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Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the District of Lewisporte; the District of Humber Valley; the District of St. Barbe; the District of Baie Verte – Springdale; the District of Terra Nova; and the District of Port au Port.

The hon. the Member for the District of Lewisporte.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. VERGE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize a young twenty-year-old entrepreneur from my district. Alex Stead grew up in Birchy Bay and recently was named Newfoundland and Labrador's 2014 Student Entrepreneur Provincial Champion. At age fifteen, Alex started taking photos and as her interest grew so did her talent and also her clientele. While in Level III at Lewisporte Collegiate, she took a business enterprise course, developed a business plan, and turned her artistic talent into a viable business – Alex Stead Photography. Before long, she was receiving numerous bookings from families, brides, and graduates.

Alex is now attending Memorial University and doing a business degree. On March 8, Alex also showcased her business and her entrepreneurial accomplishments at the Enactus Canada Regional Exposition in Halifax, Nova Scotia. There she competed against regional champions from Eastern Canada and won the \$1,000 cash prize and the right to represent Eastern Canada at the 2014 Enactus Canada National Exposition in Calgary at the end of April.

Alex is a great entrepreneur, a talented business person, and she is already an award-winning photographer. Members of this House of

Assembly please join me in congratulating Alex Stead for her remarkable accomplishments.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber Valley.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate the Western Female Hockey Team that won a gold medal at the Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games recently held in Clarenville. Team Western was undefeated at the winter games, finishing the tournament with a 2-0 shutout over the team representing the Central region of our Province.

I am honoured to congratulate the players who comprised the gold medal winning team which included Sarah Barker, Ashley Bromley, Karli Gale, Tana Genge, Kaylee Gerrow, Samantha Hann, Olivia Henley, Alyson Moores, Kerry Patey, Rebecca Reid, Sarah Reid, Heather Richards, Emily Walsh, and Megan White, along with three members of the team from the District of Humber Valley which were Brianna Brophy of Pasadena, Jolena Gillard of Deer Lake, and Becky Maher of Reidville.

Mr. Speaker, participating and competing in the Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games is a tremendous honour in itself. Winning a gold medal at the Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games is a tremendous achievement that is bestowed on very few individuals and teams. These athletes have represented their communities and the Western region very proudly.

I ask all members of this House to assist me in congratulating the Western Female Winter Games Hockey Team on winning a gold medal at the games and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate Savannah Skinner, a Grade 2 student at Jakeman All Grade School in Trout River, who recently won the provincial primary Heritage Places Poster Contest. She received her award in St. John's on March 17, 2014.

The Heritage Places Poster Contest is an annual contest hosted by the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador in recognition of National Heritage Day, which is recognized on the third Monday in February each year. The Foundation received 700 submissions of artwork for consideration in this year's contest from fifty-six schools.

For the past nine years students in Newfoundland and Labrador have had the opportunity to highlight the Province's historic places and treasures through the Heritage Places Poster Contest. It is most fitting that artwork depicting a scene in Gros Morne National Park is a winner.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating Savannah Skinner, a Grade 2 student, of Trout River on being the primary contest winner for the whole Province in 2014.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Baie Verte – Springdale.

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a hard job to keep up with Valmont Academy Vikings winning ways. On the weekend of March 14, Valmont Academy of King's Point hosted the Provincial School Sports Girls A Basketball Championships.

The following four teams vied for the provincial title: Valmont Academy, Stella Maris of Trepassy, Bayside Academy of Port Hope Simpson, and Belanger Memorial of Doyles. The Vikings went undefeated in the tournament, posting a 61-62 victory over Stella Maris in the championship game.

All teams displayed a high level of skill, teamwork, and sports mindedness. The coaches, athletes, officials and parents are to be commended for their commitment to high school athletics.

Members of the Vikings are: Natalie Burt, Brittany Andrews, Robyn Rideout, Sara Welshman, Kailey Gillingham, Kristin Budgell, Julia Burt, Brooke Blanchard, Vanessa Coish, and Hailey Noseworthy. Athletic Director, Adam Matthews, and Coach, Greg Flynn, are to be applauded for their dedication and contribution to the success of the Vikings.

I ask all members of this hon. House to join me in applauding the Valmont girls' basketball team for capturing the Provincial Girls A School Sports provincial title, making it three championships in a row in one school year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Terra Nova.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize Keisha Collins, a Grade 11 student at Jane Collins Academy in Hare Bay.

Every year, the Royal Canadian Legion plays host to a poster contest that sees students from across the country submit art that pays tribute to military history, all while promoting Remembrance Day. Keisha Collins was the talented top place winner in this Province. As the top prize winner, her submission, From Falling Hands, earned her a trip to Europe to pay respect to Canada's military history. The trip to Europe includes a tour of the most prominent battle stages of the First World War, including Beaumont Hamel where hundreds of Newfoundland soldiers were killed and wounded July 1, 1916.

Keisha's grandfather was in the military in the 1950s and her brother-in-law is currently enlisted. Her artwork makes it evident that she is profoundly aware of the role that the military and its veterans play in society. From *Falling Hands* depicts a unique blend of our military history, something that we are all very proud of.

I ask all hon. members to join me in thanking Keisha for her effort and commitment in remembering and honouring our military, both past and present.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNECT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Mr. Pat Marche on the recent release of a CD of two songs, written in partnership with Mr. Reg Eddy, honouring this country's veterans.

After seeing a photo of his uncle, Joseph Gaudet, among the rows of photographs of veterans who served in wars and peacekeeping deployments on the Memorial Wall at the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 35, in Stephenville, it inspired Pat to compose the song titled *Memorial Wall*.

The tribute song, *Lest We Forget* was penned after Pat saw his children take part in a Remembrance Day Parade. Seeing them with local veterans on that cold November day prodded him to remember what was sacrificed for the freedoms we have today.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join with me in applauding Mr. Pat Marche and Mr. Reg Eddy in their efforts and their dedication that has led to the release of this CD to remind us all to continue to honour and respect all veterans. It certainly is a great initiative and a great tribute to our women and men in uniform.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House today to note that parent resource kits for children aged twelve to eighteen months are now being distributed Province-wide as part of the provincial government's Early Childhood Learning Strategy, Learning from the Start.

The investment in a long-term early learning strategy began in 2011, Mr. Speaker, with Phase I of *Learning from the Start* focusing on initiatives aimed at children from birth to age three. Those first three years were a tremendous success. For example, parent resource kits for infants aged two, four, and six months were developed and distributed throughout the Province. Kits for toddlers aged twelve and eighteen months were piloted for a one-year period, beginning in March 2013 at twenty public health clinic sites. Over 2,500 kits were distributed during this pilot phase. The feedback we have received from parents, caregivers, and public health nurses has been outstanding and we continue to hear stories about how these kits, which contain books, CDs, play items, and information for parents, are benefitting children and families.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) take those to school.

MR. JACKMAN: The minister next to me has experienced this first-hand.

Our early learning initiative also includes a comprehensive Web site with a host of information on early childhood learning programs and activities such as the Power of

Play promotional campaign; Play and Learn Week resources and activities; early literacy programming; an ongoing pilot project centered around a provincial early childhood learning framework; and the Early Development Instrument, or EDI, which measures a child's readiness for school.

Mr. Speaker, as part of Phase II of *Learning from the Start*, Budget 2014 provides \$4.8 million over three years to continue, and to enhance, the commitment to programs for children from birth to age three, while initiatives for children aged four to six are under development. The development of parent resource kits for children aged twenty-four and thirty-six months are nearing completion, and Province-wide distribution is anticipated within the year. Phase II of the strategy also includes, of course, an additional \$30.6 million for the implementation of full-day kindergarten, beginning in September 2016.

Play-based learning is an essential part of a child's early development, Mr. Speaker. Since 2011, almost \$40 million has now been allocated for early childhood learning initiatives, including full-day kindergarten. Ultimately, we want to give every child the best possible start in life; to allow them to be healthy, happy, engaged, well-adjusted children who are well-prepared for success in school, in their relationships, and in life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. We welcome any new investments in early learning since we know that all too many parents in Newfoundland and Labrador struggle in this area. As members well know, we have fallen well behind the rest of Canada when it comes to early childhood education under this government.

Look at what is happening in other provinces across Canada. Take Quebec and Ontario, for example, where more than half of two- to four-year-old children in those provinces regularly attend early childhood education, and the national average is more than 50 per cent; but in this Province, in Newfoundland and Labrador, the proportion is closer to 30 per cent.

So we are well behind the rest of Canada in this area, and we actually have the lowest rates of early childhood education in the whole country, according to recent statistics. Now, no debate about early childhood education would be in any way complete without a mention of all-day or full-day kindergarten in Newfoundland and Labrador. Of course, we do welcome the promise to bring in full-day kindergarten in 2016.

For years now, parents have been asking this government to catch up to the rest of the country, to follow the lead of the rest of the provinces in Canada and expand access to early learning by bringing in a full-day kindergarten program. Many people have been speaking out in favour of this outside of this Chamber, including Dr. David Philpott, business person Cathy Bennett, the Jimmy Pratt Foundation, and a host of others.

We all know that this is a mere pre-election promise from this government. If we think back, Mr. Speaker, to the words of the former Minister of Finance, representing the District of Carbonear – Harbour Grace, who said in the House of Assembly when he was looking back at the promises in the 2011 Blue Book, if you look at what he said about the promises that this government makes, I think we ought to be concerned about the weight of that promise and maybe hold our applause down until this is actually fulfilled. While the minister is talking about the \$30.6 million for full-day kindergarten –

MR. SPEAKER: I remind the member his time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: – we all know he is only actually spending a fraction of that.

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Obviously, I am glad to see that the resources that he has talked about are being made available to parents of small children in the form of books, music, and play items – things that can be hard for a lot of parents to access, especially outside of the urban centres, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, I am also glad that the Early Childhood Learning Strategy will provide more learning programs for parents to attend with their children to take advantage of group learning and socialization, but this strategy falls so far short of what it is that this government should be doing, Mr. Speaker, and that is giving us an early childhood education program, of which this kind of thing would be a part. A program that would be under the Department of Education, and that would be a continuum beginning with government-administered and regulated child care, right through to all-day kindergarten, and then on through the educational system. That is what will make the big difference, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Innovation, Business and Rural Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to speak about how Newfoundland and Labrador is strategically positioned and poised to be the path to the Arctic, and how our government is exploring exciting opportunities and future development potential with Arctic activities for the Province.

When you combine our Arctic peoples – the Inuit of Nunatsiavut region – with our geographic location, industrial infrastructure, knowledge and experience, our academic, research and development capacity, and world-class business community, it is clear that Newfoundland and Labrador is well positioned to be a significant player in any future developments in the Arctic.

Mr. Speaker, in the past few months the Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development has taken great strides, in partnership with the Nunatsiavut Government, to create strategic alliances and forge new connections and partnerships. In this spirit, the department has participated in three major Arctic-focused conferences. Designed to gather key information about Arctic opportunities and challenges, and the potential role for our government in advancing these opportunities, we were pleased to participate in the Northern Lights Conference in Ottawa; the Arctic Technology Conference in Houston; and the Arctic Oil and Gas Conference here in St. John's

Participation in these conferences provided opportunity to promote Newfoundland and Labrador and our strategic location to international shipping lanes and northern sea routes, accessible ports, unmatched strength in cold ocean research and development, and world-renowned expertise in Arctic-like conditions.

Newfoundland and Labrador is well positioned to benefit from the emerging opportunities in the Arctic – in particular, those that relate to supply and services, transportation, logistics, natural resources, as well as the development and commercialization of technologies supporting Arctic activity. There is tremendous interest from across Canada and the international community is also taking notice.

Mr. Speaker, it is through co-operation and the sharing of ideas that we will become a stronger, more prosperous and diversified Province, fully capable of taking advantage of the emerging opportunities in the Arctic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister of an advance copy of his statement. Certainly, our Province is strategically positioned to benefit from opportunities in the Arctic, based on our locations and based on all the factors that the minister stated. I certainly would like to see more outcomes when it comes to the partnerships that we can have with the Nunatsiavut Government and working with the Inuit, as well as other community and municipal stakeholders.

One of the things that have happened is that we need to make sure we have the transportation and telecommunications infrastructure to really build that knowledge and those innovation centres.

This government talks about all these initiatives that it is doing, but when the federal government came out with the Atlantic Gateway, how much of those dollars went to other provinces? Everybody is chasing the way to the Arctic and being that strategic location and that service centre, so we have to be there. We have to make sure that we are actually doing something towards achieving that goal.

In the fall of 2012 this initiative was first announced. This is a re-announcement. In November 21, 2012 we all supported an initiative to move forward on the Arctic opportunities. This was supposed to direct the development of an action plan. It has been many months, over a year later, and we have not seen that action plan put forward by this government.

What is it going to do to be working with local companies, our academic institution, and local business? Attending conferences is a great

learning experience, but we need to see the plan on paper as to how it is going to be resourced and how we are going to actually tap into those opportunities that exist to grow the economy, and to diversify the economy.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member his time has expired.

MR. MITCHELMORE: 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 would like to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement here today. Yes, this is a good announcement. We know that government has undertaken several initiatives to help progress our way to the north and to help us lead the way to the north.

At the same as that, we have a seagoing heritage in this Province that we all have a unique experience with. The days of Captain Bob Bartlett years ago pointed the way to the ways of the future, to the ways that this Province can lead.

We have to recognize as well that government still has a lot more work to do to help prepare the way in better transportation networks, and in better Internet networks. Better education and health care are going to have come along with it. There is a lot here for government to think about.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Teachers have been without a contract for almost two years. After being forced to resort to a public relations campaign last month to get government back to the talks, they have broken off once again. Teachers are saying that government is negotiating in bad faith.

I ask the Premier: Why haven't you given your negotiators a full mandate to get this settled?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as a government we are committed to productive and successful discussions, a successful process, and a successful outcome with the Teachers' Association. As the NLTA said yesterday, they will be seeking conciliation. That is not uncommon in the bargaining process.

Let me assure the public that there is a clear mandate, that we are committed to the negotiating process. There is a clear mandate on the table. This is the next step in the bargaining process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister mentioned a conciliation officer, and, as you know, teachers are requesting that. Under section 79 of the Labour Relations Act it says the minister may call in a conciliation officer to help resolve this current situation, if indeed you have a clear mandate on the table, as you say minister.

I ask the Minister Responsible for Labour Relations: Will you call in a conciliation officer that the teachers are requesting?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the benefit of the member opposite, I have not been approached at this point in time by the teachers. So I am only really aware of what is in the media and what I have been told by my colleague, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

If the teachers intend to ask for a mediator, I encourage them and urge them to submit a request. I have not received anything. I am not in the position to even contemplate doing anything outside of what they may ask because I am not fully briefed on the extent to where the negotiations are, but I am certainly prepared to act within the law that is provided under the Labour Relations Act if and when they do request it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well after missing their deadlines by over a month, government finally released an RFP for the review of the Newfoundland and Labrador electricity system. The words, public consultation, are not in the document.

I ask the Premier: Since you claim to be open, why is public consultation not part of this review?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, once again today we are seeing, I guess it is a flip flop. We have been in this House for a long time arguing about Muskrat Falls. Just a little while ago the Leader

of the Opposition stood up in this House and said finally to the people of the Province, of course I support –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. DALLEY: – the development of the Lower Churchill. Of course I support the development of Muskrat Falls, Mr. Speaker. So it is a big shift in where he was.

Mr. Speaker, all along when it comes to electricity review he has been telling us, telling me as minister, stay out of the way. Do not interfere with the Public Utilities Board, let them do the work. This is a waste of money.

Mr. Speaker, when we reviewed the process and the work of the PUB, they are doing the public consultations. On the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, we are going to stay out of their way and let them do their work, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Well, the minister has some gall to stand in this House and talk about flip flop. Bill 29, we have always said – the development of Muskrat Falls, if it had been done right, except what you did was put in Bill 61 which put a monopoly on the ratepayers in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BALL: It is clear this review by government is nothing but a distraction from the ongoing review of the Public Utilities Board. Government has not indicated an overall budget, an estimate for this work, or the timelines for its completion.

I ask the Premier: When do you expect to see the final report completed and will you commit to making all documents available to the public?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, to be clear to the people of the Province, and I have said this many times, this is not a distraction to the Public Utilities Board. We support their work. In fact, we want their work. We are going to integrate that into a new system. Clearly the member opposite struggles to understand the broader view of the electrical system in this Province.

Mr. Speaker, we have been clear. We are moving from a system that has served this Province for over fifty years. We will move to a system to connect with the North American grid, from an isolated to an interconnected, the last jurisdiction in the country to do so. With that there will be new challenges, whether it is governance, legislation, regulation, operations, performance, the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders, and how that will work in terms of best practices, as well as what is happening in other jurisdictions and models.

That is our focus, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thought I just heard the minister say he clearly supports the work of the PUB. Well, I remind the minister, it was your government back in March, 2012 – did you support the PUB then, I say, Minister? Can you remember that, Minister?

Mr. Speaker, government says their review will look at the whole energy system in our Province. That is the same thing the final PUB report will focus on.

I ask the Premier: Why don't you just get out of the way and let the PUB do the work, if indeed you do support them?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the PUB announced after the blackouts in January they were going to do certain work. Then they said they were going to do an expanded piece of work. As the minister said, we support that. We support that fully, and that work should be done. Nalcor did an internal review and Newfoundland Power did their review, and that is feeding into the PUB. We support them in what they are doing.

We said in 2007, in the Energy Plan of 2007, we committed to the people of the Province, as we got close to interconnection and we would move from a totally isolated system into an interconnected system, that we would do a full study. That is what the minister has announced. The PUB study will help us; our study will help them. They will do their work. We support that. We are going to do our work. They support what we are doing. That will be in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: The problem with all of that is we still do not know when the report is going to come and we do not know when or if, indeed, they will release all the documentation.

Mr. Speaker, as part of Budget 2014, government indicated it had narrowed down proposals for the fibre resources in Central Newfoundland to just one proponent. This morning in the media we heard reports of a company called Rentech out of California has been selected.

I ask the Premier: Can you confirm, indeed, if it is Rentech that has been selected?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, some years ago our government, with the support of the Opposition, expropriated the assets of Abitibi. One of those assets was a very valuable timber resource. With that expropriation, we engaged in a very exhaustive process to look for an expression of interest for companies to come in and help develop that resource.

Mr. Speaker, we have gone through that process with two main principles in mind: one, that we could develop that resource for the benefit of the Central Region and the economy; secondly, we have developed the resource so that it can benefit the entire forest industry, particularly around the issue and principle of exchange of fibre.

Mr. Speaker, we followed that; we are at a process now where we have narrowed it to one company. Rentech is indeed the company that we continue to negotiate, Mr. Speaker, and we will certainly update the Province when it is an appropriate time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the minister identified that it is Rentech. Maybe he would want to tell the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and indeed the people in Central Newfoundland, how much financial support will government be investing into Rentech.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, contrary to some of the media reports out there today, there is no final deal done and there is no final number in terms of requests of support from government. Negotiations are ongoing, but I will certainly

commit to the people of the Province two things: one, that we want to benefit the economy in the Central Region; and, number two, we want to make sure that whatever deal we strike is in the best interests of the people of the Province, particularly in the best interests of the forest industry around the exchange of fibre issue.

When those final details are available, Mr. Speaker, we will put it out; but to be sure, there are some numbers floating around today but there is absolutely no deal on numbers or the investment that government is prepared to make at this point. We are still in negotiations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, in December, government said there would be no radiation unit for the new western regional hospital. In March, government announced \$500,000 to study and review radiation for Western Health.

I ask the Premier: Will you now table the Terms of Reference for this review, who is doing it, when will it be completed, and will the results be made public?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, our primary concern for the people of Western Newfoundland is the highest quality of health care with the highest safety standard, according to the best standards in the country. The people of Western Newfoundland deserve no less than that.

There has been a committee formed who is lobbying, suggesting, and recommending that the radiation therapy services be offered in the new hospital being built in Corner Brook. We are having our officials look at that. We are going to have a study done. The study will just not include Western; the study will include the whole Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Terms of Reference have not been set yet, but it is a study to determine if we can adopt what is referred to as a hub-and-spoke model, a different model than the national model that is being used in the country today. When that work is done, it will be announced; and yes, when the reports are completed, we will be happy to share them with the Opposition and the people of the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health stated in this House on December 9 that we will not be providing radiation services at Western Memorial Regional Hospital. The PC leadership candidate says he supports a radiation unit for the new hospital.

I ask the Premier: Does your government stand by the statements of your minister, or the PC candidate?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: I will be happy to tell you where we stand, Mr. Speaker.

We are going to offer a radiation therapy program in the new hospital in Corner Brook or in other parts of the Province if it can be done safely, if we can attract the qualified professionals to perform the work, and if it can meet the highest Canadian standards for health and safety and service for the people of that area of the Province.

The Minister of Health has asked her officials to continue to do the research – the national model, the hub-and-spoke model, the one-machine model – and now they are doing research into a two-machine model in places like Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island. The officials are gathering the data, we have outstanding and

well-qualified officials in the Department of Health and Community Services who are committed to the best quality and to the best possible care for the people of the Province, and the work they do will help inform our decision.

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, is the Premier telling the people in Western Newfoundland that all this information was not gathered before you made a decision? I mean, that is astonishing. You made a decision not to have a radiation unit or PET scanner; but, because of public pressure, now you are going to do a study. That is unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on November 25, the Minister of Health said there were 172 radiation patients from Western. On December 9, she said that these numbers do not support radiation services.

So I ask the Premier: Do you stand by the minister's statements, and does your PC candidate have your full support?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, I have seen the deck of information that the Minister of Health and her officials outlined, which the member opposite certainly has. In terms of the numbers, the justification for the numbers in Western Newfoundland, there is justification for one machine; but the one-machine model is not the normal model used in the country. It is used in two places. They are not accredited, but they are looking at them. Everybody is watching it; people are studying it. It is called the hub-and-spoke model where if you have only one machine, there has to be a place within a reasonable period of time that if your machine breaks down you can go to another machine that is calibrated to match your own machine.

That is what they looked at, but there are other models. There are two-machine models. There are other models in the country. Officials are looking at that. They are presenting the evidence. They are not making the decision. They are highly qualified, they know what they are doing, and they are presenting the evidence. That information will come to us (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: I say to the Premier, when it comes to the hospital, which you announced in 2011 that construction would start in 2012 – you are not the centerfold for *Trust* magazine when it comes to the hospital in Corner Brook, I can assure you of that.

I ask the Premier once again: Are you informing this House and the people of Western Newfoundland that the information you are gathering now was not done prior to the minister making these announcements and sending fear towards the patients of Western Newfoundland and Labrador of a radiation and a PET scanner? Are you confirming that the minister did not do her work?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member opposite was in government people wanted an MRI machine. He did not deliver on that. People wanted a new long-term care facility. He did not deliver on that; we did. I think people know who they can trust when it comes to commitments made in health care for the people of Western Newfoundland.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, this year's Budget features a rehash of school infrastructure projects as if they were new ones. Meanwhile, students are eating their lunch at their desk and others are sent to the cafeteria for gym class. In Education Estimates last night, the minister was adamant that he is not going to address the failed school planning process.

I ask the minister: How can you stand behind a school infrastructure planning process that has failed to provide students with the space they need to learn?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I do not know exactly what he is talking about. It is a lead – and I do not know what he is referencing, but I will certainly go back and check Hansard.

Mr. Speaker, all you have to do – and I have said it in this House on so many times. There has not been a government previous that invested in infrastructure that this government has. I can go on down – we have allocated \$681 million for school infrastructure projects since 2004.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Thirty new schools: Leading Tickle, Mobile, Laval, Copper Ridge in Baie Verte, the Straits and L'Anse-au-Loup, Holy Trinity in Torbay, Port Saunders, Port Hope Simpson, and Paradise. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: We have other schools that are now under construction. Mr. Speaker, we are addressing the need of infrastructure in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: The fact is, Mr. Speaker, this government has failed to plan and built schools that are too small. We have seen that with Carbonear Academy. We have seen that with Beachy Cove Elementary and others. That is the reason for the increased use of modular classrooms in parking lots. Now we have learned that government has actually failed to procure the land that is needed for the promised new schools, both in Paradise and in Portugal Cove – St. Phillips.

I ask the minister: Given that you have no plan to accommodate the students we have now, will you finally create a new school development plan that does not include making these same kinds of mistakes over and over and over again?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the member is advocating for a primary and elementary school, about 1,500 students. That is what the man is saying. That is what he is saying.

Mr. Speaker, we have built new schools. Portugal Cove – St. Phillips is underway. Hopefully, we will have the land situation in Octagon Pond straightened away very shortly; two new schools in Paradise, Mr. Speaker.

Our list of infrastructure goes on. Need I repeat it for him, Mr. Speaker? I do not think so. The man is just not listening.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, this year's Budget paints a rosy picture of the economy with lots of jobs. However, if you focus on the Province's youth, the picture is quite different. Statistics reveal that there are

fewer youth working today than in 2003 and far fewer young people entering our Province's labour force.

I ask the Premier: What his government is doing to help attract and retain our Province's youth since abandoning the Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, many of the initiatives that were part of our Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy are ongoing. They have been incorporated into multiple government departments. Our government is undertaking more initiatives to support youth in this Province than ever before through our Office of Public Engagement.

We are consulting with young people. We want to hear what they have to say. Our youth unemployment rate in 2013 was the lowest in Atlantic Canada, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: One of the best ways to attract and retain young people is to have a top quality education system. With the investments we have made in post-secondary education, we have the best system in the country, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, outside of the public post-secondary funding, they are actually investing less in youth.

Mr. Speaker, the Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy, which had forty-one initiatives to help navigate prosperity and self-reliance, has seen initiatives eliminated, including the Youth Entrepreneurs and Innovators Program, the export internships, international graduate

retention incentives, and cultural exchange programs.

I ask the minister: Why he approved of cancelling funds that would promote youth innovation, entrepreneurship, and cultural diversity?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to youth population in our Province and the statistics and the trends, the Leader of the Opposition on Open Line, the Liberal candidate in Virginia Waters, and the Member for The Straits – White Bay North are misinformed.

When it comes to the Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy initiatives, thirty-five of the forty-one were fully implemented. Most of them are still ongoing, Mr. Speaker. There were some that were adjusted and the plans changed as the strategy unfolded based on the input we were receiving from young people. Overall, many of the initiatives are ongoing. We are proud of what has been accomplished and there is more work to be done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the Chief of Police has recently stated that organized crime has increased in our Province. Along with an increase in organized crime, we have witnessed a rash of violent crimes ranging from extortion charges in Corner Brook to armed robberies and assaults on the Northeast Avalon. Criminals are now even using automatic weapons and burning homes.

I ask the minister: How much of this increase in violent crimes is associated with organized crime, including the drug trade?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, in actual fact, I met with the Chief of Police this morning. I draw the member's attention to *The Telegram* this morning. The police are actually reporting there is not an increase in violent crime in this Province, as the member alleges. Now, those are not my words. Those are the words of the Chief of Police and one of the superintendents with the RNC, that, if anything, violent crime is lower than it has been.

What I will say to the member opposite is we do recognize the increase and the presence of organized crime in this Province. That is why we invested a million dollars in the last year's Budget to develop a task force on organized crime that was going to work across the Province which engaged the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and it is why we further added to that task force in this year's Budget because we recognize the great work they are doing –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the government reallocated \$500,000 from the Family Violence Court and put it into organized crime.

Mr. Speaker, the police can only arrest people suspected of committing offences, and by all accounts they are very effective. Thereafter, the only way to reduce crime is by having a fast but fair and efficient justice system that is adequately resourced to effectively deal with sophisticated but violent criminals.

I ask the minister: When does he plan to take this crime wave seriously and stop being soft on crime?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, our decision to stop being soft on crime happened, I think it was, somewhere around October, 2003 when this party took power.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Since that time, we have invested more than \$995 million in policing and the justice system. We have added RNC officers to the streets. We have added RCMP officers to the streets. We are tackling organized crimes. We have invested in the court system, just two weeks ago. We have invested close to \$14 million in the Sheriff's Office and the legal aid system because this government believes in a fair justice system, accessible to all.

I am more than prepared to keep talking about the investments we have made in this Province to support our belief in and our strengthening of the justice system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Yesterday, the Minister of Justice said temporary foreign workers are protected by our Labour Standards Act, but our act is complaints driven. Workers themselves have to report abuses, which we hear they are afraid to do. Manitoba's Worker Recruitment and Protection Act requires employers to register their temporary foreign workers and submit to regular proactive inspections.

I ask the Premier: When will this government change our Labour Standards Act to protect temporary foreign workers who do not feel free to speak out?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right, in part, that the act is complaint driven. We do have people in the field, of course, who are available to do inspections. The Labour Standards Act is no different than many pieces of legislation, including legislation with the RCMP and the RNC. Criminal activity or wrongdoing is often, in most cases, complaint driven. We have no other way to follow-up and investigate unless somebody makes us aware of it or makes a complaint. That is how the system works.

Mr. Speaker, they have the full protection of the law in Newfoundland and Labrador, as does any other private citizen who is a permanent resident of this Province. We will enforce that legislation to the fullest extent we can. If there is a way we can improve the legislation to better the workers, we will take a look at it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, then, I mention to the minister that Alberta has a policy of proactive enforcement where employment standards officers are assigned specifically to audit compliance of employers when it comes to temporary foreign workers. They do not stand around and wait for complaints.

I ask the Premier: Why has this government not yet initiated proactive enforcement of the Labour Standards Act?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, we bring forward in here the best legislation we possibly can that is in the best interests, as far as we are concerned as a government, of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We will continue to do that every single day, in every single department, on every piece of legislation that we are responsible for.

I find it disheartening that the member opposite would stand in this House and criticize the hard-working people of the Labour Relations Agency, to suggest that they are not out in the field doing their job and working in the best interest of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is absolutely ridiculous. We have great people at the Labour Relations Agency. They do great work on behalf of the people of the Province and they do great work in support of temporary foreign workers in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

That is one of the most disingenuous comments I have heard in the House from a minister. This minister knows that it goes against everything else he just said.

Mr. Speaker, he also said yesterday that the government regularly reviews labour legislation, but the Labour Standards Act has not been reviewed for more than ten years.

I am asking: When is his department going to initiate a long overdue legislative review of the

Labour Standards Act and deal with today's reality?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, we do reviews on a regular basis. It is only within the last two weeks that this government has instituted a statutory review of Bill 29, as per the legislation. I say to the member opposite because there are not always public reviews or reviews brought before this House, it does not mean that legislation is not reviewed on a regular basis. In fact, if there is anything disingenuous it is the way that the member opposite characterizes her questions and characterizes the actions of employees.

Employees in the Labour Relations Agency work very hard day in, day out. It is our government that has done more to support labour, workers, protection of workers, and the benefits of workers in this Province more than any other government in the history of the Province, I say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

According to the Auditor General, the government has lost control of the Province's Waste Management Strategy. As damage control, they have abandoned plans for a full waste management facility on the West Coast because it is simply too expensive.

I ask the minister: What plan does the minister have to address the failure of the strategy in the Western Region of the Province?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have been working collaboratively with Regional Service Boards around the Province to advance our Waste Management Strategy and we are making great progress. We are making great progress on the West Coast as well, I would say to the hon. member.

In fact, by the decision to use the Central site, instead of creating a separate site on the West Coast, we are going to save the taxpayers of the West Coast \$1.8 million annually in operating costs. It makes economic sense and it makes environmental sense as well, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, I do not call collaborative, passing on costs that would amount to about a 325 per cent increase to small businesses.

I ask the minister: Is this one of the goals of the Waste Management Strategy, to have fees increase by 325 per cent?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, the capital costs alone of constructing a separate facility on the West Coast would be between \$75 million and \$100 million. It would result in increased capital costs; but, more importantly, on an ongoing basis, the cost difference between going with the plan that we have gone with, which is using the Central facility, versus having an additional well on the West Coast, the savings to taxpayers on the West Coast, again, is \$1.8 million annually.

It is the right decision for economic reasons; it is also the right decision for environmental

reasons. The carbon footprint impact has been studied, and this is absolutely the right decision for the people of the West Coast and the people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, he has to go back and revisit this when it comes to the carbon footprint. I mean, he knows about trucking out garbage to Central Newfoundland. Surely, no business should be subject to an increase like this.

What assurances can the minister give to businesses and taxpayers on the West Coast of the Province that they will not see such increases on the bottom line? We are talking 325 per cent upwards in costs.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, we have estimated all along that the cost of delivering modern waste management services to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador would be in the area of \$180 to \$200 per household. In the other regions of the Province where the strategy has been implemented, that has proven to be the case.

In terms of the cost difference, and in terms of the carbon footprint, the studies and the reports are all online, Mr. Speaker. I know it is a challenge for the Member for St. John's East, but in this instance I would encourage him to read the fine print.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's East, for a quick question.

MR. MURPHY: He obviously has not read the fine print from the (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

A very quick question, Sir.

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, why should small communities also bear the brunt of the failed West Coast management strategy?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the minister, for a very quick response.

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, we all have a responsibility to our environment to ensure we have a modern, progressive waste management strategy implemented for the entire Province. We are proud of the decisions that have been made on the West Coast (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 26.(5)(a) of the Financial Administration Act, I am tabling one Order in Council relating to funding pre-commitments for the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise again to present a petition on behalf of the residents of the West Coast and Labrador on the hospital.

WHEREAS we wish to raise concerns regarding the recent delay of the construction of the new hospital in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to commit to the planning and construction of a new hospital in Corner Brook, as previously committed to and in a timely matter as originally announced, without further delay or changes.

Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here again today. People from all over – there are people from Summerside, Pasadena, Mount Moriah, Petries, and Corner Brook. I present the petition again on behalf of the residents of Western Newfoundland and Labrador. Once again, I urge the government to follow through on their commitment and without delay on the construction of the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I asked questions today of the Premier about the radiation and the PET scanner in Corner Brook. As we know, there is a PC candidate who came out and said he is going to do this. I just want to bring it to the people's attention. The Budget was brought in March 12, 2014. The Minister of Health and Community Services on March 28 was on CBC Radio and she stated that it has the potential to deal with 400 patients at a number of 140, and it would not be operating at full capacity. Should the numbers change, utilization demand, they are open to that.

Mr. Speaker, so we have the Premier here today, the same Premier who announced construction

of the hospital during the election in 2011 that will begin in 2012, which never happened, and he knew that it could not happen because there was no design selected. Here we have the Premier of the day saying he is doing a \$500,000 study announced in the Budget March 12, 2014, and we have the minister two weeks later saying no, the numbers do not – can you see why I am asking questions and presenting petitions?

We have a PC candidate out there now who, last night, made an announcement that we are looking at a radiation unit. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health, when we were discussing about putting radiation and a PET scanner in Corner Brook, said herself anybody who would make that decision is doing it just for political gain – just for political gain – and she said it in this House of Assembly.

So I ask the Premier again – he can stand up any time – is the minister correct, two weeks later on CBC; or is the Premier correct that the study is going to be done?

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

I remind the member that his time for speaking has expired.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

PREMIER MARSHALL: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier, on a point of order.

PREMIER MARSHALL: The hon. member just stood up and said in front of the cameras that I can get up at any time. Obviously, I cannot. I have to get up on a point of order. I have to get up on a point of order, and he knows I cannot get up and respond to this particular debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

Are you speaking to the point of order?

MR. JOYCE: Yes, I am.

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, as I always said, this is so important. I will give the Premier one of the 3,000 or 4,000 petitions that I have to present here, so you can speak on behalf –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

MR. JOYCE: There is no reason why you cannot stand up Premier.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Further petitions.

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I have a petition. To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition –

PREMIER MARSHALL: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier, on a point of order.

PREMIER MARSHALL: I think the hon. member indicated I could stand up, and, of course, he knows I cannot stand up. I cannot stand up unless the hon. member is offering to give me leave to respond. If the hon. member wants to give me leave to respond, I will be happy to do so.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Does the Premier have leave?

MR. A. PARSONS: I would gladly give the Premier leave.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Premier have leave of the House?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier, with leave.

PREMIER MARSHALL: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to say is that I have total confidence in the Minister of Health and Community Services and the officials she has, the outstanding officials who are doing work, who are gathering the evidence, giving it to us so that the government can make an informed decision on how we can provide the best, the highest quality, and the safest services to the people of Newfoundland, including radiation services in the new hospital in Western Newfoundland, and hopefully the development of a hub and spoke model that can provide radiation services to other parts of the Province as well.

That is the purpose of the study. The study will obviously start in Western Newfoundland because there is a new hospital being built there. If there is a need for radiation bunkers, we have to integrate that into the design.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know how much time I have with leave. I assume I have about half an hour, so I want to talk about radiation services that are offered in the country. There is a model that people use, treatment for cancer, chemotherapy is done in the regional hospitals, surgery is done in the regional hospitals, but the tradition in the country, the standard in the country is to center radiation in the larger population centres.

Yet, we have discovered two communities, one in Peterborough, Ontario and one in Sault Ste. Marie that have one machine. They have one machine to serve their population, but they have another machine that is within a reasonable

distance. One is 300 kilometres away, one is about an hour's drive away, where they can get to another machine that is calibrated with the machine back in the hometown. So if anybody needs the services, the machine breaks down, they can get to that community, get the radiation therapy and then be home and be in their beds that night.

That is why the people of Western Newfoundland, and that is why the committee, want this. They want it because they want to be able to get the treatments home and be home with their friends and family. There are great psychosocial therapy benefits to that. When people are ill, they do not want to be living far away. They do not want to be in a hotel. They want to be home, to be able to go home that night after they get the service.

The Department of Health, under the leadership of the Minister of Health and officials, are getting us that information. They are getting information on the national model. They have information on the two towns that have one machine. They are looking at the hub and spoke model.

Then what came up, Mr. Speaker, through the committee, was that places like Cape Breton and places like Charlottetown that serve smaller populations, one with 120,000 and one with 140,000, they are operating with two machines. So the question would be, if this service is to be offered in the new hospital in Corner Brook, can it be done using the model of one machine? What happens when the machine goes down, or do you need two machines? Can you attract the professionals you need?

Can you attract the medical physicists, the radiation oncologists, the radiation therapists, the dosimetrists – I do not know if that is the correct pronunciation. They are highly trained people. They cannot get that training in this Province, not the medical physicists, not the radiation oncologists, and not the radiation therapists. They cannot be trained here. So, can we attract them?

If we offer the service in Western Newfoundland, can we attract those highly trained people? Can we retain them if we can attract them? If we can attract them, can we grow our own? Can we put training programs in place, identify individuals, have them go away and get their training and return? Can we do that? Then there is a question of the numbers. The numbers are small, but the geographic distance is large.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health are gathering that information for us. They are doing the research; they are presenting it to us. They are not making decisions. Their decisions are based on the evidence. They are going to give that information to us and then it will be us, as elected representatives, who in the end will make the decision, a decision to be in the best interest of the people of the Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Further petitions?

MR. JOYCE: On a point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands, on a point of order.

MR. JOYCE: I ask the Premier, if I can have leave just to explain the information that the action committee – also had the same courtesy.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Bay of Islands is asking for leave. Does the member have leave?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: By leave.

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, what the Premier just said is what I have been asking for, for two years. To have an informed discussion about the radiation and PET scanner in the Province of

Newfoundland and Labrador. The action committee has asked for an open dialogue, a frank discussion on all this information.

What the Premier just said, to do a study to see what model we can use, I agree with 100 per cent. The problem that I have, Mr. Premier, is the people in Western Newfoundland were denied this opportunity. They were denied the opportunity to have a full and open discussion on why a radiation and PET scanner should be put in there, why they do not have to travel this 700, some people up to 900 or 1,000 kilometres.

Mr. Speaker, that is what we wanted. I urge the Premier to look at the data. When you spoke about Sydney, they did have a single machine for a number of years. When you speak about Charlottetown, they did have a single radiation for a number of years. Now they have two because of the demand, but they did operate it. This is the kind of information that myself, the Leader of the Opposition, and the people on this side have been gathering. That is what we have been gathering for a number of years.

I say to the Premier in all honesty, this is bigger than any of us in this House of Assembly. By the time this is put in 2022, I am not sure if there are going to be many of us left in this Legislature. This is for the people of Western Newfoundland and Labrador. This is for the people, the seniors, Mr. Speaker, who are in palliative care, end of life, and cannot get radiation. This is what this is all about.

I commend the Premier. If this is the open dialogue we are going to have, I commend it. I look forward to it. I have been asking for it for three years. This is what I have always asked for, an open dialogue so we can take the facts, put them on the table, and let the experts say yes, here is what we can do, here is what we need to do to get this done. I have been saying that all along. The Leader of the Opposition has been saying this. This is not us and them. This is for the people of Western Newfoundland.

Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the Premier, with all due respect to the Minister of Health, when you made an announcement on March 14 in your

Budget that you are going to do \$500,000 to do a study if there should be radiation and a PET scanner in Corner Brook, I applauded it. Then, two weeks later, the Minister of Health is on CBC Radio telling the people in Western Newfoundland that the numbers do not do it, and it is unsafe to do. Who are we to believe?

I heard the Premier say, Mr. Speaker, and I agree, we are going to have one chance to do this, so let us do it right. We cannot have the Premier making the announcement of \$500,000 to go do a study on the new hospital in Corner Brook for radiation and a PET scanner. We cannot have the Minister of Health coming out two weeks later saying: No, the decision is already made.

This is what I have been saying all along, Mr. Speaker. Before we ever made the decision that there should be no radiation and there should be no PET scanner, we should have had this dialogue. We should have had all this information collected. This is why this action committee caused such a stir, that we are having this open debate and we are having this open dialogue.

I say to the Premier, and I say this with all honesty: Premier, when the former Minister of Forestry and Agriculture, Jerome Kennedy, was there, we worked well together for Corner Brook Pulp and Paper. We worked well for Kruger. We stood shoulder to shoulder, we spoke, we shared information, and we helped to get things. Why can't we do it with the hospital in Corner Brook? Why can't we do it with the radiation and the PET scanner? Why can't we do it?

We did it with Kruger. There was a trust there, Mr. Speaker, that was never broken. I thank the Member for Humber East, I thank the Member for Humber West, and the former minister, Jerome Kennedy, for their support and for bringing us into their confidence.

This is bigger than any of us, so I urge the Premier to continue your study. Most of the information you are saying you have there, Mr. Premier, we already got through our research.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask the member to direct his comments to the Chair.

MR. JOYCE: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the Premier: Most of the information you have – and, Mr. Speaker, I have to bring this up. I am not sure how this happened, but when we wanted to meet with the group in Newfoundland and Labrador, the oncologists, and the meeting gets cancelled, you become suspicious of it all. We need to work together. We need to, all of us, come together because this is bigger than any of us.

I urge the Premier, again, to ask the Minister of Health to calm it down with the statements she is making out in the public that is going in the main – it flies in the face of reasonable, frank discussion we all need to have that the Premier is trying to put through to Western Newfoundland. Mr. Speaker, I agree, and I asked for it for a number of years, to have an open and frank discussion. Put everything on the table. Have all the best information.

I can tell you, when the Premier mentioned Sydney, they did have a single unit in Sydney. I am not sure if the Premier was aware of that. In PEI, they started with one. The information we got from PEI – they started with one; they graduated to two because of the numbers. That is the information that we are getting, and this is why we need to have this open and frank discussion.

I say to the Premier when you get the Minister of Health coming out and saying the numbers, that there are only 140 people going to use the unit – I know in this House of Assembly you cannot say information that someone is putting forward is wrong; but I can honestly say that the information that the minister is putting out, 140 people that she said on CBC Friday, March 26, is factually incorrect.

Not only is it factually incorrect, it causes so much confusion, it causes so much tension, and it causes so much animosity. That is why the

action committee in Western Newfoundland are saying: Where is this number coming from? Where is it coming from? Mr. Speaker, there is nobody – and I will sit down with the Premier any time, I will sit down with the Member from Humber West any time, for anybody to show me how the Minister of Health could go on CBC two weeks after offering the study and say there are only 140 patients in Western Newfoundland, Labrador for radiation. It is just factually incorrect, Mr. Speaker.

All the experts out in Newfoundland – the information we even get under freedom of information, that information is factually incorrect. This is what we need to do. We need to put everything on the table. We need to have a frank and open discussion, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you there are people in this Legislature that someday will need that PET scanner, will need that radiation unit, and I can assure you that this is bigger than anybody in here. I might be the one who many times spoke out on it, and I know the Premier did and I know the Member for Humber West spoke about it also. This is bigger than any of us.

When you see a senior who cannot get it, this is what this is all about. I urge everybody in the House and I urge the Premier, as we did with Kruger, let's work together, let's put it on the table because when it is all said and done, we can walk around Western Newfoundland and Labrador and say, as a government, we worked well, as legislators we did the right thing, we made the right decision because the people who are going to benefit, Mr. Speaker, are the people who elected all of us in this House. Let's all work together, let's get this moving and let's stop this rhetoric about the Premier saying one thing, having the minister out trying to justify, let's get the facts, Mr. Speaker, so we can all do what we do best: represent the people that elected us.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is the hon. the Premier standing on a point of order?

PREMIER MARSHALL: No, I assume we are having a discussion, by leave.

I assume that the hon. member would want to have this discussion. I want to make sure we have an open discussion (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: If I could just speak for one minute. I just want to lay out the procedure here, so that we all understand.

Anything can happen in the House of Assembly. This is the people's House; it is your House. If you grant leave, then any debate can happen at any time. Once leave is given – the Speaker made a ruling here at one point in time which said if somebody is speaking and they want to extend their speaking time, then leave will be granted to a maximum of two minutes. What we are dealing with here is not an extension of speaking time. So if someone is granted leave, we will grant them leave to speak, and I just want to make sure everybody understands that.

The hon. the Premier, with leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: With leave.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite called for a public dialogue and a public discussion, but you cannot be attacking individuals, if that is the way you want it to be done. I have complete and utter confidence in the Minister of Health. I want to make that very clear to everybody (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: The Minister of Health and her officials – her very highly qualified officials – worked very hard to gather this information, and they have brought this information, and there was a deck that had certain numbers.

In 2011-2012, if you base it on the numbers of people who have seen a radiation oncologist in Newfoundland and Labrador, and those who come from the West Coast, and if you look at the number of people in Newfoundland and Labrador who actually had radiation therapy in 2011-2012, and you look at the number that came from the West Coast, you are going to see that number of 140, because for certain people it will not be able to be done. It is going to be complex, there is going to be a procedure called brachytherapy, and they are going to have to go elsewhere. So that is the number; 140 was the number that officials have come up with and given it to the Minister of Health. The Minister of Health should not be criticized for that.

I met with that radiation therapy group from Eastern Health and I asked them the question: Can it be operated in Western Newfoundland? Do you know what the response was? They said: We cannot answer that question until we do the research, until we do the study. They said: It may not be in Corner Brook. That is what they said. It might be somewhere else in Newfoundland and Labrador.

What the woman said to me – it was a woman from Labrador – we cannot just sit down and off the top of our head throw out an answer. She said: It has to be based on the evidence; it has to be evidence-based. She said: We would love to do the study. We want to get somebody independent to come in and do that study and to look at the numbers and then to give us the right and correct answer.

So that number was correct, and I am satisfied that the officials in the Department of Health are working their hardest to get us the information and gather the information so that we as the elected representatives of the people can make the best decisions for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Minister of Health is working extremely hard on this. She is gathering evidence on this. Once the evidence is complete, and once the additional information is obtained – and they are now seeking information in New Brunswick, in Prince Edward Island, in Nova Scotia, and the

evidence from here – that will help us make the proper decision.

Let's be very clear, the attacks on the Minister of Health are unacceptable. The Minister of Health has my complete confidence. Her officials over in the Department of Health are working very hard. They are very capable, and let's stop attacking them. Let the committee in Corner Brook – I know what the committee in Corner Brook want, they want radiation. It is very emotional, I understand that, but do not attack those officials. Do not accuse those officials of giving them misinformed information.

These are highly trained and dedicated professionals who want the best for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Do not say they lied to them. They have been accused of lying, they have been accused of misinformation, and that is unacceptable. These are amongst the best and the brightest we have. They are very concerned about health in this Province. They will work hard and give us the evidence. Then we can have our debate and make the best decision for the people of the Province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Leader of the Third Party, I am assuming would like to jump in on this with leave.

MS MICHAEL: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Leader of the Third Party have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

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

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

I really think this is an extremely important discussion that is happening here on the floor. That is why I thought it would be important to also add my voice to the discussion that is going on.

Thanks to my colleague from St. John's East, I did not know this, but apparently on March 28, 2001 when there was a petition with regard to taking HST off home heating, the three parties spoke in the context of the discussion of that petition. What we are doing today happened one time before, at least in the House. I asked my colleague how he knew that. Was he up all night reading books that I did not know about? He was present when it happened, that is why he knew about it.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS MICHAEL: In 2001. This is extremely important what we are doing here. I think it is maybe a momentous occasion, as has been indicated by my colleague from Bay of Islands, because I too believe it is extremely important that we take seriously the request of the committee in Corner Brook.

While I have not been able to meet with the committee as a committee, because of schedules not working – one time when I was supposed to be out there for a meeting a storm changing things and I could not attend – I have spoken with spokespersons officially from the committee. So, I have had my own discussions as well.

I think the case they have presented with regard to radiation being needed on the West Coast of the Island – not just for the West Coast, they fully understand that. They fully understand that when we are talking about the West Coast we are talking about a large area, not just around Corner Brook. When we look at the travel that people have to do for radiation, we are looking at a tremendous group of people who have to do that.

I have spoken to people inside of the health care system as well, to determine, does it look logical? Does it look like, in actual fact, having

a radiation unit elsewhere in the Province is something that could work? Certainly, there are individuals who believe, yes, that is the case. It could work.

Without having the figures for a study, et cetera, I think some of the reasons why this has to be considered – some of them were mentioned by the Premier, some mentioned by the Member for Bay of Islands. Certainly, one of the considerations is we cannot compare two towns sitting side by side in Southern Ontario with the Island of Newfoundland and the grand land of Labrador when we are talking about getting health care, because the distances and the logistics of travel in our Province are so immense.

I stand behind the call of the people in Corner Brook and the people outside of, sort of the Eastern part of the Province, when it comes to this issue being studied. I have no doubt there is going to be a resolution that is going to say there should be a second radiation unit. I have no doubt. I am sure that is going to happen. I think it is really good that all three parties are able, in this House today, to say that we all stand behind the study.

I am saying I really believe we are going to see that another unit is going to be called for. Will that be Corner Brook or not? I am not going to say that. I think that study will have to show where. Looking geographically, it looks logical. Looking at everything around Corner Brook in terms of access, air access, et cetera, it looks logical, but I accept a study being done. I am glad that is happening. I am sure the people, not just in Corner Brook, but elsewhere in the Western and Northern areas of the Province are really delighted to see this happening too.

I thought it was extremely important because of the importance of this issue. I do recognize the hard work that has been done by the Member for Bay of Islands. He has been consistent in speaking out on this, but I think it is an issue for the whole Province. That is why it was important to make sure that the voice of all three parties was present in the discussion.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to say that.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Member for Bay of Islands have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

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

MR. JOYCE: I heard what the Premier said, saying that the officials are lying. I understand what you are saying but I will present to you information.

Mr. Speaker, anything I say here I truly believe in my heart that it is correct information. What the minister said on that radio show is inconsistent with what we received from the Department of Health. I will just say to the Premier, if you think the information – and this is the frustration from Israel Hann, Gerald Parsons, Wayne Rose, the action committee. Look at the Stantec report. The Stantec report is different from the numbers the minister uses when she is on Open Line or CBC. This is the frustration, I say to the Premier, it is different. The numbers are completely different.

When you lowball the numbers – and it is like Desiree Dunn in Corner Brook, who is a radiologist, she said that 20 per cent of people, seniors, end of life, do not even receive care because they cannot come to St. John's. When you add all those numbers in, which the minister knows. When you come out and make these statements to lowball the numbers just for Western, when Stantec report's numbers are up here, when the radiologist numbers are even higher, and the only way I can dispute those numbers is here in the House of Assembly.

I apologize if you think I am offending somebody, but I have to get the point across that the information we are going to put forth has to be accurate, has to be consistent. It has to be matching what is in the report. Because in the Stantec report the information is not correct from what the minister is saying.

I say again, I make no apologies for standing in this House and going on the Open Line and out in Corner Brook and saying we need an open, frank discussion on this whole hospital radiation and PET scanner unit. I make no apologies. I make no apologies for showing inconsistencies in numbers. Like I said, if you do not believe me, go see the Stantec report, go speak to the radiologist in Corner Brook, they will give you the numbers.

When I heard that the Premier is going to have an open, frank dialogue with \$500,000, I stood and I commended that, Mr. Speaker. I commended that, but two weeks later to have the minister out and cutting the legs from underneath the Premier, cutting the legs from underneath the study, cutting the legs from the people in Western Newfoundland and Labrador, I just cannot stand for it. I just cannot. If my only opportunity to do it, to speak on it, is here in this House of Assembly, I will.

I say to the Premier and I say to the people in Western Newfoundland, I am not saying anybody is lying. What I am saying is the information that is presented in reports and presented by the oncologists is not consistent with what the Minister of Health is saying publicly. I will say it to the Premier: I can give you those documents. I am not here to say believe me, trust me, or believe someone else. I will show you the document. I will even give you the page. I will even give you all the information we have to show that when the Premier makes his statement, which I agree with 100 per cent, let us have an open – we should have done it two years ago or three years ago before the decision was ever made, but that is water under the bridge. If the Premier wants to see the information and why I say we have to stop this lowballing and trying to justify not doing it, Mr. Speaker, I offer the Premier the opportunity to see the information.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, when the Premier asked me to get involved with Kruger and with the pensioners to make sure we got that letter, I went to bat. So did the Leader of the Opposition. I went to bat. The Member for Humber West stood shoulder to shoulder with

us. I went to bat. I produced the information. I can work with anybody for the betterment.

I say to the Premier: I will show you that information in the Stantec report. I will give you the page. I will give you the information. If you really, really want the true facts, phone the radiologists in Corner Brook whose patients they are serving and they can tell you, Mr. Speaker. I can show it. When I say that, I say to the Premier again, I am not saying anybody is lying, I am just saying the facts are inconsistent from what we are getting from the same department.

I make no apologies for that – I make no apologies – because if you let it go unsaid, people will start believing what is being said. I have to confront and I have to show the numbers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier, with leave.

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we heard a complete discussion here, but the one thing that bothers me, and it bothers me immensely, is the fact that the hon. member is attacking the Minister of Health, who is not here today. If you want an open and frank discussion, you have to have it with the minister here.

I can tell you one thing, any information given to me by the Minister of Health will be information she has obtained from her officials and I am sure it is 100 per cent accurate. If you have any other information and if you have any other reports, bring it forward. If you have any information, and I heard the Leader of the Opposition or somebody the other day saying

you are out in Saskatchewan or you are out in Manitoba somewhere, give us that information.

The information we have is the information that was in a deck the minister and her officials presented to the people of Corner Brook when she was out announcing the new plan for the hospital, to show how there was not going to be one building, there are going to be five buildings, and how it was going to proceed.

I have confidence in the Minister of Health. She is a terrific minister. Her officials would never ever provide false information to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: If there is one thing I am certain of, it is that. These people are highly trained professionals; they do their work based on the evidence. They provide the evidence to us and let us as the policy-makers make the decision on policy.

I look forward to more discussion. I look forward to you giving me any information that you have obtained. I can guarantee you one thing that anything coming from our officials and the minister, nothing has been played with, and nothing has been distorted. There is no misinformation. They will give us the information and they will give us their advice based on that information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible) thirty seconds.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for the Bay of Islands, with leave.

AN HON. MEMBER: No leave.

MR. SPEAKER: No leave.

Further petitions?

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you very much, 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 the Family Violence Intervention Court provided a comprehensive approach to domestic violence in a court setting that fully understood and dealt with the complex issues of domestic violence; and

WHEREAS domestic violence continues to be one of the most serious issues facing our Province today and the cost of the impact of domestic violence is great both economically and in human suffering; and

WHEREAS the Family Violence Intervention Court was welcomed and endorsed by all aspects of the justice system including the police, the courts, prosecutors, defence counsel, Child, Youth and Family Services, as well as victims, offenders, community agencies, and women's groups; and

WHEREAS the recidivism rate for offenders going through the court was 10 per cent compared to 40 per cent for those who did not; and

WHEREAS the budget for the court was only 0.2 per cent of the entire budget of the Department of Justice:

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reinstate the Family Violence Intervention Court.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I call out on the Premier to, if not reinstate the court, to consider reviewing the

decision that was made. We do not have access to the supposed internal review that was done on the court on which perhaps a decision was based.

We do know from reports that the review was a positive review that showed the court was doing what it was intended to do and was doing it successfully. That, in fact, the numbers were increasing, and it took a while for the police, for defence attorneys, for people to buy in, but buy in they did. It was working well. Even the Minister of Justice said that himself.

I would ask the Premier, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask the Minister of Justice to do a review then, to revisit the decision of the closure of the Family Violence Intervention Court.

Today, in the House during Question Period, the Minister of Justice said that he has invested in the court system and he said this government believed in a fair justice system accessible to all. This court was about investing in the court system. It was about fair justice for all. It was about access to justice for all.

Also, Mr. Speaker, who in this House will stand up on behalf of women and children who are the victims of domestic violence? That is what this court did. That is what this court did so well and so expertly. Who in this House now will stand up and continue that struggle, continue to lobby on behalf of women and children –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member her speaking time has expired.

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

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

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

I will go back to my petition I had started.

WHEREAS the residents of the Southwest Coast of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador must use Route 470 and Trunk Road 470-10 on a regular basis for work, medical, educational and social reasons; and

WHEREAS Routes 470 and 470-10 are in deplorable condition, such that the shoulders of the road continuously wash away and there are huge potholes on the road; and

WHEREAS the condition of Routes 470 and 470-10 pose a safety hazard to residents and visitors to the Southwest Coast; and

WHEREAS the Department of Transportation and Works is responsible for the maintenance and repairs in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS the local division of the Department of Transportation and Works does make periodic repairs to this route but these repairs are only temporary patchwork and this road need to be resurfaced;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to support the users of Route 470 and 470-10 in their request to have Route 470-10 resurfaced;

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that obviously many members in this House can stand up on. Certainly, we have had a terrible winter when it comes to the conditions of this road. We all know that, but this winter has nothing to do with the condition of the road in this area. These roads were in bad condition well before this winter, especially the road that services the residents of Margaree and Fox Roost.

We have made this known to the minister and previous ministers that this road desperately needs some attention. I get complaints from not only the residents but, most importantly, parents of young children, school bus operators, and business people, especially even the local cab

company that has to go back and forth at all hours of the day, people going back and forth from work. This road is washed away to the point where there is actually one lane. When you take this one lane and it is already in poor condition, what we are going to see is a very bad accident.

Now we know there is a significant amount of roadway in this Province, and we know there is only a limited amount of funds, but I think for the condition of this road, the length of time that has gone since it has had any work done and the relatively short distance of time – this summer, this community has a come home year where we are probably going to see triple, quadruple the number of residents coming back home for this period of time. I am hoping this can be put into the early roadwork tender and, hopefully, we will see some action.

We appreciate the work the department has done, the operators, especially in this last week or two. It has been tremendous, tremendous work they have done, but we would like to see, hopefully, some tenders called for this area of roadway in the near future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: 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 sheweth:

WHEREAS current government regulations deny busing services to students who live closer than 1.6 kilometres from school; and

WHEREAS parents have expressed concern that children living within 1.6 kilometres of school face dangers in walking to school, such as congested streets, busy intersections and no sidewalks, especially during winter weather conditions; and

WHEREAS the \$75,000 review of the school transportation system completed by Deloitte recommended that the Department of Education consider reducing the 1.6 kilometre eligibility zone for kindergarten and elementary students; and

WHEREAS the \$75,000 Deloitte report also noted that only 10 per cent of those surveyed for the school transportation system review agree that the current 1.6 kilometre policy is reasonable for students and families; and

WHEREAS parents are continuing to demand more flexible policies to meet the current needs of school children;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to change the outdated 1.6 kilometre school busing eligibility policy in order to ensure safe travel to school for primary and elementary school children in the Province.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this petition is pretty self-explanatory. Certainly, I can attest to living in and representing an urban area of the Province that this is a real issue. We have a lot of busy streets, certainly in the City of Mount Pearl and in other areas, but in Mount Pearl in particular we have a lot of busy streets, a lot of traffic congestion.

As great as the snow clearing is in Mount Pearl, and they do have great snow clearing, there is no doubt about it that in the winter months it is a challenge to get all the sidewalks clear, even though they do make school zones a priority. That lends itself to children walking along the sides and out into busy streets. They have to cross busy streets going to school and so on.

Mr. Speaker, even in terms of this Mount Pearl school reorganization, that is one of the concerns which has been raised with the whole Newtown, St. Peter's Elementary issue, is the fact that there were people who actually moved near one of the

two schools so they would be close to the school. Now we are going to have to go to two schools. You are going to have very young children who are going to have to walk longer distances, but unfortunately even though it is much longer than what they originally had, it is still within the 1.6 kilometres. That is a real problem for parents, certainly at St. Peter's Elementary and Newtown Elementary.

We realize from the responses I have gotten from the Minister of Education that the Mount Pearl School reorganization certainly does not seem to be a priority, and that was confirmed here today in the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member his speaking time has expired.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: 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 government has a responsibility to ensure that Internet access is broadly available so people have the right to be able to access the Internet in order to exercise and enjoy their rights of freedom of expression and opinion and other fundamental human rights; and

WHEREAS Pine's Cove still remains without broadband services, despite both adjacent communities of Shoal Cove East and Green Island Cove have service; and

WHEREAS residents rely on Internet services for education, business, communication and social activity; and

WHEREAS wireless and wired technologies exist to provide broadband service to rural communities to replace slower dial-up service;

We the undersigned petition the House of Assembly to urge the government to assist providers to ensure Pine's Cove is in receipt of the broadband Internet services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I have talked about how we need to advance telecommunication, and there are different options. When we look at the community of Pine's Cove, there is a much simpler, cost-effective solution that can be provided. The community of Pine's Cove has a 456 telephone exchange. If that telephone exchange was switched to a 475 with its neighbour of Green Island Cove, this community, with a relatively low investment, partnered with Bell Aliant, could receive broadband Internet. This could improve the quality of life of a number of people who live in Pine's Cove.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot understand why we cannot move forward, make the right investments that are cost-effective, that are solution oriented to serve the people representing these communities who are currently unable to access broadband Internet. They could utilize broadband Internet to utilize a variety of other programs, such as Skype or Voice over Internet Protocol to make various long distance telephone calls to connect with others and to create those business opportunities. The Muskrat Falls Project, when it comes to the Strait of Bell Isle cable crossing, is happening right in their backyard and they do not have broadband Internet capabilities.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly would like to see that type of service added for the people of Pine's Cove. With all this development happening in their own backyard and they are kept to dial-up slow Internet, it is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS DEMPSTER: 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 humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the Strait of Belle Isle is a very important transportation link between Labrador and the Island of Newfoundland; and

WHEREAS both commercial and residential traffic is continuously increasing because of the opening of the Trans-Labrador Highway and increased development in Labrador; and

WHEREAS the existing ferry service can no longer effectively handle the traffic; and

WHEREAS there have been many interruptions in the ferry service, especially during the 2014 winter season;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to complete a comprehensive feasibility study for a fixed link across the Strait of Belle Isle that would include a geological assessment and a full cost analysis.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, as I stand again today on April 8, the ferry is not moving in the Strait of Belle Isle. She cannot move without icebreaker support. The minister often references it as an old time winter, but, Mr. Speaker, I say we need to plan how many old time winters we might be having. Icebreaker capacity has been restricted due to federal budget cutbacks. Many, many times this year we have seen a disruption in ferry service.

Let's put that aside, Mr. Speaker. We are spending \$10 million a year on a ferry service. Not only are we spending \$10 million a year on a ferry service but we are not getting any service from that \$10 million if trends continue like they did this year. People going on a twelve-hour trip, Mr. Speaker, and spending forty and fifty

hours on a boat, spending nights out in ice on a boat, women and children. Business is being impacted, Mr. Speaker, because store shelves are running bare because commercial traffic is not getting in.

We have a very high cost of travel if we choose to fly, Mr. Speaker. If you get on a plane, fly across the Strait of Belle Isle and back, a ten-minute flight, you are going to pay upwards of \$600. People just cannot afford it.

We know there was a pre-feasibility study done about eight years ago. Those numbers are dated. We look at Norway with 900 tunnels and all the wonderful movement, flow of traffic to and from and the good things that they are doing in that small country of Norway.

I will continue, Mr. Speaker, to stand here and call upon the government to do a full feasibility study on the viability of a fixed link, a study that would include a geological assessment and cost analysis. We cannot continue this trend. Once Route 138 is connected down to Quebec Lower North Shore, the government is going to be scrambling. It is the Island that will be left behind because Labrador will then have their road out.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member her speaking time has expired.

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KIRBY: 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 the lack of services and supports in the school system is a serious obstacle to

learning for children and youth with autism spectrum disorder; and

WHEREAS long wait-lists for pediatric assessment and diagnostic services are preventing many children with autism spectrum disorder from receiving needed diagnosis; and

WHEREAS the Intensive Applied Behavioural Analysis Program is currently not available for children after Grade 3; and

WHEREAS applied behavioural analysis has been shown to be effective for many individuals beyond Grade 3; and

WHEREAS there is a lack of supports and services for children with autism spectrum disorder after they age out of the Intensive Applied Behavioural Analysis Program; and

WHEREAS it is unacceptable to expect parents in Newfoundland and Labrador to pay thousands of dollars out of their own pockets to cover the costs of privately delivered applied behavioural analysis after Grade 3;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to extend eligibility for the Intensive Applied Behavioural Analysis Program beyond Grade 3 in consultation with parents, advocates, educators, health care providers, and experts in the autism community.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, we have some colourful paper here today with names of people from all over my district and parts of the Province. There are people on here from Labrador City and just up on the street, Stirling Crescent, all over.

I have received this petition from people from all over the place. Some of them colour code their paper so they can see it being presented on the House of Assembly channel. Needless to say, there is a lot of consensus amongst people who have experience with autism spectrum

disorder, whether it is individuals themselves, their parents, their advocates, or the people who care for them, that we need to extend the eligibility for this program because it has been shown to be effective.

We are not talking about a great deal of expense either. There has been a growing prevalence; we have seen the recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control in the United States. The prevalence of autism is increasing, but it is still not unwieldy; it is not that expensive to ensure that people have access to this program.

One of the things that is going on in the Province now when it comes to assessment, diagnosis, and with treatment like ABA, that it is increasingly being privatized. The funds are not being provided by government so people increasingly have to go to private sector providers, whether that is to get an assessment, diagnosis, or treatment that are effective, such as Applied Behavioural Analysis. Sometimes people have to go outside the Province (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member his speaking time has expired.

MR. KIRBY: We need to get this done, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I would like to call from our Orders of the Day, Order 4, second reading of a bill, An Act To Amend The City Of Corner Brook Act, The City Of Mount Pearl Act, The City Of St. John's Act And The Municipalities Act, 1999, Bill 6.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, that Bill 6, An Act To Amend The City Of Corner Brook Act, The City Of Mount Pearl Act, The City Of St. John's Act And The Municipalities Act, 1999, be now read the second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 6 entitled, An Act To Amend The City Of Corner Brook Act, The City Of Mount Pearl Act, The City Of St. John's Act And The Municipalities Act, 1999 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The City Of Corner Brook Act, The City Of Mount Pearl Act, The City Of St. John's Act And The Municipalities Act, 1999". (Bill 6)

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am very pleased to be introducing this legislation today. It is my first bill as a minister, so I hope the hon. members opposite will be kind and gentle.

AN HON. MEMBER: The first of many.

MR. KENT: The first of many – let's hope so. There are a couple of more coming this session, with any luck.

We have, as you are aware, legislation on the Order Paper right now which will deliver upon some important Blue Book commitments, and which will build a better environment for those considering running for municipal council, as well as those who are currently holding office.

Last fall, we saw successful municipal elections held in Newfoundland and Labrador. When we

approached that election we had a number of important goals in mind: Working with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, we will encourage residents to run for municipal council. In honour of the foundational work of the Late Dianne Whalen we will expand the Make Your Mark campaign to encourage women to seek elected office municipally, provincially and federally, and to step forward to serve in other representative and leadership capacities. We will encourage women who have already taken this step to serve as mentors and role models to others.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we reviewed the three cities acts and the Municipalities Act, 1999 and are introducing amendments today which will more closely align these acts with the wants and needs of our councillors and support their work for communities and families in their own towns and cities.

There is more to come, Mr. Speaker. I have been the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs for about six months, and as I experienced when I was a municipal politician, there are challenges with our existing legislation. There is a need for legislative reform when it comes to our municipalities. Municipalities have been saying for a long time they want less prescriptive legislation and more enabling legislation. What we are doing here is enabling, which is one of the things I think is exciting about Bill 6.

The specific portions we propose to amend are in two areas, as follows: first, to provide councils the discretion to allow councillors in towns and cities to remotely attend council meetings; and secondly, to provide councils the discretionary authority to appoint one or more youth representatives to council.

With respect to remote meeting attendance, the Municipalities Act, 1999 and the three cities acts currently require in-person attendance at meetings and do not allow attendance through electronic means. We are proposing through this amendment that the Municipalities Act and the three cities acts be amended to allow a council the discretionary authority to decide

whether their councillors can attend council meetings via electronic communication. Attendance at a council meeting through the use of electronic communication would require the person at a minimum to be able to listen to all of the proceedings and to be heard by all in attendance while speaking.

During recent reviews of the acts, as well as an MNL resolution on this matter, it was determined that adjustments could be made to allow greater flexibility for councillors to attend meetings remotely. This proposed amendment will provide greater flexibility to a councillor in terms of how they can balance meeting attendance with other family commitments and work commitments, for instance. This aligns with the goals and objectives of the Make Your Mark campaign by potentially encouraging more candidates to come forward and allows the meeting commitments of a councillor to be better managed.

Mr. Speaker, as technology increases, our government is committed to ensuring that modern techniques, including video conferencing and the use of Internet communications, are available for use where appropriate. This will also enable flexibility for councillors who are trying to balance work and family commitments or who work from non-traditional locations or have an irregular work schedule.

Mr. Speaker, the second area in which an amendment is being proposed covers the enhancement of youth involvement in local government in this Province. We are proposing that the Municipalities Act, 1999 and the three cities acts be amended to allow a council the discretionary authority to appoint one or more youth representatives to council. One of the goals and objectives of the Make Your Mark campaign is to encourage youth involvement because they are the future of our communities and they are potential municipal council members as well.

The Municipalities Act and the three cities acts do not currently allow a council to appoint one or more youth representatives. It is proposed

that the Municipalities Act and each of the cities acts be amended to provide councils with the discretionary authority to appoint one or more youth representatives who could participate in deliberations. The council would set the terms and conditions of the appointments and the youth representatives must be under eighteen years of age at the time of their appointment. The youth members would not vote, of course, and would not be counted for the purposes of determining a quorum.

It is believed that this proposed amendment will provide an opportunity for the community's youth to experience first-hand the roles and responsibilities of municipal councils, which may ultimately lead to an increase in candidates in the future; however, immediate benefits should also occur, as the youth perspective can be provided and considered as part of the council's deliberations, enabling an important voice to be heard at the point of decision making.

Mr. Speaker, through this new discretion, councils will be able to tap in to youth in their region, which will bring a fresh perspective to the council table and will also create a mentoring atmosphere to develop the next generation of municipal councillors.

It is essential that we give young people an opportunity to be involved in local government. We need to do whatever we can to enable and encourage young people to become more involved in local governments to ensure our communities thrive well into the future. Our young people have a lot to offer and I believe they are willing to get more involved if they are given an opportunity.

Not only will this benefit communities from the new ideas and perspectives these youth will bring, but it will also provide an incredible experience for these youth, which will be invaluable to them as they continue on their education, enter the workforce, and hopefully become leaders in our communities.

Our young people are the future of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is incumbent

upon all of us to gather their perspectives and involve them in shaping the policy and decision making at every level of government.

In considering this option, we also conducted a jurisdictional review. There are a number of efforts underway across the country, both municipally and provincially, to add youth representation to councils; but in terms of the provinces and territories, we have an opportunity here to be on the leading edge. Only Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories have prescriptive legislation that specifically allows for youth representatives on municipal councils.

Mr. Speaker, I have spent much of my volunteer career working with youth organizations and I have seen the tremendous value that our young people can bring and the promise, which is evident in their new, fresh ideas and different ways of viewing the world. That is why I feel this amendment is crucial, to bring growth and new ideas to our councils, as we hand our Province over to the next generation.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we are working closely with youth organizations in the Province to understand and to obtain their views on how councils can utilize these positions to ensure that the voice of young people is heard in our communities. This feedback will inform the development of suggested policies and processes for councils to consider, and will help indicate appropriate training methodologies to support this new initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity as we introduce second reading here to make some brief comments on this piece of this legislation. I really feel that these amendments go a long way to making our councils more accessible for current and future councillors as well as our youth. I am also pleased to note that we have had discussions with youth organizations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador on how we can assist councils in introducing these new positions in an effective way.

I encourage all hon. members to vote for this important piece of legislation. It is going to enable municipalities in your districts to offer additional flexibility for councillors. It will encourage increased youth involvement in our communities, which is the part that I am most excited about, Mr. Speaker.

I will conclude my comments at this portion of the debate. I look forward to closing second reading a little later on.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it certainly is a pleasure to stand in this hon. House and to have a few words as it relates to An Act to Amend the City of Corner Brook Act, The City of Mount Pearl Act, The City of St. John's Act and The Municipalities Act, 1999. There are two main points here, as has been outlined by the minister. The first one has to do with selecting a youth representative, giving councils the ability to select a youth representative.

I would say that in a general sense, in the broader terms of it, I absolutely agree with giving youth the opportunity to participate in the democratic process. It is a great opportunity. It would be a great training ground. We know there are a lot of councils these days which are really struggling to find people to run for city council or for town council. I think anything we can do to encourage more people to get involved is a positive thing.

I think bringing the youth perspective to issues affecting our towns, our cities and so on is important because youth are a very important part of our communities, and part of our society. I think we need to be doing a better job than we have traditionally done in engaging youth, getting their perspectives, getting their ideas because, quite frankly, the things we do today

we are doing for them and they are the people quite often who ultimately have to live with the decisions that we make. So from a general sense, in terms of involving youth in the process, I support that principle.

Now, with that being said, Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of points here that I do want to make, that I do have some concern about. The first one, Mr. Speaker, is 13.1(2) it says, "A person appointed as a youth representative shall be less than 18 years of age at the time of appointment." My concern there is that you have to be less than eighteen, but there is no restriction whatsoever in terms of the age accepted as beyond eighteen.

From a technical point of view – I am not saying that it will necessarily happen; I am sure council would not do it, but the way the legislation is written you could bring a five-year-old to the meeting, as is written. Now I know that in practical terms and so on, I would hope, think, anticipate, that would not happen, but –

MR. KIRBY: It is part of the child care strategy.

MR. LANE: My colleague said it is part of the child care strategy.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) baby blanket.

MR. LANE: We can give them one of the minister's blankets.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I think there should be some sort of a cap there. That would be reasonable, not simply under eighteen.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that it talks about the fact that under section 13.1(3) "A person appointed as a youth representative is not a member of council and shall not be counted for the purpose of determining a quorum or deciding a vote of the council." I agree with that, but I guess the question is: They cannot vote on anything, but can they participate? What level of participation would they have?

If there are motions put forward on the table, do the youth actually get to speak on the motions? They cannot vote on them, but do they get to speak on them or do they just simply sit in the Chamber as an observer or at some point during the meeting, after they get through all of the regular business, do they say to the youth representative, do you have anything you would like to say, or are they actively involved in the debate and so on? It does not really clarify here.

There is also no clarification here in terms of how one gets selected. It is an appointment. It says it can be more than one, so I guess more than one could be twenty. I guess in practical terms it would be one or two, I would imagine, that would make sense to me, but it does not say.

There is nothing here to say how they would determine who that youth is. Is there any kind of a selection process, or can the mayor or council just appoint whoever they feel like? What about if there is a bunch of youth in the community who are all interested? Do they all get an opportunity to participate or is it just someone who the council decides to select and the rest do not get an opportunity to participate? Is there any process where they could apply or put their name forward and have an opportunity to be involved, and so on?

The bottom line is that it is very broad in scope. There are not a lot of details there. That would be the overriding issue.

The other main point in this bill is about attending meetings electronically. Basically, it says, "The council may allow a councillor to participate in a meeting by electronic means where the electronic means enables the councillor to listen to the proceedings and to be heard." Basically, they could do a conference call, they could do Skype and so on, and as long as that member of council participates in the meetings, in the debate and so on through Skype or conference call, then that counts as attending the meeting. That is what is being suggested.

Obviously, when you look at people, perhaps, who are working up in, say, Fort McMurray and they go away for three weeks and they are home

for a week or two, or they are on the rigs and they are doing two weeks on and two weeks off, whatever the case might be, it makes sense to have that ability so they have a quorum. Again, particularly given the fact that in some of the smaller towns in particular, I do not really see it as a big issue in the large urban centres – it could happen – but I think really it is the smaller towns where we are having the biggest problem in terms of getting people to run for council and to be on council. Providing flexibility for people in that situation to participate in their town council, I get that and I support it in principle.

Again, I do have a concern. The concern I have is there is no cap in terms of the number of meetings you can miss. What I am referring to there, Mr. Speaker, is that in theory the way it is written is somebody could run for council in a town, it is a four-year term, they could run for council and decide to move for an extended stay up in Fort McMurray or whatever. They could, in theory, be there for the whole four years and never set foot in the town, but as long as they are voting via conference call or Skype or whatever, then that is okay.

I have a problem with that process. Again, it is very open-ended. I would have a problem with that because quite often councils, no different than Members of the House of Assembly, when you are on a council you are debating things like budgets, for an example, and there are a number of towns, obviously, their budgets vary in size. Smaller towns have smaller budgets. Cities have much larger budgets, and urban towns and so on.

There are a lot of important decisions that have to be made, and the decisions that are being made, whether it is on budget, or whether it is on some proposal perhaps to place – maybe there is a rezoning issue and there is some business or something that wants to go on a certain piece of property. They have to rezone the land, and as a result of that perhaps there are issues with neighbours. Maybe there are issues with other businesses they are conflicting with, maybe there are issues with people living in the area, residents, and this business could be having

some sort of an adverse impact on them. There could be, potentially, environmental issues.

There are all kinds of issues that result in rezoning and proposals to rezone. Whether it is something like that, a rezoning issue, whether it is a budgetary issue that involves spending thousands or even millions of dollars in taxpayers' money, I think if you are a member of a town council or a city council and you are expected to make decisions around all of those things – and some of those decisions, as I said, are very significant decisions, sometimes large expenditures of taxpayers' money, decisions which are potentially going to have various impacts on people in the community, positive and negative, I think it is very difficult sometimes to participate in that type of discussion, vote on those types of issues when you have not set foot on the ground.

I know from my experience serving on city council in the City of Mount Pearl for eight years, many times – as a matter of fact, I would suggest almost prior to every meeting, if there was some sort of a rezoning issue or there was some kind of proposal or whatever, it seemed like it was almost before every meeting you would have to actually go and view the site.

If someone is proposing to do something, you would drive down and you would look at the site. You would talk to neighbours in the area. You would talk to other stakeholders and so on, so that you had a real good sense of the issue, what the pros are, what the cons are, and what concerns people had. I do not think I could do that, quite frankly, when I was there. I do not think I would have been able to do that and make informed decisions from Fort McMurray. I do not think I could do that.

It is understandable to have flexibility that from time to time I might miss a meeting and I could do it electronically, so I missed one. That is no different if someone is on a vacation or whatever. Sometimes you are not going to be there for every meeting or you could do it by Skype or whatever.

In the long run, looking at the bigger picture, I think it is important for elected officials who are making decisions about their cities, about their towns – and these decisions are going to have huge impacts in many cases on the lives of the citizens as a whole, or on the lives or enjoyment of property of citizens adjacent to certain developments or proposed developments and so on. I think when you look at those types of issues, you really need to be on the ground talking to the people, viewing the area, doing your research and so on. I really do not think you can do that on a consistent basis from somewhere outside the Province. That is the concern I have.

While the spirit of what is being presented here, I totally understand it and I support it to an extent, it makes sense to me why they are doing it and in a lot of cases why it would work or why it would be necessary. I do have concerns around the fact that there is no cap here whatsoever. I really think there should be something, another amendment placed in here that says while you can participate in these meetings electronically and be deemed to have been at the meeting, whether it be three months or six months or whatever that reasonable number is, that you must physically be present in a council meeting within a certain period of time. In other words, you cannot take off for a year or two years and never step foot in the town and still be part of the city council. That is the overriding concern I have with the legislation as has been written.

It talks about here, I think, there may be some flexibility here for the town to create their own rules around youth involvement, who gets selected and how, and all that kind of stuff. Perhaps there is some flexibility from the town in terms of making their own rules as to how many meetings you can miss and not physically be there and so on. That is very broad right now, and there are a lot of towns that do not necessarily have the wherewithal and resources and so on perhaps to tackle some of those issues. They are challenged in providing the basic services without having to thrust these types of issues upon them as well.

In the larger urban centres, perhaps where they have lots of staff and a department drafting policies and procedures and all that kind of stuff, and they have the wherewithal and so on to do it, perhaps that could happen but there are certainly some situations where I think it would be a challenge. I cannot see where the consistency is. One of the things we need to try to do I think, is try to be consistent across the board. This does not provide the guidance, if you will, for total consistency. You can have one town doing it one way, another town doing it some other way and so on. Again, that could lend itself to issues.

I know one of the issues that have been raised, the City of Mount Pearl has raised for a number of years, and we raised it when we were on council, when I was on council, when the Minister of Municipal Affairs was on council as well, that the cities act – I think it could be argued in a lot of the urban centres where you have lots of resources, professional staff, you have planners, you have engineers, you have people who draft policies and procedures, you have lawyers on staff and so on, or to do work beyond a regular basis and you have the financial ability to do that.

The City of Mount Pearl, and I believe the City of St. John's and Corner Brook, have been suggesting that the cities act should be amended so that it is not prescriptive. Because right now, even the cities act has prescriptive legislation. So you are tied down to every single thing you can do and what you cannot do.

In many cases, you are seeking approval from Municipal Affairs and so on, on the most simplistic things when looking for approval, when you have professional staff who are just as qualified as the people you are asking permission from. There are issues there, where in the city they have asked for enabling legislation to allow the cities to be able to have a lot more flexibility to develop their own policies and procedures and not be tied so tightly to the provincial government and allow them the flexibility to run their own cities. Again, in that case they have professional staff. They have their own planners, their own engineers, like I

said, their own legal counsel and a whole host of staff and resources to deal with it.

You could argue that some of the urban municipalities that are not cities, the larger towns – UMC they are called with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. They call it the UMC, the Urban Municipalities. You could argue they also have the resources, the staff and so on to be able to deal with things like this.

With some of the small towns that are really struggling financially, they are struggling just to get basic services, water and sewer and so on, they do not necessarily have the professional staff as you would in the larger centres to advise on these matters, to write policies and procedures, to make sure that they are consistent. From a legal perspective they are fine, from a practical perspective they are fine, but they do not necessarily have that. For those in particular, I think it is kind of too open ended.

The youth one I have some misgivings, as I outlined, simply from the perspective – or more questions than misgivings because I think it is great to have youth involved, but there are things about the age and so on. You would not want a five year old there. Beyond that, the youth one, I can live with that one.

This one here, this second piece in which a councillor could be elected, in theory, based on as it is written, and leave their municipality, go up to the mainland somewhere, whatever, and never set foot in their own town again for the next four years, but as long as they did a few meetings over Skype and so on, that they are okay, we have a quorum, that passes and it is fine. How you can expect the person, consistently, over and over again on a regular basis to make decisions, as I said, that are going to have a huge impact on residents, I would have a concern with that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. LANE: Now, I hear some commentary coming across and if I am wrong in how I am interpreting this, I certainly welcome the

Minister of Justice or the Minister of Municipal Affairs to –

MR. KING: The Municipalities Act (inaudible).

MR. LANE: Okay, I am hearing that the Municipalities Act addresses that. If that is the case then there is no issue. The problem is, of course, Mr. Speaker, a lot of times when you are speaking to a bill here you are given simply the amendment that is being proposed to this bill, so you would not be aware of that.

Perhaps my question will be answered in Committee. If that can be satisfactorily addressed, then that is fine with me. Again, that would be my biggest concern with this. Other than that, like I said, the youth piece is great. The spirit of what they are trying to do with the electronic meetings is also a positive. That is my biggest issue, and like I said, if that can be straightened out, fine with me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, indeed, it is a privilege to get up here today to speak on this.

The former speaker there from Mount Pearl South, the whole idea of this piece of legislation is to give councils an opportunity to attract more people and to give them an open end to say – I know that every municipal election, the biggest problem with some towns in this is attracting people to run for municipal councils. We are trying to encourage people to do so. By people working away and youth and everybody else, this is a great opportunity and it shows another avenue that we are doing to encourage people to run.

I am just going to touch a little bit on the remote part first, electronically, so people can get to meetings. It is so important. We have people who travel back and forth to Alberta or on the

oil rigs offshore here who are really interested in their towns. This gives them the opportunity.

The hon. member said they could be gone for four years, but that is not true. They have to be living in their town and they have to visit their town – I think they cannot be gone for at least one year.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, this is the opportunity that some people want because they are interested in their town. So anything that we can do so that more people can become involved in municipal politics, that is what we have to do because I have to encourage people.

I have to say being in municipal politics myself, I know that the day when I am finished here, I am almost sure that I would like to go back at it again because it is a time that you can really get involved in your community. I know we are all involved in what we do here but you really get involved in your community, you can help out and sometimes it is probably the hardest form of politics also, Mr. Speaker, because you are dealing every day with the people who are around you, people who are your friends and your neighbours.

Sometimes there are decisions made whether it is on land, roads or a building lot, that it is your buddy's building lot that you have to say okay, here are the rules and regulations, if you do not abide by them – it is a hard thing to do, but most people who do participate in municipal politics, they do it for the right reasons. They do it for the love of their towns. That is a big thing. That is why a lot of people will not get involved because if they are away or they are on the rigs or they are out to Bull Arm or whatever, they cannot participate. So this is a great opportunity for the people to do what they want to do and to do the best they can for their town. So it is very important, the remote part, that if a person cannot be there that they at least can participate and they can be involved in those meetings.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk today mainly about the youth part. The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South talked about eighteen years is the age and anything underneath, he talked about

a five year old. Mr. Speaker, our town councils are respected people and there is no way they are going to put a five year old as a youth representative. We have to give people more credit than what he is giving them.

Mr. Speaker, what an opportunity for a young person. I had a young person, just last week, call me up and he was doing a course at St. Bon's and he wanted to know if he could shadow me for a day. I thought it was great. He came here, he watched the whole proceedings, he followed down – actually myself and the Minister of Municipal Affairs had a great announcement in Pouch Cove. We went down and we announced \$900,000 to the Town of Pouch Cove to fix their water and to start (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: He was with me that day and he actually said this is wicked. He thought it was great to meet the minister and he thought it was great to meet the Premier. I am sure he took pictures with everybody in the place here afterwards. His participation that day made him feel good. He was really involved in it.

We have so many young people today – the other night I was down doing a bit of campaigning down in Virginia Waters with Danny Breen and there were four young people there, they were from my district, and they were wondering how to be a delegate in the upcoming convention. I was talking to them and I was amazed how in tune they were and how they wanted to participate.

Our young people today are more involved in politics than ever before, and they want to be involved. This is a great forum we are doing. We are telling the towns down in all communities – and everybody has it a little bit different. Every town is a little bit different. Some towns will have students who will be there for a year and they may have to move on to the university. It is up to the town to appoint who they want to appoint.

It is also up to the town to say how long they want to appoint for. Everybody knows that being a municipal leader is a huge commitment. It is a commitment that probably most councils, I think, most in my area anyway, usually meet twice a month or they meet every second week. That is a huge commitment for a person in this day and age to make that commitment. We have young people who are going to university and going to college, and for them to make that kind of commitment is huge.

This is an open-ended thing that council can decide if they want to. They can say: Listen, we are going to appoint someone for a year, we are going to appoint someone for two years, and we will appoint some more so we get more youth involved. Mr. Speaker, it is so important to get them involved because they want to be involved. It is huge because they are our future leaders. They are the people who are going to be sitting in these seats in the next couple of years. They are the people who are going to be running the Province. Future generations are the key to everything.

I just look at the investments our government is making in young people. I am looking at the investments we are making in post-secondary education, where we are the best place to go to school in Canada, right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, the best opportunities for any of our young people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: This is another way to get them involved. This is another way to promote our young people, to get them out there, and make sure they have the tools to do things.

I think the minister mentioned that Manitoba and Saskatchewan already have this in their legislation, too. It is important that we continue to do what other people do.

Some people will say: Why involve youth? Why not seniors? Why not people with disabilities? Do you know what? Seniors, people with disabilities, and other people in society all have the chance to run. They have

the opportunity to be able to run for municipal politics, but youth do not. This is a way we can tell them: Listen here, we will get you involved; we know you cannot put your name on the ballot, but we are going to have people involved. That is a big reason to do this, Mr. Speaker.

I look at this, also. Granted, when you go on municipal council and you look, I know first when I went on council in Flatrock we had a gentleman there who was – we had all kinds of people. We had fishermen, we had an older gentleman, we had young people, we had female, male, and whatever, but everybody brought a different thing. Everybody at that table brought a different thing.

How important would it be to have a young person there at the table? Maybe they are not going to get involved in rezoning the properties or whatever, but when your recreation comes up and you have to say, okay listen, that soccer field, or the softball field, or what we are doing in recreation, that young person will say we play a lot of soccer here. We need money invested. The softball field is pretty good but more people are playing soccer.

Their input is so important and it is important to everyone because we have to listen to our young people, and we do listen to our young people. It is important that they get the opportunity and they feel so much better when they are at the table with us. They cannot vote but let me tell you something, we have to listen to their voices and their voices are important; they are important for us to hear.

Mr. Speaker, future councillors, again, it is important for us for future councillors – I know there are a lot of times in this Province – I know the last election down my way there were a couple of towns that just barely ran the slate, just barely had enough people. Do you know what? The sad thing is there are a lot of people who want to do it, but it is a huge commitment. The more we encourage our young people to get involved that slate will come up; there will be more people who want to run. I really do believe that level of politics is the best because you are helping your community, you are doing

what you can for your community, and people are there for the right reasons. Engaging young people is so important because they will be our future councillors and future mayors.

In 2013, it was the Make Your Mark campaign. It was to encourage everybody to get out and to run for politics. It was a good campaign and actually I will give you a few figures now in a few minutes where it increased. That was important that we do that, we get out, and we are the people who have to encourage these people to get out.

The more people you have involved in municipal politics, the better your councils are, the stronger they are, the more vibrant they are, and more different opinions. I am telling you, the more people that you have on the town councils in your town, the better perspective you will hear from people.

All MHAs here today, I know there are MHAs here, I think there are a fine lot of mayors that were here in their own districts and mayors of different things – Mr. Speaker, you were. You know yourself once you have been involved – because sometimes it may take a little twist on the arm. I know that the former Member of Cape St. Francis, Mr. Jack Byrne, was the man who encouraged me to run. I told him I was thinking about it. Then, he called me two or three times that day. He said you better go. He was the fellow who encouraged me.

It is important that we encourage young people, too, to get involved. It is important because it is such a rewarding job. It is rewarding because you know what you are doing for your community. It could be the smallest thing, it could be a seniors' party, it could be anything that you do in recreation around the community, it is very important what you are doing for your towns.

I know that most of the towns in this Province are volunteers and, this being Volunteer Week, who else volunteers more than the people who are running our towns? I want to congratulate all of them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Sometimes it is not easy. I will always remember this one; we brought in a policy in Flatrock. Before I got in council – it was there before but you had to pave the road when you were putting in a subdivision. It was a new thing they brought in, but we never did it until I got in. I said that has to be done. It is there; we have to do it.

The very first road that we had to do was a buddy of mine. Sunday evening he hauls in the yard, he comes in, and he gave it to me. I said the policy is there; it has to be done. The taxpayers of the town cannot be paying for subdivision roads being paved. We had a little disagreement over it and about six months later, we got back to talking. We have moose hunted together now for the last thirty years so we are pretty good buddies now, mind you.

Do you know what? Afterwards he understood the reason why we did it. He said: Do you know what, Kevin? That was a good thing to do. We can sell our building lots for a whole lot more money with the road paved than a road (inaudible). There are reasons to do things, and as long as people do it for the right reasons, that is why they are there. They are there to do it for the right reasons. Our municipal leaders are there for the right reasons.

I just want to talk about the young people – that is the main thing I want to talk about here today – and how important it is to get them involved, get them at that table, and to listen to them. It is very important to listen to them; they have a voice. They are out there and we have to listen to them. It is no good just putting them at the table and just saying okay, yes, the council meeting is over; see you later.

This is up to the towns. It is not up to the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs; this is up to the town councils to say if you want to do this, it is an option for you. This is not something that is going to be put into law to say you have to have a youth representative at that table. That is not the way this works. This

gives you the option to let their youth representative be there.

If the towns are going to do it, make sure you do it for the right reason. The right reason is to listen to their voice; listen to what they have to say. They have things to say that are very important. It is things that can be very good for your communities because they know what they are talking about. Like I said, there are things I do not know. I know when I listen to my two down there they tell me different things. It is very informative what the young people have to say today. They are engaged in what is happening.

I really think this is a great piece of legislation. It is great that we are getting young people involved. The more young people we get involved, the better our towns are going to be. In the 2013 municipal elections, there were almost 2,000 candidates who came forward. We had 1,358 males and we had 624 females. Altogether we had 804 elected. There were 521 males and there were 253 females.

Do you know what? Our making the mark and getting people involved was a 2 per cent increase. Any increase that we get in people participating is a big thing. I really believe that this piece of legislation is going to also do that. Once a person gets at the table and sees what it is all about – because I know new councillors will always tell you: I did not realize it was like this. I did not know that this is what it was all about. I did not realize that I could have such an impact on my town. I did not realize the work that goes into it. They look and say: Well, I thought you just showed up to a meeting on Monday night for an hour-and-a-half and that was it until the next two weeks, but that is not the way it is.

There are committees in place; there is recreation that has to be done. You have your seniors' committees; all towns have different things. Now, granted, there are large towns. The large towns have all kinds of different people on staff there to do everything that you have to do, but there are small towns – in the Town of Bauline, for example, there is only one

employee. They have a great mayor, a very young man actually, but he is doing a great job down there. Right now they are in the process of doing a new town centre, a town hall, which we have given them up to \$1.8 million to do and they are very pleased with that.

These are the things we need to do. What we really need to do is get our young people involved because it is going to pay off down the road. It is going to pay off that they will be involved. They will make our communities better places. I really want to say that this piece of legislation today is great and I think the minister did a fantastic job. I am not sure but the minister himself, I know when he became Mayor of Mount Pearl – I guess the youngest ever in Mount Pearl, I would imagine. I can remember when he became mayor – and I am not that much older than him, to tell you the truth, but it was very good to see such a young man take the reins and say listen here, I want to be Mayor – imagine – of the City of Mount Pearl. He is to be applauded for what he did.

We have so many more young people in this Province who want to get involved like that and the minister, I am sure, is a great role model for most of them. This is a great piece of legislation. I really want to support it. Again, I think anything that we can do to make our town councils better places, our communities better, the more people we have involved no matter if they are working away and we give them the opportunity to participate or they are young people sitting at the table. It is a great piece of legislation and it is going to be great for the towns of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased today to stand and have a few minutes to speak to Bill 6. Bill 6 which would amend the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of

Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999 to allow a council to appoint one or more youth representatives and a council to allow a councillor to participate in a meeting by electronic means.

Mr. Speaker, while I support some of Bill 6, I do have some concerns and I am going to use the next few minutes to talk about the concerns I have so I can be on the record for that.

Before I start, I want to acknowledge this is Volunteer Week, and we are talking about councillors, as the member across the way alluded to. I read a quote recently that said, "Volunteers don't get paid not because they're worthless, but because they are priceless." I can tell you, when you look at the small communities and all rural towns in my District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, I do not know where we would be today without volunteers.

Having served in municipal government myself for a number of years, I have nothing but the highest respect for people who go down the road of municipal governance. I believe in municipal governance. It is that boots on the ground; it is that local knowledge. When you have people on the ground in the communities who are able to make decisions for their communities, they have that vested interest. They live there; they choose to have their families there. It can only be a win-win situation.

Mr. Speaker, it is challenging in small communities being a part of the town council in your community. We have aging demographics, I think, happening all across the Province but we seem to see it more prevalent in rural communities because the younger people are moving to the urban areas where the jobs are and things like that.

What is happening, Mr. Speaker, is you have an aging population, which means these people are on a fixed income. You have aging infrastructure, so you have a shrinking tax base. You have all of these challenges that a handful of people have who are volunteering their time to run their community. Because of those challenges, I believe it is absolutely essential, no

matter who the government of the day is or what political stripe, you need to do all you can to support those people in those communities.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I want to just talk about some of the concerns I have. Before I do, I am going to talk about some of the concerns of having a youth appointed to a council. Anybody who is watching today who knows me will know the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair has done everything in all of her adult life to encourage youth to be involved. I have loved that. Having been an employment counsellor for more than two decades working with youth and watching youth go on and reach their full potential, I believe, like Justin Trudeau said, as I said here in the House one day before, youth are not going to lead the way tomorrow; they are leading the way today.

I have a lot of respect for youth, Mr. Speaker, having a seventeen-year-old daughter myself. I still tend to do a lot of carting around of young people. I value them and their opinion; however, the first section of the act talks about it would give municipalities the discretion "to appoint one or more youth representatives". I have concerns about that. I feel somewhat, that it is demeaning the democratic process, Mr. Speaker.

I think, personally, lots of innovative engagement can happen without creating a non-voting, appointed youth seat on a democratically elected council. I have some concerns and some reservations about that. Are we setting the youth up then to say: Well, I got appointed there, why can't I be appointed here? Why can't I be appointed there? What kind of message are we sending them?

All of those of us who are sitting here in this Legislature, forty-eight seats, we came here through a democratic process. All of our town councils, the people get to choose. There are several thousand people in my district who decided to hire me for the job I have now. Each time I ran for council, it was so much more rewarding when you are elected than when you go in by acclamation, Mr. Speaker.

I just think that in this act the parameters are not defined enough, Mr. Speaker. I think appointment is not the way to go. When we are saying you have the option to appoint, what happens then when – I am going to speak from my own district – all the youth in the different communities get together on weekends and one youth says: Well, I was appointed to my council in my community.

The youth from the neighbouring communities says: Well, I was not appointed because my council chose not to have a youth representative. Then, I think, all of a sudden you have just created a whole lot of problems for people who, for obvious reasons, thought, no, we will not go that way because if the youth who is appointed at the table does not help with a quorum, if they do not have voting privileges, some might say, well, what is the purpose?

Our youth today are super, super smart. I am so impressed every time I am around them. They want to be engaged. They want to be involved. If you have them sitting at a table and: No, you cannot vote; no, it does not count as quorum, and you have to step outside when confidential information is being discussed. I am not sure how much the youth would want to be involved that way. As I said earlier, I do believe there are other more innovative ways we can get youth involved for sure.

I want to digress for a minute and just talk about in my community. Through the years, every opportunity I had to try and entice youth to be involved in committees and boards, I did. I am going to share one example. Back about twenty years ago a young girl came to work with me as my assistant in the office. About a month later the council elections were coming up. She was about eighteen years old; I said you should run for council. She looked at me and said what do they do besides collect garbage? She had no idea what the council did in the community.

I shared a few things with her. She ran for council, she got involved. She really left her mark. Long story short, that young lady is now married and in a senior position with the Town of Holyrood just because somebody reached out.

I am saying that, because of the comments I am making, I do not want people to misinterpret that the member has an issue with youth being involved. I have encouraged that all my life. I am just a little bit concerned with this process that Bill 6 is opening up here.

Then we see the youth representatives would not have access to confidential information and they would only attend regular council meetings. When I look back to the council meetings we had, we moved from confidential to general, it would be all over the place. You have people who are working seasonal jobs, offshore, you are trying to fit in meetings whenever you can. You might go months without having a meeting. When you did have a meeting it might be a three or four hour meeting.

The risk is there to have confidential information; somebody might have to have their wages garnished. There are any numbers of things that could be discussed, that should be discussed confidentially. All of a sudden it goes into the ears of the youth and then maybe that is taken down to the pool hall. You never know. They might not even realize they are breaching confidentiality. I am just saying that is what this is opening up and especially when we have no minimum age. Council might say I have an extremely super bright twelve year old, I think they should be fine to sit on council; whereas a neighbouring town might say, no, I think the person needs to be at least sixteen or seventeen.

I do feel it is much too vague. I think it opens up for a lot of inconsistency, especially when you see it says council would have the discretion on how to select these persons. That is really concerning to me. Mr. Speaker, you might have ten communities, and all ten communities are going to choose to go through this process a different way. Then you are going to have the youth saying: Why did I have to do this and this? Why did I have to write a 500 word essay and you did not have to do anything?

In my mind, it is just opening up and coming back. It is going to give the people sitting on the council some extra, I am going to say headache, to deal with that they would not have necessarily

had. I think we need to be doing all we can to support these volunteers in our communities who are involved in municipal governance.

Should we be encouraging youth to be involved in councils? Absolutely. When I was involved in council and I first started attending the Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador events and the symposiums, I was amazed with the learning, the networking, and what I was bringing back to my community, but I did have a concern.

When I walked into my first municipalities' event, and I am not young, I am getting up in middle age – and no offence to anyone here who might have grey hair – but when I walked into that room everybody in the room had grey hair or no hair. I was one of the younger people in the room, and that is concerning. When we have mostly older people who are – the vast majority of our councils in Newfoundland and Labrador is run by older people. We need to be enticing young people, but I believe we need to do it through the democratic process.

My comment I will make on the white hair is I believe there is a wisdom that comes with white hair that we cannot dismiss, but also I think we need to find a balance because I think the young people come with that new fresh energy. I think most of us will admit the young people are the more technological savvy.

I remember when my daughter started on her insulin pump, we had this little gadget and her life depended on it. Every time she was punching in numbers, are you doing that right? Yes, I am fine; and it is click, click, click. That is what the young people have grown up with. I think it is important we strike that balance, Mr. Speaker, absolutely on our councils.

We know this bill that is coming in, these same practices are occurring in other jurisdictions in the Provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories but I do not know what the feedback is on that, Mr. Speaker. I do not know how long this has been happening in these other places. I would love to have some

feedback, and I am going to try and get someone to do some research for me on that.

I am going to move on, Mr. Speaker. The second section of the bill deals with allowing councillors to participate in council meetings via electronic means like Skype, Face Time, et cetera. I do believe it is a good direction. In this technological age we absolutely need to be moving in that direction but I think it is something that is going to have to be monitored very closely as we move forward.

I say it is a good idea because back in the fall I had a great uncle who was at the Miller Centre and he happened to be sharing a room with Gary Gosine. He is probably known to most here in the House, the Mayor of Wabana for a long time. Gary had an extended stay at the Miller Centre; very passionate about council and his role in municipal government, and he could not wait for this bill. He had hoped this bill would come in the fall and he would say: now, make sure you vote for that bill so I can participate from the hospital bed.

It is admirable when you have dedication like that. I believe we need to have provisions in place so these people can participate. However, again it seems very vague.

Mr. Speaker, one of my concerns, again speaking from rural, we have many broadband issues in the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair. We have communities that are on dial-up. We have streamlining that is very slow.

When I was reading this initially I thought there is room here for discrepancy. Maybe somebody might put a motion on the floor and someone says, yes, I will vote for it and then that becomes a controversy in the town. Oh, well I did not hear it all. The Internet was bad at the moment. So these are some of the things I am alluding to when I say it will have to be monitored very closely and some best practices will have to be derived and put in place from that.

This bill that I am speaking on today does bring councils into the modern era and takes advantage of evolving technology that allows

attendance without physically being in the room. I think the time has come for that, but the broadband is a big issue. I will be keeping a close ear, if this bill is passed, each time I am in the district to talk to leaders in the community and I will be looking for feedback to say: How is that working and do you have concerns?

Mr. Speaker, in this bill it says it is up to each individual council to determine the guidelines around the electronic participation in meetings. Again, I just feel that this opens up a lot of discrepancies and inconsistencies. Yes, it is an area that we need to go, but I think in the near future we are going to be back, revisiting this. I do not think we will be prepared to vote on this bill today.

Mr. Speaker, the section in the act that says a councillor does not have to be out of town to participate by electronic means, they could be home sick or babysitting, has potential for abuse. We all know in our small towns, and we admire those who are involved, but most councils have seven members. A lot of times in small communities because of work, because of people away, and because of busy lives, you are fortunate if you can get four to a meeting. I know what I am talking about; I represented all of the towns in Labrador on the provincial municipalities seat and a lot of the issues and concerns we had in my community were felt and experienced in many small communities, many rural areas. So it was difficult to get the people you needed.

Mr. Speaker, what concerns me is if you can be in your own community, there are no limits here again. Every single meeting you might decide I am going to stay home and participate, so meeting after meeting you are never at the table. I think we will all agree, while we use technology, while the phone is good and conference calling is good, there is no substitute for face to face. It is a different air about having a meeting that is face to face.

Sometimes I think, Mr. Speaker, and a concern that came into my mind as I was reading through this bill, you might have someone home who is babysitting. They are halfway listening on the

phone. They are halfway attentive. A bill is on the table. Are you voting yea or nay? Again, you run the risk of getting into: Well, I was not fully aware.

Just because it is up to each individual council, what happens now? We have 276, I believe, councils outside of the larger ones. What are we going to have, 200 different ways of doing business? That is not how you move forward and become really effective, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I will say it is very important we encourage youth to be at the table. I think all of us can do that in our own communities in our own ways as we move about and talk to people about the benefits of being involved and the rewards. This young girl I mentioned who I enticed to get involved in a number of things, she travelled and she had all kinds of experiences, Mr. Speaker, across the country and beyond just because she started out to volunteer.

When I would do resume-writing workshops with young people, I would always talk to them about the value of volunteering and how much it says about your character when you are willing to do something and not get paid for it. Certainly we need to encourage youth, but this bill just leaves a lot of things wide open, I feel, Mr. Speaker. I have concerns, while I am happy to support moving in the direction of allowing people to participate through technology and I am happy to see people recognize we need to do something to get youth more involved.

Certainly when we look at the numbers and we look at the ages of the councillors, at our particular council table in my home community of Charlottetown, I think we did have three or four of us who were still in our thirties and in our forties. I think that is not the norm. That is more the exception.

Another thing I love about the youth involved is a lot of times they come promoting healthy, active living. I have always been – I am digressing a little bit now, Mr. Speaker – an advocate for that, too. As leaders in our communities, if we are spending forty cents on every dollar in health care right now, we are

clearly still not meeting the need. We need to be getting out. When you are walking in your community in the daytime, that is when you are going to meet your residents and you are going to find out what their concerns are and things like that. I just wanted to get that plug in. Sometimes youth come with these new recreational ideas and things like that.

I am happy, Mr. Speaker, to have the opportunity to have spoken to the bill. I wanted to go on record with what my concerns are because I believe we are going to be hearing lots more about this as we move into this new era. I look forward to listening to hear what other members have to say.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNECT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly is a delight to be up on my feet this afternoon to speak to Bill 6. As the Member for Cape St. Francis alluded to earlier, a former Mayor of Flat Rock, he said that many MHAs who sit in the House of Assembly today have sat around municipal council tables. I am one of them as well, who was the former Mayor of the beautiful, cultural community of Cape St. George from 1997 to 2001, in fact, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNECT: What a learning experience that was to work on municipal council.

Mr. Speaker, today we are debating Bill 6, and Bill 6 is an Act to Amend the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999. What we are doing here today, or what the amendments will do, will allow councils to appoint one or more youth representatives to be part of council in some way, and also allow council or councillors to participate in meetings by electronic means.

Mr. Speaker, as a government we are always listening to what our stakeholders and residents are saying. During review of the act – like we do with all our legislation, all the acts, we review it regularly. At the time of reviewing this act it was determined that adjustments could be made to the act to allow greater flexibility for councillors to remotely attend meetings.

We know, Mr. Speaker, across the Province on many occasions there are times when councillors cannot make council meetings. It is important that councils do have quorums and it is important that councils do make the important decisions affecting municipalities, so they need to have councillors attend meetings. By allowing remote attendance certainly aids the business of council and to move communities forward, I say. What we are doing here now is enhancing the act so that municipalities can move to enhance their communities and to move their communities forward.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, technology is changing; it is advancing in the Province and around the world. As a government we are committed to modern tools and modern techniques. We are committed to ensuring that the modern techniques such as video conferencing and the use of Internet communications are available for use where appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard the other side as well saying there are communities still without Internet access and high-speed Internet. This is not limited or not specific to video conferencing or Internet. We can still use the land-line phones as well to hook up to our councillors who are not available to attend meetings.

Mr. Speaker, that is why this bill will include amendments to allow municipalities the discretionary authority for councillors, towns, like I said earlier, and cities to remotely attend council meetings. What these changes to the act will do is it will enable flexibility for councillors who are balancing council participation with family commitments, with work commitments, from non-traditional locations, or on a regular schedule. We are making council more

accessible to potential councillors as well. That is what we are doing with this act.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard some concerns with this method being abused, but there are mechanisms in place to ensure this will not be the case. According to sections 20(2)(c) of the City of Corner Brook Act and the City of Mount Pearl Act, section 9(1)(a) of the City of St. John's Act, and section 206(1)(d) of the Municipalities Act, 1999, a councillor's seat will be declared vacant if he or she has been continuously absent from the municipality for more than one year.

This amendment we are doing today, Mr. Speaker, does not change that requirement. The requirement is in the Municipalities Act. It is there and it should be adhered to by all councils, all municipalities in the Province.

One important piece of this amendment is that councils would have to approve this type of attendance. If attending remotely, Mr. Speaker, the existing legislative requirements regarding absence from consecutive meetings will still apply. If you miss three meetings, whether it is in person or by remote, council still does have that discretion to say your seat has become vacant.

Individual councils will be able to define the implementation parameters to assess the risk and implement or develop their implementation approach. Councils, Mr. Speaker, will be encouraged to develop policies which reflect the views on the matters and circumstances of individual council members.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs will also work closely with municipalities throughout their regional offices right across the Province. Through these offices, annual training programs are delivered to councillors on a variety of topics related to their work. These councils, once these amendments go forward and become enacted, are not working alone. We do have resources out there to help them along and to fully explain how this will function, if they are to participate in the remote attendance. Officials have also

undertaken a jurisdictional scan that has identified best practices that need to be considered when developing policies and procedures related to remote meeting attendance.

Mr. Speaker, we have also considered that there is no need for advanced technology to be used in the event of municipalities who choose to allow remote meeting attendance, and I mentioned that earlier. The only requirement which must be met is that the individual attending remotely will be able to hear the deliberations and participate vocally in what is transpiring in the council chamber. That is very important. We have to have a good system of communication so the councillor who is attending remotely hears everything that is going on and debated within the council chambers, and that councillor can be heard as well. That is very important as well – that councillor must be heard as well in council chambers.

Mr. Speaker, it is envisioned that this can be achieved through the use of a standard telephone line, like I said earlier, with a hands-free function. Many organizations use that today. It is called teleconferencing, whether it is by video or whatever, but the standard telephone line is still used quite frequently and regularly today to communicate with people across the world. More sophisticated technology can be used, like video conferencing or FaceTime, but it is not necessary to achieve the objective of remote attendance, like I said.

I talked a little bit about training and supports, Mr. Speaker, as well to our municipal governments. The provincial government maintains a collaborative working relationship with municipalities throughout the Province and our officials provide ongoing training and support to clearly demonstrate a commitment to municipalities and residents throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Through organizations such as Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, the Professional Municipal Administrators, and the Combined Councils of Labrador, Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs has reached out and recognizes the importance of training our

municipal leaders, both elected and non-elected. The department also offers training sessions on matters such as municipal budgeting, Public Sector Accounting Board standards, roles and responsibilities of councillors and administrators, water quality, and legislative amendments.

We have, Mr. Speaker, with Bill 6 an opportunity for our councils. As mentioned earlier, this legislation is not prescriptive; rather, it is enabling. Through the amendments, we will allow councils the option to add youth representatives, as was talked about earlier, and to implement a policy to allow remote meeting attendance, but government will not require either of these to be implemented by councils. What we are saying to municipalities out there in the Province is the option is there for you if you want to use this option or this amendment to your benefit and to the benefit of councillors who may be elected to council but cannot be at a meeting, whether it is for family reasons or for work reasons.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the regional offices of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs will be there every step of the way to provide support, offer guidance, and make suggestions on how best to involve youth in our councils and how to use the remote attendance effectively. It is essential that our councils and administrators are well trained and have the opportunity to further enhance their skills in these two areas so our communities are run effectively and efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, by implementing these changes, young people will have the opportunity to be exposed to municipal politics and then they will be more likely to run for office later in life. Ultimately, this should lead to a higher youth engagement and a stronger focus on youth issues by councils across the Province.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, giving councils the authority to allow remote meeting attendance will assist in allowing more people the opportunity to take part and put their names forward to serve the people of the Province on a municipal level.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for these few minutes to speak on this bill this afternoon, and I will be supporting Bill 6.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise and speak to this piece of legislation today. It is an attempt here by government to engage youth. I can appreciate that. Having been a youth at one time and walking into this House of Assembly when I was a young man, under the influence of the teachers of the day when I was in high school, I was only a young man, and even before that. The political experience of some of us, we can go back a myriad of years and start from the roots of where we ended up to or where we started off from.

In my particular case I started off with an experience in high school, and my first real political experience and my brush with the political scene, having to get involved with Youth Parliament at the time, back at that time, of course – I think it was in Grade 9, fourteen, fifteen years old. So even before I turned sixteen years old, I was involved somewhat in the political sense of things, involved in the world of politics.

I know even before that my interest in politics goes back to Joey Smallwood and the days of the old Reform Liberal Party. I can remember being there at that convention, with only probably just a handful of kids at that particular time – but being there in a smoke-filled room. I think it was at the Hotel Gander and listening to some old greats, such as Joey Smallwood and Steve Neary back then. Being able to be there was one thing, being able to participate was really something else. That is the thing that I think is probably most memorable about the political scene.

So a couple of years later, of course – and I think at that time, by the way, back then when I

was at the Hotel Gander for that particular event, I might have been ten or eleven years old and dad had dragged me out, and ended up witnessing a piece of Newfoundland and Labrador political history. If I advance the clock a little bit farther when I go to Gonzaga, it was the big influence of two teachers in Gonzaga that really influenced me toward the political end of things. Here I am being influenced by teachers, which is great – I cannot say enough about teachers, but I think of Mr. Wayne Parsons and I think about Kevin Ramsey – probably two of the best teachers that I had over my lifetime. Those two were the two biggest influences.

For Mr. Wayne Parsons – and I speak of him fondly for him teaching us how to debate and then getting us involved in Youth Parliament at that particular time. So it was back then in about 1977-1978, I think it was – 1980 I ended up getting out of Gonzaga, and a lot of other great politicians in this Province happened to go to Gonzaga as well, and no doubt, Gonzaga is going to turn out a few more. It is just a great school all around. A lot of great debaters also came out of there.

I remember my time in Youth Parliament and being to participate, again, Mr. Speaker, in the parliamentary process and learning about the parliamentary process, and I remember a lot of us who were in Youth Parliament at the time thought of the politicians of the day, back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, almost like rock stars – like some people would consider some hockey players now. I heard somebody talking about hockey earlier – my team are the Habs – well, back then I guess the politicians we enamoured might have been anybody from Steve Neary to politicians, for example, the Speaker of the House. I can remember the Speaker of the House – he is still around as a matter of fact – Mr. Len Simms, a great man in his own right, happened to come along and speak to Youth Parliament and actually open up a session of Youth Parliament.

The whole concept of the engagement of youth is there and we need much more of it. I would agree with government on that; we have to

engage our youth more. This is probably one way of doing it. Again, some concerns, like I said.

I can speak about Youth Parliament again and say that this is probably an area where government could go, or city councils, as a matter of fact, could go to get experienced future politicians, I guess, people who would be interested in the parliamentary process.

I know the students who participated this year, the young women and young gentlemen who participated in Youth Parliament in February of this year, they came out with some very poignant arguments for the motions that they talked about – whether it was for the Family Violence Intervention Court or when it came to military participation, they all had valid arguments. Even back then when it came to that particular part of youth engagement, there is no doubt that they had input in those arguments and probably will – every single point was valid. You took them seriously at times.

When it comes to this piece of legislation I say that the experience of even Youth Parliaments, parliamentarians in this Province, they come from all over the Province. We already have a vast and untapped resource out there almost that can fill some of the roles that I think government is looking to fill here when it comes to the appointment of youth. There are councils out there that are looking for some experience probably. That is something that is probably on the resume that they can look for.

We ask an awful lot of our young people too, or I should say, not ask a lot of them, but we already give them certain inalienable rights. For example, the right to drive is given when they are sixteen years old. Some hunters start out very young, too, and I believe sixteen is the age there. Some of them are even small business people at sixteen years of age. Of course, some of them are working. They are out there working their first or maybe second job or whatever it is. They have a degree of responsibility here, too. I can see where government is coming on this and we want to be able to take them and train them into the real

world at the same time, I guess, is probably where government is coming from.

The experiences that they are also going to be getting when it comes to this is also working as a team in getting to help progress their town and have that youth view brought into it. So, again, I can see where government is coming from.

As the minister said already, three provinces already have this – the earliest since 1997 in Manitoba; Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories, as well, in 2008 and 2003, respectively. So there is an awful lot here to consider when it comes to that. We know that we already press our youth with responsibility and at the same time now we are going to be asking them something else. The possibility here is, of course, that even though the door is only going to be opened up a little bit, I guess, when it comes towards responsibility, all we are doing is giving a council the possibility of appointing a youth rep if they want to. There is going to be an awful lot to think about when it comes to that.

I read with interest an article by Randy Simms in the latest *Municipal News* that talk about the opinions of some municipalities out there. What they say in the article, Mr. Speaker, if I can quote from the article in *Municipal News*, on the fifth page was an interesting argument brought out by members of the Urban Municipalities Committee. They expressed some concern over the initiative and have recommended to the board that they not support the legislation. Their concern was this, “How far down that road can you go, was the common theme of the discussion. Do you also open up a council seat to allow for a representative from the disabled community or the seniors community? If council ends up being all of one gender, like the City of St. John’s today, do you provide a seat to cover off that eventuality as well?” So you can go on with one argument when it comes to opening up the door for youth, but at the same time many others – what some may call a Pandora’s Box – could be opened up as a result.

They go on further to say here, too, talking about the other demographics, that while they need to

start attracting the next general of municipal politicians, they need to engage the next generation, “...we are hoping to spark the interest of young people to get involved and stay involved”.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: So that is great and I can see where government is coming from on that, but – and we have a big but here – the question has to be asked: Where do you stop? At the same time, when you are talking about the cut off age, for example, of voting – I think it is eighteen when it comes to municipal elections – the line that government has cut off here engages everybody from eighteen up. It does not point the finger to one demographic. It does not point the finger at a demographic of disabilities, for example, and say you are eighteen and over, you are disabled, you are still included in this because you happen to be over the age of eighteen. Because you are singling out youth at the same time, are you just saying to youth or are you going to open up the door the other way? I just wanted to bring that point out too.

We know it is about inclusion. I am wondering about the power, for example, that youth would be asked of. We ask them to trust. We ask youth about trust sometimes, and like I said we have already talked about some things that we ask them to do about driving, hunting, small business or work, that sort of thing.

When it comes to private meetings, if there is a youth representative sitting on the council – and I guess I will ask the minister again in Committee about this, about their level of commitment, for example, to private meetings and if they would be invited to private meetings. I would presume that a municipality would be setting the guidelines around that.

The lessons to be learned by youth are pretty important when it comes to that. That is what I have to say about the youth end of things. Like I said, when we are asking them about voting, even the Pandora’s box of the voting age is

probably going to end up coming up as a result of this. At the same time while we are telling municipalities about voting and about being able to sit on councils, that sort of thing, some political parties own lines when it comes to voting in nomination processes, for example, have been set pretty low, some would argue, at sixteen years of age and upwards from that, when it comes to the whole nomination process and putting in a political candidate. In some cases they already have that ability to actually get out and vote. That is something else that has to be considered here.

When it comes to the other argument – when it comes to participating via electronic means, I did talk to one councillor on this particular measure. He said I do not know why they would be doing that. If somebody was away for any particular length of time, sometimes they build a life in another place and they end up resigning anyway from that particular council. They do not know what the significance would be of keeping a person on council.

The other argument, of course, I had for that when I talked to this gentleman was the simple fact that okay, we would be able to keep a council alive, we would be able to keep a quorum and everything maintained. Then he also countered too, he said for smaller communities that are in trouble right now, particularly when it comes to the lack of funding they have and the ability to be able to go and fundraise, the other argument was, are we delaying the inevitable here when it comes to electronic voting? I said can you explain that one to me?

The first thing he said was, well, if we cannot find people interested enough in their own communities to run, for example, because they are not interested in running a community that may be in a deficit position and hence maybe they do not have services running or whatever. The other angle from them was, well, if you are going to go outside and look for somebody who is outside the community and maybe commuting or something, maybe gone away for a particular length of time, are you looking to just appoint

these people to a council so that you will not have to shut down that community?

One of the big arguments they used for that, of course, was Springhill, Nova Scotia. A pretty famous coal town in Nova Scotia is actually disbanding. They are packing it in from running their own municipality. Why? Probably because there is a lack of participation on council.

The argument has to be made when it comes to electronic voting, about what the prerequisites would be as regards to the number of service. I think one of the ministers across the floor already said that if you are not at a council meeting for one year, well, that is fine and dandy, you would lose the position. How far down that road do we go to keep municipalities alive that are probably in danger of having to face the same thing as Springhill, Nova Scotia?

It is probably a consideration this government is going to have to deal with in the future because, of course, we have a problem with growth and out-migration too, in this Province. Some communities are probably facing that prospect, I do not know. Again, if we can keep municipalities alive, if we can keep them alive by electronic means, I think it is a good argument to have the electronic means in there because I do not think any community should die. It is part of us. It is part of our heritage. It is part of who we are that we try to keep these communities alive. That is what I have to say about that.

The other thing, like I said, there may be a small privacy concern here. If somebody is going to be using electronic means, if they are having a private meeting via electronic means, how secure is the information that is going to be on the other end of the phone? Do we know if there is just one person, for example, in a room or do we know if there is somebody else who may be eavesdropping? Is there information getting out?

I would have a little bit of a privacy concern there, too. I do not think there would be a failure to address that, but I think municipalities

may be able to fight that. At the end of the day, when it comes to giving the electronic means, I think we have to give those municipalities out there a fighting chance of survival here. I think this is another tool for them to be able to do it.

Mr. Speaker, the only other thing I have to say is – there was one more point I wanted to make. I cannot seem to find it here now, but I think that is about all the arguments I have on this. I want to thank the minister for this particular piece of information. At the same time, it was very interesting listening to the other member's debate and have their input on this. I am only too glad at this particular time to have my particular say on this.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am delighted to stand in this House of Assembly to have a few comments on Bill 6, which is An Act to Amend the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and his departmental officials for a very comprehensive, thorough briefing this morning on this bill.

I would like to read the explanatory notes, Mr. Speaker. It says, "This Bill would amend the City of Corner Brook Act, the City of Mount Pearl Act, the City of St. John's Act and the Municipalities Act, 1999 to allow" – number one – "a council to appoint one or more youth representatives; and" – number two – "a council to allow a councillor to participate in a meeting by electronic means."

With respect to what provinces have this already, youth representatives, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Northwest Territories have

legislation which allows the youth to participate already. We have Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and BC that do not have legislation, but they encourage youth to participate in some format. With respect to remote attendance, Mr. Speaker, British Columbia, Manitoba, Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut have legislation which allows for remote meeting attendance.

Mr. Speaker, I will confine my comments to youth representatives for a few moments. As we all know, the Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs works closely with councillors, mayors, municipal leaders, and all key stakeholders right across this Province to ensure our legislation is meeting the needs of our key stakeholders, for example, municipalities, what this amendment refers to.

Any legislation, Mr. Speaker, is always fluid. It is a work in progress. It is never static. You want legislation to be a living document to address evolving issues and concerns.

The department is also committed to promoting the next generation of municipal councillors, and as a result is introducing amendments in this bill, Bill 6, to enable the presence of one or more youth representatives on council. These amendments will allow for the addition of non-voting youth representatives who will be able to observe council proceedings and participate on key issues.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come to engage youth and to listen to their voice. Adding their voice to the dialogue around the council table is a great move. It will result in better decisions, especially those that involve youth.

Mr. Speaker, I served on council for seven years, four years as the Mayor of Springdale, and I can attest to the fact that if I had the opportunity to appoint youth at that time, we would have loved to because we know how innovative and how smart youth really are today. They would love to be engaged in the political process today.

Through this new discretion, councils will be afforded another means by which to tap into

youth in their region which will bring a fresh perspective, a fresh voice to the council table. It will also allow sitting councillors to mentor youth. That is very important, Mr. Speaker, in order to develop the next generation of municipal councillors.

It is essential that we give young people, youth of our Province, the opportunity to be involved in local governance. We need to go above and beyond to enable and encourage young people, teenagers, and youth to become more involved in local governance. Through these efforts we will ensure that government structures within our communities will thrive well into the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we all realize our youth has a lot to offer today. When given the opportunity, many of them will be more than happy to get involved. Not only will they benefit communities from their new ideas, their new perspectives, and their fresh voices these youth will bring, but it will also provide incredible experience for these young people. It is a great learning experience for them.

In addition, through these experiences they will be enriched as they continue with their education. They will enter the workforce and take their places as tomorrow's and, I might add, today's leaders in our communities, Mr. Speaker. Our young people are leaders today and they are leaders in the future of this great Province and we need to listen to them, hear their voices, utilize their perspectives, and involve them in the shaping of policy and decision making. They add value to the equation when we sit around the council table and when we hear what they have to say. They are valued indeed, and it is about time for us to do that. I commend the minister for bringing these amendments in today.

Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs supports giving councils the option of appointing more than one youth representative. For example, councils may decide to appoint one male representative and one female representative. They have that flexibility, Mr. Speaker. They have some parameters. They

have some flexibility as to how they would go about implementing this amendment and engaging youth.

It is also believed that youth participating in a council meeting will feel more comfortable with other youth around them and other youth in attendance rather than being just there all by themselves, Mr. Speaker. In addition, with more than one youth representative the concept of continuity will be preserved as youth members of all ages can be appointed with staggering terms to ensure there is always one experienced youth sitting as youth representative.

The department, through the Office of Public Engagement, has been working with the youth community, Mr. Speaker, through all kinds of youth organizations right across this Province to gain their views on how to tailor our new materials, training, and support of the youth initiative for municipal councils. By implementing these changes, young people will have an opportunity to be exposed to municipal politics, and then may be more likely to run for office later on down the road. Ultimately, this should lead to higher youth engagement and a stronger focus on youth issues by councils right across this great Province of ours.

The vision of these amendments is to allow young people, who have no ability to run right now for municipal office, to serve in the capacity of youth representative before they reach the age of majority. Upon reaching age eighteen, Mr. Speaker, these individuals will have the ability to run for council and have an even greater impact on local affairs.

Youth representatives will be permitted and encouraged to participate fully in all public deliberations of council. They will be able to offer views, participate in discussions, and bring a youth perspective to all matters of council, but they will not be able to vote, Mr. Speaker. They will not have that ability to vote, but they are able to participate and have dialogue with everybody there.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that these amendments are not prescriptive; rather, they are enabling and empowering. They will permit councils to allow remote attendance and add youth representatives should they choose to do so, and in the manner that best suits their local circumstances.

Like I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that this amendment is an enabling amendment. Councils can choose if they implement and how they implement. We will provide advice and guidance, but the decisions are entirely theirs to make. Enabling legislation versus the prescriptive nature of what currently exists has been what municipalities have been seeking all along and we are responding to these needs.

There is no way it is intended to replace any existing mechanisms in place by towns or municipalities to engage youth. It is simply an additional tool, Mr. Speaker, one which we believe will have the high value for them to draw upon.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Make Your Mark campaign launched during the 2009 municipal elections and relaunched during the (inaudible) municipal elections had several key goals, one of which is to encourage greater youth participation in the municipal process. By adding the ability to appoint youth representatives and the concept of remote meeting attendance, the provincial government is encouraging youth and other residents to step up and make their mark by running for office and sharing of their time, talents, and energy.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the youth of our Province are innovative. They are smart. They are engaged and they want to be engaged. I commend the minister and his officials for making this amendment to the legislation we are discussing today. I certainly support that.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I welcome the opportunity to speak to this bill and try to be of some assistance to the government in putting together legislation that works. Working with this government in trying to debate legislation is almost like trying to teach a child how to drive a bicycle with training wheels. Clearly this legislation is well intentioned, but it has the training wheels left on it for sure.

The proposal is well intentioned in two ways. First of all, it is well intentioned in that it attempts to have younger people participate at council meetings. It is also well intentioned in that it would have what we will call distance voting for municipal councils who would need to vote by distance.

In the case of the age threshold, since the age must be less than eighteen, none of these people are adults. The Member for Mount Pearl South made the reference that maybe some five-year-old could attend, and that was regarded as being ridiculous. Where is the cut-off?

We know it cannot be more than seventeen, so would sixteen work? Well, maybe sixteen would be a good threshold for cut-off. We know the Criminal Code sets the age of consent at sixteen, so maybe fifteen would be okay. Well, if fifteen is okay, then is fourteen okay? Maybe it should be fourteen. Mr. Speaker, maybe if fourteen is okay, thirteen would be okay.

If thirteen is okay, perhaps twelve would be okay because a person at age twelve can be liable for a criminal offence under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the YCJA, the one young people call you cannot jail me anymore. That is what they call that. They say it is not the Youth Criminal Justice Act; it means you cannot jail me anymore. It is pretty much true. Because the first emphasis is not supposed to be on jail, but it is supposed to be anything but jail.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is an issue with the age threshold. Does this mean that someone who is nineteen years of age cannot participate and someone who is eighteen cannot be appointed? So the way that it is drafted, it looks like a person who is under eighteen – a person appointed as a youth representative shall be less than eighteen years of age at the time of appointment. So, how long is the appointment? Is it for a year? It is for two years? Is it for three years? Is it for life, or is it just for the term of the council? We do not know that.

I say while it is well intentioned, it is very, very vague and not helpful. It says that one or more can be appointed. So does that mean that if you have a council of say, seven councillors, everyone could appoint one young person, one child? So, you have seven councillors and seven young people – now we have fourteen people sitting around a table, and seven of them can vote, and seven of them cannot vote, but all of them can listen, and I think all of them can talk. That does not seem to be very constructive in council meetings. It seems that the people who have come up with the idea, while they would like participation, I do not know if they have ever attended a council meeting. I suppose they must have at some point. I am sure the minister has. I suppose he read his bill, but it is not very long.

If we do not know the age and we do not know how many, but we know that the age is less than eighteen – it could be seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, fourteen, thirteen, or twelve, or less. Does it mean, Mr. Speaker, that if there is a municipal councillor who cannot find a babysitter can say, well, that is okay, I will take my child to the council meeting, and then the child can sit in the council meeting and be appointed as a youth representative, that way I will not need a babysitter? So you have the kid there who is ten or eleven or twelve years old.

Mr. Speaker, this will bring up a problem if you have an in camera meeting. What do you say to all of these kids who showed up at the council meetings? Oh, we decided we are going to have an in camera meeting to discuss maybe an employment issue. We are going to discuss

whether we are going to fire the town manager or not, but the kids cannot sit in, so do you ask the kids now to leave the council meeting because we are going to talk about grown-up stuff that you are not allowed to know, but you are allowed to come to the council meeting? You see, this is a little bit problematic for me. I know it is well intentioned.

So, Mr. Speaker, how are they selected? Does everybody get to pick one? Does the mayor say, well, I think my nephew is going to come, but your grandson cannot come?

AN HON. MEMBER: You can have more than one (inaudible).

MR. BENNETT: Oh yes, you can definitely have more than one. So how are they selected?

I suppose we do not know the age threshold and we do not know how many, but it is going to be under eighteen, it can be more than one, and we do not how to select them. Every council can do it differently or not at all. So, does that mean that if a councillor or mayor or maybe somebody else, maybe the town clerk proposes that her grandchild be able to participate just to get some experience and because the town clerk does not have a babysitter at home, it gets stormy in some of these communities, so the town clerk does not have a babysitter and decides to bring along her grandchild because her parents are working somewhere else – we have a simple majority, so let's say we get seven councillors, do we put it to a vote as if these town councils do not have enough to worry about besides trying to decide if somebody's child should sit on council with them, talk and listen but not vote?

Mr. Speaker, that is a bit of a problem. Does it need to be unanimous? Because if somebody proposes a young person and someone opposes the young person then do we have a debate over whether this young person should be allowed to participate or not?

It is clearly open. We do not know the age threshold, except it is under eighteen. We do not know how many youth, but it can be more than one. We do not know how they are selected.

We know they cannot vote. We know they are not to be exposed to confidential information. Actually, to the best of my recollection, people of the general public are permitted to attend council meetings anyway, so there would be nothing wrong with a person who is fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen attending a council meeting and just sitting in as a spectator in some of these very small rooms that council meetings are conducted in all over the Province by volunteer councillors.

Mr. Speaker, let's say we figured out that you can go down to maybe age sixteen and someone can get a couple of years council experience. Yes, it is going to be a simple majority vote and we are going to have no more than two. That is more than one and it is under eighteen. At sixteen, that is not bad. How do we arrange for transportation for that person? Does someone have to go and pick up the child to come and attend the council meeting or does the child walk to the council meeting? How does this person get there?

Some of the communities are amalgamated and there is a lot of distance. You take a place like, say, New-Wes-Valley and you have three communities, and now you have one where the meeting is. Does the young person hitchhike there?

Mr. Speaker, has anybody given any consideration to liability issues? I guess from time to time I observe that it is both a blessing and a curse to be a lawyer because you become aware of legal issues and then you wish you were not aware of certain legal issues. What does it do to the liability of the town if a fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen-year-old child is this youth representative and a misfortune befalls this child, anywhere from a traffic accident to being taken advantage of sexually by a member of council? How does that fit into what the government is trying to do?

You see, Mr. Speaker, they have a good idea, but they do not know how to go about getting it done. I think that is a platform, too. When you have a platform full of good ideas and you do not know how to get it done, then you have

Ministers of the Crown coming back and saying things – like the former Minister of Finance said: Well, election promises are not really promises. So, we have some real problems with this part of a well-intentioned bill that has lots of difficulties.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is the part about the kids attending council meeting. Town councils are not Cub Scout troops and they are not Boy Scout troops; they are not places for little kiddies to go. Some people may think of it that way, as their little outing or whatever, but I think the things for youth development would be better served by having them participate in youth development; maybe a sixteen or seventeen year old who wants to sit in on a council meeting and watch. Well, you do not need legislation for that. You can already do that; a person can do that.

That takes it to the issue of distance voting. Now, this one is a little bit better, because this is necessary if it had some guidelines. It seems to be necessary in a way if you take a community that I come from, for example, and the mayor works in the Northwest Territories. He has been the mayor for quite some time, three weeks on and three weeks off. This happens in the mobile workforce. It is not just for voting. Voting is useful, but in many of these small town councils – and I accept that a lot of people say that we have to get a lot of young people involved, and that is a good thing; however, Mr. Speaker, you need people who have been around for a while too and you need people who have been on council for a while. Because if you have a complete new sweep and people do not know what they are doing, then they have council meetings – and town council meetings may be contentious in some places, but in most towns the town council meetings are not overly contentious, most of the work is done by consensus. People sit around and they say: I wish the mayor was here because he would know the discussions that he had with municipals affairs. I wish the mayor was here because he would know what we did about snow clearing. I wish the deputy mayor was around because he knows this kind of stuff.

Well, if he was participating by distance from Fort McMurray or some remote area, then you could probably have that person participate and you could have that person vote, but there would need to be safe guards built in.

Mr. Speaker, what about if the person never ever wants to attend and they are just never around? This was mentioned by the Member for Mount Pearl South. Clearly, there is a possibility of abuse.

There is also the possibility of other types of abuse, and that comes with voting. Sometimes council issues are contentious, and sometimes on a five member or seven member council you may have a split 3 to 2 or 4 to 3 and somebody may well be expecting to participate by telephone, by conference call, or by Skype because there is going to be an important vote that deals with an important matter in that town. Now for some reason, they cannot get through or they are left off.

If you have generated the reasonable expectation of the person they can participate, then you must have safeguards to ensure they can. Otherwise, people are going to say, well this was an abusive process because there were only three of you there and you all voted. Maybe the fourth person was unable to make it, or the fifth person or the sixth person. There are possibilities for mischief, but it is a well-intentioned section to help municipal councils have the municipal councillors participate, because they are volunteers. They do give willingly of their time.

In the town where I live, for example, the town councillors and different members have referred to this, and the Member for Cape St. Francis referred to it, in how they are more participatory. For example, a town might have – two members of the town council where I am, they form public works.

Mr. Speaker, that is how they maintain their snow clearing budget, because the two guys look out the window and they decide if the snow needs to be cleared or not. They phone a contractor and say, well, it is only two or three inches of snow, no, we are not going to pay you

\$100 an hour to be riding around in two or three inches of snow. If it is six or seven or eight inches of snow and it looks like it might be drifted up alongside of the school, they phone the guy who is on unemployment insurance or EI, because he keeps an eye on the loader that is there put in by the contractor from the next town.

The town pays at an hour a day, at \$100 an hour, from December 15 until March 15, or maybe March 31 as St. John's would have done. Then the municipal council decide when he gets called out because they are managing the snow clearing budget. It is totally hands-on.

You have these municipal councillors who, all of them have the key to the pump house. They have the key to the pump house because maybe in the middle of the night the power might go down, the power might come back on, the pumps might not start up, the town is without water. Now you have a fire.

As a matter of fact, I used to have one of the keys to the pump house. I believe I probably still do, when I was a municipal councillor only three or so years ago. These municipal councillors are absolutely hands-on in running their towns. Besides the voting and the political side, they have the knowledge.

In the case of my town council, the businessman, the guy who had the dairy farm and I were the two halves of the finance committee. We had to sit down and balance budget and absolutely make it work. They are very much hands-on. Distance voting is a good thing but it needs to be really tightened up so that there is more direction and it is less susceptible to abuse.

In one way the government has a good idea here. They have a couple of good ideas to let younger people participate and also to permit voting by distance so that someone can participate in meetings. Not just the voting, but to participate in the council meetings for the give and take and to be available.

I am not so concerned about the quorum, Mr. Speaker. If there are quorum issues then the Municipalities Act permits the town council to ask the minister to reduce the quorum. As a matter of fact, we had a situation when I was first elected, with seven councillors, where there was an issue of whether somebody needed to be voted against. There were conflicts of interest. Six of the seven councillors had a conflict involving one person, and a contract needed to be terminated and there could be consequences.

The minister, who was two or three ministers back around 2009 or 2010, authorized the town council to have a quorum of one person, one councillor to make the decision. That was a special ministerial authorization. That part can be done by ministerial decision. They can simply issue a letter, which we all know that it is the very capable and experienced people at Municipal Affairs who do this and make the recommendation to the minister, the minister asks a few questions presumably, and signs off on it.

The quorum part can be dealt with other than by distance vote. To be able to access the know-how, the knowledge, and the wisdom that the person has voted for – the reason they vote for people is because the townspeople have confidence in them to be able to run the towns. Many of these small towns are very well run; they are not as struggling as we would believe sometimes. Most of them have their budgets balanced. Most of them have reasonable taxes. We hear about some where there are lots and lots of issues but we do not hear about the ones that are doing well, and many of them are doing well. That part of the bill would be really helpful to be able to have elected councillors continue to participate.

As for the first half, and I suppose the second half as well, I am not sure what we can do about that. I certainly hope that somebody will propose an amendment to be able to get this fixed up so that we can take the training wheels off the legislation so that we can get a well-intentioned piece of legislation so it actually works and does what it is supposed to do.

Mr. Speaker, I have no more observations.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

If the hon. the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs speaks now he will close debate.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank all hon. members, even the Member for St. Barbe, for participating in the debate today. It was a nice mid-afternoon period of comic relief, I guess. He is always entertaining, I will give him that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our young people will help shape the future of this Province, and it is incumbent upon all of us to gather their perspectives and to involve them in shaping of policy and decision making at all levels of government. My view is that any tools we can provide our councils to encourage youth interest and to help build our future leaders is a tool we should provide. What we are doing here today is creating another tool.

As well, allowing remote meeting attendance is going to enable flexibility for councillors who are balancing council participation with family commitments or work commitments. Perhaps they work from non-traditional locations, or on an irregular schedule, or even in far-off remote places like Fort McMurray, as the Member for St. Barbe highlighted today. So, we think this is something that will be well-received, particularly by our rural communities.

I want to point out in my closing remarks, that we are going to provide a fair bit of training and support and advice and guidance to any council that wishes to have it. We are not dictating if or how councils will use these provisions, but we will provide supports to them with respect to these amendments.

Following the introduction of these amendments, training programs will be adjusted to reflect new capacities for remote attendance and youth representatives. The department will also prepare documentation and provide it to each community, outlining how these initiatives can be implemented. In addition, working with the Office of Public Engagement, we are engaging youth organizations and groups across the Province to gain their views on how we can tailor our materials and training and support in order to really encourage this youth initiative for municipal councils.

I believe it was the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair who asked about how things are going in other jurisdictions. The uptake has not been really significant. So there is an opportunity for us here to really show leadership, to really provide the support and the tools, and the advice and the guidance that is needed so that hopefully, with our 276 municipalities, there will be some real uptake. We can perhaps learn from what has been done in other jurisdictions, the good and the bad, and also shape the future and set an example for others to follow.

The regional offices of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs will also be there every step of the way, Mr. Speaker. We will provide support, offer guidance, and make suggestions to councils on how best to involve youth on councils and how to make remote attendance work.

I do not have a lot of time, but I want to address some of the concerns that were raised here in debate today and the others hopefully during the Committee process I will have an opportunity to address them as well. A number of members, including the Member for Mount Pearl South and a number of others, indicated the details are not in the bill related to selection process for youth, minimum age, level, or type of their participation and it was suggested the language in the bill is too vague.

Mr. Speaker, we did not want to be prescriptive. As somebody who has spent ten years in municipal government and as somebody who

has worked with municipalities in this capacity as a Member of the House of Assembly for the last seven years, I know municipalities across the Province are crying out for legislative reform. They want legislation that is enabling. They want to have more flexibility and more power. Through this bill, these are two small examples whereby we can give municipalities more flexibility and enable them to do things as opposed to always being very prescriptive in our legislation. I hope to see us do more of that in the future, but I think this is definitely a positive step.

In the selection process, the level of participation, and whether there are any exceptions, for instance, allowing remote participation in privileged meetings, these are things local councils will have the ability to decide. They can put whatever restrictions in place they want. It will be up to the individual councils, but it will also be guided by training and advice from our department. We want the local councils in Newfoundland and Labrador to be empowered to make decisions about how to make this work to meet the needs of their community.

The Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair suggested these changes would somehow demean the democratic process. I think nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. Youth can be engaged in lots of ways, no doubt about it. It was suggested there are other ways to engage youth beyond taking this step. That is true. This is just one more tool in the toolbox. We encourage our communities to engage young people in whatever way they can. We have some communities that have youth action teams, youth advisory committees, and other groups. Those mechanisms are important, but this is about taking youth engagement and youth involvement to an entirely new level. We will be among the first in the country to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Someone opposite said: Well, if they cannot vote, what is the point of doing this? They cannot be elected to council, but as I have said to young people in the schools I represent in

the communities I represent, and I have been saying it for years long before I sat in this House, just because you cannot vote does not mean you cannot have a say. There are lots of opportunities for young people to be engaged in the political process and to play a role in planning and decision making in their communities. That is what this is about.

We have to respect the democratic process. These are not elected officials. They do not have the right to vote. They should not necessarily participate in privileged debates and sensitive matters, but they can have a meaningful role to play in the public debate of a council and in the public council meetings.

By doing this, it also creates an opportunity for existing councillors to mentor them and to expose them to the council process. There are many ways to engage young people. Some have committees and other structures, as I have said, and this builds on that. I think this is just one more tool councils can avail of.

Another concern was raised related to no cap on the number of meetings that could be attended remotely, highlighting for instance someone who is in Alberta and not home in a year. It was suggested that maybe this provision could be abused. Well, according to section 20(2)(c) of the City of Corner Brook Act and the City of Mount Pearl Act, section 9(1)(a) of the City of St. John's Act, and section 206(1)(d) of the Municipalities Act, a councillor's seat will be declared vacant if he or she has been continuously absent from a municipality for more than one year. This amendment we are making today does not change that requirement.

Furthermore, councils have discretion to develop their own policies if they choose to implement them. For instance, a council could say: All right, we are going to let you participate remotely, but you have to attend at least one meeting per quarter in person; or discussions that are sensitive or of a significant nature, or discussions that would take place in a privileged meeting or in Committee of the Whole, you have to be there for that and you cannot attend remotely. Those would be acceptable provisions

and I actually think those would be good ideas and good suggestions. Those are the kinds of suggestions and ideas we will share with municipalities as we roll out the training and support to support these initiatives.

I know one member opposite was very concerned about consistency and what happens if councils all do this differently. We have 276 municipalities in this Province, not to mention all the unincorporated areas and local service districts, and they are all unique. We want to give them more ability to make decisions that are in the best interests of their community rather than being prescriptive, which we have tended to do with our municipal legislation in the past. This will give the flexibility to allow councils to develop approaches that match their local circumstances.

Councils have been asking us to move away from prescriptive legislation, so dictating exactly how these new provisions would be implemented would really be contrary to that. We will provide guidance on best practices, but we want them to develop their own approaches with our support. That may result in many councils taking a similar approach and an approach we would recommend through the training and support we offer, but we want those decisions to be made locally. We want more decisions to be made locally and we want our councils to be empowered to do that.

There were also some concerns raised regarding the availability of technologies in some communities that may impact their ability to implement remote meeting attendance. I should point out that advanced technology is not really necessary to utilize the remote meeting provision. Councils can use a simple telephone with hands-free function if they wanted to. The only requirement is that the councillor can hear and be heard. If they cannot, then they would not be eligible to participate remotely. That is addressed in the legislation.

I only have a couple of minutes but I will just quickly review some other notes I made on various speakers. It was very deliberate that the legislation is broad and that there is not a lot of

specific prescriptive detail. We want to give communities the ability to set their own direction.

The Member for Mount Pearl South suggested that it is important for politicians to be on the ground in their communities. Absolutely, I fully agree. That is why we are giving the communities the ability to set their own parameters and set their own rules around remote meeting attendance for instance. Councils will get to set the specific rules. We will provide whatever training and support we have. I heard the same member suggest that municipalities want legislation that should be less prescriptive. I would hope he will support these provisions on that basis as well.

The Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair talked about the challenges in small communities. We are very cognizant of that. That is exactly why we support the MNL resolution that brought us to this point related to remote meeting attendance. That is why we have to be aware of the changing demographics in our communities and provide more flexibility like this to our councils. That is exactly why we need to do what we are doing here.

She also talked about the discretion to appoint. I point out that this is only one tool in the toolbox. Communities can engage youth in whatever way they see fit, but this is a great opportunity to bring youth right into the council chambers, into the public meetings.

Councils can define their own appointment process. They may choose to conduct an election process in their community. They may choose to appoint the president of the local Allied Youth post or the president of the local student council if there is only one high school. They may have an existing youth committee to draw upon. We are not even going to be prescriptive around how they do it. We are going to give them a lot of advice and we would encourage them to do it in an open democratic way and to engage as many young people in the community as possible. We will not be prescriptive in telling them how to do that, and

obviously we have to respect the democratic process.

The people who get to vote in council meetings are the people who are elected to do so. Young people can still participate in public debate and still have a say in what is happening in their communities.

I know the concern was raised a couple of times about no minimum age. Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of confidence in the thousands of people who are elected in this Province, as volunteers for the most part, to lead our communities. I mean, we are talking about people who are creative and innovative; they are problem solvers. These municipal leaders, most of whom are volunteers, are more than capable of setting rules and guidelines and requirements that best meet the needs of their community, and I trust they will make responsible decisions. What we are doing by creating enabling provisions in our legislation is giving them more ability to do that and to be empowered to do that. We need to encourage young people to take more of an interest in all levels of government and this will help us achieve that.

Again, I address the comment around potential for abuse. We are going to allow councils to set appropriate parameters and, again, I recognize the uniqueness of our communities. I appreciate the Member for St. John's East making some comments today. He talked about Youth Parliament being one opportunity to engage young people, and it is. It is a great opportunity, and this is about taking it to the next level. This is about moving up that ladder of youth engagement and youth involvement and allowing young people to sit at the table and play an even greater role in decision making.

Someone made the comment – actually, it was the Member for St. John's East – what about seniors, what about persons with disabilities? They can vote; older persons can vote in a municipal election. People with disabilities can vote in a municipal election. They can run for public office and get elected to our town councils. I hope that more of them will, Mr. Speaker, but young people do not have that

opportunity which is why this special provision is needed for them.

In terms of the privacy concern that he raised, we are always very concerned about privacy. I would say that council meetings take place in a public chamber so there is no privacy concern in terms of the public deliberations of councils; however, they can set whatever provisions they want related to private meetings and discussions that are privileged, that would take place in Committee of the Whole. They could even require that those discussions be attended in person. Again, Mr. Speaker, my department will provide lots of advice and lots of support to councils to help them figure that out.

I know time is getting short, Mr. Speaker, I will now conclude debate in second reading, and I thank members again for their participation today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House that the said bill be now read a second time?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The City Of Corner Brook Act, The City Of Mount Pearl Act, The City Of St. John's Act And The Municipalities Act, 1999. (Bill 6)

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

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

MR. KING: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The City Of Corner Brook Act, The City Of Mount Pearl Act, The City Of St. John's Act And The Municipalities Act, 1999", read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House on tomorrow. (Bill 6)

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

This House will now stand adjourned until 2:00 p.m. tomorrow, being Private Members' Day.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2:00 p.m.