

Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FIFTY-FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

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HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

Tuesday November 3, 2026

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we start our proceedings, I would like to rule on a point of order raised by the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island under Standing Order 49 on November 2, 2026.

The Member stated that the Minister of Energy and Mines referred to him as misleading the government and misleading the people. I have reviewed *Hansard* and the minister does refer to the Member as "picking out pieces, misleading the government, misleading the people of the province …."

In addition, in his response to the point of order, the minister stated that the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island "is upset by the word mislead, which is actually what has been happening, very clearly."

Use of term "misleading" has been considered by several Speakers' rulings, most recently in a ruling I made on May 21, 2023. It is not simply the word which must be considered in determining whether a statement is unparliamentary, but also the context, and the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking.

While it is not necessarily a violation of Standing Order 49 to say that a statement made by another Member is misleading or is not factual, it is unparliamentary to imply a dishonest intent by suggesting that a Member had deliberately stated something that is false or misleading.

With this in mind, I find that in the current context the minister's comments were unparliamentary. I would ask the minister to withdraw them.

The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Withdrawn.

SPEAKER: Thank you for that.

I would also like to briefly discuss a matter which occurred during yesterday's proceedings in this hon. House. During debate in second reading of Bill 22, a Member quoted from a submission by a member of the public, the language of which would be considered to be unparliamentary language in its reference to the Premier.

Understanding Standing Order 7(1), as Speaker, I am responsible for preserving order and decorum. With that responsibility in mind, I want to advise all Members that, while it may be permissible to quote from documents generally, we must be careful not to repeat unparliamentary terms or offensive, provocative or threatening language during proceedings of the House, even if we are quoting the words of others.

It has been a long-standing practice of this hon. House that Members cannot circumvent the *Standing Orders* by doing through the back door what could not be done through the front door. I would ask all Members to keep this in mind as we move forward, and I will be calling it out if it occurs.

Today, in the public gallery, we have members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Athletics Association, as well as a winner of the 98th Annual Tely 10, who are subjects of a Member's statement.

From the Newfoundland and Labrador Athletics Association, welcome to Rosie Ryan, President; Michelle Wilkins, Vice-President; and George Stanoev, Executive Director.

Also, welcome Kate Bazeley, female winner of the Tely 10, who is accompanied by her husband, Dr. Peter Bazeley.

Welcome to our gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I would also like to welcome to the public gallery, several individuals from the Office of the Chief Information Officer, which is the subject of a Ministerial Statement today.

Welcome to Alex Edwards, Security Analyst; Nathan Cooney, Cybersecurity Analyst; Robert Swain, Computer Support Specialist; John Bugden, Computer Systems Analyst; Anthony Leonard, Technical Architect, Security; as well as Brian Forward, Director of Technology Advancement.

Welcome to our public gallery.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome a new Page to our House of Assembly today, Logan Savory.

There he is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Logan is from Paradise and is in his second year of the physical education program at Memorial University. I might add that we would all be familiar with his very famous grandfather, Sim Savory of Simani.

Welcome, Logan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Mount Scio, St. John's West, Placentia West - Bellevue and St. George's - Humber.

The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: Speaker, I am humbled to welcome Eugene Hynes, who also goes by the name of Avalon Pond Cleanups, to the Legislature. I'm a long-term fan of Avalon Pond Cleanups, and I'm honoured to welcome Eugene and his wonderful wife, Beth, today to our Legislature.

Over the past 10 years, Eugene has spent much of his free time snorkeling and free diving in ponds and waterways in our beautiful province removing an unbelievable amount of waste. Eugene recycles what can be recycled and ensures waste is disposed of properly, significantly improving the ecology, wildlife habitats and ecosystems of our province.

Eugene delights his followers with unique and historical finds, but also retrieves countless bottles, tires, broken glass, metal, flip-flops, fishing equipment and golf balls. As an example of the scale of waste in some of our waterways, this year alone, Eugene has pulled more than 120 vehicle tires from Paddy's Pond.

Avalon Pond Cleanups are currently collecting aluminum pull tabs, and are working towards their goal of one million tabs for their annual presentation to the Ronald McDonald House of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Please join me in thanking Eugene for his outstanding volunteerism and his unwavering commitment to cleaning up our beautiful province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I usually don't comment on stuff, but I got to say that's wonderful work you're doing. We really appreciate that. Fantastic.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Newfoundland and Labrador Athletics Association and the 98th Annual Tely 10 held this past June.

First run in 1922, the Tely 10 is one of our province's most cherished sporting traditions and Canada's oldest road race. This year's race attracted more than 4,100 finishers, reflecting the growth of running and the enthusiasm of participants of all ages and abilities.

I congratulate Andrew Davies, the men's champion, who set a new course record; Kate Bazeley, the women's champion who claimed her 10th Tely 10 victory.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

K. WHITE: Kate is joining us today and I'm delighted to welcome her to the House of Assembly. I also congratulate Gavin Baggs, winner in the wheelchair category.

Behind this event are the NLAA, its organizers and hundreds of dedicated volunteers whose commitment ensures this tradition continues to thrive.

The Tely 10 celebrates more than competition. It represents perseverance, healthy living, community spirit and the determination of every participant who crosses the finish line.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Andrew, Kate and Gavin and thanking the NLAA and its volunteers for their continued contributions to athletics throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

Today, I rise to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Town of Marystown becoming an incorporated municipality.

For 75 years, Marystown has proudly served as the hub of the Burin Peninsula for industry, health care, sports and music.

Our community has made significant contributions to this province and beyond. We built ships, we played a major role in the offshore oil industry and our residents have brought their skills and strong work ethic to major projects around the world.

Marystown has also earned recognition through sport, music and the arts, including figure skating Olympic gold by Kaetlyn Osmond and songs like, "A Letter to Mom Up in Heaven" by Junior Walsh, which continues to touch so many hearts.

I also want to sincerely thank Mayor Gerry Brenton and all former mayors, including members of council whose leadership and dedication helped build the community we celebrate today.

Having served as the MHA for the past 7½ years, it's been a great honour to uphold what our service men and women have fought so hard for us to enjoy and the lives we know today.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in celebrating 75 years of Marystown and I look forward to what the next 75 years will bring.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize and congratulate Yvonne Young of St. George's, in my District of St. George's - Humber, on receiving the prestigious Derrick Bragg Leadership Award for outstanding municipal service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: This award recognizes the important contributions of individuals who dedicate their time, energy and commitment to strengthening their communities. Yvonne's recognition is a reflection of the value of community involvement and the difference one person can make through dedication and service.

Municipal service is about more than holding a position or carrying out responsibilities; it's about caring for your community, supporting its residents and working to make it a better place for everyone.

The Town of Stephenville Crossing and the residents of the surrounding area have reason to be proud of Yvonne and this well-deserved recognition. As the Member for St. George's - Humber, I am always pleased to see individuals from my district recognized for their contributions and accomplishments.

Speaker, I ask this hon. House to please join me in congratulating Yvonne Young on receiving the Derrick Bragg Leadership Award for outstanding municipal service.

Thank you, Yvonne, for your dedication to Stephenville Crossing and for making a difference in our community.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Social Supports and Well-Being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize November as National Adoption Month and highlight the work our government is doing to help more children find permanent, loving homes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. TIBBS: Every child deserves stability, support and a sense of belonging that comes with a family. That is why our government has made increasing adoptions a priority and set a goal of doubling the number of adoptions this year.

To help achieve that goal, we are strengthening coordination across the province so children can be matched with adoptive parents more quickly. We have also developed and implemented a new adoption training and added eight dedicated staff positions to focus on this very important work. These changes are helping us build a more responsive adoption system and remove barriers that can delay placements.

The results are encouraging, Mr. Speaker; 24 adoptions were finalized in the first six months of this year and 32 more children have been placed for adoption, bringing them one step closer to permanent families.

While there is more work to do, we are seeing positive, progressive changes. National Adoption Month is an opportunity to recognize that every child deserves a place to call home, and our government remains committed to helping more children and youth find the permanence and connections they need to thrive.

I want to thank every single adoptive parent out there that has taken the time to put into their children and give them a loving home that they can be proud of.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Speaker, I want to recognize the importance of National Adoption Month and acknowledge the families, social workers and caregivers who work tirelessly to ensure children have safe, stable and loving homes. Every child deserves permanence, security and a sense of belonging. We certainly support efforts to improve the adoption process and remove unnecessary barriers that can delay children finding permanent families.

The government's goal of doubling adoptions is ambitious and the additional staffing and training are encouraging. We must ensure that these investments translate into meaningful, lasting improvements for children and families across our province.

We cannot lose sight of the supports needed by the children and youth who are waiting for adoption, as well as the families who open their homes and take on this responsibility.

Speaker, every child deserves the opportunity to thrive and I want to thank everyone involved in this important work and recognize the families who make such a difference in the lives of children.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

The NDP caucus are grateful for those who step up to foster and while we recognize the work that this government is doing to advance adoptions, we must again touch on the subject of group homes.

We cannot find decent homes for all those children and youth overnight and that is why we must, unfortunately, remind government of its duty to ensure careful and regular monitoring of these facilities, intervening swiftly and effectively when abuses and inadequacies are identified.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The Minister Responsible for the Office of the Chief Information Officer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize several employees with the Office of the Chief Information Officer, better known as OCIO, who have represented Newfoundland and Labrador at national and international skills competitions. It is a testimony and speaks loudly to our expertise and skill set.

Last month, Alex Edwards attended the WorldSkills Competition in China as Team Canada trainer. Alex previously represented Canada at WorldSkills in 2024 and earned gold at the 2023 Skills Canada National Competition

College of the North Atlantic work-term student, Nathan Cooney, earned bronze in cloud computing at the Skills Canada National Competition, alongside 500 participants from across Canada.

Speaker, these achievements build on a proud history at OCIO, Robert Swain earned national bronze in 2023, John Bugden earned national bronze in 2021 and Anthony Leonard earned national gold in 2018 and silver in 2017. Brian Forward earned national gold in both 2012 and 2013, while Shawn Edwards earned national gold in 2007. All competed as College of the North Atlantic students and are now members of the OCIO team.

The strong relationship between OCIO and the College of the North Atlantic helps students gain valuable experience and build rewarding careers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the OCIO team on their tremendous achievements.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to join the minister in recognizing the tremendous achievements of these individuals who have represented Newfoundland and Labrador on the national and international stage. It is always encouraging to see the talent, dedication and technical expertise that exists right here in our province.

Alex Edwards, Nathan Cooney and the many former competitors who have gone on to build careers with the Office of the Chief Information Officer are deserving of our congratulations. These accomplishments also speak to the important role that institutions like the College of the North Atlantic play in developing our workforce and preparing young people for meaningful careers.

As we continue to see growing demand for skilled workers in technology and information services, we must ensure that opportunities for education, training and career development are available to people across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Congratulations to all those recognized today. They have made our province proud.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

The NDP congratulates these great examples of expanding talent dwelling in our province. This should be a reminder that education is an investment, not a budget line. That's why we call once again on this government to invest properly in post-secondary education so that more of these young people can flourish, practise their trade here and contribute to growing a key industry in the province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Premier is still refusing to debate the final agreements on Churchill Falls in this House and, yesterday, the Premier referenced, in Question Period, a section of his MOU claiming that there's nothing left to be negotiated.

But if the Premier kept reading, he would have made it to section 6.1, which says, "Nothing in this Agreement is intended, nor should it be construed to be legally binding on the Parties with respect to the matters set forth herein, except for Section 3.2 (*Access*), Article 4 (*Additional Covenants*), Article 5 (*Dispute Resolution*) and Article 6 …." So only four sections are non-negotiable. That means dozens of sections are still up for negotiation.

Does the Premier understand that this means there are details left for him to negotiate, or is he still insisting to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians there is nothing left to negotiate?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me take the opportunity to talk about what has been negotiated and the new and better deal that we have signed, the Churchill Falls agreement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, one of the biggest things in that agreement that I'd point out is the previous deal, that they voted for and campaigned on, had a total value of $225 billion. Our new deal has a total value of $273 billion.

That's $48 billion more, Speaker – $48 billion more. I know the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island used to stand up all the time talking about $225 billion, maybe he should talk about $273 billion.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Premier's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: It's the Premier's deal, it's the Premier's legacy and it's his failure to answer questions, which is going to be what we remember.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: Because the Premier's MOU also says, if he read it, "Further, this Agreement is also not intended to, and does not purport to, summarize all the terms, conditions, and other provisions that would be contained in the Definitive Agreements, which Definitive Agreements shall be subject to negotiation …."

His deal literally says the final agreements are subject to negotiation. Why does the Premier continue to insist that his non-binding deal is the same as 17 final deals which are yet to be negotiated? Has the Premier even read his own deal?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, our deal contains a significant number of material terms. Actually, if you look at the deal itself, in terms of comparison of the two, I think their document was something like 32 pages. Ours is 72 – 40 more pages of certainty, Speaker –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – 40 more pages for the benefits to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and let me talk about –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I'm not going down this road again today. Can we not have order in this hon. House?

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

Let's talk about the $49 billion again. Imagine, $49 billion, what we can do with that. Imagine the people that will follow us in the House of Assembly from now, $49 billion is enough to pay off the entire debt of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what future generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have to look forward to, having a debt paid off, not standing here with a $20-billion deficit.

SPEAKER: The hon. Premier's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, the 70-odd pages that we voted on in this House of Assembly, will there be 70-odd pages, as well, in the final agreements or will it be something bigger? Because, as I've said, there's still a lot to be negotiated.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me keep going. Let's talk about the 150 per cent price increase on the power that we can sell to Quebec and they have to buy it at 150 per cent of the price.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to take his seat.

I ask the Member for Mount Pearl North for your co-operation. I'm not going to ask again.

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Speaker.

We have the optionality to decide whether we want to sell the power or keep it ourselves. Unfortunately, the deal that they voted yes to, there was no option for that. There was no power.

Speaker, they continued to say yes to less and no to more.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: We continue to ask questions and we get no to answers.

Yesterday, the Premier said we're going to make sure that the definitive agreements reflect the material terms that have already been outlined in the agreement that we voted on in the House of Assembly. The problem is he's asking us to trust him, but Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have lost trust.

Why not do the right thing and bring it to the House so that the Members can vote on it? If it is a good deal, won't he be able to demonstrate that in the House? What is he afraid of, other than losing another caucus Member?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has asked, has the Premier read the document and the Churchill Falls document? I would say yes, he has.

On Thursday in this House I stood in my place here and I had asked the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island and said – he was on the news saying there was no escalator clause. Yesterday he stood up and said, well, he wasn't talking about Churchill Falls; he was talking about Gull Island.

But for three days of testimony in this House all experts said that the 2 per cent escalator clause wasn't the way to go in the MOU – all three days – and then the Leader of the Opposition stands up and asks if the Premier has read it. I would say –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I'm not sure if the Minister of Finance heard the question because that wasn't even close to an answer of what we're talking about.

Yesterday, the media revealed that the new lead negotiator was very recently working for the federal Department of Energy. The Premier told the media he didn't know if his new negotiator worked on the Churchill Falls deal on Ottawa's side, so he doesn't know if there's a conflict of interest.

He didn't talk to his lawyer about the deal. Now he hasn't talked to the new lead negotiator about his experience.

Why isn't the Premier engaged on this file?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let's talk about not talking to people. For 173 days, the Member for Windsor Lake was the premier of this province and during that time he never moved this file not one inch further. He didn't talk about it. He didn't do anything about it. He didn't talk to anyone about the Bay du Nord contract. He sat on his laurels and expected that he was going to ride in on his white horse and take over the province.

Last October, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador told them–

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – who they lost trust in. They lost trust in them. That's why we're sitting on this side of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Why did the Premier hide his lead negotiator's most recent employment with Canada when he finally decided to announce who the lead negotiator was?

Again, why can't the Premier tell Newfoundlanders and Labradorians what is happening with this file rather than us having to find out about it in Question Period?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know that more uncertainty lies ahead and I've heard your concerns about the cost of living, access to health care, safety for your communities. The question before us makes the election so important. It's how we tackle the challenges. For me, the answer is

simple. The generational opportunity afforded to us by the Churchill Falls deal signed by our Liberal government, which will create 10,000 jobs, allow us to invest in our hospitals, schools, infrastructure, more public firefighters – and he says, the Opposition says, they will reject the deal. Without the billions in revenue, this deal is going to deliver. How can we deliver?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: I would ask the Members opposite to listen to the question and make an attempt to be relevant to what we're asking here on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Yesterday, the Premier confirmed, again, there will not be a vote on the final agreements. He said there will be a technical briefing and all Members opposite will have an opportunity to speak to them.

I ask the Premier: What is the point of that?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are interested in the facts – what this deal brings to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Leader of the Official Opposition has been quoted in the media, as recently as the past few days, as saying that our future has been sold out to Quebec. That might be a debate that we ought to have in the House of Assembly because most Newfoundlanders who have listened to the three days of testimony from our expert witnesses would say that is not the case.

We know the increased value we get with this new deal and I think all the experts, the leader, ought to tune in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: With respect to the answer, I think what he said was Newfoundlanders and Labradorians would appreciate the opportunity to have that debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: So I would suggest to the Finance Minister, next time you're in Cabinet, put that on the table and say to the Premier that that is what you believe, that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians should hear that debate in the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. HOGAN: The Premier used urgency and the December 31 deadline for the final agreements as his excuse to cancel his referendum. Now, since the Quebec election, the Premier has switched the deadline to March 31.

So now that he's admitting there's more time, why doesn't the Premier get rid of the excuse and actually have the referendum that he promised?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, 173 days and they never used any of that time to negotiate one agreement – not one. They come in here –

L. STOYLES: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: I'll ask the minister to take a seat.

The Member for Mount Pearl North, you need not rise any further today, you will not be recognized.

The hon. the minister, and I'll reset the time.

L. PARROTT: One hundred and seventy-three days he was premier and not one accomplishment – 173 days. Then he comes in here and he questions people's integrity; he questions their transparency. He campaigned on the same things he rejects today. They ask about bringing this back to the House for a vote. They voted against even renegotiating or negotiating any part of this deal when they voted against the MOU.

He said clearly: We signed a 50-year deal. Now a 50-year deal don't meet his standards. He boasted about it in his campaign. Now, it doesn't fit him.

Mr. Speaker, at some point they have to make up their minds who it is they want to be.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: What we're questioning is why the promise to have a referendum has been broken. I would suggest maybe Eugene Hynes when he finds some flip-flops at the bottom of the pond, he knows where he can give them.

Now that urgency is gone and there is more than enough time to hold a referendum, will the Premier explain to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians why he really cancelled his main election campaign promise? Is it because he knows Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will resoundingly say no?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: I would suggest the Member for Windsor Lake looks down at his feet because he probably got his flip-flops on today.

If you want to talk about flip-flop, he campaigned against the referendum. He didn't want a referendum. Don't just take his word for it. Ask the Member for Mount Scio who publicly said in the news that she thought a referendum was a bad idea. They come in here and they flip-flop every single day.

First, they think a 50-year deal –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – is great. Then when someone else brings it forward, it's no good. They couldn't get Bay du Nord across the line. I would say there's more than one pair of flip-flops over there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know who promised a referendum and they know who cancelled it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, more than two months ago the Premier announced Team Labrador. Since then, of course, the team has lost 33 per cent of the leadership team.

People are asking me what meetings has Team Labrador had since the team was announced? Can the minister table the minutes from each of those meetings held?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, when we announced Team Labrador, it was the Premier's obligation to set up a team that would actually meet with stakeholders, meet with communities, meet with people and bring those concerns back to Cabinet, back to the relevant departments for quick action. But the processes, with any kind of engagement in government, it takes time to set up.

We are actually working with the different departments, Jobs and Growth, and Rural Development. We're working with Justice. We're working with Social Supports and Well-Being. We're working with Health, Speaker, to make sure that we have the proper supports in place to engage.

Also, when you go out and consult, it has to be done in a very structured way. We will actually be meeting –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, there was a big flashy announcement; it doesn't sound like anything has been done. One of the members who's no longer on the team didn't even know about it in advance.

Has Team Labrador met with any municipalities, Indigenous governments, community leaders, businesses and stakeholders as promised? If so, which ones did they meet with and when?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, we are actually developing a website for proper engagement. We will be reaching out to the stakeholders to the communities. We will be going out soon to actually meet.

The difference between our government and the past government, you're not going to see 10 years of inaction, Speaker. Our departments are already meeting with Happy Valley-Goose Bay town council, the chamber, the relevant Indigenous organizations. We're going to make a difference.

I'll tell you something, Speaker. We're not going to be rushing this process; we're actually going to have concrete measures in place to make sure –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: – that the concerns that people raise are brought back for real action, not 10 years of inaction, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: (Inaudible) years of inaction.

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I'm asking legitimate questions on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I don't know why the Minister of Labrador is so angry.

Team Labrador was established to identify community infrastructure needs, health, education and public safety impacts associated with major projects in the region. We've been down this road with the PC government with Muskrat Falls, Speaker.

We want to know: What specifically has been identified to date? Can those conclusions be tabled in this hon. House?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I'd just like to address the preamble.

I was over in Opposition. I come from Northern Labrador, Speaker. I actually had to witness first-hand 10 years of inaction, where people were failed to be able to access health care. I actually have people now who are buried that would probably be alive if we had a good hospital system in Northern Labrador.

When you look at the cost of heating your house, I had to go through, in Opposition, and actually try to identify ways to actually engage with this former government to make sure that we had the ability to heat our houses.

Failed Liberal promises over and over again –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, don't get me started on better health care for all of us the way we've seen a downward spiral –

L. EVANS: Same here, same here.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the minister for your co-operation.

L. DEMPSTER: – in the last year. It's ridiculous, another broken promise that they ran on.

Speaker –

L. EVANS: Same here.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the minister for your co-operation.

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, I asked a legitimate question. It doesn't sound like anything has been done yet.

Can the minister tell us how far along Team Labrador is in developing its Northern Strategic Plan?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: In actual fact, Speaker, we will have a really well-developed Northern Strategic Plan. The work that Team Labrador is going to do and the departments in our government are going to do is actually going to have a really good plan.

We, basically, are two months in. We are going to be engaging our minister. Our Minister of Health actually went up to Happy Valley-Goose Bay. When I was minister of Health, Speaker, I went up to Happy Valley-Goose Bay. We know the changes.

In actual fact, one of the things that our government is doing is we're going to put the Paddon Home back in function so that our seniors are treated with respect and they have a place to reside so that their families are not worried about them over in the hospital taking up beds and not receiving the adequate care that they deserve.

We are actually going to be –

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, we are more than one year in and all we continue to hear is we're going to, we're going to, we're going to.

Speaking of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, people have reached out to ask me why wasn't Team Labrador at meetings with the Education Minister when he was in Labrador two weeks ago on such an important issue, Speaker?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, I'd just like to address the preamble first, we're going to; in actual fact, we've done. We put money in the budget.

We look at fiscal forecasts from the previous government where things were actually announced with no monies allotted to actually –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. EVANS: – start up the project. We just have to look at health for that. We have to look at housing for that. In actual fact, Speaker, we're putting stuff in the budget, and do you know something? We're not even getting credit for most of the work that we're doing. That's real action.

I look at health care, I look at supports, I look at housing, the work that we're doing in our first year, basically is putting the Liberals to shame.

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, yesterday while we were in this House during debate, the Premier and the Deputy Premier spent a long time in the Speaker's office. There's no way a district issue warranted that three-way meeting at that time.

Will the Premier explain what he and the Deputy Premier needed to meet with the Speaker about so urgently while the House was sitting?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, I find that so distasteful that you had asked us for an issue that both of us had some knowledge on. You have a district to represent as well and they were legitimate concerns and they were departmental issues.

We don't get that opportunity all the time to talk to the Speaker. So without divulging what we were speaking about, which is no one's business only the Speaker's and mine and the Premier's, we had a frank conversation. You come to the door and you were welcome to come in after. I wonder what you were going to talk to the Speaker about.

We were in there, what's the big deal with us talking to the Speaker or you? We spoke to the Speaker on his district issues and we'll do that in a private conversation any day of the week.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I say shame on the Deputy Premier, not a good look.

Yesterday, the Minister of Justice did not answer whether a commissioner has been appointed for the Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission.

I ask the minister: Was there ever any contact between the government and the Chief Justice related to the appointment of a commissioner? I remind the minister that we have access to the public record on this.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Speaker.

As I indicated yesterday, this is a very important issue to us. We are concerned about effective representation and making sure the Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission is followed in terms of its requirements. The act is very clear about what the responsibilities are of our government and we are aware of those responsibilities. We are aware of the timelines and we will have an update on this as soon as we are able.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Sounds like a goose egg to me, Speaker.

Once the commissioner is appointed, will the government follow the past convention to ensure the committee reflects the makeup of the House?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, as I just stated, we will provide an update on this. We are looking at everything that is involved with the *Electoral Boundaries Act* and the commission. We're aware of our responsibilities and the deadlines and the requirements that are set out in the act, and we will have an update on this as soon as we are able.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition and I met with the Marystown Town Council not long ago and they're very passionate about their community and what industrial development would mean to the entire Burin Peninsula, where we all live.

On their behalf, I am asking if the government has advocated to the federal government to spend and invest money in the defence sector in Marystown, which has so much to offer.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, we've advocated. We've advocated for every single place in Newfoundland and Labrador to be looked at when it comes to the defence, every single

port that has deepwater capability, every single port that's developed and undeveloped.

We've lobbied for Goose Bay, $8.5 billion. We've lobbied for Marystown. We've lobbied for Bull Arm. We've lobbied for Buchans. We've lobbied for Rigolet. We've lobbied for every single area in this province.

Equinor has announced that they're doing subsea work with Kiewit down in Marystown. This is already prosperity for that region. We are looking out to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador – something they failed to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Speaker, this government promised the construction of new ferries. Marystown has a proud history of shipbuilding.

Will this government ensure that Marystown will be utilized if the government proceeds with building the new vessels in this province?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thanks, Speaker.

We have an RFP out now for capacity on the shipbuilding industry throughout the province. Whether it's Marystown, whether it's Harbour Grace, whether it's St. John's, wherever it's going to be, we'll wait until the RFP results come back. Whatever they decide, in whatever capacity we have, we are committed to developing the shipbuilding industry in the province. Where that will be located will be decided in a future time when we get the results of the RFP and we have time to assess it.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

Last spring I asked the then minister of Tourism what she was doing to prevent the closure of the Geo Centre. She replied that it was under Memorial University and didn't confirm any actions to ensure this important tourism and educational institution stayed open.

Now the new Minister of Tourism is willing to work with MUN to see if there's an opportunity to – quote – work together to preserve its role.

Speaker, what's changed?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. GOOSNEY: Well, it's obvious, Speaker, that the portfolios have been switched around. I have stated that we're here to work with Memorial University to see what we can do to collaborate with all stakeholders when it comes to the Geo Centre.

It's an extremely important place in our province and I'm going to continue to do that. Our staff have done that and I'm going to support them. As I have something to bring back to the House, I'll be glad to present it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

Families across our province continue to struggle with the rising cost of living and those with young children are feeling that pressure every day. With the holidays approaching, the added cost of providing for children can make an already difficult situation even harder. Families need some relief when it comes to the essentials that children need.

I ask the Premier: Will he remove the HST from children's goods to help families manage the cost of raising children?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Thank you, Speaker.

Affordability measures are front and center. Yes, we know that the need is great in Newfoundland and Labrador. The need is great all over the country, maybe all over the world, due to the energy crisis that we've embarked upon.

In *Budget 2026*, we put $200 million of people's money back out to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. Just recently, with the affordability measures due to the oil revenues, we have put out $143 million in relief measures.

We know that there are another conceivably two more measures yet to come, and we will make sure that we will cover all components of Newfoundland and Labrador's population.

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

Last week we heard the disturbing report that inmates at HMP did not have access to something as basic as toothbrushes. This is just the latest example of the unacceptable conditions people are living with inside this facility. So when questioned by the media, the minister suggested these issues would be addressed once the new building is completed, but that building is not expected to be ready until fall of 2029.

So I ask the minister: Does she think it is acceptable to tell inmates to wait until 2029 for the basic standards of dignity and care that they deserve?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, it's really concerning when I hear misinformation put out in this hon. House of Assembly. That is not what I said.

I said that there will be the construction of the facility, but that is not the entire issue here. We have acknowledged that there are issues with the aging facility. We are aware of those issues. We have been working diligently with, for example, NAPE and correctional officers and other partners that are involved in our HMP and providing rehabilitation and other important services.

So we need to be clear when we're talking in this House of Assembly that we're having accurate information.

SPEAKER: The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

Taken straight from media: People in custody are still people, and they deserve basic dignity and respect today, not three years from now.

I wrote to the minister in July calling for a round-table approach on restorative justice, bringing together community organizations, justice professionals and government. This would be a valuable first step toward building a system that better serves everyone in a collaborative style.

So I ask the minister: Will she bring together a round table on restorative justice focusing on rehabilitation and addressing the root causes of crime so people are better equipped to successfully reintegrate into society?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I can say that the concept of restorative justice is an integral piece of our strategy when it comes to public safety and ensuring safer communities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

With respect to the correctional facility, we are focused on making sure that this is a safe place, not only for inmates, but for correctional officers and for visitors that attend at the correctional facility. We have been working so hard over the last number of months with all of the partners and all of the people engaged in trying to make reforms that are necessary for our correctional facility and for dealing with the root causes of crime.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Speaker, in May, alone, this government spent more than $9.2 million on private agency nurses. That is money that can be invested in recruiting and retaining nurses in our own public health care system. We have called for paid work terms for nursing students, recognizing the pressure of balancing full-time studies with the need to work to make ends meet. This was also a commitment in the PC blue book.

I ask the minister: When will this government deliver on that commitment and introduce paid work terms for nursing students?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the Member opposite for the question.

That is an important topic, and we have discussed that within the department. That was budgeted in a line item in *Budget 2026* and we are working towards making that happen, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to the agency nurses, we are also working through that part of our history here in Newfoundland and Labrador and moving forward with a proper plan to support local nurses in local jobs.

Mr. Speaker, when that is ready to unroll and fold out, we will certainly present it to the House.

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.

Tabling of Documents

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have four documents to table. Firstly in accordance with section 6 of the *Embalmers and Funeral Directors Act, 2008*, I hereby table the 2025 annual activity report of the Embalmers and Funeral Directors Board of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In accordance with section 10 of the *Engineers and Geoscientists Act, 2008*, I hereby table the 2025 annual report of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thirdly, Speaker, in accordance with section 9 of the *Chartered Professional Accountants and Public Accountants Act*, I hereby table the ’25-’26 annual report of Chartered Professional Accountants of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Finally, in accordance with section 56 of the *Automobile Insurance Act*, I’m tabling the Newfoundland and Labrador Board of Commissioners Public Utilities annual report on automobile insurance for the period of April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026.

SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

The hon. the Member for St. John’s East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O’LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

I ask for leave to table a document, a letter to the former minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change.

SPEAKER: Does the hon. Member have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave has been granted.

S. O’LEARY: Thank you.

I table the document. It’s a letter that was tabled to the former minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change, itemizing a number of suggestions from the NDP caucus on how we can move forward with climate action.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I’d like to have leave to table a meeting note from the Department of Industry, Energy and Technology dated June 5, 2025.

SPEAKER: Does the Member have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Go ahead.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

This is a meeting note. The distribution list has almost a dozen people in there and the attendees include a country director from Equinor. As I said, it was dated June 5, 2025. One of the distribution list’s individuals was the premier. At the time, that was me.

I think it’s important to put this fact in the House of Assembly, that there was a

meeting, when I was involved, with the country director for Equinor. I've noticed that the Energy Minister did not say I didn't have a meeting with Equinor today. He used different words.

I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt that he was under a misunderstanding that that meeting didn't take place, but now that this is fully, factually before the House of Assembly, I assume that those comments, which now are different than what I'm tabling here today, won't be said anymore. I think it's important that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have all the information.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I give notice that I will on tomorrow introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Tobacco and Vapour Products Control Act, Bill 35.

SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I stand on a petition for the new school in Cartwright. These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

WHEREAS Henry Gordon Academy, the school in Cartwright, is a 56-year-old wooden structure with many deficiencies, including being antiquated, inaccessible and containing asbestos; and

WHEREAS the previous government approved a new school, the tender was awarded and work had commenced; and

WHEREAS a year has passed since the contract was awarded, construction started and nearly $3 million spent before the project was cancelled;

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to take immediate steps to construct a new school in the community of Cartwright.

Speaker, yesterday I stood and I gave my first petition. The Deputy Premier got up after and said I like to make things personal. It is really personal when you go into Cartwright and you see 12 different levels in that old, rundown school; when you see windows that are broken out; when you see kitchens that are not safe to be cooking in; when you see children that don't have a gym to run and play in; when you see all of the effort that was put in to do a design, to do an RFP and then the Deputy Premier said the right amount of money was not attached.

There was a competitive bidding process. The cost of doing business in the North is more. We certainly know the benefits from the North are more, because every single day when we come in here, all we hear about is mining, about defence and now it's the Churchill agreement.

When the little children that lives closest to this project, that is now on the cover of the

federal budget and they're talking to their high-end friends at the Toronto club, the federal government, to say we are masters of our own destiny and the people who live closest to that resource can't even get a bone thrown, can't even get a 0.1 per cent of the total amount that we're talking about to build a school. Yes, it's personal, Speaker, because we got a long history of past grievances in Labrador. But when you want to put politics before the people, it's one thing. We're not talking water and sewer. We're not talking a building, Speaker.

Before that Deputy Premier went out and outright cancelled this school, without even having the decency to talk to the community, we did an access to information, zero contact, zero dialogue with the Department of Education. It's unbelievable, zero contact to say what will the impacts be? What's their plan B?

We were taking care of the housing issues as well, that community in the North. We have young teachers going in. Housing is an issue and we had all of that taken care of, like we've seen in other northern areas, having a little bit of vision, Speaker, because we saw teachers that are in homes heated just by a wood stove and dealing with chimney fires and things like that.

I'll tell you, Speaker, this entire province from one end to the other have been reaching out to me supporting the Cartwright School. I'll be on my feet again.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for a response to the petition.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker,

Speaker, short math: $60 million, 55 children. Question marks were raised from the day it was announced. It wasn't a well-thought-out project. We've proven that. It's been proven to me over and over –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: – again, it's been proven to me, it wasn't a well-thought-out project.

I had the unenviable task to having to cancel the school and I understand how that felt in that community. What the Member is not telling the House, not telling the public, is we are proceeding with a new plan, but I couldn't keep talking to a group of people in the community, including the Member opposite, that would not let us on to remediate a site for safety purposes. They held it up. It would cost us an increasing amount of money. We had to pull away and leave it as it is.

We have not turned our back on Cartwright. I have never turned my back on Cartwright, but I had to do what was in the best financial interest of the province, as governed by the deficit we were faced with. I felt $60 million for 50 children was not feasible. It's hard to believe anyone can stand up and justify it.

We are proceeding, we are moving along and we are preparing. We are doing other work in preparation for a school in Cartwright, but it will not be a $60 million school for 55 children or 50 children, but it will be a new school that will be more than adequate and the people of that community will really appreciate, but it will be done in a fiscally responsible manner.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Further petitions?

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is improving brush cutting in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. These are the reasons for and background of this petition:

WHEREAS safe and properly maintained roads are essential to residents, businesses, emergency responders and visitors throughout rural Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS overgrown roadside vegetation can reduce visibility at intersections, curves, driveways and highway entrances; and

WHEREAS inadequate brush cutting can obstruct traffic signs, interfere with drainage infrastructure and increase the risk posed by wildlife near roadways; and

WHEREAS many rural communities have raised concerns regarding the frequency, timing and consistency of brush cutting along provincially maintained roads; and

WHEREAS municipalities and residents should not be expected to assume responsibility for maintaining land within provincial highway rights-of-way; and

WHEREAS a predictable, province-wide maintenance schedule would improve road safety and allow communities to better understand when work will be completed;

THEREFORE, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to develop and implement a comprehensive road brush cutting plan for rural and remote areas of the province and that the plan establish minimum maintenance standards and a publicly available schedule for brush cutting along provincially maintained highways and roads.

Speaker, I appeal to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to please put forward something that's tangible, of substance so the people of the province can at least have some idea of when the brush along the highways is going to be cut.

Just last week, again, in my district, there was a moose-vehicle accident on Route 80 between Hopeall and Green's Harbour. The individuals have contacted myself and the neighbouring MHA about this. Thank God the individual is okay, but the vehicle did sustain some damage. It was simply because the brush was to the edge of the road and he did not see the moose approach. That's what's happening all over Newfoundland and Labrador and in the rural areas with the brush cutting.

So I plead to the minister to please put something in place for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for a response to the petition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, brush cutting is very important. It's a part of our platform for safer communities. We've committed to increasing the budget allotment. We've increased moose fencing and we've increased brush cutting.

The problem we're faced with right across the province – it's not only in the Member's district; it's right across the province – it's a capacity issue. We're having trouble getting all the brush cut in one year. It's a big list of brush cutting projects, and I have no doubt her district is on that list.

It's a real challenge to get to it. We do it based on data, based on moose-vehicle collisions. That's what we have to do because you'll never get to all the brush cut to satisfy the public, so we try to do it on the high instance areas and when we get to it, we get to it. It's not about picking and choosing people, it's about actually getting the capacity and that's the challenge we're into.

I made a commitment, or I had hoped to do a commitment, for one of our colleagues there earlier this year, and that's exactly what happened. It was unfortunate, but anywhere we need brush cutting done, if it's needed to be done, our staff are well aware. It's not political. They come back and they compile a list. I have very little input in the brush cutting list other than forwarding on people's requests.

If her request is on the list, it will be treated the same way.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

I table this petition in this hon. House: Removing the provincial portion of the HST on children's products.

To the hon. House of Assembly, parents of young children already face tough economic pressure. The government should not be taxing parents for items that are a necessity.

The current cost of living crisis has made a challenging situation dire for low income families and single parents.

The Provinces of Ontario, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island provide a point-of-sale rebate on children's goods such as children's car seats, children's clothing, children's diapers and children's footwear.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the hon. House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to remove the provincial portion of the HST from children's car seats, children's clothing, children's diapers and children's footwear.

I table on behalf of those who have signed.

Speaker, this is an issue that the NDP caucus certainly continue to bring forward repeatedly. We hear from our constituents both in St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and in St. John's Centre on an ongoing basis about the unaffordability, about the cost that families have to incur for the very basics of raising children.

It is my honour and privilege in this House to table this on behalf of those people.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the petition that she presents on behalf of her residents. I would think that she's quite pleased with the affordability measures that we put out to date to serve and to assist the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Keep in mind, each and every one will have a positive impact on the vast majority of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, whether it's the electrical rebate of 15 per cent to help families; whether it is the Home Heating Supplement for those that burn oil which would have families; we eliminated the gasoline and diesel tax provincial part for those with families that have vehicles – not all do; and then, if we have seniors in

those families, we look at the $64 million that will provide relief for them.

One thing I would say, the Leader of the Official Opposition stated yesterday that we have not provided one cost of living affordability measure for families. I would say to you, we probably know that that would be incorrect. I'm not sure what the intention of that would be, but every affordability measure we've put out is helping families.

One last thing I would add but my time is up. I would love to add it, anyway –

SPEAKER: Your time is up, you're right.

C. PARDY: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly pleased to stand on a petition here today. It reads: 10 long-term beds/acute-care beds and more space for the Family Care Team at the Connaigre Peninsula Health Centre in Harbour Breton in my district.

WHEREAS the previous commitment by the provincial government – that I was a part of and proud – to add 10 new long-term/acute-care beds and more space for the Family Care Team at the Connaigre Peninsula Health Centre was omitted from the 2026 budget; and

WHEREAS the Connaigre Peninsula Health Centre is in desperate need of additional long-term care and acute-care beds and space for the Family Care Team to adequately serve the population in that area.

THEREFORE, we respectfully petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to honour its previous announcement. We ask for a commitment to the addition of 10 acute-care beds at the Connaigre Peninsula Health Centre as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Speaker, I table this, certainly, on behalf of the signatures on this petition here today. I will admit that I questioned the current minister just last week and I was encouraged by his answer. I've met with the previous minister of Health on this, and even the Minister of Seniors and the Finance Minister is fully aware of how important that facility is and that expansion to the people of, not just Harbour Breton, but the whole of the Coast of Bays region.

The acute-care beds and Family Care Teams are referenced, I believe, of any Member opposite that's within the government that talks about the importance of acute-care beds. We hear it often, even in media interviews, the current minister talks about the importance of acute-care beds, and that's what's lacking in that hospital and it is badly, badly needed.

This project, Mr. Speaker, is a true example of making acute-care beds available in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and more long-term care beds because there are seniors on waiting lists and the waiting lists are growing longer every day.

I implore on the minister, and I plead to the minister, that, hopefully, this year it will be budgeted and financed and forecasted that we will see funding for this valuable, valuable project for seniors, in particular, in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand in my place today as Minister of Seniors. I know myself and my hon. friend that's across that represents his district, I would hope that my words will be encouraging, like my colleague's words were encouraging at the last petition.

I know that when my hon. colleague mentioned it to me, I went back to my deputy minister and I had asked where they would be, the Connaigre Peninsula Health Centre, on the priority list from the data that we have on a needs basis. The hon. Member is probably aware that it is high on the list. There is no doubt that it would be noted as one of the areas that needs to be addressed, along with some others. But they would be up there on the list.

So all I can say is that I stated it publicly that they are very high on the list. I would say it will be every intention that when we go, we will look at that list, regardless of what district it would be, as to address the needs that would be in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I just want him to be encouraged that we hear him, and he's representing his population and for his population that would be signing the petition, to let them know that we hear it and they are going to be prioritized.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 5.

SPEAKER: Motion 5.

L. PARROTT: I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier:

THAT in accordance with Standing Order 65, the Public Accounts Committee shall be comprised of the Member for Mount Scio, the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, the Member for Labrador West, the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, the Member for St. George's - Humber, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville; and

THAT in accordance with Standing Order 65, the Privileges and Elections Committee shall be comprised of the Member for Cape St. Francis, the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, the Member for St. John's Centre and the Member for Terra Nova.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

SPEAKER: Are you speaking to this motion?

L. PARROTT: No.

SPEAKER: If you're not speaking to it, I have to call the question.

The minister is not speaking, does anybody want to speak to that motion?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

SPEAKER: No, okay.

I call the question.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 3, 2026.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn at 5:30 p.m., today.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Order 7, Bill 28.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Women and Gender Equality, that the House now introduce Bill 28, An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act, Bill 28.

SPEAKER: It is moved by the Government House Leader that Bill 28, An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act." (Bill 28)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and introduce a bill entitled, the *Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act*, legislation that will repeal and replace the current *Status of Women Advisory Council Act.*

This legislation represents an important step forward in modernizing the legislative framework that supports the work of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. This will ensure that it reflects the realities, priorities and the expectations of women, girls and gender-diverse people in our province.

Over the past number of years, the mandate of the Office of Women and Gender Equality has evolved significantly. We've witnessed that. Society has evolved, and so should our mandate. Our work now expands beyond advancing equality for women. It now also includes supporting gender-diverse people. We are a progressive government; we are bringing in progressive legislation to reflect that.

We, as a government, also work with all government departments to apply Gender-Based Analysis Plus across policies, programs, legislation, services and budget. In actual fact, as minister, I've worked hard with our government departments to make sure that legislation coming forward, programs and supports coming forward into our province have the Gender-Based Analysis Plus. It's important that legislation governing the Advisory Council reflects the

broader and more modern mandate that I talk about, Speaker.

Sadly, we're witnessing troubling times in today's society; a troubling rise in hate, discrimination and misinformation directed at the 2SLGBTQIA+ population, with transgender and gender-diverse people disproportionately targeted. So we, as government, have to say this is unacceptable and we're doing that by introducing this more inclusive legislation.

Our government has declared gender-based violence an epidemic in our province and we have established a task force to end gender-based violence. We need safer communities for everyone – and I mean everyone.

We are funding violence prevention initiatives throughout our province with the support of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. This federal government funding is very important in our battle to end gender-based violence, and I'm happy, I'm proud to say that it has been renewed for another four years.

I must speak about our relationship that we have with the federal government, Speaker. It's a tremendous day to actually be able to work with a federal government that supports our Progressive Conservative government and the programs that we want to deliver to make sure our communities are safer and our populations are welcoming and inclusive. It's so important to actually acknowledge that we have that good working relationship with our federal counterparts.

The renewal of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence – it has been renewed for another four years – together we are stronger and we can do more to end gender-based violence. That's the relationship we have with the federal government.

We are urging the federal government to also renew and expand its 2SLGBTQIA+ Action Plan, which is set to expire on March 31, 2027.

Since its inception in 2022, this plan has delivered valuable financial support to organizations across Canada. In our province, in Newfoundland and Labrador, this federal investment has helped grow grassroots programs in rural and remote regions, Speaker, where some of our populations are most vulnerable. It has strengthened regional capacity, and individuals and families now have access to services that were not available before the 2SLGBTQIA+ Action Plan funding was available, Speaker. So it's so important for us to encourage the federal government to renew this important funding.

Speaker, getting back to the legislation we're introducing here today, an expanded mandate for the Advisory Council will support this work, too, Speaker, that I just spoke of, because it plays an important role in forming policy decisions across government by providing advice, research and community perspectives on issues affecting women and gender-diverse people throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. As I said, this is progressive legislation. We are a progressive government, Speaker.

Looking at the history. In 2023, government approved the development of new legislation to replace the existing act. Since then, the Office of Women and Gender Equality has worked closely with the Advisory Council and other key stakeholders to develop a legislative framework that reflects current priorities, modern governance practices and strong accountability measures. Speaker, that's very, very important to acknowledge, the working relationship with the Office of Women and Gender Equality working with the Advisory Council. Together, we are stronger.

The Advisory Council was very involved in discussions on this plan to repeal and replace the current act and has been very supportive. Like I said, it's progressive legislation, it's inclusive legislation.

From the fall 2023 through spring 2024, the Office of Women and Gender Equality, in collaboration with the government's Community Engagement Branch, conducted online and in-person public consultations throughout the province to inform and develop legislation.

Speaker, I was very pleased to see that. I was in Opposition at the time. One of the things I always called for when I was in Opposition is to make sure stakeholders are consulted with when major changes are about to happen. So I was pleased to see that. In government now, I have a commitment, as minister, to make sure that we're doing the same. So I just wanted to acknowledge that.

As an independent voice for women, girls and gender diverse people, the Advisory Council helps shape government policies by identifying emerging issues, amplifying lived experience and providing evidence-based recommendations that support gender equality. Newfoundland and Labrador will be the third jurisdiction in the country to take dedicated action to ensure issues and needs in relation to gender diversity are addressed, not only –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Only the third in Canada – to make sure needs in relation to gender diversity are addressed, not only through ministerial mandate letters, but also by legislating the work undertaken by the Advisory Council. Speaker, this is so important.

Based on these consultations and valuable input, the proposed act achieves several important objectives. It modernizes legislative language and terminology. Like I said, it's progressive legislation. It updates the name of the Advisory Council to better reflect its role and clearly establishes its mandate and functions within today's policy landscapes. Like I said, times are changing. Even though I mentioned earlier that there's a lot of hate and discrimination out there against members of the communities, that Advisory Council is there to help and support.

Our society is also evolving and there are a lot of people out there, including Members in government and in the Opposition, who recognize that it's wrong and that we have to make sure our towns, our communities, the services and the organizations are safe spaces for everybody, Speaker.

Looking at the objectives here, it also strengthens governments and accountability provisions and it enhances the Advisory Council's capacity to provide advice to government on issues affecting women, girls and gender-diverse people throughout the province. That's so important.

One of the most significant changes proposed in this legislation is the separation of the currently combined president and the chief executive officer position into two distinct roles. Under the new model, the chief executive officer will serve as the salaried operational leader responsible for the day-to-day administration of the organization. The chairperson will serve as the volunteer head of the Advisory Council providing leadership, strategic direction and governance oversight.

Why separate the two? This new structure reflects modern best practices and creates a clear distinction between operational management and board oversight, strengthening accountability and supporting the long-term effectiveness of the organization.

Overall, the legislation provides greater clarity around roles and responsibilities, modernizes accountability mechanisms,

strengthens governance and better aligns the Advisory Council mandate with the work of the Office of Women and Gender Equality.

As we move forward, the office will work closely with the Advisory Council to ensure a smooth, effective transition to the new governance model. We remain committed to supporting the organization through this process and ensuring continuity in its important work on behalf of women and gender-diverse people throughout our province, Speaker.

This legislation positions the Advisory Council to continue serving as a strong independent voice and advisor to government, while ensuring that it's equipped to meet the opportunities and challenges of the future.

As our society advances to be more progressive, so should our governments, Speaker. It's very progressive legislation that we can all be very proud of.

I look forward to discussion on this important piece of legislation.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women has played an important role in advocating for women and advancing equality in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The council was established in June of 1980 and its work has included advocating for legislative changes and bringing women's concerns directly to government.

The council has helped bring attention to issues affecting women, including gender-based violence, economic inequality and barriers to participation in public life. This council has proven to be a valued asset to women throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, modernizing legislation to reflect the realities of today's society is welcomed and necessary; however, changing legislation and changing a name are simply not enough. The council's responsibility will expand with this new legislation and I am wondering if government will increase the resources for council, ensuring that they have the financial ability to carry out their expanded mandate.

Speaker, expanding the mandate should strengthen the council's work, not take away from the important work it was originally established to do. The council's 2025-26 operating budget was approximately $456,000. Bill 28 introduces broader responsibilities, including additional research, public engagement, policy recommendations and administrative requirements. Government cannot simply expand an organization's mandate and expect it to take on additional work without the necessary resources.

Speaker, when we get to Committee, as the Opposition critic, I will want to know if the council will receive additional funding when this bill comes into effect. I will be asking if government has completed a financial assessment of the expanded mandate.

Bill 28 establishes an 11-member council appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. Speaker, the chairperson, vice-chairperson and CEO are all appointed through the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. This raises important questions about the independence of an organization whose responsibility is to provide advice and recommendations to government.

The council must be able to identify problems, challenge existing policies and provide recommendations even when those recommendations are uncomfortable for government. The public needs confidence that the appointments are based on experience, qualifications and representation.

Speaker, I want to know why government retained so much appointment authority over an organization that is supposed to provide independent advice? An advisory council cannot effectively hold government to account if its independence is not protected.

Women and gender-diverse individuals in rural Newfoundland and Labrador are experiencing unique challenges. Access to services, transportation, health care, housing and employment opportunities can look very different depending on where someone lives. I will be asking government how it plans on ensuring regional voices are represented in council appointments and decision-making? What specific steps will be taken to ensure Labrador and rural Newfoundland are represented? Representation must be meaningful, not simply a requirement to hold meetings outside the capital region.

Bill 28 requires the council to prepare an annual report outlining its activities and the performance of its responsibilities. The minister must table that report in the House of Assembly, but will the minister commit to publicly responding to the council's recommendations and reporting on what government implements?

Speaker, the Liberal Opposition recognizes the importance of advancing gender equality and ensuring that the council's mandate reflects the communities it serves. There are positive elements in this legislation, particularly the recognition of a broader range of equality issues and the introduction of clearer reporting requirements; however, there are questions to be answered in Committee. I look forward to hearing those answers.

Women across Newfoundland and Labrador still face significant challenges and their voices must remain central to the council's work. We want to see a council that is properly funded, genuinely independent, a representation of every region and capable of delivering meaningful improvements in the lives of women and all those facing inequality throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. POWER: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. POWER: Again, it's an honour to rise. This new legislation clearly defines the Advisory Council's purpose, functions and responsibilities. It better reflects the organization's current work and its role in advising government on issues affecting women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Greater clarity in legislation supports greater effectiveness and accountability. The proposed legislation modernizes terminology throughout this act. The updated name, the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council, more accurately reflects the breadth of the organization's mandate and responsibility.

Speaker, our government is a Progressive Conservative government and we want to send a strong message that we are modernizing our legislation to be inclusive of all gender-diverse people. Language matters because it signals who is included and who is represented. The legislation introduces modern governance and accountability provisions consistent with

contemporary public sector practices. These changes will support transparency, responsible decision-making and long-term organization sustainability.

One of the most significant government improvements is the separation of the president and CEO role into two distinct positions. This model reflects governance structures commonly used by boards, agencies and organizations across Canada. Separating governance oversight from operational management improves accountability and reduces the potential for role conflict.

The CEO will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the organization. This includes administration, staff leadership, implementation of programs and operational priorities. Having a dedicated operational leader supports organizational stability and effectiveness.

The chairperson will provide strategic leadership and governance oversight on behalf of the Advisory Council. The chair will help ensure the Advisory Council remains focused on its mandate, priorities and accountability obligations. Speaker, this reflects best practices in board governance and strengthens independent oversight.

The Advisory Council's ability to provide independent advice is a key strength. This legislation reinforces the important role by establishing a stronger governance structure and clearer responsibilities.

Government values the Advisory Council's ability to bring forward diverse perspectives and evidence-based advice, even when those perspectives challenge us to do better. At all times, the focus remains on ensuring the council can continue its support and advocacy, research and advisory work on behalf of the people throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Ultimately, this legislation is about ensuring the Advisory Council is prepared for the future. It provides modern tools, modern governance and a modern mandate. Most importantly, Speaker, it strengthens an organization that has long served as an important voice for women, girls and gender-diverse people in our province.

Speaker, with this, I conclude my remarks.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I am very pleased to stand here and speak to Bill 28, An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council. Just for the people at home, I just want to read into the record that this bill would certainly enact the *Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act* and repeal the Status of Women Advisory Council. Ultimately, what's really important here is the expansion of the mandate of the Advisory Council to include matters relating to the equality for persons of all genders and sexual orientations.

With that said, I'm very pleased to see my colleague, the minister, bringing this in. I know she's genuinely passionate about this. I think she's the right person on that side of the House for this job, to hold this portfolio. It's something that certainly was important to me and my team when I was minister of Women and Gender Equality.

I'm happy to say that that expansion of including the diversity started with our government when the premier of the day then, of course, expanded the name of the portfolio from Status of Women to Women and Gender Equality. Again, these are all symbolic, yet action-packed changes going forward.

It's something that's near and dear to my heart. I'm happy to see this and I congratulate the minister, my colleague, and certainly want to ensure her that any support that I can give, and I know I speak for everybody here, on that, we'll certainly work together; we are aligned on that.

That said, I'm also happy to hear the advocating, because I think my colleague, also the former minister, the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's as well as the other Members are on record, advocating to the federal government to renew that funding. It's crucial, it's very important. As minister, I signed that bilateral agreement, I think it was four years ago now, and that brought multiple millions of dollars here to the province.

The organizations that we were able to help, to get money and supports, ultimately, totally in resources for these organizations was a first. It certainly was. I will note, one organization, Quadrangle, in particular, for the first time in our history to receive government funding. They are a very worthy and deserving organization here that support the 2SLGBTQQIA+ people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It expands their reach outside of metro.

As we know, we have a large diverse geographical area here in our great province, all through Newfoundland and, of course, Labrador as well. That's very, very important. It's good to see that and it is important to get that funding. As my colleague mentioned, obviously, that funding model will have to reflect the new changes made, as well as the board members that we see for the Advisory Council, representing the diversity that we have here in our province.

On that note, I would like to thank the president, Paula Sheppard. When I was minister, of course, and it goes back prior to my time, she did great work and every board member. I don't want to name them for fear of leaving someone out, but they are very valued and they bring great diversity, they bring great knowledge. Currently, a lot of strong powerful women on that council and it will be great to see the reflection of the gender diversity that we're going to see going forward. This is something that was talked about when I was there.

That said, Speaker, I also want to give a big thanks to the team of the Office of Women and Gender Equality. They're small but mighty and the work that they've done and how closely they support the minister, I know they did for me when I was there, and my colleague, and I'm very confident that they're supporting the current minister, which is very important. So hats off to them. A heartfelt thank you to them for the work that they do, because they're very passionate. A lot of them come with a lot of lived experience for their work in community and advocacy. It can't be understated.

That said, again, it's important that we keep up this rally, this advocation to the federal government to ensure that funding continues to pour in. It's well needed. Unfortunately, there is a need. We do know for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, unfortunately, we have higher rates of violence and even death in intimate partner violence in Labrador alone that are higher than the national average throughout our country.

That said, too, we have amazing Indigenous women across this province that do wonderful work, that advocate and we were able to establish a Reconciliation Council, as the minister knows. From what I understand, there is still good work happening, that work is continuing and I'm very happy to hear that. This is great legislation. There will be good questions coming through in Committee.

Again, I also want to throw out that Eddy St. Coeur is also an advocate. He is doing good work to advocate to ensure that that federal funding continues. We have a lot of great members in the community who are doing

this advocacy. They're standing up for the minorities because the numbers and the stats show that these gender-diverse people throughout our province are a minority. They are minorities. They need the voice. They need the support of government. They need the support of Opposition. They need the support of all parties, not just here in Newfoundland and Labrador, but across the entire country and, I would even say, across the entire continent.

We are seeing, unfortunately, some of those rights eroded in our neighbours to the south, but, here in Canada and here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we're going to stand up. I know that we're all on the same page and we are aligned when it comes to this issue. It is very important.

Again, I do thank the minister. I look forward to working with her on that, as well as my other colleague who also was a former minister of Women and Gender Equality. I know everybody is on the same page here and we're going to certainly work together on that issue.

So, again, thank you. It's great to see this legislation. Thank you, Minister. I certainly look forward to continuing this and we will chat further in Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Thank you, Speaker.

It's always a great honour to rise in this House and speak, especially, to Bill 28, the *Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act*. As an Indigenous man in this House, it is important. I wanted to speak to this act.

Speaker, the current legislation was enacted at a time when government's understanding of gender equality and inclusion was much different than it is today. The proposed legislation reflects how society, public policy and government responsibilities have evolved. It ensures the Advisory Council's legislative mandate aligns with the work currently being undertaken by the Office of Women and Gender Equality.

Women, girls and gender-diverse people continue to face barriers to full participation in social, economic and public life. Speaker, our government is committed to safer communities. That means safer communities for everyone.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: So we must break those barriers down.

Government has a responsibility to ensure legislation recognizes and responds to those realities. This legislation acknowledges that gender equality work today must be inclusive of diverse gender identities and experiences. Decisions are stronger when they are informed by lived experience, research and community expertise.

The Advisory Council provides government with valuable insight into emerging issues affecting women, girls and gender-diverse people. Whether considering economic development, health care, housing, safety, education or employment, the Advisory Council helps ensure gender impacts are considered.

The Advisory Council plays an important role in helping identify how different people may experience government decisions differently. This legislation supports a stronger connection between evidence-based policy development and the voices of those most affected.

Development of this legislation has been informed through extensive public engagement. Individuals, community organizations, advocacy groups and stakeholders from across the province share their views and experiences.

The final legislation reflects that we've heard from those consultations from the Advisory Council itself. Newfoundland and Labrador continues to demonstrate leadership in advancing gender equality and inclusion. I'm certainly proud of this government who is pushing this legislation forward. Congratulations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: By formally recognizing gender diversity within the Advisory Council's legislative mandate, our province joins other jurisdictions taking these progressive steps.

Speaker, with that, I'll conclude my remarks. It doesn't matter. Love is love.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

Today I rise in this hon. House to address the *Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act*, Bill 28. This, today, is an ultimate goal for collaboration, if I've ever seen one in this House of Assembly, across partisan lines. I'm very, very pleased to see this come forward and I applaud the minister and her team on the work done towards the second reading of the Bill 28, the *Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act*.

The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Newfoundland and Labrador PACSW is committed to bringing government and community together to make positive change for women and gender-diverse individuals in Newfoundland and Labrador. Of course, they provide guidance and direction to provincial government. They identify options on how to move existing policies forward, achieve equal and equitable outcomes or deal with policy gaps that negatively impact women and gender-diverse persons. Though, not a front-line provider, PACSW basically collaborates with a multitude of organizations in the province to do so.

I'm honoured to stand to speak to this on behalf the residents in St. John's East - Quidi Vidi District but certainly the entire Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to give credit where credit is due because we are living in dangerous times, very dangerous times. So a commitment to women and gender-diverse folks right now is crucial.

As a long-time advocate and ally of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, I want to not only ensure proper language and representation for all of our communities, but as well the financial and government support needed to combat sexism, homophobia and all of the ills that we're seeing in a very polarized time that we are living in right now.

My colleague, the MHA, certainly just spoke to the issue of what we're seeing come up from our neighbouring country and it does impact people's behaviours, so it's really important to see this bill come forward. Again, I congratulate the minister on the actions here and the team, I really do; I think this is a fantastic thing.

Also, in regard to this, an action plan, I just recently had the opportunity to write a letter to the federal Minister Valdez regarding the action plan at the federal level and the funding that is provided to this community as well. Certainly, it's something that we need to keep in mind for the provincial level as well, that it's not just language or narrative, it's also the action and the

resource that goes behind it, too, but I am very, very pleased today.

In my former role as a municipal leader and deputy mayor with the City of St. John's, I have had an excellent working relationship with the Provincial Advisory Council, not only at the very leadership, but all of the staff to work through a number of things including my multiple roles as a co-chair, former co-chair of Equal Voice NL, which is all about trying to encourage women and gender-diverse people to step up and get involved in politics.

We know when we look around this House of Assembly, we're not there yet. We have a lot of work yet to do. I'm very proud of the work that we are going to continue to do with the Canadian women parliamentarian committee, which honours many of the women and gender-diverse folks in this House of Assembly as well.

We need to consider, of course, the municipalities level as well as we come on to an AGM and a conference for our municipal partners right across the province this coming week. It was certainly my honour as the member of the board and the founding member of the Women's Caucus with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador to see that come to flourish and continue to grow and change and the language there continued to grow and change. It moved again from Women's Caucus to women and gender diverse.

These are constant changes that we see in our society that are important because it's inclusive. With the leadership herstory, I will call it, of experience behind me, including with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which on the national level dealt with municipalities and representation of women and inclusivity there. We know that the language needs to be updated and modernized. It needs to continue to represent everybody in this day and age. This is truly paramount.

There will be a lot of talk, certainly, and some questions that will be asked in Committee, but I do again want to say to the minister, my colleague, thank you for the work that you and your team have done on this. This is very important work. It represents a huge number of the people who I represent and a way that the world should be going.

Thank you for this, Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Hi.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Hi.

B. FORD: How are you doing? Hello, happy to be here.

Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill 28, An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council.

At its core, this bill continues the existing Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, under a new name, expands its mandate to include broader questions of gender equality and establishes a new legislative framework for how the council operates. The bill repeals the current legislation governing the council and replaces it with a new act that sets out the council's mandate, membership, appointments, leadership structure, reporting obligations and financial authorities.

At this time, Speaker, I'm going to remove a LIFE SAVER from my mouth to continue on with my extreme professionalism here today.

Thank you, Speaker. I wasn't ready to jump up when my time came.

The bill also formalizes the role of a chief executive officer, establishes requirements around meetings and the governance and continues the council fund and current transition agreements.

Much of what is contained in this legislation is administrative in nature, seeking to modernize the governance framework around an organization that has existed for many years and has played an important role in shaping public policy discussions in Newfoundland and Labrador.

One aspect of the bill that is particularly noteworthy is the expansion on the council's mandate. The organization will continue to address issues affecting women, but it is also being asked to provide advice and leadership on broader questions related to gender equality.

As legislators, we should always take note when government broadens the mandate of a public body. Such changes reflect how society evolves and how governments seek to respond to emerging issues and changing understandings of equity and inclusion. The bill also places importance on regional representation and engagement. By requiring meetings beyond the Northeast Avalon, it recognizes an important reality in this province, experiences can differ significantly depending on where people live, so whether that is in Labrador, on the West Coast, in Central Newfoundland or in rural communities throughout the province.

While this legislation deals with governance and structure, it also presents an opportunity to reflect on why organizations, such as the Provincial Advisory Council, exist in the first place, and that brings me to the broader reason why I wanted to speak to this bill today.

Speaker, while much of it does focus on the structure, appointments, reporting requirements and governance, I think it's also to reflect again on why it exists.

When I first began volunteering and becoming involved in my community as a teenager, I was really fortunate to have many women leaders as mentors. As I became more involved in public life, serving in municipal government, on boards, committees, there were so many women who helped shape my understanding of leadership, of service and community.

At the risk of leaving someone out, Speaker, I do want to mention some names, people like Marie Matheson, Sandra Kelly, Gloria Moss, Eithna Smith, Bonnie Pritchett, Susan Scharpegge, Ivy Farwell, Linda Oldford, Peggy Hoddinott, Ellen Chaulker, Averill Baker, Penny Rowe, and I can't leave out my mother, Betty Ford.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: Thank you.

Thank you very much to this hon. House for recognizing that. Speaker, it's women like these and more who really helped me realize the importance of policy development, advocacy and that work and how important it is.

There were also countless teachers throughout my years in school and many remarkable women through St. Martin's Cathedral in Gander who demonstrated leadership, not necessarily through titles, but through service, commitment and compassion.

So when I reflect on those women, I also reflect on how much our society has changed across generations. For many women of my mother's generation and certainly my grandmother's, opportunities were not always equal. Leadership positions were less accessible, expectations were different. Many barriers existed that younger generations today might take for granted. Again, this is why policy matters. It's why advocacy matters.

Last month, I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of Sparks through the Girl Guides of Canada program. These were girls between five and seven years old. They asked me to speak as the MHA for Gander District. I chose to do an activity with them harkening back to my previous role in facilitation. We had some fun with it. We talked about what makes a volunteer special. They shared some examples of volunteers in their own lives, an aunt who helps deliver food for a food program to people who are hungry; breakfast program volunteers at school; their Sparks leaders; and they had just participated in the Terry Fox Run and referenced the volunteers who came to help them in that. Speaker, we created artwork based on some of the characteristics they identified in volunteers. We talked about what it means to contribute to your community.

One of the leaders with the Sparks program had brought along a children's book and the book was titled *The Girl with Big, Big Questions*. That book was written by an author, Britney Winn Lee. I had the opportunity to read it with the group and what struck me was the message at the heart of the story. In the story, the young girl asks questions, lots and lots of big questions. At first her questions make some adults and even some of her peers a little uncomfortable. Eventually, she stops asking them, but she soon discovers that curiosity helps solve problems and that asking questions can create positive change.

As I read that story, it made me think about my role as an MHA, about all of our roles as MHAs. One of the most important responsibilities we have in this House is to ask questions, particularly as the Official Opposition. We ask questions on behalf of the people who elected us. We ask questions because identifying problems is often the first step toward solving them. So it was wonderful, Speaker, to share that message with those young girls, because confidence, curiosity and participation matter.

Last year, I had the opportunity to speak with an older group of Girl Guides. At that time, we were reflecting on the 100th anniversary of women achieving the right to vote in Newfoundland and Labrador. I remember talking with them about what that milestone actually means. There are women alive in Newfoundland and Labrador today who, in their childhood or in their early years, knew women in their own families who had lived in a time when women could not vote.

When I shared that reality, many of the girls were genuinely surprised. They were shocked and they said, really? Because they were a girl they couldn't vote? To them, voting is simply a right and it has always been. Yet, for many women, the ability to participate fully in our democracy was something that had to be fought for. It happened because of policy changes, because of advocacy.

That conversation reminded me of how quickly history can be forgotten and how important it is that we continue to tell these stories. Progress does not happen automatically. It happens because people are willing to advocate, organize, challenge assumptions and speak up when inequities exist. While significant progress has been made, we know the work isn't complete.

Mr. Speaker, it's remarkable that a century after women secured the right to vote, we can still find ourselves debating what it means to be man enough. As evidenced in our proceedings yesterday, if nothing else, that should remind us that questions surrounding gender, stereotypes and equity have not been resolved by history. They remain part of our public discourse today, which is precisely why organizations dedicated to advancing, understanding and equality continue to matter.

Disparities continue to exist for women and gender-diverse individuals in leadership positions, in workplace advancement, in economic security and in many other areas

of public life. That is why organizations such as the Provincial Advisory Council remain important.

They help ensure that issues affecting equality remain part of public discussion. They provide research, advice and perspective. They remind governments, regardless of political stripe, that there is always more work to do to create opportunities for people to participate fully in society.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, when I think about this legislation, I think about those women who I named earlier, the women who helped guide me, I think about those young girls aged five to seven in a Sparks program who are just beginning to discover their own voices and the generations of women who worked to create the opportunities that many of us benefit from today.

Speaker, the work of equality is not finished, it's ongoing and that is why the role of this council continues to matter.

I look forward to the questions that will come forward through Committee.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to stand in my place on behalf of the people who I represent in Cartwright-L'Anse au Clair. Today I'm going to take a few minutes to speak to Bill 28, An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council.

I was listening to speakers on both sides of the House here this afternoon talking about the changes that have occurred. Back a long time ago, when I was the minister, it was actually the minister responsible for Status of Women. We know that a few years ago – I'm sure the exact year – our premier at the time wanted to bring the name along to make it more suitable to suit what we were dealing with and be more inclusive around the whole gender piece and change the name, and I believe that was a very positive thing, Speaker.

I'll tell you, I have a lot of stories, a lot of experiences from my time as the minister responsible for the Status of Women. I will say, of the eight departments that I served in – and child welfare was not easy, although it was quite rewarding when you felt you were really making a meaningful difference in a child's life. We did new legislation and things there, a new *Children, Youth and Families Act*, but, by far and above, and my inner circle have heard me say this many times, being a minister in the department responsible for the Status of Women was the heaviest.

I have other colleagues here that served and I'm sure they will agree, heavy files. You went to bed at night and sometimes you could feel, I can almost go through the rest of my life and I would be better not knowing these things, but then you had to find some resolve deep down and you had to say, no, we're going to tackle this. We're going to try to bring about some positive change.

I will tell you, for some people on this road of life, it sure opens your eyes that we may all come into the world the same but different life experiences bring us in different places, and there are some that have been on some really difficult roads.

I had the opportunity to travel around the province and meet with the really incredible folks that are doing some tremendous work down in the trenches, trying to make meaningful differences to those that are still struggling, those marginalized women and other groups just because of how they identify and the things that they would go through.

So, Speaker, like my colleagues, I am pleased to rise in support of Bill 28, the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act. I did get to see first-hand, as well, that advisory councils play a very important role in our democratic institutions. Today, we're talking about women and gender, but I can use many examples across different departments. They play an important role in the development of good public policy. With this bill that the minister has brought forward to the House, Bill 28, we see an expanded mandate for the Advisory Council and that's something that's very, very important. That's a positive step in the right direction.

Somebody said a little while ago, government cannot be expected to have all the answers. I would go as far as to say, regardless of who was in government, any government does not have all the answers. I have a friend that used to say I don't need to know everything, I just need to be surrounded by people who know everything, and we would tease her about that. But when you have an advisory council made up of people with different lived experience from across different communities, getting outside of the government offices, that's a very, very positive thing and that can certainly go a long way in terms of helping to inform decisions that are made.

When I was quite entrenched for a long time in the early years in the municipal world, I often used to say that the closer decisions are made to the people most likely to be impacted by them, the stronger the likelihood that those decisions will stay, that they will be successful. It can certainly be applied here as well today, Speaker.

The Provincial Advisory Council, they give a voice to individuals and communities who might otherwise not have the opportunity to participate directly in policy-making process, which is so, so important for governments, any government, to listen to those people that are out in our nooks and coves and crannies, that are in our more urban areas and that are in our remote and isolated areas. Because we know whether you're on the greater Avalon, you may have access to people struggling with those issues, may have access to different supports and services than somebody in an isolated community.

I remember visiting an isolated community, my EA was with me at the time, we were visiting a new shelter that had opened. My EA said, I have some questions. She was from here in the city and it was kind of new going to this isolated region. I'll never forget she asked some questions around if a woman is living with her abuser and then that individual comes home and they're intoxicated or whatever – I know the minister would be familiar with many of the stories; we share a lot of the same familiarity – and she flees to the shelter for her own safety, perhaps takes her children to that shelter. My EA said, what happens tomorrow when that woman gets up? In our isolated communities a lot of times that woman goes back to the same scenario, the same situation that she left.

A lot of sad stories. They're not easy to talk about. They're not easy to shine a light on, but, Speaker, if we are going to be serious about bringing meaningful change, then we have to talk about it. We have to talk about the hard stuff. Those decisions in the policy-making process, most importantly, help ensure that decisions are informed by the realities of the people that those decisions will affect.

I'm just thinking right now in real time. It doesn't really apply to this, but I've served on many, many, many committees through the years across different areas. One particular committee was many years ago when we were learning more and more and more about the benefits of breastfeeding. Somewhere along the way, way back years ago, people stopped doing that, young mothers stopped doing that. Just something as simple as, in that meeting when they were talking about where we're going to put

the posters to really promote, somebody around the table – it was here in town at a hotel boardroom – said let's put them up in the doctors' offices. I said, well, where I come from, we have no doctors' offices; everybody in our communities goes to the clinic. Put them up if we want to promote this, just something as small as that, Speaker.

The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women has been an important institution in Newfoundland and Labrador for more than four decades – 40 years, incredible. Since its establishment, it has provided advice, raised awareness and helped bring attention to issues affecting women throughout our province.

Society has evolved – the minister made some comments in her opening and some of the speakers following her – and our understanding of equality, thank goodness, has evolved with it. Expanding the council's mandate to include people of all genders and sexual orientations is certainly a positive step toward ensuring that the legislation reflects the diversity of our population, ensuring that people, no matter what their walk of life is, see themselves now. It recognizes that discrimination and inequality can take many forms and that different groups may experience different barriers.

Like my colleague sitting to my left, two former ministers of Status of Women or Women and Gender Equality, I, too, want to give a shout-out to the really small but mighty team that work in Women and Gender Equality. They do some incredible work. Every single Cabinet paper that rotates through the Cabinet process – you have economic and social policy on Tuesday mornings – every paper goes through a lens in that small shop.

I know during my time there, we were quite, quite busy working closely with the federal government, Federal Minister Carolyn Bennett at the time, bringing down some new funding, in particular, shining a light on missing and murdered Indigenous women and the really disproportionate number in our society of Indigenous women that experience violence.

My heart always – certain times a year at milestones, we do ours soon coming up, 10 days of action, to think about young girls like Loretta Saunders who walking the road in Hopedale one day, just decided that she was going to take some control of her own life, she was going to go away and get an education. She wanted to help people that were experiencing some of the things that had been her life experience. She was well on the road to that, doing tremendous work and you know the tragic end of her story.

I knew her from Sunday school, from way back, I kind of watched her grow up in Goose Bay and I know her parents well. We cannot allow the voices of those young girls who are no longer here to be silenced. It's incumbent upon us.

We did work around the reconciliation table. I'll never forget the day that we were in a meeting in the boardroom upstairs and I had asked Stacey from First Light, how long have you been pushing for this? They had been pushing a long time for a reconciliation table and it was a proud day when – it was then Premier Furey and myself, we attended an event and went to North West River and announced that they would have a reconciliation table; that they would have a table where they would have ministers in government to sit and to hear what their concerns were.

Speaker, while I support the expanded mandate, I also want to emphasize the continued importance of the council's original purpose, some of what I'm speaking to here today, women that continue to face significant challenges in our society.

I remember the very first time, my daughter was a little girl and we were travelling, we were on a ferry where you had cabins

overnighting and we heard some terrible abuse that was happening in the cabin next door. I'll tell you that it was difficult and I had to explain that. I said, when we know these things and we know something is going on, we have to find a place; we have to report that. Maybe that woman cannot get out of that situation, as she was travelling with children. We were going to be on the water for at least a couple of days. We know terrible things are happening.

When we go home and we go to bed in our safe homes every night, sometimes we take it for granted. In this House of Assembly, all 40 Members, we have a responsibility to talk about these difficult things and to work together.

One of the things I hear a lot from people is, do you work together in there? I say, once we get past Question Period and we do our job as our role in a democratic society in Opposition of asking the questions and trying to get things better, we do work. Sometimes the government will come with a piece of legislation and we'll have an idea that we believe we can make it better and we'll propose an amendment. Sometimes the amendments are accepted and sometimes they're not, but we continue to do our job.

I remember during my early years here how the All-Party Committee came about for mental health and addictions, another big issue that is plaguing our people in society, Speaker. You could see things happening on the floor that day in real time. I was in Opposition at the time, but the minister that had brought forth the PMR, you could see their colleagues around them saying, we have to support this. That was the Third Party, at the time, that had brought that.

I ended up later on, I think it was in January of '16, being invited by the premier of the day to be a Member of that All-Party Committee, and my colleague here I believe served, travelling around the province and meeting with people with lived experience. We met with all kinds of different stakeholders, different walks of life, but those with lived experience were the most impactful.

Coming out of that we had a report *Towards Recovery*, 54 recommendations addressing mental health needs in our province. It was really a hallmark, I think, of our government and the premier of the day, Dwight Ball, when I asked what did he want to be remembered for? We were going into an election. I said, it looks like you're going to win.

I have to give him a shout-out, a man who had in his own family issues with mental health and he wanted to leave something, and he did. When I drive down the parkway and I see that mental health institution, I remember all the stages we went through on that huge facility, a big investment at the time.

Infrastructure alone is not enough, we have to have the staff, but we know that it takes away the stigma when people can go into a nice facility and get the help that they need.

Speaker, we must ensure that expanding the council's responsibilities does not mean losing sight of the specific challenges women continue to face. There is room to recognize and address the experiences of all genders while continuing to prioritize the advancement of women.

My colleague from Gander gave some nice little shout-outs to women that had influenced her on her walk of life. We do need those shout-outs.

When I ran for public office in the spring of 2013, I joined an all-male team. Just imagine, 13 years ago, there was not one woman. There had been some here before. At that time, I got the opportunity to serve on the national committee for Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, a tremendous privilege. I got to present in nine different legislatures across our great

country, Speaker. Always trying to reach out when you saw some young woman, in particular, at that time, that had an interest in a leadership role. You had to try to support them and do what you could.

I just went over to get my swipe card the other day from a young man over in the West Block and he is the grandson, I discovered chatting with him, of Hazel Newhook – other people are nodding. I mean, that was really interesting for me, to meet that young man that day. She certainly would have dealt with the challenges that maybe many females in this Legislature today know nothing about.

One of the most important things an advisory council can bring to government is perspective. The people who experienced barriers first-hand often have the clearest understanding of where policies are falling short and what changes are needed.

Over my time as a Member of the House of Assembly for Labrador, I had the opportunity to bring many colleagues up to Labrador. I'm just thinking of deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and one particular trip we made with my colleague, the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. The plane didn't land in Blanc-Sablon. They went to Goose and they had to drive all the way out to Blanc-Sablon. They drove maybe 1,800 kilometres in a couple of days. We did a lot of meetings. Even the deputy sent me a note and said, I have a better understanding.

That is why the perspectives of people from around the province are so, so important. You have to get out there. The minister from Burin - Grand Bank, at the time, came up to Labrador and we covered a lot of ground. Even the staff they brought, it was giving them a better understanding so they could understand better the barriers first-hand by having made that trip.

One of the things that we also did during COVID, when we were all shut down into our own homes, during my time as the minister – really concerning. I would not have thought about it. I am very fortunate and very privileged that I can stand here today and say I didn't experience violence in my life. I tell you, I'm appreciative of that. I worry about my daughter, too, in society. I had people reaching out saying, I am locked at home with my abuser and I can't make a call, can we put in a text line? It took a lot, but we did put in the text line, all with a view to help those people who were at home and to make life a little bit easier for them to try and get the help they needed when they needed it in real time.

Also, I attended the briefing. I went to West Block on Monday morning and I was really pleased to see written right in the legislation – and I want to thank the minister for that – that at least half of the council's in-person meetings will take place outside the Northeast Avalon. Exactly the things that I am talking about, Speaker, you've got to get out there to add some depth to your understanding of the challenges along the way.

I think that kind of concludes my remarks. I think another important consideration is the independence of the council. If people are going to step up, if they're going to serve, if they're going to give their time because it's something for different reasons that they're very passionate about, then they have to know their input is valued and it's important that the independence of the council be maintained.

An advisory council is only as valuable as the advice that they are able to provide and it's essential that the members feel comfortable in raising some of the difficult issues around a table.

Speaker, good public policy comes from listening, learning and being willing to recognize when existing approaches need to change. It will be measured, certainly, by whether it makes a meaningful difference in the lives of the people it's intended to serve,

but I'm happy to see the minister bring in this piece of legislation today and we're certainly happy to support the bill on this side of the House.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm happy to speak to this bill today. We're in second reading of Bill 28, An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council.

I do note that in March 2024, our former government did consultations in terms of repealing and replacing the Advisory Council Act. That was in March 2024. I certainly commend the government for bringing the legislation forward.

It does a few things here. It separates the chairperson and the CEO. It does expand the mandate, as some of my colleagues have mentioned. It will be interesting to see if the government is giving the council more funding to go with the expanded mandate.

We do know that the CEO remains a Cabinet appointment, but I do note the bill removes some financial accountability requirements that are currently in place that are not in this bill in terms of the Auditor General reviewing the finances, but we look forward to asking those questions in Committee.

The bill does increase regional participation, requiring, I believe, it's one meeting a year outside of the Avalon and it does include a broader mandate, which we fully support. So kudos to the government for doing that and for bringing that forward.

I like what my colleague from Gander mentioned in terms of why do we still need the Status of Women, why do we need this type of legislation and Advisory Council? Because last year was the 100th year anniversary of women getting to vote in Newfoundland and Labrador, which was huge.

I know, in this Legislature and the House of Assembly had a celebration. There was a historical pictures up in the gallery on the third floor of the Legislature. That was a big celebration that I know the government and the Legislature celebrated with a statue in Bannerman Park, which was a very important event of women having the right to vote in Newfoundland and Labrador, 100 years – only 100 years.

It is our responsibility in this Legislature and in society to continue to remove barriers that protect full and equal participation for women and gender-diverse individuals from participating both in democracy and in our society.

I do want to highlight some of the things that I'm very pleased to have been a part of while sitting in this Legislature. I'd like to highlight – I know it's kind of commonplace today, but it was a big deal at the time when we first introduced $15-a-day child care and then we reduced it to $10-a-day child care with the support of the federal government. That was quite controversial and a very significant financial investment for the government to make, which does benefit families, but also significantly benefits women in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I heard the story that one of my colleagues were on stage at convocation and one of the graduates walked across the stage at convocation and stepped over and thanked one of my colleagues and said, thank you, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you and your $10-a-day child care.

The impact that government policy and advice from, like, an advisory council can make on government policy really does impact fundamentally the lives of

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That family and any children they might have and the dynamics around increasing financial means of that family, you can't put a price on that. You can't put a price on the value that things like $10-a-day child care provides families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Some of the other things I'm very proud of, in November 2023, we proclaimed the *Interpersonal Violence Disclosure Protocol Act*, which is also known as Clare's Law, which means that if someone in Newfoundland and Labrador is in a relationship with someone and they suspect that that person might have a history of intimate partner violence, there's a secure, privacy-minded means that they can engage with the RNC or the RCMP to find out what the risk is. I believe there's a risk measure where they can find out the risk, based on the person's past experience with law enforcement, of whether or not that person does have a history of intimate partner violence.

I'm very proud that was brought in, Clare's Law, also known as the *Interpersonal Violence Disclosure Protocol Act,* which was proclaimed in November 2023.

Also a very important policy issue, which an organization like the Status of Women Advisory Council can certainly bring forward ideas, suggestions, changes and can be engaged in consultation for all types of areas that impact women and gender-diverse individuals in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I note, in 2017, Newfoundland and Labrador was on board in terms of having gender-neutral birth certificates. Then, I was very pleased in 2021, where Newfoundland and Labrador allowed and increased the scope, I guess, and the availability for individuals to have an X on their driver's licence rather than male or female.

Specifically, the expansion was related to individuals who had a birth registered in another province. So now, those individuals who had a Newfoundland and Labrador driver's licence – and I did hear from many of them, actually, thanking me at the time – were then able to get an X on their driver's licence. That impacts the discussion that you have with people, that you're not Mr. or Mrs., it's Mx.

I know that, in government in many instances, when you're corresponding with individuals, a significant change – I'm not sure if it's still in place today – in many instances in correspondence was M-X, rather than M-R or M-R-S or M-S, in terms of that correspondence with the general population.

I did also want to highlight one area of advocacy that I'm very proud of, also, that was not in a news release or anything, was when our government invested in the new prison. Historically, women in Newfoundland and Labrador in the St. John's area, or at least in my District of Mount Scio, when they were incarcerated, would have to go to Clarenville. That has a significantly negative impact on families in my District of Mount Scio and on the Avalon. The mom or a female in a family, if they have to be incarcerated, they would have to go to Clarenville; whereas, in many cases – most cases – the men would stay in St. John's.

I was very pleased that when the government committed to building the new prison, the new prison will allow female inmates in Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm very proud of that. It took a lot of work because, obviously, that involves higher costs. The design of the building had to be different, but I'm very proud that our government, in the design of the new prison, will accommodate women.

I believe, since then, some women have been accommodated at Her Majesty's Penitentiary, but I do think it is incredibly important for families, for children. Given the

amount of money government is spending on the new prison, I honestly could not stand for that amount of investment to go to only support incarcerated men and not incarcerated women. I'm very pleased of that advocacy, and I guess it speaks also to the range of policy areas where the Status of Women Advisory Council could make recommendations to government. I certainly encourage them to do so.

I just wanted to highlight some areas of policy that I've been very proud to have been involved in. I do think this is incredibly important Advisory Council for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and I encourage them to engage with the council, maximize the engagement to increase their resources especially so that they can deliver on their wider scope.

I guess I do want to reiterate, Speaker, that it is our responsibility in this House to continue to remove barriers that prevent full and equal participation in our democracy and in society for women and gender-diverse individuals.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers to the bill if the minister speaks now, she will conclude the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Thank you, Speaker.

This new proposed *Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council Act* reflects Newfoundland and Labrador's commitment to ensure legislation keeps pace with evolving needs of the people it serves. Speaker, it's really good to actually bring in legislation that's supported throughout the House on both sides. It's very, very important.

The MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's started off her comments with talking about changes to the legislation and the change in name is not enough. We hear you. She also talked about the need to increase resources to carry out the increases to the mandate. I think a lot of her comments, Speaker, on this legislation was because of her former role as minister. We appreciate all the work that you did while you were minister; it's so important.

She talked about budget numbers and she also talked about the council and also about the appointments to council. One thing that she did mention is about having regional voices. We echo that as well; it's so important. Diversity and regional differences have to be a part of the council.

We also had the Member for Labrador West and I thought it was very important for him to talk about how language matters, because it signals who's included and who's representative. He talked about government being progressive and it's about inclusive language and modernizing the legislation.

The MHA, the former minister, for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, spoke a lot about working together. She recognized that this is something that we need to do, to work together and the value of it and to support initiatives that will make sure that legislation is inclusive. With the legislation being inclusive, so will the programs and support, Speaker.

She talked about organizations, when she was minister of Women and Gender Equality, about being able to help. She spoke about Quadrangle not having funding and then through the funding that was available to be expanded, their outreach, past the Overpass, past St. John's and how important that was.

Even though we're talking about legislation, I also want to acknowledge the role that she played in supporting a lot of these organizations to be able to reach out across the province because in the rural parts of the province, it is so important to make sure that we are having that reach and making sure that people know the supports are available.

She also talked about funding being important and about the board members and things like that – very, very important. She spoke about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and how meaningful that experience was for her, as well, and about the higher rates of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence.

Speaker, I could go on also to acknowledge the role that Eddy St. Coeur is playing. I don't know if we're supposed to be using names, but we just wish to acknowledge his work – very, very important.

The Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave talked about working together. I think we sense that.

The Member for St. George's - Humber spoke about how meaningful being able to speak on this legislation is to him as an Indigenous man; to speak about how society, public policy and government responsibility have evolved and the importance to be progressive. I think that was very, very meaningful from both Members who spoke on that from this side. He also talked about the government's commitment to safer communities, but both Members on this side recognize safer communities is for everybody. We have to break down barriers. I think he summarized it up really well. He said love is love. Speaker, that's very inclusive, very progressive.

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi spoke about collaboration. Collaboration is so important, working together and supporting modernizing the legislation and she also spoke, which is something that I spoke briefly on, sadly we are living in dangerous times, not for everybody, but for people who are not a part of the norm of society or, I should say, who are identified by our society as the norm. There is a big difference in that, isn't it? It's so important that language matters, but making sure people are included, Speaker, and people are protected. Safer communities for everybody.

Financial support; talked about the importance of the team WAGE, working with Minister Valdez on the action plan, about federal funding. Making sure to encourage gender-diverse people to get involved in politics. I wasn't expecting that, but in your role, in your former roles, too, you provided a leadership role in that as well. Because it's so important, not only to encourage women to get involved in politics, but gender-diverse people, too, because it brings that voice, that lens. I think I heard the phrase: the way the world should be going. I just want to thank you for that.

The MHA for Gander and the LIFE SAVER. In actual fact, Speaker, bringing in a progressive lifesaver, I think it was quite important for you to talk about the physical lifesaver because, in actual fact, what we do in here as government Members, when we begin to acknowledge that we need to be more inclusive, in a lot of ways that is a form of being a lifesaver out there for vulnerable populations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: The MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair talked about changing the name to be more inclusive. Also, she spoke about how she enjoyed her role as minister. I think she talked about it being the Status of Women back in the day and how the names have changed to be more inclusive. She also spoke about the heavy files.

Speaker, that's something sometimes we don't really recognize in our departments,

especially with Social Supports and Well-Being, Health.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: When we're dealing with the public and we're dealing with the public who actually need supports and are vulnerable, they are heavy files. It's important to have the experience on both sides of the House be able to acknowledge that.

Also, the former minister and the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair talked about the important role that the Advisory Council plays, it's so important. Talked about four decades of being in service now. Also, I think practically everybody there did acknowledge the importance of the staff at WAGE, Women and Gender Equality and the role that they play as well. That's very important to acknowledge.

The Member for Mount Scio talked about 2024, when they actually brought in the consultation process through government community engagement, just basically out there, online and in person, engaging and consulting to make sure that the changes to legislation were appropriate, especially when we're looking at the regional differences.

She also questioned the increase in money, which is something that I think people want to know, if we're increasing the mandate, expanding the mandate of the Advisory Council, will there be resources there to be able to make sure that they can adequately address the increasing demand that increasing the mandate will require.

Anyway, there are many things. We talked about the CEO being a Cabinet appointment and also the 100 years to vote, but, at the end of the day, Speaker, I'm not going to go on and on and on. It's very important to acknowledge, today, in the House of Assembly, we are all united that, in actual fact, our legislation needs to be more inclusive so our services, our policies, our programs and even our budget can be more inclusive.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are the Members ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 28 be now 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.'

The motion is carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council. (Bill 28)

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

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

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently. (Bill 28)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Women and Gender Equality, that the House

resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 28.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair and that this House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 28.

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 (Dwyer): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 28, An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council.

A bill, "An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council." (Bill 28)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Clause 1, so we can do clause 2, right?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: The whole thing, yes, perfect. I'm a little bit rusty.

Under clause 2, the interpretation of the definition of gender equality as it's outlined, how does it guide the council's priorities as outlined in this legislation?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Sorry, I didn't have my earpiece in at the beginning, so can you just quickly repeat the question?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

The definition of gender equality as outlined here in the legislation under clause 2, how does it guide the council's priorities?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: It guides them in a way that they have to recognize that not everyone who serves as a member or actually to be availing of services is not always somebody who identifies as a female. We have to make sure that we're including gender-diverse people, that includes our trans-people, people of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community as well.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Under clause 4, Duties, can the council initiate its own research and public recommendations without receiving a request from the minister?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: When it comes to research, yes, they can.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Can the council publicly raise concerns about government policy or services?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: In actual fact, my experience is that they do raise and they do weigh in through interviews and through advocating as well.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Under clause 5, Members, how will the 11-member composition be determined to ensure meaningful regional representation and representation of the communities that are listed in the act?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: When we're looking for the appointments, it usually comes through the Independent Appointments Commission.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Will the appointments be publicly advertised also?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: What criteria will be used to assess the applicants, or do you know the criteria that's outlined?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: There are several parts to the criteria. I don't have it written in front to me, but it does include lived experience, diversity – we want diversity included. Regional geographical representation as well is very important and just looking at, also, Indigenous, we want to make sure that Indigenous peoples are represented as well.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: What process governs removal of a member?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: In actual fact, I do not know the answer to that. I will go back and I will get the answer and I can provide it to you as well. If that came up in my role as minister, the first thing I would do is I would seek clarification on what the process would be.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Clause 5(7)(b), remuneration: What does other remuneration mean in that particular subclause?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: You're looking at (7)(b)?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Clause 5(7)(b).

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Members shall not be paid a salary but may be paid in accordance with the guidelines established by the governing council. Amounts for travel expenses

incurred in connection with work of the Advisory Council, that's another remuneration. That would be in case they had to incur some expenses in their role serving as a member. I can get clarification for you as well.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Clause 6, Chairperson and vice-chairperson: Why are chairperson and vice-chairperson appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council rather than elected by council members?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: For me, I think that's the way it was done. The differences right now, we did have the chairperson and the CEO combined, but it always went through the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. The legislation has not changed significantly from that.

In actual fact, just as minister, I would think it relates to making sure that we have adequate representation and that we have a very experienced chair that would actually be able to work and be able to address a lot of the issues that come forward, because the position is so important in the role as advocacy for services, policies, legislation and budget requirements across the province.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Minister, do you know what qualifications or selection criteria may apply to these positions?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Yes, in actual fact, there is a guidance list to actually help select who the chair would be from different résumés submitted by the Independent –

CHAIR: Appointments Commission.

L. EVANS: Yes, I know.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: The IAC.

L. EVANS: Yes. It's been a long day.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, clause 7, the Chief executive officer, who will determine the CEO's terms and conditions?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: To be quite honest, I am not sure. I would have to get that information back to you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, do you know how the council is going to evaluate the CEO, when the CEO is appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council but responsible to the council?

So it's an appointment by the LG but their responsibilities are to the council. I'm just wondering about the evaluation process for that particular position.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Which section are you referring to?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Section 7, Chief executive officer.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Which subsection, because you're referring to –?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Well, the question is in general to that clause because it pertains to the CEO.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I mean, I think basically how effective they are to carrying out their duties listed in (7)(2), they'll be responsible for the Advisory Council, responsible for human resources, general direction. It's the level of competency. But also, it has to be the right level of competency because we're dealing with women and gender-diverse people, the needs across the province. The Provincial Advisory Council is there to actually advise government based on what they're hearing.

I think that just by being able to work together as a council and make sure that they are representing the people's needs and putting them forward to government, that would be basically how they would be judged. Because, in actual fact, that's sort of an open question. I thought you were referring to one of the subsections, some qualifier there, so I wasn't quite sure.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, my question was pertaining to the position in that clause. However, clause 8, Public service, what are the anticipated staffing and pension costs?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I can get that and get that back to you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, will the existing employees retain their current employment status and incurred benefits?

L. EVANS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

Your answer is yes?

L. EVANS: Yes. Sorry, I did say yes. You didn't hear me. My mic wasn't on.

CHAIR: Right. I need to acknowledge you. So when you're giving answers, let me acknowledge you and then you can give your answer, okay?

L. EVANS: Yeah, we're just a bit rusty, Chair.

CHAIR: That's fine. No, that's good.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Clause 9 pertains to meetings. How will locations outside the Northeast Avalon be selected?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: That would be selected through the council in terms of making sure that they will be able to have a quorum. You look at travel, you look at the time of the year, things like that. We are committed to actually having those meetings outside of the Avalon, so we will make sure that works. But, in actual fact, it's up to the council themselves to select the times and dates.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, I guess the intent is that the meetings rotate among the regions. So how much funding is going to be available for travel, accommodations and accessibility at the meetings?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Where we are actually trying to ensure that this happens, that the meetings happen outside as well, to make sure that we are in the different regions, we will make sure we have adequate budget. Within the department, we'll make sure that we can actually cover the travel.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: There's a minimum set of four meetings annually. Is there any particular reason why it was just set at four?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: No, but I mean when you're looking at a minimum, you would look at trying to actually have a meeting at least quarterly.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Clause 10, General powers: What policies will govern the acceptance of gifts and grants, research partnerships and contracts with government-funded organizations?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: To be quite honest, there is a policy in place and the Advisory Council, once they become sworn in, are made aware of the criteria. There are some gifts that are allowed. I mean to say it's very similar in government, but it would depend on the criteria, the value of the gift and also the intent that the gift was given. For example, with some Indigenous leaders, they will give you a token gift and, in actual fact, it can be considered offensive to turn that down.

Some of the guidance is with that, but it's pretty standard. Every member is made aware of what the criteria is.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, it's the same thing with conflict of interest and the procurement rules, which ones will apply here?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: In actual fact, we are drawn to council, all of them will apply. That's my understanding.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Clause 11, Bylaws: Why must the council's bylaws receive approval from the Lieutenant-Governor in Council?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I would have to go back and check, but I don't think that's new. My understanding of it is that was under the old legislation as well. I could be wrong.

I actually didn't bring my binder because I was second on the list for the legislation. In actual fact, I think they're trying to get my binders with all my anticipated questions and answers in the binder.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

Great opportunity to ask some questions and I appreciate the opportunity on behalf of the members for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and beyond.

In section 1, in drafting this legislation, Minister, who did you consult with on its contents?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I did talk earlier about, in 2024, there were extensive consultations done under the previous government where it was consultation with the public through the government's Community Engagement division. It was online and in person.

Extensive work was done with the Advisory Council, as well, to make sure that the changes were appropriate.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Have those groups seen this bill in its current form and what kind of feedback did you receive from that consultation?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: We also met with the community organizations. I call them our partners. The bill is not shared in advance. That's just the way it happens because the legislation is embargoed.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Continuing to learn process here as well, so I appreciate that.

This one is one that I think might be of interest. Was there any discussion around the pros and cons of using the word "equity" instead of "equality"? Because, oftentimes, I know that they are similar concepts but not quite the same. I'm just curious as to any conversation around those two concepts.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Addressing the question as a minister – and I think we're aligned – we want to make sure because sometimes equality is not enough when you're speaking about gender-diverse individuals and you're talking about vulnerable populations. So providing a service in a rural, remote region and providing a service in an urban one, they could be equal, but you also have to make sure you're addressing equity.

I'm sure that that was discussed, but, in actual fact, I wasn't privy to the discussions that happened. That was through our department, also through the Advisory Council and through the actual government department that did the consultation there, as I discussed earlier, the government's Community Engagement division.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Are there any current vacancies on the council? I know that government has been having difficulties finding qualified people to take on roles in agencies, boards and commissions, so I was just wondering if there are vacancies that exist right now.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: We did have vacancies. To be quite honest, with full disclosure, it was becoming an issue. The council themselves were becoming very frustrated because of the vacancies. We had some people who were sitting on the Advisory Council who were looking to not renew, like not seeking to continue on when their term expired. So they were looking for appointments, and there was a bit of frustration and that was on our part. It took a while to get the names through for the appointments.

One of the things we struggled with was the geographic representation. So, in actual fact, when we did these initial appointments now, we didn't fully appoint. What we're doing is we're going out and readvertising and making sure and communicating so that we can get some other more regional, also Indigenous and gender-diverse people who are looking to serve on the council so that we can actually have what we're committed to, which is regional representation, diverse representation and people with the lived experience.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: This question may have already been answered, but just assuming that the 11 people on the council are appointed through the recommendations of the Independent Appointments Commission, is that correct, or just the CEO?

L. EVANS: The names come through –

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Speaker, by the time I'm done, I'll have it down pat – Chair, I mean. I'll still call you Speaker as Chair.

Yes, in actual fact, the appointments, the names come through the Independent Appointments Commission, and then, of course, it rests with the minister for the appointments. But what we do is we make sure that the names coming through provide us with candidates from different regions, diversity, lived backgrounds, Indigenous and making sure that the province is well represented.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: I am not sure whether or not this requirement is in other legislation to have at least one meeting outside of the Northeast Avalon, so obviously just a question about where did that idea come from or that practice from.

L. EVANS: Before I answer that question –

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Just trying to hurry things along.

In actual fact, I have to make a correction because I just want to make sure people do understand that I did make a mistake. Where I've been minister of several portfolios, things are a little bit different for different ones.

So everybody on the Advisory Council is appointed through the IAC. On that, I gave you a wrong answer, so I just want to make sure you know that.

Thank God for iPhones.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

I appreciate the information. This is great. A good understanding of the Independent Appointments Commission and their role in so many different facets, obviously, intersecting with government.

The question that I asked was about not seeing this requirement in other legislation –

or I don't think I've seen this requirement or understand it in other legislation to have at least one meeting outside the Northeast Avalon. So that idea, I can make some assumptions about it, but I'll ask you directly, where did that idea come from?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: It actually came from the council themselves, and also our different partners out across the different regions were looking for that as well, for people to have those meetings out there in the different regions so that it provides an opportunity for the council members to be out in different regions socializing, and I guess being able to see how different regions, the infrastructure, the supports, the services, just meeting people with different lived experiences.

So something that you'll be advocating for I know, for sure.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

S. O'LEARY: Absolutely.

Thank you, yes, and I've seen that in practice with many (inaudible) –

CHAIR: Excuse me, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi Member, I acknowledged the Member for Harbour Grace- Port de Grave. I'll come back to you.

Thank you.

S. O'LEARY: I apologize.

Okay, thank you.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

In the spirit of collaboration and working together, a question for the minister. Minister, the current CEO and President, Paula Sheppard, is she currently still in the position?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Will she be kept on, or will it be going to an open process? Has the contract expired or –?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: No, it hasn't expired. It's my understanding that she's committed to continue on in her role.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Just to go to the IAC appointments. As we all know, those suggestions come in from there. Will they be going to Cabinet prior to the minister announcing the positions? Will Cabinet have consideration of the applicants or those who have put their names forward?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: It's my understanding that everyone is appointed through the IAC.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Do Cabinet get a say? Would it then come to Cabinet in routine for consideration amongst Cabinet?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Cabinet does not override these appointments. I think that's what you're asking.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: No, when suggestions come in, say, when the applicants or those who put their names forward come in and those suggestions come in for consideration to the minister, will Cabinet and the minister then have the final decision what the council members would be?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Routine Cabinet does consider these appointments, but it comes in through the IAC.

P. PARSONS: Right, but ultimately the final–

CHAIR: Excuse me.

Order, please!

I need to acknowledge you just for *Hansard*. I know that we do this in Estimates where we go back and forth, but that's not the case in Committee. I would ask anybody who wants to ask questions or answer questions that you be acknowledged first.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

I'll try to explain it clearly. Again, when they come in from the IAC, they're submitted to the minister and ultimately Cabinet routine. It will then be decided by Cabinet and, ultimately, by the minister for the board members.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair.

In actual fact, the process has not changed since you were minister.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: So that is the process?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Yes, that is the process.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Okay.

With the expansion of the mandate, which I think is the key and the most important part about this legislative change and expansion, what kind of work and groups are now expected? I would assume the responsibilities of the board, of the members as well as the president and CEO, would be expanded as well. So will there be a mandate? I guess they must work with other organizations with regard to diversity.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Well, first, in just looking at the work that the Advisory Council does and their work that they do engaging across the province and ensuring that the women and gender-diverse people, their needs are being recognized through government policies, budget requests. All those things that impact decision-making, when you look at that, I firmly believe that the Advisory Council was also including gender-diverse people in their advocacy and their work but not having it identified. By putting it in the legislation now, in actual fact, it's a part of their mandate. They will have to be working and identifying the needs of gender-diverse populations.

They may be engaging with more organizations, but they'll continue to engage with the organizations, like Quadrangle – you had already mentioned that – and other organizations that represent trans populations when we look at overall wellness supports when looking at services.

So I think that there would just be more accountability when it comes to making sure that the gender-diverse people, their needs are also being identified through the Advisory Council and brought forward to government.

The whole point of the Advisory Council is – and, and for me, the nitty-gritty details are very important when we need to know them. But when you look at government and the mandate of the WAGE office yourself, as minister, it's very, very important to make sure that vulnerable populations out there are having their needs met, especially when it comes to actually empowering and ensuring that groups have access to services and supports so they're not continuing to be vulnerable or marginalized.

So that's probably the most important thing I can say.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

For the different positions, will there be positions within the council members designated, say, for members of the transgender community, for example, or will it be mandated that they have members representing our different communities with regard to gender diversity?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Right now, it's my understanding that it's not mandated to have a person from the 2SLGBTQIA+, but, in actual fact, lived experience and representation of the different groups, it is a priority to make sure that they're representative on the committee.

I don't think there's anything right now where it says that you have to have somebody on the council from the diverse populations, but that's something that we're actually looking into.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: I would agree, too, in that maybe that's something that you will consider for making it a mandatory position for someone from a gender-diverse community, that there'll be a designated spot for somebody in that community.

Again, that's for your consideration. I think you provided an answer, but this is still under consideration and I would like to see that there be a designated spot for certain members. Now, as we know, the *Hear our Voices* report has been submitted to government. I accepted that, along with the then premier of the day, from Indigenous women across the province.

Ultimately, they're looking at the federal inquiry from the calls for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Will any of that work be considered and be implemented into this mandate as well?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Yes, I mean, right now, I think it's more of a guidance, to guide the council in its work, especially when it comes to the vulnerable populations of the Indigenous communities, just the same as the vulnerable populations of the 2SLGBTQIA+ population.

In actual fact, that's something that probably will be looked at as whether we need to actually look at reserving seats on the council. That's not in place right now.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: That's good to hear.

Again, I'm pleased to see this. Any way that we can collaborate and support, certainly, I support you in these considerations. They are important.

Lastly, for me now, I'll wrap up with my questioning. Will this board also be mandated to take into consideration to help government or to make suggestions to you, to your office and your staff with regard to the expansion of the pay equity legislation and advancing that? Are there any plans for that happening? Will they be participating in that work as well?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I mean, the Advisory Council, they are to advise government, and so they will have, certainly, a role to play in advancing pay equity.

I thought you were going to ask me a different question, so I had a different answer in my mind, but it's gone now.

I want to say I do appreciate your questions and, more importantly, I appreciate your comments about supporting, because at the end of the day this is about ensuring that populations out there in the province are supported. It's all right to change the language, like you were saying, it's important to have legislation, but we have to make sure that we're reaching out into all regions and making sure there are supports.

Just like when you said that, under your mandate, you were able to provide funding for Quadrangle, and then they were able to go outside of St. John's and be out, having a presence in the regions and supporting people who are most vulnerable. I think, with us working together, at the end of the day, it's going to benefit so many people.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I'm going to go back to the clauses because, in fact, this is a new piece of legislation, the legislation is open here.

The bylaws are presently not published and they're not on the website. Is there any intent for the bylaws to be published and made public as we go forward?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Well, that's something that I can certainly take back and have answered, in terms of what it would take to actually do that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

Clause 14 to clause 16 specifically talk about funds and expenditures. The council has a general fund. I'm just wondering, what are the changes or anticipated conversation pertaining to the changes around the fund as we go forward and the budget for the council, because they are getting a new mandate with new responsibilities and I know how much work they do.

I'm just wondering, are we aware of the present balance of their general fund and if there are going to be any additional contributions from government or is this going to be a budget-related item as we move forward with this piece of legislation, et cetera?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Well, right now, what we're doing is we're looking at the budget. In actual fact, not only have we expanded their

mandate, but we also had a declaration of gender-based violence as an epidemic. They're going to play a larger role in actually working with the task force and working with the community stakeholders out there in terms of government being able to actually take action to end gender-based violence.

The task force has a huge role to play and we're relying on them quite significantly, but they are also working with the Advisory Council and the Advisory Council will be working with government to make sure what the steps are.

So their mandate is expanded, yes, but also their roles and responsibilities have increased so we will have to make sure that we're properly supporting them. That's something that Women and Gender Equality now are looking at in terms of what their needs will be, their financial needs.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, with this expanded mandate, they're going to need more supports and services to carry this out effectively. Has there been a financial assessment of the expanded mandate?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I just want to say, they currently receive $456,200. So that's their current budget. But we will be looking at what their needs are, just going forward with the extra work that's going to be required of them with their expanded mandate and also just working with the task force and the recommendations that's coming out.

We wouldn't have brought in this legislation if we weren't also looking at the financial considerations for their expanded mandate. So I've been advised that that's already been addressed before the legislation was actually introduced. We'll make sure that they do have the budget to be able to support the expanded mandate.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, in light of the fact, again, that this is new legislation, I just want to ask about the annual report, back to clause 13.

Will the annual report include the council's recommendations and the government's response and the status of the implementation?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I would say yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, the report will be made public, because it will be tabled here in the House. Will the minister respond publicly to the council's recommendations?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Clause 17, confidentiality: How will the council distinguish confidential, personal information from systemic findings that should be made public?

Just for clarity, Minister, I'm just wondering, is there is a process in place now? Are there policies in place now? Will there be new policies with this expanded mandate?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Well, in actual fact, the policies that exist now it governs confidentiality. I mean, the only thing we're expanding is the definition and the inclusion of gender-diverse people.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, I'll just go to some general questions now, Minister.

Why is the government introducing a brand new act rather than amending the existing act?

TABLE OFFICER (Russell): Chair, MHA Stoodley or MHA Dempster.

CHAIR: Questions? No?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much, Chair.

Apologies, I thought there were additional speakers. I did have some questions on the bill, thank you very much.

As I was preparing for this bill, I learned, and I guess I thought –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

L. DEMPSTER: I thought he asked me did I have any questions.

S. STOODLEY: Sorry, Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

S. STOODLEY: I can stop if you want.

L. DEMPSTER: No.

S. STOODLEY: Apologies, Chair.

Thank you very much.

I'm familiar with the Advisory Council and, I guess, up until I was preparing for this today, my understanding was there is the St. John's Status of Women, Status of Women Central and there are offices and staff and I think I wrongfully understood that that was all part of this Advisory Council.

So I was just wondering if the minister could clarify. I believe they are completely separate, but I was wondering if the minister can clarify that for me, please.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I think some of the words are very familiar and, of course, the title is long, it's really easy to be confused. I initially was, as well, in the early days of hearing of this, but they are two totally separate.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

I was also going down a rabbit hole in trying to think about what other – because I believe this is a Crown corporation – what other Crown corporations are similar?

Previously, I worked with the Occupational Safety and Safety Advisory Council, they don't have staff or offices. I'm just wondering if the minister can just clarify the organizational structure. I believe they have staff. I'm wondering if the minister can give us an overview, I guess, because up until 15 minutes ago I completely misunderstood this.

I wonder if the minister can enlighten us into the organizational structure. The employee numbers that work for them, are they included in the department's estimates? Things like that would be helpful.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Well, in actual fact, the former minister over there mentioned Paula Sheppard. Paula Sheppard is the CEO and also the president and we are now separating those into two separate roles.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

L. EVANS: The Advisory Council is an independent entity. They're at arm's-length from the government but they're there to advise government as well. The role is totally different.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

So do these staff who work for the Advisory Council report up to the minister?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: All the staff are located in St. John's. There's a CEO and there are administration policy and engagement staff. They don't report to government.

Like I said, this Advisory Council is at arm's-length from the government.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you,

Yes, so they're a Crown corporation. I guess I'm just trying to fill them into the boxes I have in my brain about other Crown corporations. Would OCIO support their IT? Do they log into government computers? Do they get a government pension? Does the Treasury Board oversee their employment? Are they in the band system? What does that look like in terms of relation to government?

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I was just taking those questions into what context is that with the new legislation. The council is continuing to operate the way they have always operated. There are three staff reporting to Paula. There's a finance coordinator, a policy and research analyst and a director of public engagement.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

Do Treasury Board policies for hiring and everything apply to that organization or are they completely separated from Treasury Board policies, for example?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I think there's a degree of independence. In actual fact, you were asking about the IT, because I know you have a special interest in IT. You were referring to OCIO. The council has their own IT support. That's separate from government, that's my understanding.

Now, I do have to say, getting down into the nitty gritty of those things is not something I do on a daily basis. In actual fact, like I said, some of these questions I may not have all the answers in terms of, like, their IT. But it's certainly answers that I can get, if you ask me some other questions now that I don't actually have the answers for.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

I'm learning more about this organization today as part of this Committee, and I guess I'm familiar with, for example, the Credit Unit Deposit Guarantee Corporation and, like, when you're going through budget processes and different HR things. I guess through my experience with government, there are implications for whether or not Treasury Board policies apply, whether or not they're in the department's Estimates in terms of the employee count.

So I guess those are two specific questions. Are the staff in the department's Estimates in terms of the salary of staff, and then do Treasury Board policies apply to the staff and the hiring?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: The Advisory Council is not subject to the *Public Service Commission Act*, so I think that will answer some of your questions there, meaning they do their own hiring. They're basically at arm's-length from government. It's not something that we or Treasury Board would have a role to play.

They are funded under us. How they manage their finances, of course, is independent from government as well. Because you don't want to have the financial ties to government. We run into this with non-profits and some of the advocacy groups out there, sometimes they may be put in a situation where they really do want to actually have public statements that may not be in line with supporting government.

We need to make sure that they have a public voice and that they are providing us with the best advice on behalf of the people who they represent, women and gender-diverse people. That's something that's very, very important.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

I notice in this act, as I mentioned in my statements, the financial requirements are lessened in this act. There's no mention about the Auditor General doing an analysis of the financials. I'm wondering if the minister can speak to why those changed, please.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: In actual act, they are audited by the Auditor General. They follow general government principles; however, they have their own policies. They do receive money through a grant from government and I have it in text; it just came to me. Their grant is voted as a part of section 2.8.03.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister for that answer.

The current act today requires an annual report within six months of the year-end and it specifies that they have to do financial statements, recommendations and an Auditor General component. I am wondering what the rationale for changing the requirements is and if the minister is satisfied that from a financial reporting perspective, the oversight is appropriate?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: She referred to the Auditor General. They are audited, so there's the financial accountability. Of course, their grant that's provided to them, that they use, is voted to Estimates under section 2.8.03, if you want to go back and look at that. Legislation was updated to align with the *Transparency and Accountability Act*.

So that was another thing why we brought in new legislation. This new legislation is in

line with the *Transparency and Accountability Act*. That did not exist in the 1980s when this legislation was originally introduced, when the Advisory Council was created back in the 1980s.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, because this is a new piece of legislation, what happens to the existing agreements, records, grants, assets and liabilities when the former act is repealed?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: It's my understanding that the Advisory Council continues to exist as before and all the stuff will actually be under the Advisory Council. We're not forming a new Advisory Council. We're just expanding their mandate, which is why we have new legislation. We're also changing a lot of the wording to modernize the words in legislation.

I think everything will be continued on as the same.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, why didn't we just amend the existing legislation as opposed to bringing in a brand new piece of legislation in the House?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: Well, the legislation that created the Advisory Council, like I said, was back in the 1980s. Some of the legislation that had to be aligned with such as the *Transparency and Accountability Act* didn't exist. In a lot of ways, it was easier just to bring in a new piece of legislation.

That being said, it probably could have been updated, but it probably would have been a lot more work.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, I heard you speak earlier about consultations when one of my colleagues was asking questions. Has there been any consultation done with the Disability Advocate pertaining to this piece of legislation?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: To be quite honest, I'm not sure. I would have to check on that. That's a really good question. If it wasn't done, we will make sure that that's a part of any kind of consultation moving forward.

I did just get a note down from my deputy minister in regard to the new legislation, because you're not the first person, it's been raised here a couple of times, why did we introduce new legislation? In actual fact, my deputy minister said that was under the advice of the legislative drafters. So we take guidance from them, we take their advice.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, I might have missed this. What is the council's current staffing complement?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: The current staffing, like I said, we have three staff. I actually read it out to the Member for Mount Scio there. We have three staff reporting to the CEO, that's the financial coordinator, a policy and research analyst and a director of public engagement. That's my understanding.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Another question, Minister, I just wanted to clarify something that my colleague here to my right asked earlier.

I'm just wondering will the council receive additional staff or specialized expertise to carry out the expanded mandate and responsibility? Will there be focused staff specific to the expanded mandate?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: There's nothing right now, but that's something that will probably be reviewed and that will be something for the Advisory Council to look into what their needs are. Yes, we have included gender diverse, but we also had Indigenous women and girls included under the mandate originally. So that's something I think the Advisory Council will look at.

For us, as government, we will make sure that they're properly supported, if it's warranted.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

A very good piece of legislation. I have one final question. What is the anticipated timeline for bringing the act into force and implementing the new governance structure?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I think, for us, it's my understanding, we will be looking at getting this enacted now as soon as possible. So by the time the House finishes sitting, we will ask for Royal Assent.

The other thing, too, I just wanted to add, when I was talking about the three staff and I said reporting to Paula, the CEO. So, of course, the CEO is considered staff. I tend to forget that. So if it comes up as four, that's just words, right, the way I speak on things.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm wondering if the government is increasing funding to the organization as a result of the expanded scope?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: That question was asked twice now by, I would say, previous ministers. We are looking at the budget now and we will be working with the CEO and the Advisory Council on what the needs will be when we're looking at their expanded mandate. We'll make sure that they're properly supported.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

I'm wondering if the minister has received recommendations from the Advisory Council since the minister has been in that role?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I would say, what came forward to me was that we needed to appoint the members of the Advisory Council. They had some vacancies and they were becoming quite frustrated with the vacancies not being filled through appointment.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Chair.

I am very interested in kind of the makeup and dynamic of the Advisory Council. I understand they have an office in my district on Hallett Crescent, I believe. I'm wondering if that is in a government building or do they go out and get their own lease or how does that work?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: It's my understanding that their office is here in St. John's. I don't know if I'm not being diligent enough but I did not ask if it's a leased property or if it's a government building. I'm sure that I will have that information – yes, just received now from my deputy minister that they're in rented space.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

I was just kind of trying to wrap my head around the pot of funding that they get, do they also have to use that funding to pay for rent and then pay for a company to manage their IT and all those things or is the amount of funding they get just for the staff? I'm wondering if the minister can, I guess, talk us through how the

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: It's my understanding that they receive a grant and there are budget items in their grant. Some of it has to do with rent and basically supporting an office, which would include IT.

I've just got a message here saying that the grant covers all their expenses, including the corporate expenses that you're referring to.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

Again, I'm just trying to understand the nuances. I find this fascinating.

Would those employees be eligible for the government pension plan and the government benefits as well? How does that work?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: They're employed through the Advisory Council as staff. I think my understanding is that, when it comes to things like pension and benefits, there are specific provisions related to the pension plan in the act under section 8.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

That clarifies that. You're right, section 8(2) – thank you very much to the minister – shall be considered to be employed in the public service. They are employed in the public service for the purpose of the Public Service Pensions Act and *Public Service Collective Bargaining Act* shall apply.

So I'd ask again then, do Treasury Board policies apply to the hiring and the HR management of the employees of the Advisory Council?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: It is my understanding that the Public Service Pensions Act and the *Public Service Collective Bargaining Act* do apply to these employees.

In terms of when you're asking about the Treasury Board, are you asking, say, for

example, increasing their grant or are you talking about some other layers that the Treasury Board would actually be involved in?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much.

Yes, I was fortunate to be on the Treasury Board for a while and there is a significant structure of policies and procedures that apply in rigour, I guess that applies to all of the roles and positions and employees that fall within kind of the Treasury Board management. I'm guessing Treasury Board policies do apply if they're under the *Pensions Benefits Act, 1997* and the *Public Service Collective Bargaining Act*.

I'm guessing, for example, they're on a certain band and they follow under the government point system for the roles. I was wondering if the minister can confirm if I'm correct in my assumption on that or if I'm incorrect, please.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

L. EVANS: I would have to actually go back and seek clarification on that. It's really good questions, but we're down in the weeds now because you're actually talking about staffing; you're talking about salaries. I would have to go back and seek clarity on that.

Most importantly for us was that even though it's new legislation, which was directed to us as the route to go, with the legislative drafters, I mean most of the things are very, very similar. This legislation is not going to impact the staffing. How the staff are paid, what benefits they're eligible to will be the same as before.

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

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Chair.

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

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 28, An Act Respecting the Status of Women and Gender Equality Advisory Council.

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

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue and Chair of Committee of the Whole.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1.

SPEAKER: Okay. Go ahead,

L. PARROTT: Motion 1, Bill 31.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022 No. 2, Bill 31, and I further move this said bill now be read a first time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this bill now be 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.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Government Services to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022 No. 2, carried. (Bill 31)

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022 No. 2. (Bill 31)

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

When shall the bill be read a second time?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 31 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I call from Order Paper, Motion 2, Bill 32.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Ferryland, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022 No. 3, Bill 32, and that said bill be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that Bill 32 be 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.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Government Services to introduce a bill "An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and

Compensation Act, 2022 No. 3, carried. (Bill 32)

CLERK: An Act to Amend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act, 2022 No. 3. (Bill 32)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 32 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Motion 3, Bill 3.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Bonavista, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Cannabis Control Act, Bill 33, and I further move that the said bill now be read a first time.

SPEAKER: It's been moved and seconded that Bill 33, An Act to Amend the Cannabis Control Act, be 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.'

Motion is carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act to Amend the Cannabis Control Act," carried. (Bill 33)

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Cannabis Control Act. (Bill 33)

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

When shall this bill be read a second time?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 33 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Motion 4, Bill 34.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend the Evidence Act, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that Bill 34, an Act to Amend the Evidence Act, be 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.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to introduce a bill, “An Act to Amend the Evidence Act,” carried. (Bill 34)

CLERK: A bill, An Act to Amend the Evidence Act. (Bill 34)

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

When shall this bill be read a second time?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

Motion, Bill 34 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Deputy Premier, that this House do now adjourn.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

This House do now stand adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, November 4, at 10 a.m.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.