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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.

Before we start, I'd just like to take this opportunity, for my first time as Speaker, to welcome the people in the public gallery. It's the first time we've had people here since March 2020.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Welcome everyone.

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we will hear Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Terra Nova, Conception Bay South, Burin - Grand Bank, St. George's – Humber and Mount Pearl North.

The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, on October 16, I had the pleasure to join the Southwest Arm Historical Society who held a ceremony at the Hodge's Cove lodge to honour 71 loggers from the Southwest Arm area who served with the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit, as well as four women who served with the Auxiliary Territorial Services during World War II, all veterans.

These women later returned to the area and raised their families and to this day, generations later, the families continue to be very proud to honour their loved ones that sacrificed and worked long, hard hours during the war.

Hayley Peddle, a Grade 12 student at Southwest Arm Academy, wrote and performed with her glee club a song, "Everybody's Got a Story." Her lyrics summed up the day perfectly: The work was hard and the days were long, no rest 'til dusk and awake before dawn 'til a lumberjack's day is done.

Hayley's great uncle, Willis Drover, was one of the many that never returned from overseas

The Lion's Club in Hodge's Cove and the Southwest Arm Historical Society has erected individual banners for each and every member.

Speaker, please join me in honouring these men and women.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to acknowledge a very passionate special needs teacher, Ms. Sandra Hemmings, from Conception Bay South, who has recently retired with 31 years of service.

Sandra Hemmings graduated from MUN in 1990 with two degrees: Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Special Education. From 1990-1991, she taught at Florence Williams School in Pool's Cove and taught two students with special needs in the morning and in multi-grade classrooms in the afternoon. From 1991-2021, she taught at Queen Elizabeth Regional High School in Foxtrap until her recent retirement. Sandra taught special needs and had the same classroom for 30 years.

Sandra Hemmings wasn't only a teacher, but a mentor and a guiding light to all her students throughout her career. She has been instrumental in helping her students compete and succeed with the Duke of Edinburgh's program, enabling them to become well-rounded individuals and building a strong sense of self-esteem.

Sandra's passion for teaching and improving educational outcomes for the children was tremendous and I've seen first-hand her positive impact she had on special needs students.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Ms. Sandra Hemmings for her dedication and remarkable achievements in the classroom and wish her all the best in her well-deserved retirement.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Speaker, today I would like to convey to the House the loss of a true ambassador for the Town of St. Lawrence, the District of Burin - Grand Bank, our region and our province, Gord Dunphy.

Gord passed away on August 19, 2021, and is fondly remembered and missed by his wife Jocelyn, his son and daughters, his grandchildren, brothers, sisters and friends.

Gord's contribution to soccer in Newfoundland and Labrador began as a player, then as a coach, executive member, a member of the St. Lawrence Laurentian hall of fame, the Burin Peninsula hall of fame, soccer NL hall of fame and as a commissioner.

Gord was honoured and well-known for his lifetime membership to soccer NL, his three-time Challenge Cup championships as a coach, a broadcaster and through his webcast known as Gord Cast.

Gord brought soccer to people who could not attend games and those who lived elsewhere around the globe. This wider audience gave him the ability to share his knowledge of the game and the players who were involved.

Gord Cast was full of excitement and great interviews with soccer fans, players and special guests.

Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador has lost a soccer great whose commitment and dedication made him well respected and a giant in the sport of soccer.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. REID: Speaker, I would I would like to recognize the good work of Jordan Bennett and Marcus Gosse, two Mi'kmaq artists from the Bay St. George area.

These two artists collaborated to paint a mural that was unveiled this past August near Corner Brook Pulp and Paper Mill, where the community of Crow Gulch once stood. This billboard-size painting celebrates the people who once lived there and is in an area where the City of Corner Brook is preparing to build a new park.

The village of Crow Gulch was largely Mi'kmaq and was marked by poverty and social stigma. Municipal services, such as electricity, were never extended into the community and it was eventually bulldozed in the late-1960s and the inhabitants relocated.

This large-scale, permanent outdoor piece of public art is a first of its kind in the area. The artists see their work as a way of honouring the people of the past, but also want to inspire other Indigenous artists around the province to show their presence in the province in public ways.

Speaker, I ask all Members of the House to join with me in recognizing the important work being done by Jordan Bennett and Marcus Gosse.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. STOYLES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in the House of Assembly today to recognize CHANNAL, Consumers' Health Awareness Network of Newfoundland and Labrador.

For over 32 years CHANNAL has been committed to their mission to help people with mental health and addiction issues to fulfil their lives. Staffed entirely by individuals with similar life experiences, peer support have offered in person assistance to over 25,000 people and the Warm Line have taken over 60,000 calls from people struggling to overcome these challenges. Allowing them to be heard, to share their stories and to understand that they are not alone all while helping on the journey of recovery.

CHANNAL has offices in Mt. Pearl, St. John's, Grand Falls-Windsor, Marystown and Stephenville. They have staff in all those

locations plus they have offices in Clarenville, Deer Lake, Harbour Grace, St. Anthony, Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Labrador West.

The vision of the staff and volunteers at CHANNAL is to support those struggling with mental health and addiction issues to realize their full potential.

I ask all Members to join me in extending a thank you to this group, CHANNAL, for their dedication and hard work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

E. LOVELESS: Speaker, I am very proud today to speak in this hon. House to inform my colleagues about four brand new schools that have recently opened and are benefiting families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. LOVELESS: In September, the new Gander Academy opened with 29 classrooms for students in kindergarten to Grade 3.

Also in September, a new intermediate school with 33 classrooms opened in Paradise for students in Grades 6 and 7, but will eventually house Grades 6 to 9 by 2023-24.

In addition, the new Bay Roberts Primary with 18 classrooms for students in kindergarten to Grade 3 opened in those communities.

Just last week, a new school with 17 classrooms opened in my district in St. Alban's for students in kindergarten to Grade 12, servicing the Bay d'Espoir area.

Construction on all four of these schools began in 2019 and was completed this year, for a total combined investment of more than \$89 million over the course of construction.

Speaker, it brings me joy to know that students and staff in these areas are receiving their education in modern school and that these buildings were constructed by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

These projects contributed significantly to the economic development in the province by creating employment in each of these regions.

Speaker, *Budget 2021* allocated \$4.1 million for improvements to schools and post-secondary institutions throughout the province, including \$19.5 million for alterations and improvements.

We look forward to continuing to improve learning environments for students and staff in Newfoundland and Labrador in a way that is responsible for all taxpayers.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Speaker, my colleagues and I join the minister in celebrating the opening of these new schools. A new school is often a beacon of community activity in the area for students, staff and residents alike. Anything we can do to relieve the pressure on the K-12 system that is battling overcrowding and aging infrastructure is welcome in this province.

However, I do note the minister's claim that these schools were constructed by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – not sure if I agree. We continue to hear of government infrastructure projects being completed by other provinces' workers while our tradespeople sit home. It is a long time this government embraced community benefits agreements as proposed by Trades NL. We should be putting our people first in everything we do.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

I applaud the government's construction of these new schools. Our party will always welcome new investments in tomorrow's leaders.

New schools are great, but they need the proper resources so that they can be effective learning environments and part of that effective learning environment will be a review of the teacher allocation model so that our children receive the quality of education they deserve and are not placed in overcrowded classrooms.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

D. BRAZIL: Thank you, Speaker.

A family in Labrador whose infant daughter required life-saving medical attention could not be assisted by medical transportation at the moment of critical need. The Minister of Health decided to dispute the claims of the family. The family has called the minister's statement – and I quote – inaccurate, misleading and inappropriate.

I ask the Premier: What concerns do you have about this situation?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

While I don't believe it to be appropriate to discuss specific details of such a tragedy on the floor of this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, I will say on behalf of the entire government and I'm sure everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador, with a loss like that, we all feel it. If someone pains like that, we all feel it and it shouldn't be a source of political gain.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, this is a situation where government and the minister has to take acknowledgement that it did occur and that there has to be actions to ensure it doesn't happen to another family in the future.

The family has written a letter to the Premier stating that the minister has mischaracterized the situation. The family is calling for the minister to apologize.

I ask the minister: Will you apologize for your public statement disputing the story of this family?

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

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

I echo the Premier's condolences. I spoke with the family immediately after the receipt of that letter. Consistent with the Premier's comments, I will not be commenting on the specifics of any case in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, the family goes on to say if the minister does not apologize, then he should resign.

I ask the Premier: Do you continue to have confidence in your Minister of Health?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

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

I'll reiterate, I'm not going to discuss the contents of the previous complaint. I think we all share a significant amount of empathy with that family and I don't believe it should be used as a political football. I do still have confidence in my minister, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

D. BRAZIL: Speaker, we all have empathy for the family and all those other families who have not been able to avail of health services when they need them. This is about an intervention, an immediate intervention to ensure that this doesn't happen to another family coming out of Labrador in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

D. BRAZIL: It has now been five days since the Premier and the minister didn't know the answer to the question, so I hope they have gotten an answer from Eastern Health.

I ask the Premier: How many people have died while awaiting cardiac surgery in our province since the start of COVID-19?

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

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

I did have a lengthy conversation with Eastern Health today. We have on an average year, unfortunately, four people who pass away while waiting for cardiac surgery. Waiting for any kind of surgery is difficult and our condolences go out to the family. The specifics of the last 12 months: There were eight deaths on the wait-list.

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Last week in Question Period when referring to a specific instance of neonatal emergency medical transportation, the minister said: To my knowledge, a team is available around the clock. If it is any different, I'll let the Member opposite know.

Can you provide an update on the neonatal medical transportation team?

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

J. HAGGIE: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I have not been informed any differently by Eastern Health and I'm awaiting a response.

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

In September, Eastern Health said they were trying to recruit and train staff to resume the 24-7 neonatal medical transportation operations.

I ask the minister: When were you made aware that the neonatal transport was not available 24-7?

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

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

I believe I've addressed what information I have and I can't add anything further to it at the moment. I'm awaiting further from Eastern Health.

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

P. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

It would be nice if the minister who is responsible would have this information sooner rather than later.

Speaker, this family we've spoke to has written a letter to both the minister and the Premier. In this letter the family states that while they waited 31 hours for emergency medical transportation for their child, virtual care was comprised of informal consults lasting less than 15 minutes and occurred over FaceTime video on personal cellphones of medical staff because of the lack of virtual care in Labrador.

I ask the minister: Is this acceptable?

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

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

This is a very difficult situation. I had a difficult but honest conversation with the family on Thursday on receipt of the letter. Following that discussion, I will not be commenting on the specifics of this case in any venue.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the issue is the case; it's the system. It's the fact that the infrastructure isn't there. That's what we're trying to get at here. The fact that we don't have a neonatal team 24-7, or we don't have infrastructure for virtual care: so that should be our focus.

Speaker, the Canadian Medical Association has now written the Premier urging him to abandon his plan to weaken the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association through legislation, the equivalent of union busting.

I ask the minister: Will she follow the Canadian Medical Association's advice and abandon this union busting tactic?

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

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

These discussions were begun with the Medical Association two years ago. I am aware of the comments of the Canadian Medical Association. It's a little bit interesting in actual fact because in 2011 the NLMA removed its mandate for NLMA members to be members of the Canadian Medical Association. So we need to get the consultations around this process completed and whatever the outcomes of those are we will decide, as a group on this side, what to do with that legislative proposals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Dawn Turner commented to *The Telegram* today concerning the fact that doctors have been without a contract for four years under this Liberal government. She says, and I quote: "I think you can offer less money, but you have to offer something. And right now, we're really not being offered anything, other than disrespect and continually being gaslighted"

I ask the minister: How can you expect to reach a deal with the physicians of this province if they feel like you are gaslighting them?

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

S. COADY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question.

As I have said repeatedly in this House, we value and appreciate the hard work of health care professionals, doctors, nurses, paramedics: all those who are contributing to our health care system. As I have said in this House before, we realize we are challenged with pay for family doctors. That's why we think it's very important to get back to the table to talk about the proposals that we have outlined. I'm sure there are other things that the NLMA will bring to the table as well, Mr. Speaker.

We've had discussions around the payment schedule. We've had discussions around family practice renewal. We've had discussions around

rural retention bonus; these are important discussions. We need to get back to the table and I urge the NLMA to do so.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

T. WAKEHAM: Speaker, it is encouraging to hear the minister wants to get back to the table with the NLMA so I just have one question. Will the minister return to the negotiation table with the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association without any strings attached?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've said to the NLMA I do wish that they would come back to the table. I have had discussions with them, Mr. Speaker. I know that they wanted to consult with the membership, but I do encourage them to come back to the table. There's much to be discussed.

I've said in this House that we recognize the challenges with pay for family doctors. I've said in this House the multitude of proposals that are before us to be discussed at the table. I hope we get there very, very soon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: I remind the minister that their contract has been expired for four years. That's a lot of time.

Speaker, while this government refuses to recognize a crisis in health care, last week the Energy Minister recognized that gas prices have indeed reached the crisis level, but that government's hands are tied.

I ask the minister: Will he direct the PUB to remove the additional five cents per litre, which was added to gasoline prices when Come By Chance ended production?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Happy to have an opportunity to answer this.

I'm not sure if I actually mentioned the word crisis or anything like that when I spoke with the media last week on this topic, but the reality is that certainly everybody across the country is feeling the pain of high oil prices and high prices at the pumps.

When it comes to this province, the PUB, which is an independent body who are tasked with petroleum pricing, received an application last year from NARL – North Atlantic Refining – as it related to transportations costs to import fuel here. That was an independent application and an independent decision.

We have no legislative authority to intervene in such matters; although, we absolutely understand the concern that is felt by the consumer.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: The people paying the prices at the grocery store and the gas pumps will tell you there's a crisis.

Speaker, the five cents per litre, which was applied to the gas taxes when Come By Chance was shut down, is still in place ever since the refinery went offline.

Minister: Are you willing to admit that your failure in securing an operational future for Come By Chance to produce gasoline and other fuels is the reason people are paying five cents a litre more than they should be?

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

A. PARSONS: No, Mr. Speaker, no I'm not willing to admit that I'm the cause of rising gas prices in this province. I certainly am not going to do that.

What I will say is the reality is that the fuel is being shipped into this province because Come By Chance is offline. We work with Come By Chance as it relates to the start-up of that facility – one that's been working quite well. We've had extensive consultation and work when it comes to the owner, when it comes to the union, when it comes to prospective purchasers. And that's something that's ongoing. We're not willing to just give everything away.

But I will point out, when it comes to the PUB or independent, the last time that a government intervened and told them what to do, it was to keep Muskrat Falls out of their crosshairs.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, the other two fuel suppliers that are in this province did not request the five cents, as the minister just indicated. This five cents per litre was supposed to be temporary but because of the minister's failure to get Come by Chance back up and processing fuel, it is looking more and more permanent.

Minister, let's be honest here, will the extra charge ever go away?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I've indicated now on a number of occasions, we have to ask the Public Utilities Board as they are tasked with this duty by the Legislature. The Legislature had tasked them with this some time ago. It is not a government policy decision.

One thing is, though, if we do something like that there's a couple questions that one would ask. One would be: If we're now forcing an importer to take away that money, do we then get into supply issues? The second part of that is, if we're talking about the subsidization of this by government, I think that leads to a bigger question, Speaker: Exactly what are we willing to do there and not do when it comes to all the issues that we face as it relates to our fiscal situation in this province?

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Will the minister table the letter that he wrote to the PUB?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely. I'd be more than willing to table a letter that I wrote about a month and a half ago to the PUB, asking for an explanation as to how the process works when it comes to these types of decisions.

A couple things I would point out. Number one, I have not had a response yet. Number two, I would point out that I certainly didn't ask for anybody to direct them to make a decision. But I do think – and I've said this publicly, actually, last Thursday out there – as the Public Utilities Board, I think the board does have a mandate to explain to the public how they do their work.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

L. PARROTT: Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, people are paying way too much at the pumps and everywhere else.

The PUB decides the price of gasoline and other fuels. The minister should not hide behind them. The minister can and should ask the PUB to find ways to lower gas prices.

Why hasn't the minister asked the PUB to review the pricing formula and see if there are ways to lower the cost of fuel?

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

A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The same way when I was in Justice, I did not tell the courts how to operate or how judges were to make decisions; I'm not going to tell the PUB how to do their job here. The last time that a government did that, a government told them not to intervene in Muskrat Falls and we ended up with one of the biggest debacles –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

A. PARSONS: – as a government, as a province, that we've ever had to face. One that, I will point out, that I'm still dealing with – we are still dealing with when it comes to every decision in this province.

What I would point out is maybe we would be in a better spot to do something about all of these issues if we didn't have to deal with the albatross around our neck that was Muskrat Falls that was inflicted by the people that came before us.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Muskrat Falls again, Mr. Speaker, three elections later.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: You just had your time, Sir.

My question is for the Minister of Education. Speaker, as our province grapples with the fourth wave of COVID-19, we have seen schools close or many classrooms are totally empty and students stay away, waiting for a COVID test appointments and results.

What is the minister doing to ensure these students are not left behind?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's an important question, because the education of our children is of utmost importance to our government.

Mr. Speaker, we take guidance from Public Health based on epidemiology, on contact tracing, on when it's important or when we're able to open a school or when we can't. What we have seen is, in the first three or four days that an area or a town is impacted or a school is impacted, that the numbers of students attending school, attendance numbers are low but they build up, Mr. Speaker. We've seen it time and time again that they build up and get back to normal.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. PETTEN: Thank you.

Speaker, the NLTA has clearly spoken out that teachers cannot teach in the classroom and online simultaneously. Some schools are near empty for roll call. The Burin Peninsula is also now dealing with the outbreak and schools are virtually empty. Government has almost two years to prepare for this exact situation and families are looking for direction.

Again, Speaker, what can the minister offer them?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Again, Mr. Speaker, based on risk level, epidemiology, contact tracing, it's determined on when we open a school and when

we don't. The two schools on the Burin Peninsula are reverted to online learning, Mr. Speaker, for the safety of the students, based on the risk level as determined by Public Health.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Member is correct; we can't have the teacher teaching both online and in class at the same time. We did see last year that there were concerns with blended learning. We also saw, Mr. Speaker, that through the Canadian Pediatric Association, for example, that they raised the concerns for the mental, emotional and physical health of students with online learning. So it's important that, when safe, we have students in class.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, last month we learned of a tragic situation wherein Gregory Pike, while an inmate at Her Majesty's Penitentiary, took his own life. Let me take this moment to extend my heartfelt condolences to the family at this difficult time. The family has spoken publicly saying Gregory needed mental health assistance, not incarceration, at the time the incident took place.

I ask the minister: What concerns does this tragedy raise about the mental health supports offered to inmates in our province's correctional institutions?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

First, I do want to offer my condolences to the family. Obviously, I can't comprehend what a terrible, difficult time it is to lose a close family member like that. I do offer my condolences on behalf of the Department of Justice and Public Safety and on behalf of the government.

As with any situation that occurs like that at the penitentiary, a review will be done to see if policy was followed, what gaps may exist and, if there are gaps, what we can do to fill them. But I do want to ensure every one in the public that medical care is provided to inmates through

certified medical professionals; that would include nurses, physicians and psychiatrists. The Department of Justice and Public Safety takes advice from the medical professionals when it comes to the treatment of inmates and the services that are provided.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, it's estimated that 77 to 87 per cent of HMP inmates have either mental health and substance abuse issues, or both; issues which the system has clearly failed to address.

I ask the minister: Why is the justice system offering incarceration and punishment to people, when what they really need is substance abuse and mental health treatment instead?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

This is an issue that permeates, obviously, not just inmates at HMP but throughout society, and it's something that this government, and really everyone in the country and the world, has come to recognize needs to be taken more seriously. We're doing that, this government, with regard to treatment and addictions and in my department as well.

So we are looking at that, we are looking at ways to improve situations for inmates and also to have therapeutic courts where certain individuals, where they meet criteria, can avoid going to prison and can deal with their addictions and issues through situations in therapeutic courts, outside of it and get the treatment and help they need and return to be productive members of society.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, the minister referenced the review and we look forward to the completion and public release of the report into this tragedy. While this report is ongoing, however, the Jesso report from 2019 is only half implemented according to media reports last month.

I ask the minister: Can he explain what recommendations have yet to be implemented, and why such a long delay?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

As I've said, mental health and addictions is an issue that's arisen and starting to be taken more seriously by everyone in this government and by my department. We are looking at all the recommendations that were made in that report, including Eastern Health taking a more central role with regard to treatment of inmates at HMP.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Speaker, the storm surge of January 17 and 18, 2020, caused extensive damage on the coastline within the Town of Bonavista. Despite promised federal disaster relief funds over 19 months ago to fix it, the seawall has not been remediated. In fact, a young family with several children fear for their safety and seeking safer rental accommodations due to the breached seawall.

With the winter season quickly approaching can the minister confirm that this work will be done this year?

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Speaker.

The actual issue in Bonavista is like many areas in the province that we deal with. It's something that in terms of a planning process we know that, through the planning, it's a costly venture as well in terms of securing coastlines. But I don't have the if and when that work will be done, but I'll certainly go back to the staff and find out for the Member and report back to him when we can have a side conversation about that actual project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Minister.

Speaker, 90 per cent of the District of Bonavista still has local dumps operating, the vast majority of which are overcapacity and negatively impacting the environment. This is not a pretty picture for residents and tourists alike.

Why has it taken so long for this area to fall under the provincial waste management strategy?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you to the hon. Member for their question.

Any opportunity we have to work with regions of the province, we have, trying to expand the regional scope for our regional waste management sites. I've spoken with the area residents as recently as about 10, 12 days ago. So we're working towards those.

Thank you very much for the question. I look forward to fruitful discussions to come forward on that in the very near future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Speaker.

As of yesterday, there were 217 boil-water advisories in 173 communities in our beautiful province. The Health Accord team has identified access to safe, clean drinking water is needed to increase healthy living in our province.

I ask the minister: When will safe, clean drinking water be provided to all people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Speaker. It sounds very rude trying to say just Speaker. I'm so used to saying Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question. It's a very good question.

Our government is very much committed to making sure clean drinking water is available in all parts of our province. We have worked very hard on that. We have put things in place. An example would be the 33 potable water-dispensing stations placed there. We have the most agreeable and generous cost-share relationship between municipalities – two levels of government – allowing them to get clean drinking water for their residents.

We are encouraging the municipalities to reach out to us. We want them to come to the table with this and make that a priority within their district. If it's not a priority in their area, it's hard for us to force that down their throat. We are working very closely with them.

SPEAKER: Time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. WALL: Speaker, first of all, I agree, Mr. Speaker and Speaker is two different things to get used to, no doubt.

I thank the minister for the comment. When we have numbers of that nature, being a former mayor, I know the importance of clean drinking water to the residents and it is a very important

topic. I do hope that more towns will reach out to the department.

Speaker, in our Blue Book, we have committed to a systemic review of boil-water advisories across the province and to provide a timeline for those particular fixes.

I ask the minister: Is he willing to adopt our solution to improve access to clean, safe drinking water to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

B. DAVIS: Speaker, thank you very much.

I thank the hon. Member for a very good question. We've got a very strong strategy ourselves. I'll give you some examples of how we've seen very encouraging milestones come forward. The levels of pH existence are at an all-time low in this province; not saying that we are perfect because it is far from there. The number of communities with a certified operator is at an all-time high. The number of communities that have a percentage of drinking water systems put in place is at an all-time high. The number of water treatment facilities put in place reached an all-time high.

So those are good things. It's not saying the job is done for sure. We are working with them. We encourage all municipalities that have those concerns to come forward with us. We want to work with them to get this solution fixed for the residents that we all represent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Last Wednesday, in answer to my colleague's question, the Government House Leader stated, "There are many Committees of this House, whether it's a Social Service Committee or other

Committees and we strike Committees from time to time

“The thing we have to realize is we always had a Committee structure in this House, which always can be used. But I will have more conversations with the Member opposite on the opportunities we may have there around Committees.”

Considering his House Leaders ringing endorsement of Committees, I ask the Premier: Will he instruct his House Leader to strike the Select Committee on basic income we called for as one suggestion to address our health care crisis?

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker.

I'll answer this question today and I'm happy to do so.

I think Committees are a great way to get work done. In fact, one of the first things I did when I became Minister of Justice and Public Safety was announce an all-party Committee to review the Election Act.

All-party being the key word, but, unfortunately, all parties didn't show up. If people want to participate and come to Committees when they're invited, I think that would go a long way as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: I think it's a bit of a misnomer, Speaker, that it's called an all-party Committee then, but I will tell you we did offer suggestions which were promptly shut down by the minister.

The Department of Health states in one of its posters that when it comes to COVID-19 interacting with more people increases the risk. The closer you are to people, the greater the risk. Risk increases as people spend more time

together. Mr. Speaker, this describes our schools.

Would the Minister of Education agree that the current back-to-school plan is actually increasing the risk to our students, teachers, staff and their families of contracting COVID-19?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the Member is applying for the job of Chief Medical Officer of Health or not but I take guidance from Public Health, Mr. Speaker, on when schools are safe to be occupied and when they're not.

I think the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Public Health have guided us very, very well so far through this pandemic. When we're advised that it's safer to keep a school closed and go online, Mr. Speaker, we do that just as we've done with the two schools on the Burin Peninsula.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DINN: Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Education, the minister should know what works in a school and what doesn't as well.

I ask the minister: Why did he not maintain the proactive COVID-19 mitigation measures his department and school district had in place last year such as extra busing to allow physical distancing, extra cleaning staff to carry out enhanced cleaning and extra teaching units?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

T. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, some of those measures were kept in place, the additional administrators and guidance, for example, Mr. Speaker, that were put in place were kept there. But, again, we, in the department and the school districts, take guidance from Public Health. We were advised that it was safe to go back to regular busing, Mr. Speaker. As part of the low-risk and high-risk measures that are in place, when the need is required for higher cleaning protocols they're put in place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

The cost of living has skyrocketed in this province year over year. Inflation has increased by 4 per cent. This will force people to choose between heat and food.

Where is the Premier's plan to address the increased cost of home heating in this province?

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

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

We are seeing, of course, the impact of higher fuel costs across the board, around the world, as the change comes out of the global pandemic and, of course, we see the price of oil rise.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, the province was very proactive. When the carbon tax was implemented in 2019, we carved out an exemption under the federal program. If we hadn't done that, of course, all of us in the province would've been impacted by carbon tax. This has been a way that we've minimized the impact, especially on those that are feeling the pressures of the oil and gas increase. I will also say that, of course, we do not charge gas tax on our home heating either.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

A quick question; no preamble, please.

J. BROWN: Well, seeing that, will you remove the tax from residential electricity for those who are on electric heat in this province?

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

S. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As budget comes forward, as we always do, we do look at our tax system to determine what, if at all possible, we can certainly do for all of our taxes across the board in this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The House Of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, Bill 43.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow move, in accordance with Standing Order 11(1), that this House do not adjourn at 5:30 o'clock on Tuesday, October 26, 2021.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

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

B. WARR: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice of the following private Member's motion, which will be seconded by the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

WHEREAS 2020 and 2021 have been incredibly difficult for the tourism and hospitality, arts and cultural industries in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS many individuals and groups are working hard to make 2022 a successful year; and

WHEREAS planning for 2022 is important now in order to take full advantage of the anticipated demand from people wishing to return or to visit our province; and

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted tourism and its important position as a key employer and revenue generator throughout the province; and

WHEREAS the desire of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who reside outside the province to visit their families and friends has increased because of many months of not being able to travel; and

WHEREAS an abundance of municipalities across the province have local or regional events planned for the 2022 tourism season; and

WHEREAS the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation's mandate letter announced government's intention to have 2022 as a Come Home Year event; and

WHEREAS government will continue to support the very effective provincial tourism marketing and branding efforts that have brought so many visitors to Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador is a remote working destination of choice; and

WHEREAS there are plans to encourage and convince Newfoundlanders and Labradorians living outside of the province, as well as first-time visitors, to stay and make Newfoundland and Labrador their home to live and work;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House supports the government's plan to make 2022 a provincial Come Home Year celebration in all areas of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

In accordance with Standing Order 63(3), the private Member's motion referred to by the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay will be the private Member's motion debated this Wednesday, October 27, 2021.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm hoping to present this petition for the last time today, depending on the answer from the minister.

The maintenance and upkeep of the roadway in the community of Cold Brook is the responsibility of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. Sections of the roadway have been in a deplorable condition for the last five years and need repairs and resurfacing. There have been a number of close calls where vehicles have to swerve in order to avoid driving over a section of the roadway where the pavement is totally missing.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to consider repairing, upgrading and maintaining the paved road through the community of Cold Brook in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, there were several stakes put up over the summer on the Cold Brook road which caused much questions to be asked and people were getting excited about it. So today, when I present this petition, I'll be anxious to hear the minister's response and he can clarify what all those stakes mean.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for his concern.

Those stakes meant that work was supposed to be done the summer on that particular upgrade and it didn't get done for reasons beyond my control, but I will commit to the Member that, in the next season, the work will get done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

The background to this petition is as follows:

WHEREAS individual residents and municipal leaders 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 who 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: 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, this matter I have raised numerous times in the House of Assembly. Today, I first of all wish to say that I'd like to thank the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure; he did acknowledge last week that he did come to the District of Harbour Main, at my request, and we drove from one end of the district to the other. He saw first-hand the deplorable and, I can say,

disgusting state of the roads in the District of Harbour Main.

While we appreciate the fact that he did take the time out of his busy schedule and the people of the District of Harbour Main recognize that, what we would really appreciate is if you would do something to fix the problems.

The roads – two areas in particular: South River and Upper Gullies. Those areas we've heard from many, many concerned constituents. They're concerned about safety issues. It's probably the biggest issue that I hear of in the district from the constituents are the conditions of the road. The people are getting increasingly frustrated; they're getting angry. They're getting so concerned and upset about the lack of action.

What I worry about, Mr. Speaker, is when I hear the government say that they've taken the politics out of paving. The people of the District of Harbour Main and other districts in the province need to know that, for example, a request was made and it was shown that Transportation and Infrastructure Minister Elvis Loveless increased his spending in his district from \$1.5 million to \$4.5 million in a single year. Three hundred per cent increase while we see districts like Harbour Main get nothing. Not acceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: I'll just tell the Member that she's learning too many of her tricks from the Member for Terra Nova.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

E. LOVELESS: But in terms of the value, if the Member – knowledge or facts are very important as well. The amount of money that was spent in my district this year was the same amount that

was invested in her district this year – absolutely.

So, in terms of her concerns – I’ve travelled this province in every district this summer, and there are a lot of roads that are comparable to hers and worse than hers. In terms of her roads, I went there because I was serious about it. I wasn’t playing politics with it, because it was important.

I will continue to do my job as Transportation Minister. Just to remind everybody in this hon. House that I have a budget as well and I have live within my means, and I continue to do that. I’ll take her issues under advisement when we develop the multi-year plan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The former mill property and Grand Falls House were taken over by government after Abitibi left Grand Falls-Windsor.

Therefore we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To return the former mill property, along with Grand Falls House and its property, back to the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor where it belongs.

We just talked about a Come Home Year 2022 for everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador. I think it’s a great idea. Grand Falls-Windsor has so much potential and opportunity, but there are things that have been holding up for quite some time now. The mill property is one, and Grand Falls House.

This is no value to the government at this moment, but it is a huge value – a huge value – to the residents of Grand Falls-Windsor and Central Newfoundland and Labrador in general. It doesn’t cost anything to do this. We’re not asking for any money. We just want the minister to sit with the council of Grand Falls-Windsor – and this is part of the petition. I’ll ask the minister today if he would sit with the council of Grand Falls-Windsor in due time over the next

month, couple of months, and acknowledge exactly what they’re asking for.

It’s holding up economic development; it’s holding up tourism opportunities. The Premier addresses – and he promised that he would address this, once the election was over, when he was in campaigning throughout Grand Falls-Windsor.

I’m just asking the minister – I know that he wants the best for the province as well – if he would sit with the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor and get this deal done and return this back to the people where it belongs?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Speaker.

I have no problem meeting with the town. I understand that the Member has been in communications with officials in my department over the last several days and with the town as well. Hopefully, we can come to a resolve at some point, but I have no problem meeting with the Town of Grand Falls.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

To continue with the theme of roads: Many roads within the District of Bonavista need work completed, none worse than Route 232 travelling from Smith Sound from George’s Brook-Milton to Burgoyne’s Cove. Residents, school buses, emergency response vehicles and tourists have to endure a stretch of road that has not seen pavement resurfacing for decades.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately address the condition of Route 232 and other tourist attraction sites within the District of Bonavista to ensure the safety of those travelling

over this road and to maximize the economic impact for the province.

Many weeks ago, Speaker, I made a request through the local officials for the roads rubric or the scoring key, as we often refer to as in the English language arts within the school system, to have a look and see what determines which roads would be prioritized over other roads. I know that population is one, but my curiosity was where tourism fits within that roads analysis. Anyway, I understood that I could not receive that to understand where it is.

I mention Route 232 – and I say from the start, we’ve had some paving in our district along Route 235, that’s going down the shoreline, and we’ve also had it on 239. In those areas, we have very wonderful tourism attraction sites that are there that could even piggyback on the work that is existing or, in those small sections, would make a significant difference to the tourism within the District of Bonavista. At a risk of naming them, sometimes there can be adjunct that the work that is done, it might leave out 200 metres of very terrible road that would prevent people from going down to New Bonaventure, for example, or it may be even to, we’ll say, Tickle Cove where the sea arch would be under the UNESCO geopark.

My thinking would be Bonavista sometimes would quadruple its population and, I would think, probably for four or five months of the year. I would think that if the tourism piece is used that we would look at that and at least those more critical spots can be seen too, hopefully, for the Come Home Year in 2022.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you for the petition. I think what the Member is asking, in terms of planning, is will we look at the lens of tourism when we do the planning? I can confirm for you that we definitely will.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Speaker.

I’m going to, again, present a petition on behalf of the people on the West Coast concerning the closing of the motor vehicle registration office in Corner Brook.

Speaker, there’s considerable frustration over this. I just can’t understand how the minister can state that it worked well during the pandemic so we’re going to continue on with it.

I’ve seen pictures out in Harbour Grace of people standing in a lineup in the rain waiting to get in; standing up, lining up in the rain.

P. LANE: Seniors.

E. JOYCE: Seniors. Can’t get into the building; standing in the rain. That’s how we’re treating our seniors. It’s almost like in some ways we don’t appreciate the seniors who are standing up in the rain in Harbour Grace, in the minister’s district.

Out in Corner Brook, I had a person who contacted me – and it’s sad; it’s actually sad. They were trying to arrange – they had to get an appointment done, if not, they would have had to get a test, an older person. They were actually arranging their doctor’s appointment around to try to get in on a Wednesday morning so they wouldn’t be left out. It’s just sad.

There’s no appreciation for the frustration and the inconvenience that we’re giving to people in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There has yet to be a reasonable reason why this is being done.

P. LANE: (Inaudible.)

E. JOYCE: Spending more money, as my colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands just said, they’re spending more money on it. It’s more aggravation with less service.

I had someone again last week who can’t get through on the computers, the computers are down – as the minister said they’re down at times. The phone lines, you can’t get through on

the phone lines, yet we're still allowing this. I'm sure there are other government Members getting phone calls on this because I'm getting them from all over the province. I'm getting them from all over the province.

Why isn't the government stepping in and saying, okay, we're here to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, not cause them hardship and not put them through extra stress and strain. It is just inconceivable when you got seniors standing up in Harbour Grace in the pouring rain waiting to get in because you only got three hours a week to get in there. It is just inconceivable.

Then you got it in Corner Brook also, where I had to bring chairs down to people to sit down because they're waiting so long. Then you walk in, you got one line for the seniors, one line of people who got appointments and you've got another line for people just sitting over in the corner, hopefully, they're going to get in.

I urge the government to change this draconian policy to help out the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and stop putting them through this stress.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: I move, seconded by the Minister for Justice and Public Safety, that under Standing Order 11(1), this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, October 25, 2021.

SPEAKER: The motion is that this House do not adjourn.

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.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, under Orders of the Day, I call from the Order Paper second reading of Bill 38, An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province.

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member from Mount Pearl North, that Bill 38, An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province, be now read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 38, An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province, now be read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province" (Bill 38)

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, I'm very proud to be here in this hon. House today to discuss a very important piece of new legislation for Newfoundland and Labrador, An Act Respecting Accessibility in the Province, referred to as the *Accessibility Act*.

As a government, we are strongly committed to delivering provincial accessibility legislation to create a more accessible and inclusive province that will apply to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. In fact, my mandate letter from the Premier clearly states that I and my department will work across government and with stakeholders to lead the development of provincial accessibility legislation to help ensure equitable access to services and opportunities for people with disabilities. Today I am meeting this key commitment.

When we, as a province, improve accessibility and inclusion, all persons in Newfoundland and Labrador benefit; this ultimately leads to everyone being able to fully participate in

society. Nearly one in four Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are disabled by barriers. These barriers can be physical, attitudinal or systemic. As well we may have an act, a regulation, a policy, a technology that can also prevent full participation in society.

It is extremely important to remove barriers, as it helps to make the province more inclusive and accessible, which benefits everyone. It helps improve a person's health and well-being when they can fully participate in their community and communities and businesses benefit from this engagement. Further, the purchasing power of people with disabilities has been estimated by the Royal Bank of Canada to be roughly \$25 billion nationally; that is an estimate. For Newfoundland that would approximate to \$30 million.

There are so many people and organizations that I would like to thank for being engaged in the development of this proposed legislation. Obviously, you run the risk of leaving someone out when you begin listing groups, but I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the important role of the disability community and specifically the provincial advisory council of persons with disabilities and the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities Newfoundland and Labrador. The commitment, passion and patience of so many in this community to ensure that this was done right, I believe, have led to the development of very strong piece of legislation.

So too, we have appreciated our engagement with the business community. Certainly, over the last year or more, businesses have and continue to experience challenges due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Many businesses have also found opportunities to reach customers and clients by expanding their products and services with the use of accessible and different technology features. From offering online ordering and deliveries to curbside pickup, these additional options have directly helped to expand their businesses to reach so many more individuals. As businesses continue to look for ways to expand their reach, they are already advancing accessibility and inclusion throughout the province.

Let's all take a moment to ask why. Why are we advancing accessibility now? The answer is

simply it is the right thing to do. Everyone deserves to equally participate in society without barriers, in a province that prides itself as being more inclusive and accessible.

The proposed *Accessibility Act* is a bill that will allow government to outline the principles and goals for an accessible Newfoundland and Labrador. The legislation that I'm presenting today, Speaker, is enabling legislation. Enabling legislation allows for further development of associated regulations and policies rather than prescribing specific requirements in legislation today. It provides a broad focus on areas of authority that government can act on in the future.

The purpose of this bill is to improve accessibility by preventing, identifying and removing barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from full participation in society.

The proposed bill would authorize the establishment of accessibility standards to improve accessibility, and it's a key feature; establish an advisory board to make recommendations to the minister regarding accessibility standards; require an individual, organization or public body that is subject to an accessibility standard to take actions to prevent barriers from being created and to identify and remove those barriers.

It will require public bodies to prepare accessibility plans every three years and make them publicly available, and it will provide inspection and enforcement powers to enforce the accessibility standards once they are in place.

Speaker, as a province, this proposed accessibility legislation would allow us to join five other provinces: British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, as well as the federal government, in having such legislation focused specifically on advancing accessibility and inclusion. As well, Saskatchewan is currently advancing accessibility legislation, with a goal of having it implemented in 2023.

To get us to this point today, we partnered with the Provincial Advisory Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and the

Coalition of Persons with Disabilities Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as government's Public Engagement and Planning Division, to develop and deliver an extension engagement process.

I am very proud to report that this engagement process was identified as the most inclusive and accessible engagement process ever held in this province. It is now a preferred model for accessible and inclusive community engagement sessions.

The process consisted of eight in-person consultation sessions, with two sessions in each of the following communities: Corner Brook, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, St. John's and Gander. These consultation sessions consisted of an afternoon session with key stakeholders, such as the community of and for persons with disabilities, community organizations, the business and tourism sectors, municipalities, Indigenous governments and organizations, which were by invite and an evening session, which were open to the public. As well, there was an online webinar to help reach even more individuals in more communities.

A discussion guide was available on engageNL and for my department's Disability Policy Office for interested individuals and organizations to provide written, video or other formatted submissions and was available in accessible formats as required. This discussion guide provided the context for the in-person consultation sessions and webinar that are previously mentioned. In total, over 219 individuals and organizations participated in the public engagement process.

The final stage of this engagement process was the accessibility symposium workshop. This workshop provided key stakeholders with the opportunity to learn what input information had been received thus far in the process, to discuss the draft accessibility legislation and to provide an opportunity for additional input.

The workshop was also designed to explore some of the opportunities and challenges of creating and implementing accessibility legislation from other jurisdictions. This included a keynote speaker and panelists with expertise in accessibility legislation. That

speaker and those panelists presented on experiences in their jurisdictions, national considerations and practices relating to accessibility legislation.

Throughout the entire engagement process, we heard repeatedly and consistently from the community of persons with disabilities and key stakeholders that we need a made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador approach to accessibility legislation, and we need to get it right. That, Speaker, is exactly what we have done.

This made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador accessibility legislation specifically takes into account the province's unique cultures and demographics. The legislation also embraces the principles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Act.

As well, the legislation also aligns closely with the mission of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network, which encourages Commonwealth Parliaments, such as ours, to enable effective and full participation of persons with disabilities at all levels.

To develop this bill, we built upon our initial provincial consultation process that sought the perspectives and knowledge of persons with lived experience. We then continued to engage persons with disabilities and organizations of and for persons with disabilities, as well as incorporating the advice of the Provincial Advisory Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities to better inform the development of this legislation.

This ongoing collaboration and engagement has been vital to development of the legislation and it supports the philosophy of Nothing About Us Without Us. To ensure fulsome discussion, we held further consultations within the past year with the business and tourism sectors, community organizations, the non-profit sector and Indigenous governments and organizations to help better inform the approach to this legislation.

It has been said to me on numerous occasions by the community of and for persons with disabilities that the passing of this accessibility legislation will be the next critical step in advancing accessibility and inclusion in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In this bill, Speaker, it is important to note that disability is clearly defined to include physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive and learning disabilities, as well as communication or sensory impairment. This definition also includes a functional limitation that is permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, that interaction with a barrier prevents a person from fully participating in society.

Speaker, this enabling legislation will allow this government the ability to establish standards requiring individuals, private sector organizations and public bodies to take actions to improve accessibility. Accessibility standards are truly the building blocks used to make real and measurable changes to the accessibility.

As we begin to develop provincial accessibility standards, there will continue to be ongoing engagement with individuals with lived experiences and expertise, community organizations, the business and tourism sectors, Indigenous governments and organizations and all other municipalities representing the interest of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. These standards will establish clear, specific and achievable goals to remove and prevent barriers.

Each standard will be introduced in stages with a time frame for implementation. The standards and timelines will consider all sectors such as government, including the House of Assembly, to be covered by an amendment to the bill, the business and tourism sectors, municipalities and community organizations.

A particular standard may take into account the type of barriers being addressed and any technical or economic factors that may be involved in its implementation. This legislation could set monetary penalties for non-compliance of the standards.

The standards will focus on nine key areas: the design and delivery of programs and services; the built environment including facilities,

buildings, premises, public transportation and transportation infrastructure; information and communication; procurement of goods, services and facilities; accommodations; education; health; employment; and any activity or undertaking prescribed in the regulations.

Speaker, for example, Manitoba enacted its accessibility legislation in December 2013 and then its first accessibility standard, the Customer Service Standard, in 2015. The focus of Manitoba's Customer Service Standard was to introduce policies, to address training and communication with the goal of achieving respectful, barrier-free customer service in all Manitoba organizations and businesses that have at least one employee.

For instance, to meet the standard organizations are required to meet the communication needs of customers, clients or members, invite customers to provide feedback and train staff on accessible customer service, including reasonable accommodations under their province's Human Rights Code, just to name a few. As well, there were different timelines for organizations to meet the standard: The Manitoba government had one year to comply; the public sector had two years to comply; and private, small municipalities and non-profit organizations had three years to comply.

In addition, Speaker, this made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador bill outlines that sign languages are recognized as languages for communications by deaf persons and this includes American Sign Language and Indigenous sign languages.

The act also enables the establishment of an Accessibility Standards Advisory Board. This Advisory Board will be responsible for advising and making recommendations to me, as minister, respecting: priorities for the establishment and content of accessibility standards, as well as the time periods for their implementation; measures, policies, practices and other requirements that may be implemented by the government to improve accessibility; long-term accessibility objectives for furthering the purposes of this act; and any other matter relating to accessibility on which I, as the minister responsible, seek the board's advice.

The Accessibility Standards Advisory Board, following the premise of Nothing About Us Without Us, shall consist of a minimum of seven members and a maximum of nine members, and at least one-half of these members would be persons with a disability or representative of persons with disabilities and at least one member shall be an Indigenous person.

To assist the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board in the development of an accessibility standard, a standard development committee, which would report to this board, will be established for each standard. This committee will consist of at least half of the members being persons with disabilities or organizations representing them, as well as technical experts, representatives of organizations and public bodies that may be affected by this standard and representatives of government departments that have responsibilities related to the standard.

In addition to the role related to the creation and oversight of accessibility standards, Speaker, this bill also outlines the expectations of the duties, roles and powers of myself, as Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and these include raising awareness of how barriers impact persons with disabilities; promoting the prevention, identification and removal of barriers; and providing information to assist individuals, organizations and public bodies related to this new legislation and any applicable standards.

To this end, my department's Disability Policy Office is required, through this legislation, to support the implementation and administration of the act and the regulations through such things as providing policy and communication support; reviewing measures, policies and practices to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities; and providing administrative support to the accessibility standards advisory board.

We recognize that public awareness is an important part of making the province accessible and inclusive for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; therefore, increasing the awareness of this accessibility legislation throughout the province will be critical. As standards are introduced and regulations become law, education, tools and other resources will be

provided to organizations to help them understand and comply with the accessibility regulations.

The bill also outlines that public bodies, individually or two or more together, will prepare an accessibility plan within two years and then every three years thereafter. An accessibility plan will include the measures taken and/or measures intended to be taken to remove barriers and procedures to assess if the measures are working. These plans will be developed in consultation with persons with disabilities and representatives of and for persons with disabilities.

The proposed accessibility legislation will give me, as minister, the authority to appoint a director of compliance and enforcement. The director of compliance and enforcement will have the authority to issue orders related to non-compliance and there will be an appeal process; however, as is the approach in all other provinces with accessibility legislation, compliance and enforcement are and will be a last resort. We are looking at awareness and education first and foremost as the key priority for this legislation. Next would be detection, then correction and finally sanction.

The legislation also outlines accountability mechanisms which include: I, as the minister responsible, must prepare and publicly release an annual report to describe the actions taken within each year; the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board must also prepare an annual report and make it publicly available; an accessibility standard, once in place, will be reviewed at a minimum every five years; and, finally, there will be a statutory review of the effectiveness of the legislation every five years after the bill comes into force.

To conclude, Speaker, I would like to highlight that every December 3 we come together to join persons with disabilities around the world in celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The annual observance of this day was proclaimed in 1992 by the United Nations.

The observance of this day aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and to mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-

being of persons with disabilities. It is my goal – and I hope the goal of this hon. House – that the made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador accessibility legislation be proclaimed on December 3 to help further advance and ensure the accessibility inclusion of all persons throughout the province.

Speaker, before I conclude, I went through sort of a detailed explanation and description of the consultation process for this bill. I think it speaks to the recognition by my department and the government that that was, and continues to be, essential if we are to be successful. Nothing About Us Without Us is an operating premise of our Disability Policy Office and certainly of this legislation.

We continue to consult and will consult with them. The legislation speaks to the important role that the persons with disabilities and their representatives will play in each stage of the implementation of this legislation. Whether it's in the design and delivery of the accessibility advisory board, the standards development committee, the development of those standards and the consultations. So it is fully embedded throughout. I think that will make sure that this will be successful on an ongoing basis.

With that, Speaker, I will conclude.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to lead the debate on behalf of the Official Opposition on Bill 38, An Act Respecting Accessibility in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The purpose of the *Accessibility Act* is to lay out in section 3 of the bill – this is how that section of the bill reads in its entirety: Section 3(1) “The purpose of this Act is to improve accessibility by preventing, identifying and removing barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society with respect to (a) the design and delivery of program and services; (b)

built environment; (c) information and communication; (d) the procurement of goods, services and facilities; (e) accommodations; (f) education; (g) health; (h) employment; and (i) an activity or undertaking prescribed in the regulations.

“(2) Communication referred to in paragraph (1)(c) includes the use of American Sign Language and Indigenous sign languages.

“(3) Sign languages are recognized as languages for communication by deaf persons in the province including, without limitation, American Sign Language and Indigenous sign languages.”

The term “built environment” is defined like this: “‘built environment’ includes (i) facilities, buildings, structures and premises; and (ii) public transportation and transportation infrastructure.”

The word “barrier” is defined like this: “... ‘barrier’ means anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in society, including (i) a physical barrier, (ii) an architectural barrier, (iii) an information or communications barrier, (iv) an attitudinal barrier, (v) a technological barrier, or (vi) a barrier established or perpetuated by an Act, regulations, a policy or practice.”

The term “disability” is very broadly defined. Here is how the definition reads in the bill: “... ‘disability’ includes a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation that is permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, that, in interaction with a barrier, prevents a person from fully participating in society.”

So, as we can see, the scope of this bill is extremely broad and far reaching, and if we had any doubt about how broad that scope is, we need only to refer to the document provided by the department at the briefing. The document states: Nearly one in four Newfoundlanders and Labradorians report their everyday activities are limited due to a disability.

We are potentially talking about a quarter of the population – more than 125,000 people facing

barriers that this act is determined to remove. When we see signs for designating parking or seating or other facilities for persons with disabilities, we are used to seeing the symbol for a wheelchair. This bill is certainly for those who face mobility challenges, but more than that, it covers those who face vision challenges and hearing challenges. It covers disabilities that may be hidden or temporary. It covers barriers that include the way people are treated.

This bill is about changing, not only the physical realities around us but also our attitudes. We all need to appreciate that the person beside us may be a person struggling with a disability that we need to be mindful of.

We need to empathize and care enough to recognize the barriers they face. We need to care enough that we become part of the movement for change. Progress will happen more quickly as more and more of us come on board. It's going to be a learning process that we need to pay careful attention to. We need to let people tell us their stories and describe the changes that will help them participate more fully in our society.

The stories are going to vary. The barrier faced by one individual may be completely different from the barrier faced by another. The bill is designed to be an umbrella bill for all sorts of disabilities.

On the website of Johns Hopkins University is a lengthy list of types of disabilities. It's not comprehensive but it gives a good idea of the broad range of disabilities that people may have to deal with.

There are speech and language disabilities, perhaps they result from hearing loss, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities or physical conditions. It could include stuttering or stammering or the complete loss of voice. There are psychiatric disabilities. These include a wide range of behavioural and psychological problems characterized by anxiety, mood swings, depression or a compromised assessment of reality.

Our attitudes towards mental health have been changing in recent years, but we still have a long way to go.

There are physical disabilities. These may result from congenital conditions, accidents or progressive neuromuscular disease. They may include conditions such as spinal cord injury, such as a paraplegic or a quadriplegic; cerebral palsy; spina bifida; the loss of a limb; muscular dystrophy; cardiac conditions; cystic fibrosis; paralysis; polio or post-polio; and stroke.

There are medical disabilities. These include respiratory, immunological, neurological and circulatory systems. Examples include: cancer, chronic fatigue syndrome, epilepsy seizure disorder, fibromyalgia, lupus, multiple sclerosis, chemical dependency, diabetes, Epstein-Barr virus, HIV and AIDS, multiple chemical sensitivity and renal disease.

The list also includes learning disabilities. These are neurologically based. They may interfere with the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical skills. The list includes those who are deaf or hard of hearing. They may require different accommodations depending on several factors, including: the degree of hearing loss, the age of onset and the type of language or communication system they use. They may use a variety of communication methods, including: lip-reading, cued speech, Signed English, American Sign Language or an Indigenous sign language.

The list also includes brain injuries. This may include, in many ways, traumatic brain injury, typically resulting from accidents; however, insufficient oxygen, stroke, poisoning or infection may also cause the brain injury. Brain injury is one of the fastest growing types of disabilities, especially in the age range of 15 to 28 years. Brain injury can cause physical, cognitive, behavioural or personality changes that affect someone in the short term or permanently. The list also includes blindness or low vision. Some people are totally blind, others are legally blind and others have a severe vision loss in distance or near vision.

Other disabilities include attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, also known as ADD and ADHD. These are neurological conditions affecting both learning and behaviour. They result from chronic disturbances in the areas of the brain

that regulate attention, impulse control and the executive functions which control cognitive tasks, motor activity and social interactions.

This is a long list of disabilities and the scope of the bill is broad enough to encompass all of them. So, as we can imagine, if we, as a province, are to remove the wide range of barriers faced by people with such a broad range of disabilities the implications will be enormous. It's going to be a step-by-step process and one of the most important steps in the process is going to have to be education. We need to learn about the kinds of barriers that people face, not just so we know but, more importantly, so we act, because once we find out that a barrier exists we need to own the responsibility for removing it. Think globally, act locally; make a difference close to home.

A great deal of work has already been done thanks in large part to the organizations and activists who have made progress with their purpose in life. It is time now to build on their work and take the next steps to real change happening. According to the department in their briefing, this bill establishes an accessibility standard. The standard is intended to move us step by step progressively towards full inclusion. The standard will consist of building blocks that will make real, measureable changes to the accessibility around the province.

The standard will establish clear, specific and achievable goals to identify, prevent and remove barriers. The standard will be introduced in stages with time frames for implementation at these various stages. These time frames will consider the circumstances of all sectors of our society, government, individuals, business, municipalities and community organizations. The standard will be developed by people whose knowledge of these matters is the broadest and the deepest. There will be an Accessibility Standards Advisory Board, there will be a standard development committee and these will work with the Disability Policy Office.

Everyone will be working together on solutions that move our province forward. We can learn from the jurisdictions that have already passed laws on this. Five provinces and the federal government have implemented accessibility legislation: Quebec in 2004, Ontario in 2005,

Manitoba in 2014, Nova Scotia in 2017, Ottawa 2017 and British Columbia in 2021.

One example of a standard already adopted under such a piece of legislation is Manitoba's. They have developed a Customer Service Standard. To meet that standard, organizations must meet the communication needs of the customer, clients or members; allow assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers and oxygen tanks; welcome support people who are there to assist; welcome people with service animals; ensure accessibility is maintained as intended through the use of ramps, wide aisles and the removal of clutter; let customers know when accessible features and services are not available; invite customers to provide feedback; train staff on accessible customer service, including reasonable accommodations, under the Human Rights Code; make public events accessible when they are hosted by large public sector organizations; and require that all public sector organizations and private sector organizations with more than 50 employees must document their customer service policy and provide notice that it is available upon request.

So, as we can see, a standard will make a real difference. It's more than just good intentions. The legislation means that it will require accountability. This legislation will have teeth. The bill provides for inspectors to check on compliance and enforcement. The government will have the power to appoint a director of compliance and enforcement who will monitor all complaints of non-compliance, prepare an annual summary of complaints and outcomes, delegate powers and duties to inspectors, issue remedial orders and enforce administrative penalties.

The bill prescribes penalties that range from a fine of up to \$1,000 where the person is an individual, and up to \$25,000 where the person is an organization or public body. The bill also provides for incentive-based measures to encourage and assist an individual, an organization or a public body, or a class of individuals, organizations or public bodies to meet or exceed an accessible standard. That's an interesting feature of the bill described in the regulations.

Public bodies will also have to produce accessibility plans. The first within two years, and then every three years thereafter. The bill also provides for the legislation itself to be reviewed and updated from time to time to make sure it's working as it should.

So here we are today at the beginning stages. We're not entirely sure what to expect; we have only a general idea of how this will work. We can look at the standards of other provinces and imagine that ours may be similar. We can look at their experience to learn from their best practices and avoid any pitfalls they may have encountered.

We expect the government to keep the public fully informed at every stage of implementation so people know what will be expected of them. This is particularly important when we think of organizations and businesses that will have to invest in measures within certain time frames in order to meet the standards. They need to be fully informed well in advance so they have the time and resources to comply.

The thing we really like about this legislation is the way it was created. It was created after significant consultations including the publication of *Nothing About Us Without Us* and consultations with the Provincial Advisory Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, the business sector and Indigenous governments and groups.

This is an initiative driven by people with passion for full inclusion and full participation of persons with disabilities in our society. Those are the heroes of this initiative. This will be part of their lifelong legacy. We owe them our gratitude for their dedication and tenacity. They are the ones who will ensure this initiative works. They are the ones who will hold our feet to the fire, no matter which administration is in office. We note that this is also a nation-wide and worldwide movement toward inclusion.

In 2010, Canada joined the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The convention protects and promotes the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal basis with others.

In 2018, Canada also joined the Optional Protocol to the Convention. The Optional Protocol allows individuals and organizations to make a complaint to the UN if they believe their rights under the convention have been violated.

In 2019, Ottawa also passed the *Accessible Canada Act* known as an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada. We expect our province to be a leader in removing the barriers facing persons with disabilities.

As the Official Opposition, we intend to be among those who hold the government's feet to the fire. This has to be more than good intentions or long-term goals. Let's bring everyone in the province on board and allow the public to be part of this movement for change.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'll just spend a few minutes on it. I just want to congratulate the minister and the staff in the department and everybody who participated in presenting this bill here today. It's something that's overdue and, as the minister stated, it's an enabling legislation that allows the groundwork to actually get the legislation put in place and have regulations put in place to put down the barriers across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I just want to recognize the hard work of the minister, all the advisory groups, all the people who participated and the staff itself. It's a great step to get things working in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador for people with disabilities and other issues.

I noticed that the minister mentioned that the consultation was very extensive and that is very important to have extensive consultation.

I can go back a long while to when I was involved with the disability community. I remember this guy with the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Mr. Sean Fitzgerald. Sean was

involved with it for a number of years. Newfoundland and Labrador, at the time, when we were involved – I remember going to national meetings in Vancouver at the time. The point that we pushed when we got in there, at the time, and we pushed it back in the province and it moved ahead a fair bit, was to have people with the Canadian Paraplegic Association and other disabilities to get involved. That was so important. I go way back in the '90s when they used to have the accessibility awareness day in the province.

I'm going to tell a little story now about awareness. It was Premier Clyde Wells. I remember we arranged it, going into the building, the Sir Richard Squires building, we asked the premier to sit in the wheelchair and get up to the 10th floor. He couldn't do it. So then the awareness of the premier of the province started the acknowledgement by the government, at the time, that we need new accessibility regulations put in place and remove barriers and have the elevators with the sound.

I'll say to the minister, this here today takes it to a higher level and I just wanted to recognize that.

When you look across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and all across Canada, the awareness is lacking and a lot of times it's the buy-in of some of the regulations that you put into it. The slogan Nothing About Us Without Us is a great slogan because it's so true. Many times things are done without consultation, then you have to go back and try to change it or people aren't really aware of the issues.

Another good story I always liked talking about was when people came back – this is how the Canadian Paraplegic Association was started – war vets coming back from the Second World War. At the time, the owners of the Toronto Maple Leafs went and said, okay, we have a duty here. So that's where all the wheelchairs were stored. I remember the sidewalks, cutting down the sidewalks so people can get by. They used to bring down the politicians in downtown Toronto and say, okay, get across the street. They couldn't.

This is the awareness that started back in the '40s. This was a physical disability, of course, with war veterans coming back. Since then, there are a lot more issues that have arisen that wouldn't encompass physical disabilities and sometimes intellectual abilities that we need to be challenged with also.

I will be supporting this. I will be looking forward to having input on some of the regulations that will be coming out on this. It's always great to have the advisory boards, the people who have the first-hand knowledge and the best way.

I notice the minister mentioned it earlier – and this is for the businesses around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – I remember meeting Rick Hansen several times on this also. This is something which has a lot of power in money. A lot of people with disabilities these days, they travel a lot. They look for places where they have accessibility, especially in tourism, especially in other initiatives, especially in sporting events. They look for it.

So not only will it help the business community, it will also enhance the tourism in the area and help the people in this province who can get out more to spend money; help the economy a lot. It is a business initiative also, along with the initiative of helping people with disabilities.

I just want to say that this is a great enabling piece of legislation. I'm hoping that it's going to be done by December – December 3 I think the minister mentioned. That would be a great day because I remember always recognizing those days.

The minister mentioned back in the United Nations when they passed that piece of legislation, when they described that day as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. I remember that well also.

I just want to give full support to the minister and the government for this, and I look forward to the regulations of it. This is a great first step for all of us to move ahead, will help a lot of people in the province, our own family at times, our own neighbours at times and a lot of people that come in contact with.

I will be supporting this and I will be urging everybody in this House – which I know they will. I think everybody in this House will be supporting this bill. The big part about it is that the people who are mostly affected will be the driving forces behind this.

Congratulations to the minister, the staff, the people on the committees and all the people who gave input for this to bring in this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

I, too, am very proud to be able to support this legislation. I think people in every single district in this province would support this legislation. It's a very important piece of legislation. As my colleague in the House has already said, what's really important about this is the input that the organizations, the advisory councils and everyone have had into this particular piece and how it will work in the future.

For the people of my district, this is a long time coming. They are looking forward to the implementation of this piece of legislation. Because one of the most inaccessible buildings in my district is the Government Service Centre. I was really interested in some of the minister's words when he talked about equitable access, a key commitment being met, the right thing to do and enabling legislation.

Again, I'd simply say that the first place that we're going to have to start here is with the government-owned assets, because for too long people in my district have not had access to a public courthouse. People with disabilities have not been able to access the courthouse in Stephenville. People with disabilities have not been able to go to the Government Service Centre.

More than six years ago, this particular building was promised to be replaced and it still has not been replaced. To make matters worse, there was a rumour – and I hope it is only a rumour – that government were going to spend a million

dollars to repair the roof on this particular building. Again, what a total waste of money if that is the case.

We've had similar situations in my district already, where buildings that have been left over from the days of the American Air Force base have been remodelled or tried to be remodelled. The Bay St. George Medical Clinic, another one, while it has a wheelchair accessibility ramp on the back of the building, government has spent more than \$1 million on putting siding on this building, while inside the building staff continue to complain about poor ventilation and many, many issues.

So again, I think this piece of legislation is fantastic. I think we support it. But again, I want to make sure that government lives up to its commitment, that it meets its key commitment and that it actually starts now to look at its own assets and how can we move those forward so that we can eliminate public buildings from being inaccessible. That, to me, is the key that we have to start with first. Government has to take care of its own challenges first and then work with the business community and others to make sure that they meet their requirements.

I'll have a few more questions to ask when we get to Committee stage.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Speaker, I am quite pleased today to speak to Bill 38, An Act Respecting Accessibility in the Province. This new piece of legislation is a commitment by the current Liberal government. We now join five other provinces and the federal government with developing accessibility legislation.

What I like about this, Speaker, this legislation will reach across a wide spectrum of individuals and organizations. The establishment of an accessibility standards board to make recommendations and provide consistency in standards is a great move as well.

It recognizes American Sign Language and Indigenous sign language as languages of communication. There are soft compliance and enforcement measures, which is very important. There will be an evaluation of the act every five years and that is key as well, Speaker, because it is important that we continue to evaluate any bills or legislation of this type – when you're dealing with persons with disabilities.

There had been extensive consultation with the disability community, and that's key. They certainly spoke loud and clear, and their concerns and what they expressed in those consultations were part of the legislation.

Speaker, the private sector, as well, is very supportive of this legislation. Despite the fact that some businesses may have to do some renovating, they still very much support this legislation.

Speaker, a bill such as this will help people with disabilities and will help everyone as well. It brings about an increased quality of life, creates independence and improves social integration. It leads to better health and the opportunity for independent living within communities – very important. In an accessible environment, people can care for themselves and live independently. Wouldn't that be great, Speaker, to be able to do that?

Accessible environment and service delivery such as public library services and so on allow people with disabilities to move around independently and access services – very important. This, in turn, will allow people to leave their homes, which will prevent social isolation, which is very much part of the daily issues that people with disabilities have. I know people that have disabilities that sometimes don't get an opportunity to leave their homes. This legislation will help people get out.

Speaker, under this legislation, issues in relation to transportation will be addressed and will enable and hopefully help bring day-to-day service to people to enable them to visit friends, enable them to get to appointments and so on.

Accessibility legislation, Speaker, in the area of employment and recruitment will be beneficial; cultural and sports activities will allow people

with accessibilities to spend time with family and friends at such events.

Speaker, accessibility in Newfoundland and Labrador is about creating workplaces and services so that our residents can fully become involved and participate in a society without barriers.

In a 2017 study, six million Canadians aged 15 and over identify as having a disability. That's 22 per cent of the population. This bill will address 59 per cent of Canadians ages 25 to 64 with disabilities are employed compared to 80 per cent of Canadians without disabilities.

The Government of Newfoundland is building on the advocacy of stakeholders to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and to build on inclusion and accessibility.

The legislation will benefit everyone in this great province, especially those with disabilities by working towards a barrier-free Newfoundland and Labrador and working through creating standards crossing all sectors.

This act will interact with all our residents and bring changes and visibility to accessibility in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, I am totally in favour of Bill 38.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Warr): The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Certainly, this is something I, personally, and the Third Party, will support, especially when you look at the purpose of the legislation is to improve accessibility as a necessity for full inclusion of persons with disabilities. The benefits, obviously, are far-reaching if inclusion means participation in the economy, day-to-day life, so on and so forth.

Establishing an Accessibility Standards Advisory Board: In many ways, that's about making sure that measures are ongoing; it's not

a one-off, but there's consistent opportunity here to improve.

I particularly like – in terms of the next one – requiring public bodies to prepare accessibility plans and provide inspection and enforcement powers. This is coming at a particularly important moment, especially in light of the Supreme Court of Canada ruling with regard to snow clearing regulations, policy versus operations, in which, basically, it has allowed citizens to sue cities for a lack of snow clearing.

Now, you don't have to go far in St. John's to find – and I speak here of St. John's; I'm assuming for other areas, as well, it's going to be a similar issue and maybe even for smaller municipalities. But I'm assuming here that this legislation also will have implications for cities and snow clearing, when all you have to listen to – look at the Facebook group of citizens of winter-unfriendly St. John's. It's very clear that in the winter anyone who has a physical disability, who's in a wheelchair, is going to have a tremendously difficult time to get around. They're basically forced, if they have to, to use public transportation, but the option for them to walk safely is not there.

As it was said by, I think, one of the candidates in the recent municipal election, she purchased a guide dog. A guide dog is trained to keep you out of the lanes of moving traffic; not help you join them. For many pedestrians – and pedestrians, whether they're disabled or not, but certainly people who have physical disabilities – that is a significant barrier to them in participating just in ordinary pleasures in life. Even just to go out for a walk and enjoy the fresh air.

I note that in this act in Part I, Interpretation and Purpose, it talks about a physical barrier as well as architectural barrier. I would suggest that icy sidewalks and snowbanks are physical barriers.

Public transportation and transportation infrastructure, again, for the driver, a road that's a little bit bumpy, a little bit ice clogged is not a major impediment. For the person who is walking, especially the person who may be using a wheelchair or a walker, it's almost insurmountable.

I notice also that in here, I'm assuming – and certainly as the debate goes on, maybe the minister could certainly clarify this – it also refers to a municipality under the Municipalities Act. I'm assuming here that they will have to come up with some sort of an accessibility plan to deal with snow clearing, especially in the wintertime.

It says here “The purpose of this Act is to improve accessibility by preventing, identifying and removing barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society with respect to (a) the design and delivery of programs and services” Again, snow clearing is a service. It's something that we do. We certainly have a blacktop policy, I would say in most municipalities, where we will scrape snow and salt the roads down to the asphalt itself.

But until recently no such policy for sidewalks really existed. I would suggest that that's a core duty of any municipality and indeed when it comes to our highways as well. Certainly, when it comes to this even when sidewalks that are now cleared are still not, what I would call, accessible to people who aren't able to walk without help.

I notice that in this “An accessibility standard may (a) specify the individuals, organizations or public bodies that are subject to the standard (b) set out measures, policies, practices and other requirements for (i) preventing barriers from being established, and (ii) identifying and removing barriers”

So I have tremendous hope for this bill that it's going to have some significant implications, positive implications for pedestrians who choose to walk or who have no choice but to walk, and for those pedestrians who have no other means but to walk.

For the most part, I can drive in here. I have a short distance to walk to get to the door. People who use public transportation don't always have that luxury. Sometimes the distance between the bus stop and where they're going is significantly longer than the walk that I would go through here. I would argue that if you look at the sidewalks here around the Confederation Building, they are salted and they are cleared,

for the most part. You do not have to compete with traffic going through the parking lot.

So I think in many ways the cities – municipalities – and, indeed, any government-owned roadways should be kept up to the same standard. To me, it's not just about failing to install a ramp or the proper slope or anything like that, but it's about the other barriers that come because of our environment.

I do commend the minister. A few weeks ago we visited the house on Froude Avenue. To me, it's what an accessible design should be. From the get-go, a person can walk into that, even if they have no mobility issues, they can age into that. I look at the father and daughter who are there and they are absolutely thrilled. It's significantly much more difficult to retrofit an older home, but I've got to commend the investment – and I would assume this goes back a few years, but the investment in this and the forethought is significant, and I do applaud that construction. I hope that we'll see more of those. Not only is it accessible, but it's bright, it's spacious and it's a great family home.

Still, around Froude Avenue, you're going to have to make sure that roadways are clear. Just a little bit out from Froude Avenue you have Cashin Avenue, which is a major thoroughfare. For a person, again, in a wheelchair, if they've got to share the road with cars, God help them. Because many drivers do not slow down. And that's a reality. We're in a rush to get everywhere and we're not paying attention to what's on the road next to us.

The only other point – and I'll move away from snow clearing – has to do with accessibility when it comes to motor vehicle registration. I pass this on right now. We might think that going online increases accessibility, but not always the case because there are those who do not have emails, that do not use the Internet, that depend on other people. Whatever the reason is, that in and of itself, going virtual is not the total answer. It's part of the answer but there's got to be some other way of allowing people to access the services that they need.

For my wife and I, it's not much of an issue. We're reasonably technical savvy until, of course, I run up against my granddaughters and I

realize that they're a lot more technical savvy than I am – and they're only four and three.

I think, when we're looking at this, we've got to look at it from the point of view that just because I have an ease with using technology, not everyone does. Some of us can rewrite the program on a computer. Others are lucky if we can access the various functions on emails.

So the final comments I'll make – two things here. I'm hoping to hear that this act does have implications for cities to draft accessibility guidelines when it comes to snow clearing in the wintertime so that people who choose to get out in the wintertime or who like going outdoors are not restricted to the summertime activities, that they also have that opportunity, who also depend on sidewalks to get to work, buy their groceries and so on and so forth. Also, if we could look at our own government departments for that, and I'm thinking there are a lot of provincial roadways, too, that might need areas cleared for pedestrians and accessibility.

Also, when it comes to our Service NL, Digital Government, that digital is not necessarily synonymous with inclusivity and accessibility.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, today we are debating Bill 38, An Act Respecting Accessibility in the Province. This bill has been a long time coming. I personally believe that bringing this bill into law will lay the foundation for accessibility in Newfoundland and Labrador. Yes, we have made amendments to other pieces of legislation to make accessibility equitable but we are now building up.

When you openly talk about a barrier you identify it, prevent it and remove it. The equity then evolves. It's somewhat unfortunate that we have to go to these lengths. But having said that, we do this every day, especially with legislation like the *Highway Traffic Act*, for example; we

identify an issue and we work to resolve it. This bill requires individuals, public bodies and every one of us to abide by an accessibility standard.

This bill also provides inspection and enforcement powers to enforce accessibility standards. You may ask: What are these barriers that warrant this legislation? There are multiple barriers, Speaker. Attitudinal barriers and behaviours, perceptions and assumptions that discriminate against persons with disabilities. These barriers often emerge from a lack of understanding which can lead people to ignore, to judge or even have misconceptions about a person with a disability.

Hallways and doorways that are too narrow for a person using a wheelchair, electric scooter or a walker; counters that are too high for a person of short stature; poor lighting for persons with low vision; doorknobs that are difficult for persons with arthritis to grasp; parking spaces that are too narrow for a driver who uses a wheelchair; loud spaces for individuals with autism – these are just some examples of the barriers to inclusion.

Our goal is that organizations will remove or prevent physical barriers and, thus, make community more welcoming to people with and without disabilities. For instance, stair-free access, wide paths and automatic doors are often useful to families with small children and seniors.

This legislation has very clear expectations of the duties, the roles and the powers: to raise awareness of how barriers impact persons with disabilities; oversee the development and implementation of accessibility standards necessary to obtain the purpose of the act; provide information to assist individuals, organizations and public bodies to integrate applicable accessibility standards into activities and undertakings; and ensure that individuals, organizations and public bodies that may be made subject to accessibility standards are consulted in the development of accessibility standards.

Speaker, when one thinks of accessibility, they often think of physical accessibility. But, as I mentioned here, there are many forms of accessibility. Another example is accessibility

and the use of computers. We are moving towards a digitally accessible work for efficiency to allow more people to have quicker access. There are many types of accessibility aids needed for computer use: visual impairments, at least 1.5 million blind and visually-impaired Americans use computers; hearing loss and impairments; audio enhancers; speech impairments – my own son is non-verbal and at times he uses his iPad to communicate through a program called Proloquo2Go – motor impairments; and cognitive impairments. Many individuals use accessible programs and apps to access the digital world.

Speaker, this legislation will be the second provincial accessibility legislation to recognize American Sign Language and Indigenous sign language as languages for communication by deaf persons. Amendments to the designated mobility impaired parking regulations under the *Highway Traffic Act* related to illegally parking in a blue zone did come into force in January of 2018. On that day, there was an increase in the minimum fines for illegally parking in a blue-zone parking space anywhere in the province from \$100 to \$400 and the maximum fine is now \$700. So our government has made amendments to the *Buildings Accessibility Act*.

Speaker, I was quoted at that time saying, “Improving accessibility is a key component of our government’s commitment to ensuring inclusion and equity for all. Illegal parking in blue zone spaces makes it more difficult for people with mobility impairments to fully participate in their community. Increasing fines is an effective means of deterring these offences, as shown when the City of St. John’s did so within their jurisdiction in 2012.”

We are now putting a standard in place; we will work together in all sectors of society to make our community accessible to all.

Speaker, just prior to entering politics I worked as a community inclusion coordinator and the executive director for the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living. Community Living is an organization committed to a future of inclusive communities. As an employee of the organization and alongside volunteers and staff, we battled barriers to inclusion, especially inclusive education, day in,

day out. I saw individuals face accessibility barriers non-stop. It was discouraging at times but this legislation today is a result of that consultation being done with the community that represents persons with disabilities and key stakeholders. Speaker, I am proud that our government understands Nothing About Us Without Us.

I cannot talk about this legislation without mentioning my late friend, Brenda Power. Brenda was an individual who was a wheelchair user, but she never let that slow her down. She was a powerhouse and a friend of mine. Brenda went everywhere with us in the late '80s, from George Street Festival to the Top Hat, and she would proudly be directing me today on accessibility and very supportive of this legislation. My personal awareness of what accessibility really meant and the tools needed to make our world accessible started with Brenda.

Speaker, as I mentioned, there has been extensive consultations with regard to this piece of legislation, especially with the disability community. Those in the private sector are supportive of the legislation, despite the fact that many businesses will have to make changes in order to remove barriers and become accessible.

Here we are today with what I believe is truly the foundation to accessibility in Newfoundland and Labrador. Thank you to my friends, past colleagues and all those individuals that gave our government advice and guided us with this piece of legislation.

Speaker, I strongly support Bill 38, An Act Respecting Accessibility in the Province.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, support the bill. I think it's very important for us to look at what the purpose of this act is. It's actually outlined in section 3(1). It says: "The purpose of this Act is to improve accessibility by preventing, identifying and removing barriers that prevent persons with

disabilities from fully participating in society ..." and it goes on to list what it's respective to.

I think first off we need to ask the question: Why do we need to improve accessibility? It's 2021, we have a lot of infrastructure, we have a lot of resources and we live in a province in a modern country. So why do we need to improve accessibility? How can it be that there are people out there that actually have barriers to accessibility that the rest of the population takes for granted?

I've listened to people advocate on their behalf to try and identify, and really a lot of the times what's important is not only about the barriers to accessibility, but who's greatly impacted, for whom is this bill intended to help? As a self-identified able-bodied person, I think this bill actually improves the quality of life for, not only people who face barriers but for everybody. Because when we help people overcome barriers, we're also helping ourselves and that's very, very important.

When you answer the question: Why do we need to improve accessibility and for whom? When we have those answers, we do understand the importance of this bill. That's why we all need to support this bill.

It's about equal access for everyone. It's about fairness. I totally applaud the intent of this bill.

Also, I applaud the broad view taken in identifying what are barriers? Identifying barriers, it's not just pigeonholing the definition. We need to be able to identify the disabilities first and then we need to be able to identify the barriers that actually impede people who suffer with disabilities.

That's why it's important to me. I believe that with improved accessibility comes improved quality of life such as access to being able to get a job and to be able now to keep a job. A lot of times people who actually are burdened with some disabilities, the barrier to accessibility will actually prevent them from being able to maintain and keep a job.

Something as simple as being able to get on public transportation; being able to navigate

within the work-office environment. It's about quality of life.

It's about the ability to be independent and also when we remove the barriers that people face to accessibility we also improve, not only their quality of life but their self-esteem, their mental and emotional health is improved. You just have to ask a person who is suffering with a disability this winter when they're going to trying to navigate the streets, a lot of times be at risk of being hit by a vehicles, being injured, being killed.

I've been to a couple of the protests where basically that was the gist of the protest. It's protesting the inaccessibility of being able to walk on the street in the middle of the winter without fearing for your life. We know of people who have actually died.

This bill is very, very important, not only to people who face barriers but for the general population. It's about quality of life and it's about improving access.

A lot of times it's very important for us to recognize within ourselves, even within this House of Assembly that we don't recognize a lot of the barriers out there. If we don't recognize the barriers, basically, there are gaps that will be created.

It's very important for us to identify that a lot of the decision-makers, a lot of the influencers don't recognize barriers. That has to change. I say that we need to be able to recognize that everybody has to work together.

One of the biggest things that I think we need to do is we need to listen to people who are the advocates for removing barriers. Because, a lot of times, people fall between the cracks that are created when there's a failure to actually ensure equal access. Barriers put people at risk of injury, at risk of losing their jobs, at risk of suffering emotional and mental health issues and we learn now, in 2021, that it's all interconnected.

But most importantly, if I say one thing in this House of Assembly today, is that we need to be more respectful and we need to listen to people out there that are advocating on behalf of others.

We need to ensure that their voice is heard. And it's shameful, in 2021, a lot of times those advocates, their voice is silenced, their voice is discredited and their voice isn't given the weight that it deserves. So it's very, very important for us to actually be able to do that.

I've listened to a lot of people who advocate. People like Joanne McDonald; she's been an advocate for people facing disabilities for many years now. It's important for us to understand that.

I'm not going to go on; I'm not going to dwell on the facts, but I think it's very, very important for us to recognize that. Also, I want to say here that I do support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a great honour to follow up my colleague from Torngat Mountains today and speak about this bill. I'm going to start off with a tribute to Rosalie Belbin, who many of us know. She's become a good friend to many people in this House and –

AN HON. MEMBER: I saw the pumpkin.

P. TRIMPER: Yeah, you saw the pumpkin.

It's a three-day drive from Lake Melville to this House of Assembly, but I've made it a great routine of being able to stop in and see Rosalie on my trips. That is one of the best ways to pick up your day, I can tell you.

She follows – and I bet she's watching now; I have to send her a message. She'll probably send me and most of us in this room a text. Sometimes I get a little jealous when I see just how much attention she has. Whether it be the bobble-head from the former Member for Windsor Lake, the former leader of the Official Opposition, or the photo of the former Speaker – I see him over there from St. George's - Humber, and so many others. There's a little shrine there.

Anyway, Rosalie is one of those people who has so much to offer and it's incredibly rewarding to spend time with her, just to interact with her. She's always reaching out to us. So I'd encourage you guys all to do that. She spends a lot of her time closely attuned, and there's great contribution from her. So, Rosalie, thanks for all you do for us.

My colleague was just saying it goes both ways. For people who are trying to find a good way in society, we need to realize that this is going to improve those of us who maybe have those opportunities and a way to reach out to them.

If you try to understand, I think the whole Legislature is grasping the whole concept around accessibility. It's not just the physical aspects of this. As many have noted, there are attitudes, the organizational or systemic barriers that are out there; information or communication – technology, for example. I'm just thinking back on my time, both as a politician and then prior, some of the things I've encountered. I often like to speak about Russia because I spent a good 14 years running around in that amazing country.

You only have to travel afar to realize maybe some of our own issues you're dealing with here in Canada or in this great province, but maybe while we are very proudly going forward with these advancements, you just have to travel a little way else in the world to realize, you know, we're very lucky and very fortunate.

That doesn't mean we stop doing what we need to do, but I can remember working in different organizations and so on, where folks with disabilities were, frankly, hidden away. You did not see them. They were not participating in any kind of meetings, discussions, organization. In fact, it was almost like a sentence that the state would not support or help them.

I can remember a couple of instances, just helping somebody off a plane and people were walking around this person. He was there with his mother and I remember helping carry this person off a plane in a far-flung airport. And, wow, it really was a whole attitude. It was a societal aspect. I'm glad I live where I do.

I want to give a little shout-out to a former minister, the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's. I watched her very closely when she served as minister, because there was an interesting little requirement she used to have in place – and many of you may know what I'm talking about, but she would not speak at a building unless it was fully accessible. I can recall, in fact, some venues where she would arrive and it was not appropriate and she actually did not proceed. I believe she stuck to that throughout her term as minister and I salute her for that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. TRIMPER: I'm thinking also, too, of locations in Lake Melville. We finally have a beautiful new YMCA. I contrast with what we just replaced, which was the training centre. In my time working, it was soon after I was first elected and I was working hard with the different departments, including that same minister, to actually get a lift in place so that we could help provide access for the Special Olympians.

I'm very proud of the Howling Husky's team that we have in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, but so many of the athletes could not gain access because if they were in wheelchairs, you should see the approach that they had to take just to get from the change room to the pool. It required two people to carry the chair up and down three or four sets of stairs. It was designed to be a deterrent. I'm very proud to see now that YMCA that's functioning and working well with a fully accessible access for people in a wheelchair, for example, to get into the pool. It's absolutely a wonderful addition.

Some other issues – again, thinking in these different contexts of barriers; just think to the election this spring and so many people in Labrador whose mother tongue is not English and going to fill out a ballot. This issue certainly received a lot of attention. I'm proud to sit on the Elections Committee now to see what we can do to fix some of these things but for many people a legal form, a formal document, such even as a ballot, is an intimidating feature.

My mother-in-law, her first language was Cantonese and she struggles to this day. I will tell you, this week I will be spending some time

with her just helping her interpret and understand tax forms or any other kinds of official papers. So, languages are also very much of a barrier and we need to find strategies for dealing with it.

Sunday morning, consistent with the rollout of the NLVaxPass, I went to attend church. I got there a few minutes early, thank goodness, because there were folks getting ready to attend the church who've done so probably for, I would say, decades and decades and were about to be turned away at the door, because they were intimidated by the technology that is on these VaxPasses.

I can tell you the technology, when it works, is amazing; it's fantastic. I'm pleased to say I was able to go over and help these dear friends of mine. I took their MCP card, put it in the system and, within about a minute, we had their VaxPass and they were able to go on into church. Something that is very important to them. But again, it was the technology; it was that barrier that we need to realize is out there for so many people. Sometimes they're not obvious.

I'm going to end on a point that I think we all need to realize, and I'd ask everybody in this room to look in this room right now. If you're in a wheelchair, how do you get to your seat? How do you do it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. TRIMPER: If we're going to lead by example, we really need to lead by example. I know the people in the Clerk's Office and the Speaker's office and so on have been very concerned about this for years. When I served as Speaker, over two terms, I became acutely aware of the challenges.

We've got this beautiful room, lots of room, we've been able to handle ourselves during COVID, but just imagine if one of us was in a wheelchair. Just remember, folks, some of the special guests that we've had, whether they be in the Speaker's gallery or in the public gallery, who haven't been able to fully participate here. We had to have very unusual, awkward situations where we've had to bring them in by the Sergeant-at-Arms just to participate, to be

recognized because we couldn't handle them with a wheelchair accessibility issue.

I'm looking forward to watching these three-year plans being developed, proposed, approved and implemented. We will all need to support it because, you know, these modifications are not going to come easily and they're not going to be inexpensive. We're going to need to disperse resources. But I feel people like to say this is the people's House and we need to make sure it is available for all the people of this province, so let's set a good example.

I look forward to supporting this bill and moving on with moving our society forward.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's great to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 38.

As everyone has said, Mr. Speaker, this is a great – well, I'm going to say it's a great start. I'm going to say that, it's a great start. I'm sure there are many people in our disability community and so on and various organizations that are very excited about this and are welcoming this, for sure.

I can certainly speak to, I'm sure, a very strong advocate, a friend in my district, Mr. Craig Reid. I can say one thing to Minister Abbott, if you haven't met Craig yet, I'm sure he had his input into this and I can guarantee you he will have his input in making sure this is implemented because he's like a dog with a bone when it comes to this stuff; very passionate about it. I have no fears that with Craig and others they're going to make sure that some of these, what you're referring to as, accessibility standards, will be implemented.

Of course, Speaker, it is important to note here that, as has been noted by the minister, this is enabling legislation, which gives the ability to create accessibility standards but it does not in itself create any standards. It's important for people who may be viewing and listening to this

to understand that. This doesn't mean that everything, all of a sudden, changes overnight.

It's unfortunate that it's taken this long for this to come forward. I'm glad it has. I certainly commend the new minister on bringing it forward, but I can recall – and I will just say as an example, this is something that we talked about – I was part of the Liberal caucus at the time, back in 2014 we were talking about this. I participated in a debate during the election of 2015, it was at Easter Seals House and, at that particular time, the then-leader of the party, Dwight Ball, said: Paul, go forward and when you're debating on behalf of our party, you can announce at that time that we will be bringing in a disabilities act. That was in 2015 that this was first brought forward, the idea of it at least.

I asked questions in Question Period subsequent to that over the years. It was being worked on, being worked on and so on. But it took until 2021, now, for this actually to be brought in.

I'm glad it's being brought in. Again, I'm not trying to rain on the parade here. I think it's a positive thing, but it is important to know that it's 2021 and we're bringing in enabling legislation.

Based on the briefing, when you talk about the standards, I'm just kind of going off the top of my head now – I don't have it written down here. Because I think the minister said I think there are five other provinces who have it, plus the federal government has it. But Ontario, if I'm not mistaken, Ontario went down this road in 2005 I want to say – 2005 or 2006, so approximately 15 years ago. I think they're on their third standard, maybe their fourth standard, 15 years later.

The point is, when the minister talks about nine standards, we're averaging about three years per standard. Now, hopefully, based on the experience of other provinces, based on the fact that Nova Scotia has it and Ontario's had it and BC just proclaimed it; based on the fact that there may not be a need to reinvent the wheel, so to speak, I'm hoping that the implementation period for these standards, the creation of these standards, I'm hoping can be a lot faster than three to four years per standard to get it done. Because if it's going to take three years per

standard, times nine standards: we'll be 27 years later before we ever get all the standards in place – if you were to do that math.

I'm sure that won't be the case – I hope it won't be the case but it is important to note that. Again, that is not to be negative about what is being done; I think it's fantastic that it's being done. But I believe we need a commitment that we're going to have an aggressive timetable in terms of the creation of standards and, more importantly, the implementation of standards because this has been way, way too long.

I also think it's important that government needs to lead by example when it comes to what we can do, what government can do. It's one thing to create standards to be imposed upon private industry and so on, but government needs to be the leader here. They need to lead by example. Again, that's not being negative here, but I can look at things, as an example, things that I have pointed out over the last number of years.

Here is one: the government was under a PC administration at the time, if I'm not mistaken, they brought in on the blue zones, I think it was a \$400 fine. I think the Liberals upped it to an \$800 fine, if I'm not mistaken. It was changes made by the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's and it got adopted province-wide. I think it's an \$800 fine if you're parking in a blue zone. Interestingly – and I've brought this up on numerous occasions, still nothing done – we put in all these blue zones here at the Confederation Building, as an example, \$45 ticket.

So you go out here now where the Premier parks, all the Members, all those blue zones are there; somebody violates that, I think it's a \$45 ticket because there is a separate set of legislation. It's not the *Highway Traffic Act*. Because it's on our parking lot, it falls under a different piece of legislation. If I'm not mistaken, I think it's \$45 is what it is.

So if I went to AES Office here in the building and I violated the blue zone, say over at the Regatta Ford building, it would be an \$800 ticket. If I come in and I violate a blue zone here at the Confederation Building, I think it's like a \$45 ticket for the same violation, because we're on government property. What kind of nonsense

is that? How is that setting any kind of deterrent or setting a standard?

So that is one. Then, if you look at Memorial University – and, by the way, I checked with security there a while ago and I asked did it change, and I even brought it forward to the department and they didn't change it. Memorial University, if I'm not mistaken, I think it's like 20 bucks. Violate a blue zone and it's 20 bucks. Because MUN, under the MUN act has the autonomy, if you will, to create their own parking fines.

I'm assuming they created it because they're saying, well, poor students, they can't afford to pay big fines or whatever. But what we're saying to the poor student is that it's okay for you to go and park in a blue zone for a disabled person who now has nowhere to park. And it's worth your while; it's cheaper than buying a permit. Pay 20 bucks on a fine for parking in a blue zone. It's not right. That still exists, to the best of my knowledge, at MUN. So that's something that should be changed.

We brought in the changes to the *Accessibility Act* for outside properties, businesses and so on. We put in this 1984 rule, which is absolutely ridiculous. There's a 1984 rule in there that if you have a building and it was older than 1984 or newer than 1984 – whatever you want to look at it – newer than 1984, built after 1984 – that you're required to have appropriate amount of blue zones, blue zone signage, accessibility and so on. But if your building was built before 1984, you're exempt.

Now, I can understand – and there are people in the disability community who would say, well, they don't even understand that. But I can get my head around the fact if it's an old building and it's, for example, some kind of a historic property, like the old courthouse or something, and there's no way to possibly do what needs to be done, for some reason, in terms of accessibility, it cannot be done, then I can understand. But you have a building over on, I don't know, Elizabeth Avenue and it's just an old square box, just like any other old building. A warehouse, a building, whatever, an old square box and it doesn't have to meet the standards because it was built before 1984, which is absolutely ludicrous.

So that's something that could be changed. And, as far as I'm concerned, needs to be changed if we're going to be serious about these issues.

Another issue I've brought forward on a number of occasions. We have out here at the front of the building, just to the west of the main entrance, you have the courtesy flagpole. We have people there every year from the MS Society, as an example, they raise their flag there and so on. When you go out there by where the security is, by the tunnel, and you take that door out there, that is not accessible access to that pole. It's all torn up gravel and mud and everything else out there. You cannot get out there.

We've had people out there, like I say, with the MS Society with their wheelchair or whatever, and trying to get them over that mud and grass. I've brought that to the department now for the last number of years and still not fixed; still nothing done with it.

So, again, these are things that if we're going to go down this road – which is great, and I support it; I'm sure everybody supports it – we need to get our house in order. My colleague here from Labrador mentioned the fact, even the House of Assembly, and he's absolutely right. You cannot get a wheelchair, for example, up here. If you had a Member who had an accessibility issue, you cannot get a Member up on this with a wheelchair. We've had people – and again, he's right – in a wheelchair recognized and everyone else is up in the Speaker's gallery, but the guest in the wheelchair had to be put there on the floor next to the Sergeant-at-Arms, you know, to my mind not being treated equally. I know we were trying to accommodate and so on, but it's not the right way to accommodate. People should not be sort of stuck out in any kind of a way to make them seem like they're any different than anybody else. So that's something that he raised which I also agree with, I say, Speaker.

This is fantastic. I'm bringing these matters up because it's an opportunity to bring them up again. I'm just bringing it up because it's an opportunity to bring it up again to make the new minister aware of some of the things that we could and should be doing just to get our own house in order here, so that's why I'm bringing it up. But this piece of legislation is great and the

more we can make things more accessible throughout the province, it's wonderful.

I seen something – I'm sure the Members may have seen it. I saw it on social media this summer. I can't tell you where it is. But there was apparently a beach or something here in Newfoundland somewhere – I don't know if it was the Sunshine Park, maybe. It was somewhere. They put, like, a paved ramp, if you will, right down to the beach, right down to the water's edge, so you had sand on both sides. So anybody –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: Where was it?

AN HON. MEMBER: Down in Deer Lake.

P. LANE: Deer Lake, was it? There you go, Deer Lake.

So you could wheel right out to the edge of the beach, just like everybody else, with your wheelchair. That was wonderful. That was something that that town took as an initiative on their own and good for them for doing it. But that's the kind of thing that we need to see more of.

My colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands raised a very good point, a very, very good point.

E. JOYCE: He always does.

P. LANE: He always does, he says. Yeah, sometimes he does.

One point that he did make, beyond the accessibility piece in terms of having everybody being treated equally and having access, which is all very important, from a business point of view, from a tourism point of view, it makes sense. Sometimes when we're talking access and inclusion as well, it's not about necessarily somebody who was born with some kind of an issue that they were in a wheelchair or so on. It could be just an aging population. As we get older, like you say, you get arthritis, you get issues with your back and you find it hard to walk and all these kinds of things.

We have an aging population and also, when we talking about tourists coming here, there are a lot of tourists and people, whether they're in a wheelchair or they use a walker or they have any kind of issues, who are looking for places to go that are accessible. Looking for a place to go where – or when you go to a hotel, that the hotel rooms are not what they call accessible. Some of the ones you see that are called an accessible unit and they're up on the 10th floor or something. What happens if there was a fire and you can't use the wheelchair, as an example? Maybe they should be on the bottom floor. When they say the bathroom is accessible, is it really accessible in the true sense of being accessible? But they should be incorporating a more universal design and so on, as should all facilities.

But there is a market – and a growing market – of people, whether it be older persons or people with disabilities who like to travel, who are looking for places to go. I would suggest that when you talk about St. John's and so on, and Newfoundland in general, the demographic that probably want to come to Newfoundland and explore is not the young families necessarily. A lot of the young families, they're going to Disneyland and those places. I would say a lot of the tourists and people we see coming to Newfoundland are generally older people who want to come, they want to take in the whole cultural piece and all that kind of stuff.

They're the people who would more likely require a lot more accommodations. So it makes sense from a business point of view, from a tourist point of view and so on, for us to have great accessibility standards throughout our province. I say to the Member from Humber - Bay of Islands, that was a very valid point. It's something I've heard before from people in the disability community.

Speaker, with that said, I will conclude my remarks. Again, I do support the legislation – long time coming. Something that is really needed.

I say to the minister once again, I will reiterate the point, that in terms of the implementation of the creation and implementation of these standards, I really think we need to do it right – we need to do it right. That's why I'm glad that

there will be a committee comprised of people with lived experience who will be part of the creation of these standards and so on. But we need to make sure in terms of the implementation that we try to move it up the timetable as fast as we can. I understand it has to be done in reasonable time frames but we cannot wait – we cannot say it's going to take us the next 20 or 25 years to get the standards in place. I think that's not a road we want to go down.

I encourage the minister, like I say, to get everybody working on this, get these standards in as soon as we can. I think we'll all be the better for it. It will be great for business. It'll be great for tourism, but it will also be great for our own population because, as we know, we have an aging population.

There are things that we can do now; some of the things that I sort of brought up, issues here within our own house. I encourage the minister to get those issues – let's address them. We don't need to wait for a standard to come up. If we know right now that there are things within this building and within government facilities that are not accessible, we don't need to make the excuse and say, oh, well, we're going to wait for the standard to come up in three years' time or the next standard for six years' time. If we know there's now, let's fix it now.

Certainly anything we can do in that regard, I will support it and I'm sure every Member in this House will because, as somebody said earlier, it's the right thing to do.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no other speakers if the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development speaks now, this will close debate of the bill.

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

J. ABBOTT: Speaker, thank you.

Thank you, colleagues, for the nine speakers that addressed this particular bill. I'm encouraged by

the comments, the suggestions and the overwhelming support.

I'm reminded of statement by Neil Armstrong on July 20, 1969: This is one small step for man but one giant leap for mankind. I see this piece of legislation as one small step brought to our persons with disabilities and the disability community and it sends a very large message from this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. ABBOTT: So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 38 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province. (Bill 38)

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

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

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 38)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 38, An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province.

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

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt 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 38, An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province.

A bill, "An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province." (Bill 38)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

In section 2(1)(c) it defines barrier to include an attitudinal barrier. Could the minister elaborate on how this kind of barrier might be defined, identified and removed?

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

J. ABBOTT: I think one of the issues around that is just that: defining it and to remove subjectivity. If you use an example when we see a person with a disability coming down the street, can they or should they be able to avail of a common service: access to a bus, access to a store. Within our society there are some attitudinal perspectives that would suggest, no, they don't have a particular right. That is what we need to address and that is what we will try to put aside as we develop the standards going forward.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you for that answer.

Section 2, paragraph (1)(k) defines disability very broadly. Were any concerns raised about how broad and all encompassing the definition is? Here is why I ask: Removing certain barriers will require major investments, while removing other barriers will take much small investments. But we don't want to be satisfied with the smaller changes when the larger and more costly changes are exceptionally important to the people facing certain disabilities.

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

J. ABBOTT: The legislation basically looks at this almost at a two-step process. One is recognizing and defining the disability, as you mentioned, and then is there a barrier in place that needs to be addressed to allow the person with a disability to engage in the activity or the enterprise. So they go in tandem.

If you look at the legislation and the intent, and certainly my view on this, is that it should be as broad as we can make it. We are not going to limit the perspective around and the definition around disability. That's one of the challenges up till now and, this legislation; we will leave it to the accessibility standards advisory committee and the committees setting up the standards then to delve into the specifics on the disability and the barrier.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your answer.

In section 8 the bill reads: "The minister may, in accordance with the regulations, delegate a power or duty conferred or imposed on the minister under this Act to a person prescribed in the regulations."

Can the minister please give an example of this?

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

J. ABBOTT: Chair, we have a Disability Policy Office. We have a director of that office. For example, I could, in my capacity, delegate some of my roles and responsibilities to that office.

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

J. DWYER: In section 9 it allows for an establishment of the Accessibility Standards Advisory Board.

Can the minister please outline how the members will be appointed? Will appointments go through the Independent Appointments Commission?

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

J. ABBOTT: Chair, the appointment process will be under the Independent Appointments Commission. They will make recommendation to me as minister. I, in turn, have to bring that to the Cabinet for ratification and approval.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

Subsection 9(9) of the bill states, "The board shall (a) hold at least 4 regular meetings; and (b) meet with the minister once a year." It's further noted a report after each meeting will be available to the public.

The minister needs to be on top of this important issue and the minister or designate should engage in immediate conversations with the board after each meeting.

Can we be assured of this?

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

J. ABBOTT: I guess, more importantly, the legislation ensures that I do it, so yes.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

Section 11, and many of the sections to follow after section 11, outline the development of accessibility standards.

Can the minister outline the process which will be used to establish a standard?

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

J. ABBOTT: Just a couple of things on that question.

One is the legislation does sort of lay out the process, but the committee, once it's established, really defines its terms of reference. It then refers them back to me for approval and then they will commence their work. In doing that, we will certainly be looking at other jurisdictions to see how they do it.

To the point made earlier by someone when we were discussing the bill earlier, I want to make sure we can expedite the development of the standards as quickly as possible. I think we've got a lot to learn from other jurisdictions to move that process along very quickly.

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

J. DWYER: So will the accessibility standards apply to public buildings and private buildings?

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

J. ABBOTT: The act and the standards will apply right across the board to all public bodies and municipal organizations and what have you, once the standard is developed and those things are taken into consideration.

In the meantime, we have our *Buildings Accessibility Act* and that will be the law of the land unless a new standard is approved by Cabinet and put in regulation that would change or override that.

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

J. DWYER: How, Minister, will you assure that the standard increases accessibility in a way that is practical to implement and meets the needs of individuals who may have a disability?

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

J. ABBOTT: I think that's going to be the nub of the issue in developing any standard. That's why there will be people with lived experience, representatives of organizations representing persons with disability and whomever is going to be directly impacted will be at the table to develop that and address those very specific questions.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

Section 21 reads: "Where the minister believes it is in the public interest to do so, the minister may recommend that the Lieutenant-Governor in Council prescribe by regulation incentive-based measures to encourage and assist an individual, an organization or a public body, or a class of individuals, organizations or public bodies, to meet or exceed an accessibility standard."

Can the minister clarify what these incentive-based measures will be? Will there be public disclosure of the incentives required and their costs?

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

J. ABBOTT: Chair, in terms of the incentive-based measures, it could be a grant, it could be a tax incentive or exemption, what have you. It's yet to be defined and how they will play out. So we have no cost on that at the present time.

My department currently does provide – quote, unquote – incentive grants to different non-profit organizations around the province to allow more facilities and experiences to be inclusive. We have the funding for converting vehicles for citizens and we have funding for public transportation in certain areas. Out in Stephenville - Port au Port, recently, we just announced funding there, or at least the funding is there and the bus is finally put in place.

That will be for the present time; we will continue on that. But when they're developing those standards, again, that will be built in there to say if we want to implement this standard this is what government and others are going to have to do to make it work.

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

J. DWYER: Thank you for that answer, Minister.

Section 23 allows for the appointment of a director of compliance and enforcement. Is this a current or a new position? Will this position also have the necessary administrative and other support in order to do their due diligence?

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

J. ABBOTT: It is contemplated that will be a new position and it will have the resources necessary to undertake its work, or his or her work.

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

J. DWYER: In section 23, it also states those that follow prescribed penalties for non-compliance, they can be quite large. How will monetary penalties work when applied to public bodies or to not-for-profit organizations?

You want to give the legislation teeth, which means penalties, and that means an appeals process is necessary, which is also costly. What was the thinking in setting things up this way? Has the research shown that it is only with enforcement and penalties that real change will happen?

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

J. ABBOTT: Chair, actually how we looked at this is that would be – if there are penalties to be imposed – as a last resort. As again mentioned by some of the Members here this afternoon, education and awareness are going to be the tools that would be most effective for compliance.

But that being said, we knew we had to have in legislation a penalty clause – if I can put it that way – and it could be, and it will be financial. We think those measures are reasonable, but it will certainly send a message if we need to.

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

J. DWYER: Section 31 is about issuing public reports about penalties made. Is this also about shaming those who failed to comply and using what kind of public pressure to motivate people to act?

J. ABBOTT: (Inaudible.)

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

J. ABBOTT: Sorry, Chair.

I will put it in the sort of affirmative: I think for us and for me it would be transparency.

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

J. DWYER: The last question: Section 35 gives leeway to Cabinet to define many things in regulation. Can the minister assure the people that the government will widely report on the things it does by way of regulation so everyone is fully informed about what is being done and what is expected of people?

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

J. ABBOTT: That's certainly the intent, and also the legislation does provide that the minister has to issue an annual report and those measures would be reflected in that report.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Chair.

In the research and analysis that the minister has done, how many government-owned buildings are currently not accessible to people with disabilities?

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

J. ABBOTT: If my colleague were here I'd prefer that he try that one. I do not have the answer to that.

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

T. WAKEHAM: So the analysis on that particular side of it, I guess – then my second question about what plan do you have to fix them doesn't really count because we don't know how many we have.

Again, the last question is: How much is it going to cost?

So, again, there's a significant piece of work to be done here on behalf of government. I'm just trying to get a plan of what you might have planned for the government buildings.

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

J. ABBOTT: So in terms of the legislation – and I think it speaks to a very important point here – is that each public body now has, or will have, to have an accessibility plan – something we don't have. That will address the building issue, the access to buildings and everything that goes with that.

This now has the teeth that, also, the departments themselves want, to be able to identify and to bring those buildings and resources up to meeting the standards as we know them. That will certainly put pressure on the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, but we will deal with that in due course.

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

T. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the minister for the answer. So when we pass this legislation this evening, we can look forward to a plan from government on how they're going to bring all of the government-owned buildings that are not currently accessible to people with disabilities or replace them, where necessary.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Minister of Digital Government and Service NL.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

Just for some context in the debate, the *Buildings Accessibility Act* is under Digital Government and Service NL. We've currently asked the Buildings Accessibility Advisory Board to do consultations around changes to the act. We've received that report. The report is public; it's on our website. We are in the beginning processes of reviewing the *Buildings Accessibility Act*, which defines specific accessibility things for government buildings, all public buildings and private buildings as well.

Just to add, the *Buildings Accessibility Act* is different than this piece of legislation today. That is something that we are working on. I just wanted to provide Members with that context.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I thank the minister for that piece of information. Obviously it's the *Buildings Accessibility Act* that the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL has referenced there that's under review and that is the one that's going to determine whether or not we keep this 1984 rule or we scrap it, correct?

S. STOODLEY: Correct.

P. LANE: Okay. That's good; good to know.

For the minister responsible here today, I am wondering about the timelines which I brought up in debate in second reading. Obviously, looking at other provinces as I mentioned, I look at Ontario and I think it's 15 years ago they brought it in. I think they're at standard three or four or something like that.

Do we have a sense of timelines? Which standard do you intend on bringing in first, I guess, would be my first question? There are nine different standards, I think, the minister indicated. So I would wonder which of those nine is going to be the first standard, because we can talk about accessibility but the minister could talk about – maybe the first standard is going to be about employment for persons with disabilities and we won't even be talking about a built environment for 10 years from now. I'd like to know where he intends to start.

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

J. ABBOTT: Chair, I think the Member almost answered the question, because some of the comments made earlier today talked about where, individually, we would like to see a standard. The advisory committee set up under this legislation, that will be their first task: to advise me, as minister, as to which standard and when. I have my views on some of that, but I am going to wait to hear from that committee and that will be literally their first order of business.

I am anticipating, based on what some other jurisdictions have done, that we can pull that best practice into ours. If you use Ontario, and I don't like the idea that it has taken that long but I can understand because of the complexity of large province and all the actors that would be involved. We have the benefit, being smaller,

lesser actors, many of the same issues but we can get the people in the room very quickly to work through a lot of these processes to get those standards in place.

One of the things that I would like to see that committee do – and I'll talk to them obviously once it is set up – is to actually develop a work plan and we can put that out over the next year, two years, three years to show what we intend to do and really keep their feet to the fire as well.

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

P. LANE: I thank the minister for that.

Just wondering, Minister, in terms of the enforcement piece and I know that there is recommendation – well, not a recommendation; it actually talks about the fact that there would be a new position, I believe, the minister said around this. Just wondering how the minister anticipates enforcement going, whether it is one person or a couple of people. Even in the St. John's metro area, there are an awful lot of facilities, buildings out there and so on.

Is this going to be a complaint-driven type scenario, or will there be resources involved in, for example, doing audits of public and private facilities, for that matter, going out, doing audits and determining whether or not they are up to code, whether they had plans in place and so on?

Would that be the function of this particular office or does the minister see an opportunity, perhaps, with working with a not-for-profit group like COD-NL or something with people who could go out and do accessibility audits as opposed to all government employees that would be doing it?

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

J. ABBOTT: Thank you, Chair.

A good question in terms of that. One of the things we will be doing is certainly building on and using existing resources, and we have different inspectors in government services. So those and municipal inspectors – so we will be

building on existing resources from the inspection complaint side of things.

We will, when we're doing the standards, identify how we would be looking to measure for compliance in that so people know. Where it makes sense to do, we will engage other organizations to help us in that task. The director's role will be largely to oversee that and then to formally lay a complaint or charge against an organization or business or whatever that is seen in contravention.

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My final question, I guess, relates to municipalities; this is going to apply to all public bodies. I'm just thinking now about, you know, a lot of smaller towns, smaller municipalities and so on that don't even have the money for safe drinking water, as an example. I'm just wondering where this would have to be prioritized with those needs, where they would get the funds to do so.

And, I guess, related to the funding, is there going to be any federal assistance? We know we don't have a whole lot of money here in this province – we know we're into it – but is there any federal programs, I wonder, that could be availed of, say, by our municipalities or cost shared with the province and municipalities to assist in implementing some of these things in the small towns in particular.

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

J. ABBOTT: Chair, I know in terms of helping to respond to that question we'll be working with my colleague, the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, as we engage the municipal sector in getting them to build and develop their accessibility plans.

It's not a one-size-fits-all kind of approach here. But if you use the basic issue around just accessing the municipal or town office to making sure, as an example, that the materials and literature that a municipality produces is

accessible; so all very basic things that we need to look at.

The Member for St. John's Centre talked about snow clearing. Again, we need to figure out with them what that means, how it would look and to whom it would apply.

We recognize that whatever the standards that are going to be developed, they're going to be within that, potentially, different standards for different size organizations based on their capacity to implement. So that will have to be all worked out standard by standard by standard, plan by plan by plan.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

This question goes right to the heart of snow clearing then. I'm just wondering what the implications are of this act in terms of snow clearing and keeping sidewalks, streets and that accessible in the wintertime.

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

J. ABBOTT: In the conversations, obviously, we will have with the municipal sector guiding them around their plans they will be dealing with their constituents, voters and taxpayers as to what's important for them when it comes to their accessibility needs, wants and desires.

You represent a district – as do I – that this is a big issue, obviously, in terms of mobility around the city and safety and those kinds of things. I'm sure the recent court case automatically has changed how the municipalities are going to be looking at this issue. Whatever guidance we can give when they're developing their plans we will.

But it's going to be left to them to determine the priority within their own municipality for that particular issue.

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

J. DINN: But will this act have any say as to determining priority? For example, let's say the majority of the citizens of St. John's decide that no, having sidewalks cleared of snow is not a priority. It's going to be too costly. Actually, we need to scale it back. In other words, we don't have a choice, really, blue zones are out there.

I'm just wondering if we're going to leave it up to the city, will they have the ability to opt out of this, if that's not a priority of the citizens of the city, if the majority are saying no, too expensive?

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

J. ABBOTT: Chair, I certainly appreciate the Member's question.

As we have the bill constructed right now, there will be a municipal plan, accessibility plan. That being said, on some issues, not necessarily the one you're suggesting, but like we have for our blue zones and those kinds of things, it was of a significant provincial interest that there is a provincial regulation and we have that opportunity to do that under this legislation.

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

E. JOYCE: I'm just going to make a comment.

I know my colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands, mentioned about municipalities. I just want to make a comment that over a number of years, and I mentioned this earlier, I was involved with disabilities. I know many towns and many churches in the area, that I'm fortunate enough to represent, have applied for the community living grant or the Community Enhancement Program, has built wheelchair accessible washrooms, wheelchair accessibility to get in the building and accessibility. So there are funds available there.

The bigger funds for, say, Sir Richard Squires Building, would be up to the government and the minister, as you mentioned, but for the municipalities there are smaller funds that I know a lot of town halls brought their buildings up to wheelchair accessibility, mobility accessibility for a lot of seniors who visit the

hall. So there are funds available now that I know a lot of towns that we applied for have been approved for that and that would help this program out a fair bit.

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

J. ABBOTT: Chair, just as a response.

That's exactly what we want to do in the department and we are doing it right now. There's a good example in the Premier's district with the Royal Canadian Legion and they've addressed that quite effectively. We are seeing more of that. The demand is there and the need is there. One person that is left outside because of a disability, we recognize is wrong and we have to, obviously, correct that immediately. The legislation, obviously, speaks to that on a broader scale, but we know it is happening every hour of every day and we have to put that to an end.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 36 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 36 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 36 carried.

CLERK: Clause 37.

CHAIR: Shall clause 37 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: I move, seconded by the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, that the following – it's just a friendly amendment to the bill.

Clause 37 of the bill is deleted and the following substituted: 37(1) "This act, except subparagraph 2(1)(o)(v), comes into force on December 3, 2021.

"(2) Subparagraph 2(1)(o)(v) comes into force on a day to be proclaimed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council."

It's just when the bill was drafted, there was a minor technical error recognizing the House of Assembly as a separate branch.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The Committee will recess so we can have a look at the amendment.

Recess

CHAIR: Order, please!

Are the Government House Leaders ready?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

The amendment is in order.

Is it the pleasure of Committee to adopt the amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

CHAIR: Is it the pleasure of the Committee to adopt clause 37, as amended?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 37, as amended, carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act Respecting Accessibility In The Province.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill with amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill with amendment, carried.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 38 with amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 38 with amendment.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt that 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): The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, Chair of Committees.

B. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have carried Bill 38 with amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have carried Bill 38 with amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: I move, seconded by the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social

Development, that the amendment be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the amendment be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: First reading of the amendment.

SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister for Children, Seniors and Social Development, that the amendment be now read a second 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: Second reading of the amendment.

On motion, amendments read a first and second time. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, back to Orders of the Day, I call Bill 23 from the Order Paper, An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs that Bill 23, An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act, now be read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 23, An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act." (Bill 23)

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure today to introduce Bill 23, An Act to Amend the Automobile Insurance Act. Automobile insurance is a requirement for all motorists in Newfoundland and Labrador. It has a soft spot in my heart because it's the industry that I came from prior to my new life.

In 2017, government requested the Public Utilities Board conduct a review of the automobile insurance system in Newfoundland and Labrador. This review included public consultations, as well as closed-claim studies, and focused on identifying opportunities to lower rates that will benefit consumers and help bring stability to the automobile insurance industry.

In 2019, a comprehensive report was submitted to government by the Public Utilities Board to support decision-making related to the automobile insurance system. This report is available on our website.

When we look at the auto insurance market and the review, the Public Utilities Board commissioners told us an average of five uninsured automobile claims are reported each year in Newfoundland and Labrador for every 10,000 vehicles insured in our province compared to three in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and four in Prince Edward Island.

So the report further noted that Newfoundland and Labrador's average claim cost per insured vehicle is \$19 and was also the highest

compared to \$5 in New Brunswick and \$9 in Nova Scotia, \$7 in Prince Edward Island.

In relation to the Atlantic comparison, the report indicated: We assume that, on average, higher uninsured automobile claims frequency rates are associated with a higher percentage of uninsured vehicles. However, data to compare vehicles in the number uninsured vehicles in each province is not available. Of course, we don't know at the moment, Speaker, how many uninsured vehicles we have in this province nor in other provinces.

Uninsured drivers impose costs which must be paid by drivers who are insured. As a result, the overall cost of insurance is higher than it would otherwise be. While the issue of uninsured drivers is not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador, the Public Utilities Board report states that this province has the highest claim frequency and costs for uninsured drivers of any Atlantic province.

So, Speaker, one of the changes that we made to address this gap in the *Automobile Insurance Act*, effective January 1, 2020, was the addition of section 6.01, duty to notify the registrar. This provision requires auto insurers to inform the registrar of motor vehicles when a policy is cancelled or expired.

My department has been working with OCIO and the Insurance Bureau of Canada to develop an electronic solution so that all insurance companies can let us know automatically when a policy has been cancelled. We call that the insurance validation program and the federal government funded that program, Speaker.

This program allows policies to be checked at the time of registration, renewal, at roadside checks by law enforcement and periodic checks of registered vehicles, getting accurate insurance status much more efficiently and effectively.

To enable this project, information comes from the General Insurance Statistics Agency, which provides data from insurers under the *Insurance Companies Act* and the Facility Association. Which administers the residual market for automobile insurance in Newfoundland and Labrador, which essentially, are those drivers unable to get insurance with other insurers. These are often high-risk drivers. If you have a

lot of accidents and you can't get insurance with the companies that we would think of, Facility is the insurer who you can get a policy with. It's kind of like an association of all the insurers.

During the development of this system, it was determined that while the legislative authority already existed to request data from the General Insurance Statistical Agency, the same authority did not exist for Facility Association data. This amendment to the *Automobile Insurance Act* is necessary to facilitate the insurance validation program access to the data held within the Facility Association. Without this amendment, the Facility Association is unable to share the data with us.

I guess, Speaker, this is a very small bill. There are two pages and, essentially, if you read the Explanatory Notes, it's pretty simple what we're trying to do. We would like to essentially change some of the definitions and the wordings to make it very clear that Facility Association can give us the data that we're looking for. This amendment would allow the insurance validation program to proceed and reduce the number of uninsured drivers on our roads.

I look forward to answering any questions that might come up in Committee.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, it's a pleasure again to speak in this House to represent the District of Ferryland and I thank all the people for putting me there, all the constituents.

First of all, I'd like to thank the minister and her department for the briefing that we had on this. As she said, it's just a couple of pages, but we'll get in and get those proper changes made. I'll certainly say we'll support this bill.

Not all drivers are driving with insurance. There are still a number of uninsured drivers on our roadways. Uninsured drivers increase the cost of

insurance premiums for all insured drivers. When a car is registered with the motor vehicle division a policy number is asked for but the registration system cannot check this number against an insurer's data. Likewise, if a police officer checks a driver's insurance card, they cannot check to see if the policy card is active. This means that some drivers can get insurance, get a card and then cancel their insurance and the driver is uninsured.

This will bring in legislative amendments to implement the technology solution to help prevent this. Through this legislation, a secure electronic system will be created, which will allow the Motor Registration division to ensure that the insurance policy number entered at registration is, in fact, an active insurance policy. Likewise, a police officer will be able to key in an insurance policy number to see if it's still an active insurance policy. The electronic solution being implemented in this province is being modelled after the Ontario legislation. This bill has allowed this electronic system to be created and give the provision for it to be accessed and utilized.

Currently, the legislation 6.01(1) reads: "An insurer shall notify the Registrar of Motor Vehicles of the cancellation or expiration of a policy issued by the insurer for the type or use of vehicle prescribed in the regulations." This language is being removed from the legislation. This text was added to legislation in 2019 and would serve until this electronic solution is ready and the insurance companies and Facility Association is ready to work together on an updated solution. As an electronic solution will be implemented, which can check the real-time status of the insurance policy, there will no longer be the need for an insurer to notify the registrar of any cancellation or an expiration.

I came from a car dealership, I worked there for 22 year between service and, I'm going to say, sales in the last 12 or 13 years. So when you come in to buy a vehicle, once you went to the finance office, before you came back to get your car, you had to make sure that you notified your insurance company that the insurance is on your vehicle. When it first started, we would take their word for it. Before I finished, in the last three or four years, our company would send a copy of the information on the vehicle to the

insurance company and when they emailed it back or faxed it back with the proper information, that was the time that you were allowed to take your vehicle.

But what happened along the way, when you're there, if you came in as an individual and wanted to buy a car for \$4,000 or \$5,000 and you took it off the lot; well, that was up to you, if you were going to put insurance on it or not. If you left the lot, it wasn't up to us. If you drove off the lot and somebody ran into you, then you were responsible for your \$4,000 or \$5,000 that you paid for a used vehicle, that would be gone.

I'm going to say when you buy a vehicle and you finance it, the bank is the one that is looking after your needs and looking after your vehicle. Because if you didn't have insurance on it and you left the lot and somebody wrote it off, and it's a \$50,000 machine – and it has happened, they don't get down the road and it has happened, I've seen it a couple of times – there would be insurance on it and it would be written-off. The bank would make sure that it's there, obviously, you got the protection that's needed. Right now, those banks make sure they're covering their asset because it's theirs until it's paid off, so that's how it's done.

One of the other circumstances that would happen is somebody come in – and this is the issue that we got to get to and you got to go a little bit deeper, I think, on some of this legislation. I would say, in my opinion – and there are always arguments against it – the last time I asked it they based it on being a costly venture for the data and the computer system to do it, but I think a plate-to-a-person registration is something that should happen in the province.

Because, right now, what happens is somebody buys a vehicle, they come in and buy a \$200 or \$300 vehicle and they go out and get a ticket for no insurance, no registration and whatever else comes with it – not licensed to be on the roads. So those kinds of examples with a plate to plate would disappear because if you took that vehicle with no plate, the only plate that you got is your own and that should not still be to the vehicle, it should stick to the person. That is something that I think we have to look into a little deeper.

Well, you hear it once a week, there's \$35,000 worth of fines on this person and \$40,000 on someone else. They continue to just come in and buy a vehicle and pay \$500, take it and go get hauled in, whenever they get hauled in. That's something that we have to look at for sure.

In touching on that example, as well, like I said, the used cars – and this will continue if you don't stop that process; it will absolutely continue – you can come in and buy a used car, no insurance and you're gone. Now, the dealership that I worked at, we would sell you a car, you would not get a copy of the registration until you came back with an inspection slip on that car. You take the vehicle, but that car is not inspected, not registered and the dealership wasn't on the hook for that.

It's just something to keep in mind when we're looking at some of this legislation. That would be about it for now. I just have a few questions when we get to Committee.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm going to just have a few words on this here. I'm glad it's done electronically because most people can't get into the buildings now, Motor Registration, to get it done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

E. JOYCE: I'm just glad that there's an electronic system set up because if they had to go in, if there's a mistake with the insurance and you have to try and get in, arrange an appointment – and it do happen, I can assure you it do happen. If there's something in this gets sent in that's wrong, then you have to go and try to arrange a meeting with Service NL. You have to wait four or five weeks without insurance before you even get in the building. That's what's going to happen. That's why we need the buildings open. That's why we need the Motor Registration buildings open.

I just want to bring that point out because I did see it happen where there were mistakes made in insurance. You had to go up and go back to the insurance company; go up and sit down with someone at the office and actually get it worked out.

This is great. This is a great system and I'll speak on the system in a few minutes. But when there are flaws in the system this is going to affect people if the buildings are closed. I can assure you that right now, as sure as I'm sitting here in this chair.

It's something that we're bringing in, which is good news to bring that in, but it's going to hurt people when there are flaws, and there will be flaws. It always happens. Maybe it's just someone sent in a typo or someone else may have just forgot to register it or – it's going to happen.

I just want to say to the minister that this is a worthwhile piece of legislation to bring in. We all know the amount of people, we hear it everyday – just as an example, there were two ATVs racing up the road and neither one of them had insurance or liability or a licence. That's the kind of things that causes a lot of issues in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When it gets to cars – and how many times do we hear of accidents where people never had insurance? It's a major issue. This actual bill will ensure that the registrar or superintendent would be notified if an insurance is cancelled. It will make our streets safer. It will help out a lot of people if there are damages and having to go through the rigmarole of your own insurance.

This is a good piece of legislation that would hopefully allow the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to have safer streets, streets without people driving around without insurance. I'm not saying all the time, but usually you find a lot of the times there's high insurance, a high insurance rate. If someone in Newfoundland and Labrador just can't afford the insurance rates, they're going to go off and drive and hopefully not get caught. But this here would ensure that if any person who walks in today and gets registered and gets insurance, then they have to carry out the insurance until

they either sell the vehicle or disown the vehicle or the insurance expires and they have to go in and get it again.

I heard the Member for Ferryland talking about licence plates to a vehicle. I agree with that 100 per cent. That would save – I know this is not part of this bill, but it's something for the department. If you take your licence plate off a vehicle and you own that licence plate, no one can drive that car until they put their licence plate on it.

The way it happens now, as the Member from Ferryland stated, you can sell your vehicle and they still got your licence plate. Once you get it inspected and get it passed, you can cancel your insurance, you can keep driving it with that person's licence plate on it. So if it comes up with the police or comes up in an accident, the licence plate that's on it will be your name.

I agree with that idea 100 per cent; that whoever wants to buy your vehicle will have to go get new licence plates, have their name registered with that licence plate. That is a great idea. It would save a lot of people going around with cars that are not registered and then, hopefully, that would have to force them to get insurance before they can put the vehicle on the road. I agree with that 100 per cent.

When you hear about the vehicles being not registered, no insurance, when you check it, you always find many times that it's not registered because there's a licence plate on the vehicle not registered. So I will agree with this piece of legislation to have it.

I notice the minister mentioned facilitators. Part of that facilitation is when people have one or two accidents – and I use some people in the taxi industry; they have a few accidents. The regular insurance company may not take you because of the number of accidents. When you have to go to the facilitation group, it's a group of insurers who got together which are higher cost, so the insurance goes up. So when your insurance goes up and once you get the insurance, most people have a tendency to say, well, this is too much – not most, some. I shouldn't say most. But many people have a tendency, okay, I have it now through – I can't even say the word – before that association.

AN HON. MEMBER: Facilities.

E. JOYCE: Facilities association. And before you get out through the door, they're already contacting and saying, okay, I want to cancel that because the vehicle is registered. So that happened on many occasions. I know in my previous roles that has happened.

I will agree with this piece of legislation. It's timely and we hear about it so many times across Newfoundland and Labrador of people stopped with no insurance. So I will be supporting this and I think it's a great idea. A great way to hopefully make our roads much safer and make people more accountable.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. LANE: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm just going to take a couple of minutes. Speaker, I'll be supporting this bill as well. As has been said, this here really ties down to safety. To my mind, getting some of the menaces off the road. That's not to say everybody on the road that would be involved here is a menace; but let's face it, for the most part, anybody who's going around without insurance and having accidents, they're a menace to the rest of us who are trying to abide by the rules and keep everybody safe and be responsible for their actions and be responsible if they have an accident.

As has been said, there are a couple of ways here that this new system would kick in: the electronic system. The first one is you go to register your vehicle at motor vehicle registration. Of course, as my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands has said, these days, that's a challenge in itself. So I get a car today – I buy one – and first thing I have to do is wait maybe about five or six weeks to get into Motor Registration to actually get an appointment to get my vehicle registered. Now, I do understand that an option just came out in the last couple of days to do it online but of course we know, (a), not everybody has Internet access; not everyone

is Internet savvy or understands how to use it and so on.

Unfortunately, one of the things that can happen here is I get a vehicle and I can't even get insurance until I get my vehicle registered first. They're not going to insure – you want to get your vehicle registered and then you get your insurance. Of course, we run the risk now of people who have to wait so long – and I've actually had a couple of people reach out to me and say this: I'm not saying I'm doing anything illegal here, but I need a vehicle to get to work and I bought a vehicle and I need to register my vehicle and if I got to wait five or six weeks, what do I do, not work for the next month? I got to get where I need to go.

It's encouraging people to take chances and actually break the law and drive around in unregistered vehicles, because they have to wait five or six weeks to get an appointment to get their vehicle registered at Motor Registration. That is a big problem. One of the many problems associated to Motor Registration these days.

But anyway, if you finally do get there, now, under this new piece of legislation, they will know automatically, Motor Registration will, when you go to register this vehicle they will know automatically from the insurance company that you indeed do have insurance. You can't just go in there with a card from an insurance company or a number and say, yeah, I'm with Johnson's, my number is J5245 or whatever; and they just put it in and say okay, there you go, you're done. Now they can actually check and make sure that that's an active insurance policy.

That's one way we catch them at Motor Registration to make sure the vehicle is insured when they go to register the vehicle, if they can actually get in there to register the vehicle, five or six weeks later.

The other piece, of course, is the RNC or the RCMP. If they pull somebody over now, right now as it currently stands the officer hauls you over – not that I would know from personal experience, but could I see your licence, insurance, registration type deal. Of course, you could show an insurance card and that police officer has no way of knowing whether or not

that insurance is valid or if it isn't. Because, as has been said, I can go to the insurance company, I can go register my vehicle, show my insurance, leave Motor Registration and cancel my insurance policy because I don't want to pay for it or I'm not able to pay of it, whatever the case might be, or I choose not to pay for it. So now I'm going around with an uninsured vehicle. If a police officer hauled me over and I showed my card, as far as that police officer is concerned, I have valid insurance, when really I don't have valid insurance. That is, obviously, a big issue.

As the minister said, I think, in her commentary, one of the things that's driving the cost of insurance through the roof is the fact that you have people going around driving with no insurance, then having accidents with the people who do have insurance and then that person is on the hook for it all. They're the ones who are driving everybody's insurance up. So this is going to deal with that issue.

The other piece in this legislation, of course, is that Facility's insurance, there's an amendment here that would include Facility's insurance being placed on the database. Because, as the minister said, right now, they have the ability with this database to get the data from the insurance companies, but without this amendment, they don't have the ability to go to the Facility's insurance and say we want this data as well.

That's very important because, let's face it, a lot of – and that's not to say everybody who's on Facility's insurance is a bad person. Some people, as my colleague from Humber - Bay of Islands said, perhaps you're in the taxi industry; the fact that you're driving the cab, you know, all hours of the night, seven days a week and so on; 16, 18 hours a day or whatever, in all kinds of weather, you're more likely to be having more accidents because you're simply on the road all the time. So the law of averages kind of works against you.

There are people, let's face it, that are irresponsible drivers. I think someone referenced this as well, and it's true, a lot of times when you hear in the news someone got hauled over and they had like thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars in fines, what that is – not

in all cases, but a lot of cases, so I've been told from people I know in the RNC and so on; I believe the former leader of the Official Opposition talked about it one time as well – is you get these guys or girls, whatever the case might be, they go out, they buy a hunk of junk for \$500, or \$1,000 or whatever. They take it and they don't insure it, they don't register it and they'll drive it around for a month or two, or whatever the case might be, until they finally get hauled over by the police; they get caught and then the police will seize the vehicle. They'll give them a fine for no registration, no insurance and no driver's licence, in a lot of cases. They might get \$2,000 worth of fines and they take their car. Then that same person goes out a week or two later and they buy another hunk of junk and they do it again. That's why they owe \$20,000; \$30,000; and \$40,000 because it's a repeating cycle. They keep doing it.

The police keep hauling them over; they keep seizing the vehicle. They do it again, they do it again and they do it again. These are the types of menaces out on the road that are causing a lot of the problems, safety issues for the public and driving the insurance costs as well. These are the people that the only insurance they're going to get, even for that short period of time to try to pull the wool over Motor Registration's eyes are these individuals, and the only insurance they can even possibly get is Facility's insurance to begin with.

That's why I think this amendment, in particular, is really important because it would be a lot of the people that would be on the Facility's insurance; again, not all. That's not grouping everyone into one category here. But a lot of the – quote, unquote – skeets that are causing the problems, they're the ones that are involved with this; they're the ones causing the problems. It's important to have that Facility insurance as part of this, tied into this, so that they can't be pulling the wool over Motor Registration's eyes, can't be pulling the wool over the eyes of the police and being a menace on the road, causing a safety issue and driving insurance rates up for consumers.

That's what this legislation does; it protects people from that type of activity. It prevents people from trying to so-call cheat the system

and causing issues for all of the responsible motorists on the road and so on.

With that said, Speaker, I will be supporting this bill. I think it's a good piece of legislation.

I will conclude by saying to the minister once again: open up Motor Registration.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Speaker.

Like I said, I do want to speak to this on the fact that I do think it's a good idea that we have such a database and the ability to crosscheck and check on insurance. It is a huge issue right now in the province is uninsured drivers. It does cause a lot of havoc but also costs a lot as well to the province, but also to the everyday driver who has to pay that extra fee on their insurance for uninsured drivers on the road. If you get the breakdown of your insurance costs there is that fee there to pay for uninsured drivers on our roads.

It's good that we can actually now start tackling the issue head on in the sense of, you know, people that are on our roads causing havoc, like the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands said, buys a piece of junk one day, drives around, racks up a bunch of fines, gets it taken away and does the whole thing all over again the next week.

We know this is a problem and it's going to continue to be a problem until we tackle it. So this is a good start on tackling that issue of uninsured drivers.

I know the Member from Ferryland mentioned about the dealership having more control over making sure you have insurance if you finance a vehicle, because the bank will make you get insurance to cover your financing. But if you go and buy a used car off a lot, unfortunately, there's nothing there really governing it from the point of view, other than, you know, it's up to the individual; where is, as is, as they say.

At the end of the day, we should also go back and maybe have a conversation with the dealership association and stuff about maybe there's changes that can be made there, saying that you can't take anything off their lot unless you have proof of insurance and your name is registered here as having insurance. There are other ways that we could probably also tackle this issue because it costs the province a lot of money and it costs the residents of this province a lot of money.

The Members from Humber - Bay of Islands, Mount Pearl - Southlands and the Member from Ferryland all said, maybe we should start attaching licence plates to individuals and not cars, because if we're taking people's vehicles, impounding vehicles from people who are not paying their fines, they're not following the rules of the road and social norms right now when it comes to having insurance and being a safe and responsible driver. Maybe we should start taking their plate so that they can't go out and buy a hunk of junk on Thursday, rack up a bunch of fines and then do it all over again on Friday.

This is where we should really have a conversation about maybe it's time to start attaching plates to driver's licences and having that kind of said now that we're taking a responsible approach to removing these nuisances off our roads right now.

I'm sure it would be better and a lot of people would enjoy it because, as insurance rates continually climb, it is causing havoc for people who are responsible drivers, people who actually do take the time of day to follow the rules of the road. Yet, when they get the bill for their insurance every month, it is nipping into their savings as it continually climbs because of hazards of the road, per se.

So this is a great step and 100 per cent support it, but now maybe we need to broaden our scope and start seeing other opportunities to alleviate this issue. But also try to get a lot of these havoc drivers off our roads and make it a safer place for those who actually take the time to buy their insurance, be responsible drivers and follow all the rules of the road. Because there are a lot of them out there that are very responsible

individuals that are being punished for other people's behaviours.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll be brief. I'm only going to speak on the merits of this bill, Bill 23, An Act to Amend the Automobile Insurance Act.

According to the PUB report, one factor contributing to the high cost of premiums that impact all of us is the high number of accidents involving vehicles that are not insured currently. And, of course, driving the premiums up really impacts everybody, not just the people involved with driving without insurance. We basically pay for all the damage and injury that's incurred by a driver who actually is not insured. That's a very important fact, and that's one of the reasons why I support this bill.

One of the recommendations was to put in place a process to minimize the number of uninsured drivers. I do commend the government on coming up with this solution, having the digital solution. Because right now, currently, you just have to have a policy number associated with the insurance company. I've done it myself when I went in and I couldn't remember my insurance number. I had to go back and look. Sometimes I had the old piece of paper that was in my vehicle from a few years ago, but I just put the number in anyway. Of course, I always drove with insurance.

So the problem is right now when you're stopped by an officer, he doesn't know if the paper is valid or not, like my fellow MHA for Lab West was speaking to. This creates a problem for everyone. We all suffer. When we have a lot of drivers on the road who are not insured and they actually have accidents, we all pay the cost.

When I say we all suffer, one of my friends from university told me a story a while ago when I was in university. She was telling me about her brother and he had bought this new vehicle. Of course, he got the insurance; he got his truck

registered. Within a few months, he wrote the truck off. For years, he was paying on a brand new truck that he didn't have access to. That really impacted him financially, and also he incurred fines for driving without insurance. And he had a family to raise. He didn't have a set of wheels. He was paying on a truck he didn't own. He was paying off the fines.

So this legislation I think is actually going to help everybody, because people shouldn't have to suffer from bad choices. The digital process will prevent that from happening. It has a real-time. It also has a way to hold drivers accountable and ensure that there's coverage, if damage or injury occur. We all pay for uninsured drivers, like I was saying. The periodic checks, too, I really like that, to make sure that the insurance is current and valid.

The one thing I do ask and I hope is that there is a direct correlation to the actual reducing the costs that's incurred from uninsured drivers under the new system. I hope that all drivers who pay premiums, law-abiding people, I hope their premiums go down. I hope we actually see this as a trickle-down effect.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I just wanted to say a few words about this particular bill. I have some history with it back to 2017. It's really good to see progress sometimes. I find time is an interesting concept. Some things you can remember; I can remember the temperature; maybe what you would have had for a meal on a particular time several years ago. As was the case when I remember serving as minister of Service NL and had my first meeting with the taxi drivers and other members and owners of the taxi industry. Well, that was quite a welcome to Service NL, because they were extremely angry.

Facility Association is the default insurance for those high-risk clients. The taxi drivers, owners and operators were then, and are still, now facing extremely high costs. I want to, as with the previous bill, sort of mark progress and I'm going back to some of my notes I was able to find here where I can remember being quoted by the media after this. It was close. The drivers were so frustrated, they were proposing a stand down, essentially a taxi strike here in St. John's on a couple of occasions during that spring of 2017. We managed to talk them down on both occasions through some pretty intense discussions, which I feel very good about. I'm looking back at our comments and it's good.

At the time, I remember the first meeting there was probably six, seven, maybe eight different items that staff and the industry had agreed were sort of the pointing the fingers at why these prices were so high. One of them was this very matter before us here today. It is really good to see that

Their frustration, I can recall, talking about the fact that so many folks and our inability to actually tackle and find out who was complying, who was actually insured on the road and who wasn't. Because we do have, I think, within Atlantic Canada the worse performance in terms of the number of uninsured drivers who are in accidents, and because of that whole Facility Association and the way the calculations work and so on, by default, even for the honest taxi drivers, they are paying exorbitant costs.

I find myself – the habits that you develop in politics, but every time when I leave here on a Friday morning, usually it's early morning to catch my flight back to Labrador, I'm in a taxi and I have to ask the driver: Do you own the car? How much do you pay for insurance? How do you feel about that? So I still find myself gauging and keeping on top of the topic, as it were. It was back in 2017 I remember saying to saying to Doug McCarthy, one of the key leaders of the – spokesperson for the owners. I said to him and the media: I feel your pain. It's reflected in the frustration of those owners.

The guy that took me to the airport last week, I asked him about his driving history and he said that we used to own three stretch limos and another taxi in Toronto and he said for the price

of his insurance at that time that it would barely cover one car here now in our fair province. So I was aware of some changes that were coming, and I said: At least we're hearing you and we're seeing progress and there changes coming.

This certainly will help. It is going to take a little while. The briefing was excellent, again, by the staff, as you get into the nuances and the justification of the bill. But as we go to pass this and I'm sensing there is going to be good support here for it, Minister, but it will still take some time, of course, for the benefit to show up in Facility Association and the rates of which one has to pay to insure their vehicle here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Nevertheless, we're making progress and it's good to see. I thank the staff for all their hard work and patience with so many matters.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Digital Government and Service NL speaks now, we will close debate.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you everyone for your feedback. I look forward to answering questions in Committee.

SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is Bill 23 now be read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act. (Bill 23)

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

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

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 23)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: I move, seconded by the Minister for Digital Government and Service NL, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 23, An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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 23, An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act." (Bill 23)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Thank you, Chair.

When will this legislation change come into effect?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

This would take effect upon proclamation, after receiving Royal Assent.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: When will this electronic system become available to use by law enforcement and Motor Registration – it will probably be the same answer, when it all comes into the effect or fairly quickly.

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

S. STOODLEY: We have a few more tweaks to do with the system, so definitely in 2022. I'm hoping the earlier part of 2022.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Has the Privacy Commissioner been consulted on the creation of the new system and what was the Commissioner's recommendation if there was?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

So the Privacy Commissioner is involved and sees all pieces of legislation. The IT teams work with the Privacy Commissioner as well on Privacy Impact Assessments.

I think it is important to understand that for the change to amend the *Automobile Insurance Act* we're debating today there is no change in spirit from the original changes that came into effect January 1, 2020. We're just kind of doing a housekeeping revision here, essentially, to help facilities. There's nothing here up and above what was passed in the last round of changes to the act in terms of, like, policy decisions. This is more of a housekeeping item.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: Has the Insurance Bureau of Canada been consulted? And what were their recommendations if they were involved?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

There's no impact. From a policy perspective, this would have been passed and taken effect January 1, 2020. It's like a housekeeping revision. I don't anticipate that the Insurance Bureau of Canada would have any feedback on this, other than being supportive.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

S. STOODLEY: Oh, sorry – they were a partner in the IT project and, yes, they are involved.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: How much did this cost?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

The work is still ongoing. A lot of the work happens for our internal team. So we have a very small MRD team that works on the mainframe and they do all the work. The way government IT works, which is different than my past life,

we don't keep track of the hours, like the people cost of projects. But, externally, there's about \$65,000 of funding from the federal government that we've received that is covering any external costs that we have to pay.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: So the question part would be was it budgeted for this year or will it be in next year's budget or how is that –?

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

So that would be this year and my hope is that the project will be completed before the next budget year.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: So the question that I have, I'm going to say that if you have a vehicle and the insurance expires – an example would be my daughter had a car two years ago that was in my name and she drove it for six months with no registration and I'm guilty, no question. And everybody else is getting registrations at their house.

How are you going to ensure that if you – pardon that word. How are you going to make sure that the car is insured if you forget to licence it? Like, if your licence or your insurance expires today, how are you going to ensure that that's – is there somebody going to be notified? That's what I'm trying to get at.

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

S. STOODLEY: Thank you for the question.

So different insurance policies, I guess, would renew different ways. My personal one auto renews. I don't have to do anything and they just send me something in the mail and then my auto

insurance renews. Not everyone's auto insurance is like that.

Essentially, you'd have yearly insurance unless you cancel. So if someone cancels their insurance, as an example some of my colleagues have raised during debate, if you buy a policy and cancel the next day or the next week, the insurance company would tell our system that they've cancelled and then at MRD we would have internal processes to make sure that a letter went out or someone called the person. Because if you don't have insurance like that – depending on what you change with your insurance that could or would impact your registration. There would be knock-on effects to your vehicle registration or your other types of registration.

Driving without registration is an offence. That's an important piece for everyone to keep in mind.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: I know the offence is \$275, I know that much.

Just in regard to that. Right now, we have a system in place if your vehicle is not registered – and I'm using the example it was my daughter's vehicle but it was in my name – even though we were notified, other than she got hauled in, there was no way to stop her from doing that. It's the same with insurance.

If you have insurance on a vehicle – a bank is going to make sure when your car is financed, no question, but if you have a vehicle that you paid cash for and the insurance expires, then is there a system in place that you're going to call that person and say: If you don't have your vehicle insured in five days then the police are going to show up and ticket you or you're not going to be able to drive the vehicle?

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

S. STOODLEY: Yes, there would be because you'd need at least public liability insurance to have a vehicle on the road. We would be essentially be contacting you to say that you would no longer be registered and then when

you try to register next year, we would not renew that either.

I can't speak to, I guess, specifically and all the time frames and how many communications we would make and that kind of stuff, but, yes, you would be notified.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

L. O'DRISCOLL: The last one – and that's what I wanted to be sure of, that somebody is going to be – because if you buy a car with public liability and the insurance expires, then will the insurance company notify motor vehicle that it is expired? That's the main part that I'm saying.

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

S. STOODLEY: Yes, so that is in the law, then once the system is up-to-date it will be mandatory for them to do that.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Further questions?

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Automobile Insurance Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: I move, Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 23.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 23.

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 and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

B. WARR: Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 23 without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and directed him to report Bill 23 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. DEMPSTER: Now.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that this House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

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.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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