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HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

Wednesday November 4, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Government Business

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 9, Bill 30.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, that Bill 30 be now read a second time, An Act Respecting Registered Professional Planners in the Province.

SPEAKER: The motion is that Bill 30 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting Registered Professional Planners in the Province." (Bill 30)

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: It's the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs for this one today.

SPEAKER: Oh, okay.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: All good.

SPEAKER: You have so many titles, it's a job to keep track of them all.

B. PETTEN: All good. We have to keep it straight.

SPEAKER: Yes.

B. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today with great pride to seek the approval to introduce *the Registered Professional Planners Act*. This bill is a bold step forward for the planning profession in Newfoundland and Labrador and, more importantly, for the people and communities that planners serve every day.

At its core, this legislation is built on three powerful ideas: public protection, professional accountability and good governance. These are principles that guide many of our province's professional regulatory frameworks and they deserve a place in the planning profession as well.

Mr. Speaker, planning shapes nearly every part of our daily lives. The communities where we live, work, raise families, build businesses and invest for the future does not happen by chance. They are built by thoughtful decisions made over many years.

Professional planners help communities turn their vision for the future into reality. They work with governments, organizations, businesses and residents to help guide growth and development in a thoughtful and sustainable way. Their work shapes housing development, land use planning, transportation systems, infrastructure projects, environmental stewardship, economic growth and community development.

As our province continues to grow and evolve, those responsibilities matter more than ever. Communities are rising to meet the housing demands, municipalities are investing in infrastructure for the future, governments are working to balance economic development with environmental sustainability, regional partnerships are bringing communities together around

shared priorities. Professional planners are at the table for every one of those efforts.

Mr. Speaker, planners already play a significant role under existing legislation. Under the *Urban and Rural Planning Act, 2000*, professional planners are involved in preparation and certification of municipal plans, regional plans, development regulations and amendments to those documents. Their professional expertise is relied upon in decision-making processes that affect residents, businesses and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

These are important responsibilities. They require specialized knowledge, professional judgment and a deep commitment to serving public interest; however, despite the important role planners already play, the profession is currently governed through a voluntary professional association rather than a statutory regulatory framework. That means there are limitations in what can be done to protect the public and uphold professional standards. For example, there's currently no protection over planning titles. There's no ability to prevent an individual from falsely presenting themselves as a professional planner. There's no legislative discipline process to address professional misconduct or breaches of ethical standards. There's no statutory mechanism to ensure consistent accountability across the profession.

Mr. Speaker, this bill closes those gaps. The proposed *Registered Professional Planners Act* would establish a modern regulatory framework for professional planners in Newfoundland and Labrador. It would create the College of Professional Planners of Newfoundland and Labrador as the regulatory body responsible for overseeing the profession in the public interest.

This approach is consistent with how other professions are regulated in our province. The provincial government already regulates 43 professions under 27 self-governing acts. These include doctors, nurses, engineers, architects, accountants, pharmacists, social workers and many other professions whose work has a direct impact on the public.

The reason these professions are regulated is straightforward. We recognize that professional expertise brings with it a responsibility to meet established standards. We recognize the need for accountability mechanisms and we ultimately recognize the importance of protecting the public interest.

Professional planning is no different. The work planners have, has a direct impact on communities, property owners, businesses and residents. It is reasonable that a profession operates within a modern legislative framework that builds accountability and public confidence.

Speaker, one of the strengths of this bill is that it takes a measured and practical approach. The legislation is designed to protect professional titles without restricting planning-related work. That distinction is important. This bill does not create barriers for municipalities, Inuit community governments, provincial government departments, businesses, consultants, community organizations or others who participate in planning activities. Those organizations will continue to do the important work they do today.

The legislation is not about controlling who can contribute to planning discussions or planning processes. Rather it's ensuring that individuals who use certain professional designations must recognize the standards are accountable to a professional regulator and the public.

Under this bill, only qualified registered individuals would be permitted to use the protective titles of registered professional planner and candidate planner. This approach protects the integrity of those designations while preserving flexibility for

employers and organizations across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I know that whenever professional regulations are proposed, questions can arise about the impact on existing employees and workplaces. I want to reassure the Members of the House of Assembly that government departments have carefully reviewed this legislation and that review confirmed that the bill will not negatively affect employees who currently perform planning-related work. People who contribute to planning activities as part of their jobs will continue to do so. The legislation focuses on professional title protection and professional regulation. It does not restrict planning functions that are currently carried out by public servants, municipal employees, consultants or others.

This legislation will also strengthen public confidence. Public trust is the foundation for every successful professional regulatory framework. Residents should have confidence that individuals presenting themselves as professional planners are qualified to do so. Residents deserve confidence that professional standards exist and are maintained. They deserve confidence that concerns or complaints can be reviewed when necessary. The college established under this legislation will provide that assurance.

The college will be responsible for registration, registration requirements, professional standards, continuing competency, ethics, complaints investigations and discipline. These are functions that exist within many professional regulatory bodies because they help ensure accountability and transparency.

The legislation also recognizes the importance of public representation. Ministerial appointments to the board of directors and the disciplinary panel will help ensure that the public interest remains central to the work of the college. This is an important safeguard. Professional self-regulation must always serve in the broader interest and this bill puts that principle into action.

Speaker, another important feature of this legislation is that it can be implemented without additional financial implications for government. The college will be responsible for administering the legislation and regulating the profession. The department can support implementation within existing resources. As a result, we can strengthen accountability and modernize professional regulations without creating additional financial pressures on the government. That is a practical and responsible approach.

This legislation is also important from a national perspective. Across Canada, professional planning titles are already protected by legislation or other recognized regulatory frameworks. This bill brings our province into alignment with professional planning regulations elsewhere in Canada. That alignment brings real benefits. It supports labour mobility, it helps us attract qualified professionals to Newfoundland and Labrador, it also helps us keep skilled planners who are already working here and it helps ensure that planners trained and practising in our province are recognized alongside their counterparts across the country.

These benefits matter. Communities compete for talent while employees compete for expertise. Professional mobility is increasingly important. A modern regulatory framework helps make Newfoundland and Labrador a place where professionals want to build their careers and contribute their expertise.

The moment for this legislation is now. Today, communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador are seizing significant opportunities while facing real challenges. We’re seeing investments in housing. Communities are working to address the growth and developing pressures. Municipalities are upgrading and

expanding infrastructure. Governments are considering land-use issues and long-term sustainability. Economic development projects are opening up exciting opportunities in many regions.

At the same time, communities are planning for climate resilience, population changes and future growth. Professional planners are valuable partners in helping communities navigate these issues. Their expertise helps communities make informed choices about how they grow and develop. It helps ensure that these decisions serve both today's needs and future generations.

As planning becomes increasingly important, it makes sense that the profession is supported by a modern, regulatory framework that reflects these responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to recognize the work that has gone into developing this legislation. The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Professional Planners and the Atlantic Planners Institute has championed this initiative with dedication since 2019.

The association and institute have worked collaboratively and constructively throughout the drafting process. These contributions have helped shape legislation that is balanced, practical and focused on public interest. I want to acknowledge that effort and sincerely thank everyone who helped develop this bill.

Mr. Speaker, legislation such as this is not simply about creating a new regulator or establishing a new administrative process; it's about building public confidence and strengthening accountability. It's also about honouring the important role that professional planners play in communities throughout our province and making sure the regulatory framework reflects the responsibilities they already carry and practise.

The bill provides a clear path forward as it protects the public, establishes professional accountability, supports good governance, protects professional titles, aligns Newfoundland and Labrador with other Canadian jurisdictions and avoids unnecessary disruption without additional financial implications for the government.

Mr. Speaker, professional planners help shape the future of our communities. They help guide the decisions that determine where we live, how we grow, how we invest and how we build strong and sustainable communities for generations to come. This legislation recognizes the value of that work and gives it the modern framework it needs to thrive.

I look forward to hearing from Members and their concurrence on this proposed bill, as we build stronger communities together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank the minister for presenting this bill. I think it is a good bill and something that we'll be happy to support.

I value planners immensely. Of course, as a municipal politician and a mayor, we utilized the advice of planners every day. Municipal plans, development of regulations are the bedrock of what we do and planners are the ones who create them.

As the minister mentioned, this is following on with other legislation that is on the Order Paper right now, the Fair Registration, of course, so I would assume one of the first things that will happen once this all gets passed through will be, through the Cabinet, to be able to add a regulation to add this new college to the list.

Planners do work to help make sure that your house isn't next to a factory, that you're planning your town or city in the correct way; in a way that makes it livable for everyone and that helps its economic development. Often their work is not appreciated. It's seen sometimes as red tape but, when you look behind the scenes, these municipal plans are well-thought-out things. They often require changes, of course, and, again, planners are there to advise and help municipalities figure out how to do it.

They're also there to help the department and advise them, and that brings us to the Urban and Rural Planning Act, which the minister also mentioned.

Right now, when changes are made to municipal plans or development regulations, they go through a process that is outlined in Urban and Rural Planning Act, regardless of if you're the biggest city or the smallest town in Newfoundland. It's not a terrible idea to have some oversight in a very important process for consultation, development of these regulations, review cycles and such, but quite often they can be overwhelming for small municipalities and they do take some time. Quite often, these changes might take six to eight months. So this will not affect anything I hope.

I hope that we will get our planners and we will see them transition into the college from NLAPP. I'm hoping, as part of this and part of this new red tape reduction bill that's before us, we will see changes to the Urban and Rural Planning Act so that the reviews that are submitted by our towns and cities do get reviewed quickly. I know, for instance, right now the department does have a shortage of planners to do these reviews and it is causing a bit of a backlog on this.

This act does establish a new college and a professional designation. The minister has mentioned that pretty much every other jurisdiction in Canada does have this in place right now. We do rely on the MCIP designation. It is not a professional designation; it is a membership. It does, I guess, give people some confidence that planners have gone through the proper education and apprenticeships, but this will establish a college that can enforce and create these rules.

That's a very important thing for sure and NLAPP has been a very diligent organization but, of course, these are people doing it as part of an association off the corner of their desks. They are planners. They are working planners who do maintain professional associations. This should change this and make it more of a regulatory and oversight board, which is a good idea.

The other thing that's important is labour mobility. Right now, we do have a shortage of planners, both at the municipal level and at a provincial level. That is in part because, if you have homegrown talent here, they would want to get some professional designation so they could transfer their skills to another part of Canada. Hopefully, by implementing this and getting the registered professional planner designation and the candidate planner designation established here, these planners will be able to move on to other positions and other roles.

Right now, in our province, I think we have 34 planners, nine of which live out-of-province and nine of which are candidate planners. People have to realize that to become a planner is not simply just getting a degree. You have to do work in the field in like an apprenticeship-type role with oversight for, I think, two years and that does cause a bottleneck to get quick relief when we have shortages. We do need to increase – 34 planners for all of the cities and towns in Newfoundland is not adequate right now.

The City of Corner Brook, for example, we would typically have one planner on staff, sometimes, if we're lucky or one doing an

apprenticeship, but often we would have to rely, because of the volume of work, on consultant planners to do that work and often those planners do come from other parts of Canada.

This bill will help, hopefully, alleviate the problem. We do have to formalize how we build our cities and towns. Like I said, sometimes people see this as red tape, but I think that with the government's commitment to reduce red tape, we can fix some of the problems around the Urban and Rural Planning Act. We also see the introduction of the *Cities Act*, which, again, gives Corner Brook and Mount Pearl new provisions and new powers which we'll talk about I'm sure in the coming days.

There could be more done here to grant planners in these cities more authority so that these cities, including St. John's, would not have to go through the same processes in URPA in terms of public consultation and review and government oversight to get changes done so you can develop housing faster, you can develop economic development measures faster.

There are a lot of things to be done here. I will say this is a good first step, it goes along with the other 43 professions that we currently regulate that way and we'll be in full support of it, I'm sure.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to support the proposed *Registered Professional Planners Act*. I want to focus today on what professional planning means for making decisions in our communities.

Behind every municipal act, there are practical questions. Where can homes be built? What services will they need? How will decisions made today affect communities years from now? Those questions connect this legislation to everyday life. Professional planners help communities understand their options before decisions become long-term commitments.

Speaker, a housing proposal is not just a question of finding available land. It raises questions about roads, water and sewer services, transportation and nearby uses. The same is true for a new business, a recreational space or an infrastructure investment, each decision needs to be considered along with the community's other needs and priorities.

Professional planners bring these pieces together. They help communities examine how one choice affects another, weighing competing needs and think beyond the immediate proposal. Good planning asks not only can we do this? It also asks, how does this fit within the future the community wants to build?

Mr. Speaker, communities across Newfoundland and Labrador are working to address these housing needs and renew infrastructure residents rely on every day. They're also considering economic opportunities, population changes and climate-related challenges. These issues do not stop at the edge of a single property or the end of a council term, that's why access to professional planning and expertise matters. It supports the careful long-term thinking these decisions require.

Under the *Urban and Rural Planning Act, 2000*, professional planners already help prepare and certify municipal plans, regional plans, development regulations and amendments. Their expertise supports the framework communities also use as a guideline for development.

This bill recognizes the responsibilities that planners already carry and would place their profession within a legislated regulatory framework. For municipalities seeking professional advice, it should be clear what a professional designation means and what responsibility comes with it.

At present, professional planners are governed through a voluntary association rather than legislation. This bill would add statutory title protection and processes for professional accountability. The proposed act would establish the College of Professional Planners of Newfoundland and Labrador to oversee registration, standards, ethics, complaints and discipline. For communities and employers, it would give protection and designation a clear foundation, recognizing qualifications, professional obligations and the regulator responsible to uphold them.

Mr. Speaker, the bill's principles have a practical purpose: protecting the people who rely on professional planning advice, making professional responsibilities enforceable and ensuring the profession is governed in the public interest. Just as important, the bill would protect professional titles and all plan-related work to members of the college.

Municipal staff, consultants, engineers, environmental specialists, Indigenous governments, community organizations and government officials all contribute to the planning. Their knowledge and perspective remains important. The proposed legislation would preserve that collaborative approach. Professional expertise supports community decision-making, it does not only remove the need for the local knowledge and participation.

Only qualified, registered individuals will be permitted to use their titles as registered professional planners and candidate planners. Municipalities and other organizations could continue their planning-related work. That balance matters, clearer professional credentials without closing the door to many other people who help shape the community's future.

Mr. Speaker, building community capacity also means supporting the workforce that communities depend on. The bill would also bring the framework into greater alignment with approaches to professional planning titles elsewhere in Canada. Professional planners work across provincial boundaries; greater alignment can support recognition of their credentials and make it easier for employers to understand the qualifications behind the designation. That may help Newfoundland and Labrador attract and retain qualified planners, while supporting planners who choose to build their careers here. Legislation alone cannot meet everyday workforce needs, but recognition and a regulatory framework can be one part of strengthening professional capacity available to our communities.

Mr. Speaker, whether the task is preparing for new housing, renewing infrastructure or considering economic opportunity, communities need advice that looks at the whole picture. The value is not simply producing a plan; it is helping people understand their choices, considering long-term impacts and connecting individual projects to broader community goals.

The proposed framework would also be administered by the college rather than creating a government-run professional regulator. The government's implementation of this legislation would support the existing resources. The college would take responsibility for administering the professional regulatory framework.

Public representatives appointed by the minister would bring the public perspective to the college's governance and discipline processes. The communities that rely on this profession will have an interest in how it is regulated.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Professional Planners and the Atlantic Planners Institute for their contributions to the development of this legislation. Ultimately, the importance of this legislation reaches beyond the profession itself. It matters to communities that depend on professional planning advice. Our communities need to respond to today's pressures without losing sight of tomorrow's responsibilities. Housing, infrastructure, economic opportunities and environmental stewardship must be considered together.

Professional planners help communities make those connections and turn broad goals into informed choices. This bill would strengthen the framework supporting the work, clearer credentials for those seeking professional advice, enforcing responsibilities for those who provide it and continued room for local knowledge and collaboration. That is what good planning requires.

Mr. Speaker, the decisions communities make today will help shape the places future generations call home. Supporting the profession that helps inform those decisions is a practical investment in our community's future.

For those reasons, I support my hon. colleagues bringing forth this bill and I encourage all Members of the House to support Bill 30, the *Registered Professional Planners Act*.

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.

It is my honour to stand in this hon. House and speak to Bill 30, An Act Respecting Registered Professional Planners in the Province – a group of professionals that I have great respect for.

The bill speaks to the College of Professional Planners of Newfoundland and Labrador as the regulator of the professional planning by registered professional planners and candidate planners in the province. Again, this is an effort for nothing about us, without us. Providing for good governance, registration and discipline of registered professional planners and candidate planners.

Speaker, working for 14 years in the municipal sector, I had the incredible privilege of working with highly skilled planners, both within the City of St. John's staffing but also in community at large, and certainly heard loud and clear through Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador as well the struggles and challenges that emerging planners faced, the deficiencies across many towns and cities across our province.

Never has there been a more important time than now to streamline governance so that we can align across the country for the growing need for recruitment and retention. We hear that recruitment and retention, how important that is in all sectors, but specifically in professional planning, and to help these invaluable planners who help us envision our communities.

I take a moment to just reflect upon one of my many mentors but one of the strongest ones in my world, for sure, was former Mayor Shannie Duff for her incredible vision and long-term advocacy to create a planning department at the City of St. John's. It wasn't done without a lot of grief and a lot of work, but the ongoing desire to bolster that planning and to create a planning department so that the capital city could be envisioned and have control over everything – all the infrastructure, the housing, the water, the sewer, the environmental stewardship. All of these things all come under planning.

That is in our capital city, but our towns and our communities province wide are in dire need of planning acumen for building sustainability right across this province.

I'm very pleased to see this streamlining come forward. Right now, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Professional Planners is the body that supports professional planners and while it currently represents the interest of planners across the province, the NLAPP does not have the ability to self-regulate its own affairs.

They've been working, obviously, with government for some time on legislation for professional self-regulation since 2019 and, currently, this is the only province where there is no formal mechanism for self-regulation. Meaning there is no official body responsible for registering practitioners, binding the standards of practice or disciplining them in cases of misconduct. Of course, accountability is something that we speak a lot about in this House of Assembly, Speaker.

As of 2026, planners relied on membership in the Canadian Institute of Planners for a secondary means of designating themselves as practising professionals using the Members of the Canadian Institute of Planners. However, the membership is also voluntary and does not count as registration in a self-regulating body.

As my hon. colleagues had mentioned, there are 34 professional planners registered right at present, with nine of them practising outside of the province. Of course, this bill would allow for the creation of the College of Professional Planners. This new body would regulate the practice of planning in the province and provide for the governance, registration and discipline of registered professional planners and candidate planners with three main objectives: public protection from misconduct by a professional or candidate planner; professional accountability from professional and candidate planners; and good governance within the profession.

In my time, Speaker, I've seen many emerging professional planners come up, want to work in community and, unfortunately, move away to where the opportunities arose across the country and otherwise. So this streamlining, the self-regulation, I think, is going to be something that will really help the professional planners in our communities, hopefully, stay. We'll get to start training them here and recruit and retain them here in our own Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Given the current need to hire more planners in this province, it removes a barrier to recruiting them from other jurisdictions. It provides mechanisms for registered planners recognized in other jurisdictions to obtain registration and practise legally here. Currently, there is no such formal process existing. The lack of registration, governance and accountability framework made some planners reluctant to take up work in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is something that we want to see change. We want to ensure that there are professional planners in this province.

Most of the contents of this bill mirror the laws dealing with other self-governing professions very closely and are also, therefore, reflective of best practices. It allows for a smooth transition, as well, from NLAPP to the college and, of course, where the members of the executive committee of NLAPP become the members of the board of the college until replacements are elected and appointed under the act; that the bylaws of the NLAPP become the bylaws of the college, to the extent that they do not contradict the act and professional and candidate planners currently registered with NLAPP automatically gain registration under the new college so that transition will be smooth, so that we can continue to bolster the professional planning community in our province.

Speaker, I have deep respect for this particular profession. They are the visionaries and the ones who actually put the boots on the ground to ensure that our communities are planned appropriately so that we can avoid things like conflicts with development, wetland delineation which we dealt with strongly within the City of St. John's. I know many of our communities across the province are certainly dealing with as well.

This is an opportunity to bolster that profession so that we can see more and more communities across our province thrive and sustain themselves, especially in the wake of climate change where we know that, not only the coastal communities, but communities in Central and in Labrador, in central areas, are impacted by climate change which is a reality. It is something that's true and happening that we, the government and certainly our Members, all need to address together because there are very strong economic impacts as a result of that. The planners are the people who help us move towards that future of ensuring that we can be safe in our communities and in our city.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to speak in support of the proposed *Registered Professional Planners Act*. This bill is about trust. When someone calls themselves a professional planner, people should be able to count on that person being qualified and accountable.

Speaker, this is not a new idea here, we already recognize the importance of professional regulation. In fact, the province currently regulates more than 40 professions under their own laws. Doctors, nurses, engineers, architects, pharmacists, accountants and social workers are just a few examples. These laws set clear standards. They also give the public a way to raise a concern and have it dealt with.

Professional planners are part of our everyday life in our communities. Their work influences where homes get built, where business can grow and how infrastructure takes shape. When a town or city develops a new plan for how it will grow, planners are involved. When a major infrastructure project is being considered, planners are involved. When a new housing development is being proposed, planners are involved. When a community looks at its transportation needs or how its land should be used, planners are involved. That is important work. Yet, right now, professional planners in our province are not regulated through legislation. Instead, planners belong to a voluntary association. While that organization has done good work, it cannot enforce rules the way regulators set up by law can.

Speaker, because of that there are gaps. The title of professional planner is not protected. Nothing stops someone from wrongly calling themselves a professional planner. There is no complaint process set out in law. There is no legal process to discipline a planner who breaks rules and there is no legal way to hold everyone in the profession to the same standards. This proposed legislation fills those gaps. It puts protecting the public first.

This bill creates the College of Professional Planners of Newfoundland and Labrador to regulate the profession in the public interest. Like other professional regulators in our province, the College of Professional Planners will handle registration, standards, ethics, complaints, investigations and discipline. In simple terms, people can have confidence in planners and there is someone to answer to when concerns are raised.

Speaker, let me be clear about what this bill does. It protects two titles: registered professional planner and candidate planner. Only people who are qualified and registered can use those titles. If you see one, you know the person has met the standards for the profession.

Speaker, just as important is what the bill does not do. It does not limit who can do planning work. Individuals, organizations, municipalities, Indigenous governments, businesses and government departments can keep doing planning work as they do today. This bill is about who can use the title, not who can take part in planning. The college, not the government, will run the profession day to day.

Mr. Speaker, another strength in this bill is its commitments to have good governance. The public will also have a voice on how the college is run. The minister will appoint members of the public to the college board of directors and to its disciplinary panel. That gives the public a seat at the table. It is a check on the system and balances the planner's expertise with the public's interest.

Mr. Speaker, this bill does not come out of nowhere. The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Professional Planners has advocated for this legislation since 2019. They have worked collaboratively with the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs as the bill was developed. Their input helped produce legislation that is practical, balanced and focused on the public.

Today, we have an opportunity to modernize an important profession, strengthen accountability and protect the public. This puts professional planners on the same footing as many other regulated professions in our province. It also brings us in line with other parts of Canada where planning titles are protected. That can help planners registered here be recognized elsewhere and may help us attract and keep professional planners.

To sum up, Mr. Speaker, this bill recognizes the significant role that planners already play in Newfoundland and Labrador. The proposed *Registered Professional Planners Act* protects the public, holds planners more accountable and gives our people and our communities greater confidence in the professionals they deal with. I encourage all Members to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to this legislation concerning the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Professional Planners. Having spent 12 years on municipal council, I've certainly received my fair share of complaints about municipal planning, and also the fair share of compliments on municipal planning and the role that planners play.

Speaker, when we talk about the bill and about professional standards, accountability, as well as public confidence, I do support the principle of professional self-regulation where it is appropriate to do so. Across Newfoundland and Labrador, we already entrust a number of professions with the responsibility of setting standards for their members, establishing codes of conduct, maintaining professional competence and ensuring accountability. So what's important is that this authority always be exercised in the public interest.

This legislation does follow a model, as has been said, that's already familiar in our province. Similar approaches are used for professions such as engineering and architecture. The concept is not new, it's not untested, but, rather, it reflects the understanding that those with specialized expertise are often best positioned to

oversee professional practice, provided there are appropriate safeguards and accountability measures in place.

Planning is one of those professions that many people may not think about every day, but its impact can be seen. Professional planners help shape the communities in which we live, work and raise our families. They're involved in decisions related to housing development, transportation networks, municipal growth, infrastructure planning, environmental considerations, recreation spaces and economic development, so the whole breadth of topics that this House of Assembly often discusses, and funds.

When a new subdivision is proposed, planners are involved. When municipalities examine land use and future growth opportunities, planners are involved. When governments and communities consider how best to balance development and, as my colleague spoke earlier with environmental sustainability, planners are involved.

Many of these decisions that shape our communities are long-term decisions. They often extend well beyond the single council term or a single government mandate. The work of the professional planners helps ensure that these decisions are informed, strategic and focused on the future needs of residents.

As someone representing the District of Gander, I understand the importance of thoughtful planning. Speaker, just to kind of lighten up the conversation around planning here in the House this morning, I'll just share a story about Gander and a fact that some of you may be aware of and some of you may not be aware of. In the early days of Gander, planners designed the streets to form the head of a goose. I can share the map later; I might even do a Facebook post about it.

The early streets are formed in the shape of a goose that you can point out on a map and, in fact, the town hall in Gander is where the eye of a goose would be. I'm delighted that the Finance Minister is finding this so fascinating. I honestly appreciate how you listen to all of our remarks when we speak, Speaker.
I really value that in a Finance Minister. I'm going to give you props for this today. Well done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: To further that, I'm going to share a story. When I worked with the Town of Gander as a Festival of Flight student planning the Festival of Flight activities for the Town of Gander – and this is way back when. I think it was my second year, I was 17 years old, and someone came up with the idea about the streets being shaped as the head of a goose.

Someone suggested let's try and get in the *Guinness World Records* book as having the largest goose head, shaped by ribbon, with an aerial photograph. I'd like to point out as well that the Minister of Education is also very interested in this story, and I appreciate it.

P. DINN: I am looking it up now.

B. FORD: Thank you, I appreciate it.

During the Festival of Flight, we had to ask all residents of Gander who were on the streets outlined by the head of the goose to come outside of their houses. My job as a Festival of Flight student was to sit in back of one of the Town of Gander trucks and myself and another student, they had purchased this huge roll of, almost like tablecloths, plastic tablecloths, really, and it was on a tube that would roll out.

As we went around the streets, this table cloth was rolled out and the residents came from either side of the streets there on Airport and Elizabeth and held on to this big

swath of plastic tablecloth, and the truck went all around the route to form the head of the goose.

I believe it was one of the Labrador Search and Rescue helicopters had offered – this was before the Cormorants – and had gone up to take an aerial picture and you could see this ribbon outlining the head. It was actually a really fun community event.

So the conversation today prompted me to think, did we ever make it into the Guinness Book of World Records? I did a search. I don't think we did. Maybe the ribbon broke somewhere along the way or the tablecloths.

Anyway, all of that to say when it comes to planning, it's really pretty cool that Gander, not having been a seaport community, not having been a place, an older community where the roads were built up around horse paths or foot traffic, it was a planned community right from the very beginning. So how neat that planners could intentionally outline those early streets as the shape of a head of a goose.

Thank you for indulging me in that story.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. FORD: I'll carry on now about the legislation that we're discussing. So we are seeing growth in many communities throughout our province. Communities face opportunities as well as challenges. We do need housing. We need infrastructure. We need industrial and commercial development. We need to ensure that transportation corridors, municipal services and public spaces meet the needs of growing populations.

In my District of Gander, it's one of the few places across Newfoundland and Labrador where population is growing. Speaker, those aren't simple decisions. They do require expertise, consultation and careful consideration of competing interest. Professional planners play an important role in helping communities navigate those decisions in a way that supports both current residents as well as future generations.

This legislation does establish a framework that helps ensure individuals holding themselves out as professional planners meet appropriate educational and professional qualifications. It creates standards of practice and ethical obligation, providing mechanisms for professional oversight and discipline where required. Those measures are important because self-regulation carries responsibilities.

With public professional status comes an obligation to uphold confidence – public confidence. Residents deserve to know that the professionals involved in major planning decisions are qualified, competent and accountable for their work.

Professional regulation also helps create consistency across the province. Municipalities of different sizes often rely on planning expertise to support local decision-making. Clear professional standards help ensure a common level of competence, regardless of where that expertise is being provided.

Speaker, good planning is increasingly important as communities respond to changing circumstances, population shifts, housing shortages, climate resilience, infrastructure demands and economic diversification. These are issues being discussed across Newfoundland and Labrador and, certainly, across Canada. Effective planning can help communities prepare for these challenges rather than simply react to them after the fact. That preparation benefits residents and it benefits businesses and governments alike.

As legislators, our responsibility is to ensure that governance structures are clear, that they're accountable and ultimately serve public interest. Based on the information

before us, this legislation appears intended to strengthen the professional framework surrounding planning services in Newfoundland and Labrador while maintaining that focus on public protection and professional accountability.

Committee work, of course, Speaker, is going to provide an opportunity to examine some of the details, ask questions and ensure that the framework being established achieves its intended goals.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Thank you for the story about the goose. That was pretty interesting, I have to say.

The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Thank you, Speaker.

I have no goose stories to share.

AN HON. MEMBER: Gushue?

J. KORAB: I'm still trying to get through that book.

Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on Bill 30 on behalf of the residents of Waterford Valley, but also as someone who served on St. John's city council for almost seven years. I got to see first-hand the work that professional planners do throughout the City of St. John's. I'd be remiss – I'm sure my colleague from St. John's East - Quidi Vidi would confirm the work of Ken O'Brien, the city planner at St. John's, the important work and the professional work that he does.

For me, Speaker, you might look at this legislation and look at a bill that specifically looks at a particular profession. While technically it is, it is about much more than that. It's about recognizing this legislation is much bigger.

It supports the principles of professional self-regulation. When appropriate, the authority is delegated to qualified professionals to establish this body and maintain and enforce standards that they're perspective professionals while ensuring that the public interest remains paramount.

Self-regulation isn't simply about giving professionals the ability to govern itself without oversight, it does come with responsibility, accountability and there should be a clear and transparent process in place to address any professional misconduct towards this professional or municipality.

Planning is something that affects every person's life in this province whether they realize it or not. It does play an important role, where we build our homes, where we locate our schools, how we design our roads, how we plan our roads, hospitals, recreation facilities and how we protect our green space and how we can accommodate, of course, new business that every municipality in this province wants to grow.

In the City of St. John's alone, Speaker, there is over 50 individual zones. You have residential zones, apartment zones, commercial, industrial, public use, industrial use, rural and agricultural zones, planning and mixed development zones and inside of all these zones you have discretionary use that could be zone standards with lot frontage. There are a number of things in zone standards so you need a professional who knows this.

You just can't come into this role and develop, for argument's sake, with the city, but what works in the City of St. John's may not work in rural Newfoundland, so I think it's important to have this college that they can go back to and make sure that these professionals are trained and working correctly.

You look at also the City of St. John's, you look at that 190-metre contour, things like how you do planning for water, water pressure, the recreation, school patterns, traffic. All these things go into what a planner has to take care of.

When planning is done poorly, the consequences can last for decades. We've seen poor planning, unfortunately, throughout this province and we paid a price for it now, certainly with climate change and how culverts and things were done years ago.

This legislation follows an established model used in other professionally regulated provinces. This includes engineering and the architecture.

Good planning, in my opinion, Speaker, supports good governance and professional planners help take the long view.

Speaker, I'll be honest, I was bored one day watching TV and I came upon this story about the City of Barcelona. I got to watching it and it had to do with the planning and development. I really do want to go to Barcelona, not for the food or the culture, for the planning and the reason why I say that, factiously, but in all seriousness –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. KORAB: What's that?

AN HON. MEMBER: No row houses.

J. KORAB: No, right.

In all seriousness, one of the things back in the 1850s, 1860s, the planners in Barcelona, one specifically and I can't remember his name and if I did, I'm sure I'd mispronounce it, they wanted no uncontrolled developments. They wanted it organized by grid. If you look at a map over Barcelona, it's done by grids. They had wider streets because they knew down the road, whether they had the foresight of cars and Model Ts rolling down the road, but they had wider streets. They wanted it for ventilation, for sunlight. They cut corners for sightlines so that vehicles, eventually, or horse and carriage or whatever, they had more sightlines. They had green space and mixed use in future infrastructure.

If you go and google that, they'll say that's one of the best planning ever done and it was done, you know, about 170 years ago. So with that said, I can look forward to going to Barcelona and study the planning.

Speaker, in closing, just to say, thinking of what the city will look like or the town and municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador, we can't look at what it's going to look like now today. We've got to look ahead 50 to 100 years. I hope this legislation sets professional standards and a mechanism of accountability that can only help the province and the people who live here but, more importantly, it can make for better development in this province.

I look forward to getting in Committee, but, as it stands now, I support this legislation.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, if the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs speaks now, he will conclude the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

I thank everyone for their words, their support, their commentary. The Member for Gander, I would have expected a plane to be the shape of a street, not the head of a goose, but it was quite interesting. I might add, when she was talking – the porch

goose, it's very popular now. The people get these geese, they put on the porch and it's called the porch goose. The person who makes them is in CBS, in my district, I know them quite well, who they are, so I might give her the contact information and then she might want to get one of them for her porch. It is a great story and it's interesting. My colleague, the Government House Leader, pointed it out on the map, the actual depiction. I never knew about it before. It's an interesting story.

The Member for Corner Brook, former mayor of Corner Brook, I thank him for his commentary. He gets it in spades, obviously, the importance of planning. I think all of us do, actually, in this Legislature. If we've dealt with any municipality over the years you would know. In my previous life, I used to be on the Municipal Appeals Board for Eastern Newfoundland. I spent six years at that so I learned an awful lot about the Urban Rural Planning Act over those years. I thank him for his comments and support of the legislation as well.

The Member for Waterford Valley, who just spoke then, I hope he enjoys his trip to Barcelona and brings me back some good information for our provincial planners and whatever else he finds in Barcelona. If I went to Barcelona, I'd probably go for more than that but, by all means, I hope he enjoys his trip and learns something along the way.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi for speaking. Once again, a deputy mayor, I think, and councillor for the City of St. John's, she gets it full well, the importance of planning. I think all of us get it. You, Speaker, yourself, in sitting on council, I think we appreciate that planners sometimes are the unsung heroes. They go through it.

If you ever go through your town – the planner for CBS, director of planning, is actually in the gallery, so this will be a compliment and a dig – every time you go to get anything done in your community, the most challenging place you have to go through is planning, but that's not a criticism. That's a compliment because that shows the importance, and nothing flies without getting through planning.

We also take things for granted. So I give kudos to the job they all do, because me, on a personal level, sometimes we all get frustrated, but the frustration is because they have an important job to do and they have to make sure everything is in place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: I'm a person who wants it done yesterday, so that's never the case. Me and this person, together, we've had many conversations – I'll say conversations – but it has always been respectful and he understands me like I understand him. It's been a good relationship actually. He does great work for our town and we're lucky to have him. We're lucky to have the planning division for what they do in one of the fastest growing communities in the province. Good on them for the work they do.

When you go to other communities or other areas of the province, a lot of older areas, you see the value of planning because, back in the day, there was no planning and we see the results of it. It's part of evolving and, as those communities evolve, you see the new areas of all these towns, it's much better constructed and it's much better laid out, but it's about learning as we go along. Planning is very important, as we know, as we get into the future.

I want to thank my two colleagues from Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde and Lewisporte - Twillingate for their commentary and their support. They also see the value. I thank them for the comments and supporting this legislation.

I won't have anything else further to say, Speaker. I look forward to any questions they may have in Committee.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I say to the minister, I have actually been to CBS and bought one of those geese for my mother-in-law. She puts a witch's hat on it on Halloween and bunny ears on Easter and all that stuff. She loves it.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: Are Members ready for the question, with all that said?

The motion is that Bill 30 be now read a second time.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK (Hawley George): A bill, An Act Respecting Registered Professional Planners in the Province. (Bill 30)

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

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

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting Registered Professional Planners in the Province," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently. (Bill 30)

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 30.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 30.

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 30, An Act Respecting Registered Professional Planners in the Province.

A bill, "An Act Respecting Registered Professional Planners in the Province." (Bill 30)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Just a few questions, Mr. Chair.

I know we talked about this act providing some protection and formalizing the registration process. Have we had instances of misconduct that we are aware of?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I can check. Not that I'm aware of right now, no. I think this is an ongoing issue.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Many towns and cities utilize MCIP designated planners, and, of course, they also use planners that do not have the designation behind the scenes.

Does the minister have any idea how many of the people working in planning in the cities and towns right now are working without designation in Newfoundland and Labrador?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I'll get that for you. I do have something. I have a lot of papers in front of me right now, but I'll get that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: I would imagine there would be quite a few because quite often a lot of the work is done, but then, of course, the Urban and Rural Planning Act requires a MCIP designation to make plans or develop regulations or amendments. Is there a plan, I guess, to update URPA now to include the new RPP designation or to replace the MCIP?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: The short answer to that is yes. We are doing a piece of work now on modernizing the Urban and Rural Planning Act, so that would be included within that modernization, yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: The reason I asked, though, a lot of towns and cities rely on outside consultants to certify plans and regulations and, of course, it would be very important that we make sure we don't screw that up with this new designation, in terms of allowing a broad range of designations.

Have there been discussions with NLAPP about how the college will recognize external registered, like other provinces that have registered planners in terms of consultants that are doing work in Newfoundland?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I'll get that information to you, but I'll answer a couple.

Yes, outside the 34, the rest would basically be in towns that would be employing people doing planning activities. It's outside the 34 that are registered right now. You asked about the number.

As for misconduct, right now the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Professional Planners doesn't have jurisdiction to discipline, so that's something that we would not have a grasp on. Under the college, obviously, you would. They should be implementing a disciplinary panel and it would be a totally different – well, you're professionalizing, so that's part and parcel of some of the rationale for creating the college.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Yes, and I guess that's a good point of the legislation, of course. I

was just wondering if this was a problem that was well known. Like, were municipalities getting into legal issues because of either planners didn't have the proper credentials or were making mistakes or that kind of thing?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I guess the rationale for this legislation in general was that the fact that the work was being done by others. The self-governing piece, it was like it was a volunteer operation. There they were and they were the professional planners but other people were doing the work in place of them.

It's like any other profession. You do the work. That's your career. You should be recognized so that when you have to get professional planning done, it should be done by a professional planner. In order to do so, you need to be under a registered college, which that is the full intent of this is to bring more credence to their profession and to make it more standardized and professionalized. Basically, the proper people are doing the proper work and so forth.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: I just want to confirm that I understand that the currently designated MCIP planners will be grandfathered into the registered professional planner designation. Is that correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: Yes, they'll be left untouched.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Okay.

Will registration be available to planners who obtain the qualifications outside of Canada?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I'll get that for you. In Canada it is, but that's a good question.

I'll get that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Right now, NLAPP is an association. As I understand it, it doesn't have staff or doesn't have a lot of infrastructure behind it. Has government estimated a cost around what it will take to form a college that has, I guess, the necessary personnel to conduct the registrations and those sorts of things?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: No, there's no real cost. I mean, right now it's not going to be an extra burden really to government. I don't know what infrastructure would be required, but I don't think we're anticipating that to be too extreme. That's something that I don't think that's going to be an extra burden. If there's some financial assistance required, it's something we'll address, but we're not forecasting it to be any impediment.

To your other question, MHA, I'd say yes, you can have regulation outside the country.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: I mean, in terms of establishing the new college, I would imagine there will be some new costs associated with the college. Often, those professional colleges are paid for through registration fees and that as well. As we said, right now, I think we have 34

registered planners working under the MCIP designation.

That does seem like it may or may not be enough to keep a college like that afloat. Would the government consider somehow providing assistance to such a college?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: There's been a financial analysis done already and they think it can be done by fees. There may be an increase in the amount on the fees, but I guess that's a bridge you'll cross to when you come to it. It's one of those ones, I don't think we're going to see this college fail, based on the numbers but based on the financial analysis, they're confident.

That was done by the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Professional Planners already, the current body, and they feel that a smaller increase in fees should be enough to run the college. Again, forecasting it, but we won't see it fail. If it means some shortfall, I'm sure we'll make sure it succeeds.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: I guess the important thing is the bill does allow the board to establish these fees. It doesn't prescribe particular amounts. Will the government have any approval capabilities over those fees that are set?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I guess, overall, the ministerial appointments go through the board, so there will be people representative of government on their board anyway. I think that will be part and parcel of their board.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: That brings me to my next question. I assuming, again, the two public representatives, will they go through the Independent Appointments Commission? Is that correct?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: Yes, they would, yes.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: Some colleges, we talked about, of course, the *Social Workers Act* earlier this sitting. Will government have the ability to approve bylaws and regulations of the college outside of these appointments on the board? Will Cabinet or the minister have any authority?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: The whole intention of this is to be a self-governing body. I mean, it's all about self-governing and we're putting appointments on the board. The hope would be that all their issues will be under self-governance, so my hope or our plans would not be for government to have to interfere with the running of their college.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

J. PARSONS: This act also establishes disciplinary and complaint procedures. Who can file a complaint against an RPP under this?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: It's not clearly written but I think anyone who would employ a planner – developers and municipalities would probably be your main two clients. Outside of that, I don't know if anyone else would be – I guess anyone that the planners do

planning work for, they would have that right.

That's like any college, if you employ anyone from the college, whatever professional designation they have, they have that right. If you are using their services, you have the right to form that complaint. I guess it's no different than lawyers get called in lots of times, we read about and talk to them, what have you. I think the same thing would apply here.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Corner Brook.

We'll get one more question, then we'll move to another person with questions and we'll come back to you.

J. PARSONS: Okay, perfect. Absolutely.

Yes, then that's an important thing because, unlike many professionals, of course, planners are probably not as well-heeled as more well-compensated professions.

So in terms of protections, there could be a danger there. Say a developer that is angry with a municipal decision could threaten legal action. Are there protections in place in here to guarantee some kind of help from the college to protect these planners that are registered?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, I think that would fall under the whole scope of the college itself. We develop regulations, of course, for the college and they do their self-governing, but they would have to have insurance, obviously.

So when it comes to your fees, the college would have to cover them under insurance. That falls under professional designation. They would have their own insurances to protect them against any such suit.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, which groups did you consult with on this legislation? What feedback did you receive?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: You ask your next question and I'll get you the answer to that one.

Also, before I go – I only got a minute – the Minister of Health and Community Services and the MHA for Cape St. Francis quietly come over to slip me a note that Julia Swartz from the Town of Torbay is the director of planning and development and, he writes the line in his note, in the beautiful district of Torbay, is up in the gallery. So he wanted me to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Anyway, I had to get that in.

Yes, I'll get you that information.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, acknowledgement is key. Thank you for that.

I saw in one report of the NLAPP that this bill has been in the works since 2019. Just out of curiosity, why so long to get it to this stage, bringing the legislation to the House of Assembly? I'm just curious.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: Well, ironically, I came here in August, and I was told that the planners were really anxious. They wanted this

legislation brought forth. They were excited about this legislation coming forth. So I asked then, can we move it forth?

As for what happened previous to that, I can't answer the question, to be quite honest. I wondered that too when I read it, because it's a good piece of legislation, but it's like everything I guess. I mean, sometimes legislation gets bogged down, gets caught up. There's a lot of legislation you're trying to get through. Other than that, I wouldn't be able to provide you with any other answers.

The consultation – I'm flicking through papers here so bear with me, but it's the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Professional Planners, the Atlantic Planners Institute, Intergovernmental Affairs and Labrador Affairs. There was no direct impact with municipalities as such because they're basically working for municipalities, but they're getting briefed on this bill as well. They've been asking for this since 2019, like I said. So I'm very delighted that we're finally getting it through the deck.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, the municipalities will be the beneficiaries, certainly, of planners. So I'm happy to see that, even though they are the employers of sort.

Do the bylaws of NLAPP currently deal with all of the matters, like, some of the themes and areas that they do not cover yet? Are there external things? Because we're talking about a smooth transition, are there external things that are going to be added as well, that will enhance or bolster?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: Yes, and most of that will be developed in regulations in consultation with them. Right now, you're dealing with a board that was a volunteer board, really. So when you're stepping up to the level of professional college, with the regulations, there will be, obviously, more so-called meat on the bones to overall regulations, with their fees, the professionalization. You are professionalizing a profession, basically. So there will be no doubt there will be a lot of expanded duties, responsibilities and powers that will come to the college.

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

S. O'LEARY: How did you come up with the ratios for elected versus appointed board members? Why three elected and two unelected?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I guess it's to give a balance, you know, internal, external. That's where I'm to with it; it's a balance. I never really thought about that to be honest with you. It kind of covers all bases, when you're picking any board. I look at it as a balance.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just going to jump ahead in some of my questions, just due to timing.

How long does it take for a candidate planner to graduate to the full professional title? Do we know?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I'm thinking it's two years. I've got that here somewhere. I have too many papers here. I think it's a two-year period – two to three years, actually, it is. So two is the notional. It could take three but it's in the two- to three-year range.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Certainly, you can give me the information if you – it is two to three. Okay.

Minister, does the province have a sufficient number of professional planners willing to mentor the candidates? I'm a huge fan of mentorship. It's been, historically, a problem, so I'm just wondering if there are any provisions for that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I'm not sure if there'd be provisions but I think that the desire is to grow this profession so I do believe that they're very excited about getting this college set up and be professionalized. I think that comes part and parcel with the profession itself. I think they want to grow the profession so I think there's a full-on appetite to do exactly that. They want to grow.

I know someone spoke earlier about retention, attraction and retention, and it's very important. Yes, I don't think that's going to be any issue. I think we need to grow the profession and as time goes on, like I just said earlier when I did my closing remarks, for many rural communities throughout the province, planning is becoming a new norm to them. Us people here on the Northeast Avalon have been experiencing it for quite some time but smaller municipalities are starting to really embrace it and they're realizing the future and with that comes more demands. I think that 34 number will grow quite significantly over the next coming years.

To your point, and I was trying to find the right word, the balance of the board, the balance is trying to get two different views from professional and from the public perspective. I was tongue-tied on that one but all good.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Certainly, just to comment on the growth component of the planning and the importance of it. It truly is something that is going to be quite expansive and a very positive thing right across the province.

Just looking for clarification, section 38(3), does this mean that the college can't take up investigative or disciplinary proceedings until a specific case involving a planner in their professional capacity is finished in the courts? So, again, about the concern about conduct or can both processes be completed in parallel?

So I know that's a specific question there but does it mean the college cannot take up investigative or disciplinary proceedings until a specific case, involving a planner, in their professional capacity, is finished in the courts?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: My answer to that, without reading any notes, would be that I don't think they would. They would wait for the court action to be followed up. Usually that's pretty standard in all professions. They'd wait for the court to make their ruling or they'll do their investigation or whatever. So after that nature, then the board would take it, if need be. If the court found the ruling, then the board would usually follow-up and deal with it on an internal level.

I think that's pretty standard among all boards, all the colleges and what have you. They will wait for the courts to rule and then they will act accordingly. I don't think it would be prudent to do it together. I think you'd need to have one process over before

you'd start the next process. That's pretty standard in most colleges.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

I'm just curious as to how $25,000 was the sum arrived at for a suitable maximum fine?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: That figure would come from consultations with the board when they introduce public consultations, I guess. The numbers arrived, that was done through the consultation process when the discussions were ongoing. I guess it's meant to be a deterrent because that's a significant fine, and I guess that just strengthens their profession. You'll probably get better results, better work, better compliance. It's not a small fine. It's significant.

I guess sometimes you get improper work – I don't see it in planners, but I see it in others. In my department, we see a lot of it through other professions and it can be quite costly when you can get improper work done through anything you're doing, anything you're building, it can be very costly to government or to anyone. So the higher the fine, I guess – and they've always agreed upon it – the higher the fine means more scrutiny, more stringent to the profession.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

That's it for me right now. I want to thank the minister for the answers.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the minister's opening remarks, he talked about labour mobility, attracting professionals, and he also referenced protecting the public.

Can the minister just explain that a little bit in terms of what this bill does in terms of protecting the public?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: Yeah, no problem.

Essentially, when you're doing planning work, sometimes planners are working for municipalities a lot of the times, but planners can do much other work. If you're doing a development, it could be a home, it could be what have you, good planning leads to a good process. Bad planning can leave you faced with extra costs.

I just went through my conversations dealing with, on a personal level, when you deal with planners. Their rules are in place for a reason. But if you're not getting good direction from any planner, no matter what level you're dealing with, that can incur costs and create a lot of headaches and, basically, in a nutshell, it will wreak a lot of havoc.

So when we say protecting the public, it's protecting them in that nature. Like I just said earlier to the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, in my own department, you're familiar with what I'm saying, when you get not so up to standard work done, the public – the public being the public person sometimes and the public businesses alike – can suffer. I think it's an overall thing.

I guess you want to be professionalized, and that's their wish in forming the college and we very much support that. Being professional is also a requirement on them and it shows with the fines that there's a

standard we all expect. In doing that, it's ultimately the public who are the ones who will be either the beneficiary or the victim. I hope most cases in this will be a beneficiary, obviously.

So protecting the public, it might be a long explanation to it, but that's roughly what we're talking. It's got many facets. It's not just in one particular angle; it's just in general.

With a college, many of these professions, the whole idea is to protect the public. That's what all these colleges kind of allude back to, protecting the professional, but you're also, in turn, protecting the public.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: I certainly relate to that. Being the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, professional planning is paramount because, at the end of the day, it trickles down to whether it's a house being built and protecting that homeowner or potential homeowner is crucial for sure.

Minister, we talk about the structure of the college, the structure of the board. This is fairly lengthy, 39 pages. But in terms of the small municipalities, which have been crying out for help in terms of planning, because we know the bigger centres, from a capacity perspective, are able to do more. Are there any additional costs to the smaller municipalities because of this bill here today?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: No, I would not think so. It's either the municipality employs you or they hire you on. Not to my knowledge, that shouldn't change one way of the other. If the fees increase, they increase on their own. They will not be a result of this legislation or this college, not that I'm aware of. There will be an increase in registration fees. How that trickles down, that would be entirely within the college's purview to do so.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: I mean, that's important and, again, it goes to the small towns certainly need that help in terms of the planning. I know when I was there, there'd be questions of how come this project hasn't moved forward. It's because they've come to a standstill. They don't have the capacity to move it forward. Professional planning, again, is important.

Minister, how many staff in your department are devoted to professional planning?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: We have six, I believe, over in our department. They're not all professional planners. They do planning work. I have that number there. I'll get that for you in a second. I think it's six.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Just one general question, but it's important in terms of representation, Minister. In terms of Labrador, Western, Central and Eastern, the makeup of this bill, do you feel that, from your department to municipal planning, there's a true representation for all those sectors in this province?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: I think so. There's been a consultation process that happened along the way and, again, I do believe that.

Just to confirm your last question, it is six. One of those is a professional planner. The rest of them are planners, but they're not

professionals. As I said in my opening remarks and it's part of the legislation, you can still do planning work. That's within the department we have six planners but one got the professional designation.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Okay. Thank you for that, Minister.

In terms of the focus from the department in terms of those planners, are any of those specific to geographical areas in the province?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: No, I don't think so.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you very much, Chair.

Previously when I was minister, I did have the opportunity to consider or think about whether or not to regulate an industry, and one of the issues or concerns that was paramount to me was the financial cost of doing that for the actual members.

I know, in this bill, we've heard a little bit about that but I'm wondering if the minister can talk about, firstly, would there be members that pay out of pocket. I guess the municipality or the employer would pay for their fees, but I do note that they currently have to pay, I think, over $800 a year between their Atlantic Planners Institute fees, the Canadian Institute of Planners fees, the professional liability and then taxes. So it is actually $807 plus tax, which works out to over $900 a year.

I'm wondering if the minister can confirm for any planners watching how this will impact the financial amount that they have to pay. Will anyone be out of pocket based on the changes the government is making, please?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: This is basically something that's going to be done within the college. The fees, I think I said just now earlier, are maybe around $100 for their membership fees. I think that'll be the outside of it.

Again, I don't think that's an issue. That's an issue that has been well versed. They're well aware of it, and they want to get on with it and get self-regulated in a professional manner. Fees have not been an issue. They're fully appreciative of that and they understand that. They expect it actually.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you.

I guess, just to conclude, I would recommend that the government consider how they can implement this change without increasing the fees for members. It's already over $900. I guess an extra $100 would make it over $1,000 a year.

I know that all the other Atlantic provinces with regulatory bodies, their total fees are the same. So Newfoundland and Labrador members currently do not pay less than the members in other provinces who are in their own professional organization.

I would recommend that the government seriously consider how the members could maintain the rates of similar Atlantic provinces and that their members not have to pay $100 more than all the other members in Atlantic Canada.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the Member opposite for the question and the observation, but it's self-regulatory. Government will not have any control in that. Employers can determine to pay the fees on behalf of their planners. It's self-regulatory. It's not a government policy. It's really outside government's hands and it will be well within the college's guidelines.

I would guess that, probably, a lot of employers will pay that. It would be up to the employer, but a lot of employers will probably pay those fees.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 62 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 62 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 62 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting Registered Professional Planners in the Province. (Bill 30)

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Chair.

Chair, I move the Committee rise and report Bill 30 without amendment.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report the bill without amendment.

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 the 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 that the Committee recommends Bill 30, An Act Respecting Registered Professional Planners in the Province, without amendment.

SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and recommends Bill 30 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

L. PARROTT: Now.

SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

L. PARROTT: Tomorrow.

SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, that Bill 27, An Act Respecting Civil Forfeiture of Property, now be read a second time.

SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 27, An Act Respecting Civil Forfeiture of Property, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting Civil Forfeiture of Property." (Bill 27)

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Speaker, I feel honoured to stand today to begin the debate on Bill 27, An Act Respecting the Civil Forfeiture of Property.

Our government was elected on a mandate that includes making communities in Newfoundland and Labrador safer. I am pleased to bring this bill before the House because it represents another important step toward fulfilling that commitment and will provide our province with an additional tool to help keep our communities safe.

Speaker, civil forfeiture is not a new concept in Canada. It was first introduced in 2001 in Ontario. They became the first province to adopt this approach. Today, Newfoundland and Labrador is one of only a few provinces and territories without civil forfeiture legislation. By introducing this legislation, Newfoundland and Labrador will join jurisdictions across the country that have recognized civil forfeiture as an effective crime prevention and crime disruption tool.

While this legislation operates separately from the criminal law process, this legislation complements broader public safety efforts by enabling the provincial government to address property connected to unlawful activity and it's through civil proceedings.

It is important to note that this legislation operates within the provincial government's constitutional authority over property and civil rights.

Civil forfeiture proceedings are civil matters. They're determined by the courts using civil standards of proof. This legislation does not create new criminal offences; nor does it require a criminal conviction before property may be the subject of a forfeiture application. Its purpose is to address property that has been acquired through or used in unlawful activity, rather than to punish individuals for criminal conduct.

Speaker, the Financial Action Task Force, that's an intergovernmental body that creates international standards with the goal of preventing illegal activities like money laundering. That task force, Mr. Speaker, emphasizes the importance of all provinces and territories in our country having civil forfeiture programs so that every jurisdiction can contribute to a coordinated national effort to combat organized crime, money laundering, terrorist financing and human trafficking.

This bill supports these objectives and it demonstrates our government's commitment to working with all partners to enhance public safety. We are confident that this legislation will strengthen national efforts to root out money laundering and other illegal financing activities.

Speaker, I think it's important for us to understand why this legislation is vital and it is needed. At present, government right now relies on federal legislation, namely the *Seized Property Management Act*, to seize assets that are connected to illegal activities. Generally, under that model, criminal property can only be forfeited following a criminal conviction. In addition, Newfoundland and Labrador receives only a portion of the proceeds recovered by the federal government.

Civil forfeiture is different. It provides a different and complimentary approach. It helps reduce crime by seizing property, proceeds and instruments of crime through civil proceedings. These proceedings target the property itself and under this legislation, property and assets may be forfeited even where a criminal conviction has not been obtained through the criminal justice system.

The proposed legislation, it has two streams. It includes both court-based and administrative processes. As well, it provides opportunities to resolve matters through settlement. So this approach is designed to reduce administrative and court workloads while ensuring matters can be resolved efficiently.

Speaker, the Department of Justice and Public Safety is committed to ensuring the administration of this legislation is transparent, accountable and effective. To enforce the legislation, a civil forfeiture office will be established. The office will include a director, an asset manager and a lawyer – a solicitor – who will also serve as a shared resource for other departmental initiatives. The civil forfeiture office will also be responsible for collecting proceeds obtained through forfeiture actions. Importantly, the legislation will provide flexibility to support victim restitution and crime prevention initiatives through this fund.

We know that women, children, Indigenous women, newcomers and other vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by organized crime and human trafficking. This legislation will help ensure that victims of these crimes can be supported through forfeiture proceeds while also protecting the interests of innocent partners and other individuals who may be affected by criminal activity through no fault of their own.

Speaker, I'm grateful for the support of both RCMP B Division and the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary with respect to

the creation of civil forfeiture legislation. They recognize the importance and the value of this additional tool and the role it can play in protecting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Civil forfeiture is a critical tool because it addresses the economic foundations of criminal activity, of crime. It helps disrupt the financing of criminal networks. It supports victims and strengthens co-operation among jurisdictions across Canada that have enacted similar legislation. It will align us here in the Newfoundland and Labrador with national efforts to combat organized crime and human trafficking, while also strengthening crime prevention initiatives and supporting community organizations that work every day to keep our people safe.

The department has heard from residents throughout the province who are very concerned about rising crime, particularly crime involving guns and drugs. Civil forfeiture legislation responds to those concerns. It's a crime prevention, a crime disruption tool that will enhance public safety. It will reduce pressure on the police and our criminal justice resources and it will help remove the profits and assets that fuel criminal activity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: By seizing criminal property, the legislation aims to reduce recidivism and deter future criminal behaviour, including in many rural communities throughout our province. Speaker, this legislation is ultimately about making our communities safer, about supporting victims and essentially ensuring that crime does not pay.

I am pleased that this bill is now before the House for debate and consideration. It supports our government's commitment to safer communities for all of us and I ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in supporting this very important bill.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and stand to Bill 27, An Act Respecting Civil Forfeiture of Property. I want to begin by saying that we support the principle behind this legislation and we will be supporting Bill 27.

This is a very important piece of legislation for Newfoundland and Labrador, as we know. It gives the province another tool to address the financial benefits of unlawful activity, protect victims and prevent people from continuing to profit from activities that cause harm in our communities and, of course, to our people.

This is also legislation that was being worked on while we were in government, and, in fact, it was a commitment in our 2025 election campaign. We recognized that Newfoundland and Labrador needed to catch up with the rest of the country and we are one of only two provinces that have not had a civil forfeiture framework in place. So while we welcome the introduction of this legislation, I would also like to point out that it's an important piece of work that has been under consideration for some time.

When we talk about unlawful activity, we often focus on the criminal investigation, the charges laid and whether someone is ultimately convicted. But there is another part of this conversation that is sometimes overlooked: the money, the property and the financial benefits that can come from that activity. Someone can engage in unlawful activity and accumulate significant assets, property or wealth as a result. Even when a criminal prosecution does not result in a conviction, those assets may still be connected to unlawful activity.

This legislation recognizes that the financial side of unlawful activity needs to be addressed as well. It creates a civil process that focuses on the property itself rather than making forfeiture entirely dependent on the outcome of a criminal prosecution. That is an important distinction. Civil forfeiture does not replace criminal investigations or prosecutions, and it should never be treated as a substitute for them. It is an additional tool that can operate alongside the criminal justice system. The objective should be straightforward – people should not be able to benefit financially from unlawful activity and property should not be allowed to continue facilitating that activity.

I think it's important to consider what this legislation could mean for people who are caught up in unlawful activity through no fault of their own. Consider someone who owns a home, a vehicle or another significant asset only to discover that a spouse, tenant, family member or someone else has been using that property in connection with unlawful activity. That individual may have no involvement in the activity, may not have benefited from it and may have had very little control over what was happening. Yet, they could find themselves facing significant financial consequences and potentially losing property that represents years of work and investment.

This is why prosecutions for innocent third parties are also important. We need to ensure that the legislation is not simply about giving the Crown more authority to seize property. It must also be about ensuring that people who have done nothing wrong are treated fairly.

I'm also encouraged by the fact that the legislation creates a mechanism for enabling victims to seek compensation from money recovered through forfeiture. We know that people in this province are losing money through fraud, scams and other unlawful activity. For some victims, those losses can be absolutely devastating. The possibility of recovering some of those losses is an important part of the purpose of this legislation and, of course, we recognize that compensation is subject to requirements of the act and regulations and to the funds available. It is not an automatic guarantee that every victim will be made whole, but establishing a process through which eligible victims can potentially receive compensation is a positive step.

Speaker, we have examples here in our province when significant amounts of money have been seized during criminal investigations only for the related criminal proceedings to ultimately be stayed or not result in convictions. In those circumstances, money that had been seized was ultimately returned to the accused.

I want to be clear, the existence of an allegation or a criminal investigation does not, on its own, mean that somebody's property should be forfeited. There must be evidence and a proper legal process, but these local examples demonstrate why it is important to have a separate civil process available to examine whether property is connected to unlawful activity.

Under this legislation, the ability to pursue property would not necessarily end simply because a criminal prosecution does not result in a conviction. That is particularly important when we consider what has been happening in our justice system over the past year. We have heard increasing concerns about trial delays in the province, with shortages and capacity challenges throughout the justice system contributing to delays in getting matters before the courts.

People who are waiting for their day in court are affected, victims are affected, accused individuals are affected and the confidence that the public has in our justice system is, indeed, affected. This government needs to make addressing those pressures a priority. We need to see a clear plan to address staffing shortages, improve capacity and ensure that cases are moving through the

justice system in a timely way. Unfortunately, we have not seen that same level of urgency from this government when it comes to addressing those underlying challenges.

Civil forfeiture legislation is not a solution to trial delays. It does not replace the need for properly resourced courts, prosecutors, police or other justice system personnel, but it does recognize that the pursuit of property connected to unlawful activity should not always be entirely dependent on the outcome of a criminal prosecution. We need both a properly functioning criminal justice system and additional civil tools that this legislation provides.

When we support the intent of this legislation, we also recognize that these are significant powers. The ability to freeze property, require production of records, seek unexplained wealth orders and ultimately pursue forfeiture is not something that should be taken lightly. There must be a clear and consistent approach to how these powers are exercised. We need to ensure that the legislation is applied fairly, that the rights of legitimate property owners are respected and that there is appropriate judicial oversight.

The fact that these proceedings use a civil standard of proof rather than the criminal standard of proof beyond a reasonable doubt is an important distinction. The legislation must be administered carefully, particularly where the consequence for the individual or family could be significant.

Another area I want to touch on is how this legislation will actually operate. The bill establishes a director of civil forfeiture and provides a number of different mechanisms through which the director can pursue property. There are court-based forfeiture proceedings, interim preservation orders, unexplained wealth orders and the administrative forfeiture process. Each has its own requirements, timelines and procedures.

We recognize that having different options available to the director may be necessary, not every situation is the same and having different avenues to pursue forfeiture could make the process more effective, but we also need to consider the administrative burden that comes with establishing and managing all of these different processes.

There is a bit of irony here, given that this government has another piece of legislation before the House specifically aimed at reducing red tape. We certainly support finding ways to reduce unnecessary red tape, but we also need to make sure that the legislation we introduce is designed to be as straightforward and efficient as possible. We want to ensure that this does not become an overly complicated or expensive system either for government or individuals who may find themselves dealing with the office.

The government needs to be clear about the resources required to establish and maintain this office, including the staff, legal expertise, investigative capacity and administrative support. Ultimately, the success of this legislation will depend, not simply on the powers contained in the act, but on whether the office can exercise those powers efficiently, consistently and fairly.

I also want to speak briefly about the civil forfeiture account. One of the positive aspects of this legislation is that money recovered through civil forfeiture is directed into a dedicated account within the Consolidated Revenue Fund. The legislation identifies purposes for which those funds can be used, including victim compensation, crime prevention, addressing the impacts of unlawful activity and administering the act.

It is important that the public have confidence that money recovered through this process is being used appropriately and keeping with the intent of the legislation. That means transparency around how much money is recovered, how much is spent

administering the program, how much is directed toward victims and which other initiatives receive support. The annual reporting requirements are an important part of the accountability.

I would encourage the government to make that information publicly accessible and ensure that reporting provides enough detail for the public and Members of this House to understand how the legislation is working.

Ultimately, we support the introduction of the civil forfeiture framework in Newfoundland and Labrador. This legislation gives the province another way to address the financial proceeds of unlawful activity, helps prevent property from being used to facilitate further unlawful activity and creates the possibility of compensation for eligible victims. It also brings our province in line with an approach that has been in place in most of the country for many years.

The real test will be in how this legislation is implemented. We need to ensure that the innocent are protected; that victims are treated fairly; that the powers provided to the director are exercised responsibly and ….

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Given the hour of the day, as per the *Standing Orders*, can we –

AN. HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) 12:30.

SPEAKER: I apologize. It's 12:30, I apologize.

I guess I'm just hopeful on my part. I'm hungry for lunch.

Go ahead.

I ask the Member to continue. I apologize for that. I was getting excited when I saw 12 o'clock come up.

P. PARSONS: I won't stand between you and lunch for much longer.

So we need to ensure that innocent people are protected; that these victims are treated fairly; that the powers provided to the director are exercised responsibly; and that the public can see how the recovered funds are being used.

We will be watching closely as the office is established and the legislation is put into practise. This is an important step forward for the province. We are pleased to support Bill 27 and I thank and congratulate the minister.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Bill 27 is first and foremost about people, communities and public safety. Criminal organizations depend on money, assets and property to sustain their activities. Taking away those resources help weaken criminal networks and limit their ability to cause harm. The legislation creates opportunities to redirect forfeited funds towards initiatives that benefit the public.

Victims and crime prevention efforts can be supported through resources that would otherwise remain tied up in unlawful activity. The bill recognizes that organized crime often affects society's most vulnerable and difficult individuals and communities.

A community requires more than enforcement; it also requires prevention, victim support and long-term investment. Police agencies have identified civil forfeiture as a valuable tool that will complement their existing work.

The legislation responds to public concerns about crime by focusing on prevention and disruption rather than simply reacting after harm has occurred. It helps ensure that profits generated by unlawful activity are no longer available to fuel future crime. Safer communities, stronger victim supports and greater public confidence are among key outcomes this legislation seeks to achieve.

At its core, Bill 27 reinforces the civil principle that those who profit from unlawful activity should not be allowed to keep their benefits of that conduct.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Dwyer): The hon. the Member for Placentia – Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Boy, talk about redistribution. That's a big district.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

It's very nice to stand in this House and get the opportunity after a nice laugh as a group. I know myself and the MHA for Cape St. Francis had a good chuckle at the Speaker for that. It wasn't the shut down of Speaker earlier, it was the commentary after that I found really funny.

I do want to say thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and thank you to the minister for continuing this important file. As a former Justice minister touching this file initially and after the previous Justice minister, our current Leader of the Opposition, brought it forward, it's an interesting thing. It's very important for our province and I think you did a very good job explaining the intricacies of the legislation. I'm going to continue on with a few things that I've got to say.

I couldn't agree more with all of the colleagues that have spoke so far. This is pretty straightforward at its core. It's built around the principle that individuals should not be profiting from unlawful activities, as my colleague had said earlier, from Lewisporte - Twillingate. I couldn't agree more with that.

I think part of what we'll agree in this House is we want to ensure that individuals can't continue with activities that are nefarious in nature, intruding into our communities, and anything we can do, as a collective to impede that, make it challenging, make it difficult, make people think twice about, you know, if they purchased this house based on the proceeds of crime, then they could lose this house very easily.

So I think that's an important piece of this legislation and it brings us in line with other jurisdictions across the country, which is important. So whether it's drug trafficking, fraud or profit-driven offences, financial gain, we want to take that incentive away from that criminal behaviour. I think that's part and parcel of this whole piece of legislation.

We must ensure that these powers, though, are necessary, proportionate and accompany the appropriate safeguards. I think Peter Parker's uncle said it best that with power comes great responsibility. So I think it's very, very important that the responsibility is there to do this.

Legislation of this nature and the civil forfeiture framework in Newfoundland and Labrador is going to allow our province to pursue the forfeiture of property acquired through unlawful activities and to facilitate that transfer.

I know the minister highlighted this, that those things that are obtained through crime, but also doesn't require there to be criminal proceedings going forward. So I think that's a very, very important piece because we all know how long criminal proceedings can take. Some can be in the court system for a decade depending on appeals and all those things. This would get

around the entire process and make sure that those proceeds are put into the Crown.

When I get to it in my speech a little bit later, I think it's interesting that we're going to be putting it into certain areas, which I thought back all those – I won't say all those years ago because it's not that long ago, but a couple of years ago when we started the process, we were very focused on it not going in general revenue. Sorry to the Finance Minister, but I'm very excited that it's not gone there and it's going to go to help areas that we need to. I know the Member for Cape St. Francis is consoling him right now about that very topic, but we are going to get through this together on this file.

So it's not a new concept, as my colleague from Harbour Grace - Port de Grave had said. It's a framework that existed for a long time in other parts of the country. The Supreme Court of Canada has also recognized civil forfeiture as a legitimate area of provincial legislative authority. So the minister is correct in saying that's a good piece of legislation as well.

Any benefit experience that any other jurisdiction has experienced in this particular file would now transfer to here. We would see some of those benefits as well. That experience will also inform when we examine the bill in the future. As I've said many, many times that legislation in this House is built to be changed and improved on every time, and I'm glad that the minister has brought this forward to talk about today.

We will have some questions, of course. I thought that an interesting piece of this was the unexplained wealth orders, which is a really interesting piece as well, which allows the Supreme Court under specific legal conditions, when they're met, to require individuals to explain exactly how certain property was acquired and maintained, which is an important piece. If you can't explain where you got it, how can you say it's not from nefarious activity.

These provisions will be useful in addressing sophisticated financial arrangements where sources of substantial wealth are difficult to establish; however, we can also warrant careful scrutiny in this file as well. The legislation would grant great authority and significant powers to obtain personal financial information, and we should be very satisfied that the thresholds for this examination and exercise of these powers are appropriate.

This bill provides judicial oversight, which is important. Nonetheless, we should always examine whether the requirements for obtaining these orders adequately protect the individuals from reasonable intrusion. I think that we strike the balance in this piece of legislation with respect to that.

Bill 27 would also introduce administrative forfeiture, which allows certain property valued at $125,000 or less to be forfeited without obtaining a court order, provided the statutory requirements are met. While this approach may improve efficiencies, and I know the Members on the other side are talking about red tape like we are, we want to also ensure that it recognizes the importance of ensuring that it's done correctly. That balance is really, really important.

This bill also includes notice requirements for opportunities to dispute the forfeiture. These are necessary safeguards but their effectiveness will depend on whether the individuals will reasonably understand and exercise their rights within the prescribed timelines.

We also must consider the innocent property owners. Property connected to unlawful activity may involve family members, legitimate purchasers and others who have no involvement in the wrongdoing. I was happy that the minister referenced that in her speaking when she brought in this bill.

Bill 27 contains protections for the eligible interest holders as well. Our responsibility will ensure these protections are meaningful, not just in practice, but in principle.

The victim compensation and community benefits is an interesting concept as we've talked about before. Another feature would be the fact that these individuals can recover some of the funds or maybe all of the funds directed toward the victim compensation, crime prevention and remediation of the effects of the unlawful activity.

I'm going to hope to hear some examples of that through the question segment of this when we get there. I don't know if we'll get there today but we'll get there at some point in the future. It's worth supporting, making sure that those questions get answered because we may have a number of questions here but they're questions that people will want to know to ensure the legislation is strong and protects that balance that we've talked about, that the minister has also talked about.

I'm thinking that we're all going to be on the same page with respect to this. It is very good piece of legislation and I know my hon. colleague that spoke before me had mentioned that we're going to be supporting this but we will have questions as I keep continuing to say.

There are annual report requirements which are an important step towards accountability. We should also be able to assess whether the system is producing the results that we intended to and how much it is costing us to administer and whether those powers are being exercised fairly. That's an important piece, I think, for us to go with.

We should also seek those assurances that the relevant parties to these resources and expertise have the resources and expertise necessary to administer the framework effectively without creating unnecessary delays, costs and those requirements to navigate that process.

In closing, I just want to say that I think that this is great piece of legislation. I look forward to it coming to fruition. Anything we can do to remove money from criminal activity and criminals is a good thing and putting that money to good use for crime prevention and helping satisfy some victims' concerns is going to be a good thing. I'm glad that the minister brought forward this piece of legislation and continued moving forward on things.

We've seen a couple of pieces come forward. I know that the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay brought forward a piece of legislation and I passed out some credit for bringing that piece of legislation forward.

I think it's important that each government builds up on the previous government's legislation or agenda that they were working on. Not everything is going to be approved in the same way but it's important, in this case, that we move forward on a good piece of legislation.

Thank you to the minister. I look forward to the opportunity to ask a few questions during Committee stage. I just want to say thank you for the opportunity, Deputy 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, Deputy Speaker.

When I rise as a backbencher, it's always good to rise in this House and get to speak. Every opportunity I get to speak is, one, a learning experience for myself, but, two, it feels good to get up and standing and

support the Members on this side of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Speaker, this legislation is about modernizing the public safety framework on the *Civil Forfeiture Act*. Newfoundland and Labrador is closing a legislative gap and bringing itself in line with most Canadian jurisdictions. The province should have access to the same tools that are already available elsewhere to address property linked to unlawful activity.

Criminals increasingly rely on sophisticated financial networks, making modern enforcement tools essential. Deputy Speaker, we see that; we hear it. We know the scams that come in from foreign countries that primarily attack our seniors. We really need to stand together and protect our seniors in this society.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Civil forfeiture reflects the reality that disrupting criminal enterprises requires more than criminal prosecutions alone.

This legislation provides government with an additional avenue to address the proceeds and assets associated with unlawful conduct. The bill supports a coordinated national approach to combating organized crime, illicit financing and other serious unlawful activities. Adopting civil forfeiture demonstrates that Newfoundland and Labrador is prepared to play its full role in national public safety efforts.

The legislation is carefully designed as a civil process that respects constitutional boundaries and jurisdictional oversight. Bill 27 strengthens the province's ability to address emerging public safety challenges. This legislation is about ensuring Newfoundland and Labrador has the tools needed to meet today's realities, not yesterday's.

Deputy Speaker – I won't be long; I got a bowl of pea soup waiting for me for lunch too – public safety is a priority for every government. Organized crime, drug trafficking and the financial benefits that come from illegal activity have consequences for families and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, and we see it. We know the drug issues in this province. This government is addressing it, but we have to bring it to a halt.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: We will now have the tools to disrupt criminal activity, protect our communities and prevent individuals from profiting from unlawful conduct. At the same time, we must protect the rights of innocent property owners, respect due process and ensure that every individual is treated fairly under the law.

This objective is clear. These changes make our communities safer, these changes support the victims and these changes ensure the proceeds of unlawful activity are put toward the public good.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

It is, as always, my honour to stand in this hon. House and speak to the *Civil Forfeiture Act*, Bill 27. I want to say, first and foremost, we will be supporting this bill. I want to thank the minister for bringing this forward and certainly for the technical briefing that we had yesterday to delve into the details here about civil forfeiture.

I'll just mention a few points because I know that my colleagues have delved into some of the issues here. We do know that this has

been something that has been in place for two decades in other jurisdictions. So we're very happy to see this finally coming forward.

We know that civil forfeiture has close ties with the police and with enforcement agencies; however, it is an additional tool to help us with a number of different issues. In Newfoundland, when property is seized by the police due to its affiliation with unlawful activity, it is managed by a federally run program, as it stands.

The process is governed by federal legislation. The value of the seized property is split between the federal office and the province according to jurisdiction and involvement with the RNC and RCMP, but now this civil forfeiture creates an added layer for us to look at ways to deal with a myriad of issues that are happening in our cities and communities. Of course, it will give us the power to make a request to the court to initiate the seizure of property that the proceeds are an instrument of unlawful activity.

We hear a lot about drug houses. We hear a lot about grandparents scams. We hear a lot about different things like that that are impacting our population, and this will be one additional tool that will certainly help in the scheme there. Currently, the Newfoundland government has little control of how the proceeds from civil forfeiture are handled or spent. This legislation provides an opportunity for proceeds of criminal activity to be reappropriated back – and I really appreciate that – into vulnerable communities.

I just wanted to mention quickly an international scheme that came to my attention with our Canadian fugitive, Ryan Wedding, who was arrested after a decade on the run, and had his exorbitant motorcycle collection confiscated and auctioned with the proceeds going back to the Mexican public agency known as INDEP, returning the stolen assets to the people. Power to the people! It's fabulous.

That is awesome because, what happens is, that goes back to the public good. So wherever there's an opportunity, whether or not it is in a grandparents scam or something that's like that kind of international story as we see there, for the good to go back into either the individual who has been impacted by the criminal activity or an NGO where this money could go back into the community for crime prevention.

I'm sure the Members of the House know how important crime prevention is to me. I talk about restorative justice principles on an ongoing basis, about how we need to get to the roots of crime, because we can't just be punitive in our approaches, but this is one tool in the tool box that will certainly help with making communities safer. I do respect that the minister has brought this forward in the House.

One of the other things I noticed that the minister had spoke to was about how women, gender-diverse and Indigenous folks, in particular, obviously, are vulnerable in communities. Oftentimes we're not just talking about the impacts of trap houses and drug trafficking, but we're also talking about human trafficking.

This legislation – this overdue legislation – is certainly welcome to help along the way, I think in conjunction with a number of other things, certainly the call for restorative justice principles so that we can get at the start of it before we see people entering into criminal behaviour, but I am very, very supportive. We, certainly, in the NDP caucus, will be supporting.

Thank you very much, Minister.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

This is a very important bill. There are a few areas that I'd like to touch on in my remarks today.

The first one is around the proceeds of crime. I do think it's a good thing that this bill includes a special, I guess, account in the Consolidated Revenue Fund where the proceeds would go. I notice across the country that other provinces spend a lot of the proceeds on court costs and the internal costs that it costs to prosecute these cases.

I do note that BC, for example, of the $221 million that they've collected, they've spent $93 million on crime prevention. So I would encourage the government to take as much of the funds as they recoup as possible and spend that towards crime prevention, which would further go towards the government's goal of increasing safety in communities, Speaker.

Another area I'd like to touch on is, and I'm not lawyer, but I know that in our system we're innocent until proven guilty. While I do support this legislation – I don't know whether or not this is the first time we're kind of opening up this realm – this bill now does kind of change the balance of that where the owner now has to disprove that the money they have or the property they have is not from crime. So you're not innocent until proven guilty in terms of this legislation. The owner has to disprove that what they have is not the proceeds of crime. I can't say whether or not this is the first time this has happened, but that is an interesting change which is worthy of consideration.

The legislation talks about that the balance of probabilities will be used. So I know in workplace health and safety, and I've dealt with a lot of appeals on behalf of constituents, a lot of times this concept of the balance of probabilities is used whereby the balance of probabilities for the injured worker is not the same as the balance of probabilities for WorkplaceNL. I often disagree with how the balance of probabilities is judged.

So I do think that's interesting, and I'm sure that the Crown and the Justice Department will appropriately use that balance of probabilities concept, but it is kind of a grey area. I do support the legislation, but I imagine that the government will get some criticism about this from different organizations in Canada, but that's okay.

I also want to talk about the priorities in the Department of Justice and Public Safety. I think it's very important to acknowledge and recognize that politicians and ministers or the government does not direct the day-to-day activities of the Department of Justice and Public Safety, and I've come across that in numerous different ways. Some members of the public think that they should but I absolutely do not think that they should, and it is a tricky balance.

I heard the minister talk about the fact that they're going to be adding new staff, a new director and new staff to support the director in this new area of the Department of Justice and Public Safety. There is only one department, one deputy minister, and I guess the director will fall under ADMs.

The Department of Justice, I know from my previous experience, they work with, for example, highway enforcement officers in prosecuting things under the *Highway Traffic Act*. They work with occupational health and safety inspectors to prosecute occupational health and safety violations under the Occupational Health and Safety legislation. They're a very busy legal team in the Department of Justice and Public Safety.

One area, for example, in the previous government, when we were in government, we introduced changes and received revised opinions from the Department of Justice in terms of whose responsibility it was to take people to court under the landlord tenant act and regulations.

Previously, there was the understanding that the members of the public would have to do that, and then, all of a sudden, there was a new opinion around, okay, well, the Department of Justice is going to do that.

Since that legislation has changed, I don't believe any landlords or tenants have been brought to court from the Department of Justice and the lawyers and the Crown – I'm not exactly sure how that works within the Department of Justice – but I do note that they are very busy in the Department of Justice. They have many competing demands. Again, there is not an infinite number of resources in terms of prosecuting Occupational Health and Safety, the Residential Tenancies, the *Highway Traffic Act*, now these civil forfeitures and all the other important criminal and civil things that the Department of Justice lawyers would spend their time on.

I just think we're now adding another thing that the Department of Justice and the lawyers and the Crown are going to have to balance between which things do they prosecute.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

S. STOODLEY: I'll conclude with those remarks.

L. DEMPSTER: Just recess the House until 2 p.m.

S. STOODLEY: Okay, I'd like to recess the House until 2.

Thank you, Speaker.

SPEAKER: Okay, thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: Adjourn debate.

S. STOODLEY: Adjourn debate, okay.

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that we adjourn debate.

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, Deputy Speaker.

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

SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do now recess.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

This House is now recessed until 2 p.m.

Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Today, in the Speaker's gallery, I would like to welcome Statutory Officers of the Newfoundland and Labrador Legislature: Jay McGrath, representing the Office of the Auditor General; Kerry Hatfield, Information and Privacy Commissioner; Wilma MacInnis, Child and Youth Advocate; Pamela Dawe, Seniors' Advocate, acting; and Bradley Moss, Citizens' Representative.

They're not with us this afternoon, but I also wanted to recognize, of course, our Commissioner for Legislative Standards and our Chief Electoral Officer who couldn't make it here this afternoon.

Statutory Officers perform an important role in our system of democracy, supporting the Legislature in its accountability and scrutiny functions by carrying out independent oversight responsibilities assigned to them by statute. The important work they do affects people of all ages across every area of our province.

On behalf of this hon. House, I want to thank them and the employees who work in their offices for their service and dedication to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also today, I would like to welcome to our public gallery, members from the St. John's Mi'kmaw Women's Circle, which is the subject of a Member's statement. We have Lorinda and Stephanie White, Gloria Powell, Melinda Cooper, Lorraine Singleton, Bev McLean and Jo-Ann Prosper.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome to the public gallery, Maria Gentle, Executive Director with the YWCA St. John's, which is the subject of another Member's statement today.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also joining us in the gallery today are Grade 9 students of public service employees, who are participating in the annual Take Our Kids to Work initiative.

This is a national event by the Students Commission of Canada that aims to provide young people with meaningful opportunities to experience the world of work, discover diverse career pathways and connect their learning to future possibilities.

Welcome to our Chamber.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: As well, in the public gallery are Lucas Ellsworth with his daughter, Ramona, and Linda Roberts, who are representing the Newfoundland and Labrador Down Syndrome Society, which is the subject of another Member's statement today.

Welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Also visiting the public gallery as part of a Member's statement today are Elyse McGrath, Maya Bayliss, Neddal Ayad and Olivia Lynch.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Last but certainly not least – we got a full crowd here today – Jessica Peddle, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Nurse Practitioner Association, which is the subject of a Ministerial Statement today. She is joining us today in the public gallery as well.

Welcome, Jessica.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

SPEAKER: Today, we'll hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, Placentia - St. Mary's, Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, Waterford Valley, Windsor Lake and Mount Pearl North, with leave.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the St. John's Mi'kmaw Women's Circle, a group of Mi'kmaw women and friends united by a shared commitment to learning, preserving, celebrating and sharing Mi'kmaw culture.

Established in 2013, with just four women, they have grown to approximately 30 members, creating a vibrant community that celebrates Indigenous traditions, strengthens relationships and fosters greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The circle is committed to both learning and teaching Indigenous culture, sharing their culture with schools, community organizations and at public events, helping ensure that Indigenous knowledge and traditions are passed on to future generations.

Through partnerships with organizations such as the Moose Hide Campaign, the Red Dress Campaign, Orange Shirt Day and the Purple Ribbon Campaign, they help raise awareness of violence, the impacts of residential schools, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and other issues affecting individuals, families and communities.

This group demonstrates that cultural preservation is about more than maintaining traditions. It is about building relationships, supporting one another, giving back and creating a stronger and more inclusive community.

Join me in celebrating the St. John's Mi'kmaw Women's Circle and their contribution to cultural awareness, community well-being and reconciliation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate one of Placentia's own, Stephen Mullaley of Freshwater, on his induction into the International Softball Congress Hall of Fame. This is an extraordinary achievement and one that brings tremendous pride to Steve's family, his community and our entire province.

Steve began his remarkable softball career in Michigan as a teenager, embarking on what would become an outstanding 17-year career at the highest levels of the sport. Through talent, determination, hard work and an unwavering commitment to excellence, he established himself as one of softball's premier power hitters and became a seven-time, all-world player.

He was also part of six International Softball Congress World Tournament championship teams, including two championships with the Kitchener Rivershark Twins and four with the Hill United Chiefs.

What is particularly impressive is Steve's evolution as an athlete. After establishing himself as a powerhouse outfielder, he worked tirelessly to become one of the game's top defensive first basemen.

Steve has represented Freshwater, Placentia and Newfoundland and Labrador with tremendous pride on the world stage.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Stephen Mullaley on this very well-deserved honour. We are incredibly proud of you, Steve.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the YWCA St. John's Circle of Distinction Awards, which celebrates the achievements and contributions of women and gender-diverse people in our community.

These awards honour individuals who break barriers, advance social justice, create opportunities for others and make a lasting difference. This year's nominees and recipients reflect the strength, leadership and generosity found throughout our province.

I am especially pleased to recognize Kelly White, a resident of Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, who was nominated for the Circle of Distinction Award. It is wonderful to see someone from our district recognized for her amazing contributions. Congratulations to Kelly on this well-deserved nomination.

I also want to recognize Executive Director Maria Gentle and the entire YWCA St. John's team for their long-standing commitment to supporting individuals and families and building a stronger, more inclusive Newfoundland and Labrador. Their leadership and dedication make a meaningful difference to our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating this year's nominees and recipients, recognizing Kelly White, and thanking the YWCA St. John's for its continued leadership and commitment to our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Waterford Valley.

J. KORAB: Speaker, I am happy to be able to stand here today to acknowledge Canada's Down Syndrome Awareness Week, which took place last month from October 25 to October 31.

This Awareness Week puts an important spotlight on the education, advocacy and representation that the Down's syndrome community does every day.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Down Syndrome Society is a group of volunteers, parents, friends and families committed to raising awareness and understanding of Down's syndrome, and to removing societal barriers that place limits on their children's ability to be valued and contributing members of our community.

Ramona and Lucas are both from Waterford Valley and met each other through the society. They have been friends ever since. Ramona is seven and loves Rainbow Riders. She has benefited greatly from their therapy program. Lucas is 11 and enjoys participating in the Special Olympics program. Lucas's mother, Allison, is also a board member of the society.

If you want to learn more, check out the Down Syndrome Society. They're a great resource.

Honourable Members, please join me in recognizing Ramona, Lucas and all the incredible individuals in our community.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Windsor Lake.

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to recognize individuals who went to extraordinary lengths to help a mother, Bouchra Marbouhi, and her daughter Tamara. Imagine Bouchra's nightmare when she learned Tamara had been taken from Newfoundland and Labrador to Egypt

by Tamara's father who was not allowed to leave Canada.

The story included Kathy Porter, Elyse McGrath, Olivia Lynch, Neddal Ayad and Maya Bayliss who have helped the family in Canada by travelling to Egypt to be with Bouchra throughout the court process there. They witnessed numerous attempts to physically recover Tamara until they finally succeeded in Cairo in a scene you'd only see in a movie.

Always thinking of others, these women want everyone to know that Bouchra is the real hero. She embodies the meaning of motherhood and determination. They've been here in the worst imaginable circumstances but I've seen her continue to fight for her daughter every day. Bouchra was never the victim, always remaining the fighter, even on her darkest days.

While Bouchra and Tamara are reunited in Egypt, they fight to get them home to Newfoundland and Labrador. Bouchra is forever grateful for people who kept her in their thoughts. Kathy, Elyse, Olivia, Neddal and Maya deserve recognition and a thank you for their selfless efforts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Does the Member have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

SPEAKER: Leave has been granted.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

L. STOYLES: Thank you, Speaker.

It is with a heavy heart that I stand here today and pay tribute to a dear friend. Sandra Baggs passed away this week with her family by her side.

As the deputy mayor of CBS, Sandra has certainly made her mark in municipal politics her in our province. Back almost 30 years ago, we met through the Northeast Avalon Joint Council. Sandra was deputy mayor of CBS at that time. She worked tirelessly within her community and beyond, serving on every committee during her almost 20 years on council.

Sandra also served as chairperson for the Northeast Avalon Joint Council where she led this group in many joint projects on the Avalon. She also worked with the CBS arena board, organizing special events such as their main fundraiser weekly bingos.

Family always came first, as she raised her three sons, and was always there to support her grandchildren.

Sandra will be laid to rest tomorrow by her church community where she was an active member.

Speaker, I ask all Members to rise in a moment of silence in memory of the late Sandra Baggs.

Thank you.

(Moment of silence.)

SPEAKER: Thank you.

You may be seated.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Next week is National Nurse Practitioner Week, and I rise today in this hon. House to recognize our dedicated nurse practitioners

who are a vital part of our health care system.

I also welcome the President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Nurse Practitioner Association, Jessica Peddle, who is with us here today in the gallery.

Our government celebrates all nurse practitioners across the province who provide high-quality care in emergency rooms, primary care, long-term care, community health, in-patient services and beyond.

Budget 2026 committed $6.3 million for a new Nurse Practitioner Funding Model to support our platform commitment to make sure anyone can see a nurse practitioner for free.

We will continue working with nurse practitioners to ensure our campaign commitment that anyone can see a nurse practitioner at no cost with no strings attached, and I encourage those interested to please contact my department.

Thirty-seven nurse practitioners are participating, of whom 17 provide continuous care, while 20 offer episodic services.

I also thank the association for its continued support and partnership on a comprehensive occupational review to ensure nurse practitioners are appropriately integrated within our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in wishing these compassionate and highly skilled health care providers a happy National Nurse Practitioner Week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement.

Speaker, nurse practitioners play an incredibly important role in our health care system, providing essential services to patients and families across Newfoundland and Labrador.

I join the minister in acknowledging Jessica Peddle, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Nurse Practitioners Association. We worked closely with Jessica during our time in government and greatly appreciated her advocacy, passion and collaboration in creating the pilot program the minister is referencing today.

Speaker, it's great to hear that the program is working as we intended, and I thank the minister for the update. While it's great to hear this program has expanded, I need to be clear; this government is nowhere near fulfilling their election promise.

In fact, while this government celebrates the program's success, Forteau, the only health care system in my district, currently has no nurse practitioner. Residents deserve access to these essential services close to home, and this government must recognize that celebrating a successful program means precious little to communities that are still going without these important services.

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 his statement.

The NDP takes this opportunity to thank nurse practitioners for all the work that they do throughout the public health care

system. We recognize the need for more of them across the province, and that is why we call on government to pay nursing and nurse practitioner students for their work terms, as was promised. More would choose to study or upgrade their skills to the NP level if only they had the financial means to do so.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to highlight the first phase of our 10-Year Agricultural Strategy, and I'd certainly like to thank our staff, Stephen Balsom and Tara Morgan, in our gallery today for their work on this strategy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. FORSEY: Yesterday, we launched public consultations for the strategy. This is an important step in shaping the future of Newfoundland and Labrador's agriculture sector.

We are working alongside farmers, food producers and retailers to grow the agriculture and agrifoods sector, strengthen our local food supply and increase access to local, affordable food.

Feedback from those working in the industry is essential as we develop the strategy to create new opportunities and ensure the next generation of farmers and new entrants have the support they need to succeed.

Speaker, there is no substitute for lived experience. Those who work in and support our agriculture sector understand its opportunities and challenges first-hand. We want to hear their ideas on how to create new economic opportunities in rural regions; making land available for agriculture; support the next generation of farmers; increase local food production and expand indoor growing; extend the growing season; and reduce barriers facing both new and established farmers.

I encourage everyone to have their say by visiting engageNL.ca or contacting our department. The consultation is open until January 29, 2027.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to acknowledge the familiar faces in the gallery of former staff that I had during my time in that department. I thank the minister for his statement.

Mr. Speaker, a 10-Year Agriculture Strategy was not promised as a consultation; it was promised as a plan. I know first-hand how important farming is to food security and supply, and we need them to do more.

Newfoundland and Labrador's farmers were told this government would take action to grow the industry, strengthen food security and take opportunities in rural communities. One year later, what we have is a consultation asking farmers to identify challenges they have been talking about for a long time.

Farmers already know the issues. They know the barriers to accessing land. They know the challenges of rising costs, labour shortages, succession planning and expanding production. They have been asking for solutions. Consultation is important, Mr. Speaker, but leadership means bringing forward a vision, clear targets and concrete actions now.

The question now is simple, when will this government stop asking what the problems are and start delivering the solutions they promised?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Given the high levels of food insecurity in our province, we sorely need a strategy to boost production right here at home, but more needs to be done in the short term. Soaring fuel and fertilizer costs risk putting the farmers we currently have out of business. I suggest connecting with the Food Producers Forum for engagement.

We, therefore, ask the government to find targeted solutions to help farmers weather the economic storm so we don't lose the producers we already have.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Innu Grand Chief had to publicly confront the Premier today just to get a meeting after months of being ignored. The Innu has said that this government wants to develop their land without respecting the Innu's histories, their rights or giving them a seat at the table.

Why has the Premier allowed the relationship with the Innu Nation to deteriorate to this point, and why did they have to protest just to get a meeting?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me take the opportunity to set the record straight.

On Monday, we received a request from the Innu for a meeting. They told us they would be at the Mining Conference here in St. John's and requested a meeting. We agreed to that meeting – delighted to agree to that meeting.

We met this morning right after I spoke at the conference, and we had a discussion that gave me an opportunity to introduce Gary Smith. It gave the opportunity for myself and minister to talk about our plan for fast-tracking their land claims agreement.

We took that opportunity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Grand Chief publicly has said that Churchill Falls will not move forward without the Innu being respected.

Does the Premier agree that the deal cannot proceed without the consent of Innu Nation?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, as I just said, we met this morning. We discussed

many outstanding issues with the Innu, and both myself and the minister have agreed to continue to have those discussions with the Innu and have agreed to go to their community of Sheshatshiu to continue those discussions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

Yesterday, the Premier said everybody is entitled to their opinion, no matter how ill-informed they might be.

Why does the Premier think anyone who questions his Churchill Falls deal, or his refusal to debate the final agreements is ill-informed?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, the answer to that question had nothing to do with the Churchill Falls agreement. As a matter of fact, it was disappointing, though, to hear the leader opposite talk about Quebec in his scrum and not talk about the Churchill Falls agreement that has been negotiated on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We all understand that the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal Party has voted against the new Churchill Falls agreement – a deal that delivers more for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I would think that if the Member opposite could stand up and support the 2024 agreement, he could certainly stand up and support an agreement that the delivers more.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: I asked a lot of questions about details in that agreement. The Premier failed to or couldn't answer it over the course of this week. Now he doesn't seem to understand that I had to talk about Quebec because they are the ones that signed the deal with us, Premier.

The Premier believes people are ill-informed about the deal, so maybe he should accept some responsibility for that.

Why doesn't he take the opportunity to, number one, answer questions in the House of Assembly about the deal or, here's another idea, hold the debate on the 17 final agreements so Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can be informed about this deal that the Premier is forcing down their throats?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let's take the opportunity to talk about what's in the agreement. Let's talk about what the Liberal deal of 2024 had in their agreement that they all voted yes to and the new agreement that they all voted no to. Let's talk about the 1,990 megawatts that was in their agreement. Our new agreement has up to 2,350 megawatts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: They voted no.

Let's talk about no guaranteed access to multiple market pricing options, which their agreement did not have, but they voted yes. But when we put forward an agreement that has a 985-megawatt transmission portfolio, they voted no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Yesterday, Hydro-Québec released a report suggesting it may need to import electricity from neighbouring provinces or the United States within just three years. Hydro-Québec projects an extremely high increase in the demand for energy in the coming years and energy deficits as early as 2029.

Will the Premier take advantage of this new level of need by Quebec and get more for Newfoundland and Labrador before he slams the 50-year deal down Newfoundlanders and Labradorians' throats?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, let me once again talk about what we have and what we didn't have. What we didn't have in the 2024 agreement – which again the Members opposite, the Liberal government voted yes for. There was no premium-pricing option and now we have a premium-pricing option built into this new agreement where we can sell Churchill Falls power to Hydro-Québec at 150 per cent – 150 per cent of the contract price; 50 per cent higher value for surplus power and flexibility to sell the power or to recall it back when we need it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: The problem is there's an issue with the contract price. The Hydro-Québec report says, according to Bloomberg, paints a picture of a province with an ever-increasing appetite for electricity, which will require unprecedented investments in Quebec to satisfy Quebec's customer needs.

I hate to say I told you so, but does the Premier regret giving away the replacement-based pricing that we had, given it is clear now that Quebec will need to build new energy infrastructure?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, the Member opposite is obviously quite worried about Quebec and their power needs. He actually signed a 50-year deal himself and now he's complaining about it.

But I'll tell you what this government isn't going to do. We're not going to sit on our hands and let the world get out in front of us. As a matter of fact, today, we just announced 10 land parcels for our offshore oil – 10 bids – the first time in years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: So the government that he led, that he was the premier of, failed to move anything forward. We have been moving things forward and now they're opposed to it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Well done to the minister for putting the oil in the ground. I didn't know he could do that.

The Hydro-Québec report states that in order to meet demand, the utility plans to add –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

J. HOGAN: – 24,000 megawatts of generation capacity by 2041.

Again, I hate to say I told you so – I really do – but does the Premier regret giving away replacement-based pricing that we had, given it's clear that Quebec will need to build energy infrastructure?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd be remiss if I didn't address the preamble. While I may not have put the oil in the ground, I can guarantee you that, they never took any out of the ground.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: For 10 years, they let an industry fail. For 10 years, they disappointed the fine men and women that work in our oil and gas industry, brushed them aside, dismissed them and did nothing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: Today, we had bids for 10 parcels, the first time in years – $260 million.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Speaker, we will progress this project forward. We will not do what they've done. We will not make those same mistakes. We will talk to the companies. He admitted yesterday he talked to Equinor once in 173 days – once.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Thank you, Speaker.

The Quebec CHPE and NECEC contracts expire before the Premier's 50-year Churchill Falls deal. Can the Premier let us know and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know what happens in the future if there's no CHPE or NECEC price because Quebec is no longer able to sell to the US? How do we value our energy then, or is that still to be negotiated?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Speaker, it's called optionality. We have built into this new agreement the optionality to sell our power to Quebec or not to sell it to Quebec. My preference would be that we will grow industry in Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: – so we will never sell any power to Quebec because we will be using it to build our own mines and our own resources and our own industries right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

This week five Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with energy experience, including Gabe Gregory, Des Sullivan and former deputy minister, David Vardy, wrote an open letter to the Premier raising serious concerns about his Churchill Falls deal.

They say the agreement repeats the mistakes of 1969, abandons market-based pricing and ignores key recommendations of the Premier's own review committee.

Will the Premier listen to these experts, honour his election promise and put this deal to a referendum before signing the final agreements?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

For the record, the Premier has already met with them all, and what I will say is this, they didn't listen to him. They didn't even want an independent review panel. They were misled by a former premier who took over the negotiations. They talk about negotiators leaving. Their lead negotiator resigned and walked away.

So they cannot sit over there and pretend to be something that they're not. They signed a 50-year deal and now they're opposed to it. They voted for less; now they're opposed to more. They have failed the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and that's why they're sitting over there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, maybe the Premier and his Energy Minister can look at or listen to what people are saying because they're saying that this government is failing them. These people are calling for a province-wide referendum, which the Premier promised on the day he launched his election campaign, during the campaign and on the night he won the election.

Given that the Premier has acknowledged the deal won't be signed until at least March of 2027, next year, he now actually does have time. There is no rush.

What's the Premier's real excuse for breaking his referendum promise, breaking his word with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Perhaps the Member across the way should stand and tell everyone why he broke his promises on transparency. Perhaps he should tell people about Snow's Lane. Perhaps he should tell people about the 106 hotel. Perhaps he should get up and talk about all that. He should talk about why he supported a 50-year deal. Now he's opposed to it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: He should talk about why he supported $232 billion; now he's opposed to $277 billion. He voted yes for less and no for more and now he has a problem with it. Do you know what it is, Mr. Speaker? It's pure politics.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Deflect, deflect, deflect, that should be their three main catchphrases.

Speaker, it is particularly interesting that the Premier is now dismissing the concerns of David Vardy, because in January of 2025, when he was the Opposition Leader, he himself quoted Mr. Vardy here in the House of Assembly when he was sitting here and relied on his expertise to make the case for an independent review.

He recognized Mr. Vardy's experience on the Churchill River Management Expert Panel. He was, by the way, appointed by Premier Furey at the time and cited his call for independent scrutiny.

Why was David Vardy's expertise good enough for the Premier when he was in the Opposition, but suddenly, not worth listening to now that he is in government?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, their time machine is broke. This Premier hasn't dismissed anyone. He's listened to everyone who has wanted to have his ear. He has listened to everyone.

But I tell you who he has listened to specifically: the experts that negotiated the deal. The same experts that they utilized to negotiate their deal, which was good. According to them, it was great. They voted for it.

We listened to the IRP, an independent review panel that came in. They didn't want one – they did not want one. So now here we are with a deal that's better. Once again, I will say it; they don't want it because they couldn't get it. At the end of the day, this deal is the best deal for the province and they're opposed to it for pure politics.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, I think the Opposition Leader and myself and other Members on this side have said very clearly that we will support a deal that is in the best interests of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We don't feel that this deal is. It's as simple as that.

Former PC Premier Brian Peckford and former PC leader Ches Crosbie have wrote to the Premier calling on him to pause the Churchill Falls negotiations and undertake an independent review, arguing that the proposed deal falls short of the 2024 MOU. The Premier's PC predecessors says: "Unlike in the 2024 MOU, there is no reopener and no offramp."

This week the Premier dismissed them and their concerns. But this is much different than when the Premier was in Opposition – once again flip-flop – when he celebrated Peckford for his tenacity and his accomplishments.

Again, why is the Premier only interested in listening to people when they agree with him?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you who didn't disagree with the Premier, former Premier Roger Grimes and former Premier Dwight Ball when they stood down on the wharf the day the announcement was made, alongside Prime Minister Carney, and said how great this deal was and how good it is for the province. They actually said there's no way that the Liberals could vote against it but, boy, were they wrong.

At the end of the day, we have the best deal for this province. A deal far better than they got and because they couldn't bring it across the line, now they're opposed to it – pure politics.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, we've got an Energy Minister who calls certain people who oppose the PC deal, do-nothings – a complete insult. We have a Premier who thinks people are ill-informed.

When will this government acknowledge that the public are against their deal, stop insulting them and start listening and deliver on the promise of a referendum?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't get down in the mud.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: They took a nine-second clip from a speech and they utilized it as a weapon. So they can do and say what they want, but I can tell you if we want to talk about do-nothings, think about the last 10 years, because there was nothing done in this province. Not one thing for our oil and gas. Not one thing for our mining industry. Not one thing for the men and women of Newfoundland and Labrador in the trades – not one thing.

If he wants to utilize words, he should think about his flip-flops because I think he got the wrong colour ones on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, coming from a minister and a Premier who said that we're back in the oil industry is interesting. Let's remind them of Hebron, let's remind them of West White Rose, two projects. Let's remind them of the 42 million barrels of oil that came out of the ground while the Opposition Leader now, when he was the premier.

How can this minister stand and say nothing was done? It is just not true, but it's on brand for this government. They say things that simply are not true over and over again and yes, Finance Minister, people do begin to believe it.

SPEAKER: Is there a question?

The hon. the Member, is there a question?

F. HUTTON: I asked him how he can say this about an oil industry, which is one of the cornerstones of our economy, and how he can continually say that we did nothing during that period of time

SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Energy and Mines.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

I didn't realize that they actually put the oil in the ground, according to what he just said there. That's pretty amazing.

Mr. Speaker, our oil and gas industry was stagnant under the previous administration, and they know it. At one time, we sat in here and they touted 650 potential Hebrons. They delivered on zero. That's how many – zero. They had 10 years to get Bay du Nord across the line – zero. Hebron was done before they came into power – zero. If they want to talk about mining starts, they did nothing.

They did nothing. They left the province in shambles, in debt that it can't handle. We're here to pick up the pieces and we're doing a good job. And today's bids, the 10 bids, guess what?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: That proves to not only the province, but the entire oil and gas industry that Newfoundland and Labrador is back in business.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Justice would not answer a simple yes or no question, so I will try again today.

Has there been any contact with the chief justice in the last year in relation to the Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission, yes or no?

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Not sure what the “oh” was about, Speaker. I’m going to answer a question, hopefully.

We’ll have an update on that in the coming days, if not next week. We’re working on getting that completed. The Minister of Justice is heavily involved, as we all are, and we’ll have something out on that in the next week.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PARSONS: Well, Speaker, I say to the Deputy Premier, why don’t you let your minister get up and answer? She’s quite capable of answering a question.

Speaker, realistically, there is no time for the commission to be appointed and complete its work by year-end.

Does the government have plans to bring new or amending legislation to the House in this sitting in relation to the Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

B. PETTEN: Stay tuned.

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

P. PARSONS: Stay tuned – it sounds like we are all watching an episode of *Days of Our Lives* in here in this House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, is the government doing work behind the scenes, in secret and behind closed doors in relation to gerrymandering the electoral boundaries?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: Speaker, there are a lot of bigger issues out in this province facing us today. I deal with them every day; we all do here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: (Inaudible) platform is still alive and well: safer communities, better health care, lower taxes, jobs and affordability. This Member has to get up in the House of Assembly day after day after day and asking about the electoral boundaries bylaws –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

B. PETTEN: They'll be done. The commission will be set up. We're going to have something on it in the next week or so.

To spend our time in the House of Assembly trying to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is it that difficult for Members to maintain order in this hon. House?

The hon. the minister.

B. PETTEN: Thank you, Speaker.

To waste time in the House of Assembly asking questions about something that the majority of the province has no idea or no interest in. There will be something announced on it in a week's time. I would tell her to go do her research and get some better material for the House of Assembly.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

L. DEMPSTER: Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Labrador Affairs said she had met with the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, the council and the chamber.

Is this accurate and when did these meetings take place on the DCIA?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, just to clarify, she asked about Team Labrador and what meetings they had. I said, actually, I had met with the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay multiple times as the minister of Health and Community Services – so many titles, Speaker – and also as Minister of Women and Gender Equality, and also as Minister of Labrador Affairs and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. We have met multiple times. I've also met multiple times with the chamber representing my department, Speaker.

Another thing I just want to clarify, Team Labrador was set up to make sure that the messages and the information was brought back to ministers. Ministers, in the last two months, have gone up to Labrador to meet with (inaudible) –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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, Team Labrador that was going to go out and gauge the concerns of Labradorians around this Churchill Falls deal, the minister said yesterday she will not be rushing the process. But the Churchill Falls deal is supposed to be done by December 31, so there is a rush.

Will she be able to show some real consultation and report on real meetings? Because all we've heard two months in is they're developing a website to gauge people's feedback.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Labrador Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, that's not what I said. I said one of the things we're doing is actually developing a website so people can reach out and arrange meetings and consultations

with us as Team Labrador. But, Speaker, when the Premier spoke of Team Labrador, it was so that issues and concerns in the region could be brought back to the ministers and government departments, Speaker.

But do you know something? She may be complaining that Team Labrador hasn't been out there, but who's been out there? The ministers, Speaker. The ministers of the department have been going out. The Minister of Health, the Minister of Housing has gone up, the Minister of Justice has gone up and the Minister of Education has gone up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. EVANS: Speaker, the ministers have gone up themselves, which is far more than what I can say they've done, Speaker, in the last few years (inaudible) –

SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

J. HOGAN: Speaker, I have to follow up on an answer. The Deputy Premier basically said electoral boundaries and democracy is not important. There are other things that are more important. It is very important but what he did –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

J. HOGAN: It's fine, you can argue whether he said it or not, but he did say that we are working on it.

Now, the legislation says the first step is for a letter to go from the Attorney General to the chief judge. That's the first step. So what are they working on if the first step hasn't been done? Work is supposed to be done by the committee, which hasn't been appointed.

So, Deputy Premier, what are you working on behind the scenes in relation to electoral boundaries?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: God, they've got a lot to worry about here today, Speaker.

The letter.

SPEAKER: Any more questions?

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

J. HOGAN: We've asked about this in Estimates and in the House of Assembly and the answer was we will work it expeditiously.

Speaker, that was seven months ago. The Deputy Premier and the Attorney General can't write one letter to the chief justice in seven months?

So I ask anyone: What are you doing?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: We're working on safer communities, better health care –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: – lower taxes, affordability, jobs, jobs and jobs and a better deal for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

We learned through the media that the greenhouse gas emission projections for 2030 will overshoot our goal by two megatonnes, which is absolutely unacceptable.

The Premier responded that he hopes to meet 2030 climate targets. Yet in their blue book, they stated: "Without immediate and decisive measures, it is increasingly unlikely that the province will meet its 2030 emission reduction targets …."

So I ask the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change: When can people expect to see a finished climate action plan and those decisive measures begin?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: I know there's something else but I can't think of it now off the top of my head.

Anyway, go ahead. Close enough.

A. BARBOUR: Speaker, I'm so happy that she asked this question because I get to clear the air. We know the media took the narrative and twisted it and wrote what they wanted and they didn't say the truth.

So the truth is –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I want to hear the minister. I don't want to hear anybody else.

SPEAKER: The hon. the minister.

I'm going to reset the clock.

A. BARBOUR: Thank you.

The truth is what's in the media and what was ATIPPed back in July was a draft model. Now, how can you take a draft and say this is what we have and put it out in the media and talk about it? The department said we don't want to give out the draft because we knew this was going to happen, and here we are today and it's happening.

This model is under development and the media and everything that was based and put out there was based on a snapshot of a draft model, not the final model.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I want to hear the Member.

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to remind the public that the PCs and Liberals publicly opposed the federal government's gas emissions cap. Hope doesn't stand a chance.

We continue to see new governments elected, present detailed plans to tackle the climate emergency and say all the right words, only for the plans to collect dust and we end up starting over all over again.

I ask the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change, why should the public trust that her government will finally act?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what the public should be, they should be thankful that they don't have an NDP government because they would have a government that is fully opposed to oil and gas – fully opposed. Their federal leader is out saying it daily, he wants no oil and gas whatsoever.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: We will produce oil and gas in this province as long as we have it offshore and the world needs it. We are a better, clearer, greener option for the world. We stand by that. We all –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

L. PARROTT: – know how this works.

At the end of the day, we pay for everything we do based on industry. If we didn't have industry, if we didn't have mining, if we didn't have oil and gas, we would have nothing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, Western Memorial Regional Hospital radiation department is helping so many residents to fight cancer while at home and near their towns with radiation services.

Patients have to travel to St. John's to have a PET scan, a short procedure but a long trip for people with cancer. The PET scanner services was removed from the original commitment to have this included at the Western Memorial. The former minister stated that the PET scan should be available in Corner Brook in 2027.

I ask the minister: Can you confirm that the PET scanning services will be available in Corner Brook in 2027?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

The PET scanner in Corner Brook is indeed a blue book commitment of ours, Mr. Speaker. We do have these constructions meetings for the PET/CT scanner currently underway. They are progressing very well.

The timeline is by the end of 2027 to have that PET scanner in Corner Brook to serve the people of the West Coast. That also includes making sure that we do have everything in place, not only with respect to the infrastructure there, but, of course, with the staff that's needed as well.

We will deliver on this promise, Mr. Speaker, a blue book commitment, by the end of 2027.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: I thank the former minister and the current minister for that great news.

Speaker, recruitment and retention of specialists, professionals to operate the PET scanner, are vital for these services to be available to the residents who now have to travel to St. John's.

I ask the minister: Can the minister update the House, and the residents of Western Newfoundland who rely upon these services, the status of the recruitment of these necessary professionals to ensure that the services will be available in the Western Memorial Regional Hospital in 2027?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

We are, indeed, planning as we are going forward, not only with the infrastructure that's needed for the PET scanner at Western Memorial, but we're also moving forward, currently, at the same time, with the recruitment initiatives. We are certainly going to make sure that, when that PET scanner is operational, it is up and running for the people of the West Coast and that it is fully staffed.

Mr. Speaker, we do have to make sure we have nuclear medicine technologists. We have specialist physicians in these highly competitive areas that we are recruiting for right now. I can say that, with the proper signing bonuses and relocation supports, we will make sure that it's fully staffed when it's operational for the people of the West Coast of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

J. WALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a document. On October 26, I spoke in this House about the number of vacancies that we have in our registered nurses here with NLHS. I want to table a document that gives the dates for this year in 2026, February, April, July and October, the number of vacancies and the vacancy rate just to ensure from my department and from NLHS through transparency. So I'm tabling this for the House, Mr. Speaker, and there are sufficient copies available.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Seeing none, Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, and I will remind you of the clock.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Speaker.

This petition is addressing the increasing cost of living. These are the reasons:

WHEREAS the rising cost of groceries, housing, electricity, heating, fuel and transportation is putting enormous pressure on households across the province; and

WHEREAS increasing numbers of residents are struggling to afford their basic needs; and

WHEREAS no one should have to choose between putting food on the table or paying their household bills; and

WHEREAS the current government campaigned on the commitment to "take real steps to ease financial pressure and put more money back in the pockets of hardworking people."

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 provide tangible relief to help make essential expenses such as food costs, electricity costs and home heating costs more affordable for all residents, for all of us. The assistance provided has to reflect the increased cost of living that has occurred in the province.

As we know, Speaker, this is a government that campaigned on making everything better, fixing all the problems, making everything safer, making everything more affordable but we have yet to see real tangible efforts. We've recently seen – and I know the Finance Minister is looking now, he can't wait to pop up I'm sure – they made a few little announcements, things that they can be doing now and even taking further.

With that, the reduction on the electricity bill that was announced, that is only for the first 2,000 kilowatts, not the total bill. I say to the Finance Minister we can do better. Perhaps let's cut the taxes on electricity altogether and oil. Even call on Newfoundland Power to bring in smart meters, let's put that pressure on getting smart meters so people, consumers, can monitor their consumption like we see in other jurisdictions.

There are a lot of measures that can be taken. Also, let's put pressure on grocers and the basic essentials and the needs that people have. They campaigned on it. They promised to make everything better, to make Newfoundland and Labrador better for people all around, for all of us, but we have yet to see real tangible things only micro, micro measures. They can do better.

We're calling on them to do better and we'll work together to make things better. I am calling on the government to put their money where their mouth is, Speaker, and make things better for all people here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Minister, you've got 30 seconds for a response. Once that clock hits 1500, we're done.

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

C. PARDY: Speaker, since *Budget 2026*, we've put out to the people, returned the people's money to the people, $243 million.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

C. PARDY: If we weren't paying $1.2 billion on the debt, mostly left by the previous government –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: – we'd have a lot more money to be able to put affordability measures out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

C. PARDY: That's $1.2 billion that's going to grow $100 million each year for the next three. We've got our work to do, but we will do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

SPEAKER: Given the hour of the day, I now call upon the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde for his private Member's motion.

The hon. the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Red Tape Reduction:

WHEREAS red tape is a hidden cost on businesses and residents of Newfoundland and Labrador that drives up the cost of doing business, slows investment and falls hardest on small businesses; and

WHEREAS the Canadian Federation of Independent Business awarded the province an F grade on its Red Tape Report Card in every year from 2021 onward under the former Liberal government; and

WHEREAS under the former Liberal government, Newfoundland and Labrador repeatedly finished at the bottom of the country on the Red Tape Report Card, including failing every category in a single year; and

WHEREAS the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found no concrete evidence that the former government applied any comprehensive measurement practice, set targets for red tape reduction or placed meaningful restraint on regulators; and

WHEREAS businesses told the former Liberal government directly that delays in application processing and approvals were holding them back, yet the former Liberal government failed to deliver meaningful action, leaving the province with failing grades year after year; and

WHEREAS 67 per cent of Canadian Federation of Independent Business members in Newfoundland and Labrador identify tax and regulatory costs as their top concern; and

WHEREAS the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador appointed its first dedicated Minister of Red Tape Reduction, a step the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce called significant and positive; and

WHEREAS *Budget 2026* started the first of three reductions to the small business tax rate, lowering it to 2 per cent in 2026, 1.5 per cent in 2027 and 1 per cent in 2028, supporting more than 6,000 small businesses; and

WHEREAS *Budget 2026* established a Red Tape Reduction Office to oversee policies, regulations and legislation across government and make it easier for businesses to navigate; and

WHEREAS this government has introduced legislation, the *Regulatory Improvement and Efficiency Act*, to demonstrate its commitment to red tape reduction; and

WHEREAS this government recently announced province-wide consultations, launching October 30, 2026, inviting businesses, communities, organizations and residents to help shape the next phase of Newfoundland and Labrador's red tape reduction agenda;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House of Assembly support the government's commitment and applaud its efforts to date to reduce red tape, restore regulatory accountability and achieve an A grade on the Canadian Federation of Independent Business Red Tape Report Card.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Speaker, I am pleased to bring this resolution forward today. It asks this House to support the work under way to cut red tape, restore regulatory accountability and earn an A on the CFIB Red Tape Report Card.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy in every region of this province, and especially in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. They create jobs, provide services and keep our communities strong. I see that every day in my district. From the fish plants in Bay de Verde, Old Perlican and Winterton and shops and service businesses in Carbonear, to the tourism operators all along the Baccalieu Trail, these are the people who keep our communities going, but red tape is a hidden cost. It delays projects, it discourages investment and it falls hardest on small businesses, which often have the fewest resources to navigate complex government processes.

The numbers tell the story. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the average small business in Canada now spends 256 hours a year on red tape. That is about 32 business days more than a month every year spent on paperwork instead of serving customers, hiring staff or growing the business.

Across the country, CFIB estimates that red tape costs businesses $17.9 billion a year and 87 per cent of small business owners say excessive regulation significantly reduces their productivity and their ability to grow.

Before I was elected, I served four years on the town council in Heart's Content. I saw first-hand how much time small towns and the businesses in them spend working through government processes that should be simpler.

Red tape does not only affect businesses, Speaker, it affects our towns, too, the applications, the approvals and the reporting that small councils, often with very few staff, have to manage on top of everything else.

That experience is not unique. As the resolution states, 67 per cent of CFIB members in Newfoundland and Labrador say taxes and regulatory costs are their top concern, and we know where we started. From 2021 to 2025, CFIB gave this province an F every single year. That is the baseline this resolution asks us to move beyond.

So what does it take to get from an F to an A? CFIB grades every province on three things: first, political priority, whether government leadership has made red tape reduction a real commitment; second, regulatory accountability, whether government measures the regulatory burden, sets targets and reports publicly on its progress; and third, the regulatory burden itself, whether the rules and processes people deal with every day are actually getting simpler.

Provinces like Nova Scotia and Alberta earn top grades because they do all three. That is the standard this resolution sets for us. Speaker, this government is acting on every part of it.

Start with political priority. We appointed Newfoundland and Labrador's first Minister of Red Tape Reduction, a step the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce calls significant and positive. Through *Budget 2026*, we established a Red Tape Reduction Office, supported by a Deputy Ministers' Steering Committee to review policies, regulations and legislation across government. Red tape reduction is now a priority for all of government, not the job of one department.

Next, is accountability. Speaker, commitments like these need to last, that is why on October 29, our government introduced Bill 23, the *Regulatory*

Improvement and Efficiency Act. It puts this commitment into law and provides a framework for long-term red tape reduction, less unnecessary administrative burden, more transparency, stronger accountability and better service.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business welcomed the bill the day it was tabled and commended our government for their leadership.

Finally, reducing the burden itself. Here we are already seeing results. In September, we signed a co-operation agreement with the federal government on environmental and impact assessments, built on a one-project, one-review approach, where a project faces both federal and provincial assessments, the two governments can now coordinate and choose the most effective process instead of running two reviews side by side. That means less duplication while keeping environmental protections and consultations with Indigenous peoples in place.

We have simplified fish processing licence applications, which matters in a district like mine. Residents can also now renew their driver's licence photo online through MyGovNL. We have simplified applications for home repair and accessibility programs while increasing the assistance available, making government easier to deal with for seniors, persons with disabilities and families in every corner of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: While we cut red tape, we are also leaving more money with small businesses. *Budget 2026* began cutting the small business tax rate to 2 per cent this year, 1.5 per cent in 2027 and 1 per cent in 2028. That benefits more than 6,000 small businesses.

CFIB estimates they can save up to $2,500 this year and up to $7,500 a year once the rate reaches 1 per cent. But government does not have all the answers, the people who deal with these processes every day know best which ones need to change. That is why on October 30, we launched province-wide consultation. Businesses, organizations, community groups and residents can take part through the questionnaire on engageNL, by email to redtapereduction@gov.nl.ca or by mail until November 20. In-person sessions are held in partnership with the Board of Trade, the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador so our towns have a voice, too, and a What We Heard report will follow.

Speaker, this work has broad support. The Newfoundland and Labrador Board of Trade said we must ensure these businesses have the conditions they need to grow, invest and succeed. The Atlantic Chamber of Commerce says that by making regulatory reform a priority and working with employers on practical changes, the province can lower cost. Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador says any efforts to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens are welcome and the CFIB says it welcomes government's commitment to red tape reduction and looks forward to quick and bold actions in the months ahead.

When our business community and our towns are saying the same thing, this House should listen. I will be sharing this with businesses, towns and organizations across my district and I encourage every Member of this House to do the same.

Cutting unnecessary red tape is simply good governance. It is about accountability. It is about better service and it is about a government that responds to the people it serves.

I ask all Members of this House to support this resolution and to help make Newfoundland and Labrador a national leader in red tape reduction for every business and every community for all of us.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

K. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this PMR concerning red tape reduction and regulatory improvement in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We believe government should work efficiently. Businesses should be able to navigate government processes without unnecessary delays and entrepreneurs should not be burdened by outdated administrative requirements.

Nobody in this House wants to see a small business owner spending more time completing paperwork than actually running their business. However, supporting the principle of reducing unnecessary red tape is not the same as endorsing every claim made in this resolution. This motion asks the House to support the government's initiative, applaud its efforts and endorse its objective of achieving an A grade on a Canadian Federation of Independent Business Red Tape Report Card. The question is what exactly are we being asked to applaud?

We're being asked to applaud announcements, the appointment of a minister, the establishment of an office, consultations and new legislation. Those may be steps in a broader process, but they are not results. Businesses will measure success by whether applications are processed faster, permits arrive on time and government becomes easier to deal with. Until this government can demonstrate those improvements, there are legitimate questions about whether its performance should be applauded.

This resolution also spends considerable time pointing fingers at the previous Liberal government. It's important to recognize that meaningful, regulatory improvements did not begin with this government when they took office.

On February 2, 2024, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business presented its Golden Scissors Award to the Council of Atlantic Premiers for the Atlantic physician registry. Former Liberal Premier Andrew Furey accepted that award on behalf of the council.

Before the registry, physicians seeking to practise in another Atlantic province faced separate registration processes, applications and fees. The registry streamlined that process, reduced duplication and made it easier for physicians to practise across the region. That initiative was recognized by the very organization whose report card this government now relies upon. I'm not suggesting that our previous government solved every problem; I am simply pointing out that meaningful improvements were made before this government took office.

The current government points to its dedicated Minister of Red Tape Reduction, the Red Tape Reduction Office, small business tax reductions and the introduction of an Act Respecting Regulatory Improvement and Efficiency. These initiatives deserve to be examined on their merits.

A dedicated office to examine government processes can be a useful step, but it's effectiveness will depend on its resources, its authority and its ability to work with departments to implement meaningful changes. The public needs to see tangible results, not simply recommendations and announcements.

I also want to address the government's decision to highlight small business tax reductions as evidence of its red tape reduction agenda. *Budget 2026* introduced a phased reduction in the small businesses

tax rate, moving to 2 per cent in ’26, 1.5 per cent in ’27 and 1 per cent in 2028.

Supporting small businesses and reducing their costs is important; however, tax policy and regulatory reform are not the same thing. A lower tax rate does not automatically shorten permit processing times, nor does it eliminate duplication between departments or make government requirements easier to understand. Those are separate issues and should be measured separately.

The government’s new legislation, An Act Respecting Regulatory Improvement and Efficiency, is also an important part of this discussion, even though we are still waiting to discuss it in this House. The bill establishes a Charter of Governing Principles, assigns responsibilities to the Red Tape Reduction Office, introduces annual reporting requirements and provides a mechanism for departments to develop red tape reduction plans, but does it go far enough to ensure the government follows through?

One concern is that the legislation does not establish firm, province-wide targets for reducing processing times or regulatory burdens. Much of the responsibility for establishing specific targets and performance measures is left to the government through regulations and ministerial direction. The legislation also allows the minister to request red tape reduction plans from individual departments. It does not require every department develop a plan consistently.

There are also concerns about service standards. The bill addresses certain new licensing, permitting and authorization requirements introduced after the legislation comes into force. That does not automatically address existing processes where businesses may already be experiencing delays.

The annual reports must also provide meaningful information. The public should be able to see how long businesses are waiting for permits, whether processing times are improved and how many unnecessary requirements have actually been removed. A report that simply lists government’s activities is not enough. We need measurable outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, reducing red tape can become an excuse for reducing necessary regulation. Regulations protect workers, consumers, public health and safety and our environment. There are certainly outdated requirements and unnecessarily complicated processes that can be simplified. But we must distinguish between removing unnecessary administrative barriers and removing safeguards that serve an important public purpose.

That distinction matters in Newfoundland and Labrador. We want investment, we want economic development and good jobs in our communities. But environmental assessments, workplace safety requirements, meaningful consultation and the rights of Indigenous communities are essential parts of responsible developments. We should be able to develop economic opportunity while protecting our communities, our workers and our environment.

I also wish to address the government’s recently announced consultations. Businesses, municipalities, community organizations and residents should have an opportunity to identify the barriers they experience when dealing with government. But announcing consultations is not completing the work. Government must listen, act on the feedback it receives and report back on what has changed. People who take the time to participate deserve to know their contributions have made a difference.

Newfoundland and Labrador should absolutely continue working to improve

regulatory efficiency, but the work must be supported by clear targets, transparent reporting and meaningful accountability. The government has set a target of achieving an A grade. That is a commitment it has made and it is up to the government to demonstrate that it can deliver. Businesses should experience shorter wait times, fewer unnecessary requirements and government services that are easy to access. Those are the results that will matter to people across this province.

We will continue to advocate for small businesses, entrepreneurs, workers and communities that deserve a more responsive and efficient government. We will continue to support practical improvements that make government services more accessible and remove unnecessary administrative barriers, and we will continue to insist that efficiency must go hand in hand with transparency, accountability and the protection of the public interest. For those reasons, we will be proposing an amendment to this private Member's resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Mount Scio, that this motion be amended by deleting the second, third, fourth and fifth WHEREAS clauses, and by amending the THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED clause by deleting the words "and applaud its efforts to date, to reduce red tape, restore regulatory accountability" and replacing them with the word "to."

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER (Dwyer): Okay, there's an amendment on the floor. We'll take a short recess to go and have a look at the amendment.

Recess

SPEAKER: Order, please!

After deliberation, I find that the amendment is not in order.

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

K. WHITE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Of course, I respect the ruling of the Chair and appreciate the consideration given to this amendment; however, we'd like to be clear that the Liberal Opposition's position on the resolution before the House, we support reducing unnecessary red tape, we support making government more efficient, improving services and ensuring businesses can navigate regulatory requirements without unnecessary delays.

Where we disagree is with the wording of this particular resolution. As drafted, this motion does more than ask the House to support the government's commitments. It asks Members to applaud the government's efforts to date and endorse its record before meaningful results have been demonstrated.

The government has established a dedicated Minister of Red Tape Reduction, established a Red Tape Reduction Office, introduced legislation and announced consultations. These may be important steps but announcements are not results.

Bill 23 itself raises legitimate questions, it does not establish firm, province-wide targets for reducing processing times or regulatory burdens. Departmental plans can be requested by the minister rather than being consistently required and the service standards do not automatically address existing processes where businesses may already be experiencing delays. These are not arguments against reducing red tape, they are arguments for doing for the work properly.

We must also ensure that reducing red tape does not mean weakening regulations that protect workers, consumers, public health

and safety, our environment and our communities.

Deputy Speaker, the government has set a target of achieving an A grade from the CFIB. We will hold the government to that commitment, but that grade must be earned through measurable improvements, not simply endorse their resolution in this House.

There is a difference between supporting the goal to reducing red tape and applauding the government's performance before the results are clear. The Liberal Opposition will continue to support sensible improvements, while insisting on transparency, accountability and results.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

M. BUTT: Speaker, I rise today in support of the private Member's resolution and our government's commitment to reducing unnecessary red tape, restoring regulatory accountability and making government work better for the people and businesses of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Red tape reduction is about something very practical. It's about making government simpler, faster and easier to navigate. It's about ensuring our processes serve a purpose, our requirements are clear, our decisions are timely and the people who need government services can access them as efficiently as possible.

Speaker, this is not about eliminating regulations. It's about improving regulations. Strong regulations have an important role to play but unnecessary paperwork, duplication, unclear processes and unavoidable delays do not make regulations stronger. They make it harder for people and businesses to get things done.

Speaker, when we talk about red tape, we also have to recognize that it doesn't look the same for everyone, everywhere in Newfoundland and Labrador. Think about a major mining development. The scale may be significant, the investment substantial and the regulatory requirement complex but we absolutely need the appropriate oversight and strong standards. We also need processes that are clear, coordinated and predictable so proponents understand what is required, who they need to work with and how decisions will be made.

Now think of a small retailer in one of our communities. For the business owner, red tape may look very different. It may be an application that is difficult to navigate, information that has to be submitted more than once or time spent dealing with administrative requirements rather than serving customers and running the business.

The scale is different but the principle is the same. Government processes should be clear, efficient and proportionate to what someone is trying to accomplish.

Speaker, there's another important reality in this province. What works in an urban centre may not always work the same way in small rural communities. An investor looking at an opportunity in St. John's may be operating in a very different environment than someone looking to grow a business, advance a development or make an investment in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. That's where red tape cannot simply mean applying the same solution everywhere.

It means listening to communities and businesses, understanding the barriers that they are experiencing and asking a very simple question: Is this requirement necessary? If it is, are we administrating it in the simplest and most effective way possible?

Speaker, investment is important, whether it's a major project worth millions of dollars or a small business owner making the decision to expand, hire an employee or open a new location. Growth is also important, whether it takes place in the heart of St. John's or in the beautiful District of Lewisporte - Twillingate. Our job is not to decide whether the opportunities should happen. Our job is to make sure unnecessary government processes are not standing in the way when opportunity does happen.

Our government made a clear commitment to tackle unnecessary red tape, improving services and making it easier for residents and businesses and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador to navigate government programs and services they rely on every day.

Speaker, we are turning that commitment into action. Our government established a Red Tape Reduction Office through *Budget 2026* to lead a whole-of-government approach to do this work. We also established a Deputy Ministers' Steering Committee to identify the acts on opportunities for red tape reduction across government.

We have an advanced one-project, one-review approach with the federal government to create a more streamlined and predictable governmental assessment process while maintaining strong environmental protections. We have simplified the fish processing licence application process, streamlined applications for home repair and accessibility programs and launched online driver's licence photo renewal through MyGovNL.

We are also working with federal, provincial and territorial colleagues to remove barriers to internal trade, including expanding direct to consumer alcohol sales, improving labour mobility, aligning commercial trucking regulations and advancing occupational health and safety harmonization.

But we know red tape reduction can't be accomplished through one change, one piece of legislation or one announcement, it requires sustained attention, accountability and a culture of continuous improvements across government. That is why our government introduced a *Regulatory Improvement and Efficiency Act*. This legislation will help establish a permanent framework to ensure regulatory improvements continue into the future, including formally establishing a Red Tape Reduction Office in legislation, publicly reporting on processes each year and requiring service standards for new permits, licence and authorizations. Speaker, accountability is important.

Success must be measured not by intentions but by results. That is why government is establishing baseline measurements so progress can be tackled and publicly reported over time.

Just as importantly, we recognize that government does not have all the answers. Businesses and municipalities live with the day-to-day realities of government processes. We know what it means when an application takes longer than expected, when the same information has to be provided more than once, when an approval pathway is difficult to understand or when a requirement no longer reflects modern realities. That is why we listen and partnership is fundamental to this work.

Last week, our government launched province-wide red tape reduction consultations, inviting businesses, communities, organizations and residents to help shape the next phase of this work. We are working with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and the Board of Trade. These organizations bring real-world experience and practical knowledge

to the table and help identify where improvements can be made to make the greatest difference.

When government listens, we gain a better understanding of what is working and what needs to be changed. When government collaborates, we can build solutions that are practical and informed by experience. When we turn that feedback into action, we deliver better outcomes for the people we serve.

Speaker, the goal here is straightforward. Businesses should be able to spend less time navigating unnecessary red tape and more time investing, innovating, creating jobs and growing our economy.

When we get this right, and we will, the benefits will be real. It means mining proponents can spend more time advancing investments and less time trying to determine where they are in a government process. It means small retailers can spend more time serving customers, managing employees and growing their business and less time navigating unnecessary paperwork.

It means someone with an opportunity in rural Newfoundland and Labrador is not disadvantaged simply by distance, geography or the size of their community – it makes an already complicated process harder to navigate. It means government continues to protect the public interest while becoming more responsive to the people, businesses and the communities we serve.

This is what red tape reduction looks like. It is not regulation versus growth; it's good regulation that supports responsible growth. Residents should be able to access government services more easily and predicably. Municipalities and communities should be able to move opportunities forward without unnecessary administrative work.

In our goal, a change is clear. We have set the goal of achieving an A grade on the Canadian Federation of Independent Business's annual Red Tape Report Card. That is an ambitious goal, Speaker, and appropriately so, because Newfoundlanders and Labradorians expect a government that continues to look for ways to work better.

Red tape reduction is not a one-and-done initiative; it is an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. It requires government to keep listening, keep measuring and keep acting. The work is ultimately about better government, better service, greater accountability, stronger partnerships and creating the conditions for people, businesses and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador to succeed.

We have made progress and we know there's more work to go. That is precisely why we have put the leadership structures, legislation and partnership and public engagement in place to keep moving this work forward.

Speaker, our government is committed to reducing unnecessary red tape, restoring regulatory accountability and delivering real, measurable improvements for the people and businesses of our province.

For those reasons, I am pleased to support this resolution and I encourage all Members of this hon. House to do the same.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

I do want to say that I totally approve and support the idea of reducing red tape for businesses, for people, making things easier, 100 per cent.

I do want to talk about some of the things that I'm very proud that we did and specifically in my department of things in terms of red tape. Then I also want to take a moment to talk about the CFIB Red Tape Report Card. I do encourage all Members of the government to read the fulsome Red Tape Report Card. It is very insightful, which I will get to.

First, some of the things I'd like to highlight, starting out, I guess, one of the first things that I encountered as minister was some challenges with Motor Registration. We had some lineups at Motor Registration. During COVID, there were some issues and we did a full Lean Six Sigma review. We had experts come in and do a full Lean Six Sigma review of Motor Registration to make sure it was as efficient and flowing as well as possible for consumers and for commercial clients.

One of the things I was very proud of – I know the government talked about MyGovNL. We had 98 per cent of residents in Newfoundland and Labrador renewing their vehicle registration online which, as I'm sure every Member in this House will realize, it is very efficient and very quick and it is very easy to renew your vehicle registration online. I was very proud of that with an over 98 per cent of residents of Newfoundland and Labrador renewing their vehicle registration online. I'm very proud of that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

S. STOODLEY: I do want to say in the private sector, businesses would kill for a 98 per cent adoption rate, 98 per cent of people doing things online.

I do want to give full credit to the MyGovNL team who worked very hard on that and all services because whenever they go in to a service, they really do make sure and challenge every step and every user experience to make sure that it is as smooth as possible. Kudos to the MyGovNL team, which I know our government is very pleased to support, and we did give OCIO an extra $10 million over five years to help with user experience and making things more streamlined.

Some other things that I just wanted to highlight that I'm very proud of, we streamlined lottery licences – I know that's kind of a pain point for a lot of charities and chartable organizations across Newfoundland and Labrador – working within the federal government regulations in terms of the *Criminal Code* and what's allowed in lottery licences, and allowing organizations to apply for a two-year or five-year licence to do bingos and those types of things, significantly improving the experience for many organizations in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I was very proud that we invested $500 million in a new health information system, which is completely transforming and streamlining the health care system in Newfoundland and Labrador, which was a very expensive option but one that hopefully will pay dividends and completely changes how all the health care delivery in this province happens between pharmacies and doctors' offices and clinics and emergency rooms. Every element has been transformed by the health information system, which I'm very pleased that our government implemented.

Also, another one, as minister, we streamlined professionals applying for their financial services licence, for example mortgage brokers and renewing your mortgage brokers licence, your real estate training licence and all of those things; allowing our electrical inspectors to do all their inspections online on iPads; and all kinds of things and ways that we improved services for people in Newfoundland and Labrador and government employees and for businesses and the general public.

Whenever I would meet with a company or talk to someone or an organization, I would

always ask them, you know, are there any areas that you can think of where there has been too much friction or any areas that we can do things different, and we did get feedback and implement the solutions for that.

I would like to talk about the CFIB Red Tape Report Card, because I know the government are kind of hanging their hat on that. I do really recommend that the government read the Red Tape Report Card. It is very insightful.

In 2026, Newfoundland and Labrador did not get any rankings across the board. In 2025, we received rankings. I do want to expand on the three categories that the Members have outlined. I'm trying to think, how can the government possibly get an A, but I wish them all the best in their efforts to do that.

I do want to say, I fundamentally do not believe achieving a very strong result on the CFIB report card is the same or is equivalent or even moves in the same direction as improving services and streamlining things for businesses and people in Newfoundland and Labrador. They are not necessarily related and linked, but I do wish the government all the best in their efforts to achieve an A grade.

So when you think about the breakup of the CFIB report card, the political priority is 20 per cent of the grade. I think, sure, the government has made it very clear it is a big political priority. This is the only area that I do think it may be feasible for the government to get an A. They have a minister. They have their very clear target. Sure, there's a piece of legislation. I look forward to debating their piece of legislation hopefully in this sitting and I will be raising similar points during that as well.

That is an area, political priority, and I noticed in 2025 our previous government got a 6.5 and a C minus grade on political priority – fair enough. There was no grade in 2026.

The next area I'd like to speak to is regulatory accountability and that makes up 40 per cent of the CFIB's Red Tape Report Card grade. So the regulatory accountability is four components. The first is the existence of a comprehensive measure of the regulatory burden; secondly, the public reporting of the regulatory burden; three, the use of a regulatory budget; and four, accessibility of regulatory documents.

The CFIB is thinking for regulatory accountability, which is 40 per cent of the grade, they want the government to count the number of laws and regulations that they have, count the number of things that companies and businesses and people have to comply with. Then they want the government to report how many, what is that number. Okay, that's not impossible to do.

The use of a regulatory budget. They want to have a budget – and this is a yes or no. Is there a budget? Yes or no, and then how accessible the regulatory documents are. So in my opinion, moving the needle on those four things does not move the needle in terms of a business in Newfoundland and Labrador being able to transact efficiently and effectively with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

For me, personally, meeting those four things was not a priority for me. I can only speak for myself. But reducing red tape is a priority. Making things easier and more streamlined is and was a priority. As an example, my team were responsible for daycare inspections and we would get complaints about it's taking too long, why didn't we pass the daycare inspection? So one day I printed out all the regulations for the daycare inspections and I had them all laid out on my desk. I said, okay, I'm going to streamline this. I'm going to take out some regulations. I had my highlighter and I went through every single daycare

regulation and I could not find one daycare regulation, Speaker, that I would say get rid of.

I was not successful in my effort in removing requirements for daycare regulations. But I do wish the government, if they're going to streamline things, that's great, I wish them all the best. It really does take that kind of minute effort because there are a lot of regulations and the teams advising the government will give them 1,000 reasons why all of those things are needed and required.

In my two and a half minutes left, I do also, most importantly, want to talk about regulatory burden. This is 40 per cent of the CFIB report card grade. I cannot stress this enough; this is how many rules and requirements we have in Newfoundland and Labrador. There's a lovely table you should look at on page 16 of the 2026 Red Tape Report Card and it actually counts the number of regulations and it counts the number of legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador. In 2026, we had 52,407 and it divides that by the number of people in the province.

We have the third lowest number of legislation and regulation together and then they divide that by the number of people in Newfoundland and Labrador, so because –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I need to hear the speaker.

S. STOODLEY: Thank you, Speaker.

Because we have such small population, Newfoundland and Labrador will never do very well, because it actually says the province with the best performance, i.e., the lowest number of requirements and regulations, statutes, per 10,000 population receives the maximum score of 10, while the province with the worst performance receives a score of zero.

PEI has fewer people than we do, they do worst then we do, then New Brunswick and then Newfoundland and Labrador. We are never going to achieve, unless we completely slash the number or regulations, but where we have the third lowest in the country, because they divide it by the number of people in our province, Newfoundland and Labrador will never achieve any results on the CFIB's regulatory burden element which makes up 40 per cent of their grade.

I guess I fully support the government's effort in the spirit of reducing red tape, 100 per cent. I strived to do that every single day when I was minister, but the CFIB is not following this, and following this only will not achieve results for Newfoundland and Labrador businesses or make things easier for people.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a real privilege to stand and talk on this PMR today. After the announcement last week, listening to both the Atlantic Chamber and the CFIB talk about the failures of the last 10 years, it's pretty clear that we had to make some changes so I'm happy to be here today to talk to this.

It's a privilege to rise today and speak to this resolution. It's about something every single small business owner in the province knows by heart. Even if they've never read a single regulation, the forms, the waiting, the phone calls that go nowhere and the

approvals that take months, when they should only take days.

Speaker, red tape is a hidden tax. It doesn't show up on your tax bill but it shows up everywhere else. In the hours an owner spends on paperwork instead of serving his customers, in the hire that doesn't happen and in the expansion that gets put off for another year. It falls hardest on small operators, the corner store, the family fishing enterprise, the start-up in the spare bedroom and the everyday citizen that lives here in this province. They don't have a compliance department, all they have is themselves. Speaker, this is not a theory.

Speaker, 67 per cent of CFIB members in Newfoundland and Labrador say tax and regulatory costs are their very top concern, not their second concern, their top concern and it's been that way for numerous years. The Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses has graded every province for red tape for more than a decade.

When the report cards started, this province earned a B. Three years running it earned a B. So the question this resolution puts to the House is simple, what happened and who was responsible?

Speaker, the Members opposite will want to talk about anything but their own record, so let me help them out. When the former Liberal government took office, red tape reduction sat with Service NL and later with Digital Government and Service NL. Three of the ministers who held the file still sit across in the House today, so this is not ancient history. These are the people who held the pen.

Let's start with the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's, the minister of Service NL from 2017 to 2020. In 2016, the House passed the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*. The CFIB gave the province credit for it but, on the Member's watch, the province's grade slid. By 2019, it was a D. In 2020, it was still a D. That was the last time that this province got anything other than an F under the previous government.

The Member for Mount Scio, minister of Digital Government and Service NL from 2020 to 2024 – digital government, the ministry whose entire purpose was to make it faster and easier to deal with government – so how did it go then, Speaker? It was an F in 2021, an F in 2022, an F in 2023 and an F in 2024. In 2023, the province did not just fail, it failed in every single category. It got an F in accountability, an F in burden and an F in political priority – dead last in the country.

The red tape law passed in 2016 had a five-year sunset. It was the one tool that forced government to measure and report the regulatory burden and the former government let it expire and never brought it back. The CFIB has been asking for it to be reinstated for years, and they're still asking today. That is exactly what we'll do.

Here's what we find remarkable, Speaker. In August of last year, after five years in that portfolio, the Member gave an interview to the *Atlantic Business Magazine* and she said: Some business processes were still on paper, that businesses were still being asked to scan email forms and email them back. This was – quote – very embarrassing. I agree with that Member, it was embarrassing, but she was the minister for five years before that.

The Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune from '24 to '25, and what did CFIB find out about 2024? Another F, except this time we were tied for last in the country. I'll quote them directly: There was no concrete evidence that Newfoundland and Labrador applied any comprehensive measurement practice, no targets for reducing red tape, no meaningful restraint on regulators and, on political priority, the measure of whether our government actually cared about the province, scored a zero. Not a low score, not zero out of 20, zero out of every single mark – zero.

When the report came out, the department's response was that it was disappointed that the CFIB didn't recognize a business navigator service, a service that it had launched that same month. After nine years in government, it launched that in 2024 – after nine years in government.

Speaker, let's add it up. Five Fs in a row; red tape law left to expire; a score of zero on political priority; three ministers all still in the House; no targets, no measurement and no plan. Businesses told them, Chambers of Commerce told them, CFIB told them every single January, and the answer year after year was another failing grade.

So what is this government doing? Speaker, the people of this province asked for something different, and this government is delivering it. First, I'm honoured to have been appointed Newfoundland and Labrador's first Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

L. PARROTT: The Atlantic Chamber of Commerce called that a significant positive step and it's exactly what the CFIB had recommended. Second, *Budget 2026* created a Red Tape Reduction Office to look across government at policies, regulations, legislation and to make it easier for businesses and citizens to find their way through the system. One place, with the job of cutting red tape and to be accountable for it.

Third, we brought legislation before the House, the Regulatory Improvement and Efficiency Act, because commitments need to be written into law, not left to expire. We're putting money back into the pockets of small business owners.

Budget 2026 began the first of three cuts to small business tax rates: 2 per cent this year, 1.5 per cent in 2027 and 1 per cent in 2028. That supports more than 6,000 small businesses across this province, Mr. Speaker.

Fifth, October 30, this government launched provincial-wide consultations on the next phase of red tape reduction. We're asking businesses, communities, organizations and everyday residents to tell us where they experienced the bottlenecks, because the people who fill out these forms and deal with the delays and the bureaucracy are the people who know better than anyone else. They are the ones who know exactly where the problems exist.

Speaker, compare that record to the opposite. They had no measurements, they had no targets and they let the law expire, and they scored a zero on priority. We now have a minister, an office, legislation, a tax cut, consultation, all in the first 12 months.

Speaker, this government has set a clear goal: an A on the CFIB Red Tape Report Card. Some will say that's ambitious, coming from an F. It is. But this province deserves ambition and our small businesses deserve a government that's on their side. The Members opposite had 10 years. They had 10 years and they decided to do nothing. Three of their minsters, who held the file, sit across from me today. They can stand up and support this resolution, or they can explain to the small business owners of the province why five failing grades were good enough for them.

The government is cutting red tape for the corner store, for the start-up, for the rural and urban individuals, for every business in this province and for every citizen on this province – for all of us.

I urge all Members to support this resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

It's my honour and privilege to stand and speak to this private Member's motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I want to hear the person that's presenting.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

It is my honour and privilege to stand and speak to this private Member's motion and I can certainly speak from experience. My experience, both as a very long-time small business owner and as a municipal leader, certainly has given me incredible insights into the need for improving efficiencies.

We understand the need to streamline and, at first blush, this legislation does look promising. In many years serving in municipal politics, I've seen a number of processes that could have been streamlined and simplified. Yes, there was frustration within some of those realms. I know that Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador has been asking for this, and I'm sure that they're very excited for it to be implemented.

However, there's one thing that causes concern in how this legislation is drafted. It really has no clear definition of what red tape actually is. It's concerning because red tape is a loaded term that people often use to describe laws, regulations or rules that they find inconvenient or costly to comply with or deal with a situation or problem that no longer exists.

While some of the laws or rules that will be changed are indeed no longer relevant or serve any purpose, absolutely, a lot of what is called red tape actually deals with environmental or labour protection, health and safety, consumer protections and other important measures that safeguard the public interest.

I have to wonder about that divide when the minister announced consultations and, apart from MNL, there were no community groups, non-profits or others that have to navigate tangly bureaucracy and gatekeeping just to get their client's help with income support, housing or decent health care.

Fully understanding CFIB, Atlantic Chamber and Board of Trade play a role, certainly, in the business sector but there's a larger omission of engagement in this process, and that is concerning. Instead, it was only business interests who were front and centre at the announcement.

While some of these laws might no longer be relevant, as I mentioned, and we know that, again, dealing with environmental, labour protections, health and safety and consumer protections, these are safeguards. These are safeguards that are there for the public trust and, certainly, we do not want to just wash it away with ambiguities.

The lack of definitions or guidelines in this bill are concerning. The government states that it will bring in a charter of good governance and put it into the regulations, but if they wanted to be transparent about who this bill is intended to serve, they would have followed Nova Scotia's lead, for example, when they brought in similar legislation just last September. They publicly released their carter at the same time that the legislation got debated. So why can't we see what principles will be used when applying the legislation in this province?

It's, again, good intent to reduce the red tape. I know that a lot of small businesses and municipalities certainly have been calling for it but, as always, the devil is in the details. Ensuring that due diligence is

done on understanding exactly what that means is imperative.

As a result of the uncertainty and the lack of a fulsome engagement with those, other than the business interests that I just declared, I will not be able to support this resolution.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. PETTEN: That's quite amazing, not supporting a good resolution – I'll leave it at that. I won't say no more.

I think the F that my colleague, the Government House Leader, was saying that F wasn't for fairness I don't think. Too many Fs. If I ever brought home that many Fs, I wouldn't go home. I'll put it that way. If I was heading home, I wouldn't go home with that report card. I'd find something else to go at that day, which I did a few times.

Speaker, it's a privilege to stand today as the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs and speak in support of this private Member's resolution and our government's work to cut red tape. Our government is committed to supporting local governments and building stronger regions. Cities, towns, Local Service Districts and Inuit community governments know the challenges that residents face. They should be free to help their communities grow, not be held back by red tape and lengthy delays.

As a government, we are listening to local leaders, we're supporting them and we are helping them deliver the location solutions their communities need. We are committed to cutting red tape and simplifying rules that stand in the way of local governments doing what is best for the people they serve.

Speaker, red tape can take many forms. It can be a slow approval process, extra and unnecessary paperwork or rules that made sense years ago but no longer reflect the realities faced by communities today. Every hour a local government spends working through a complex process is an hour not spent on what matters most to residents, such as infrastructure, housing, recreation, economic development and community services.

Municipal leaders have been clear, they want a government that responds faster, works more efficiently and helps them deliver results for their residents. We heard them and we are taking action. It's not about just changing rules; it's about building a government that works better for communities across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaker, as hon. Members know, just last week I was proud to help launch the Newfoundland and Labrador Red Tape Reduction consultations with my colleague the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. This is a major step toward a more efficient government. Stronger services for all of us and greater opportunity in every region of our province. It shows that we are ready to act. By cutting red tape and simplifying processes, we can free local governments to spend less time on paperwork and more time serving their residents.

We're calling on all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to bring forward their bold, practical ideas, help us simplify processes, improve service delivery and unlock new possibilities for business and communities to succeed.

In the weeks ahead, I encourage residents, municipalities, Local Service Districts, Innu community governments, organizations and businesses throughout the province to take part in the engagement process. Your experiences can show us where the barriers are. Your ideas will help us identify solutions that deliver real improvements.

There are two ways to share your perspectives and help shape this work. First, you can complete a questionnaire on our online platform at engageNL. Second, we are holding focused discussions with municipalities, Local Service Districts and Innu community governments, businesses, industry associations and organizations. Both approaches will help us find the changes that make the biggest difference. Discussions are under way and officials will keep meeting with stakeholders in the coming months.

This is an opportunity to remove barriers, unlock potential and build a government that works better for all of us. We want to hear directly from the people who rely on government programs, regulations and services every day.

Local governments know their communities better than anyone. They are best placed to tell us what's working and what's not. The practical experience and on-the-ground knowledge will guide us as we look for ways to improve.

Speaker, every municipal government and every community is unique. Growing urban centres face vastly different challenges than the small rural communities. That is why we need to hear from communities of all sizes and every region of our province.

The people closest to a challenge often have the best solutions. Through these consultations, our local governments can help shape changes that make things better, not only for their own communities, but for communities across Newfoundland and Labrador.

We can't improve government services on our own. Local governments are key partners in shaping this next chapter. By taking part in this consultation, they help us remove today's barriers and rethink the processes for tomorrow.

Speaker, this is about more than less paperwork or shorter processes. It's about making government work better for the people we serve. By listening to municipalities, Local Service Districts, inner-community governments, businesses, organizations and residences, we can find real improvements that will strengthen services, support economic growth and help communities strive. We are confident that together we can find practical solutions that improve services, save time and effort and support local economic growth.

Together, we can build a provincial government that responds, communities that strive and a stronger Newfoundland and Labrador.

I look forward to continuing this important discussion.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

P. PIKE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in this hon. House on behalf of the great people of the District of Burin - Grand Bank.

There is a major need to reduce red tape in Newfoundland and Labrador because excessive and outdated regulations drive up the cost of doing business, slow down economic growth and repeatedly land the province poor marks from the business community.

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't help but notice that when the minister got up and spoke just then, he didn't talk about the great things that he was going to do with the red tape reduction, he talked about things that weren't done. Instead of taking this opportunity to tell the people of Newfoundland and Labrador all of the great

things he was going to do, he decided that he was going to talk about things that weren't done. We're never going to move ahead if we dwell on the past. Let's look to the future.

It's ridiculous, absolutely. I couldn't believe that he'd waste that much time talking about such foolishness. Shameful. There's no doubt about it. It's shameful.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the Member to address the Chair.

P. PIKE: Yes, Speaker, sorry. It's hard when the chirping is coming from the other side, as you know.

The 67 per cent that was said before, businesses in the province, identified tax and regulatory costs as their top concern, navigating slow approvals, duplicating paperwork, confusing rules that take time away from actual operations and job creation.

That's true, but one of my colleagues mentioned to me earlier – this is not a dig at anyone – in housing, for home repair and home modification, when we looked at that this time around, you had to get two quotes.

Now, two quotes are easy for someone living in urban Newfoundland and Labrador. No problem, you can get a hundred quotes, but if you're living on the South Coast of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in a small community, you can't get two quotes. Why would put that on a senior? Why would you do that?

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Address the Chair.

P. PIKE: That doesn't make any sense. If you want to cut red tape, cut that stuff. Let's make things easier for seniors –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

P. PIKE: – especially when it comes to affordability.

SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the Member to address the Chair.

P. PIKE: There's no doubt, as the minister pointed out a few times, that Newfoundland did receive, historically, an F grade on this report card, but if we're going to bring it from zero to A-plus, that's going to be quite an accomplishment, Speaker – quite an accomplishment. I hope that we get to hear the new grading system, how it works and how it's going to impact the province. If we do get to an A grade, that's good for all of us, but let's wait and see what happens.

Local entrepreneurs frequently face administrative hurdles, such as personal care home operators dealing with dense regulatory mandates or business owners needing multiple overlapping licenses, such as a person in my district needed three liquor licenses for one single establishment – crazy. Unnecessary rules deter outside investment, stall infrastructure projects and make the province less attractive for new enterprises, compared to jurisdictions that actively practice regulatory changes or "dieting," as is the lingo they use when they talk about regulations and the lack of them.

The province has launched targeted steps to tackle the issue: a dedicated Red Tape Reduction Office – great work – introducing regulatory improvement in the House of Assembly to set up structural oversight; opening province-wide and public business consultations to identify redundant forms; slow approval timelines and outdated policies.

While the business community, such as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which is known as the CFIB, and local boards of trade have welcomed the initiative to target an A grade on regulatory

efficiency, several structural, legal and systematic concerns have been raised by policy analysts, political scientists and community advocates.

The bill leaves it up to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction to decide whether or not to request reduction plans from individual government departments. It does not legally force every single department to set or hit a specific limit in reduction targets. Will the minister, I wonder, be requesting reduction plans from all government departments? Let's hope so.

The exact organizational structure funding and legal independence of the new Red Tape Reduction office are not fully detailed in the bill. This raises questions about the actual capacity to independently police other areas of government.

Memorial University scientist Elizabeth Schwartz noted that a stand-alone red tape reduction portfolio can easily amount to a political move or empty messaging unless it is robustly resourced with the institutional teeth required to author how the civil service works.

Critics worry the office will simply add another layer of bureaucratic costs rather than stripping them away. Critics point out that the past Canadian deregulation initiatives across various decades frequently shifted government oversight into industry self-regulation. We have to be very careful about that.

This historically compromised public safety, contributed to catastrophic systematic failures in infrastructure, environmental protection and public health. Weakening safeguards – concerns exist that lowering administrative barriers to fast-track resource development such as mining, offshore oil or green energy could end up diluting vital environmental assessments, workplace safety protocols and climate targets under corporate pressure.

Speaker, while the business community certainly has welcomed this, during the launch of this province-wide consultation in engageNL in late October 2026, the minister acknowledged that red tape looks completely different to a small clothing boutique than it does to the industrial operator and I, as a Member from rural Newfoundland and Labrador, am very concerned about that.

There's concern that the regulatory framework could apply to an overly urbanized template to rural areas, and we must be careful of that, Mr. Speaker. All of us Members here that represent rural Newfoundland, we stand up for rural Newfoundland and we certainly don't want them to fall into any sort of misrepresentation when it comes to this.

Mr. Speaker, all in all, yes, we always hear in our districts that there's too much red tape with government. It's too hard to get things through, whether that's Crown lands or whatever. I think that we're heading in the right direction, but we certainly need to bear in mind some of the things that have been brought up here today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

E. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to stand and have a few words on this here, on this motion here today. First of all, I want to say I agree that we do need the red tape reduction and we do need to find a better way to streamline things in the province.

I'll just give you a little example. We got it worked out after. We were trying to get something approved for a town. ServiceNL allows it. When it comes to Environment, Environment says no. But we got it worked

out. We did get it worked out after for the town, but that's just one thing that happens that towns get caught up into is there are regulations for one department and another department. So that is something that I hope is going to be looked at and I hope I'll have an opportunity to have some input.

I've seen this type of private Member's motion, this type of thing happening in government for a number of years. I'm going way back to the '90s when it all started. But what you find – and I can give a lot of examples of it – is that everybody is intent on making the red tape reduction better for the people of the province.

So we passed the legislation in this House for different departments. What happens then is once the regulation is done, the departments go and put in regulations. What happens over the years through lobbying, through different views that people have, is that the regulations change. I've seen that so many times. So once legislation comes in, this is approved in the House of Assembly, and the regulations are made later by departments. Then, as regulations are in, people lobby to get certain regulations changed because the minister has the authority to do it.

I've seen over the years many times, the regulation has changed, taking away the intent of the legislation in this House of Assembly. That is why, today, this government and the previous government, we're still on the same thing, let's cut out the red tape, because it creeps back in. I've seen it so many times on so many different governments.

As the legislators here in this House of Assembly, we have to find some way that when we pass legislation and the regulations after, they're not changed. If they're going to be changed, there should be some notification to the House or have a great reason why it was changed. If not, I can assure you, my next term running we will be hearing the same thing, that we're going to have to have red tape reduction, if we don't stick to it. That happens on a regular basis.

I'm just going to have a few more words on this here. I agree with red tape reduction. I agree that there are a lot of different regulations and acts that compete against each other. We need it done. We need it for businesses. We need it for town councils. We need it for individuals.

But we have to keep in mind the environment and public safety for people; not do it because it looks good, we have to keep the safety in mind. We have to remember the goal of the red tape reduction is to help individuals, help companies, help groups, help the environment to get through government bureaucracy to make it quicker, better, faster and help to create businesses in this province, where I've known some businesses to walk away because it's so hard to get through the regulations. It's just so hard.

So I applaud the Member for bringing this forward, because it's something that we need in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I know, as I said before, that private Member's motions are not binding, but I urge the government and I call upon the government to follow through on the commitment on the red tape reduction to make it easier for everybody in the province to know what they have to do if they want to start a business, if they want to do some volunteer work, if they wanted the town councils, whoever it may be, so that we can streamline, do it safe for the environment, safe for the individual and make this province much better. I will agree to any red tape reduction that's going to have those things in it, Mr. Speaker.

Again, to the Member for bringing this forward, it's a great opportunity for all of us to talk and to see how we can help out, as legislators, to improve the system for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Thank you, Speaker.

I am pleased to rise today to speak on cutting red tape for businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador. Small businesses are important to us and red tape creates unnecessary costs and frustration for them. It can delay projects, discourage investment, place an even greater burden on small business who often have the fewest resources to navigate complex government processes.

Speaker, I'm going to stop right there for a second and talk about a business.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

H. CORMIER: I love the attention and I appreciate that.

In all seriousness, Speaker, a business in Codroy Valley, the Member for Burgeo - La Poile will know, Green Acre Cottages with Gus' Barn and the troubles they had getting up and running. Beautiful spot and I'll even mention to say that that's where I got engaged this past summer in Gus' Barn.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Please God in 2028 we're going to get married there as well.

Speaker, I know first-hand the hoops and hurdles they had to go through to try to get to that point and this red tape reduction will help move businesses like that forward quicker.

Over the past year, we have taken important steps to streamline processes, eliminate duplication and remove barriers that slow progress for individuals, businesses and communities.

While we are proud of the progress made so far, there is much more work ahead. For years, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business highlighted Newfoundland and Labrador's challenges with regulatory burden, assigning the province an F grade on its Red Tape Report Card every year from 2021 onward under the former Liberal government.

During that same period, Newfoundland and Labrador consistently ranked among the poorest performing jurisdictions in Canada on red tape reduction, including years where the province failed every single category.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported that there was little evidence the former Liberal government had implemented a comprehensive approach to measuring regulatory burden, establish meaningful reduction of targets or placed limits on the growth of regulations. Businesses repeatedly raised concerns about the lengthy approval times and application delays that were preventing them from moving projects forward, just like Gus' Barn.

Despite these concerns, the former Liberal government failed to deliver meaningful improvements. Today, 67 per cent of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business members in Newfoundland and Labrador identify taxes, which we addressed in the 2026 budget, and regulatory costs as one of their greatest challenges, underscoring the need for continued action to improve the business environment. That is why our government took the step of appointing Newfoundland and Labrador's first Minister of Red Tape Reduction; a move that was recognized by the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce as a positive step forward.

I'm going to pause there again. The minister himself, we all stand in this House and we all wear a poppy, but all the portfolios that minister may have, the most important, in my eyes, is he's a veteran, and I thank him for his service and every veteran.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: Through *Budget 2026*, we also established a dedicated Red Tape Reduction Office to review policies, regulations and legislation across government and make government services more accessible and easier to navigate. A key part of this work is ensuring government information and services are clear, accessible and user friendly for everyone including persons with disabilities, under-represented groups and those living in rural and remote communities.

Our government has further demonstrated its commitment through the introduction of the *Regulatory Improvement and Efficiency Act*, which provides a framework for long-term and meaningful red tape reduction. At its core, this legislation is about making government work better, and isn't that what we're all here for?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

H. CORMIER: It aims to reduce unnecessary administrative burden while maintaining public trust, increasing transparency and strengthening accountability and improving service delivery. It would help create the conditions for businesses to grow, communities to succeed and government to operate more efficiently.

To ensure this work reflects the experiences of those most affected, our government recently launched province-wide consultations on October 30, 2026, inviting businesses, organizations, community groups and residents to help shape the next phase of our red tape reduction efforts. Building a more efficient and responsive regulatory environment requires direct input from the people who interact with government processes every day. That feedback will be essential as we continue to identify barriers and improve outcomes.

Cutting unnecessary red tape is simply good governance. It is about improving accountability, delivering better service and making government more responsive to the needs of the residents and businesses. All Members of this House should support these efforts to improve accountability, reduce unnecessary regulatory burden and help Newfoundland and Labrador become a national leader in red tape reduction with the goal of achieving an A grade on the Canadian Federation of Independent Business Red Tape Report Card.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The government opposite can cut all the regulatory red tape it wants, the only cut that they're going to be remembered for is the cut they had with the province, with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to break the promise to give them a final say on Churchill Falls. That is the cut they will be remembered for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

F. HUTTON: Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: Are there any further speakers?

Seeing no further speakers, I will call on the Member for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde to close out the debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd be lying if I said that I wasn't a bit perplexed here now, but I am. Anyways, let's see if we can get through it.

Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to thank all Members who took part in today's debate. When you strip it down, this resolution asks three things of this House: support a commitment, recognize the work under way and hold this government to a clear standard, an A on the CFIB Red Tape Report Card.

Speaker, that is not a slogan, it's a measurable goal set by an independent organization and graded in public every year. We put it in this resolution because we expect to be held to it and the work behind it is real: a dedicated minister, a Red Tape Reduction Office, a small business tax cut, legislation now before this House and consultations open to anyone who wants to be heard, all in our first year.

Now, Speaker, the Members opposite may say this is just talk, so let's talk about what talk looks like. Talk is a red tape consultation in 2020, followed by failing grade after failing grade. Talk is a regulatory accountability law left to quietly expire. Talk is a business navigator launched in the final year of a government that had nearly a decade to do it. Talk is a former minister telling a magazine, after years in charge of government services, that the paper forms were very embarrassing.

When the CFIB measured how much of a priority the former government placed on red tape, Speaker, the answer was zero. So I would make the Members opposite an offer. They cannot change their record, but today they can change their vote. Stand with small businesses and support this resolution.

Thank you, Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: Order, please!

Are the Members ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Division

SPEAKER: Are the House Leaders ready?

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER (Hyde): Tony Wakeham, Lloyd Parrott, Barry Petten, Lela Evans, Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Paul Dinn, Joedy Wall, Craig Pardy, Jeff Dwyer, Loyola O'Driscoll, Andrea Barbour, Chris Tibbs, Lin Paddock, Pleaman Forsey, Mike Goosney, Jim McKenna, Mark Butt, Riley Balsom, Hal Cormier, Joseph Power, Eddie Joyce.

SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

TABLE OFFICER: John Hogan, Lisa Dempster, Bernard Davis, Sarah Stoodley, Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Pam Parsons, Keith White, Paul Pike, Elvis Loveless, Fred Hutton, Jamie Korab –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

SPEAKER: B'ys, we're almost there. Can we keep her quiet for another minute?

TABLE OFFICER: Jim Parsons, Bettina Ford, Michael King, Sheilagh O'Leary.

CLERK: Speaker, the ayes: 21; the nays: 15.

SPEAKER: Motion has been carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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's been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

This House does now stand adjourned until tomorrow, being Thursday, November 5, at 1:30 p.m.