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Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Burin - Grand Bank, St. George's - Humber, Mount Pearl North, Placentia West - Bellevue and Lake Melville.

The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this week is Volunteer Week, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers in the District of Burin - Grand Bank. I am very proud and humbled today to recognize our volunteer firefighters who play such a vital role in my district, and indeed the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, we are so grateful to our firefighters for answering this calling as they put our lives and the lives of those we love ahead of their own. Always on call, they live with the understanding that they miss out on family moments and occasions to perform their duties.

Mr. Speaker, for their dedication, commitment and courage, the service and sacrifices that they make, they are truly heroes in our communities.

Thank you to those men, women and their families for keeping our province safe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

S. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I would like to recognize Pasadena author Nellie Strowbridge, who recently published her latest book. This new book is a sequel to her bestselling novel *Catherine Snow*, which is based on true events from the history of

this province. The first book tells the story of Catherine Snow, a woman from Salmon Cove who was accused and convicted of complicity in the murder of her husband in 1830.

Nellie Strowbridge's latest book, *The Hanged Woman's Daughter*, tells the story of Bridget Snow, the oldest daughter of Catherine Snow, and picks up the story after Catherine's death. While the first book has been described by the author as a work of creative non-fiction, this most recent book also tries to adhere closely as possible to what was known about the life of her daughter.

The author says she writes books on subjects that inspire her and hopes it will cause people to think about things in a different way.

In conclusion, I ask all Members of the House of Assembly to join me in recognizing the work of author Nellie Strowbridge, and other writers like her, who contribute to our understanding of our history and culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. STOYLES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The District of Mount Pearl North is a showcase for many successful businesses. Today, I am highlighting just one.

Junior Reid took a chance 30 years ago by starting Reid Music. Music is Junior's life, a dream come true for him. The business is the cornerstone to the community.

Mr. Reid is a long-time volunteer with the City of Mount Pearl, having volunteered with the Frosty Festival for well over 30 years. He also judged many awards that have focus on youth in our community. He has also played music for many senior events.

The family business continues to support Mount Pearl organizations by sponsoring events that have helped to shape our community. Reid Music started out in one room, but after four

years, his business grew to the point that he moved to a location at 835 Topsail Road, having expanded several more times at the same location.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in wishing congratulations to Junior and Gina Reid of Reid Music for over 30 years in business.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I sit in this hon. Chamber today to express my deep appreciation for the volunteer firefighters that serve to protect the communities of our beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

Placentia West - Bellevue has a total of 16 volunteer fire departments, each made up of brave and selfless men and women whose goal is to ensure the safety of the residents in their communities and travelling public.

The saying firefighters save more than homes; they save hearts, memories and dreams is a great explanation of the impact a firefighter can have on one's life.

Just within the last few weeks, the Southern Harbour Volunteer Fire Department accepted two new recruits, Christopher Penny and Brad Peach, into the ranks of their brigade. Congratulations, gentlemen, for stepping up to serve your community, neighbours and visitors.

I invite all Members of this hon. House to join me in showing our gratitude for those who serve with a volunteer fire department, not only in Placentia West - Bellevue, but throughout this beautiful place we call home, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

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

I am pleased to recognize the achievements of Inuit artists from Labrador at the exciting INUA exhibition in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Opened in March and comprising 8,000 square feet, INUA is the single largest gallery space for Inuit art.

Among the 90 artists invited to participate from Canada, Alaska and Greenland are several of Labrador's finest, including two from Lake Melville. Shirley Moorhouse of Happy Valley-Goose Bay is known for her mixed-media wall hangings that combine traditional and modern elements to create beautiful artwork. Michael Massie is a sculptor, also from Happy Valley-Goose Bay, who incorporates elements of traditional life in Labrador.

Three other respected artists from Nunatsiavut, Eldred Allen, Glenn Gear and Bronson Jacque, also have profiled their work in various media. The exhibition is attracting national and circumpolar attention.

Heather Igloliorte, one of the co-curators also from Happy Valley -Goose Bay said: "Together these artworks celebrate our past, survey the present and speak to an exciting future for Inuit art."

Congratulations to these artists and curators for assembling this exciting showcase for all to enjoy and appreciate.

Nakummek.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize April 22 as Earth Day. This year's theme is Restore Our Planet.

As our climate changes, we are working to preserve our environment, coastal and protected

areas, and to reduce waste in Newfoundland and Labrador. We all can play a part in protecting our land, air and our waters while preserving spaces that we cherish in our communities.

I just came from visiting St. Paul's Junior High School who were doing a community cleanup in honour of Earth Day.

Mr. Speaker, our government is moving forward with innovative technologies and initiatives in our province to adapt to the effects of climate change and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We are committed to the net-zero emissions by 2050 and we have taken action on 43 of the 45 items in our Climate Change Action Plan. Our plan will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, stimulate clean innovation and growth, and build resiliency to climate change impacts.

We were pleased to see increased investment in the federal budget for the green economy to support our efforts here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Our government has announced six programs for energy efficiency and fuel switching. By 2030, these programs are anticipated to deliver 830,000 tons of greenhouse gas reductions.

We are also working to convert schools and municipal and provincial public buildings from oil heat to electric heat and to improve energy efficiency.

On Earth Day and every day, we can all be environmental stewards. We share a responsibility to protect our environment for future generations by making greener choices each and every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I join with the minister to recognize Earth Day in our province. Not only today but every day we need to acknowledge the dangerous impacts our planet is facing due to climate change. The Innu and Inuit of Northern Labrador are already

living with the impacts of climate change and our province needs to listen and learn. Climate change is here and if steps are not taken our very way of life is threatened.

This government talks on the progress they are making on fighting climate change, and every action does, indeed, help, but they need to do more. Mr. Speaker, this government has been in power now for almost six years and in those six years they have yet to clearly outline specific CO₂-equivalent reduction targets. We need to hear from this government on what actions they are taking while also qualifying the reductions of these actions.

Until this government produces a plan, which quantifies the reduction in CO₂ equivalence, clearly outlining how the province will meet its Paris climate targets, they are doing the people of our province a disservice.

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, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement and join him in recognizing Earth Day and the need for all of us to be environmental stewards.

However, lofty sentiments do ring hollow when government also speaks of clean oil, subsidizes wealthy oil companies, faces judicial challenges for failing to perform proper environmental assessment of aquaculture projects, undermined the work of WERAC and, most recently, breaks its own rules in allowing an ATV trail through the protected Main River watershed.

We need to do better.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

G. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, getting people back to work is crucial for the province's post-pandemic economic recovery. Part of that means making sure that we provide students with opportunities to enter the workforce and for businesses to harness the talents of students to assist them in that process.

In response to the unique challenges created by COVID-19, this year our government increased funding and flexibility for student employment programs. This change will help create over 600 additional jobs, securing summer employment for some 1,600 post-secondary and high school students in our province.

With a one-time increase to the Workforce Development Agreement, funding for this year is set at over \$3.7 million, which is up from \$2.1 million last year.

As a result, we are increasing wage supports for the private sector employers. They are now eligible to receive a wage subsidy of up to 75 per cent of the student's hourly wage, to a maximum of \$12.50 per hour. This is up from a 50 per cent wage subsidy in past years. In addition, our not-for-profit organizations continue to be funded at 100 per cent, to the same maximum of \$12.50 per hour.

This year, we are also expanding eligibility to include part-time employment. Under the previous rules, all summer employment must be full-time, a minimum of 25 hours per week. As we know, students are engaged in part-time studies, and part-time employment is important.

Mr. Speaker, the valuable experience high school and post-secondary students gain from the summer jobs will help them pursue their chosen careers, right here at home.

These enhanced employment programs provide working and learning opportunities, while bringing the energy and enthusiasm of students to businesses and to not-for-profit organizations who are working towards economic recovery. I encourage all employers in our province, in communities throughout the entire province, to apply online before the deadline of May 11 this year.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I join the minister in recognizing the importance of getting more students to work with enhanced employment programs here in this province.

Students have been disproportionately affected during the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to employment. We need to be steadfast in providing our young people with opportunities: opportunities to obtain education, to live here, to work here and to remain here. An increase in funding to create 600 additional jobs for students in our province is very welcome news. Our young people are one of the most treasured resources. Let's get to work to ensure they have a bright future right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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 thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement and I applaud a program which provides students with opportunities to enter the workforce, and helps our province recover from the pandemic.

However, as most of us know, the post-pandemic economy is proving to be very expensive, especially for those on fixed income and those earning a minimum wage and for our students. Now is the time, I believe, to act boldly and implement a \$15-per-hour minimum wage for our students and our other minimum wage workers. Our students and our workers are worth that investment.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Other statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to speak in this hon. House today to recognize April 18 to 24 as National Volunteer Week.

This year's theme – The Value of One, The Power of Many – reflects the inspiring acts of kindness by each individual volunteer throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and the impact they have when working toward a common goal.

Mr. Speaker, I have seen how volunteers make a difference in our province, especially during this past year as we have faced the challenges of COVID-19. The individual and collective efforts they have put forth during the pandemic are phenomenal and I commend all of them for the outstanding contributions they continue to make for the benefit of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Volunteering also enriches our lives by helping us connect with and learn from others leading to personal and professional growth. I would like to thank the Community Sector Council of Newfoundland and Labrador who have been fostering volunteerism and cultivating leadership since 1976. I might be remiss if I didn't thank them for also highlighting the volunteers in Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair this year, Mr. Speaker, I had nothing to do with it, but it was lovely to see.

Their vision is for an inclusive society, which supports individuals, families and communities and our government shares this vision wholeheartedly. On Tuesday, the Premier and Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development and Minister Responsible for the Community Sector signed a proclamation to recognize this week and the incredible volunteers who make our province strong and vibrant.

I invite all Members of this House to join me in celebrating our province's wonderful volunteers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. I join with the minister in recognizing the thousands of volunteers in our province and the impact it has on the many organizations and groups meeting their goals.

In each and every community there are organizations, fire brigades, church groups, seniors groups, councils and many others that provide valued leadership. Volunteers are a major asset for success.

Our kids develop skills because of volunteers and it leads to an inclusive society. Support for our children, youth, adult, seniors and their very different needs are made possible by volunteers. During this pandemic it's important we recognize all volunteers that have been risking their own health to ensure the safety of others.

It would be remiss of me to not recognize the many volunteers that work countless hours to ensure all of our election to this office to allow us all to work on behalf of the people of this great province we call home, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. I can say from personal experience that my own district has benefited enormously from the contributions of volunteers. Without their tireless efforts, communities across this province would be a much less vibrant and pleasant place to live.

Though it often goes without recognition, our volunteers actually provide a wide range of social services. Unfortunately, we've come to

this situation because successive governments have failed to address the shortcomings of our social support systems.

We understand the hard work of these volunteers and we thank every one of them in this province that stepped up to the plate in supporting our neighbours when the systems have failed them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Other statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Media reports today have shed a light on the failure of the government to adequately provide search and rescue helicopter services for the Northeast Avalon, which have been absent for over a year. Last month, Transportation officials said they were working with St. John's Regional Fire Department to address this issue. Now we learn this is not correct.

I ask the Premier: Who is telling the truth on this critical matter of public safety?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

First, let me pass my condolences on behalf of the province and on behalf of this House, I think, to the life that was lost, or certainly seems to be at this particular moment in time. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family during this tough time.

As it pertains to what has actually happened with respect to the negotiations between the City of St. John's, the firefighters and the government, we're certainly looking at everything right now. As I understand it, there was a helicopter contract in place.

There is certainly space to improve on where we are, and the Minister of Justice and Public Safety is certainly looking at that right now, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The chief of the St. John's Regional Fire Department said she had not heard from provincial officials since October of last year.

Again, these words may mean something that the Premier just said, but why is this critical issue allowed to go on for so long? Who is looking into this?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to send my thoughts and prayers to the family who is going through a very difficult time right now. As we all know, we live in a province with oceans surrounding us. It has given us a lot, but it has taken a lot as well. I hope the family can get through the next few days and what the future holds for them.

I do want to reassure, as the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, that the search and rescue services are available on the Northeast Avalon and they are available throughout the province.

I hope that the Member opposite isn't conflating the issues here for political purposes. The issue with the St. John's Regional Fire Department is completely different from the issue that arose last night. Last night, after this incident was reported to the RNC, marine support was requested and it was provided. Extra support was offered in the form of air support, and that was provided as well.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's concerning for a comment like that to come from across the way. My colleague from Cape St. Francis is the Member representing that area and is quite familiar with that area and a former Member who was from Flatrock. These are two separate stories, if you read the news they came out in two separate issues.

This happened to be coincidental and maybe it's timely, who knows, but it's a very unfortunate situation. But never tie this to me playing politics with someone's lives. I take great offence to that and I think anyone listening should feel the same way.

Mr. Speaker, in describing the seriousness of the situation, the current deputy chief of the RNC described the situation as life and death. Again, these are words of experienced professionals.

Why has the government sat idly by for months while companies like Cougar have aircraft ready, willing and able?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I was advised of this tragic event last night, one of the first things I did was reach out to the Member for Cape St. Francis and we did have a conversation this morning because I do understand he is the Member for that area and I wanted him to be aware of it. I do understand he was there last night on the scene and I thank him for that. He was there again this morning. Again, I'm happy to reach across the isle and work with everybody, especially the Members that are specific to that area.

I do want to reassure everyone that there is search and rescue available in this province. The issues that were put forward by the letter from the St. John's Regional Fire Department are separate, distinct and very discreet. We will work with the St. John's Regional Fire Department and the city going forward, my

department as well as the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I point out, it's also the RNC that made complaints, not just the fire department. Also, out of the frustration with the failure to act, Mayors Breen, Aker and Bobbett wrote the Premier on March 17 indicating that contrary to government's statements to the media, there have not been any communications and there were no clear protocols in place.

Again, I ask the Premier: Why is life and safety of the public been put at risk for so long?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The letter was received, it was sent to the Premier's office and there was a letter that was sent back to them to respond to it. Again, that's something that we're going to be working with them going forward, but it is a very specific and discreet issue related to rope teams at the St. John's Regional Fire Department. Last night, was not an issue where rope teams were requested. The appropriate services were requested by the RNC and they were provided.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

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

Mr. Speaker, I was happy to see the Minister of Justice finally acknowledge there were issues with this election despite his difficulty in seeing what's obvious to everyone in the province. He

has now taken the lead of the All-Party Committee but has not stated an independent investigator will be called in to independently review the election.

I ask the minister: Do you agree an independent investigator should be called in to review the election?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I stated yesterday here in this House, there is an independent investigator, actually four, they're called Supreme Court judges. They will do an independent review of the legalities around the 2021 election.

I look forward to Members of the opposite side of this House to join in the All-Party Committee to review the facts of the 2021 election, as we move forward to modernize the Elections Act here in this province to provide the most access to voters in Newfoundland and Labrador with the ability to make it as easy as possible for them to vote in the next election and future elections.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, the minister is not off to a good start if he does not recognize the importance and necessity of having an independent, impartial, external review of this election.

Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer is an Officer of the House of the Assembly, whose appointment is voted on by this hon. House. It is therefore the power of this House of Assembly to suspend the Chief Electoral Officer while the review –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: – of the election takes place, as his conduct is subject to the review.

I ask the Minister of Justice: Do you believe it is inappropriate for someone under investigation to be part of their own investigation?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member opposite knows, there are court cases ongoing at Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador and the CEO that she speaks of is a named individual in that. So what I think is appropriate is for the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of this province to not interfere with ongoing court matters in this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, surely the Minister of Justice understands the power of the House of Assembly to suspend the CEO while the review of the election takes place. That is the venue and the proper form for that to be done.

Mr. Speaker, on January 6, Bruce Chaulk asked for an extended election, which the Premier ignored. On January 15, the federal government issued modeling to show a two-month spike in COVID-19 cases across the country, which the Premier also ignored. If the Liberals ignored warning signs leading into this election, why should the people of Newfoundland and Labrador trust the Liberals to lead this election review?

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

J. HOGAN: I think the Premier has answered that question on numerous occasions. Again, we are looking forward to doing the review to modernize the Elections Act. I am very pleased

that the Premier has tasked me with that. Again, we have tasked an All-Party Committee to get involved with that as well, and we hope that all the Members are happy with that, seeing as that they asked for it yesterday, and satisfied with the first step towards fulfilling this task and the mandate that the Premier has given me.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We were shocked to recently learn that successive premiers had secret talks about storing toxic nuclear waste in Labrador. Records recently released showed that the former Premier Ball and current Premier Furey had talks with former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien about the proposal.

Mr. Speaker, why is government satisfied to have Labrador as an environmentally friendly battery for electricity for North America on one hand, but serve as a toxic dump on the other hand?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

I welcome the opportunity to clarify. Perhaps I wasn't clear in the media. Absolutely not on my watch.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Secret talks without consultation, Mr. Speaker, we have to question what he says.

Mr. Speaker, the Nunatsiavut Government has spoken out about the lack of legally required consultation on this project. Labrador has a sad history of large-scale environmental pollution, abandoned and contaminated military sites and,

recently, the failure to mitigate methylmercury from Muskrat Falls.

Why is the Premier ignoring clearly defined legal rights and repeating past failures to consult Labradorians, especially Indigenous groups? If he is having talks, he should be consulting Indigenous people and Labrador's people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

Let me say again: Absolutely not on my watch.

There is no consultation because there are no discussions – frankly, plain and simple. I don't know how to be anymore frank than that. Not on my watch. Labrador is nobody's dumping ground and that's why there were no consultations because it's not even being entertained.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The original terms or the Greene report call for an interim report to be delivered by February 28 and the final report due by April 30. Yesterday the minister said it could be received a few days or a few weeks following April 30.

Considering the Premier has had discussions with Dame Greene, either the Premier has changed the Terms of Reference or Dame Greene is ignoring them, which is it?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Moya Greene report, which is made up and comprised of – the task force is comprised of some incredibly strong, intelligent and gifted Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They're going to give us the information that they have

found, that they have discovered, that they have reviewed and that they have consulted with people around the province. They're going to give that to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As the Premier has indicated on multiple times – multiple times – that we will be consulting with people, we'll have a large discussion with people and we'll debate it and review it in this House of Assembly. The Premier is committed to that, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, certainly, this is not going to be delayed as the Muskrat Falls reports, and Muskrat Falls was delayed. We're certainly going to look forward to having good, open consultations and discussions when we receive the report in due course.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, the people of the province deserve transparency on the Greene report, and the government keeps changing its mind on when it's going to be received, whether it's an interim report, a final report.

They pushed back the release of the Greene report until after the election and now they seem determined to push it out until after the budget.

So I'd ask the minister: Why or what are you hiding?

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

S. COADY: Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite is putting out false information. It is simply not true. As everyone in this province knows, we were in lockdown due to COVID. There has been some delay in getting the interim report. I don't expect there'll be any delay in getting the final report. It's expected to be received within the next couple of weeks. We all know that – all know that.

We have said quite clearly, quite sincerely and quite fulsome –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

S. COADY: I know they are chirping across the hall. I can hear them say this. But we have been very clear. We have asked very great Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to consult with others to bring forward a plan to help us with the financial mess that the Members opposite were responsible for creating.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, we still don't know whether we're getting an interim report or a final report and sometime after April 30.

So again I ask the minister: Can you confirm whether it's an interim report or a final report?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

S. COADY: I can still hear them chirping over there, Mr. Speaker; it's disrespectful.

We have good, solid Newfoundlanders and Labradorians looking at how to make sure that Newfoundland and Labrador is strong, vibrant and self-sustaining into the future. I can tell you they're looking at an awful mess left behind by the Progressive Conservative government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

S. COADY: Just think about this, Mr. Speaker. We have to find almost \$600 million a year just on rate mitigation, let alone paying for Muskrat Falls. Now we have this stellar group of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

S. COADY: The Members opposite are being disrespectful.

I can say to you that I understand from Moya Greene and her team that the report will be received in due course within the next number of weeks and we'll be consulting on that.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

We had a great example of respect yesterday afternoon, I thought, led by the Opposition, I have to say.

Yesterday in this House, the minister said, "There is a denture program. It supplies a set on a regular basis at the request of the individual and a dentist." However, what he failed to note is that is limited to only individuals on the Foundation Plan of the NLPDP and only provides standard dentures once every eight years.

Imagine having to wait eight years to properly eat a meal. This program, as slashed by the Liberals in 2016, fails our seniors.

I ask the minister: Will you do the right thing and reinstate the full Adult Dental Program in this province?

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

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

We have a modest number of people for whom we provide benefits, and dental care is one of those. We are compatible in terms of our range of services with five other jurisdictions and better than three.

I have repeatedly said in this House that we are constrained by our fiscal envelope. As that solves itself over the course of the coming mandate, as we deal with the financial issues that we inherited back in 2016 and are still plaguing us, then we may be able to do more. I look forward to being able to present those to the House in the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate that information.

This week is Information Management Week and it has come to the attention of the Official Opposition that there have been 86 separate data breaches within the Department of Digital Government and Service NL in the last three years alone.

I ask the minister: Why is the Liberal government failing to protect the private information of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Information management is incredibly important. It's important for all public servants; it's important for private organizations as well. We certainly take any data breach very seriously. I'm not aware of that number. I'll certainly look into that for the Member.

We take the information of the residents of this province extremely seriously. We have a comprehensive cybersecurity program in place to prevent attacks. I would encourage all Members and all government employees to be really mindful about the emails they get, the attachments they open and the links they click on. Protecting our data is everyone's responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: On October 1, 2020, WERAC submitted a proposal to government for approval. Six months later now have passed.

I ask the minister: What is the status of this report?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for the question. I'm all caught up here in my earpiece. It's not functional down in this end, but thank you very much.

This being Volunteer Week, I'd like to say thank you to the WERAC volunteer group that does some great work in our community. We're in the process of cluing up the consultations in that area. I look forward to them presenting that report and their findings of what they've heard in the near future.

Thank you very much for the question. Very important.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Safety is extremely important for our vehicles on our highways throughout the province; in particular, on the Burin Peninsula, we have treacherous winter weather. Total whiteouts are a common occurrence on the Burin Peninsula.

Will the government commit to upgrading cell services on the Burin Peninsula highway for not only Fire and Emergency Services, but for the general public?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the question from the Member opposite. I think it's a concern that a lot of us

share, including myself, especially all over rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

What I can say is that we have made great strides over the past few years. Phase I of the cell service program is now complete. I believe I spoke in the House about Phase II, which has been announced and we are working through.

What I can say is, number one, we know that the federal government has invested another further billion dollars on Monday in the budget to go towards broadband and connectivity, which I think can be applied towards this. What I will also say is that we are very bullish on the idea of connectivity in this province, whether it is broadband, whether it is cell service. The reality, as we all know, especially in a post-COVID world, is that we need more connectivity for safety reasons, for social reasons and for economic reasons.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: With that being said, the program that's in place, Minister, is cost shared and is applied for by towns. I'm just wondering who would be applying for the Burin Peninsula highway?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, that's one of the challenges that we face is that we have a terrific number of kilometres of highway; in fact, 10,000 kilometres of highway. A number of those kilometres are in areas – I look at the Member for down in Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, the same as myself, we have long stretches and it's difficult. The reality is should government just invest in long stretches of highway just on its own?

Right now, I think we have a number of challenges with communities and other populated areas that we need to work on, but I do share the concern for the Member. What I

will say is it's a concern that we're working on, but it requires partnerships. It requires partnerships with our federal government; it requires partnerships with the providers, as well as municipalities and citizens. I think we all have a role to play in ensuring that we have that coverage.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, a number of my constituents have concerns with the length of time it takes to get a hearing test in this province, specifically seniors. Western Health's own website states wait times are very lengthy for routine referrals, which acknowledges the problem quite clearly.

I ask the minister: What is the average wait time for a hearing test in our province and what is being done to reduce the wait times?

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

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

We are aware of challenges with recruitment of audiologists. We, through our processes in the department, had a request for proposals to go out to seek extra audiological support from the private sector. That was held up as a result of some issues with the RFP. That RFP will be going out again in the near future.

It will produce a significant reduction in the number of people waiting and the time they wait. I don't actually have the accurate figures in front of me, but I can certainly go and get them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I'd say to the minister that's little consolation to a senior who can't hear

anything for 12 or 14 months. A reduction in the services is creating great problems and being able to enable these seniors to go to a private clinic or elsewhere to get a test would certainly reduce the backlog for infants and other people that need it.

I'll ask the minister again: Can you give us a time frame when public or private entities will be able to do these tests?

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

J. HAGGIE: The short answer to that is no. I can tell him that whatever date I gave him today would be wrong simply because I don't have complete control over the process. It depends on who responds to the RFP and whether or not they fit within the parameters and are eligible and those kind of things.

It is a priority, the Member opposite is quite correct. It has been a challenge to recruit the skills that we need. One of the other directions we're taking is to try and train these people in-house in the province, because in general in health we know that if we train these folk and these skills locally, we keep them. That's another line of approach, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have been contacted by an interim physiotherapist who advises that there's a backlog of more than 3,000 candidates who have been waiting over a year to challenge the national exam required to become a licensed physiotherapist.

Is the minister aware of this issue? What is he going to do to address the shortage of licensed physiotherapists in the province?

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

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

Yes, we have been made aware of this situation. Unfortunately, physiotherapy is a self-regulating profession and the remedies are outside our immediate control.

What I can say is we are aware that people who have passed the local exams but not yet passed their national certifying exams are able to practice in controlled environments. We are working to see what options exist through their national body, Mr. Speaker, to speed the process up. We are aware of it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was pleased to hear in the news this week from the Minister of Health that we have a significant boost in the supply of vaccines, and that he will be asking pharmacists to assist in giving those inoculations.

I ask the minister: What assurance can he give that all pharmacists will be vaccinated in time to also give the vaccinations?

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

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

We are expecting a large influx of vaccine in May. Exactly when, we're not sure, but it could be in the second half. We have an open call for Phase 2 coming this week.

As far as pharmacists are concerned, the regional health authorities have been working with PANL, the Pharmacists' Association, to identify pharmacists within their boundaries to make sure that they have received a vaccine prior to the arrival of this big surplus.

It's a work in progress, I don't have an update on where we are with that. Certainly, I can go back to PANL and the RHAs and ask for that. Happy to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In my short time here in this House, I've asked this question to a couple of different ministers. Route 60 through Topsail - Paradise, through Topsail in my district, is pitted with potholes, it has erosion of the shoulders and it presents safety issues for drivers and pedestrians.

I ask the current minister responsible: What commitment will he give to the residents of Topsail - Paradise that this road will be looked at in the very near future?

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

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

I will say, that presentation in terms of potholes, it's a reality in a lot of areas of this province. But as I committed to you on a side conversation, I'll go have a look at it with you, I'll be glad to do so and I look forward to that. So, yeah, I have no other commitments than that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've heard many promises of public consultation on the Premier's Economic Recovery task force report, or the Greene report.

Will the Premier outline, please, the plans for the consultation process?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

We are looking at a combination and, frankly, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board is going to lead this, but we're happy to reach across the aisle and work with Members opposite to facilitate the public consultation.

As I said many times, every Newfoundlander will have a chance to have their say on the Greene report as we develop strategies moving forward to create sustainable opportunities for families here in this province, Mr. Speaker. We look forward to engaging Newfoundlanders with many different platforms, including public consultations in town halls, should COVID restrictions apply and allow. We would also look at doing things like online portals and telephone consultations, if required, where online would be an issue to ensure that we give every Newfoundlander the ability to have a say on this report when they want.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Labrador West is in the midst of a housing crisis, today low-income individuals have been evicted from units as they are being sold off to highest bidder. There are currently more families on the list than NL Housing units in Labrador West. With no emergency shelter in the region, I have repeatedly warned previous ministers and NL Housing of this upcoming situation.

Why did this government allow the situation to happen?

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question. I was actually in Housing at the time, in the spring of '19, when we signed a \$270 million – the most

historic, largest agreement in our history between the feds and the province for Housing. That nine-year agreement, we're going to be rolling out three, three-year action plans.

As I outlined in this hon. House, maybe earlier this week, Mr. Speaker, we have made tremendous strides. We have specific targets in that three-year action plan to expand, to preserve. We do have some challenges. We have a housing stock that is 50 or 60 years old, Mr. Speaker. We have a demand, as our families have shrunk, for one and two bedroom and we have many larger.

Right now, in Labrador West, we have – actually the job has started, I misspoke earlier and said the job was starting on those units the end of May. It has started and we expect it to be clued up by the 27th of May.

SPEAKER: Your time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, the people of Labrador West are done hearing this phoned-in rhetoric from this government. We have families and children homeless in Labrador West; kicked out of houses because the market is high. They are living on the streets.

Again, I ask why this government ignored warnings from the people of the district, from people from Labrador causing families to be living on the streets because they continued to ignore the realities we face in Labrador.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is not rhetoric when we have gone out – 10 units – and we have brought in an external contractor. It has been awarded, the contractor is onsite; they have actually started work on five of the units. That's not words, that's action, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we've been doing in

the area of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing: has been action.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: With regard to five other units, Mr. Speaker, we're going to be doing those in-house. There are nine units that remain sitting in Lab West that require a major, major overhaul. Those are being looked at, Mr. Speaker. I believe we've made tremendous strides towards addressing the housing issues, right now, currently, in Labrador West.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Time for a quick question, no preamble, please.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, in response to the fact that cohorts are not being maintained during lunch-hour breaks, five junior high schools in the St. John's metro area are being asked to decide on condensing the instructional day to approximately five hours, which will mean that the five schools will, because they have busing schedules, have to accommodate this change and will mean confining students to their classroom for five straight hours.

SPEAKER: Get to your question, please.

J. DINN: I ask the Minister of Education to explain how this is conducive to effective learning and to the mental and physical health of these school communities.

SPEAKER: Time for a quick response.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've all seen the pictures of children not cohorting at lunch hours. I believe the Member across himself has raised this as a concern. We can control what we can control, Mr. Speaker,

and that is when the students are inside of school, we can control the cohorts.

One of the ways we can help reduce the crowding at lunchtimes, Mr. Speaker, is to shorten the lunch break and provide an earlier release for the end of the day.

Members of the union that you were former leader of, Mr. Speaker, in a number of these schools have accepted that proposal by the English School District. There was one that didn't who felt that this was a good way to protect the students when not in the jurisdiction of the school by eliminating the crowding outside during lunch hours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

SPEAKER: I do have a couple.

In accordance with section 105 of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015* and section 82 of the *Personal Health Information Act*, I am pleased to submit for tabling the 2019-2020 Annual Report for the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Secondly, pursuant to section 43 of the *Citizens' Representative Act*, I am pleased to table the Citizens' Representative Annual Digest for 2019-2020.

Any other tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

**Answers to Questions for which Notice has
been Given**

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would just like to provide some additional information to the question the Member raised.

In terms of the 87 over three years, that was manual data breaches. When we look at Motor Registration Division, in particular, we do three million transactions a year. That was 87 times, for example, an employee made a manual mistake and they emailed the document to the wrong email address, for example. Maybe they mistyped it or something.

Data breaches are very serious; we take it very seriously. Those are training opportunities. We look at performance management then. But I just want to reassure the general public that we're not aware of any data breaches or anything like that, or security breaches. These were manual errors, 87 over three years, of three million transactions, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the Member for Torngat Mountains question yesterday about the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Thank you.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you again for your protection there, Mr. Speaker.

It's an important question and it's an important answer. There was \$200,000 for a pre-feasibility study announced in *Budget 2020*. That will be going ahead. I don't have a date to give you, but it will be issued this year and we intend to get it done, absolutely.

SPEAKER: Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a little bit more time today.

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador who urge our leaders to ensure that fair electricity rates be provided to the Torngat Mountains' residents in the Northern Labrador 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 adequately heating their homes. The rationale for this petition is to bring electricity rates more in line with what our neighbouring residents of Lake Melville region pay.

For the first thousand kilowatt hours, Torngat Mountains' residents are charged the same rate as our neighbouring residents of Lake Melville region. However, above the ceiling of 1,000 kilowatt hours, Torngat Mountains' residents then pay six times the rate that Lake Melville residents pay, jumping up to 18.5 cents a kilowatt hour. The thousand-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 to haul wood are the greatest impacted.

Poorly heated houses often result in damage, creating expensive repairs for frozen pipes, 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.

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to

increase the lifeline block to 3,500 kilowatt hours when applying the Northern Strategic Plan subsidy to the electricity bills of Northern Labrador residents of the Torngat Mountains region.

Mr. Speaker, I have a couple minutes left to speak on this petition. Greatly impacted are our seniors, our elders, because they don't have the ability to haul wood. If they do have relatives that can haul wood for them, they still have to actually bring it in and put it in the stove, which causes a lot of problems. People with health issues and age-related issues, they don't have that option. Also, women, single women, single families are greatest impacted as well.

This is a good petition and it would go a long way to help people in my district. I presented this several time –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The level of chatter is getting pretty high. I can't hear the speaker.

L. EVANS: I presented this petition several times now and I was wondering why there is no interest in increasing the lifeline block that would make life so much easier for women, mothers, our seniors and our elders.

There is talk going around, and many are hearing that Labrador electricity rates are being looked at and there are plans to increase Labrador electricity rates, so we are wondering know: Is that why the Premier and this government will not consider increasing the lifeline block to 3,500 kilowatt hours for North Coast residents, making life so much more easier and convenient for single families, our elders and our most vulnerable?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to take a quick moment to respond to the petition that was just put in there. Obviously this an issue that we are aware of. We are aware of the petition for a 3,500-kilowatt-hour lifeline block as opposed to the thousand right now. I could get into a lot of discussion about the rural deficit; the fact is that the cost to provide this is extraordinary.

We could talk about the difference of rates, but what I would like to say to the Member, just about the last part of the petition, talking about Labrador electricity rates are being looked at: Right now, electricity rates all over this province are being looked at, because we have to grapple with Muskrat Falls coming on stream and the money that we are going to need to mitigate those rates so that everybody in this province – every citizen – is not frozen out of their homes. That is the reality here.

I share the concern that the Member brings, but every single citizen is worried about the albatross that is Muskrat Falls and the hundreds of millions of dollars that will be required on an annual basis to mitigate those costs to keep them at the level that we have committed to, which, I would note, we are not backing away from.

On that note, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

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

Mr. Speaker, the background to this petition is as follows:

WHEREAS individual residents, municipal leaders, including the Conception Bay North Joint Council, have spoken to the deplorable road conditions in the District of Harbour Main; and

WHEREAS the district is made up of many smaller communities and towns like Holyrood, Upper Gullies, Seal Cove, Cupids, Colliers, South River, North River, Roaches Line and

Makinsons. Those places in particular have roads in desperate need of repair and paving; and

WHEREAS these roads see high-volume traffic flows every day and drivers can expect potholes, severe rutting, limited shoulders and many washed-out areas along the way;

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately take the necessary steps to repair and repave these important roadways to ensure the safety of the driving public who use them on a regular basis.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to congratulate the current Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. I'd also like to thank his predecessor, who, I believe and I want to state, has been very positive, and I want to give credit where it's due: He was instrumental in assisting in the work and making sure that brush cutting was done in the District of Harbour Main. The people of the District of Harbour Main appreciate that and the fact that he recognized the serious safety issues that were at play.

I'm asking the current minister to look at that same safety issue which is definitely evident with respect to the roads in the Harbour Main District. Throughout the election campaign, for example, other than COVID and the fact that we were having the election as we were and with all of the problems with that, the next biggest issue that I faced was people responding to the conditions of the road and how really deplorable they were.

Not only were they frustrated though; they were outraged that there's no action. They're concerned about safety issues. There are hazards that are caused by these roads. Large potholes that are difficult to avoid, swerving and severe rutting place people in jeopardy.

I'd ask the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to recognize this. This is not only the people in the district but all of the people who have to travel on these roads. The frustration level is high; people are upset. Please respond to the issues, especially with respect to

Upper Gullies to Holyrood, really serious problems. South River to North River and Roaches Line, those are the three key ones that really need to be addressed. We ask the Minister of Transportation to make a commitment and we call on you to respond and to give us some sense of optimism that these roads will be repaired, if not paved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

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

I have a petition here today.

As the Trans-Labrador Highway continues to be developed, there is an immediate need for basic roadside services within the extensive distances between communities. The two greatest unserviced sections are from Churchill Falls to Happy Valley-Goose Bay at 288 kilometres, and from Happy Valley-Goose Bay to Port Hope Simpson at 405 kilometres. There are no washrooms or emergency services over these distances. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, there is really nothing there. Accidents, mechanical breakdowns or basic conveniences have been challenging and even life-threatening to deal with.

While the province and their contractors operate depots at Cache River, Crooks Lake and Cartwright Junction, these facilities are not available to the travelling public. However, at each of these locations, stand-alone and independently operated facilities could be established by the private sector.

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to call for expressions of interest to provide essential services at these isolated locations on the Trans-Labrador Highway as soon as possible.

Very timely today, Mr. Speaker, because we have had a couple of questions dealing about the long distances between communities. Well, perhaps we set the record there on that. It's about a four- to five-hour drive if you're making

good time between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Port Hope Simpson across Route 510.

While we are working on getting the asphalt down, it is quite a state in terms of – if there are any reasons you have to stop, you are on your own, and that would be from washrooms – forget communications, as the minister alluded to earlier in that challenge, and certainly any other convenience or mechanical repair. You are on your own. We have, as a province, provided in the past satellite phones, which drivers were able to pick up and then drop off if and when they successfully completed their journey across the Trans-Labrador Highway. It is improving. We have a long ways to go.

I can just ask anyone in this room to think about what it would be like to leave St. John's, drive five hours west and then hope that you didn't have to stop for anything, because that really is the situation facing anyone having to make that distance.

The responsibility of the contractors is to fix the highways. I think it was 2017, maybe 2016. I'm just trying to recall. We had a serious washout on Route 510, about an hour and a half outside of Goose Bay. Some friends of mine were involved in it, where the highway literally blew away in front of them. Folks on the other side managed to scramble out of their vehicle, and their vehicle went downstream. They were completely cut off. The inability to respond and so on just further accentuated and exacerbated the problem they were in.

So I really hope we can get this resolved. There are folks out there with ideas and they could come forward, so just get that expression of interest going.

Thank you.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've been presenting this petition for quite some time, I guess since I came to this House of Assembly, and I don't feel that there has been much action on it.

The background of this petition is as follows:

WHEREAS there are no current operations at the Bull Arm Fabrication Site; this is a world-class facility with the potential to rejuvenate not only the local economy, but the provincial economy; there's a lack of employment there and we would want the facility to encourage employment for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; it's an asset to the province, it was built to benefit the province and a long-term tenant for the site would be gainful business opportunities for tertiary businesses in the area as well; and the continued idling of this site is not in the best interest of the province.

I even have somebody on here that signed this petition that's from Bloomfield, and that's not even in my district, so it obviously affects just about everybody in the province.

It's a world-class facility; we have world-class workers. Again, it comes back to the question I asked in the House today. The reason why we're not attracting international business, because we don't have the technology and the opportunity for them to come here and to do business away from their native country.

I ask the minister if he could give us an update on what he feels the direction is from Nalcor or OilCo to utilize this facility and get a long-term tenant.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll speak to this; I believe I have made comments about this in the past.

The sad reality is that this is an area that's dealing with this fiscal crisis that we face in the oil industry, the same as everywhere else. The fact is that it was great to see a drill ship going out now, but this is an issue worldwide, and sadly we see this happening at Bull Arm, which is a world-class facility.

I would point out that there is no technical issue that prohibits us from attracting international

business. In fact, we try our best, we are a part of virtual trade missions and we're a part of everything to try to draw that attraction here. But the reality is that the big players right now have reduced capital, they have reduced ability to invest here and they have reduced exploration budgets. Right now, we're competing all over the world, whether it's Guyana, Brazil, Norway, you name it.

We do know that Barnes is out there with a lease right now and they are a tenant at the moment. They do have a lease that expires next year and there are 27 employed out there right now – far from what it should be, but what I will say is that we are keeping the asset in a good state. The reality is we fully believe that we will have a return to what was and we will be prepared for it.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 5.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that under Standing Order 11(1) this House not adjourn at 5:30 o'clock, today, Thursday, April 22, 2021.

SPEAKER: The motion is that we do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m.

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, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Government House Leader, that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 10.

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

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.

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

A bill, "An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity And Administration Act." (Bill 10)

CLERK (Barnes): Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Opposition House Leader.

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

Mr. Chair, I spoke on this at length yesterday and I have another opportunity today, of course, in Committee, to have further discussion. It comes back again and 24 hours later, you get a lot of time to think about stuff. Sometimes you

go and you soften up, sometimes you stay the same, sometimes you get more determined, but this is one of those ones – it's ironic, the last two days there have been a couple of things.

We debated yesterday on the PMR and this one happened to be all grouped together. There's one word that's missing and it's the independence – that's not being adhered to, I should say, and what's appropriate and what's not appropriate for the House. There are lots of things that are appropriate. We're lawmakers; we make a lot of laws, regulations and rules. We set wages; a lot of responsibility that comes with being a Member of this House.

As I have said many times, there are 40 of us in this House and we represent this province. No one should take this job lightly. You're put here for a reason. We just went through three months of learning how to get here. It's no easy task and it's something that we all should keep in mind. Regardless of what the court of public opinion states a lot of times – because I think if we governed ourselves by that on every issue, we'd probably be led astray too.

I'll come back and I think it needs repeating: independence has to be your guiding principle to get things right. Not everything. You can't have independence on everything, but on certain things. This is one of those ones. There's a time when you hear tell – and I know it has happened many times at the municipal level, counsellors would go in and they'd vote themselves a raise. As municipal counsellors, former mayors in this Chamber now, they can attest to what I'm saying – public outcry galore and rightfully so.

Yet, we prevent that. We bring in a process. We're going to prevent that from happening. We're going to form this commission. Good, bad, indifferent, whatever comes out of that commission, we'll accept what comes our way. There's a lot of bad that comes that way. I've said this yesterday, a lot of bad things come our way and we accept them. Yet, anything good comes you're not accepting it – it's a raise, okay. It's not about a raise, by the way. I don't think any Member in this House is advocating for a raise. It's all about a process.

You bring in an MCRC – Members' Compensation Review Committee – to take the

politics out of this. It's meant to take the politics out of it. It's supposed to be independent; they have no affiliation with us. I sat in this Chamber in 2016 and the head of the Members' Compensation Review Committee at that time – there was no love-in; government on the government's side didn't get treated any different than anyone else. It was pretty well by the book. You asked a question; you got an answer. I think any Member who sat through that can agree to it. There was no sugar-coating it; there were no favours. This person was in no one's court; she came in and made tough decisions. Fair enough. We accepted it and we agreed to it. That's the way it was supposed to be.

Like I said before, yesterday there was some talk about the pensions. They were trying to grandfather in pensions and people started crying out. It was only over a day or so but, anyway, everyone pulled back and we went along with the MCRC. If you go through *Hansard*, you can find out that it was said in this House that that had to be your guiding principle. But, now, when it's politically cool and looks good to say, no, we're not doing that; we're in a financial bind and we can't do that, you go in and search yourself politically. But that still doesn't make it right. You can't have your cake and eat it too when it fits the right time.

Mr. Chair, my gut would tell me if we were in a surplus situation and this House were to sit here and approve a raise, there would be a public outcry. It doesn't really matter the financial situation we're in, it's where we are as a Legislature. It's the society you live in and it's never – a no-no. It's meant to be independent, to remove all of that. If that Committee came back and wanted to take a rollback and we came in here and we voted against the Committee taking that rollback – we said we're going to keep the same wages – how would that be responded to? My guess is it wouldn't be very good.

As I said yesterday, it's a cherry-picking event. Again, I repeat, and I'll continue to repeat, it's not about a pay increase. That's not where we are. It's about a process. When it suits you, when you can bring the politics into something and it looks good and it's the right thing to do, then you're going to do it, but you have to keep your independence. I don't think that can be

stressed enough, the independence of this process. Right now, there's no independence. We're in a certain (inaudible) where it seems fit.

Many conversations – and we look in the media. Flick on Twitter now anywhere at all and you'll find out the public opinion on politicians is low. If you go into a quiz and they ask who is the lowest opinion in professions, it's politicians, it's lawyers – they're all there, which is not really fair because it's probably one bad lawyer or one bad politician. But we diminish ourselves by agreeing to do what we're doing, exactly what was brought forward in the House yesterday.

If you're entitled to a rollback, if you're supposed to get a rollback and it's done independently, well b'y, that's it. You've done it independently. Live with it. I come from a union background and we went into arbitration. You roll the dice. That's the game but it was done independently. That was even more hands on then. You negotiated for a raise, but an arbitrator would come back and you had to live with that decision. It was binding arbitration; you had to live with it.

This is really no different, only the fact is they ask you your opinion, whether they want it or not. They may have had it – I think that in 2016 it was a preconceived notion on a lot of this stuff, which is fine. It's something that's out of our control. A lot of us were new at the time so it was kind of a new experience for most of us.

It comes back to the process but it also comes back to each and every Member in this House diminishing what we are. So we're not worthy of that? An independent commission decides that you're entitled to a raise, but because it's not politically cool, the public doesn't like it –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I've got several conversations going on the floor and I'd like for it to cease, please.

Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

So if it was not cool then, you're going to go in now – where does this end? We saw it yesterday in the PMR and we pleaded for independence, we pleaded to get this right. The public should be asking for that. They'll ask for independence on election review, but throw the crowd in there out. They're overpaid anyway. They're over paid; they don't work. They only work when the House is open. That's what you hear.

It comes down to, Mr. Chair – and I said this yesterday. I was never a Star Trek fan but they always said, to boldly go where –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Second warning. I want to be able to hear the Member.

Thank you.

B. PETTEN: Thank you again, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

AN HON. MEMBER: Thank you for protecting me.

B. PETTEN: Yeah, that's right. No, I don't need protection.

As the saying goes, people inherit – it's a taboo topic in your talk. I spoke yesterday morning and I got a little bit of Twitter traffic: Look at the provincial state, how dare you advocate for a raise? I'm not advocating for a raise, but you have to stand for something, Mr. Chair. You have to be able to stand for something.

I was just about to say, before I was interrupted, I've never been a Star Trek fan but I always remember the quote: "To boldly go where no man has gone before." What's the matter with courage? I would bet money – I wouldn't bet a lot because I'm not that silly, but the majority of this House here agrees with what I'm saying. Just like the PMR yesterday – a majority agree with me on that, too, by the way. It's not cool to do it because you have to toe a party line.

Sometimes that is problematic with party stuff. But if you have any respect for yourself and this Legislature, that should be enough. I've said this in this House, and my colleagues can attest to this sometimes. I have very pointed opinions, and you've probably noticed that in my conversations in the House. I don't get a lot of coaching from anyone else. I kind of go my own way; sometimes it can be dangerous. You never know, it is a surprise every day.

I really believe you always should stand for something. Sometimes you stand for an issue, you stand for something and you may stand alone; that's fine too. Sometimes it is lonely, because I've been there. You go to bed at night, you sleep and you do what's right. That's like every step of the way of my life and no matter – it's not perfect, but I make lots of mistakes. I am guided by a very principled approach of what's right.

I spoke yesterday on it and I went home and I did give it honest reflection. I thought about it a lot last night and I wondered – I'm honest with myself and I said: Should I have not sucked it up and went along and done what the public and the willingness of government wants to do with this issue? Sometimes I have those moments and I'll come back, I'll have a different approach the next day and I'll be much more reserved. Actually when I went home and start thinking no, I must get really resolved to the fact that this is not right.

By doing what we're doing now, there is no need of us ever having an MCRC again. So unless we change a process – I've spoke to the Government House Leader opposite and I respectfully asked: no raises, don't give any raises, but delay this and put it off to a totally independent – let them decide on a go-forward basis. You have to live with whatever comes out of that, Mr. Chair.

You have to live with whatever comes out of that so if that means you're going to go back 2 per cent, you have to go back 2. That is a fair, independent process; that's what you sign up for. This is not the way this is being done; this is political. It is total politics, the truest form of politics you'll ever see. That's all this is, it's idealistic.

The vast majority over there, it doesn't affect them. The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands made that comment and he's right. That's not where I'm to; it's about the process. It is also having the courage. It frustrates me sometimes, and I sit in this House, why people don't really, truly say what they believe.

I've long said this and, who knows, I may be held to my word on it. I believe I will and I won't disappoint. If we were ever in government, if I was ever in government and I sat on the government side as a minister, I'd probably get myself into trouble. There are people close to me, very close to me, and we've had pretty heated debates over my frankness. The mayor of CBS mightn't be listening now, but he knows. Him and I have had down and out dirty rackets where, as the mayor, he said: I thought you were my buddy. But, I mean, I'm very principled. I speak my mind sometimes, and I'm not always cool, but I get into trouble for that.

I believe in this case here we need to look at things in a different lens and remove the silly games of politics out of this stuff. No one wins here, Mr. Chair. If you're not comfortable based on our financial situation and you don't think it's right, well, okay, defer it to another Committee, ask for it to be reviewed. There are lots of mechanisms that can be done. The will of this House – it's a powerful House; we can make any decision now. But to just come in and flippantly say no, we're not doing it because it's not cool. The public will support them.

I think the Question of the Day was on – I don't know if anyone followed it. I think I seen it earlier. I'd say it's about 90-odd per cent that said we don't deserve a raise. That's not the issue. It's not about the raise, it's about the process and it's about your rationale for doing it.

I know that the Members opposite will be looking forward to making a comment about the judges' raises. I can't control what was said on this side of the House because if it never came out of my mouth, I had no control over it.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

B. PETTEN: That's right.

But if we were told we had no right to bring this in the House, it shouldn't have been brought into the House. If we had no right to vote against it, why did it come into the House? But when it comes in the House, you have a right – anything that comes before us you have a right to vote, and we voted against it.

The principle of the matter is it comes from an independent tribunal. That's the bigger question. We have the ability to change the laws. It should never have come to this House. That should never have come to this House. The independent tribunal said they deserved the raise. We don't have to agree, but the independent tribunal said they deserved it; that meant it should have went on. I know the former minister of Justice was perplexed by it. Maybe he's right. But the issue was it should never have been put in front of us, because on the principle, if you're a principled person, you could not vote for that raise in this climate based on the salaries given to those people. That was the issue.

But if you want to change the laws and regulations, it doesn't have to come to this House; it shouldn't come to this House. If you're going to throw something out and you can't control the answer, you can't control the narrative, so why are you throwing it on the floor of the House of Assembly? Of all the places, to throw something out here and expect to get the answer you want, in a minority government, because that's what happened. Now, they got the majority they'll probably get that through. But I don't think it ever should come to the House. I personally don't think it should ever come to the House, and the government opposite has the ability to change that law.

This count here, there's no reason we're here debating this. We should not be in the Legislature debating whether we're entitled to a raise or not. I'm adamant about that. There was a process put in place to prevent this from ever happening, but because it's politically cool, it's good – you always curry public favour. Always curry public favour. If they decided tomorrow to try to bring a motion to cut every pay for MHAs, we would have parades in the streets. We need to be bigger than that, but we also need to do what's right and have the guts to stand up for

what you believe in and give yourself more credit than what we're giving ourselves.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I hadn't intended on speaking to this piece of legislation. My intent was to support my colleagues and stand up and to vote for it, which I will still do. But I feel it necessary to make some comments in regard to the comments made by the Opposition House Leader as it relates to the judges' tribunal, because it will relate specifically to that. Again, it was directly referenced there, because it was less than a year ago that I stood in this House as the minister of Justice at the time and I brought forward a resolution as it relates to the proposed raise for judges.

Now, I'll just point out some background for everybody there, because it's very familiar to what we are dealing with here now. Again, I'm just going to point out the irony of the situation that we're faced with now. The difference in some of the comments that were made then and the comments that are being made now this week. I'm not going to the substance, so much, of this particular thing, but I'm just talking about the comments as it relates to independence and principle and doing things right.

Back then, I had to stand up and do the very unpopular thing of bringing forward a raise for Provincial Court judges through a resolution in the House, which has been dictated by legislation for the last 30 years. Basically, there's a process where the judges get an individual, government gets an individual and there's an independent third party that's agreed by everybody. We have basically a review of the judges' salaries. I believe it happens basically during every session, usually on every four years.

So they came forward with a resolution last year. Again, completely independent, presented to government. It said that the judges were actually

entitled to a raise. I will point out that this was a completely independent process of government, of this House. It has to be done, there is no way around it, and failure to do it will result in the judge directing you to come back to this House and forcing you to do it. Again, you're just not going to get away. It's basically done for the same reason that the MCRC was put in place. That we need to have a process to look at this independently.

In that particular case, what I'll point out is just that I brought that resolution and entered it into the House. Not much was actually said the first day but on the second day and the third day, I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, I got carved up by the Opposition; I got carved to pieces. They're apologizing now. Well, I tell you what: the scars are still there.

They can say now it wasn't me, it wasn't me. It doesn't matter, it was the position of the team, which I respect. That's fine, that's their team position. I did not see anybody digress from that position in any public way or any private way. But what they did was these judges make a lot of money, we're in a fiscally tough climate, we don't care what an independent tribunal says; we cannot give them a raise. Do you know why they did that? Because it was politically popular; a politically popular move completely filled with politics.

The reason I say that is because I stood up and I took it at the time. I put it in there because the law said that I had to. Again, I remember the former Leader of the Opposition, and I'll give some credit to the other Members here because most of them, except for the Member for Harbour Main, are not trained lawyers, and there are times – and no disrespect to my colleague, I wish the Member was here right now so he can answer because he knew better. He knew better. He knew what he was doing and he did it anyway. He did it because he knew what it would cause, which would cause VOCM polls, saying: Is the current Minister of Justice ridiculous? Believe me, it was higher than 90 per cent. It was higher than 90 per cent, I can guarantee you.

The reality is that we got laughed out. It's funny because, again, the Member that used to sit in the chair, the former Leader of the PC Party,

said: Well, my God, I'm friends with judges, they're not going to sue. They're not going to do anything bad. Why would they? In fact, the current Member for Harbour Main said the judges will think we're doing them a favour. That was what was said to me: we're going to be doing the judges a favour. They don't want to have that. I said: Well, that's not the way it goes because this is going to end up in court. The former Leader, he said: No, I don't think this is going to end up in court, I'm friends with them.

Newsflash to the House of Assembly: It's in court. It is in court, just as we said, but it didn't matter. It didn't matter because it was good politics to go against that independent tribunal, which was not popular.

What I'll point out, and I don't need to belabour it, I don't need all the time, but I'll just point out that we talk about having respect for yourself and for the Legislature, and sometime it's lonely – was one of the quotes – and are very principled. Well, I certainly don't need any lessons on that today.

What I will say is that I did something and the other side tore me to pieces because it was popular. So to stand here and tell me today that I am not principled because I don't think I deserve a raise, I'll say: I will take my seat and I know that when I go to bed tonight, I will sleep very softly because, again, I'm doing what I think is the best thing for me and for the citizens that I represent.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am truly sorry that the Member is upset and scarred, but I think –

AN HON. MEMBER: He'll get over it.

P. DINN: Yes, you're right. He'll get over it.

I don't say that sarcastically, I really don't. We come into this House, we debate issues, and

whatever happens in the House should stay in the House. We leave and have a conversation outside.

I certainly wasn't around when this Committee was formed. When I got into this game, we'll call it, I was elected by the people to serve the people and that's all I'm going to do here. When we talk about our own wages, our own benefits – increased, decreased, deduction, kick you out, whatever – I really, really find that to be in a conflict of interest. I don't know why that comes on the floor here. Again, I say that not even thinking about if it's a raise or not. There is a certain amount of independence that we need to be doing with that in terms of forming a Committee.

If I may, I just want to go back to a press release from the House of Assembly, November 1, 2016. The title is: "Members' Compensation Review Committee ... Report Released." If I can read this to the record here, because I think this really puts in perspective what this is all about. I'm surprised we haven't talked about Muskrat Falls in this discussion yet, but we can throw anything into this discussion. But if you want to keep it real and focus on the issue, then the issue is there was a Committee appointed; people gave of their time to that Committee to carry out a mandate of that Committee; to provide a report, an independent assessment, to us. That's what it was.

I'm looking at this news release, and this will take the Minister of Education back because he was also Speaker at the time: "The Honourable Tom Osborne Speaker of the House of Assembly, today released the report of the 2016 Members' Compensation Review Committee (MCRC). Appointed in accordance with subsection 16(1) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, the Committee's mandate is to inquire into and prepare a report respecting the salaries, allowances, severance payments and pensions to be paid to Members of the House of Assembly. Such a committee is required to be appointed once during each General Assembly." It's quite clear what the Committee was intended to do.

"MCRC 2016 was appointed by resolution of the House of Assembly on May 12, 2016, with an effective date of July 7, 2016. The members

of the Committee are Ms. Sandra Burke, Q.C. (chair), Dr. Kathy LeGrow and Mr. Jeffrey Pardy. Their report was delivered to the Speaker on Friday afternoon (October 28)."

There are a couple of quotes here in this press release, one from the hon. Tom Osborne, then Speaker of the House of Assembly. "I wish to thank Ms. Burke, Dr. LeGrow and Mr. Pardy for their extensive work in conducting the review and preparing the report. I also wish to thank the public and the Members of the House of Assembly who provided input." Extensive work; we called on this Committee to do an extensive, important piece of work.

There's a quote from Ms. Sandra Burke, the chair: "Our goals were to ensure that Members of the House of Assembly have a reasonable and sustainable compensation package, and to enhance the accountability and transparency of our elected officials. We believe that we have achieved our goals, being mindful of the significant role of an MHA in our democratic society as well as the province's current economic circumstances." Which is something we've already discussed; the Committee took into account the current economic circumstances.

"The 2016 MCRC Report contains a total of 59 recommendations which will be brought to the House of Assembly Management Commission for review. The Commission has the power to modify the recommendations, but only in a manner that does not exceed the maximum amounts recommended by the Committee."

The reason I bring that forward is to try and bring us back – and there are so many new Members in this House that certainly weren't around in 2016 – to what this whole Committee was formed for. I know this is the House of Assembly and we take every opportunity to attack – I'll say attack, but maybe that's too much of an aggressive word, but to bring up other items, but I am trying to focus on this.

I don't care – and this will be in *Hansard* – if I'm getting a raise. I don't care if I'm getting cut back. I'm not here for that. I was elected by the people of Topsail - Paradise to bring their issues to the floor here. I'm committed to that, at least for the next four years or if there's an election

called beforehand. We have to have respect for the people we appoint to Committees, their extensive time that is put to these Committees, to bring an independent review to the floor. I know you can talk about the judges' salaries and so on, but the difference here is we should not be commenting or debating our own salaries.

I really find there's something wrong with that. I know my time on municipal council, I remember we had to vote on salaries. The last time we voted on it, I voted it down. I said: Why are we doing this? There are processes in place. I know in the public service, if NAPE gets an agreement, then management tends to get an equivalent raise. There's a process. I think we cannot lose sight of the fact that this Committee was appointed for a role, and they put forward a recommendation. Again, it can be modified, but I just think it's totally wrong that we're discussing something that, in my mind, is a conflict of interest for us all here.

I want to end, again, with saying: I am not for that. I'm here for the people of the province. If it's a raise, if it's a cutback, I don't care. I will be working the same job tomorrow as I am today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I won't take a lot of time at all, but I've heard some words across the way, like willing to stand up and be bold. Well, as a person that has been elected – I've been elected four times now – I'm bold enough to say here today quite clearly, now is not the time for us as MHAs and leaders in this province to increase our own pay. This is not the time, Mr. Chair.

We have evidence or we have *Hansard* from very similar comments from the former Member for Windsor Lake, when he talks about a tribunal

that was outdated. By the time it got to this floor, it was outdated.

Mr. Chair, I'll end again, and I'll repeat this as many times as I get the opportunity today, I have no problem standing in my place today and boldly saying: Now is not the time for MHAs to increase our pay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

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

There are just a couple of points I want to make about this. I've listened to my colleagues speak about this issue and I have to say that I share the views of my colleagues from Conception Bay South and as well Topsail - Paradise when they say this is a very uncomfortable effort that we make here. It's very uncomfortable for me and for them to be speaking about something like this, debating our own salaries.

I want to try to understand why this is being discussed here today, and I'm not really sure that it's clear to me. We do have an independent Committee, and for the benefit of those watching, that Committee was struck – it's an independent Committee – to basically oversee these types of matters. It's called the Members' Compensation Review Committee, the MCRC. We've heard it referred to a lot here the last couple of days. That is the purpose of that Committee. It is struck for the purpose of looking at things like the Members of the House of Assembly, our wages.

This legislation that's before us today, it's Bill 10, An Act to Amend the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act. This legislation before the House, what it really does, from what I can understand, is that it removes from the act the formula for providing MHAs with salary increases. The Government House Leader, when he introduced the bill, he indicated that this would be a continuation of a 13-year wage freeze, correct?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Yes. So if this bill passes, which it most likely will, it will continue that 13-year wage freeze for MHAs.

We're not saying that we believe that there should be an increase to the salaries, because we do recognize, as the Government House Leader has stated, that this is a terrible fiscal climate for the people of the province and we will put them first, because that's what we do. That's why we are here, is to think and be concerned about the interests of the people we represent.

What I find curious and perhaps disingenuous when I hear stated – the Government House Leader say that we need to lead. In other words, the statement is: we need to lead by example, right? But let's look at the salaries of Cabinet ministers. They're not affected to the same degree as other MHAs. I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair.

We need to lead, yes we do. That's why we are not disagreeing with it. What our concern over here is, is with the process. We have a Committee that has the responsibility and has been tasked with that responsibility to oversee these things so we're not debating our own salaries. Inherently, that is wrong.

Another issue that I want to state, and I find this somewhat sad as well – yesterday, the Member for Conception Bay South referenced it – there's no sympathy for politicians, and public opinion about us is pretty low. I'd probably say that it's at the same level as lawyers. I, as well, am a lawyer, so I have a double whammy here.

I find that really sad and I really feel that we need to, maybe, yes, be bold in that regard, and maybe perhaps talk and have more conversations about what we do as MHAs. Because I can tell you, I practiced law for many years as well, in the trenches as a criminal defence lawyer for 12 years, and then another five as a human rights lawyer. I know how tough that was, but I have to tell you, this is really tough work, but it's work that I'm honoured and privileged to do everyday. I love it, and I'm here because I feel that it's my responsibility to serve the people that elected me. It's not about the money.

I can pretty much say that stands for most people here, because I know that they have the demands of being an MHA – and I'm sure as a minister as well. It is tough. I don't think it's a bad thing to talk about, that we really do work very hard and that we have the best interests – I believe most of us have the best interests of the people in our hearts. I know the hours that we put in, the sleepless nights. I can vouch for that. I know that pretty much most of us here have those nights as well because we're concerned about the issues that face the people that we represent.

It's very sad when I look at the poll today on VOCM and I see that there's such disdain, I guess, for politicians. I believe it's because they don't understand what we do. I think that's incumbent upon us, perhaps, to bring the discussion more, have more debate about it and explain the things that we do, because it's important work; it's great work, but I think there needs to be a better understanding amongst the populace of what we do.

The concern that I have with this bill being passed has to do with attracting good, competent candidates to elected office. With salaries that are very low, how are we going to raise the bar, if you will, and attract people? Yes, I would say that most of us are here for the fact that we represent the people and that we want to serve people. It's the honour of public service. There's no question about that, but many people, perhaps, don't have the means to be able to do that, to run for political office. They need to have good salaries.

I think that it's okay to talk about that and to say we need to have adequate compensation for people, because it is no doubt a 24-7 job. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, there's no question about that. I've been doing this for two years, and when you're sleeping, you're thinking about it. At least I know I am, and I'm sure I'm no different than most people here.

I think we need to look at – and keep it in context. I'm concerned about the fact that we're back here and this legislation before the House removes from the act with respect to salary increases. I really don't believe that that's the proper way to be doing this. I think it puts all of us sort of in a conflict, really. It puts us in an

awkward position because we have an interest in it, in our own salaries, obviously. Yet, we're commenting about it.

I certainly don't want to be talking about it. I did want to talk about those issues, about trying to attract better candidates, qualified candidates and people to run for elected office, to attract women as well. As well the process, that process has to be independent, and that's why we have the Committee in place. I really find it difficult to understand what we're doing here.

At any rate, on those notes, in conclusion, I'd just like to thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time here today.

CHAIR: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Humber -

E. JOYCE: Humber - Bay of Islands.

CHAIR: Humber - Bay of Islands

E. JOYCE: I know of our soccer days you didn't want to come down to Bay of Islands, but you did. I have to give you credit.

I'm going to speak a few minutes on this. Mr. Chair, I said yesterday that I would be voting for this, and I'll stick by that. The reason why I will stick by that is because if government is willing to bring in an amendment to take away something from a Committee that they will set up, I, for one, will be holding the government accountable to start getting our finances in order. If you're willing to walk in here because it's politically expedient, politically correct, so people won't be upset, I'm going to hold the government accountable. Because when you hear phrases coming out, well, we're not going to do much now. We're going to go out and have more consultation. Another year of consultation is another year of debt that we're going to incur and another year that we're going to kick it down the road.

I will stick to my guns on that, Mr. Chair, for that principle, and I will be speaking a lot on it. Because when you look at another year of

interest on the money that we have to borrow just to go for this year, another year, just interest that we're going to have to borrow, and here we are now the government trying to stand up and say, look, what we're doing, people; we're going to take away raises.

I said it before; I can go back many years where government brought in this cut the wages from MHAs, cut their salaries. It's great. People out in the public love it; they think it's great. But I can assure you one thing – and said it before – when we stand in this House and we start undermining and cutting each other, how is the general public going to have confidence in politicians? How are they doing to have confidence? It's just not going to happen – it's just not going to happen.

I just want to put something on the record. As I said, why do we have these Committees set up if we're not going to follow the Committees? Why do we do it? I know the Minister of Industry spoke earlier. I know I'm going to state this now and I'm going to state it publicly. I was here back years ago when we came in with the judges also and we turned it down. We went to court, lost it in court and had to pay court expenses also. When that came in with the minister who brought it in – he was the minister of Justice and Public Safety at the time, the Attorney General – I was voting for it because the process was done and the process was followed. If we follow a process and we bring it to the House of Assembly and if we're just going to say no to it, because it's not looking good in the public's eyes, why do we even have the process? Why don't we find another avenue?

The minister at the time did take a lot of heat publicly over that, but I can tell you it was the right thing to do. When it gets back in court and they'll get the same thing that the judges brought forth, the remuneration that the Committee recommended at the time, it's going to be proven that that was the process. In this case here, setting up a process and then having a Committee come through to make the recommendations – and there's absolutely no doubt we're in a financial bind. If you look at the amount of money that you're talking about here, and government is going to say yeah, this is great, the public don't want us to do that – how about the \$2.2-billion deficit we have?

That's what we should be tackling. That's what we should be tackling is the \$2.2-billion deficit.

Now we're nickeling and diming – I'm going to vote for it, by the way. I will vote with the government not to approve this for the reasons I mentioned earlier. Somewhere along the line this government now, with a majority, has to sit down with all the stakeholders and we have to start getting our finances in order.

I remember, and I said it before, Clyde Wells did it. He worked on it. He brought everybody in and he took a lot of heat. Yet, I guarantee you he was respected for it. I can tell the people of this province right now, and I've been around a long while, don't underestimate the intelligence of the electorate to know what financial situation we're in. Don't do it.

They understand the situation we're in; we just have to work with all the groups and all the stakeholders in this province to help ourselves get out of this mess. I understand the bantering going back and forth. I've been there; sometimes I have been quiet too much. I understand the bantering back and forth: us, the PCs, NDP, the independents and the Liberals. I understand all that but somewhere along the line for the betterment of the province we have to come together, even if it's go in a room somewhere and let's start working things out on how we can move forward. Get the unions to sit down: how can we move this province forward.

That's what we're going to have to do. It's all right to get up in this House and do our political stuff, do our bantering and do our questions – which they should do. Opposition should keep government accountable. Absolutely no doubt, they should keep government accountable. The NDP should keep government accountable, the independents should keep government accountable, but as we keep government accountable, we have to work with government for the betterment of the province. That's what we need to do.

In this case, this is brought forth and politics now is stepping in there, absolutely no doubt. I remember when all the debate went on about the judges. I was sat here; I remember it all. I remember what was said. Go back in *Hansard*; I remember what was said. Now the shoe is on the

other foot. Now we're saying we have a policy, we should follow it. Back when it was the judges, we shouldn't follow it.

I remember Ross Wiseman stood up one day and we asked him a question in the House that he said something before. He stood up and said: Damn *Hansard*. Be careful what you say in this House because it is on record and people can look it up. So when it happens one day to you, get ready, because when that shoe is on the other foot like it's happening here today, it's coming right back at you, the shoe is coming back at you.

My only advice here to government is that I will be supporting this, but I will be supporting with the caveat that remember I said it. When the government stands up now and says we have to wait and we have to do more consultations as we go another year without tackling that deficit, I, for one, will be raising my voice to say this has been going on now since last August, when you formed the government, that you were going to set up the Moya Greene committee – which I'm sure they're going to do great work; with the health care, also, I'm sure it's going to be great work.

Every time we take it and push it down the road, just remember interest is getting higher and higher on what we're borrowing; now, it's gone up to a \$2-billion deficit. I understand about the pandemic. I understand all of that. I understand the needs and that the government had to step in and help out small businesses. I understand all of that. That's never going to be debated by me, whatsoever.

But somewhere along the line, government – if you're bringing this in now and saying we have to be accountable to the people of the province, I'm asking the government today to be more accountable to the people of the province on the deficit. Absolutely, when someone sits down and figures out how much this is going to cost the province compared to a \$2.2-billion deficit, it's like putting your hand in the water, when you take it out you won't even notice it. Yet, here we are bantering back and forth if we should go ahead with it.

The other thing that I heard some Members opposite in the Opposition talk about was the

process; we should find some way to take the process out of our hands. There's nothing more difficult than anybody sitting around here saying, yes, we should get this for ourselves and, no, we shouldn't get this for ourselves. It is putting everybody in this room in an awkward position – everybody. Then, if the Liberals were on this side, they would be doing the same thing that the Opposition is doing, because it's awkward for everybody.

I'll just close my speech on that, Mr. Chair. I will ask government to start and bring forward the plan that they're going to have for the deficit reduction, what plan they're going to have for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. If you're going to show true leadership, true leadership brings out bold ideas, makes a plan, sticks by it and convinces people this is why we have to do it.

I remember, again, Clyde Wells – I always remember – in 1993 after he made a lot of bold decisions, he won more seats than he did in 1989. The electorate understands and the electorate is more intelligent than we always give them credit for, trust me.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I've truly enjoyed the debates here this afternoon. It's somewhat heartwarming to hear the reasoned perspectives of Members coming forward: the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands, for example, making a very passionate case that change is required.

Change is never easy for the mover; sometimes it can be quite difficult, but the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands is imploring the government to act on change. The status quo is not acceptable to the hon. Member and he is prepared to be a part of that initiative. Even though sometimes as constituency representatives we may want much, the Member makes the case that what we need more is a new outlook to our finances. I appreciate the hon.

Member saying that. I'm sure that in future debates that will hold true as well. What we're here to talk about today, Mr. Chair, is really questions of change as well, whether or not a formula that was brought in in 2006 through the advocacy, through the efforts of a learned jurist – whether or not this Parliament should be held to a fixed standard brought in by the recommendations of that jurist.

There's a fundamental tenet in our Westminsterian parliamentary traditions and systems, it's the doctrine of parliamentary supremacy. The doctrine of parliamentary supremacy goes as follows – it's three key points; one being that Parliament, or our Legislature in this particular case, can make any laws concerning matters that are within its jurisdiction. Parliament is the supreme lawmaker and no Parliament of one day can bind a Parliament of a future day. The doctrine of parliamentary supremacy invokes a pathway for change.

Mr. Chair, what is before us today, in this particular piece of legislation, in this matter, is whether or not the Parliament will be bound by a former decision. Now, the case has been made that when advice is sought and received from an independent body, that it must be acted upon and cannot be deviated from; otherwise, it would break the chain of integrity. It would break the chain of being able to stand the test of scrutiny.

Well, Mr. Chair, I also note during the course of the debates of this past week, the Member for Conception Bay South went on at length earlier this week, in earlier debates, indicating that to him optics matter. Government must be in lockstep with the popular sentiment of the day of the people. Failure to be in lockstep with popular sentiment, failure to understand that optics matter, will cause the government great grief.

Mr. Chair, I believe that the government's stay is in lockstep with the sentiments of the people, but at the same time, I also believe that the government is very cognizant of the fact that it's being called upon for leadership. It is not simply an echo chamber of voices exterior or voices outside; it is providing leadership.

I'll leave with one parting comment. If we are to be held rigid to independent or outside advisory

bodies, if Parliament's supremacy is not to be invoked, will those Members who suggest that we should be rigid to advisory bodies and never have debate on the floor of this Assembly when we receive those learned opinions, would they hold that true, for example, for the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council? Would they hold that same concept for the provincial Economic Recovery Team's advisory?

I think, Mr. Chair, in all of these instances, you cannot cherry-pick and say we shall be rigid in one instance; Parliament is not supreme, but in others it must be. Either we are or we are not. I hold the view that this Chamber is the ultimate expression of the view of the people. We have to be leaders, not followers. We have to be cognizant of what popular opinion is, but we also have to understand that our role as leaders is not just simply to be an echo chamber of popular sentiment; it is to do what's in the best interest of the province, to bring people to that place and to seek compromise.

I think, Mr. Chair, what you will find is that this move, this initiative, I suspect will undoubtedly be endorsed 100 per cent by this Legislature. It should be endorsed 100 per cent by this Legislature. It does reflect leadership in a time when it's required. I hope all Members will be part of that leadership initiative.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To be clear, if it comes before this House that I have to approve a salary increase for me while I'm sitting here, the answer will be no. My support for that has not wavered.

I'll try not to repeat what I said in the previous day, but I do believe that my job here is to advocate for those who don't necessarily get increases based on a committee, whether it's a learned jurist, whether it's a parliamentary

Committee, regardless. I can tell you, when I look at the people I serve, some of them, it's difficult. If I did my math correctly, for me, I think it was the 5 per cent increase, it would amount to another \$6,000 or \$7,000 or so. I could be wrong. But that's a significant amount. For some people, that would be, for the people I've had to serve, a gold mine.

Now, it's interesting because there's a certain bright spot to this in the fact that the government Members are asking that we basically go against the recommendation of the Committee and we not proceed with the salary. It gives me hope. Because, you see, there is a Minimum Wage Review Committee that puts forward steps which now gives me the hope that, rather than rest on the increments set out, we can now have the power to actually do what's right for many, many more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I'll be pursuing that. If I'm going to be looking at putting public money somewhere, it's about advocating for issues and advocating for people who are struggling on minimum wage who may be working two, three or four jobs just to put food on the table, I'm all for it.

Now, in my many years I guess I've developed a certain level of scepticism. My colleague from Humber - Bay St. George -

AN HON. MEMBER: Bay of Islands.

J. DINN: - Bay of Islands, my apologies, we'll get it right; I'll get it right. He referred to the former premier, Clyde Wells. It's interesting at the time because there were rollbacks and cuts and severe cuts to public service.

My colleague as well pointed out the fact that we have bigger problems. That this is like putting your hand in the bucket. Actually, in many ways, I guess the gesture is not really going to be that significant. As a friend of mine would say, it's like spitting in the ocean and expecting the tide to rise.

But I can't help but think if this is simply the opening act, the overture, the prelude to cuts and rollbacks for members of the public service to say, hey, it's tough times, look at us and we chose not to take the raise; therefore, come on, follow our example, our bold example and our

bold action. We're doing this for the good of the province; you do the same.

Now, I'm not saying we don't deserve a raise or we don't deserve fair compensation. I think all people deserve fair compensation for the work they do. It's gotten incredibly difficult, especially during the pandemic, and it's become a lot more difficult, I would say, for people on the front lines, for people who are the store clerks, the grocery clerks, the people who meet you when you go to that checkout since the pandemic. The stress on them is enormous.

In many ways I do think if we are going to start looking at compensation, how do we rectify the other problems first. Here's the thing. My colleague from Harbour Main talks about the lack of sympathy for politicians, the distain. Yes, I've run into that. As one constituent said to me when I went up to the door in a previous election – not this one, but the one before – you're all crooks.

Part of that is born out of the frustration, the anger and the desperation that many people live, the situation that they find themselves in. Now, whether it's popular or not, I don't know. All I can tell you is that my stand on this is the same as it was on the judges' salaries. If you put something before me, especially knowing the conditions of the people I serve, then I know where I'm going to stand. I'm going to look at the man – let's look at other people first, then we'll come back to ourselves.

It's interesting, we talk an awful lot about process here. In many ways, the one thing that I don't think I really brought out in terms of when we were discussing the judges' salaries here – first of all, if we didn't have authority over it, why bring it but, at the same time, here's the key thing. If I remember correctly, and I stand to be corrected, you're talking to, at the time, three new MHAs. This came up in the space of a few days, near the end of the sitting, and we were asked to make a decision on it. There was no briefing. We were given a report, and that's what we're struggling with. That was literally, I think, a day or so before.

I can tell you, if you're asking me to make a decision on something then you very well better provide the information beforehand, the

rationale and the explanation. That's not a failure on my part, that's a failure on the part of the individuals introducing it. That's the first thing.

Now, it's interesting here, and I've got to go to the whole notion of Committees, Mr. Chair. There have been many Committees that have been struck and whose recommendations have been ignored, partial ignored. I'm sure there are bookshelves lined with them collecting dust. I can think of environmental assessment protocols that were not followed, that resulted in, not one but two court cases won by an environmental group because government did not follow its own processes laid down. Here we're talking about we're not following the process with this Committee or the judges' salary. It seems when it's convenient that's trotted out.

WERAC is mentioned, and it's going to be interesting to see what happens when they bring forth their idea, because I've seen how the work of the Committee has, indeed, been treated in the past. But I would suspect that there will be parts of that report that will not be introduced because, well, it may not be politically accurate or correct to do so, or politically expedient is the better word.

Now, I'll certainly look at, if there's a motion, or anything along the lines or an amendment, to entertain maybe a look at another approach, but, in the end, I can tell you that I'm comfortable with my decision. I have to live and work for, with a good conscience, the people I serve. Basically, I look at the fact that I have to serve them first, and before I look at my issues, then I really have to start looking at: How do I help them first? That's my primary concern; that's why I'm here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to take a couple minutes just to speak to this as well. I wasn't really intending on doing so. I thought we kind of were done with the

issue when we discussed it in second reading, but I guess just to add a couple of quick points.

First of all, as I said during the second reading, I feel it would be hypocritical of me to support a raise for myself at this current time, given our financial situation that we're in and given the fact that I voted against the raise for the judges for that very reason. I'm going to support the motion, as I said, just to be clear on that.

The only difference I do see when I see the comparison between the vote on the judges' salary versus the vote on our own salary, the only issue that I have and the difference I see is that I don't think I was in a conflict of interest if I'm voting on somebody else's salary; i.e., the judges. That doesn't put me in a conflict of interest. That's part of the process. It has to be approved by the House and we make our decision based on, not just the report and the recommendations but also our financial capacity and any other factors that may be out there. That's what we did. That's why I didn't support the raise for the judges at the time.

I understand the argument could be made that it was an independent process, and as the minister of natural resources – it's not called natural resources anymore; I forget what it's called, but anyway, he knows who he is – former minister of Justice, I agree with him that that was an independent process. Arguably, we could have said: Well, do you know what? It's a fair, it's an independent process; we should just go along with it. But it did come to this Legislature as part of the requirement to be approved.

As I said, based on where we are from a fiscal point of view, I think we're – I believe our debt is – what is it, \$15.2 billion now? I could be wrong on that. I think the latest number I saw was \$14.2 billion or \$15.2 billion. When you add in all the other unfunded liabilities and Muskrat Falls and everything else, we're up to \$24 billion or \$25 billion that we owe.

We've been having year-over-year deficits. It's probably going to be a couple of billion dollars again this year. I think we had to borrow \$3 billion last year. Last year's budget, we had to borrow \$3 billion with a B, just to pay the bills. I suspect we're going to have to borrow another \$1 billion or \$2 billion or \$3 billion again this

year. The cost to finance that debt is growing. The ability to even obtain the money, I'm sure, is becoming more challenging and the interest rates are probably going to go up because of the situation that we're in.

You look at how much money we pay on servicing the debt, I believe it's second to health care, I think, or maybe it's third to education, but it's up there anyway. If it's not our second –

AN HON. MEMBER: Second to health care.

P. LANE: Second to health care is debt servicing, imagine that.

I understand that there's some politics with this and so on as well, I get that. People are looking upon it favourably. Someone referenced the VOCM there, 97 per cent. I'm not surprised. I'd say if we had a \$2 billion surplus this year and our deficit, or sorry, our provincial debt was eliminated, people would still vote to say that politicians don't deserve a raise, because in the minds of many people, unfortunately, this profession is at the very bottom of the barrel, in the minds of many people. Politicians and lawyers, that's what I hear all the time; politicians and lawyers: the worst of the worst. Imagine if you're a politician and a lawyer, imagine how people feel about you.

Anyway, the fact is there is no sympathy there for politicians to get a raise regardless of the circumstance, I don't think it really matters. There's not going to be any will there.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, like I said, for me, it's the conflict of interest piece that makes it different when we talk about the judges versus ourselves because we're being put in a position to approve or, in this case, to turn down a recommendation, to not approve a recommendation made relating to our own benefits, our own remuneration.

I don't know how else we can do it, but I'd like to find some other way. It would be great if we could find some other way, some other mechanism – and I don't know what it is – so that we would not be put in this type of position in the future. That is what I would like to see, some sort of mechanism where we would not be put in this awkward position. Whatever that is, I don't know.

It's pointless looking at our fiscal situation right now, and I suspect it's not improving any time soon. I would say save yourself the time and trouble and everything else, don't even bother with an MCRC this time around. You're saying you need to put another one in place in two or three months' time. Don't even do it.

If they ask me if I want to come for input, I'm going to say, no, I'm not interested; I'm not even going to go to it. What's the point of going through the process if it's all just going to be overturned anyway? If you're going to have a process, you need to follow the process. If you're not, then get rid of it. I'm not wasting my time with it, but that's fine.

I'm supporting the motion here of not – I didn't even know we were getting a raise, by the way. Didn't even know there was one on the books, the first I heard of it. When I signed up for this job I knew that the salary was \$95,000 a year, whatever it is. That's what I thought it was, that's what it is and that's what I expected. I didn't expect one dime more and I'm more than happy with what I'm getting. That part I'm fine with.

The only issue I have is the process. The fact that we're having to debate our own remuneration in this House of Assembly, which I feel is a conflict, that's the only issue I have. I definitely agree with the fact that during these fiscal times there is no way I can, in good conscience – I know I've had people come to my office, I have been to their homes and so on, in such distress, financial distress. The last couple of years in particular have been heartbreaking. The number of people that have lost their homes and on the verge of losing everything else they have because of the downturn in the oil industry – whether that is people working here on our own oil and gas projects, or whether it is people working in Alberta – is terrible.

There is no way I could ever support voting for a raise, but I just think that it's unfortunate that we even have to be having this conversation in this House of Assembly. There should be some other way that somebody else decides. I guess that would be the only issue I would have with it.

Just to conclude, I have to make this point. I heard one Member say – the Minister of

Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, I believe, talked about this is what the people want and we need to be reflective of the people's views and so on. I agree with him a hundred per cent, a thousand per cent. I could not agree more, but I have to say, I wish that same approach had been taken yesterday on the motion about having an independent investigation into the election. I wish the people's views were respected yesterday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. LANE: Because I can guarantee you that just like 97 per cent, you're saying, of people don't want us to get a raise – I don't know if it's 97 per cent, but I can guarantee you that the number is up there, big time, of the people who are very, very upset with yesterday's decision. They want to see an independent investigation of that disaster of an election.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

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

I'm trying to think. When you're having an opportunity to speak to something in Committee – or at any time in the House – you try to think how do you start with your thoughts. There are so many thoughts here. It's the here and now; it's what happened a couple of years ago. It's what happened, frankly – what is it – 15 years ago and what happened five years ago. So with all of that rambling, let me see if I can put some thoughts in.

I think I'm going to start with two ministers of Justice and Public Safety ago. I can recall watching him very eloquently speak to the matter that has been brought up in terms of providing some juxtaposition for the debate that's going on here on the floor.

My thought at that time was this is a process that was set up. There was an independent – I guess the term used is – tribunal. I'm not sure if that's the correct term. It was an independent group

identified. Their conclusions have gone before a Legislature in the past, for political expediency voted down and with a more expensive and, as my mother-in-law would say, a more 'expensive' consequence to the taxpayers of this province. That is something to think about. I can recall the politics that went on at that time – and as the minister said, he took a carving; he was carved up soundly and, again, around a political decision.

I was just trying to put a little quote together. I know the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair always likes to have a quote and I think I'm going to try to generate one here. The history of one political error in judgment should not justify a future, or should I say, present-day political error in judgment.

The Member for Corner Brook talked about the pathway for change. I'm trying to think about the pathway for change, if I think about what the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands just referred to in terms of looking for a process, looking for an opportunity. Well, guess what? I think a good number of us were here in 2016 and watched that MCRC process reveal itself and it was challenging. There were, obviously, some hard feelings, some back and forth and so on. Nevertheless, they were tasked with the job and they did that job. Some were happy with it and some weren't, but there were decisions made then.

The MCRC delivered its final report after a lot of debate. This Legislature looked at those conclusions, moved forward, and guess what? This text of the matter that we're talking about repealing has been sitting there in legislation for five years. Now we find ourselves with, I would suggest, a politically motivated opportunity to say to the public: Hey, look at us. We're going to take this.

I think myself, I would say probably every one of us – I haven't heard anyone who's said different – didn't even know this was happening. I'd forgotten all about it. I'd like nothing better than to say: Yeah, we're not here for that raise. We're not here for that additional compensation, but we have to think about the future.

Again, I will say – I'm going to talk about it a lot over this Assembly – we have four crises

facing us: there's this fiscal one that's preoccupying this discussion here today, we have this little pandemic on the go that is – 300,000 people in India yesterday found out they had COVID-19 – 300,000. This is truly something. We are going to need to put our smartest folks on the scene to be able to deal with this.

We have a demographic challenge like no other. I'm meeting tomorrow morning with Rob Greenwood at our favourite breakfast haunt. The Harris Centre is trying to figure out how we, as Newfoundland and Labrador, are going to be able to figure out this population distribution challenge that we have.

As the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands has said today and yesterday, government really needs to be – this Legislature – needs to be preoccupied with these amazing challenges. As the Member for Torngat Mountains said earlier this afternoon, in her petition about climate change – my other big one, which I frankly think is the most serious of these crises – we are going to need the best minds available.

I always believe that if we have to find ourselves in this awkward position – I'm talking about compensation – I want to punt the ball out. I want to punt it out to the future folks that are coming in.

I don't feel that we should be in a position to say, yeah, we're here, we ran on a platform of such-and-such, we understood the terms and conditions and now that we're in we're going to change it. Well, that's not what this is about. This is about something that happened six years ago. I'm fortunate enough to just be here in that situation to see this unfold and then to see this moved by government now that, frankly, is saying let's repeal that. Let's do something politically expedient to go forward. Wow, it's a very frustrating position to put ourselves in.

Back to that minister of Justice, that motion, that bill that he brought before this Legislature, I remember saying to him at the time, and I still believe it, it should never have come to the Legislature. If we have an independent body set up, can we please bring some legislation along so that in future when whoever's sitting in this room feels it's politically expedient to tell the

judges that they shouldn't get a raise that they don't have that ability? This should be taken away from us, much the same way that the compensation for ourselves should be taken away from us. And guess what? It is taken away from us. It is there in place and here we are dealing with this.

Mr. Chair, there was a cartoon a little while ago and it's one that I know my independent colleagues, particularly the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said he liked it. It's interesting, if you've seen it. It's the three of us in caricature design and it's called the "Rise of the Independents." It's pretty interesting. There are somewhat likenesses to the three of us. But you know what is really interesting? Sitting in this chair now is the liberating aspect of being able to look at exactly what's in front of you every time you make a decision. I think about the District of Lake Melville, I think about this province and I go for it. I don't think about a brand; I don't think about a party, a policy, a posture – what is right for these people that I represent, whether back home or broadly across this province.

I have to tell you, bring on the independents. Yesterday, I probably made a few enemies; today, I may make a few more. But I'm going to make a decision every day around that non-partisan perspective and lens I'm going to put on this.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I would like to bring forward an amendment. I'll read it out to this Legislature. So I'm going to first of all read the bill. Bill 10, the amendment: "Subsections 11(1.1) to (1.3) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* are repealed." That's the bill we're dealing with.

I'm proposing the following, that we replace the words "are repealed" with "are suspended until the completion of the Independent Members' Compensation Review Committee has submitted its recommendations for the 50th General Assembly for incorporation in the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*."

Mr. Chair, we have a process in place. My recommendation is that we park this decision; pass it over to the MCRC, in the event that they

are required to meet sometime during this Assembly; and that they deal with this matter. Take it away from us. Take it out of this Legislature. Let an independent body work with it.

I table that amendment right now.

It's moved by myself, seconded by my colleague from St. John's Centre. And I have copies for my colleagues.

CHAIR: Thank you.

This House will recess and we will certainly take a look at the amendment to see if it's in order.

Recess

CHAIR: Order, please!

The motion is deemed not to be in order.

I recognize the hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Mr. Chair, I have a bit of time left.

Yes, I'm not surprised. I did what I could knowing what I do about writing amendments. Given the conciseness of the natures, either haul it out or leave it there. The choice before this House is that stark. As I said in my remarks, people before us, I was there, others, years ago worked through a very challenging process to put distance between ourselves and the MCRC. They made recommendations that came before this Legislature. It's been sitting in legislation for really five years and suddenly it's expedient to have that yanked out of there.

Given the situation of numbers in the House and so on, it's unfortunate. I wanted to come back to – I wonder if I can just find it, I need to keep speaking – I think it was the Government House Leader who said this is not the time. Well, if I think back – and again, this lad here is not looking for this wage increase and I'm not sure how I'm going to vote yet. I'm going to wait until I hear all the debate on the floor because I think you need to do that before you formulate your final conclusion.

Given there's been 13 years of a wage freeze, I don't know, maybe there'll never be a time and maybe we should just write some legislation to say: Forget about any further adjustments, we're just going to go with whatever we got here and on into the future.

I go back to my concerns about the challenges before this province, before each of our districts. We are going to need to attract people from other walks of life, people aren't born and become politicians; they do other things. They've got experiences in the private sector, in government, in academics and we're going to need –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. TRIMPER: Except for, yeah – I liked that reference yesterday, by the way, that maybe we should cap how many terms. I was thinking that we'll call it the Putin, the Putin clause that you can't be a politician for life, but we'll see what happens here.

Again, on a serious note, we need to attract good people. I'm very comfortable with what I'm doing, how I'm compensated and what this job entails. It is challenging but we're going to need to attract future good MHAs in this House.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's nice to be able to weigh in on this, I guess, for the people of my district. I actually didn't even know what I was getting paid in the first place until I was probably about six or seven months into the job. I certainly didn't sign up for the money. I didn't know, as a colleague on this side said earlier, that we were even getting a raise. It's news to me.

To bring in a tribunal, I guess, on the judges, to me seems to be a little bit of a different situation for the simple fact that we wouldn't turn it over to the judges to give themselves a raise; therefore, I don't think it's right and it's

unethical that we would debate or approve any kind of a raise for ourselves.

It just don't make sense to me that there would be an independent review about us and then be brought back to us to make a determination on. It just seems to be top flippant to me, that we would have even any say in it. We should keep the sanctity of these independent reviews when we ask for them, or what's the sense of even having it in place?

To say that this MCRC has been disbanded now because of a drop of the writ and now there's a new MCRC going to be brought in, then we're just kicking the ball down the road a little bit further, that's all.

On a 13-year wage freeze, I'm not saying that it's deserved, it's not deserved or anything like that, I'm not looking for a raise. In the meantime, I don't think that any of the public sector unions or anybody like that would sit on their hands and not argue for their membership based on 13 years of a wage freeze.

It is the wrong time to do this, as it was the wrong time to give the judges a raise. As the minister had already stated when he was the Justice minister, if it does come back that the judges do argue it in court and they are approved, then that's the mechanism that they had at their benefit. I don't think there's anybody in here that's going to go to the Supreme Court and challenge this to say: Please, give us a raise. I don't think there's anybody in here that is looking for that.

Do we deserve it? I guess based on years of service, there are some people in here that deserve it, but after working here for just about two years, I feel quite content with the money that I'm making. I can't speak for anybody else. In the meantime, this is not about money for me at all; this is just unethical. It shouldn't have been brought back to us to make a decision on, just for the simple fact that it's like feeding a fox because you have lots of feed, and when you run out of feed, you tell him, don't touch the chickens. Well, that's not going to happen. He's still going to want to feed. What we need to do is we can't let the fox be watching the henhouse. It's not our place at all to make a determination on if we get a raise or anything like that.

There was absolutely no problem for the government to add two new ministers to the Cabinet. There's an added expense there. I guess there are two trains of thought here and that what's good for the goose is good for the gander. If you're going to increase your Cabinet by two ministers, then, obviously, that would kind of conflict with the fact that other people are in line for a raise, but it's not the right time to do it; therefore, it probably wasn't the right time to increase the amount of people in your Cabinet.

As it goes for the tribunal, I will commend the former minister of Justice for sitting there and taking it, because as somebody that's in the field, I would imagine that he did understand the legislation and probably did give us enough warning going down that road. In the meantime, at the time, it wasn't the right thing to do, and giving us a raise today is not the right thing to do either. We're agreeing with what you're saying, but we don't agree with the process that it was done by an independent Committee that brought their findings and everything that was supposed to be brought back to the House of Assembly and we're just going to disregard it.

With that being said, I think there should be an independent Committee that is not bringing things back to the House of Assembly; it's implemented as to what their findings are. Because, like I said, I don't want to be in a conflict of interest, especially when we're in the economic situation that we're in, and we know that people are struggling right now in this economy.

With that being said, I have five minutes; I don't think I'll go another five on this. In the meantime, I think that if we have independent Committees then we should be adhering to what they bring back, their findings, and it's not for us to say yes or no, if their findings are correct or not. They went through a very long process, used a lot of very highly skilled professionals to come to this agreement and they brought it to the House, and we're not agreeing with it, which kind of flies in the face of why we even asked them to get on this committee in the first place.

For me, Mr. Chair, I'm not looking for a raise, but I am looking for a little bit more clarity in

why we would ask for reviews and turn them down flat based on the fact that –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. DWYER: No, it's not right. But let's make sure the process is right for the next time, because obviously it didn't work this time and it has been in place for five years.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and with that I'll conclude.

CHAIR: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have my glasses all tangled up in this mask. I can't see when I got the mask on because my glasses steam up and then I can't see when I take them off because I'm blind.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak to this issue in Committee once again. I just want to emphasize the fact – and it's kind of funny in a sense, I suppose, that everybody agrees with this but we're continuing to talk about it even though every Member in the House agrees with the motion and it's going to be supported, I would suggest, unanimously, I would think. I'd be surprised. Although, my colleague from Lake Melville said he's going to wait to see how the debate ends out before he makes his decision. But I have a feeling that everyone is going to support this.

I think the issue that has been raised here now over and over again is one of process, and that's the concern. That's the only concern, I think, that people have on this side, is the process and of the conflict of interest – putting Members in a conflict of interest to be debating and voting on their own remuneration. That's really the only issue that anybody has, I think, on this side from what I can gather.

The premise of not taking the raise, absolutely, I think we all agree. We know where we are financially. I kind of want this time to speak a

little bit about what the Member from Humber - Bay of Islands, my colleague, was talking about the need for government to act on our fiscal circumstances. This is symbolic. That's all it is. At the end of the day it's really not going to mean a row of beans to the finances of this province, but it is a symbolic move.

I get that and I support it. As I said, there is no way in good conscience, given the fact of where we are as a province, given the fact of all the constituents that I've had to deal with over the last number of years, there is no way I could support giving myself a raise knowing how there are so many people out there that are really challenged. Whether that be people that are challenged for housing, whether that be people that are challenged to afford groceries, people who are challenged with child care issues, whether it is seniors who – I believe my colleague from Ferryland brought up a very good issue today about the dental program which got terminated in the 2016 budget. It is unfortunate that happened, but that is a real hardship on people. I know there are seniors out there that they can't get dentures: they can't afford them.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: I would say to the Member it is very relevant, because it is talking to the fiscal circumstance that our province is in and it is talking to the fact that there are many people suffering in our province in any number of areas because we just don't have the fiscal capacity to provide all the services and programs that they require which is why, in good conscience, I would never be able to support sitting in this House of Assembly and voting myself a raise. That's the point I'm making; that's why it's relevant. But it's also relevant that if we're going to make these symbolic gestures in this House of Assembly, that we're also going to take action on the bigger issues. That's where I go back to my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands when he talked about the bigger issues, substantive issues.

I talked yesterday about the fact that there's very little scrutiny of our agencies, boards and commissions – very little. We know that Nalcor has been the tail wagging the dog for years. We know the huge dollars that have been spent and

continue to be spent there. Now we have Nalcor, we have Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, we got OilCo and we've got the department. So we have like four entities here. I'm sure that there's a lot of duplication and redundancy there, particularly since the Muskrat Falls Project is pretty much complete, that we could be finding huge efficiencies and dollars there.

Again, I talked about it yesterday. We go through the budgetary process for Health and Community Services and we're literally counting pencils in the minister's office and saying how come last year you spent \$1,000 on office supplies and this year you spent \$1,200, why did you spend \$200 more on office supplies. How come you spent \$300 more on photocopying? But then, we ignore the fact that there's \$2 billion to \$3 billion going to the health care authorities and there's not one question about how is that money being spent, because we're not diving into that.

The same thing is happening with the Liquor Corporation. The same thing is happening with Nalcor and its subsidiaries, and OilCo and so on. The same thing is happening to the school boards. Talk about the school boards, we all remember that issue that came out in the media last year or the year before, whenever it was, about buddy who was renting wheelbarrows for \$1,000 a week or whatever it was –

AN HON. MEMBER: Extension cords.

P. LANE: Extension cords and so on, paying \$500 for an extension cord or whatever the issues were. All that stuff that was going on. We're not diving into any of that stuff.

Now, I understand that there's an Auditor General that can pick a place here and there, or a division of a department or whatever. That happens periodically and so on. But we are the people who were elected by the people. We were elected by the people to manage the people's money and the people's affairs. That is like an \$8-billion budget, but we only talk about a couple of billion of it. The rest of it is all left to unelected people, appointed people managing three-quarters of the people's money, and we're not involved in that at all.

Again, to bring it back around to relevance and to this particular motion, if we're going to be making these symbolic gestures, which I support, then we have to be prepared to go further than that. As I said the last time I spoke, we have a provincial debt that is somewhere around \$14 billion or whatever – I forget the exact amount, but \$14.2 billion rings a bell, maybe. We borrowed \$3 billion last year – \$3 billion. We're probably going to borrow another couple of billion dollars again this year.

Then, when you throw in all the unfunded liabilities with the pension plans, the Muskrat Falls Project and everything else, we're probably up to around, I think I read, \$25 billion or somewhere thereabouts for a population of 500,000 people. It's not about – everyone can share the blame. There are years and years and years of blame to go around, numerous administrations and numerous premiers. It's not about blaming anyone.

We can talk about Muskrat Falls, absolutely; we've seen what went on there. I've acknowledged that in this House numerous times, but it's not just Muskrat Falls. If there were no Muskrat Falls, we'd still be in this. I can remember back in, I'm going to say – what was it. I think it was around 2013, I do believe. I can remember at that particular time the price of oil was at about \$110, \$120. It was way up there. I think it was \$110.

AN HON. MEMBER: One hundred and forty-eight dollars.

P. LANE: Yeah, it went to \$148. It was about, at the time, \$120 a barrel and we were still borrowing over a billion dollars. I can remember referring to it as the Finance minister's billion-dollar shopping spree at the time.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his speaking time has expired.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair (inaudible).

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

I don't know if I would call this an honour to be speaking on this in the House today. It's a bit embarrassing I have to tell you.

AN HON. MEMBER: You don't have to.

L. O'DRISCOLL: No, I don't have to, but I will. Again, I sit here and listen to you. I would like for you to sit here and listen to me.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: I'm not talking when you're talking; I'm listening when you're talking. I'm not throwing shots across at you, so I would like the same respect back. I certainly do appreciate it.

I sit here and I've been here two years. I came from a job as a car salesman. It's embarrassing to be a politician I have to tell you. It's embarrassing. To get in here now and run this along to prove a point, it's without words I have to say. It's without words. When you rank a car salesman above a politician or lower than a politician, then that should say something.

I was a car salesman and I was good at it. I come in here and I'm trying to do the job for the District of Ferryland and I'm trying to do the same kind of job here and represent the people that put me here. I sit here and I look around and it's just embarrassing. Everybody should be looking at themselves. Get off your high horses.

We have ministers here and I respect them. I totally respect you. I do, I really do. I will listen to what everybody is saying, but it's embarrassing to sit here and be a politician. We're never going to change it if we don't sit down, look at ourselves and get back to what we have to do. It would drive you mad. There's no need of it.

We come in here; you have a job to do. Let's get down and do it. We're trying to run a game here now to see where we're going to go with this.

AN HON. MEMBER: We're not running the game here.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Oh, you're going to chirp in again? Wait until I'm finished. You will have your turn.

I'm not interested in the pay. I could care less whatever the pay was. I still don't know what I'm getting paid. I had to get my T4 this year to do my taxes and see what I was paid. I'm down \$30,000 or \$40,000 to do this job. It was an honour to do it for the people in the District of Ferryland. I'm representing the people here and I will continue to do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. O'DRISCOLL: But I'm not going to go along and play the political game. I have no say in it; you have the majority. What can I do about it? But I'm going to speak my voice when I get my chance and I'm not going to fall into the trap of playing a political game. It's just the way it is. You really have to sit back and look at yourselves and look at what you're doing. You want to change this and get – 93 or 94 per cent on VOVM today. How is it going to change if we don't change it ourselves? I don't know.

You talk about collaboration. That's the only time I ever heard these words since I came in here. There's no more collaboration in here than anywhere I've ever been in my life on committees. You're on a committee and whatever council you're on, you make a decision; you vote on it and you move on. It's just so embarrassing it's beyond words.

We're sitting here talking about people collaborating. We asked a question the other day on ATV proposals and it's not against the minister, they're going to bring in legislation. Has anyone ever come over: we might have a good idea that can help you? No one has ever asked. No one has ever spoke to anyone about it. They're going to bring in legislation and pass it forward and no one is going to talk about it. Where's the collaboration in that?

I've been sitting here now for two years and I haven't seen any collaboration. I might have a good idea, somebody else might. My ideas might be the worst in the world but at least if you listen to them, they might be something that you can take and move forward with it. But if you don't hear them and don't listen to it, if you

have a committee then you probably should do it. We just have to be open. We can sit here and we're going to put up walls; we're not going to do it, make gestures. It's just embarrassing I have to tell you. It's beyond words.

Even on our side, too – I'm not going to say it – arrogance all over the place. Get off our high horse and do the job we're put in here to do and that's what the people want. They don't want to witness this all day long. We're in here now; we're going to stay until 12 tonight to prove a point. That's what we're at.

AN HON. MEMBER: Not us.

L. O'DRISCOLL: No, it's not us. Not you. It will be you tomorrow.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

L. O'DRISCOLL: It's the same situation and you're going to run all over it. You can't let people run over you. You have to make your point. You make your point. We'll make our point.

AN HON. MEMBER: We're going to fix it.

L. O'DRISCOLL: No, we're not going to fix this.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

L. O'DRISCOLL: When I worked at a car dealership, I earned my wages because I had to sell. There was no salary, it was commission only and you earned your pay. When I got a raise, they'd call you in to speak about it. I worked in service for 10 years before I got at that. When I did a good job I'd have to go in and see my boss, to speak to you, to do an evaluation on you, which I thought was great. They're not going to do that here, obviously, because the people evaluate you when they put you here.

You go in there and the boss would call you in. They'd do an evaluation on you. If you deserved a raise, you got it; if you didn't deserve a raise, you didn't get it. So why am I coming in – I'm

going to give you a raise; you give me one back. That makes no sense. Let the people do it. Let the independent person do it and that's where it should be.

If they thought I deserved the raise, they'd give it to me. If they didn't, I didn't get it. I didn't discuss my own wage. That's not how it goes. If they decide to up the labour rates in a car dealership, then they upped the labour rates. What are we going to do about it? Not a thing, only go in and get them fixed or ignore it, one or the other.

It's the same thing. If you deserve a raise, you deserve a raise. Let someone else make that decision. Not put it in our hands in here. To me, it's just something that we should not be at. I don't know how it's fixed. I don't have the answers. I know that you have an independent commission. I don't have the answers for it but we should not be discussing this.

Like I told you, I didn't know what I was getting paid until I got my T4 online, and I had to go find out my password to get it. I didn't know how to do that myself. So to get to that point, I'm not here about the money, and I'm not sitting here bragging about that because that's embarrassing to even be talking about. You should just get to the point, do what's right and we'll move on from there.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I just want to take a few minutes to remind anybody at home on what we're debating here this afternoon. We're debating government's decision to put forward a bill to not – and I repeat to not – increase MHAs' wages. We've just spent almost two hours, with us intervening, I think, four times for maybe a total of 15 or 20 minutes, we've intervened for 15 or 20 minutes

in the last two hours on why we do not support MHAs getting a raise.

Practically I've heard from everybody across the way now on why we should not get a raise, but we shouldn't be talking about it because it's a conflict of interest. In all fairness, the two independent Members, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands and the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands have been very clear in their statements, as has the Member for Lake Melville.

But from Members of the Official Opposition, it has been totally unclear. They speak one after the other saying they don't want a raise but, for all intents and purposes, they're filibustering the House. We have business to do in this House today. We have Interim Supply which we need to pay our workers and we need some third readings on some important bills we did this week. The Nalcor bonus bill, the one that we brought in yesterday, we need third reading on that.

So, Mr. Chair, the Official Opposition has spent the entire regular afternoon of the House of Assembly telling us why they support us not getting a raise, but we shouldn't be talking about it. I've done a little bit of research this afternoon while I've been listening inventively. Conflict of interest is when you vote for a benefit for yourself. The last time I checked, voting on a raise that would put more money into my bank account and saying I'm satisfied not to take that money, is not a conflict of interest because there's no benefit for me in declining a raise.

Mr. Chair, what we're saying here today, and I'll say it again, quite clearly, I've said – I've heard the words like embarrassed, stand and be bold. Well, I'll boldly say again, now is not the time for us as MHAs in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to accept a pay increase.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. PARROTT: Mr. Chair, this is not about a conflict of interest; it's about a moral conflict. You can shake your head; you can say what you want. The House Leader from the opposite side just said that not one Member of the PC Party said today that they want a raise, and I agree. There is nobody over here saying that we want a raise or that we believe there should be a raise. What we are saying is that we do not believe in the premise of this bill and how it is being presented. I will also go on to say that the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology has been over their tweeting and shrugging and rolling his eyes and doing his whole thing and he goes on Twitter and says: "... the PC's twist themselves into a pretzel voting for a raise to their salary while turning down a raise for judges" – entirely false. Nobody is voting for a raise.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: The issue at hand is the exact same argument that the former Justice minister brought in here with the judges and he supported, and now he goes against the exact same thing he supported six months ago.

A. PARSONS: (Inaudible.)

L. PARROTT: No, you did the same. You did the exact same thing; you voted for it and now you're turning it down, no different –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: I will remind the Members about pay in this House and I will say a couple of names (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

AN HON. MEMBER: Can't we get along?

L. PARROTT: Yes, can't we get along?

Look, this is not about a pay raise; this is about how this bill was brought to the House. This is about a problem with how this is managed. If you want to talk about collaboration, you should collaborate. There is not one person in this House who doesn't agree with the amendment that the hon. Member for Lake Melville brought forward, but it got shot down because it doesn't meet the premise of the House.

The governing party has the ability to change that. They can change the bill. They can amend it. It is their bill.

AN HON. MEMBER: They are not going to let that happen.

L. PARROTT: No, we know that's not going to happen because it is smoke and mirrors, period. The hon. Member next to me said that yesterday and it is 100 per cent right.

We come in here and we sit down and we try and be better, and we say we're this and we're that and everything else. Listen, everybody here works hard; everybody here is on the same premise. I can look around this room and I don't know what everybody was making, but I can guarantee you there are a good many people who came in here with their heart on their sleeve and took a major pay cut to come here to do the right thing, and we all agree on that.

We all sit here on our high horses and say we're going to be better and we never are; it's like a bunch of children. You know what? Yes, we're as bad on this side of the House as you are on that side. But the reality of it is that sometimes when things get presented to this House, we have to sit back and look and talk about it collaboratively, and it doesn't happen.

A majority government allows you to do what you want. You know what? You can go ahead and do what you want. We sit here and we get our say based on we are voted to represent our districts, and you guys will say: Well, this isn't representing your district; it's representing your own interests. But this isn't about my interests. I'm not asking for a pay raise. What I am asking

is for the next person that comes in to represent my district, they know what they're getting into ahead of time. We all deserve that as Members of this House, not just me, not just the people I represent. Every single person in this House deserves to know what happens going forward, and this clouds it and muddies it.

We could pause it; we could walk away from it, and nobody is suggesting that we get a pay raise. I don't think we should. I actually think that we should vote on a freeze. But this is not the way to do it. The way to do this is to put a bill in front of this House where there's a process going forward, and this is not a process; this is a way out. It's a simple cop-out. It's always the way that things happen in this House. It's ridiculous.

We can sit here and shake our heads and pretend that we're better and everything else that happens in this House, but you know what? Everybody here knows the difference. At the end of the day, we're here for the right reason. We're here to represent the people that put us here. Whether we take a \$10,000 pay cut or a \$10,000 pay raise, every single person in this House is going to go back to their districts tomorrow and they're going to represent the people. One hundred per cent. That's what we're put here to do.

Do I think that this is a load of crap? Absolutely. One hundred per cent.

J. HAGGIE: Mr. Chair?

L. PARROTT: Go ahead.

J. HAGGIE: Not that I'm adverse to the odd expletive, but is that parliamentary?

CHAIR: I'm sorry? Are you on a point of order?

S. COADY: Yes, he's on a point of order.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

Not to appear too picky, and I'm used to language that's far rosier than that, but I don't think that's entirely parliamentary.

CHAIR: Thank you. We will take that under advisement.

J. HAGGIE: Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I apologize, Mr. Chair.

Probably I should have said a load of feces.

At the end of the day –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

L. PARROTT: Your mask is a little bit too tight there, right?

Mr. Chair, what's at hand here today is that a bill has been brought forward to this House where there's a process laid out and we have decided not to follow it. It's not a big deal. There are other ways around this. That is the problem. That is the argument. The argument is not whether or not any MHAs in this House deserve, should get a pay raise or want a pay raise; the argument is about the process. The process was put forward to us by government. Government had an opportunity to be everything that they say they are. They can come in and be collaborative and they can do all of the things that they promised to be. But, at the end of the day, we're four days into it and we haven't seen it. We have not even come close to seeing it.

We had a private Member's resolution voted down yesterday that served all the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, and everybody in this House knows that. Now, we're going into another opportunity here where we can look after something in a way that it fixes the problem for generations to come. Instead, we're going to kick the can down the road once again because it's the easy and convenient thing to do.

Now, Mr. Chair, I won't prolong this much longer. I will support this bill. I will vote for this bill. I do not want a pay raise. That's not what it's about; it's about the process. The Government House Leader knows it's about the

process. He knew the process was flawed when he put the bill to the floor; he knew how it was going to go.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Government House Leader.

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

I'm going to look across at the Member and say: No, I did not think how this bill was going to go. In my calendar for this week, I had allotted long enough to do three stages of this bill and Committee. I really did, because I thought every one of us in here understand the position that we're in and this is not the time for MHAs in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to accept a pay increase.

If you go back to the remarks of the former leader of your party, he said about a decision that was six or eight months old. Times have changed. This MCRC was 2016 and, quite honestly, I've heard a number of Members here say they forgot there was a raise or didn't even know there was a raise, likewise me too. But if you take the time to read why it was forgotten about, it was because our public service – there was a four-year wage freeze for our public service. It's only because through negotiations we were able to reach extensions to the public service agreements, which triggered this.

This is the first time that this has been triggered since it was brought in, in 2016. It hadn't been presented to us before. If you go back to 2008 when this province was running surpluses, there wasn't a raise. How can we ask the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, today, in our current fiscal situation, to increase our pay? It's not conscionable to me as an MHA, and we've spent the whole afternoon debating something you're going to vote for.

What I would propose, before we break for supper, let's vote. Let's vote so we can get on to more important work tonight of Interim Supply so that we can keep this province up and running until we get our budget.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, I feel like my colleagues on this side, really; I didn't know about a raise either. I didn't know this piece of legislation was coming through, but, anyway, we're into it. I'm certainly not looking for a raise. I do believe that it's not up to us to make the decision. It's up to the MCRC or another Committee to make that decision. It's not up to us.

I guess with regard to public opinion, maybe after the botched election that we just went through, maybe this is a good way to gain public opinion, because someone said 97 per cent of the public don't agree with it. It should be 100. I'm wondering which three in here phoned in, because they had to.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're over there.

P. FORSEY: No, you agreed that we didn't. You agreed that we didn't agree with it, so it must have been your side.

I'm wondering if that's what it is, to gain points. Hey, you got them, because the public certainly don't agree with it. I don't agree with it, either, not to be discussing this. I really don't, but I do support the amendment.

Again, we need the MCRC, we need another group to make those decisions for us. It's very uncomfortable again to be here talking about it. I've heard conflict of interest mentioned dozens of times here. Maybe it's not conflict of interest, maybe it's a vested interest. If anybody was on council or a group that was making a decision, if someone had a vested interest then they'd be excluded from that decision. As for us, I'm sure we have a vested interest in this decision. If we get a raise that's a vested interest for us, isn't it? Not a conflict of interest. We should be removed from that decision. Why we're doing this just absolutely makes no sense of us fellows making those choices right now.

Mr. Chair, again, like I said, it's an uncomfortable, unpredictable position to be put in. I think we should be excluded, and the Members are right, you're only kicking this down the road. This should be done, the MCRC or another Committee should be put in place to make those decisions so that we don't have to make those decisions. Again, I didn't know I had to make that decision.

When I became an MHA or was elected to the House of Assembly, I didn't know that I had to make a decision like this, and it's one of the worst decisions that I have to make, to be honest with you. I don't want to make it.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) over here.

P. FORSEY: With some of the decisions you're making right now, I wouldn't want to be over there either.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, I'll leave that alone. I just wanted a few minutes to speak on that because, like I say, I'm appalled just as much as every other Member on this side is. I will support the motion, but, again, I just wanted to make a point that we need to put aside and leave our vested interest out of it and let somebody else make those decisions for us.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are in the Committee stage, for anybody that's watching. It seems like we're doing speeches, but sometimes during the Committee stage, it's a good opportunity on bills where actually you do get sort of the quick back and forth where there is question and answer between, usually, the Opposition asking the question and government providing an answer as to the rationale for doing something.

Now, this one might be a bit different because I'm putting it on the other side. I hear what the Members are saying, and it gets heated because we're all in a room; we have different

viewpoints. We all think we're right. I have a perspective on this. As I say, I listened to the Member for Ferryland; he was getting animated with it, and I can do that, too. I get that; we all do that. But I'm going to try my best to do this on a logic-based approach.

I believe what the Members are saying is that they don't want a raise and they support the bill, but they disagree with the process. I look to the Members to see if there's any heads nodding, if I've gotten that right. I see one Member nodding his head and I appreciate that.

My question is: If that is the case and the point that has been made, why would we continue to filibuster a bill for which we all agree and will vote, unanimously, then there would be a conversation after as to going forward? We have a motion that's put down.

Again, I've been through three or four of these MCRCs now. That's the question I have. You can understand why I would be exasperated when I sit here and say: You support it; you don't want the raise, but we're going to stay here and we're going to not vote on the bill when we could get to – I'll be honest with you, I'm kind of anxious to get that Nalcor bill done. I'll just put that out there, if somebody wants to answer that.

I'll put in the second part: One of the comments that Members have made is that we need an independent process, which brings me back to June. There was an independent process – been there, been recognized by the courts, was put in place and we had to follow it. I haven't heard a good explanation yet as to why that process, which was independent in nature and brought to us, was not followed at that time and, in fact, it was politicalized.

I think the two questions that I ask are good; I think they are sensible. I'll take my place now so we can have a question and answer, if that is something that the Members would like to entertain.

Thank you.

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

J. DINN: With that in mind then, my next comments are going to be very brief and maybe even a suggestion; one that people may not like. If we're replacing 1.1 to 1.3, which outlines the process, it comes down then, Mr. Chair, as to how the decision is going to be made. What is the process in place? Will it still be with the MCRC or is it now left up to whom? That's the first thing.

In some ways – and I'll throw that out there because I'd like to hear that, but I'll pass this on to another comment. I guess it goes back to my union days when it comes to negotiations. If you want an ideal solution from me, because I think in many ways we need to have that, here's a thought: let the MCRC make the recommendation. The next time a general election is held, put that as one of the options: do you agree to the recommendations of this Committee that the MHAs you're about to elect are entitled to? Now, we're making it truly independent and it's not left to a Committee.

I would dearly love to have, in many ways, a Committee looking at a lot of things along those lines. But if we're talking about compensation, the people who are our political masters, and who, I would say in my district, are our employers, our bosses, let them make the decision on that. If we do a good enough job and if we are, indeed, from their point of view, serving their best interests and that they have that say, then put that to a ballot each time. Now we'll have a truly independent process where we are truly answerable to the people we serve.

In the meantime, that's a suggestion for another time. I really would be interested as to if you remove this what happens next? How is this determined? What's the process?

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Bennett): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

B. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole has reported that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

S. CROCKER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

S. CROCKER: Presently.

SPEAKER: Presently.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again presently, by leave.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move, seconded by the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, that Bill 9 be now read a third time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and that its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Energy Corporation Act And The Hydro Corporation Act, 2007," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 9)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper, third reading of Bill 5.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, that Bill 5 be now read a third time.

SPEAKER: It's been moved and seconded that this bill be now read a third time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Access To Information And Protection Of Privacy Act, 2015. (Bill 5)

SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and that its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Access To Information And Protection Of Privacy Act, 2015," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 5)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the House recess until 6:15 p.m.

SPEAKER: This House do rest until 6:15 p.m.