by special ballot, Mr. Speaker, because that is what works for them. If somebody in the Straits is driving to Goose Bay to go to work at Muskrat Falls, they will stop in Port Hope Simpson along the way. One of the pieces of feedback that I got back from a lot of people was it's the first time that I ever voted in advance of election day and I will never wait again until election day.

Now, I do believe that there are people out there that their ballot is very sacred to them and exercising their democratic right is important,

and they like to vote on election day. I had a gentleman tell me that his mom up in 90, that's her thing that she did her whole life. She gets all dressed up in her Sunday best and she goes to vote on election day. But there are more and more people that vote in advance.

In my district, like I'm sure a number of others, I did have a good number of people, Mr. Speaker, that voted in advance before all this sort of went awry when the B117 variant that – nobody could have predicted that. I know there's a lot of conversation in this House often about why there was an election called in January. We had come through Christmas; there was no spike. We had gone through the couple of weeks post-Christmas, where if you saw gatherings during Christmas, you might have seen the spike. None of that was happening. There were a number of other provinces in this country that held elections and everything went very well. When we looked at the briefing from Dr. Rahman, he talked about this super-spreader. It was like a perfect storm; it could not have been predicted. So, Mr. Speaker, we found ourselves in the situation that we found ourselves in.

The all-party Committee, Mr. Speaker, once that starts, information will be gathered by the Committee, and it will be considered in advancing amendments to the act, and it will be tabled. Everything will be fully transparent; it will be tabled in the House of Assembly. I think if there's one thing that we will all agree on here in this Legislature, it's that it is important that we have a modern electoral system for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. If COVID had not happened and if we had not had all these challenges that we had from January up until April with the election, I believe, Mr. Speaker – I'm sure you'll agree – that the time had come when we needed to modernize the Elections Act. Three decades old, it was time for it to be pulled out, dusted off.

Just like we often do. When the House is sitting in the spring and sitting in the fall, there is a lot of legislation that comes before this House. Some things need minor amendments. We brought in a *Children, Youth and Families Act* in May of 2018. We took a year to sort and work through regulations and policy, and that was proclaimed in June 2019. So now we're coming back with some minor amendments. There are

other pieces of legislation that need some major overhaul, and I believe the Elections Act is something that needs major overhaul.

We all agree that the most recent election presented challenges. Now we have 40 Members, Mr. Speaker, back into the House. We have 40 elected officials, so it's incumbent upon all of us here in this House that we do our job as legislators to focus on the task at hand, and any legislative amendments that come out of the all-party Committee and the recommendations that they be considered as part of the normal legislative process, Mr. Speaker.

I see that my time is winding down, Mr. Speaker, and we never get to talk about all that we want. Some of the key principles in this all-party Committee, not unlike the All-Party Committee that I sat on for mental health and addictions that I believe was a great success. The key principles will be that it will be collaborative. All parties will follow the generally accepted rules, the same rules for everybody. It will be consensus-seeking. It will be open and transparent, accountable, accurate and thorough.

Best efforts, Mr. Speaker, will be made to capture the views of all those interested in the topic. That's kind of key: all those interested in the topic. Sometimes we're in here and we're in a bubble, and we think that everybody shares the same view, and it's just certain groups or certain pockets that do. We know that the membership of the all-party Committee will be made up of Members of the House from government side, from Opposition, from Third Party and from independents.

I think that in my closing, I'll just say that once again I want to commend the new Attorney General and Minister of Justice and Public Safety for tackling the Elections Act right away, right out of the gate. He's probably not even finished his briefings yet in his department, but clearly it's important to him that we have a fair, just and modern electoral system for the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, this legislative review, it will take some time. It will examine what other jurisdictions have done and that's very, very important. We don't always have to reinvent the

wheel. There's a whole list – I won't get into them – of provinces across this country that have made some changes to their elections acts, that have had a stab at electoral reform, and there are a number of things that have come out of that. It's important that the legislative review examine what other jurisdictions have done and consider things like – I mentioned online voting. Maybe it's telephone voting. Maybe that senior who is not comfortable with technology is comfortable with using their telephone, Mr. Speaker.

We need an Elections Act that considers all of the mechanisms available to voters and how they may be used to make it easier for everyone to vote. That's what it comes down to. I remember – it's just coming to me here now – when my daughter was old enough to vote and her grandma said: Are you voting? I guess she shrugged her shoulders and she said: You have to vote, Natalie; it's your civic duty. We want to ensure that at the end of the day, we make it as easy as possible for every Newfoundlander and Labradorian that would like to take part in the democratic process to be able to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's with some regret that I note that the person who said that it was his decision and his alone to call this election is not here to hear or participate in this debate.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. DINN: I withdraw that. My apologies.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: You know that.

J. DINN: We all know. It's my mistake, and I apologize for that unequivocally.

SPEAKER: Move on, please.

Thank you.

J. DINN: The story surrounding this election, Mr. Speaker, has more twists and turns than a snake on a country road. That's the best way I can look at this. It has resulted in court challenges. It has resulted, in my district, in 1,000 or fewer people voting. It has become a cautionary tale for other jurisdictions, that even New Brunswick has changed its laws based on what it has seen right here.

I can tell you the problems in my district in terms of people who were, for lack of a better word, denied the opportunity to vote. People who wanted to vote on election day didn't vote at the advance polls because they wanted to go there and vote in person. That should have been afforded to them. People who didn't have the technology to apply online; some people who didn't have a phone, necessarily; people who were voting for the first time. Sometimes the people who were voting hadn't voted in their life. They were 60 years old the first time they were going to vote. This was when they were going to vote, and they didn't. As I said, it has resulted in court challenges and I believe it could have been avoided.

Over the past few days, we've asked questions regarding the re-establishment of the Committee on Democratic Reform. It appears to be the one question that the Premier has consistently dodged, preferring instead to let other ministers answer the question and promise that a Striking Committee will look at all Committees, even in today's question with regard to why was the advice of the Chief Electoral Officer not followed. Some of it was to hold the election on a Saturday – followed; the extension of the election period to 35 days to allow for the mail-in ballots to get in. Based on the experience of the by-election in his district, it would have been advisable to go 35. That was not done. Why is that?

I know, however, that when I asked if he was truly committed to modernizing the Elections Act or if he was going to renege on it like his federal political masters, he bristled at the idea; more at the suggestion, I would say, of having political masters. But, still, he never took the opportunity once to endorse the idea of resurrecting the All-Party Committee on Democratic Reform.

Today, when we finish up we get word that the Minister of Justice is announcing the establishment of an all-party Committee to modernize the Elections Act. Flabbergasted. My first thought was what sorcery is this. Then we see that it's not really what we've been asking for in the House here, what was set up in the last session, by any stretch of the imagination.

A few key differences. The Select Committee in the previous session was answerable to this House of Assembly; this Committee is answerable to the Minister of Justice. The Select Committee of the previous session had a much broader mandate and it could indeed have dealt with, and it was going to look at, the whole election process. It could have looked at modernizing the Elections Act as well. That was all part of it.

The previous Committee was chaired by an independent Member. Not so this one. The composition is probably the most glaring difference. The last Committee was composed of two Members from the governing party, two Members from the Official Opposition, two Members from the Third Party and one independent Member. No one party, no one group could hold sway or determine the outcome. This one, however, is made up of five Members of government, two PCs, one Member of the Third Party and one independent. As I said in the interview, it is basically a partisan Committee with fries on the side.

I don't know if it's insecurity or lack of confidence in being a new and relatively inexperienced leader, or if it's the uncertainty of where a truly independent Committee on Democratic Reform, answerable to the House, may go, but I do believe that when you make decisions as a leader, and I've been there, you have to face the possibility of – at least when I was leader – my decisions blowing up in my face. But I'm not the only person in this Chamber who's been in a leadership position. The key thing is to weigh all facts and hear from all sides, especially with those who disagree and make the best decision.

The Premier has consistently said that he did not cause the outbreak in the middle of this election. No more, he didn't, I guess any more than the driver with summer tires driving around in the

middle of a snowstorm caused a blizzard. It just showed incredibly bad judgment and it certainly didn't help the situation.

We've heard the narrative, Mr. Speaker, of probabilistic modelling; the protection of this probabilistic modelling by Cabinet confidentiality; the omission that such probabilistic modelling was impossible to do. Who knows if it exists? I do know of other modelling – it's interesting – stochastic modelling actuaries use to determine what you need to make sure a pension plan is viable. It looks at all the possibilities including random events that could change that. As I used to say to actuaries, when do you want me to die to make the pension work?

Then there's one I've certainly heard, in terms of the chief medical officer, of tabletop exercise where you model the possibilities, the preparedness and what we will need, certainly, in handling a crisis or a pandemic. But to be honest with you, the decision to call an election was not based on any real analysis of the scenarios. It was more or less a whim and where the governing party at the time was in the polls.

As I said, the Premier accepted the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendation to hold an election on a Saturday, but totally ignored the one to extend the election. I think the problem lies here and why this Committee is so important is the fact that it has got to guarantee – it has to, it must guarantee – full transparency and differing points of view. You have to be prepared to live with the consequences.

Basically, here we have a situation where we need these multitude of voices. One of my best friends, Jeanne Williams, a person I first met when I joined the NLTA, and she became one of my table officers when I president. Now, I will say this, you would never say we are best friends when you saw us in a debate. She challenged me every way, at every point, and I'm sure people were confused. I have more vehement conversations with her than I do with the Member for Topsail - Paradise on political issues.

The key thing is I often sought differing opinions. Why? Because it is important to make sure that I knew the pitfalls, and I do have a soft

spot for contrarians. Because a failure to ask questions is a failure on my part. Maybe it was my experience as a parent or as a teacher, but I always ask the question – you know the one, anyone who was a teacher, the Member for Bonavista will know this one, and as a parent – have you completed your work? Invariably the response was: Yes. My next statement was: Show me, show me.

Now, the Premier says he asked the Chief Electoral Officer if he is ready for a COVID-style election and the Chief Electoral Officer had said yes. That's the conversation as relayed to us by the Premier. What he appears to have failed to do is ask the Chief Electoral Officer to show him or ask for the details of his preparedness. That's not second-guessing or undermining the professionalism or the authority of the officer. But how many times has it been said that these are unprecedented times?

One thing for certain is that we had not been through a pandemic election before. As a leader, I would want to make sure that the Chief Electoral Officer had everything he needed, I would want to know all of the details to inform myself and to make sure that I was able to provide a clear rationale as to why I made the decision.

This leads me back to why I am supporting this PMR: leadership is about showing courage and about taking the heat for your mistakes and making improvements that need to be made, most of all it is about trust.

The Premier brings about some altruistic ideals, puts forward some great rhetoric about making bold decisions, about doing things differently, about putting aside partisan differences and working together. I've said this already before, Mr. Speaker, and here's the key thing here with this because we do need an independent, objective, balanced approach to this investigation, to this inquiry, if you want, if the Premier is not willing to support an independent investigation or an all-party Committee similar to the one that existed in the last session, then we'll have a very clear indication that the lofty sentiments are basically empty rhetoric, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I begin, I would just like to thank the people of my district, the beautiful District of Torngat Mountains for re-electing, their confidence in me. I'm also very proud of all of the obstacles they had to overcome to actually vote. Even people who didn't get the ability to vote, I am so proud of how hard they advocated to everybody who did receive a mail-in ballot kit, that it was so important for them to vote. I'd like to thank that and I'd like to acknowledge them as well, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

I'm speaking on behalf of our PMR today. It is so confusing to a person who got elected back in 2019, that came in with expectations of government, expectations of the House of Assembly and, to see what we've seen, a lot of us here are very disappointed. This election is another big disappointment, the way it unfolded. When the election was called, we were in shock. I have to tell you when the election was over, we were in greater shock. We kept saying to each other, did this really happen? Did this really happen? The whole country was looking on and what they saw unfold in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador was shocking to them. It was disappointing and we became the cautionary tale as the worst-case scenario.

As my hon. Member said there from St. John's Centre, a man, I have to say I do respect. I'm going to try not to duplicate a lot of the things that you said in your speech because he was saying a lot of the things that I was saying and I made sure I checked with my fellow MHAs so I wouldn't be duplicating, on a Friday, and I know a couple of more people want to go after me.

We were the cautionary tale, but I have to tell you what's really confusing is that this was predicted. At the heart of the problem was the weakness of our legislation, but we already knew that, it was identified. The weakness in a planned, thought-out process to deal with the situation of COVID at hand. That was the problem with this election. This is why this election became chaotic. It became

disappointing and it became an embarrassment to see what happened and to watch elected officials make up the rules as they went along and change the rules and the failure to communicate with the people of this province who have a legislated right to vote, and to see the failure. This is what this PMR is about, it's making sure that an independent review is done to make sure that we don't fail the people of this province that voted us in.

We're here, 40 elected Members, and if we don't have an independent review, we are going to fail the people again. The people have already lost confidence in us. They lost confidence in the electoral process. Do you want to know something? I think they had lost confidence before this – I don't know if I'm allowed to call it this farce of election happened. It's true.

This PMR is about restoring confidence, Mr. Speaker. It's not about making us out to be something that we're not. It's not about partisan politics. It's not about trying to get one over on the government who sits across from us. This PMR is about an independent review to make sure that we can come back and restore confidence.

My former Labrador Member there, the Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs, she talks about people who've always voted. In my district, most of these are elders, they always vote and they were the ones that were greatest handicapped because you voted by phone. A lot of people actually don't have a phone in my district, some of my low-income seniors.

When your furnace oil cost \$1,200 a month and your pension is barely making it, a lot of people can't afford \$120 for a phone. That's usually what they have now, and a lot of times there are problems with the phone. A lot of them certainly don't have Internet. Even if they have Internet, in my district there are so many problems.

You know something? I joke and I say I'm the MHA for COVID, because I communicate these COVID updates and the changes with COVID. I also call myself the MHA for Bell Aliant. That's because I have a good relationship with Bell Aliant, because there are so many problems with the phones and Internet in my district that I'm usually the one that comes in and helps

somebody who was waiting 12 months to get a phone repair or a phone install.

So as the MHA for everything, I have to say I think I'm entitled to voice my concerns. One of the things that would reassure me, not only for my district but for all of Labrador, is that we have an independent review. Because in Labrador we do not have access to all the luxuries of these services and infrastructure that are elsewhere in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, mainly the Island. In my district, we are further behind than anywhere else. It's that lack of access to service and infrastructure that really impacted our democratic right to vote.

In addition to that there are other things, like the language barrier, the failure to have translation services and to communicate to people. I had people long after the registration deadline had passed who were trying to get in touch with me, asking me how do I get my ballot. How do I vote, Lela? That yellow thing we got in the mail, can we use that to vote? Everybody knows what I'm talking about. It was so disappointing.

You want to talk about language barriers. I'm on the phone talking to a speaker of his traditional language, speaking to me in broken language on the phone. His son sent me a picture of what he received in the mail. So I'm looking at the picture and I'm explaining to him, no, you have to put the white ballot with that line on it that you write in, remember that sheet, the three names. And I listed out the names. I'm one of them. Listed out the Liberal, listed out the NDP, because I want everyone to vote for whoever they want to vote for, whether it's a Liberal, NDP or myself.

I'm there and I say: Okay, now, you have to put that in the green envelope. No, no, you have to put it in the green envelope. You have a green envelope there. I can see it in the picture. This is the conversation I'm having, and I had many conversations like that about the green envelope. You know something? I had many, many conversations about the blue envelope: You have to make sure you sign. If you do all of this and you don't sign the blue envelope, they're not going to count it.

Even to the point – and I don't know if I was allowed, but I was actually calling the

postmasters and postmistresses, whatever their title is, and saying: Can you remind people if you see them, whether it's in the store or in the post office, that they have to sign the blue envelope? Because the Chief Electoral Officer said that if the blue envelope is not signed, their ballot is not going to count.

Now, language or no language barrier, that's a communication issue. There was no plan; there was no communication plan. You want to know something? This should have been communicated before the writ was dropped. This should have been communicated; this should have been planned. There was no planning. I worked 20 years in construction and mining exploration, and one thing we always do is we look at what can happen and we make sure that we plan it out to deal with this, to make sure that no one is injured, no resources lost, all these things. We have a plan in place. Then we actually communicate it with everybody and then we practise it. We practise it. That has been my life for 20 years, and I look here and I see: Whoa, man, they didn't have a plan in place, no communication plan. There was no plan to translate. It was fly by the seat of your pants.

You know something? The biggest failure to me was how we learned of the information about changes to the plans. Because I have to tell you something now: A lot of our information that we got on this side of the House came from talking to people in the district who told us what the Liberal candidate's party was telling them. Then we would go back and check: Is that right? Look, my fellow MHA is nodding his head. You know something? That's a huge failure. We had to follow on Twitter and on Facebook the Liberal candidates to find out the changes being made with the elections. The knowledge, the extra phone lines coming on, what you can do. You can actually help somebody.

One of the biggest failings was – you know something? I'm aware that in past elections, there were no translation services. I'm aware of that. I've voted on the coast; I've been on the coast. I've taken people to vote on the coast, and when I'm talking about the coast, I'm talking about Torngat Mountains. I know there are no translation services, but I have to tell you, every election, the Elections official that was running it on the North Coast – and I think I can mention

his name now because he's been doing it for a long time – Jack Shiwak, always made sure his officers were trained and he always made sure Innu and Inuit people were accommodated, that if they needed any help in voting, to make sure that they knew exactly who they were voting for; it would be done.

It was never a cause. It wasn't like we didn't understand that, but we had no idea what would happen when we detoured to this mail-in ballot. The issues that I talk about, and also – I'm bad with the districts here – St. John's Centre and also Harbour Main – the districts are getting away from me because I'm getting emotional; I start to forget things.

Rural Newfoundland and Labrador really suffered in this election. The Northern Peninsula has a lot of issues with Internet and phone access, even in downtown St. John's. You know something? The homeless people, they're residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. They have a legal right to vote. When we switched to a mail-in ballot, did anyone ever think about them? Was there a plan? Was there a contingency plan there where it was outlined so that these people wouldn't fall through the cracks? This election, this switching and flying by the seat of your pants failed the people, Mr. Speaker. It failed them bad.

What we're trying to say now with this is if we have an independent review, we can identify what happened and make sure we don't fail people again; we don't fail our seniors. You're talking about people fighting, but people serve as well. I have an elder in one of the communities. He's retired. He actually is an active member of the Canadian Rangers who supports – if we were invaded by Russia. That's a joke in the North Coast because first I think when they established the Canadian Rangers across the North Coast – but he's an active member and he volunteers and he trains junior rangers, takes them out on the land, target practice, but also skills in making traditional clothing, igloos, all this sort of thing. He's an active member of the community.

You know something? He couldn't get his ballot. He actually registered for his ballot and his ballot never came. We kept checking with Elections NL. First, they weren't responding to

us, but then he got a call from Elections NL saying that his ballot showed back up in St. John's. His ballot showed up and there wasn't enough time for them to send it out. I think it was three days. He actually was not going to get to vote, and that's the first time ever he could not vote, an active member of our society, an elder, a person who volunteers.

It had nothing to do with taking voting seriously; it had nothing to do with dedication. It had nothing to do on the part of the people – another thing that offended me was when the Chief Electoral Officer said that people had enough time. If you wait until the last minute, there are going to be consequences.

I have to tell you I know people who were phoning for the first three days and couldn't get through. I don't think anyone on the North Coast got through in the first three days of calling and that was very discouraging. Also, people were on hold for over two hours. Who with responsibilities in their day-to-day life can be on hold for three hours, two hours? People were cut off. I have a whole lot of screen captures of people who got this error message online after actually filling out the forms.

So this PMR is about honesty and respect to our voters. This PMR is about restoring confidence in the people that vote. We talk about encouraging women to run, we talk about diversity, but if we don't support the people who are candidates in order to have a decent election, they're not going to put their names forward. After this mess, I don't know who would put their names forward. When we go to bring in the next budget and there is a vote on it, people are going to question the validity. We have to send a strong message to the people of this province that we're going to fix what went wrong and make sure it doesn't happen again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

J. HOGAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank everyone in the House and for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to a private Member's resolution. This is obviously a first for me in my new role; a lot of firsts for me this week. I have only been in this job for three days, as everybody knows. I'm hanging in there; I'm doing okay. I have to say I did get a warm welcome from a lot of Members opposite in the first couple days and I appreciate that.

There has been a lot of talk about working together and reaching across the aisle, so it was very, very good things to hear. I think if we can stick to that for the next four years, we're going to be okay and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are going to be okay.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: As I said, this is a special one for me to talk about today because it has to do with the Elections Act. I got a call from the Premier. It seems like a long time ago, but it wasn't very long ago. He welcomed me into his Cabinet. When I got that call, obviously, I was surprised, honoured, humbled and excited. I don't even know what I said to him, on the other end of the phone. I hope everything was appropriate and okay because I was thrilled to accept his offer.

Then we went down to Government House for the ceremonial swearing-in. That was a big moment for me as well. Unfortunately, I only got to bring one person. I was fortunate enough that my wife was able to be there. My four-year-old daughter wasn't able to be there because of COVID restrictions, my parents weren't able to be there because of COVID restrictions, but I know they watched online. We can do that sort of thing now; we can watch online. I'll get to why that's important because 30 years ago when this Elections Act was drafted, you couldn't do anything online. Times have changed. Generations have come and gone. We're moving forward.

After the swearing-in, I had my first scrum as a Cabinet minister. The Premier turned to me and said you're going to modernize the Elections Act. Now, I had a call from the Premier to be a

Cabinet minister, sworn in as a Cabinet minister. I have instructions from the Premier to do work as a Cabinet minister. As Ferris Bueller said, life comes at you pretty fast, and it did. It's still coming fast because now we're here today, three days into the job, and as the Member for CBS today said, he got notice that I've announced that we're going to have an all-party Committee, as part of the process, to deal with modernizing the Elections Act.

He said he was happy about that too, which is great. I'm glad he wants to participate and is happy that it's announced to have an all-party Committee. I will take this time to personally invite Members opposite me to join in and sit on that Committee as we work towards the Premier's goal and my goal to modernize the Elections Act.

The purpose of this Committee is to review the facts of the 2021 general election. All Members who sit on that Committee can provide their own input, facts, what happened, their experience in the election of 2021. They can talk about other elections that they have run in. I know there are people in this House who've run in more than one election, more than two, more than three, more than four, more than five. A lot of experience in this House, and I hope that they bring that experience to this Committee so we can work towards our goal.

This is only one aspect, of course, of how we're going to work towards doing this. This is how the Members in this House who represent people in Newfoundland and Labrador to bring their stories forward will also have the full support of the Department of Justice to do research throughout this country, throughout this world. How do we vote? What are the best ways to vote? How can we improve on our ways to vote? We'll do all kinds of research. We'll investigate. We'll talk to members of the public. We'll leave no stone unturned.

We will have the most modern Elections Act in this country. When other provinces go to do the same thing – because COVID didn't just happen here. It happened throughout the country; it happened throughout the world. Everybody's going to have to deal with this at some point in time, and we will lead the way in that. That's not the only thing we're leading the way in, in this

government. We're digitizing everything. We're modernizing everything. We're leading the way in everything. We are leaders. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are leaders. We're not staying behind. We'll show the country and we'll show the world how to do things and we'll get it right.

This Committee will consist of nine Members: two Members from the Official Opposition, one Member from the Third Party and one independent. Very representative of what the members of the public, the voters, sent to this House of Assembly to represent them and make decisions on their behalf.

I did hear some disappointing statements this afternoon about the composition of this Committee. It's called the partisan Committee. The Committee hasn't met yet, by the way. The Committee hasn't really been formed yet, and it's already being accused of being partisan. That's troubling for a couple of reasons. I knew if I was successful in being elected to the House of Assembly and becoming a politician – I can't believe I'm a politician, but I guess I am – I knew I would get criticized. I knew I would get criticized for decisions I made, comments I make or colours of ties I might wear, et cetera, et cetera, all kinds of things.

I had no idea I would get criticized for reaching across the aisle and asking for their input and their help to move this province forward in modernizing the Elections Act. That's disappointing and that's surprising, but I've learned a lesson, obviously, three days into this job, that maybe that's the way it's going to be. And I'll deal with that. We'll all deal with that. That's unfortunate, but that doesn't mean I'm going to change my ways. I'm always going to reach across the aisle and ask for help and assistance and input.

I'll tell you what, when the Premier did call me and invited me into Cabinet, it wasn't just the Minister of Justice and Public Safety he asked me to serve, he asked me to serve as Attorney General. Attorney General means a lot to someone in my field, obviously, as a practising lawyer. I've been practising law for 16 years in this province. Seventeen years ago, I was called to the bar in Ontario.

So to be asked to be the Attorney General for the entire province was obviously something very overwhelming, is the word I'll use. And it still is overwhelming. When I think about all the cases I had, all the lawyers I dealt with in this province – and that is adversarial by nature. That career choice is adversarial by nature. That doesn't mean we fight.

Every file I had there was a lawyer on the other side and they had to represent the interests of their clients and I had to represent the interests of my clients. We did it. We argued and we debated, but we did so collegially, we do so in the best interest of our clients. More often than not, we did not have to go down to the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador to argue and have someone else decide the fates of our clients. More often than not, we managed to come to a reasonable, sensible and non-partisan conclusion that made everybody happy. I'm happy to continue to do that as Attorney General. I've left my career behind, but I'm happy to do that as Attorney General to make everybody in this province happy, even if it means the Members opposite are not going to be happy.

Another thing is, I would like to set the record straight a little bit. I'm not sure if that matters in this House to everybody, but it matters to me. I was quoted as saying there may have been or there may not have been issues with the 2021 election. I think I might have said something along those lines.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: I think I did. But the context is important. Context is always important. Despite what people might think, context is always important.

That question was in relation to what is going on at the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's up for the judges to decide the legal questions as if something may have been done wrong or not. I, as Attorney General, am not going to interfere, comment or opine on what those judges should decide.

AN HON. MEMBER: Thank God.

J. HOGAN: Thank God.

If that's where we're going to start going, we'll turn into our neighbours to the south light, who appoint judges so they can make the decisions that the politicians want them to make. Not only do I not want them to make decisions just because I ask them to, it's completely inappropriate and it would lead down a path that no one in this province wants. I want to let them do their jobs. I've seen them do their jobs for 16 years. They're good at it, they're qualified, they're capable and they wear black. They don't wear red, they don't wear orange and they don't wear blue. So don't anybody worry about an independent decision being made in relation to not one, not two, not three, but four court applications. Not only can all of the Members of this House sleep easy tonight that there's going to be an independent analysis, the public can rest easy tonight that that will be done.

I know the Member for Harbour Main brought up something that the judges look at things from a different lens. I don't know what different lens she was talking about, but I guarantee the lens they look at it through is a legal lens, which is the most important thing. As the Government House Leader spoke about, there's a rule of law in this province and that is the lens that they are going to look through and that is the result that we're going to get back and it's the one that will be right because the independent judiciary is going to make it and we're going to let them make it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Now, I know there were issues with the 2021 election. I was a candidate like everybody else. I made a tough choice to potentially walk away from my job as a lawyer that I dearly loved. I'm still going to miss it, but I'm happy to be here now and represent the people of Windsor Lake.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I saw all the work that went in to my campaign. Volunteers who showed up, snowstorms, knocked on doors, time away from their families, made phone calls – sometimes they're not always pleasant phone calls, we all know that. We had a plan in place from day one, and we worked and we worked and we worked and we put up signs. We took names of who was

going to support the Liberals. We did everything we could, social media, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera and our plan was going to be carried out when? On Election Day. What happened? That didn't happen. It didn't take place the way we planned. It didn't take place the way anybody planned.

I know how disappointing it was and I know how frustrating it was for everybody, but we dealt with it and the reason I have been tasked with modernizing the Elections Act is because those challenges were there. It brought to light issues in the Elections Act that need to be changed.

Yes, the 2021 election was a trigger for what we're going to do here in this House, and that's to modernize the Elections Act. 1991, it's written on the Elections Act, *Elections Act, 1991*. I was 13 years old when that was drafted. I was at Mary Queen of Peace school right on the edge of my district right now that I represent, Windsor Lake. I can guarantee you 13-year-old me did not think he would be drafting legislation; 13-year-old me thought he was going to play in the NHL, but that didn't happen.

1991 is an infamous year for Newfoundland and Labrador, too. That was the year of the cod moratorium: tough times, sad times. I recall something about people banging on doors when I was 13 years old about the fishery and no one was happy. But what did we do? We didn't leave it and not talk about it for 30 years, no. We modernized the fishery, we moved it forward. I'm sure people in this fishery talk about every day how we can make it better, how we can make it the best for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Unfortunately, we didn't do that with the Elections Act but that's something that we're going to do now. Everything in good time and we will deal with that, so that's a good thing.

As a lawyer, I think we always need to go to what we're talking about. What we're talking about is this private Member's resolution. **"WHEREAS** it is imperative that the Province's election legislation, policies and procedures be reformed properly" Well, tick, we are going to do that.

“**AND WHEREAS** the most responsible way to determine which changes must be made is to first get a thorough, independent and unbiased analysis of what went wrong.” Tick, we are going to do that. We are going to have this Committee, everybody can come forward. It is not a partisan Committee; it is a fact-finding committee. Bring your facts forward and let’s talk about what happened. Facts aren’t partisan: never will be, never have been.

And then whereas, it talks about the Chief of Electoral Officer, it talks about suspending the Chief Electoral Officer, it talks about his conduct: I am not going to say it again, we have judges for that. I have heard the Opposition Leader say that they support the applications of Progressive Conservative candidates in court: so that’s being done, that is being publicly by the Members of the House.

Then we go to the resolutions: “**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that a respected independent individual be appointed to review the conduct of the 2021 general election” That’s the judges, four of them: tick.

“**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that Mr. Bruce Chaulk be suspended” That’s before the courts, we are not doing that. I’m Attorney General, I’m not talking about that. I’m not saying that, I’m not dealing with it. I’m going to do my job, I’m not going to interfere with other people’s jobs.

“**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that a Select Committee of the House of Assembly on Democratic Reform be struck” Tick, we are going to do that.

Now, I know the Member for CBS is upset that he got his invitation late, but his invitation is there and he can come if he wants.

With that, I want to thank all the Members who spoke on this today: the Member for CBS, Trinity - Bay de Verde, Harbour Main, Cartwright - L’Anse au Clair, St. John’s Centre and Torngat Mountains.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It being 4:45, I call on the Member for Conception Bay South to close debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I’m going to list some words and I’ll fill in the blanks on the words after: independence; politics out of it; democratic rights; Charter of Rights; people denied the right to vote; can’t ever happen again; Premier who was 40 points ahead in the polls.

Independence – not, lead by the Liberals. Politics out of it – not, lead by the Liberals. Democratic rights, ignored. Charter of Rights, ignored. People denied the right to vote? Yes. Can it ever happen again? Only if it’s done independently. A Premier who was 40 points ahead – the only reason the election was called and ignored everything else.

To address some –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: The Government House Leader is pretty chirpy. I’m trying to be respectful in this debate, because it’s an important issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I am asking for co-operation from the House.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

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

The Minister of Justice just pointed out that they reached across the House, and I was insulted because I wasn’t notified. Facts don’t lie. We were in the caucus room and I read a tweet on Twitter that they had an all-party Committee formed. It’s utter disrespect for this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

Then to sit there and just be so dismissive of what we feel. We have rights. But you know what? Maybe the minister and the government opposite needs to realize – forget about us; forget about who we are. We're PC Members or Opposition; we are thorns in their side. Think about the people that were denied that right. Think about that 96-year-old lady that we all have in our districts – because I had them and I know each one of us had them that's very upset to this day that they never got a right to vote. Now, there are 96-year-old Liberals too that never got the right to vote, so it's just not a Tory thing.

Minister, with all due respect, the courts are not designed for everyone. It's out of reach for a lot of people in this world. You have four members contesting the court, that's fine. I respectfully don't think Bruce Chaulk's suspension is part of that – I haven't read all the documents. I don't know if it is. I question that, but that's fair enough. That's out of reach to most people. We're the lawmakers, Mr. Speaker. We're the people who are put here by the people in our respective districts. We make the laws of the land; this is our Legislature.

For those that the courts are out of reach to fight for them, it's incumbent upon us. We should be standing up for the underdog. We should be standing up for those people's rights who were denied, people who lost their rights. If we're not doing that, Mr. Speaker, I think this Legislature has no right in this province. That's how strongly I feel about this. This hits at the core of who we are.

When I go door to door, I hear people telling their stories of how their children voted and my father he'd turn in his grave because I never voted. This is sacred to many, many, many people.

Why do we only get 48 per cent of the people or 45 per cent of the people vote? It is because of this nonsense. We all have our goals. We all have our antics back and forth. That's part of this House. But it's this stuff that happens in here that turns people off. The numbers are declining not because of what we're doing right, it's because of what we're doing wrong. If you were to poll the public today, the public would say: Forget politics, get someone outside to do

an independent review, get this right and this can't happen again.

But you get this dismissive – and I'm going to be polite and I am going to say dismissive – response just then. It's disturbing. Will we sit on a Committee? We have no choice. We have to pick up for the rights of our people. Are we limited, are we muted by being in this Legislature and they have the majority? We're Members of this House of Assembly and just like every other Member we have voices and we can make those voices loud. The public needs to kick up. If I kick up, it's a Tory kicking up. If the leader kicks up, it's the PC Opposition kicking up. The public should be outraged by this. I mean, I'm calling on the public to stand up and tell this government that's wrong. Their rights were trampled; there was a shamble of an election. We all get it. Get it right the next time.

This is too big an issue to be left with rhetoric, words and potshots across the way. I'm sorry, and I can send it back as good as the next person, but I feel too strongly about this issue. I said this morning I won't be here forever. I will not be here forever. I don't know how much longer I'll be in this House. But I'll tell you right now, if I don't stand my ground now, and I think we all equally agree we're standing our ground, this issue was the worst three months of my political career. It was one of the worst three months of most of our lives, when you look at a period of time. This was unbelievable. Don't ever lose sight of that.

But the Members opposite, they have a 40-odd point lead in the polls.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

B. PETTEN: And they refused – they refused – to acknowledge what the rest of the province was saying. That's shameful. That's shameful. Why did they start plummeting in the polls? Good thing the election was called when it was, Mr. Speaker. I'd say if it was two weeks earlier, it would have been a different result.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's unfortunate that he's heckling me down, or trying to heckle me down, but that don't work anymore with me. But I'm speaking for people in the Government House Leader's district, too, Mr. Speaker. Not just for people in CBS. I'm speaking for people in Windsor Lake, too, and Corner Brook, and Burgeo - La Poile, and Harbour Main and Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: But it just shows the lack of respect that this government is showing for the voter, Mr. Speaker. It's not a matter of a lack of respect for me. I could care less.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's very difficult to hear the speaker.

Thank you.

B. PETTEN: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'll just go back – it is terrible, it is unfortunate. I've been here long enough to know, people watch this place. That's it, we'll move on.

To my point, none of this needed to happen: it was overzealousness, it was the polls are right, the time was right, let's get it done. Here I am a sitting Member, I have enough signs up there to do half the garages in CBS from three or four elections. But the Saturday morning, day one, she was peppered, full on. The Liberals signs were everywhere. Fair enough, this is a game, I get that; it's a competition. I'm all about competition, that's what motivates you. But you're doing it in the middle of a pandemic, you're questioning the rumours: bam, it's all done.

It was all planned out. The Chief Electoral Officer asked for 35 days: no, no, 28, get it

done. Had it been 35 days, this could have changed the numbers in the House. Had advance polls been a week later and things went the way they went, it could have been a different result to this election: that's how quick things turn in this province. They know it. We all know it.

I respect the will of the voters, I've always respected the voters. They made this government in charge and that's fine, but don't desert your duty, don't give up on your duty. This is not about politics. You can laugh and giggle all you want, Mr. Speaker, but it is not about politics. It is not about that, I heard from people loud and clear. It bothered me to no end.

I spoke earlier and I said, at the end of the day, did it hurt me? No. Did I think it was going to hurt me? Probably not. But it killed me to hear those stories, it killed me.

I know my colleague from Harbour Main spoke on this resolution as well. Me and her spoke regularly and she used to be in so much turmoil when she was getting calls from people. I'd say, hopefully, you'll be all right.

People never got the right to vote. Did they have time? Yeah, I guess. Unless you're lucky enough to be on that call or to get in when all the other roadblocks – voting shouldn't be a roadblock; there should be no obstacles to vote. It is your democratic right, there should not be any obstacles to vote. We should be trying to make things as easy as possible. I know we are not advanced to online voting or telephone voting, I get that. We should be, we should be working towards that and all the other parts of democratic reform.

But to have the obstacles and the barriers, it's unbelievable. My colleague from Torngat Mountains up there, they dealt with total different issues: language barriers and transportation and the mail. It's unbelievable. It's more unbelievable to get the response across the way, it's like: I asked that crowd over there, I reached across the House, they don't seem like they appreciated it. Mr. Speaker, that's absolute – I'll leave the words out of the sentence because you'll be calling me on a point of order – but that's absolute foolishness, Mr. Speaker. That's not what we're here for.

I'll say it and I'll say it and I'll say it again: people listen, people listen. We'll make sure people are aware. We have a way of getting the message out, too, Mr. Speaker. There is no way you can get on the right side of this argument unless you have an independent review. There's no way possible.

If you don't bring the independence into this and take the politics out of it, an election that was tainted with everything, you name it; it's impossible. There will be asterisks on this review. We'll partake in it. We'll have to, we have no choice, to make sure the voices of our constituents are heard and to help our people, we have to. We have to, but I'm telling you now, if we don't have independence, this review will be tarnished. They'll think it will be the best thing since sliced bread, but it's not, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to finish now, I could go on. I know the Government House Leader would love for me to go on for another while, but I made my point and we will not give up on this one, Mr. Speaker. We'll partake in the Committees and whatever is offered across the way. But just something for every Member of the House, especially across the way to think about, in your districts, it's not about the outcome of the election, trust me. I've said it repeatedly, I'll say it again, it's not about the outcome of this election; it's about people's rights. If we can't, as Legislators in this House of Assembly, defend people's rights, we're in the wrong job.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Division

SPEAKER: Division has been called. I think everybody is in their seats.

Are the Government House Members ready?

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

All those in favour, please rise.

CLERK (Barnes): Mr. Brazil, Mr. Petten, Mr. Wakeham, Mr. Wall, Mr. O'Driscoll, Mr. Tibbs, Ms. Evans, Ms. Conway Ottenheimer, Mr. Parrott, Mr. Pardy, Mr. Paul Dinn, Mr. Forsey, Mr. Dwyer, Mr. James Dinn, Mr. Brown, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Lane.

SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Furey, Mr. Crocker, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Haggie, Ms. Coady, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Loveless, Mr. Davis, Mr. Warr, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Hogan, Ms. Stoodley, Mr. Reid, Ms. Howell, Mr. Pike, Ms. Stoyles, Ms. Gambin-Walsh, Mr. Trimper.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 17; the nays: 21.

SPEAKER: I declare this motion defeated.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It is a motion of the House that this House do now adjourn and will be reconvened at 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.