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Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

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MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we start proceedings today, I want to welcome some special guests to our gallery. I want to welcome twenty-five students from Crescent Collegiate Vocal Ensemble in Blaketown, along with their teacher Robert Colbourne, their bus driver Chris Reid, and their chaperone Morley Reid.

Welcome to the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: We will learn much more about them now as the Member for Bellevue makes his statement a little later.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of Bellevue; the Member for the District of Humber West; the Member for the District of Bay of Islands; the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North; the Member for the District of St. John's North; and the Member for the District of Mount Pearl South.

The hon. the Member for the District of Bellevue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PEACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize a group of twenty-six Crescent Collegiate students who range from Grade 7 to Grade 12 at Crescent Collegiate, Blaketown.

This group is the Crescent Collegiate Vocal Ensemble. They have performed at the opening of the Ronald McDonald House in St. John's, competed at the Kiwanis Music Festival receiving the highest marks for best performance in Newfoundland choral music, and have

performed at numerous benefit concerts and community events.

I have heard them perform many times myself, Mr. Speaker, and they are outstanding.

The Crescent Collegiate Vocal Ensemble submitted a YouTube video to the selection committee in Ottawa for Canada Day and has been selected to represent the Province to perform as part of the Unisong music festival. The vocal ensemble will be performing at various venues throughout Ottawa, and they will be joining a mass choir with singers from across the country on Canada Day at the National Arts Centre.

This group attributes their success to the great leadership and professionalism of Mr. Robert Colbourne.

Mr. Speaker, they are energized, they are excited, and I want all members of this House to join me in wishing the Crescent Collegiate Vocal Ensemble all the best as they represent Newfoundland as a strong voice in music on this Island.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Humber West.

MR. GRANTER: Mr. Speaker, I stand in this hon. House to congratulate Sherman Downey and the Ambiguous Case from Corner Brook on being recently selected as the Best New Music Act in Canada for the National CBC Searchlight Competition.

Downey's five-piece band beat out close to 3,000 artists and bands from across Canada to win this honour. The winning prize includes a trip to Toronto, where the band will be featured in a CBC Music video, and a performance at the CBCMusic.ca Festival. They will also receive \$20,000 worth of music equipment.

This rootsy folk rock, West Coast band has been relentless in their music pursuit and has garnered a large following, both locally and nationally.

On Saturday, May 4, true to their roots, the band pleased local fans in Corner Brook by performing a concert in Margaret Bowater Park. They did not let the crowd down, Mr. Speaker. Their second album, featuring the winning track, *Thick as Thieves*, is scheduled to be released very soon.

I ask all hon. members to congratulate Sherman Downey, Andrew Ross, Paul Lockyer, Neil Targett, and Bill Allan on their success thus far and wish them many more years of music success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the organizing committee of the fifth annual Steps for Life walk, which I attended this past Sunday, in the Town of Irishtown-Summerside. Ninety-three people took part in this year's walk and raised over \$4,500.

The Steps for Life walk is a fundraising event for the Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support-Threads of Life program. This association is dedicated to helping families living in the aftermath of a workplace fatality, occupational disease, or life-altering injury. Funds raised go directly to programs and services to support the families of workplace tragedy.

Geraldine Wheeler of Summerside, and Chair of the Corner Brook Steps for Life Committee, has been the driving force of the local chapter since its formation in 2009. Mrs. Wheeler lost her own son, Greg, in an industrial accident in the Northwest Territories in 2001. Through the pain and heartache Mrs. Wheeler and her family have endured, she has found strength and comfort in helping other families who have experienced similar tragedies. Mrs. Wheeler is committed to raising awareness about the important of workplace safety.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in recognizing Geraldine Wheeler and her committee for their dedication and commitment in helping other families in their healing journey.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I must begin by complimenting the Member for Bay of Islands on his footwear today, if I might.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a team of environmentally conscious children known as the Paradise Grasshoppers.

Mr. Speaker, Paradise Grasshoppers is a group of enthusiastic children who want to make a difference in their community. Formed in 2011, they are all between the ages of four and nine and they make the planet cleaner and healthier.

Mr. Speaker, they take to the streets with a goal to tackle litter and increase awareness amongst the community that littering is unacceptable. They demonstrate the fact that everyone has a part to play and that age is not an excuse or a barrier.

Most recently, the Paradise Grasshoppers were named the 2012-2013 Town of Paradise Volunteer Group of the Year. This is an amazing feat for such a young, enthusiastic group. The Grasshoppers have big plans and hope to continue their work towards making Paradise a greener and cleaner place to live.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating the Paradise Grasshoppers for all they do for the Town of Paradise.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I would like today to congratulate everyone involved in the Prince of Wales Collegiate Safe Grad event held at the Ches Penney Y last Friday, May 3, following the more formal graduation at the Convention Centre.

About 200 students in this year's graduating class partied from midnight to 5:00 a.m. This year's theme, appropriately for PWC's academic stars, was: On the Red Carpet. The Y was festooned with Hollywood decorations, including two huge Oscar statues set up outside the door.

The planning for Safe Grad starts right at the beginning of the school year in September, but work really starts to pick up in January, and does not stop until the last student leaves for home.

The almost 100 volunteers, mostly parents, raised – wait for it – \$10,000 this year so that all graduates could attend this inclusive, safe event, without concerns about financial barriers. All of the recycling drives, ticket sales, and 50/50 draws, all the planning and decorating are more than worth the effort when 200 kids can have a memorable time.

Congratulations to all the volunteers for their hard work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Pearl South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in this hon. House to offer congratulations to a group of individuals who have made a significant contribution to sport in my community.

Once again, this year's Mount Pearl Athletic Awards were a tremendous success which

highlighted the achievements and emphasized the important role that sport has played and continues to play in the development of youth and adults alike within our great city.

There were a number of very worthy nominees again this year nominated in four categories. Congratulations to this year's winners: Peter Halliday Executive of the Year Award winner, Mr. Jim Bulger of YBC Bowling; Coach of the Year, Mr. Scott Gordon of Mount Pearl Minor Hockey; Female Athlete of the Year, Charlene Barter of Dogs Rugby; and Male Athlete of the Year, tremendous hockey player and ball hockey player, Patrick O'Keefe.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of this hon. House to join me in congratulating these individuals on this significant accomplishment and wish them all the best in their future sporting endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before we have ministers' statements I want to acknowledge another guest in our gallery, the Deputy Mayor of Charlottetown, Labrador and the Labrador Director for Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, Ms Lisa Dempster.

Welcome to our galleries.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Mr. Speaker, the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission has launched its annual SAFE Work Young Worker Video/Radio Ad Contest, which challenges students in Grades 7-12 to create a

video or radio ad to illustrate the importance of safety on the job and their rights and responsibilities in the workplace.

Voting began on May 1 to determine which of the top ten videos will receive the Viewers' Choice Award. Voters have until Friday, May 10 to visit the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission's Web site or the SAFE Work Newfoundland and Labrador Facebook page to vote for their favourite video. The winning entry will receive \$500 in cash as well as a plaque for their school.

Mr. Speaker, I am inspired by the mix of creativity and responsibility our young people demonstrate in contests such as this one. Every year, this contest brings out the very best our students have to offer and showcases the immense talent our students have.

Creativity and talent aside, I am most impressed with the safety awareness exhibited by these students. Last year's winning videos can be found online and feature very effective reminders of the potential hazards that can arise in the workplace. These student video submissions acknowledge the importance of proper safety procedures, and the overall message is loud and clear. Safety must be top of mind.

Mr. Speaker, it is a well-known fact that young people are at greater risk for a workplace injury. Their best defence is knowing their rights and responsibilities at an early age. Contests such as this help students learn those all too important lessons in a way that is interesting to them. Arming our students with safety knowledge early will help instil safe work practices so they are prepared when they start their first job.

I wish all this year's participants the very best of luck with their submissions for the 2013 SAFE Work Youth Video/Radio Ad Contest, and encourage all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to go online, vote for their favourite, and learn some interesting tips to make our workplaces safer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The SAFE Work Youth Video/Radio Ad Contest is a fantastic event which encourages students in our Province to take every interest in safety on the job.

Encouraging our young people to take an interest in safety in the workplace is vitally important and, as the minister stated, we know young people are at greater risk for a workplace injury. Empowering them with the knowledge of our workplace safety is an important first step as our young people enter the workforce, and I commend the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission for continuing with this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the top ten entries: B.L. Morrison All Grade School in Postville, in the lovely District of Torngat Mountains; Clarendville High School; St. Kevin's School; Lewisporte Collegiate; Laval High School; Gonzaga High School; Greenwood Academy; Roncalli Central High; John Watkins Academy; Bayview Regional Collegiate; as well as the other schools that submitted to this contest. Well done.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. It is really good to know that this program is being continued by the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission. It is a great idea to get students to make their own safety messages and deliver them to their

peers. I look forward to seeing this year's entries on the SAFE Work Newfoundland and Labrador Facebook page.

The statistics on young worker injuries in this Province, 491 lost time injuries and 249 health care injuries in 2011, are a testament to the minister's statement that young people are at greater risk for a workplace injury. It is true that young workers need to know their rights and responsibilities, and we need to keep educating students long before they get into the workforce; but in order to reduce the number of youth injuries in the long run, our laws and inspection programs must be strong to target and eliminate unsafe places.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to congratulate the winners of the 2013 Arts and Letters Awards which were presented this past weekend at a ceremony at The Rooms. More than \$47,000 was awarded to recipients in a number of categories including literary arts, music, visual arts, and digital multi-media.

The Arts and Letters Awards Program encourages the creation of new works of art by both professional and non-professional artists in Newfoundland and Labrador by providing an opportunity to submit works for adjudication at an annual competition. For the past sixty-one years, this program has played a fundamental role in the encouragement and support of artistic impression. Since its inception in 1952, it has recognized some of the Province's most well-known artists. The hallmark of this program is the acknowledgement of the creative talent of established writers, composers and visual artists, as well as the Province's young up-and-coming talent.

Mr. Speaker, in the junior division, there were thirty-six winning entrants ages twelve to eighteen and, in the senior division, there were thirty-eight entrants. Overall, 611 entries were submitted. The Percy Janes First Novel Award, the event's top prize of \$1,500, was awarded to Mary Pike of St. John's for her manuscript entitled *Never-Ever-Land*.

Newfoundland and Labrador is renowned for its rich and vibrant culture, and boasts a wealth of talented artists who have made their mark locally, nationally, and internationally. Many of these artists gained their first recognition through the Arts and Letters Awards Program.

Once again this year, Mr. Speaker, our government has reiterated its commitment to our Province's cultural industries, allocating more the \$17 million in *Budget 2013: A Sound Plan, A Secure Future*. This represents an \$87 million investment in the sector since 2006 when we launched our blueprint for development and investment in culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy. Members on this side would also like to congratulate all the winners and all the participants who participated in the Arts and Letters Awards Program.

I remember years ago when I attended the program and I presented some awards, you can see the young up-and-coming artists who are now professionals in their own right. You can see that this is a training ground for a lot of younger artists in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is a great way for a lot of other students in the Province to exercise their artistic skills in a number of ways, Mr. Speaker, either through

music, writing, visual arts, and other ways. It is a great program for all of us.

I see, Mr. Speaker, at the end, that government is still taking all the credit for it, announcing all the money. One thing we have to be careful of, make sure that we arrange the program and arrange for when the ceremony is going to be because the number of hours has been cut at The Rooms. When you stand up and make all the announcements to try to take credit for all the good stuff, you also have to realize that there are some major cutbacks in this field this year.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Sixty-one years is a milestone. It may have been around that long but it certainly is not aging. If anything, the Arts and Letters Awards program is more vibrant than ever with the expansion into the digital multimedia, in addition to all the other categories.

It is very positive, Minister, to see so many entrants. Let's work to encourage even more than the 611 applicants next year.

Congratulations to all the winners, especially Mary Pike of St. John's who won the prestigious Percy Janes First Novel Award. Seventeen million dollars in our cultural industries is a good investment, and I hope in the future we can do even better.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During his meeting this week with the federal Minister of National Defence, the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services outlined that he would like to see partnerships with the private sector to augment search and rescue in the Province.

I ask the minister: Can you explain the position? Are you looking at privatizing some aspects of search and rescue in Newfoundland and Labrador?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member recognizes that I did not go into the meeting empty handed. I came in with suggestions in regard to addressing the issues that were outlined in the federal Auditor General's report. One of them was exactly that – which is not rocket science in regard to augmenting your service from your military by partnering with private entities.

CHC Helicopters, which used to be an entity here in Newfoundland and Labrador, provides that in such countries as Ireland, Norway, the UK, Australia, Kazakhstan, and other places in the world. Cougar is into it as well. PAL, another Newfoundland and Labrador company, partners with many governments across the world, and also with DND here to augment the service on a fixed-wing basis.

Mr. Speaker, it was a good suggestion. I am hoping that the minister will act on it, because it certainly would correct some of the problems that –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Two years ago it was reported that the federal government was looking at privatization components of the military search and rescue. At that time, the Premier said that the federal government would need to be very careful here and consult with people who could be impacted.

I ask the minister: Did you have any consultations with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador before making the suggestion to the minister about privatizing certain aspects of search and rescue?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time we have to act responsibly, we have to act now. We have to have a solution to a problem in regard to search and rescue, not only in Newfoundland and Labrador but also in Canada.

If the federal government wants to consult with the public in regard to – and it is not privatization. It is augmenting the service that is already provided by such bases as in Gander, the 103 Search and Rescue Base that provides great service to the people who work offshore, both in our oil industry and in our fishing industry. All you have to do is augment it.

As a matter of fact, he works quite closely right now with Kruger in regard to the oil industry. There is a great relationship with them. Many of them came from the military that work with Kruger right now. It is only just to enter a pilot project...

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was not talking about the federal government doing the consultations with the people of the Province. It was the Premier's words that said you should do it, and you should speak to the people who would be impacted. That was my question, I say, for the minister.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Black Tickle have been left stranded without any means of affordable transportation out of their community. They have been asking the Department of Transportation and Works for help since the beginning of April.

I ask the minister: Why have you left the residents of Black Tickle stranded without any means of transportation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is an arrangement in place for the residents of Black Tickle who can avail of what we refer to as a schedivac flight, which is utilized through the area for persons who need transportation from isolated communities. It is especially important to the people of Black Tickle during the shoulder seasons, between the winter months where the ice is solidly frozen and the summer months where there is a ferry service.

Very recently, I have had some good discussions with a representative from Black Tickle who expressed some concerns. We are working through those concerns to be able to provide the best service to the people of Black Tickle that we can possibly provide.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, we are aware of the schedivac flight but that is not the solution because there is a 50 per cent subsidy available to Black Tickle residents who could avail of the schedivac flight, but it is simply not a scheduled flight, I say to the minister. There is no scheduled flight into Black Tickle. There is one, however, along the South Coast of Labrador.

I ask the minister: Will you make the 50 per cent subsidy available to the people in Black Tickle to avail of the scheduled flight to the South Coast?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are numerous municipalities, local service districts, and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador that live in very difficult and isolated circumstances. Many of them vary from community to community. A circumstance you will find in one community is different from other communities.

Black Tickle, up to a fairly short period of time in history, had a scheduled flight service provided by a private carrier. In the last couple of years the carrier stopped having regular flights to Black Tickle. This subsidized service was put in place to provide a service to the people in Black Tickle.

As I mentioned, I had discussions this week with a representative from the local service district of Black Tickle who explained it in great detail. We had a very good discussion about the challenges they face and we are working to correct those and make a better service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One way to really work and have a meaningful impact for the people who live in Black Tickle is to make the 50 per cent subsidy available. The schedivac flight is not the solution here, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on the other hand, the *Apollo* traffic across the Strait of Belle Isle is expected to increase on May 24 weekend. The present schedule will not be able to accommodate the extra traffic.

I ask the minister: Will you direct your officials to arrange extra crossings on The Straits with the *Apollo* for the long weekend?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The *Apollo* has been providing a service across The Straits now for many, many years. We are quite pleased that service is back in operation again this year. We have policies in place that deal with extra traffic.

As well, in recent meetings that I had with representatives from Labrador, when I attended the Combined Councils meetings in Labrador with some of my colleagues, we had some discussion there about pressure points that exist in the *Apollo* service. Again, we indicated to them that we would work with them. They identified particular needs through the fall of the year on some days of the week. We indicated that we are quite willing to work with them, to consult with them, which we have done to make the service as best we can.

It is very similar to the people in Black Tickle. We know we have pressure points in services quite often, especially in remote areas that we provide, and we work with them to make the best possible service that we can.

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, maybe just a yes or no answer would be good.

What the question is: Will you speak to your officials and put on the extra *Apollo* crossings on the Strait of Belle Isle on the May 24 weekend, just a yes or no?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, operating ferry services can be very complex, and it would be inappropriate, it would be irresponsible for me to stand here today without having all of the information and consideration for all the factors to be able to tell the hon. member opposite: yes, I can do it, or no, I cannot.

We will get the information. We will research the request, and if we can provide a service or find a way to provide a better service because the demand requires it, we will certainly do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the Noseworthy report shows that the Department of Advanced Education and Skills is in a mess. Executives have known this for quite some time, I say, Mr. Speaker. The minister had the report since December 2012 and really never got around to reading it until February.

So I ask the minister: How can you justify cutting millions of dollars of programs and services outside your department, when

internally the organization is in complete disarray?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly, first of all, take exception with the comment that the department is in disarray. We have a fine group of public service employees in the Department of Advanced Education and Skills who work hard each and every single day on behalf of the people of this Province, in the interest of the people of the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Just this morning we sat through three-and-a-half hours of Estimates with a group of eight or ten officials who put in tireless hours preparing information to present to the members opposite. So, I do take exception to that on behalf of the people of the Province.

As I said yesterday, the Noseworthy report is but one piece of information that will inform the decisions that the Department of Advanced Education and Skills will take as we focus on the priorities of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and the first priority is to ensure that we maximize every opportunity available to us in a growing economy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I take exception to the fact that the minister has made the connection to having a disorganized department and connecting that to the valuable employees you have there. As a matter of fact, some of those employees, as the report said, are working in very challenging situations. This is not about the department; this is about the leadership in that department, and it

is dysfunctional – the report says that, I say, Mr. Speaker.

It was revealed in Estimates today that the government is spending \$170,000 on a population growth study this year.

So I ask the acting minister: Is Ross Reid's salary included in this \$170,000, and how much is Mr. Reid being paid?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe the salary details are provided by the Minister of Finance in Estimates, and I think they were provided online several weeks ago.

The focus of the Population Growth Strategy is responding to a changing economy in Newfoundland and Labrador. We recognize that the circumstances we are in today are different than they were even two or three years ago. There is tremendous opportunity on the horizon.

Contrary to the two messages that you hear opposite, on one particular day the members opposite argue that we should make changes, and then when we talk about making changes, they argue that we should not make changes.

Well, that is not where we are on this side of the House. We are going to make changes in the department so that there is a clear focus on ensuring that people of Newfoundland and Labrador have every opportunity available to further their education, to get a good quality background, and take advantage of the job opportunities that exist in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the first part of the question was about is it included in the \$170,000. That, for us, right now would be enough.

Is Ross Reid's salary included in the \$170,000 or not, and what is the amount?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the salary details for all deputy ministers and senior officials have been made public. It is my understanding, and I will qualify it to be corrected in this House, that the \$170,000 would include the salary and mandatory employment-related costs, which would be an additional 15 per cent on top of the base salary.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, according to the teachers' collective agreement, the Minister of Education had until yesterday, May 7, to notify teachers if they would be kept on or let go.

I ask the Minister of Education: How many of our teachers did you let go yesterday?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the member obviously does not have a lot of knowledge about education. It is obvious in his question. It is all part of the collective bargaining process and notification. I cannot say anything else other than that. He just does not know the system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, last week, after the public service hiring freeze was lifted after

only a few weeks after it was imposed, the government started to hire people back that they thought they did not want.

I ask the Minister of Education: Does he want these teachers that he let go to hang around in case he needs them in the fall, or should they simply pack up and leave the Province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, let me just give the member a statement. We have a per-pupil spending of almost \$13,000 per student, the best in Atlantic Canada. Our funding to education ranks top within Canada. Another point to note: Our funding formula for needs-based allocation has kept 265 additional teachers in the system. It speaks to our commitment to education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, clearly we are spending the money; we are just not getting the results. I think it is probably leadership from the top that is the problem.

Mr. Speaker, when questioned this week on the status of his deficient Safe and Caring Schools Policy, the minister became defensive and stated the policy was working well.

I ask the minister: If his policy was working so well, why did he commission an expensive review, accept the report's twenty-nine recommendations, establish a committee, carry out public consultations, and commit to revising the policy? That seems like a lot of work for something that was working well.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I have to question his understanding and commitment to

teachers and students in this Province. His first statement, his lead-in, as far as I am concerned is an insult to teachers.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell the member this, in 2003 our graduation rate was 85.1 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, in 2003 our graduation rate was 85.1 per cent. In 2012, that is 92.5 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, in terms of our Safe and Caring Schools, we always look for ways that we would improve it. We consulted with major stakeholders –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, the Labrador School Board, as of today, is advertising for an education psychologist in Labrador West, days after eliminating the position in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. This is pure manipulation.

I ask the minister: Why are you advertising for a new position of an education psychologist when you already had one on staff that took you seven years to find?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, you talk about manipulation; that is exactly what just happened there and what happened before. This is a position that a person was in on a contract basis for a number of months. The position is there; it goes through a collective bargaining process.

Mr. Speaker, the individuals there have the opportunity to apply just the same as others

would. It is the process that has to be gone through. He is playing politics with it, Mr. Speaker, nothing more than that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, this is not a collective bargaining issue. This move by the Labrador School Board will result in the loss of a highly-educated Aboriginal professional. It clearly removes the position from where it is needed the most.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. EDMUNDS: I ask the minister: Will you put an end to this blatant manipulation and reinstate the position where it is most needed in Labrador?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, our commitment to education in Labrador, on the Island, continues and will remain strong. There is nothing undue in this process. It is a process that has to be gone through. It is as simple as that, Mr. Speaker – as simple as that.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I brought up about the moose graveyard and the very serious incident of safety and health with rotting moose. Anybody on a farm has to dispose of it properly.

We just learned of another one in Goose Arm Road by Hughers Brook Pond where there are four carcasses piled up together, Mr. Speaker. This is becoming a trend for the department.

I ask the minister: Will the minister have this investigated and ensure that the health and safety of people – the kids who are riding bikes along this road – that this is not causing any disease and have these moose carcasses removed and disposed of properly before any serious injury or health to anybody in the area?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that, of course, is yes.

With respect to the animals or carcasses he mentioned yesterday, the Environmental Protection Officer went to the site and has confirmed that the site has been cleaned up. Obviously, there are protocols that have been followed. There is a close connection between Natural Resources and the Department of Environment and Conservation, that will be maintained and the proper rules will be followed.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We have a government who is out \$1 billion on their Budget deficit predictions. They budgeted \$90 million, the purpose for which they kept secret for weeks, and recently they sent a backbencher to say they have made \$50 million from expropriated hydro assets in four weeks. When pressed for details the minister twists and turns, but does not answer correctly. The people of the Province can be excused if they are skeptical.

Mr. Speaker, to make it clear, I ask the minister, yes or no: Will he provide appropriate financial documents to the people of this Province to back up their claim?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, in the best interest of the people of this Province, expropriated assets in Central Newfoundland so that these assets would be owned by the people of the Province.

Since the assets were expropriated in 2009, the government through the people's energy company, Nalcor, an energy company owned by the people of this Province, an energy company that exists to get the lowest possible energy rates for the people of this Province to run the facility – and they have done it. They have sold the electrical power to Hydro, they paid the operating costs, and they paid the loans that were taken out. Since 2009, after bringing in the revenue and after paying the operating cost, after paying the loan, has a profit on a cash basis of \$21 million. That is one benefit and there are more that –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the minister noted the Auditor General could look into the botched Abitibi expropriation deal. That was a good idea.

In 2007, then Premier Danny Williams asked the Auditor General to review a controversial financial arrangement by government to purchase fibre optic strands. The Auditor General found that government was getting a good deal.

I ask the minister: Will he ask the Auditor General to examine the financial implications of the Abitibi expropriation and report to the House? It could be a good deal; let's find out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Department of Natural Resources, is audited by our provincial Auditor General. Nalcor has its own independent auditors. The audits are always available.

Mr. Speaker, let me talk about the other benefits that came out of the expropriation of these assets. There was fifty-four megawatts of power that were being used for the mill. Out of the Central Newfoundland hydro assets, they were going into the mill. They are now available to go on the grid. That cheap power is used to displace the purchase of expensive power, oil power at Holyrood. There is enhancement number one.

The second extended benefit is that the previous owners were selling the power to Hydro at a cost of eight cents a kilowatt hour; Nalcor is selling the power to Hydro at four cents a kilowatt hour. So, there are additional advantages of cheaper power there because the ratepayers will get the benefit of that (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Minister of Natural Resources said in referring to the purchase of hydro assets in Central Newfoundland: We have to pay only for half of the value of the asset.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Who pays for the other half?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, what I said was that we had paid for just slightly less than half of the value of the equity.

We paid out the equity owners, except for Abitibi – Abitibi were the majority owners in both projects – and we assumed the debt. We did not have to pay Abitibi; the federal government paid Abitibi.

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to point out to the minister that if the federal government paid the rest to Abitibi then that comes from the pockets of the people of Canada, which the people in this Province are a part.

We paid for more than what he had indicated –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, the recent Auditor General's update on prior years' report recommendations notes that government has been dragging its feet in collecting information regarding gasoline tax. The Auditor General noted the department had, among other things, failed to conduct regular reviews to identify unregistered retailers and failed to perform more frequent field audits on retailers.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: Why would such a cash strapped government, as they claim to be, forced to fire over 1,000 employees, not be more vigilant in its tracking of revenue owed to it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was actually as a result of being diligent, and particularly the officials in the Department of Finance, that we found or managed to reduce that deficit by a billion dollars. The officials in the Department of Finance, Mr. Speaker, found an anomaly in the reporting of the C-NLOPB and found that, in fact, there was 8 million more barrels of oil.

What we are doing constantly as a government is we are raising revenues, but we are not doing it on the backs of middle-income Newfoundlanders and Labradorians like the NDP would do by taxing them, taxing them, and taxing them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Will he look at the AG's report and make sure that the Department of Finance starts –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: – putting in place the recommendations they have made with regard to gasoline tax?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We certainly examine the Auditor General's report and we look at everything that is said. Let me point out a couple of things about the economy, Mr. Speaker, and what this government has done by rebuilding the economy

since 2003. We have lowered taxes by a half billion dollars.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: We have raised wages by a half billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. We have the most competitive tax regime in Atlantic Canada. We have the lowest tuition fees in the country. We are second in the country in weekly earnings. We have more people working than ever before and we have the lowest unemployment rate that we have had in thirty-seven years. That is what this government is doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, in March 2012, I asked why a perfectly working air ambulance service was removed from St. Anthony before any planning for human resources, evident from eleven unfilled medical flight specialist positions. The Drodge report said this team should be located with the air ambulance to maximize effectiveness because sending a team from St. John's could double travel time.

I ask the Minister of Health: Why did your department ignore this recommendation; and why are these vital positions –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: – still unfilled after three years?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this particular decision was made to best serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it has certainly worked. We have statistics that show the number of flights from Labrador far surpass the number of flights that were happening in St. Anthony.

Mr. Speaker, further to that, when he talks about the flight specialist team, we have worked diligently to get that second flight specialist team in place. We have eight people in training as we speak.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, when reviewing Newfoundland and Labrador ambulance program, the consultant responded to a submission I made, stating location is not within the purview of her review to improve effectiveness. Yet, the consultant's mandate clearly notes that she can make suggested changes to the current program.

Will the Minister of Health explain why she is limiting the consultant's review of the program?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no reason to review where the air ambulances are operating from. We have made our decision on that, the statistics prove that was a wise decision. It is working, and there is absolutely no reason for us to change our mandate in terms of what the ambulance review is to do.

The ambulance review has a broad mandate as it is. It has a large number of areas to investigate,

Mr. Speaker. The report is coming on that very soon and I am certainly looking forward to that report.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are looking forward to seeing some of those statistics too when she makes them available. Mr. Speaker, the Health Estimates last week revealed that indeed the ambulance review is coming up.

I would like to know when she is going to be making that public.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Mr. Speaker, I certainly cannot make it available before I get it. I am waiting to get the report. I will get the report, we will review it, and after that time we will be able to make it available. Mr. Speaker, I do not have it right now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, roads in the Province are in dire need of line painting. There was an article in *The Telegram* today talking about the situation in St. John's. There have been several close calls for motorists all over the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: Can the minister please tell the House: What is the progress of the painting program, and when can we expect to see the appropriate work done?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I should explain to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, that it is difficult to paint lines on the road when they are covered in salt and snow and ice. We have to wait for the snow and ice to dissipate from the roadways, and then we also have to wait for the salt to dissipate from the roadways as well.

You cannot put lines on the road when there is salt and sand, that is residue left from the winter. It takes several weeks and months, depending on weather sometimes, to clear the roads. Mother Nature does that job for us.

When Mother Nature has the roads cleared and to a point in time when it is a good time to paint the roads then we start the painting process. We have our line crews that are gearing up to start the process, and that work will be underway very shortly, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, the whole idea of early road construction, maintenance, and tendering would be to allow the roadwork to be done in our short construction season.

I ask the minister at the same time as that: Why isn't line painting work done earlier? Why isn't it announced in the fall when it can be done at the purview of the companies that are doing it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will try and explain it to the member opposite. Line painting in the Province is primarily carried out by the hard-working and dedicated public servants of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. The employees of Newfoundland and Labrador from Transportation and Works with equipment that is owned and operated by the Department of Transportation and Works are the ones who carry out this work as part of our summer maintenance program.

As I said, after winter clears, even though winter may clear earlier in the year in his district, in other places it is later in the year, but we have our road crews underway and they will start doing painting during the season as we do in other years, and they do a good job, I say, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East, time for a quick question without preamble.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am looking for some results as regards to some of the accidents that have happened to –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

A quick question, please.

MR. MURPHY: Does the minister have assessments of these accidents? Do you have reports available?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs, time for a quick response.

MR. O'BRIEN: What accidents? You are going to have to be a little bit more specific, George. Write me.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Obviously, there are some disgruntled Hab fans in the House today because of the amount of excitement.

Question Period has now expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Resource Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report they have passed without amendment the Estimates of the Department of Environment and Conservation; Tourism, Culture and Recreation; Innovation, Business and Rural Development; Natural Resources; Fisheries and Aquaculture; and Advanced Education and Skills.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, a petition to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS home care allows the elderly and people with disabilities to remain within the comfort and security of their own homes, home care also allows people to be discharged from hospital earlier; and

WHEREAS many families find it very difficult to recruit and retain home care workers for their loved ones; and

WHEREAS the PC Blue Book 2011, as well as the 2012 Speech from the Throne committed that government would develop a new model of home care and give people the option of receiving that care from family members; and

WHEREAS government has given no time commitment for when government plans to implement paying family caregivers;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to implement a new home care model to cover family caregivers.

As in duty bound your petitions will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is a promise that was made, a promise that has not yet been kept. We have received some reassurance that the government probably will go ahead with part of this program this year, because there seems to be a Budget allocation. Now, the Budget allocation seems to be for part of a year but not for a whole year. I think in Estimates we are gradually starting to learn that the Minister of Health is trying to tailor the money to actually fit the time left in the year.

I would urge the minister to get on with it, because what may happen is if they are so slow getting out this program as they have been with programs over the past year or so, you may have money left at the end of the year and people still in want.

So I would urge the government to move forward with this promise because funds have been allocated but not yet dispensed. Please move with the program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS transgendered people face high risk of discrimination, violence, underemployment and lack of access to housing and other services; and

WHEREAS a recent EGALE Canada survey found that 90 per cent of transgender youth hear transphobic comments regularly from other students and one quarter hear such comments from teachers; and

WHEREAS the Public Health Agency of Canada reports that nearly half of trans youth seriously considered suicide and one-fifth attempted in it in the previous year; and

WHEREAS all individuals should have equal opportunity to live their lives and meet their needs without being hindered or prevented by discriminatory practices based on gender identity or gender expression; and

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to amend the Human Rights Act to include gender

identity and gender expression in the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it was wonderful yesterday to sit in the House and to hear the Minister of Education praise the work that is being done in the Department of Education by their Safe and Caring Schools policy, where they had EGALÉ people from all over the country come and do workshops about homophobia, about transphobia. Here we are in this week, Mental Health Week across the country, and what we are focusing on, the theme this year is Youth Mental Health.

We know that trans-gendered youth are among the most vilified in our community. I keep getting up in the House and talking about this. As a matter of fact, the Premier two weeks ago in the media said: I do not know why she is always up there talking about this. Well, I guess because I always have to be up here talking about this, Mr. Speaker.

It is imperative, absolutely imperative, that our Human Rights Act be changed to include this. Our Human Rights Act is a living document. It has a responsibility not only to hear complaints, but to have a proactive role. The proactive role is to do education about this issue.

This is an issue whose time has come. It is embarrassing, and it is shameful at this point, that this government has not done this; and I know they have the ability to do this. It is not going to cost us any money. It is our moral obligation to take this in hand and to amend our Human Rights Act to have it do the right thing.

This is happening all across the world, Mr. Speaker. I do not know why we have to be the last ones. Last week I had the opportunity of meeting with some gay-straight alliances in junior high, junior high school, Mr. Speaker, and the students in junior high school were asking: How come this government is not changing our Human Rights Association?

Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Junior high students get it. They know the importance of this. The junior high school students are far ahead of our own Minister of Justice. That is a sad state of affairs, but maybe he will listen to them.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Your time has expired.

MS ROGERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A petition to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS students of the Adult Basic Education program at the College of the North Atlantic do not wish to attend privatized educational facilities; and

WHEREAS College of the North Atlantic has the most accredited Adult Basic Education program in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS students are concerned as to the availability of private institutions and whether or not they can accommodate additional students.

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to reverse this damaging decision to students and reinstate the Adult Basic Education programming at the College of the North Atlantic.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition on a subject that we actually had the opportunity to ask questions

about in Estimates this morning. We had three hours; there was a lot to cover. We never had as much time as we would have liked, certainly, to cover off that wide a range, but one of the things we did discuss was ABE. Besides the fact that it is quite clear that the department has a horrible, horrible mess right now, that it is barely functioning, it is actually funny that we have a department that is a year-and-a-half old and it is going through restructuring. It is actually amazing; the department is barely past a year old, its birthday, and we are already restructuring the department. I mean, it is an absolute mess.

I think that is one of the reasons we have this ABE situation like it is. Now, I will put some positive news out there. The positive news is that it looks like the RFP or tender process will be coming sometime this month. Now, that is not for sure, but we have to hope for the best. Again, that is the only positive I am going to say is that it looks like that. That is all there really is positive that I can see to it.

We found out a lot of information that the government is putting out through their speaking notes was actually basically wrong, miscalculated; talking about graduation rates where we do not even take into account the fact that Income Support students who have to go to College of the North Atlantic have barriers that prevent them from graduating in many cases, which is part of the white paper that government commissioned. Again, they use that to justify the move they have made. It is counterproductive and it is counter to everything they tried to do.

I am hoping they will come to their senses at some point and make the right decision as it relates to Adult Basic Education as we move forward, not to put out misrepresented information, as has been done by many members on the other side. I hope the Premier lives up to her words, that there is going to be more opportunity for Adult Basic Education in the future.

There are still a lot of questions to ask on this section, and hopefully we will get some answers at some point.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

I remind him he has a couple of minutes before 3:00 o'clock.

MR. KIRBY: The hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS students of the Adult Basic Education program at the College of the North Atlantic do not wish to attend privatized educational facilities; and

WHEREAS College of the North Atlantic has the most accredited Adult Basic Education program in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS students are concerned as to the availability of private institutions and whether or not they can accommodate additional students;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reverse this damaging decision to students and reinstate the Adult Basic Education programming at College of the North Atlantic.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

As my colleague, the Member for Burgeo – La Poile, has pointed out, we did talk about this at length this morning in the Estimates Committee. It is increasingly evident this was just a cost-saving measure and nothing more.

One of the things this has done now is thrown a wrench into the Province's plans for a strategic adult literacy plan, which this government, the government opposite, promised the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador back in 2007. Just last year, the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, the current minister, said we would have that plan this year. Now we understand that plan has been put off perhaps up to even two years as a result of this change.

This is at a time when we really need to focus on Adult Basic Education and literacy. Instead we are shaking up the system to get something uncertain. We are not even clear on what the quality assurance mechanism for this will be in the end. Certainly those who teach in the program and students of the program now believe the program they are taking at College of the North Atlantic is one of high quality.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The member's time has expired.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, and it is now 3:00 o'clock, I call upon the hon. the Member for Humber Valley to introduce the private member's motion that is on the Order Paper in his name.

The Member for Humber Valley.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a privilege for me to introduce this private member's motion on this Wednesday. I will just read in the motion again for those –

MR. SPEAKER: Seconded by...?

MR. BALL: Oh yes, it is seconded by the Member for Torngat Mountains:

WHEREAS we have seen many tragedies and many lives lost due to distress on land and at sea, including tragedies like the *Ryan's Commander, Melina and Keith II, Check-Mate III, Cougar 491, and Burton Winters*; and

WHEREAS the federal government has closed the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre for search and rescue services in Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS many questions have been raised about procedures and practices of the provincial government and the Department of National Defence in relation to these tragedies; and

WHEREAS the federal Auditor General has determined that search and rescue services in Canada are operating at a bare minimum and need significant improvements; and

WHEREAS the federal Auditor General has identified that a common set of principles for coordinating these levels of government on national matters does not exist; and

WHEREAS the federal Auditor General did not audit or investigate provincial, territorial, or municipal search and rescue activities, including those volunteer organizations, or the activities of other federal organizations such as the RCMP, who are involved in search and rescue activities; and

WHEREAS the federal government has announced that it would co-operate with the province on an inquiry into search and rescue issues;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House urges the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to conduct a full investigation into search and rescue services in Newfoundland and Labrador using a public inquiry under subsection 3.(1) of the Public Inquiries Act, 2006, which states, "The Lieutenant-Governor in Council may by order establish a commission of inquiry to inquire and report on a matter that the Lieutenant-Governor in Council considers to be of public concern."

Mr. Speaker, the reason why we are entering this private member's resolution today is simply because we have been for many years now – and really last year in January there was a lot of attention paid to the Burton Winters tragedy. It is just not about one specific event; there are a

number of tragedies that have occurred in our Province and in the waters surrounding our Province. We all know that it is a difficult environment that we operate in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The big question that would get asked in this situation is: Why do we need an inquiry? I have asked this question in this House many, many times in the last year or so and even earlier this week. The federal Auditor General, Michael Ferguson, in this case, has done a review. He has done an audit of the federal assets and how they would respond to search and rescue. Not only, of course, in Newfoundland and Labrador, but across the country.

Mr. Speaker, that audit of search and rescue assets really did not involve many of the things I just mentioned in the motion, things like the search and rescue components involved the Province, that involve our municipalities, and of course many of the volunteer organizations we have that participate in searches in our Province. It did not include the activities to other federal agencies, like I said, the RCMP, for instance. All of those components, indeed, what they do, they make up search and rescue. These are people who will be called upon if indeed a search and rescue was required.

It is not just about our Coast Guard; it is not just about our air force. These were the primary assets or people who would be involved in search and rescue and this is what formed his audit. As I said, Mr. Speaker, there are many components within search and rescue in our Province that were excluded from the Auditor General's audit of the assets of search and rescue and indeed the activities.

Mr. Speaker, since this period of the audit, there have been even more changes, I would say. For instance, we have seen the closure of the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre in our Province and, of course, this was put in place simply to deal with the high traffic that could support the Joint Rescue Coordination Centres that were located in Nova Scotia. We put the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre in St. John's. It was located here to actually support and be able to help the

high traffic that was offshore Newfoundland, the Maritime traffic.

Also, since that we have seen another significant event in last year's federal budget, which included the closure of our Coast Guard stations. We have had five within the Province: one in Argentia, one in St. John's, one in Port aux Basques, one in St. Anthony, and one in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Those so-called MCTS, the Marine Communications Traffic Services, play a very valuable role. This is something we truly do not know when you look at search and rescue responses; we do not know yet what has been the full impact of losing those significant assets for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. What has been the impact?

This was not part of the audit that the federal AG did; this was not part of his audit at all. It is not fair to say that when you look at and when you want to put in a world-class, gold-standard search and rescue service for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and indeed the people of Canada, that is what we have been told. This is what we want; this is the objective. It will not be able to do that by simply just auditing two components of that.

From the Auditor General's report, there were significant concerns. He talked a lot about the communication that would happen. Now, because we have a number of components that participate in search and rescue activities, you just cannot isolate it to the federal component. Often what we get were the provincial components that are included. The federal minister on his recent visit made it quite clear there is and must be shared responsibility for search and rescue in our Province. He clearly said he would participate in ways to improve that service.

Mr. Speaker, that co-operation is something we have been challenged to do. As a matter of fact many times in this House, we have been told we should speak to our federal MPs, our federal Liberal MPs, to get them engaged and get them involved. Here we are about a year later asking for this inquiry. Now we have all parties involved and the Premier herself has said over

the last year they would participate in an inquiry if there was co-operation from the federal government. We are at that stage now.

Yes, we have said and we have heard it many times in the House this week that what is required is not more study; what is required is indeed action. Well, finding out where the gaps are, putting in an inquiry, doing an investigation of your current assets, and looking at all the components of search and rescue is an important part of taking action. This is in my opinion, Mr. Speaker.

Part of taking action is when you identify where your gaps are and what is missing in the system. If we do not have the components, for instance, talking to each other, collaborating, or working with each other in a search and rescue event, then what happens is it becomes disjointed. We do not need that. We do not need that at this critical time, especially when we have increased traffic, I would say, around our Island.

Mr. Speaker, one thing, too, I would like to address in these gaps is this is not about politics, I would say. All members in the Official Opposition clearly say this is about putting a gold-standard, world-class search and rescue response team in place for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is our goal. We would like to see this inquiry put in place because what it would do is take the politics out of it altogether.

Now, when you look at the federal Auditor General's report, there were many things in this, I would say, Mr. Speaker. It covered the period from April 1, 2007 to November 1, 2012. The work was done by February 15, 2013 and we just recently received the report from the federal AG.

You say to yourself, why is any of this at all important? According to the AG himself, "Cooperation and collaboration are essential to the success of search and rescue activities, especially" – and these are his words – "considering Canada's size..." Now, we can take that to our own Province because we know we have a lot of coastline around Newfoundland

and a lot of coastline around Labrador. So it is essential, I would say, that we have the co-operation and collaboration for this to be a success.

He goes on to say, "Effective management and support, including adequate human resources, reliable equipment, and information systems, make it possible to carry out efficient search and rescue activities." The report clearly outlines there has been a big concern around staffing, finding trained people to actually man those stations, getting qualified people to be available for search and rescue, and also around the information systems. He goes on to say in his report that the information systems themselves are at a breaking point and we have a significant gap with no plan, really, with the information system supposed to be upgraded around 2015 and 2016.

So here we are, three years from that, and we have a significant gap when we have the components of search and rescue that are there and put in place to be called upon if an emergency is to happen for people who are using the activities in our Province, the people in Newfoundland and the people in Labrador who are actually working offshore and working our coastlines, if it is fisherpersons or people just out using it as recreation. What we do not have is the information systems in place. There is a significant gap that will actually take us through where we are today in 2013 to get us through to 2015-2016. We have asked that question, I say, Mr. Speaker.

The report itself was an extensive report. I am not sure how many people have had a chance to read the Auditor General's report. It outlined many, many concerns about the various roles and responsibilities. The minister himself, this week in the meeting he had with our provincial minister, made it quite clear that there is shared responsibility here, made it quite clear that he is willing to co-operate to improve services here. In our opinion looking at an inquiry, an investigation into the assets of what we have available so that we can put a world-class system in place, where we could have all the components of search and rescue speaking to

each other, communicating with other, collaborating with each other, Mr. Speaker, is very important if we expect that to happen.

Mr. Speaker, he went on to say, in addition to their air and marine search and rescue duties, for instance the Canadian Forces and the Coast Guard also respond to provincial and territorial search and rescue incidents when available. This support is normally around humanitarian incidents. This clearly says they would not be the lead organization in this situation; indeed, they would be there to support existing groups, which in that case would be a provincial responsibility. It is very clear here that it is extremely important that all parties work together. In order to do that, we would have to identify what is missing in the systems right now.

We know through the Auditor General's report that there are significant gaps, very important pieces of not only assets, but how people talk to each other, information systems, trained personnel, Mr. Speaker. I would say there are significant gaps in the system right now. We need to find a way to bring the Province and the federal components together so that they understand what would happen in an emergency situation.

Mr. Speaker, we are not convinced, based on the information we have had and certain responses we have had over the years in our history, we are not convinced – neither is the Auditor General, I would say, Mr. Speaker. Based on the comments we see in this report, they are not convinced that those components, this collaboration, this communication is in place.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have seen closures of Coast Guard stations and we really do not truly see what the impact will be. We have not seen what the impact will be of the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre, the closure of that office. I know today it was mentioned in a press release by the provincial minister that he has asked to have that office reopened.

What we need is timelines on that. We have not seen a commitment on that. Even a provincial

audit would identify how important that particular component, that particular station would be to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. What would be the impact of the closure of the Coast Guard offices in St. Anthony as a for instance, and in St. John's?

They are extremely important components, Mr. Speaker. They have been put in place for a reason. To see the downgrading of those services without knowing the impact – and I will get a chance to speak again at a later time in this debate, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I get up in this House today to talk about a very critical and important issue for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and as well, Canada, and that is search and rescue, Mr. Speaker. Just to reflect a little bit, the livelihood of our people is quite clear on the sea in regard to fishing, the oil industry, recreation, and whatever it may be. Search and rescue, especially air search and rescue is critically important to this Province.

Mr. Speaker, I come as well, not only as the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services and the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I come with sixteen years of experience in regard to conducting searches and participating in searches here in Newfoundland and Labrador, along with the federal component. I noticed as well, as the hon. member spoke, he spoke for fifteen minutes and I would say probably 95 per cent of his speech was all concerning federal responsibility. That is why I say, Mr. Speaker, that this is not the time for study.

The Auditor General has outlined in a comprehensive, systematic study of search and rescue pertaining to Canada - which pertains to Newfoundland and Labrador - that now is the

time for action. The responsible thing is to act now. That is what I am asking our federal minister to do, is act now in regard to the recommendations in that report.

I do not need another study to tell me exactly what is missing. I know search and rescue well, very well. I know exactly how it works in regard to the twenty-five ground search and rescue teams across this Province, well trained. We have invested in those. We have invested in those over the years in equipment, training, and whatever it may be.

We have great people in the RNC and the RCMP, but what we are here for today is asking the federal government to act now. That is what we need. We need action now because the Auditor General has outlined areas of concern and deficiencies, which I met with the federal minister on Monday morning about.

Some of the key issues in regard to areas within that report are communication, equipment, such as aircraft and personnel, Mr. Speaker. The communication piece, which we have reiterated, our Premier has reiterated that we need the marine search sub-centre. That was established here in 1970 for a reason. We need that reinstated in the Province because we deal with, my people deal with JRCC at various times during the year. We know exactly how the protocol works. We know exactly how to approach and what they provide.

The marine rescue sub-centre puts an added pressure on JRCCs. We do not need that at this particular time. We need clear, really clear communication lines between that centre and the JRCC. Again, that is a federal responsibility. We need the minister to act now and act quickly, and reinstate that sub-centre in St. John's, Newfoundland.

The other thing in regard to things that were brought up in the Auditor General's report was insufficient equipment and assets. We had quite a discussion on Monday morning in regard to that. I had a number of suggestions. We did not come empty handed to that meeting. I did not as a minister, neither did we as a government. I

came with suggestions that if they took immediate action in regard to my suggestions it would have an immediate impact on their capability of delivering the service that the Province, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserves and requires, as well in regard to the rest of Canada.

I suggested to the hon. member that they should pilot a project here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Not like what is happening in the UK, Norway, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Australia and other countries around the world where they augment the service that is provided by their military. I, in no uncertain terms, am talking about privatizing that particular service because it is the responsibility of the federal government and they should keep it with the military.

Fine enough if they could, Mr. Speaker, because one other thing that was outlined in the Auditor General's report as well was issues within personnel: number one, on recruitment; number two, on training; and, number three, on retention. That has to be addressed.

The suggestion I had would really address that issue because first off, hard recruiting in the military these days, especially with pressure points and the challenges that they have with the private industry in providing a much higher rate of pay than the military can provide. They train them up and train them well, but then what happens, Mr. Speaker? They lose them to the private industry. Those people are working all around the world augmenting the service right now in the UK, Norway, and the other countries that I just outlined here in this House today.

The capabilities of CHC helicopters, the capabilities of Cougar, and the capabilities of PAL; they have that capability, they have the expertise. The minister could quite quickly enter into a pilot project with one or two of those particular companies, or whatever way he wants and it will have the desired impact in regard to the delivery of search and rescue services in this Province, Mr. Speaker.

We had quite a conversation in regard to that. He brought to the table as well that they have

recently purchased some helicopters from the US. I said, Minister, it is going to take a long time, even if it is possible, to convert those particular aircraft to be able to perform the tasks that are outlined and come to the standard in regard to a helicopter that is used in search and rescue, Mr. Speaker. That will take a long time.

The Auditor General's report is quite conclusive, quite comprehensive, and very systematic. It identifies an issue that we have to have addressed now, not later, not after another study which will take a long time to do. Like I just said, I know the system well. I know exactly how it works here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I know exactly how it works in every province in Canada. It works the same. The missing components and the issues here are all federal responsibilities which we have outlined, and our Premier has outlined to the federal government many times over the last two years.

We have to know how many incidents and I have asked for that data from the federal minister as well. I need to know the incidents, the number of incidents in Atlantic Canada, and what the response times were in regard to wheels up time, twenty or thirty minutes, whatever it may be. I am looking for twenty minutes wheels up, twenty-four seven, 365 days a year.

I impressed on the federal minister that we do not stop fishing because it is a holiday. We do not stop fishing because it is a weekend. We do not stop fishing because it is Christmas Day. It is 365 days a year for twenty-four hours a day. That is exactly what happens in Newfoundland and Labrador.

He talked about peak times. Fine enough, he talked about the lobster industry. Those people should be protected, absolutely, and have confidence in the system in regard to their portion of the fishery here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Our fishery is a lot more comprehensive than the lobster fishery; it goes 365 days a year, twenty-four hours a day. Various other species are fished off our shores and people are on the water as we speak.

They have to have confidence. There has to be a system in place. That requires proper assets and properly trained personnel. If the federal Minister of DND, has an issue with regard to the assets and with regard to the personnel – and no disrespect whatsoever, Mr. Speaker, because they live in my hometown. Searcher and Rescue 103 are located there. I know a lot of them very, very well. They put their life in danger many, many times for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, but if there are challenges there, maybe we can augment that with some type of a pilot project with the private industry.

As I said in Question Period, Mr. Speaker, Cougar interacts with 103 right now in providing a service to the offshore, in their capacity. Many of them used to be stationed at 103 and work with the military, but have transitioned over to Cougar. So why not go down that path and have an immediate impact, and an immediate solution with regard to that opportunity that is out there? I implore the minister to support that, explore it and certainly get it up and running as quickly as possible.

As well, I said that the hon. member, the Leader of the Opposition, was talking about another study. Everything that he talked about was a federal responsibility. The RNC, the RCMP, and our ground search teams are well trained. Everything - he went right through the Auditor General's report and each and every one of them was a federal responsibility.

We do not need a study. We need to come together as all parties and implore and lobby, and make sure that the federal government addresses those needs, not only here but right across Canada, but certainly in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That is where I am with it. The time has gone beyond study time. That is where I am with it, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, I have been in that system for a long, long time, sixteen years. I have trained people. I know the system well and it works well, but there are missing components. The main missing components are in assets, aircraft and trained personnel in the

air. They have to be at the ready and they have to be airborne within twenty to thirty minutes after the call. That is what the Auditor General outlined in his report in regard to the wheels up time and the various other components that he outlined.

Mr. Speaker, as well, I chatted with the federal minister in regard to the availability of the data and the availability of the response times because I want to review that myself. He said that he would participate with all jurisdictions, all the provinces, with all the territories in regard to working with them to provide a goal service, if you want to put that terminology to it in regard to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and also the rest of Canada. I need to have a look at that data in regard to the number of incidents, the wheels up time. I want to look at all of that.

I go back again that I firmly believe that talking about it now really deflects away from the need. That is what it is. I do not want to talk about what we have; I want to talk about what we need. What we need is a clear, definitive approach with timelines attached from the federal government, from the Department of National Defence, in regard to how they are going to address the issues that were outlined in the Auditor General's report.

I need that because that would certainly show the people of the Province that we are moving forward, that there are going to be solutions to the issues that were addressed, or outlined, or identified in that report, and then we will move it forward. I think we can have immediate action, Mr. Speaker. The only way we are going to get that, to be honest with you, is to come together as one.

Yes, our federal counterparts or colleagues in the House of Commons should be asking for just that as well in regard to their time on the floor of the House, the time to asking questions or meet with the federal minister, whatever it may be. They should be asking for action now.

This is not a time for chatting and talking, this is not a time for anything like that. This is a time

for action; this is a time to take the responsible approach. Act now and you could have a dramatic effect in regard to the resources that we have on the ground here in the Province, the federal resources on the ground in this Province, as well as the way they respond to a request.

That is where it lies, Mr. Speaker, no more to it than that. I was glad to see the hon. member, the Opposition House Leader, identify in his speech for fifteen minutes that all the problems he outlined was all with the federal government and all with the Department of National Defence.

So now is the time for action, Mr. Speaker. That is the responsible thing. Act now and we can have a dramatic impact in regard to that service or the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly with mixed emotions that I speak to this resolution that has been tabled here today, Mr. Speaker. I heard the hon. minister talk about search and rescue, and predominantly he tends to shift everything to the federal government. In a lot of cases, in the majority of the cases, I agree with him.

Mr. Speaker, in Question Period I heard the hon. minister talk about his meetings with his federal counterpart. They talked about search and rescue problems in Newfoundland and Labrador. He talked about search and rescue problems in Canada. The minister said he talked about problems with search and rescue in Newfoundland and Labrador. He told the federal minister that, and Hansard could probably prove that. There is a concern and there is a provincial concern.

Mr. Speaker, we had people like the hon. minister in the field with search and rescue, and certainly my life would depend on him. I have had thirty years with the Royal Reserves, with ground search and rescue, and with the Coast

Guard Auxiliary. I have co-ordinated searches. I have taken part in searches that have brought family members home to their families with smiles on their faces, thankfully a lot more than the situations where I have been part of search teams that have had to go back to the families and bring bad news. It is not something I would recommend to anybody in this House or anybody in this Province. It leaves you at a loss, and it is a loss you have to live with for the rest of your life.

I have also been rescued more than once. In the lives we live, Mr. Speaker, you are out at the mercy of the elements and accidents will happen. To know that you have that service that you could, and I will say, at one time depend on was a comfortable feeling. When we look at the questions that arose out of disasters offshore, the *Ocean Ranger*, the sealing disaster in 1914, and the *Titanic*, there were investigations, there were questions asked. It is because of those inquiries, whatever you may call them, Mr. Speaker, whether they be investigations, blunt-end questions, they got responses, and our services are where they are today because of that.

Mr. Speaker, we are still losing thousands of lives in our Province. It is because of the nature of what we do, Mr. Speaker, the very nature of what we do will cost lives. Can services be improved upon? You bet they can, Mr. Speaker, you bet they can.

Mr. Speaker, I was involved in a search about two years ago, and what I want to try to tell you in this incident is how the system worked and our perception of the actions that unfolded.

Mr. Speaker, there were a bunch of seal hunters that went ashore due to an engine failure on Cape Harrison. Anyone who is familiar with Cape Harrison, Mr. Speaker, it is a high cliff that sticks out into the Atlantic Ocean. So, Mr. Speaker, I got the call from one of the people who went ashore on the cape that evening. They had a part of a satellite telephone call, Mr. Speaker – and I will quote the words, if I may: We are gone ashore at Cape Harrison; send help. Mr. Speaker, that was the total content of the conversation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I relayed the call to Coast Guard in Goose Bay. In two seconds I had the call gone through. We knew about the problems with the *Ryan's Commander*. We knew about the problems with the *Melina & Keith II*. We did not want to leave our friends there. So we were going to sit back and say, it is going to be taken care of? No.

Mr. Speaker, I led the search team up to Cape Harrison that night, and you talk about – and the minister talked about it earlier – what search and rescue technicians will do to get the job done. Mr. Speaker, I watched a SAR tech come down 100 feet and bounce off the rocks, and from my viewpoint, the blades of the chopper were inches from the side of the cliff – and they pulled those guys off the rocks, Mr. Speaker.

We went up that night in two speedboats, two eighteen-foot speedboats, Mr. Speaker, two metre swells and twenty-five knots of wind, and we did not know if we were going to hit a crest of a wave or a piece of ice because we could not tell the difference, Mr. Speaker. What did we risk to get there? We risked our lives, yes. Would we do it again? Yes, we would.

Mr. Speaker, it took us four-and-a-half hours to cover fifty miles. The same time it took the search and rescue helicopter, out of Gander, to get to the same site. It worked – it worked. From the time I got the call saying the boys were plucked off the cape, the time elapsed were five-and-a-half hours. It turned out good, Mr. Speaker, and that is what we would like to see. Now the next morning four of us could not walk properly because when you are driving a small boat in conditions like that, it takes a toll on your body.

Mr. Speaker, a little while ago I was involved in another search, one that did not turn out so good. I was the driving point on this search; I was a member of the search team. I assisted in parts of a search that I would rather not, Mr. Speaker, and some of the images that I have seen haunt me today.

Mr. Speaker, when the whole incident unfolded and questions started to be asked, the one

question that I remember was Burton's mom in Makkovik asking how she got there before search and rescue did. This was after the fact, Mr. Speaker – this was after the fact. She questioned why she got there first.

Now, is this a federal issue? Yes. Mr. Speaker, when the federal Auditor General's report came out one of the incidents that were questioned was the lack of communication between different levels of government. Different levels of government, I say to the hon. minister. Where is the confusion here?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible)

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, I might add, I gave the minister his opportunity; I wish him to give me mine.

Mr. Speaker, when questions like that arise out of a federal report, communication problems with different levels of government, I ask questions and so do everyone else in this Province. In response to the accident in Makkovik, 9,000 people were polled; 69 per cent of the people said yes, let's have an inquiry. Is this a matter of public concern, when the public comes forward? Yes, I believe it is, Mr. Speaker. I do believe that is.

You talk about having the discretion, Mr. Speaker, the Public Inquires Act and I think if you could call Cabinet, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, the same people I believe – in a matter of public concern, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council can call an inquiry.

I asked the Premier in Question Period in another sitting: Is this not an area of public concern? You talk about the comments that came in and where they came from. Not only in Makkovik, not only in Gander Bay, not only out on the West Coast, not up in St. Anthony. They came from Qatar in Saudi Arabia, they came from Lakewood, California, they came from Frankfurt, Germany, and they came from the West Coast of Canada. I could not answer the e-mails that I received because there were too many. What did they want? They wanted something done.

When you have an investigation, when you have an inquiry, Mr. Speaker, it is not to point out what went wrong, although it is part of the process. An inquiry is to find out how it can be improved. I cannot understand why the government across the way does not want to improve on services by finding out what went wrong. That is the whole basis of an inquiry.

Yes, there is a time for action, Mr. Speaker, but the Auditor General's report and the minister's own comments in Question Period, say there are problems in search and rescue in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are problems in search and rescue in Canada. We all know that. We knew it before the Auditor General's report come out. There was equipment failure with the *Ryan's Commander*, communication problems with the *Melina and Keith II*, and with the young Burton tragedy. Questions are still there. Yes, it is time for action, but we need to know what went wrong.

I am going to clue up a bit early, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's report gave problems with equipment, and it gave problems with personnel shortages. I am not, at any time in my life, ever going to question the credibility of a trained search and rescue technician. I have worked side by side with them, I have seen them work. These people will do what they have to do to get the job done. They problem is, they have to do it with what they have, and therein lies the problem.

Ground search and rescue – we have seen improvements over the last year and certainly any more improvement is never too much. There is never going to be enough improvement, Mr. Speaker. If we can see the day in Newfoundland and Labrador that we can go without losing lives at sea or on the land, then we can say we have done our job. Until then, we have to question tragedies. We have to inquire into what went wrong. We have to make recommendations. As the minister said in his closing statements, we have to act.

There are all kinds of statements out there, Mr. Speaker. Why fix it if it is not broken? I have heard the minister say that search and rescue

would be applied, as is, the next time around. If there is a life lost, there is a question there. I think that is the one thing that the government across the way and that this side of the House will agree on, that there is always going to be room for improvement. That will never go away.

Mr. Speaker, if you do not know what is wrong, how are you going to fix it? I think we have seen enough wastage on presumptions, and resources thrown into what we presume that is wasted money. I do not want to ever go on a search and rescue sortie again and come back and listen to comments like, I could not send a helicopter because something might happen here, or the weather was bad.

On the third day of the search for Burton Winters, Mr. Speaker, I sat in my living room window looking out at 2:00 o'clock in the morning watching two aircraft that were tasked to fly around. I hoped and I prayed that they would come back and say it was a success. It did not happen.

Mr. Speaker, when we went out the next day what we found I would not like to see again and I would not like to wish it on anybody. There are going to be lives lost because that is the nature of where we live, it is our history, it is our culture, and it is something that we have to work to improve on. I believe the minister when he says it is time for action. Let's fix the problem, but first let's find out what the problem is.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand here and speak to this resolution today. Search and rescue certainly is important to every Newfoundlander and Labradorian. There is not a single one of us in this House and among the people of this great Province who have not been

touched by some tragedy in some way or another that has happened at sea.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we heard our minister go on about how we are a seafaring people in terms of the fishery and all the different species that a lot of our people make their livelihood on. We are certainly acutely aware of all the dangers of what could happen while we are out on the water. As such, I just have to say that this is too important an issue. It is too important an issue to play politics with and to obscure with rhetoric. That is a simple fact.

I want to help us today, Mr. Speaker, look straight on at this, and let's look at the facts about what has happened now with the latest report that we are all here discussing today. The fact is that it is the primary responsibility for search and rescue of the federal government. That is a fact. The fact is that the Auditor General has done an objective, independent, and systematic review of search and rescue. The fact is that his report indicates systematic problems and a lack of capacity to respond to critical incidents. The fact is that he also sets out a clear course of action to rectify all of the problems that he found.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the Auditor General of Canada, I would suggest that there is no more trustworthy, independent, and thorough source than that office in and of itself. His very substantial report outlines some very serious shortcomings, and the very fact that there are some very clear actions that needs to be taken to rectify those that were outlined. Furthermore, he makes specific recommendations to improve the entire system of search and rescue, not only for us here in Newfoundland and Labrador, but across our great country.

In our Province we certainly know the importance of world-class search and rescue. Our people, like the people all across our great country, deserve that level of service. It is not an unreasonable expectation for those who make their living on the sea to want confidence in a high-quality, well-staffed, well equipped, highly co-ordinated, and responsive search and rescue effort in a country as great as Canada. Mr.

Speaker, our people are interested in seeing that these issues that were identified by the AG get dealt with. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General studied personnel in search and rescue, and I am going to quote him here. The report states, "Providing SAR services across Canada requires that the Canadian Forces and the Canadian Coast Guard have a sufficient number of qualified personnel". Nobody is going to argue with that. After studying human resources available to SAR teams the Auditor General noted, "Air Force personnel shortages make it difficult to meet minimum crew levels".

Mr. Speaker, he recommends that National Defence assign a sufficient number of personnel, not only to meet the operational needs of search and rescue, but also to provide for the mandatory training needs of personnel which have been difficult to accomplish due to lack of staff to cover absences for training. If you do not have enough people in order to keep that training up-to-date, then they have to be on duty. There is definitely going to be a difficulty there. Nobody can argue with that.

Mr. Speaker, there are grave concerns about the inability of the technicians to consistently update their skill set. In the rescue of Canadians they provide unseen medical aid, evacuation from some of the harshest, most difficult and remote areas of Canada. They must frequently update these qualifications. This could be anything from diving, to parachuting, mountain climbing, and of course, they have to have the up-to-date medical qualifications as well. It is simply going to be difficult to do. If you do not have people to cover those who are in training and to be on duty, you are not going to get the job done. That was clearly identified.

The review also found, Mr. Speaker, that in addition to these personnel shortages, that there is simply not enough aircraft available for training the aircrews. This has delayed the training of new recruits, as our minister said, as well as the existing personnel that we have. The new recruits just simply cannot carry out their

functions until they have had that training. We can almost see the Catch-22 there, Mr. Speaker.

The AG found this situation in and of itself has had a particular impact on SAR activities, since in order to be available for the missions the pilots, the flight engineers, and operational crews have experienced delays in maintaining their mandatory training due to the lack of available aircraft, Mr. Speaker. That is a fact.

The report also outlined that the air force is not the only SAR agency to have insufficient personnel. According to the report the Canadian Coast Guard has personnel troubles too, Mr. Speaker. That is very serious as well. That organization faces difficulties in recruiting marine co-ordinators for the JRCC, the Joint Rescue Co-ordination Centres. It is difficult to maintain an adequate number of rescue specialists and deliver that SAR training to commanding officers that are so necessary.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to reiterate the point of our minister here today. We do not need this studied any more. We want the federal government to act, to recruit more staff, and make sure that they have the training necessary to carry out this very important job. What could be more important than keeping Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and indeed all Canadians safe?

Mr. Speaker, according to the Auditor General, personnel recruitment and training is only a part of the story. According to him, the rest can be found in the aging - and I quote - dilapidated and insufficient aircraft. Problems included two few Cormorants and the use of the inferior Griffon, whose limitation means it can only be used for certain missions. We have twenty-year-old Hercules planes, which are down for significant amounts of time and for which parts are difficult to get. We have the aging Buffalo aircraft, which are out of service and unavailable much of the time. It is a simple fact.

The AG also notes that National Defence has not sufficiently replaced or maintained its SAR aircraft to the level that is necessary to respond to the SAR incidents effectively. He

recommends that National Defence give priority to acquiring new aircraft that are best suited for search and rescue, it is as simple as that, and ensure we have not only the best aircraft but that we have enough of these resources to meet the needs on an ongoing basis. I do not think anybody, whether you are a legislator or not, would disagree with those statements.

Mr. Speaker, we need the SAR system adequately equipped and we need a new plan for how that is going to be accomplished. We have heard that from the speakers here today, that we have to have a plan going forward. That is irrefutable. We need to know, as our minister said before during his comments, how long it is going to take the federal government to acquire adequate numbers of aircraft and to bring the SAR system up to a level where we as residents, as legislators, and as average Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can feel confident once again.

We need to know, Mr. Speaker, no matter where you are from across our great Province that when we go out on the water, should you need that assistance, it is going to be available with the appropriate – and I emphasize the word appropriate – aircraft and vessels staffed by the best skilled and highly specialized men and women that this country has to offer. Nobody is going to talk about our SAR techs, our people, and our commanders and say they are not the best. We are just saying we have to do better in terms of making sure they have what they need to get the job done and their training is up to date. We have enough people to cover the shifts and the training.

I would just like to take a few minutes here, Mr. Speaker, and talk about the information systems associated with all this, too. If you are in that line of work, these professionals have to have up-to-date, minute-by-minute information in order to make the decisions regarding their missions. That is an irrefutable fact. Unfortunately, the Auditor General found out the current system of information management just cannot provide the data needed by the coordinators and the other SAR personnel.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the system does not support daily operations and is near a breaking point. The AG recommended that the government immediately put in place a plan to cover the time between now and 2015-2016 when a new IMS, a new Information Management System, is expected to be in place.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House, our government, we fully agree. We want to see that plan, too. We want to see how this gap is going to be managed in the short term and we expect the federal government to act on their responsibility; it is as simple as that. The time for study is long past, long past, Mr. Speaker. Now is the time for action; it is as simple as that.

Mr. Speaker, this government, we accept the measures that have been taken by the federal minister, MacKay, and we are glad to see those steps; however, I am not alone in saying that in light of all the issues that I just outlined, these issues clearly just do not go far enough. There are other opportunities out there, absolutely. It is not enough, Mr. Speaker, to simply just fix up a Web site, renew a satellite subscription, and talk about flexible deployment of resources and so on. It is not enough when our AG also says that we have very serious issues with capacity within our system, and we just do not have the personnel and the equipment to respond appropriately.

The measures are not enough when we have a system of gathering and disseminating that critical information that is at a breaking point and is not meeting the day-to-day operational needs; and that is a fact. It is just not enough to do some window dressing here, Mr. Speaker, and it is not enough for all the members of this House to settle for that, either. In this House we should be calling on the federal government to take its responsibility to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and to all Canadians, very, very seriously, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to SAR.

In this House today, we should speak with one voice, asking more of our federal government, asking for a definitive, immediate action on the report of the AG. Mr. Speaker, we know what

the problems are. We know what needs to be done. The federal government needs to move on these recommendations. We need equipment and we need the personnel issues addressed. It is as simple as that.

We need new aircraft, we need people to fly them, and we need more people to operate the entire search and rescue system. We need information management and communications issues addressed, and we need response times improved and the confidence of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador restored. We need the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre, Mr. Speaker, reinstated. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Speaker, I know some people here would like to see more study and more talk. The time for study and talk is over. We need to see a detailed action plan from the federal government that outlines a specific time frame, as our minister had mentioned, about how and when we are going to address these serious issues that were raised in the AG report.

Mr. Speaker, we need acknowledgement from the federal government that they realize the urgency of this issue to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. They have to act now to improve the state of readiness of air and marine search and rescue resources and services. It is as simple as that. We must ensure the resources are provided right away so this critical service is available when our people need it.

For those, Mr. Speaker, who are making their living on the sea, for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Canadians all across this great country, the facts are already before us. The time for study and talk is over. The federal government has all the information it needs to create a top-notch, world-class search and rescue service. In this House of Assembly, let us speak with one voice to call them out, to call them to act decisively, quickly, and with a definitive timeline to give search and rescue personnel the tools and training they need to restore the confidence the people of Newfoundland and Labrador should have in this system.

I would just like to say I wanted to get up here and stick to the facts today, Mr. Speaker, and I have certainly done that. My good colleague the MHA for Torngat Mountains has said it, too. The people can only act with the resources they have. We need the personnel and we need that equipment.

I would also like to point out though, too, both speakers from the Opposition who were up here today did a great job. Thank you for that. They never said one thing about the Province. Every single thing discussed was a federal responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do not know if I can say I take pleasure in standing and talking to this. I guess in one way I can, yes, but at the same time when you are talking about the loss of human life it is a necessity, if you will, when you are a legislator. Sometimes it can be a little disturbing and sometimes it is a little bit of a sensitive issue. I can appreciate where some members come from on this issue.

The first thing on my mind, Mr. Speaker, when this motion came across was to put some really pensive thought into this. Before I do, I would like to thank those people who are out there doing that work, groups such as the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association, who are the eyes and ears, if you will, and crawl into those aircraft, and do the voluntary search and rescue duties when they are out there looking for people; and groups out there like the St. John's Rovers and Pasadena Search and Rescue.

I think the minister referred earlier to something in the area of twenty-one or twenty-two volunteer organizations out there. There are twenty-five organizations that are out there doing their work. They all have a job to do.

They do not necessarily have to do it, but they do it on a voluntary basis and they deserve our thanks for that, for answering the call every time that phone rings. At the end of it all, sometimes it is a positive result and they find somebody alive; sometimes it is a negative result and they find that somebody is after deceasing. To those people I wish peace, too, that they can sleep at night knowing at least they are doing a good job.

When we did this last year, it was a little bit of a different resolution compared to what it was this year. Last year's resolution had pretty much three main components to it and all parties voted in favour of it: to call on the feds to work with the Province to strengthen search and rescue services in the wake of the Burton Winters tragedy. It also called on Ottawa to consider establishing permanent search and rescue capability at 5 Wing Goose Bay. We know they have some helicopters there now. Since then, I think they have added a third. The third was to rescind the closure of the Marine Rescue Sub-Centre in St. John's. Mr. Speaker, which had to be one of the most shocking things the federal government did on their perspective.

We are also at risk, too, of the closure of the station in St. Anthony. We need that back. There is a huge coastline in this Province.

We know the provincial government is talking about different initiatives in the Artic. We are going to need a base of operation, not only for business to carry on, but also for search and rescue capability and the backup to that. We have to think about that.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing the resolution does this year is call for an inquiry based on a provincial law in the Public Inquiries Act, which states that, "The Lieutenant-Governor in Council may by order establish a commission of inquiry to inquire and report on a matter that the Lieutenant-Governor in Council considers to be of public concern." This is of public concern. We have all talked to people who have had an issue with the most recent issues in search and rescue.

At the same time, we also have to ask ourselves: Should it be an inquiry? We do know inquiries are very, very costly. We should be asking ourselves if the information is already readily available for any incidents that have happened in the Province.

We have had several incidents over the last couple of years. Indeed there should be assessments and reports that are made available, made public, and made public on a regular basis whenever they do occur so we can scrutinize our own provincial services. This is not just a federal responsibility here we are talking about; it is also a provincial responsibility.

Do you know something? For what has been happening in the news lately, particularly when it comes to the federal Auditor General's report and when it comes to search and rescue, I think everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador is asking themselves the same question over the last couple of years. We have come to a point where we saw the Labrador helicopters, for example, being replaced; we saw older aircraft, the old Argus search and rescue aircraft being replaced with Buffalo and Hercules aircraft.

Now we are coming to a point where this equipment is aging and we are still talking about the federal government going out and buying seven formerly US used helicopters from the States just to keep our own aircraft flying. It is absolutely sickening, I would say to the minister, and I hope he let Mr. MacKay know that the other day when he was here. The last thing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the last thing the people of Canada deserve is used junk in our backyard.

We had a prime example of the kind of equipment that 103 is struggling with now. Just last year, on July 5, everybody remembers the incident out in Grand Falls-Windsor. We had a problem with our own lift capability, I think it was. The minister can correct me if I am wrong on that. We had a smaller helicopter that could not perform the lift operation in Grand Falls-Windsor when there was a gentleman, I think it was, who fell down into a ravine just outside Grand Falls.

The call went out, of course, to the backup which happened to be 103 Rescue Squadron and all three Cormorant helicopters were down. They were all down. So where did we have to go? By chance, what did the Armed Forces do? The Armed Forces called Greenwood, Nova Scotia to ask for a helicopter to come in and lift that man out of the ravine.

We had a federal call for backup, which was coming from Nova Scotia. While that helicopter was on the way, they suddenly became aware there was a Cougar helicopter available out of St. John's. It just happened to be a foggy day. The Cougar rescue helicopter which was pretty much brand new, all of a sudden was available. They called in Cougar from, as the crow flies, 250 kilometres away; and about forty-five minutes later I think the helicopter arrived and managed to get the gentleman out of the ravine.

Not only did we have a problem federally when it came to that helicopter, we had three Cormorant helicopters down, they made a second call for another Armed Forces helicopter, and then we ended up getting one from a private concern. That one was only at the oil company's disposal, so we had to fall back on that one. It was lucky it was available. We got really lucky. This gentleman ended up surviving the incident at the same time.

At the same time as that, it all started off when it came to provincial jurisdiction. Like I said, the minister can probably explain it at a later time, but we had a problem with lift capability for that particular helicopter. We have to ask ourselves, when it comes to provincial jurisdiction – and I will say this. This is why it is important. For our provincial jurisdiction, when it comes to calling in our own helicopters for something that is happening on land, do we have the proper equipment?

That is why it is important to have the inquiry at the same time as saying that, and at the same time as being able to make some of these reports of these past incidences available to the public so we can look and we can do scrutiny on our own system. Sometimes it helps to look inwards. That is not there to be critiquing

government; that is there so we can critique our own system.

Private helicopters, as the minister says, when we go and charter them out, we charter them out on an on-call basis. Sometimes they are used by Environment and Conservation, for example, and they might be out doing another project. I think there are five or six helicopters that would be available at any one time within the Province and perhaps all five or six of them could be busy.

We have problems when it comes to the dedication of service. In some cases we might need to have an inquiry or at least look at ourselves basically on the simple fact of saying because the federal government is at risk here of not having the proper equipment in place, we might have to have dedicated services for our own people in Newfoundland and Labrador that can answer that call because the feds one of these days are not going to be there.

Mr. Speaker, it would not surprise me in the least to hear that the Armed Forces would have 103 Rescue Squadron on the block because they do not have the equipment to run. That is a very scary thought knowing that the possibility is there that we could end up losing 103. If the federal government is not updating its equipment, what is the sense of having a helicopter squadron?

I would not expect the personnel of the Canadian Armed Forces, the pilots and the SAR techs who are there working on those helicopters, to be flying in junk. I would not expect it of them. That is why sometimes it helps to look inwards and realize your own situation. We have to probably sit back and do a full evaluation.

I know from time to time Municipal Affairs would have some conferences on the go. Like, for example, Minister, the Horizon conferences. Perhaps it is time to have a regular ongoing series of Horizon conferences. Perhaps it is a good case for having standing committees together in the House of Assembly, so that we can constantly look at the whole aspect of these

different branches of government, so that we can go ahead and look at our own search and rescue needs, for example, in the Province.

What would a search and rescue technician on the ground be looking for when it comes to doing his job on a volunteer basis from the provincial government? It would be a very good question to ask. I will put that out there for government's consideration at the time. That not only is this a federal problem we are dealing with here, in some aspects it is a provincial problem.

We know the Province, for example, has responded with thermal imaging cameras. We know they have responded with vehicles for the various fire services that are out there, but at the same time, are we doing our utmost? Are there gaps there that we can fill where the federal government is not going to be able to do it?

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the provincial government at the same time when we are talking about looking inwards, whenever an incident like this happens, we know government obviously must do an evaluation of some kind of whether they did something right or wrong, or whether a search and rescue operation went the right way, or whether it went the wrong way.

My own personal experience with search and rescue, Mr. Speaker, happened in an area up off Torbay Road a number of years ago now, about twenty-five years ago. When we found the victim alive and successfully taken out of the area and gone to hospital for medical treatment, the first thing we did was sit down with the RNC of the day – the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary was there. The first thing they did was put us all on the ground in a little circle, if you will, and they asked us how the operation went. They asked us to scrutinize the whole operation.

That same question was asked of everybody, from the Salvation Army to the medics that were there, to the people who did the search and rescue. Again, there are ways of doing evaluation here. I also have to remind everybody in this particular case that we are

under ongoing threat when it comes to search and rescue.

I have already touched on the simple fact of the state of some of the equipment that is out there. The Member for Lake Melville already touched on it, the aging equipment that we are dealing with, the Buffalo aircraft, the Hercules. We are talking about the Cormorants falling apart and being in a state of disrepair. The lack of replacement parts, that sort of thing.

There are other ongoing things. For example, budget funding, we know that when it comes to federal job cuts we lost fifty-six RCMP positions, civilian and officers over the last little while. We lost a number of people who are working in the Canadian Armed Forces. Now we have a few less when it comes to federal employees working in this Province. These are the people we would probably fall back on when it comes to search rescue, in particular the RCMP in rural areas. We did not hear anything from the Province when it came to the loss of those fifty-six positions.

We have to ask ourselves, are we prepared with lift capability? That needs a second look. For example, is there a way they can merge search and rescue along with air ambulance services that are required? Are we better off with the Province having our own fleet or do we go ahead and leave it in private hands?

To me, Cougar is a good example of what can happen when you leave it in private hands. They are an excellent service, no doubt, on that particular day but their commitment is to the people offshore. That is what the helicopter is there for, to mandate rescue for people offshore.

At the same time, when we go ahead and take a look inwards at ourselves, too, we have to be able to straighten away what is federal and what is provincial jurisdiction. We get to see some reinforcement of that. (Inaudible) again, under threat when it comes to federal government cuts, for example, equipment requirements. I have already touched on it, choppers; the simple fact of new boats.

There is an ongoing argument over new smaller patrol vessels. The risk of the communication centre in St. Anthony is on its way out. We are losing the St. John's centre. It is time to put a stop to it. Sometimes we have to look at ourselves too, at the same time, besides looking at the feds.

We agree with the provincial government when it comes to federal jurisdiction but now it is time as well that we look at ourselves when it comes to this issue. Let's deal with it so that we can settle it away for everybody.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to give notice under Standing Order 11 that I shall move that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 9, 2013, and I further give notice under Standing Order 11 that I shall move that the House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 9, 2013.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly – as I think my colleague before me mentioned, perhaps not pleased to stand today but I am honoured to be able to have a few words with respect to the topic of this private member's motion. I congratulate the Opposition for bringing the issue forward for further debate and focus in the House of Assembly.

As most of the members who have spoken before me have acknowledged, we have seen many tragedies on the sea in Newfoundland and

Labrador over the years, and many lives lost. Every time we hear of a tragedy and we hear of a sad story it brings back memories for all of us in one shape or another.

I grew up on the South Coast where the fishing industry was prominent. I had many family members who went to sea and a lot of people I knew who did not return. I certainly appreciate where the Member for Torngat Mountains is sometimes when he speaks about his experiences of the more recent tragedy in Labrador. It is a topic that is high priority for all of us here in this House, I believe, and certainly for our government.

I had the honour of serving as the Minister of Fisheries for a year or so, and had the opportunity to work closely with those who are attached to that industry in this Province. It is an industry that employs more than 20,000 people throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, mainly, Mr. Speaker, in the rural areas of our Province. It is very much a part of our culture and our heritage.

As I said, in my own particular district on the South Coast, traditionally we had fish plants in Grand Bank, Fortune, St. Lawrence, Marystown, and Burin, a heavy attachment to the sea. I recognize through a lot of my experiences, through a lot of my family members, and a lot of stories I have heard, the challenges that people face when they go to sea. Whether it is a challenge because they are out in a fishing vessel, or in the new economy of Newfoundland and Labrador perhaps they are out there working in the oil industry, or perhaps in the marine transportation sector, whatever the case might be. We all recognize each time someone goes to sea there is a potential for accidents to occur and, heaven forbid, lives to be lost.

We have to ensure whatever we do in this House, whatever position that we take as a government and as a House of Assembly as a whole, that safety is our number one priority. Mr. Speaker, as I listened to all of the individuals participating in this debate today, and in fact everyone who has made a contribution to this debate over the last number

of weeks and months around the whole issue of search and rescue, I have no doubt that all of the individuals have the same perspective in mind of what we want to achieve. I do not think there is any question that safety is the number one priority for everyone. It is a matter, I guess, of how we achieve that and where our short-term focus should be to achieve the long-term goal.

It is, as I said a few moments ago, a clear priority for government. I am certainly pleased and honoured to participate in the debate. Specific though to events of recent weeks, as members would know, the Auditor General's report was released on April 30. It contained an important piece that focused on search and rescue in particular, a full chapter I do believe.

Among other things the AG's report found that with respect to search and rescue activities, there are several factors that they talked about for search and rescue across the country, and several factors in particular that present at this point in time significant risks to the people of Canada, and in this particular context, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. In particular, Mr. Speaker, the report talked about sustained shortages of personnel within the Canadian Forces, it talked about substantial and increasing maintenance requirements for search and rescue equipment, and it talked about an aging aircraft fleet for search and rescue. All of these, he went on to say, pose significant risks.

From this perspective the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, through the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Office of the Premier, have constantly and consistently talked about the concerns that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have, and have made those concerns known. Most recently, the Minister of Municipal Affairs met with the Minister of National Defence and clearly outlined our position with respect to the Auditor General's report.

I will acknowledge that there was an announcement of a number of initiatives recently by the federal minister here in the Province. We certainly acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that any time there is an announcement

of that nature, we see it as being positive, and we accept it with open arms. We do not believe as a government, and I do not believe personally, that it goes far enough in addressing the problems that have been identified by the Auditor General in his report.

Specifically as I said a few moments ago, the AG talked about a lack of resources, talked about response times for search and rescue, and unserviceability of assets that cause significant gaps within search and rescue. Mr. Speaker, all of those raise significant questions and significant risks that I believe are certainly not acceptable and need to be addressed.

There are a number of specific comments to that I would like to share in the few moments that I do have left. The Auditor General's report concluded that unless there is an increase in the hours worked by search and rescue personnel, and if there were a shifting of the regular weekly schedules for the Canadian Forces, there would be improvements for search and rescue in Victoria and Trenton. The report clearly indicates that it would have marginal, if any effect at all, on the East Coast, which would be the Halifax region for federal purposes in which Newfoundland and Labrador sits.

The AG also recommended, Mr. Speaker, that the Department of National Defence ought to systematically analyze its search and rescue data, including its states of readiness and its provisions of services, and ensure that its provision of services is based on current and anticipated needs. I will acknowledge, in fairness to the federal government, the Department of National Defence did in fact agree with this.

Since the Cougar 491 incident, which seems like only yesterday but in fact was in March 2009, our government has consistently articulated the position that the response times should be in the fifteen-to-twenty-minute wheels-up response time. That should be available at twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. That position has been consistently and regularly presented at hearings within the Province, search and rescue hearings, as well as during meetings between the

Premier of the Province and the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services with the appropriate personnel on the federal side.

As a matter of fact, in response to that, on April 25, 2011, a letter to Premier Dunderdale – excuse me, to the Premier of the Province. Mr. Speaker, I apologize for using the name there. In a letter to the Premier of the Province, the Prime Minister committed to work with the Province in a co-operative manner to address some of the concerns we have raised. Since that time, we have continued to push forward with the agenda that the search and rescue services available to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are certainly not adequate and need significant improvements.

Mr. Speaker, the AG's report also talked about personnel shortages, the shortage of sufficient aircraft and training crews. This has delayed training for both new recruits and existing personnel. What is important to understand there is without adequate professional development and training opportunities for new recruits, it places a heavier burden of workload on existing staff.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the AG recommended that DND should assign sufficient numbers of search and rescue personnel to meet the operational needs that have been identified, and provide for the necessary training and professional development, as I said a few moments ago. That is certainly a recommendation we completely agree with.

Mr. Speaker, in summation to all of the recommendations brought forward by the Auditor General, we fully agree with the points brought forward and we expect immediate action. The debate we are having today and throughout Question Period over the last number of days is on what the appropriate course of action is for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As I said in my preamble, we all recognize the challenges we face in this Province because we are a marine environment, and a good part of the

economy in Newfoundland and Labrador is based on the sea, whether it is through the fishery or through the oil industry and marine transportation.

The Auditor General, in the report, from our perspective, did a thorough review of the search and rescue capabilities and made some very direct and very significant recommendations on how the service that is being provided by the federal government can and ought to be improved.

I do not think that anybody would disagree with members opposite who articulated on a number of occasions that it is important to look at all of the search and rescue operations, not only the air search and rescue which is delivered by the federal government, but of course, the ground search and rescue delivered by the Province. I do not think anybody would disagree with that. As a matter of fact, I would suggest to you that the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services engages in that activity on an ongoing basis. It is part of what we do as a government, ensuring that the services that we are providing are adequate and are meeting the needs of the people of the Province.

I would suggest in this debate today that is, as I said, an ongoing activity and it will continue to be ongoing. Where the needs are identified, as we have done in the past, government will make investments and make changes to our own protocols and our own service delivery patterns.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, as a side note to this debate, I have been engaged with CASARA which is another volunteer group who provide search and rescue activities. In the coming weeks, hopefully, we will have an opportunity to provide some positive news about a step forward in engaging their services as part of the provincial responsibility for ground search and rescue. I share that just to demonstrate that consistently, whether it is through the responsibility of the Department of Justice or whether it is through the responsibility of the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services, we are always engaged in reviewing our processes and activities.

What we have before us now is an opportunity to take a giant step forward because we have the results of an extensive review completed by the Auditor General for Canada, an extensive review over the entire federal operation of search and rescue activities. The Auditor General has come back with some very clear and very direct recommendations. We believe, Mr. Speaker, that the focus and the priority for the people of the Province at this point in time ought to be on ensuring that those recommendations are implemented, acted upon, and any other changes beyond the scope of the AG's report.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the AG's report ought not to be seen as the maximum, that the highest level that we are hoping to achieve; it ought to be seen as the minimum. The minimum expectations that we should have in the Province is that every single one of those recommendations ought to be implemented and if there are other steps that can be taken, other resources that can be added to the system, other changes in policies and procedures that can be implemented to augment the recommendations of the Auditor General, then I would suggest to you that the federal government needs to do that as well.

We have offered any number of suggestions. The Premier, on any number of occasions, has met and provided concrete direction and suggestions as to how we may move forward. As I said a few moments ago, the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services has taken the opportunity – probably far many times than we care to talk about because we hear him talking about it every day, frankly – in an aggressive way to try to move forward this agenda and to suggest to the federal government specific ways that they can enhance the service and build upon what the Auditor General has recommended.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe personally that we ought to take more time to do another review of search and rescue in this Province. I believe that we have clearly identified that there are deficiencies and that changes need to be made. I believe the Auditor General has given us a very, very solid footing into the kind of direction that

we ought to take to make some changes to enhance the services and ultimately provide a better level of protection and comfort for those who spend days and weeks and months travelling the sea in some of the harshest conditions and harshest environment in which we live.

Mr. Speaker, my perspective on this particular motion is that I do not support a further review of search and rescue services. What I do support is a very strong and a very aggressive leap forward, hopefully a co-ordinated and co-operative effort on behalf of all members of this House to impress upon the federal government that the time for review and the time for walking around the perimeter of this issue is over. That they need to dig in with both feet and adopt the recommendations of the Auditor General's report and use that as the bottom, lowest level benchmark and build upon that with other changes and other suggestions that have been brought forward by members of government and I suspect by members of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, my perspective is that it is time for us to move forward. It is time for us to park any idea that we need to do further reviews and let's get on with the action that is going to make a difference to the people who make their living and earn their living and spend most of their lives at sea.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Anybody who has come on watching late might wonder what we are talking about. We are talking about search and rescue in this Province and a private member's resolution that calls for a public inquiry into search and rescue in this Province.

The mandate to hold a public inquiry is provided in the commissions of inquiry. We have had many of them in this Province over the years. Section 3.(1) says, “The Lieutenant-Governor in Council may by order establish a commission of inquiry to inquire and report on a matter that the Lieutenant-Governor in Council considers to be of public concern.”

Lieutenant-Governor in Council means government. Mr. Speaker, this is brought on by the tragic deaths that we have seen in this Province year after year after year, and with the downgrade in search and rescue services, search and rescue services that are primarily the responsibility of the federal government.

The flashpoint in this particular one without minimizing the deaths of the individuals with the *Ryan’s Commander, Melina and Keith II, Check-Mate III, Cougar 491, with Burton Winters*, every year we can expect a certain number of people to die, and I would say unnecessarily. Unnecessarily because if search and rescue services were the way that we feel they should be, many of these people would be rescued. The Member for Torngat Mountains has explained different situations where he has seen people rescued who would not have been rescued had they waited for the federal government to respond.

Mr. Speaker, I have a series of letters here which will outline and highlight why we are at this point, and why we are still talking about this. Why the government is talking about action and still doing nothing.

The letter on February 10, 2012 from the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services said, “I am writing you in regard to the recent tragic loss of the life of a 14-year old boy in Makkovik, Labrador.” In the body of his letter he says, “...while there are two Griffon helicopters stationed at Happy Valley-Goose Bay, neither of these aircraft were serviceable on the morning of Monday, January 30, 2012 when a request for assistance from DND was first made to the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) in Halifax. That both of these aircraft were unserviceable at the time of the request is a

matter of grave concern for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.” This is fifteen months ago and our minister says to the federal government, to the federal Minister of National Defence, he has grave concerns.

His letter goes on to say, “Another issue of concern relates to Rear Admiral Gardam’s indication that current DND operational protocols mean that DND will not deploy aircraft to assist in ground search and rescue efforts if private aircraft are involved in the search.” He does not bother to mention that Burton Winters was on the ocean ice. The ocean ice is not water.

“Given the superior operational abilities of military aircraft and their crews, I believe there needs to be a re-examination of the appropriateness of this protocol. We welcome further discussion on this matter.” At that point I would say discussion would be reasonable and I would congratulate the minister for taking that initiative; however, based on these letters, there is more and more talk and no action whatsoever.

On March 9, 2012, the federal Minister of National Defence wrote to our minister and said, “...there are provisions for the Canadian Forces to provide search and rescue assistance in the prosecution of a GSAR event. These protocols do not preclude the deployment of CF aircraft when private aircraft are involved in the search.” So already we have a change in the story. “Rather the protocols leave the determination of whether to request CF assistance with provincial and territorial authorities.”

He goes on to say, “Consequently, as stated by Rear-Admiral Gardam, it was determined that had a CH149 Cormorant from Gander been deployed for the search in Makkovik, the CF would not have been in a position to respond in a timely manner to an aeronautical or maritime SAR incident in the vicinity of Newfoundland and Labrador.”

Mr. Speaker, that is an absolutely, disgraceful statement for the Minister of National Defence to make. He is saying our man on the ground in Gander would rather let a fourteen-year-old boy

die than send an aircraft. He is saying we did not have sufficient backup that we could look after somebody else, so we are going to sacrifice Burton Winters. Burton Winters did not die of exposure.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BENNETT: Burton Winters died of neglect, indifference, and incompetence of the federal government, and I am beginning to believe of this government if it does not take action today.

“In this particular case, one CH146 Griffon was undergoing heavy maintenance while the other was undergoing pre-flight inspection at the time of first call from FES NL, almost 20 hours after Mr. Winters was last seen. During this inspection process it was determined that the second CH146 Griffon was unserviceable; however I note that the CF have advised me that even if this helicopter had been serviceable it would not have been able to respond due to the weather conditions in Makkovik at that time.”

Fine, these people cannot fly in high-end aircraft, but a fourteen-year-old boy can freeze to death on the ice. That is how I see that letter.

On March 27, our minister sent another letter that said, “Recent information provided by the Fifth Estate” – finally it gets to the media – “contradicts information provided by Department of National Defence officials regarding the Department’s response to the January 30, 2012 call for aerial search and rescue (SAR) support.”

Our minister says, “Particularly disturbing is that reports suggest DND’s operational log contradicts the assertion that the ceiling and visibility on the date in question made it unsafe for helicopters to fly in the area. The failure to deploy a helicopter from 103 SAR Squadron in Gander is a significant concern.”

Our minister says, “We urge you to further investigate and provide us with a formal

response.” The Minister of National Defence comes back and says, “Unfortunately, the *Fifth Estate* report contained a number of inaccuracies.” Well, great, if the *Fifth Estate* is wrong, let’s have a public inquiry and straighten it out, and get the answers. We do not expect the media to do all of the work. They alert us to the situation.

However, the federal minister goes on to say, “The deliberate decision not to deploy a CH-149 Cormorant helicopter from Gander was an operational decision based on the information available at the time.” What is wrong with the information?

He says, “In this specific case, the Officer in Command (OIC) of JRCC Halifax, using the limited information provided to the JRCC at the time, determined that he could not deploy a CH-149 Cormorant to Makkovik, some three hours distance from Gander by air one way, because it would have left the CF unable to respond to a SAR incident within the CF primary mandate.” We are more concerned with what might happen somewhere around Gander than a fourteen-year-old boy that we know have gone missing in the middle of the winter.

Our minister goes back and says, “...there are two questions that require clarification: According to media reports there were three serviceable Cormorants at 103 Search and Rescue Squadron Gander. Why was the deployment of one of these assets not carried out given that the other Cormorants at Gander would have been available for the primary mandate? It is our understanding that secondary resources were available at Greenwood. Why were those resources not deployed directly to Makkovik?”

He goes on to say, with respect to evidence of poor weather conditions. “Given the inconsistencies in the foregoing, would you please provide a reconciliation of the weather issues on the morning of January 30?” It is a simple request, but never, ever satisfied.

Mr. Speaker, the federal minister goes on to respond and say, “The CF primary SAR mandate is to provide air assets to assist aircraft

in distress (aeronautical incidents) and ships in distress...”.

He also said, “While it is true that there were three serviceable Cormorants stationed in Gander on January 30, aircraft availability was only one factor considered by the JRCC. Regardless of the aircraft type in question, the CF SAR standby posture mandates that only a single crew be assigned to each aircraft type at a time.”

He makes an astounding statement. “To be clear, having three serviceable aircraft does not necessarily equate to having more than one SAR asset...”. How can you have three serviceable aircraft and not have more than one asset?

Mr. Speaker, he goes on to say, “Specifically, the Griffon helicopter is not equipped with an anti-ice capability.” Can you believe that? How long does a summer last, and how long does a winter last in Labrador? How long is it going to be freezing? How long is it going to be thawing?

If there is aircraft there that does not have anti-icing capability, clearly it must be the wrong type of aircraft or it needs to be serviced so it can provide anti-icing capability. When will you need it? You will need it in the winter. You will need it when it is cold. You will need it when a child is going to freeze to death. You may not need it in the middle of the summer when you can take it and maybe go on a fishing trip, which we have seen lots of that as well.

On May 24, our minister says, “While your letters have provided additional information, I am not satisfied with the response. We believe a Cormorant helicopter should have been dispatched from Gander the morning of Jan. 30.”

Our minister, I think, is flawed in his next statement. He says, “We do not believe a public inquiry is necessary.” Mr. Speaker, I believe, and the Official Opposition believes that a public inquiry is absolutely necessary.

He goes on to say: I wish to express my disappointment regarding several points in you

letter on May 15 that are unrelated to the search for Burton Winters and therefore serve only to deflect attention from the core issues. This becomes then a blame game.

Mr. Speaker, then we come all the way forward to the current week. All of this, time passes, this thing goes away, people forget about it, and nothing happens.

We have a Labrador by-election. The only Member of Parliament that the Prime Minister had representing him in Labrador was someone who turned out, it was discovered, to be an absolute scoundrel, who they are offering all over again. An absolute scoundrel who had to resign his seat and now is offered back to the people of Labrador, take him or leave him. He is the guy we are going to put into Cabinet.

What is our response this week? “Premier Reiterates Urgent Need for Action From the Federal Government Regarding Search and Rescue Concerns.” That is from the Premier’s office at 12:55 on May 2, and three-and-a-half hours later she says, “Federal Government Search and Rescue Plan Falls Short”.

On March 6, “Province Continues to Press Federal Government for Immediate Search and Rescue Improvements”

Mr. Speaker, what is missing in this equation in this Province today is we do not have strong enough, inspired enough leadership from the top in this Province. Both parties who have been represented in this House of Assembly have produced leaders and have produced Premiers who would not take this lying down. I can go from Smallwood to Williams, or I can go from Williams to Smallwood, neither one of them or any of the Premier’s in between would have settled for this whatsoever.

An inspired Premier would say: Prime Minister, we are going to have a public inquiry. You please yourself, if you come. You can have a public inquiry and we will joint venture with you, or we are going to have a public inquiry here.

We will have the national media, we will have the *Globe and Mail*, we will have the *Toronto Star*, we will have the *Ottawa Citizen*, we will have the *Calgary Herald* and we will put the reporters up here. We will run a provincial inquiry about the disgraceful state of search and rescue in this Province. Every night we will pay to play the *Fifth Estate* program on Burton Winters. Mr. Prime Minister, we will absolutely trash you across Canada, and you know we will do it.

Williams took down the flags; Smallwood ran the IWA out of the Province; Tobin grabbed the Spanish trawler; Peckford went to fight over the offshore, and we got it all. Today we have a lie-down-do-nothing Premier who leads a lie-down-and-do-nothing government. We are okay up to this date, but unless this government absolutely insists on a public inquiry and then with or without the Prime Minister does a public inquiry, then they will be absolutely as much at fault as the federal government has been to this date.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for Humber West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. GRANTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know my time is short; I have about two or three minutes. I have about fifteen minutes or so prepared. I, too, am pleased this afternoon to stand and speak to this very important issue on search and rescue. I want to pick up from where the Minister of Justice left off a little while ago and I want to focus for the two minutes or three minutes that I have with regard to specifically referring to what the Auditor General is and what the role and responsibility of the Auditor General is, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General of Canada is one of the most trustworthy sources of review and advice in the country. The office is guided by the highest of democratic and professional

standards. Democracy and independence, Mr. Speaker, is strong, integrity and professionalism, stewardship and serving the public interest and commitment to excellence.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the duties of the Auditor General are carried out honestly, impartially, in a non-partisan way, and in a manner in compliance with legislation. The Auditor General's office uses a non-partisan, objective approach and the Office of the Auditor General ensures that the values of transparency and accountability in government are upheld. They make decisions in the best interests of the Canadian public, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General of Canada speaks with utmost credibility, utmost impartiality, thoroughness and independence. That is why the Government of Canada, Mr. Speaker, must act upon the clear recommendations for improving our search and rescue system in this country and in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The deficiencies, as we have talked about today and it was identified by the Auditor General last week is a resounding validation of the concerns that we have had as a government in Newfoundland and Labrador for the last number of years. SAR's response time and efficiencies are often the matter of life and death, Mr. Speaker, in all emergency situations, in our offshore in particular.

The Auditor General of Canada has released an independent, an objective, and a systematic review of search and rescue services in Canada. Many of his findings are frightening. Mr. Speaker, in his report the Auditor General identified a search and rescue system in grave danger of floundering if the Government of Canada does not act immediately and decisively.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. GRANTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: It being Private Members' Day and in accordance with Standing Order 63, I

now go back to the mover of the motion to close debate.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is my privilege to actually stand and close debate here today on this private member's motion that was seconded by my colleague, the MHA for Torngat Mountains.

Now, I have listened to some of the debate and some of the comments that have been made by people who have participated in this debate today. As I think all members would agree, this is indeed very important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, not only for people who make a living from the sea or people who make a living on the water but it is indeed important for every single Newfoundlander and Labradorian who actually uses the resources within our Province both on land and on the sea, I would say, Mr. Speaker.

Now, there has been quite a bit of comment made in the debate about action and in supporting action. We agree with that. There is no question that action is required. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time we have been – I was elected in the provincial election in 2011, and we have seen search and rescue issues that have been brought to the attention of this House of Assembly many times now. The real question is: Have we seen any changes in search and rescue? Have we seen changes in the way we respond to specific incidents, Mr. Speaker?

For the most part, I would say that we have not. When you look back over, there has been a lot of letter writing, there has been a lot of phone calls, there has been a lot of meetings that have been held in the Province, some in Ottawa, and been everywhere, and we have had a lot of feedback from people who are concerned about the response – not only the response time, but how we respond, in terms of equipment, the information that we use, and the personnel, I say, Mr. Speaker.

So we have seen a downgrading in services, a downgrading in the assets that are available to

the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I clearly outlined in the first time that I spoke there when I moved this motion that the assets that we had available even a few months ago are no longer available to us. All those problems that exist within the system, those issues that are inherent in the system, I would say, are still there. As a matter of fact, time, in this particular case, does not heal the situation. As a matter of fact, in this case, time makes the situation worse, I would say. So when we look at aging equipment, when we look at aging information systems, all of those things are now indeed worse. When you look at the challenges of getting trained people in place, they are indeed worse.

Now, when you look at the situation, for instance, around the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre that we had here, we never did have an issue when it came to putting staffing levels there. So I would encourage the minister, when he is calling for action from the federal government, that the action on his part or the part of his government, would include a reopening of the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre. This is what we agree.

The minister also said that 95 per cent of what we talked about is indeed federal government responsibilities. What the number is, if it is 95 per cent, if it is 90 per cent or if it is 80 per cent, that is not what we are questioning here today. What we are saying is that we have not done a review, we have not done an audit, and we have not done an investigation of 100 per cent of the program, Mr. Speaker. That is what we are asking for.

Just within this year the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, he actually made a comment in this House within the last year that 85 per cent of search and rescue services are the responsibility of the federal government. We would not necessarily argue that. We know the vast majority of the responsibilities of search and rescue within our Province is the responsibility of the federal government. Mr. Speaker, that leaves the question: Who is looking after the remaining 15 per cent? These

are his words. There is 15 per cent there that would be the responsibility of the provincial government in this case.

Mr. Speaker, the House Leader and the Minister of Justice made a comment about CASARA which is a volunteer group within the Province that I believe can be a significant asset, I would say. This is a question that we raised in this House of Assembly just last spring. Why is it that we have not seen movement, why is it that we are not embracing, why is it we are not bringing this particular asset, this particular group of volunteers within our Province? Many of them have expertise in helping people in navigation, some of them would even have their own small aircraft that could be very useful in a search and rescue mission, I would say. In this particular this would be something that the provincial government could be involved in with, I say, Mr. Speaker.

What we are looking for here is the gold standard, a world-class search and rescue operation system available to the people of our Province just in case an emergency did happen. One thing for sure that I said in the beginning here is that just to assume that the federal audit takes care of this problem and identifies the significant gaps that we have within search and rescue is not good enough. This federal audit did not even review all its own operations, I say, Mr. Speaker. I did mention earlier about RCMP, and there were others, the provincial, territorial, and the municipal activities around search and rescue.

Mr. Speaker, there has been some mention of the response times. We do not even have a standard response time. We know that this has been something that – the standards are even different when you look at the federal government. It has been an antiquated system. If you look at the Canadian Coast Guard, for instance, the search and rescue assign vessels to react within thirty minutes of being tasked. This standard applies twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week throughout the year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BALL: As well, the Canadian Coast Guard modifies its own operations in times of anticipated greater need.

Now if you take that to the next step and you look at the next component, which is indeed federal responsibility on response times, what do we get? The Canadian Coast Guard in this particular case and the Canadian Air Force, we see something that is very different. For instance, thirty minutes from Monday to Friday between 8:00 and 4:00 p.m. and within two hours on evening and weekends.

Now we know there are adjustments that would be made in peak times, Mr. Speaker, but that is not good enough. Really, you should not have to set your watch, look at the calendar, or look at what day of the week it is. If someone is actually going to work offshore or making a living from the sea, you should not have to be out there working realizing that after 5:00 p.m. in the day that the coverage for search and rescue is not the same as it was at 4:00 p.m., Mr. Speaker.

What we are asking for is that we get this standard in place, not only from the federal component but indeed for the provincial component as well.

The federal auditor also went on to say that this is a system of systems. This is just not about a system that is a responsibility of the federal government and, indeed, that this is a system of systems. I will just quote from the report. For instance here he says, “While the Canadian Forces and the Canadian Coast Guard coordinate the response to distress calls across Canada, they are not necessarily the first responders to SAR incidents. SAR response services are multi-jurisdictional and also rely on a range of primary, secondary, voluntary, and private resources.”

That tells you that this is indeed a complex system that if the federal government is not necessarily the first response, then what are they? In some cases, they respond just because

it is humanitarian, for instance; and that is said, they provide the support.

They talk about CASARA which is the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association. They talk about the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary and on and on it goes, but the point that I am trying to make here with this is that we are not talking about only a federal responsibility. We are talking about many systems, provincially, municipal, and volunteer groups. What they do is come together to make a search and rescue program. So when people are called upon they are not saying I want the federal component piece of it, or the provincial component piece of it, or the volunteer component piece of it. They want the system to work for them. This is why we need an investigation into all the systems, so that we can put a response for search and rescue in place that will meet the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker.

They also went on to say search and rescue is considered to be a no-fail mission, and the Canadian Forces and the Canadian Coast Guard personnel put their lives at risk in order to save others. This is something they were asking so that we would be successful 100 per cent of the time. That is what they are expecting here.

We also know the staffing, as I mentioned – they have had difficulty finding trained staff members. It has become a big problem for them. It is becoming a big problem not just here in our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador but it is indeed a national problem, I would say. The decrease in the average number of years of experience, for instance, an increase in the number of search and rescue related activities, and an increase in leave, administrative and training requirements.

So not only is this a problem for the staffing, but when you look at the volunteer aspect of our ground search and rescue, for instance, that we have in our communities, it is a problem there as well. We know our own volunteer base is much smaller now than it was at one time. It is more difficult to get people to volunteer as it used to be.

We have some very strong ground search and rescue volunteer associations within our Province. I know in my own district for instance, in my own community actually, I have a lot of friends who volunteer with the ground search and rescue. Yet, only this week we heard the president of the national association, who happens to be from our Province, talk about he is having a lot of problems securing \$400,000 to run that national office.

For \$400,000 we have someone there who coordinates all the ground search and rescue volunteers across the country, which is provincial jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker. Here we are, this particular group are having trouble raising \$400,000, primarily from the federal government in this case, yet they work within our Province. It is volunteers who work and volunteer their time on search and rescue missions right here. They have made a significant commitment to our communities.

Mr. Speaker, this is about staffing. It is about response time, it is about equipment, it is about information. It is about a system of systems, which includes provincial, it includes volunteers, and it includes definitely a federal component to this.

There is one other thing I wanted to raise before I finish with the time I have. It talks about the National Search and Rescue Secretariat and the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund. I will just read it here.

The objective of the program is to “enhance the effectiveness of SAR response in” – and it clearly outlines this – “federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions...” to promote and support projects designed to develop and improve search and rescue prevention in this case. This is a budget that really has not changed for over twenty years, Mr. Speaker. So you know this is something we can work on, prevention, education, and training.

Now, as I finish up here, when we look at all the recommendations that have been made by the federal Auditor General in this case, yes, Mr. Speaker, we do support that we need action.

One of the department's responses, I would say, and it was agreed upon by the federal government in this particular case, is we need to do more work so all parts of the system can benefit.

There are many components to this system of systems. We need to work together, I say, Mr. Speaker. This is the reason we have called upon this inquiry and this investigation that we do within the Province, so all the components of search and rescue – that we can identify where the significant gaps are.

This is not about placing blame on any one part of government, either federal or provincial at all. This is about getting all parties co-operating together so that this inquiry would give us an independent, unbiased view, similar to what we have seen from the federal Auditor General in this case. We would get that independent, unbiased review so we could get to that gold standard search and rescue system that we want and we all believe we should have.

Finally, this would take the politics out of this, Mr. Speaker. It would identify the gaps. I believe we have the authority under our Public Inquiries Act. I will just read to you why I believe that. It comes in section 3(1), with the few seconds I have, “The Lieutenant Governor in Council may by order establish a commission of inquiry to inquire and report on a matter that the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers to be of public concern.”

Mr. Speaker, I call upon this House to support this motion and put the inquiry in place. Let's identify the significant gaps we have, provincially, federally, and from our volunteer base, so that once and for all we can put a world-class, gold standard search and rescue program in place for the people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is the House ready for the question?

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Call in the members.

Division

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Are the Whips ready?

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

All those in favour, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Ball, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Edmunds, Ms Michael, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Murphy, Mr. Mitchelmore, Ms Rogers, Mr. Osborne.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. King, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Davis, Ms Sullivan, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Jackman, Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Hedderson, Mr. Littlejohn, Mr. Granter, Mr. Cornect, Mr. McGrath, Mr. French, Mr. Dalley, Mr. Felix Collins, Mr. Sandy Collins, Mr. Kent, Mr. Lane, Mr. Dinn, Mr. Brazil, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Little, Mr. Cross, Mr. Pollard, Mr. Crummell, Mr. Forsey, Mr. Russell.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

CLERK: Mr. Speaker, the ayes eleven, the nays twenty-seven.

MR. SPEAKER: I declare the motion lost.

This being Wednesday, in accordance with Standing Order 9, this House now stands adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, at 1:30 p.m.