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Speaker: Honourable Wade Verge, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we start today's proceedings, I want to especially welcome Mr. Stelman Flynn to the Speaker's gallery today. Mr. Flynn was recently elected in an election in Humber East and will be sworn, I think, sometime next week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we have members' statement from the Member for St. John's East; the Member for St. John's South; the Member for Burgeo – La Poile; the Member for Cape St. Francis; the Member for Bellevue; and the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale.

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

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate an organization that has been making an important difference in the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of children and parents in and around St. John's for twenty years.

The Brighter Futures Coalition of St. John's and district brings together parents, community members, and professionals from the St. John's area. Through a variety of programs, Brighter Futures promotes a healthy birth, growth, and development of children age six and under and their families.

Their home base is in my District of St. John's East, but Brighter Futures offers programs like their Healthy Baby Club and Family Resource Centres in locations including Bell Island, Torbay, Mount Pearl, and Paradise, as well as several locations in St. John's.

The Healthy Baby Club, run in partnership with Eastern Health, gets children off to the best possible start, providing support, nurturing, and guidance to pregnant women in a relaxed and friendly environment. Numerous other programs give children and caregivers the

chance to socialize, learn, and become part of their communities.

I ask all hon. members to join me in thanking Brighter Futures for the work they have done and continue to do for our Newfoundland and Labrador families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I recognize a new inductee into Canada's prestigious Governor General Curling Club. The club, which was started in 1874, has a maximum of 100 members and twenty-five emeritus members from across Canada at any given time.

The main focus of the club is to recognize those who have made a significant contribution to curling. Some of its members are legends of the game and all have helped build the sport. It is considered a huge honour to be invited to join this prestigious group of men and women who have contributed so much to curling.

The club's crested red blazers are a familiar sight at national and international championships. This Province's newest inductee is a resident of my colleague's district of St. John's North.

I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating my brother, Bob Osborne, who is truly now one in a hundred.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise today to recognize and commend MacKenzie Ambulance Service of Channel-Port aux Basques, on their first annual Pack the Back fundraiser. Their goal was to Pack the Back of

one of their ambulances with items in the support of the local food bank and churches.

During the month of November, one of the MacKenzie's ambulances, along with staff and members of the Port aux Basques Cadet Corps, were stationed in the back of the ambulance outside the Grand Bay Mall, to collect food items and other donations in support of local charities that help families during the holidays.

Due to inclement weather and increased call volume, they were only able to participate in a portion of the planned twenty-two days. However, in that brief time, they received \$268.00 in money and gift cards; 392 food items; fifteen miscellaneous household items; books; movies; stuffed animals; clothing; and a crib set. These items will be used in Christmas hampers that will then go out to families around our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join with me in commending the staff of MacKenzie Ambulance Service and the Port aux Basques Cadet Corps on giving so generously and selflessly of their time for this very worthwhile cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Holy Trinity Elementary School in my district. On September 26, the students at Holy Trinity took part in the annual Terry Fox Walk. This school community has the incredible distinction of being the first school in the Province to raise over \$13,000. They raised \$13,352 in one single run, beating last year's total of \$12,614.50.

They were recognized by the Terry Fox Foundation in a video that was sent to the school by Terry's brother thanking them for their

efforts. The school community is truly making a difference in cancer research.

Congratulations to the children, teachers and staff, and all the stakeholders at the school community, and the Towns of Torbay, Pouch Cove, Flat Rock, and Bauline for supporting them and keeping Terry's dream alive.

I ask all hon. members to join with me in thanking the students, teachers, and the whole Holy Trinity Community for their continuous efforts in cancer research. Cancer affects us all.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bellevue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PEACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On November 22, I had the great privilege of attending the 100th birthday celebrations for Martha Smith of Dildo. Martha was born in Dildo to Leah and Arthur Reid. She was the second oldest in a family of seven. Martha left home at the age of fourteen to work for a family in St. John's, and she stayed eight months before she could come home.

Martha married Albert Smith and they had two children, Lillian and Charlie. Her husband Albert drowned at Gander Lake in 1953 while working at a lumber camp. Martha became a widow at thirty-eight. She was left to raise two children and she never remarried.

In 1956, Martha took a job working at the quick freeze plant at South Dildo, starting at fifty cents an hour. She worked until 1973, when she had to stop work to look after her mother who became ill.

Martha still lives in Dildo with her daughter Lillian. She has seven grandchildren, and twelve great-grandchildren. All of them live in the Dildo and New Harbour area. She is quite active and attends church regularly with her sisters, Florence Williams, Julie Higdon, and other family members.

I ask all the hon. members of this House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Martha Smith on reaching a milestone of 100 years.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was the first time in their history. The friendly, picturesque community of Shoe Cove on the Baie Verte Peninsula celebrated their first ever Come Home Year. From July 21 to 27, Shoe Cove was indeed the place to be. Family, food, fellowship and music was the order of the day as eager, enthusiastic friends converged upon the community, swelling the population fivefold.

Committee members Edna Welshman, Lori Payne, Thelma Fahey, Marion Starkes, Tracey Newbury, Bessie Welshman, Barbara Foster, Cynthia Skinner, and Chairperson, Elizabeth Welshman are to be commended for such an outstanding effort to ensure the celebrations were a raving success. My wife and I had the privilege to experience the sense of community, as we witnessed old friendships rekindled and new friendships forged. Gospel singer Glen Tetford and entertainers Bugs and Debbie added flavour to the celebrations.

The slogan said it all: so much to do, so much to be seen, come back to the shoe in 2014.

I invite all hon. members in this House with a unified voice, to help me offer accolades to the local service district of Shoe Cove for the tremendous success of its first ever Come Home Year celebrations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Order, please!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would be remiss if I did not extend my best wishes to the good people of Shoe Cove. He is a hard act to follow. I am glad he is my Parliamentary Secretary.

I rise in this hon. House to provide an update on the work we are undertaking as part of the Premier's Summit on Health Care.

Primary health care is the day-to-day care needed to protect, maintain, and restore our health, and we are looking at how we deliver primary health care services in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Premier made a commitment to hold a health care summit to gain insight and perspectives from patients as well as all residents of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that this process is now up and running, and off to a great start. We have planned regional forums across the four health care regions, and completed our first session last week in Grand Falls-Windsor, with a second one scheduled for this evening in the beautiful City of Mount Pearl.

Our first session saw over sixty participants coming together to discuss a wide range of primary health care issues in areas including mental health and addictions, dementia care, healthy living, aging, and chronic disease management.

Mr. Speaker, we are also adding additional sessions as previously announced. These include sessions in Kippens, Gander, Burin, St. Anthony, and Clarendville. More information on the times and dates for these sessions is available on our health summit Web page.

We have also been talking about other ways in which feedback can be provided into this consultation process. To assist with this, last week we launched a new interactive online engagement tool known as the Dialogue App.

Mr. Speaker, the Dialogue App was purchased from a UK software company, and adapted for the primary health care consultations by the Office of Public Engagement. The app is trusted by governments around the world and is used by more than forty organizations on three continents. Residents can join the dialogue today by visiting dialogueapp.gov.nl.ca.

We value the feedback we continue to receive as part of this process, and we encourage all residents to register for a forum, to express interest in participating in the summit, or to provide feedback by visiting the Department of Health and Community Services Web site or by calling 1-844-729-6310.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. It is unfortunate that we do have some of the poorest outcomes here in Canada. We have some of the highest rates of stroke, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, just to name a few. A significant amount of our Budget goes to health care; just about forty cents out of every dollar.

It is interesting to hear the Premier announced a summit on health care. He was the Minister of Health for quite some time. He was in the position to call the summit long before now if he was truly interested in understanding the issues.

We, as the Official Opposition, held our own health care roundtable last year. People from all different aspects of the health care system attended and gave us valuable information to help create a better health care system. The overwhelming message that came from our session was that the health care system did not need more money, but there needed to be smarter spending.

Just this year, we have held other sessions all over the Province on seniors' issues and health

care, with excellent turnouts and very informative results.

It is time government finally started listening to the people of the Province, eleven years after taking power. The problem is they should have been listening all along.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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. I am glad to see the Premier and the minister giving attention to our health care system. For the eight years that I have been in this House of Assembly, I have been listening to people in my district and the Province and bringing their health care issues into this House.

I hope that at the end of this consultation process, we are going to see action by this government to have a health care system that works for the people. I hope that any software tools employed in the consultation will emphasize, not trivialize, the issues that I know the Premier is going to hear raised by the people coming to these sessions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to note that tomorrow, December 3, is the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, an inclusive society that welcomes diversity is essential to building a strong and dynamic Province – and we all have a role to play to ensure equal opportunities and choices for all of our citizens. This morning, I met with the Provincial Advisory Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, where we

discussed issues of common interest and how we can move forward.

Tomorrow I will attend a business leadership breakfast, sponsored by the Network of Disability Organizations, where the discussion will focus on the fact that people with disabilities make up a largely untapped labour pool in our Province. I know there are several members will be attending – and I am glad to see that, because I believe this is an issue that transcends politics.

The keynote speaker will be Randy Lewis, Vice-President of Walgreens in the United States. He will be talking about how that company found that a diverse workforce is not only profitable and efficient, but it is an environment preferred by all employees. His company has made it work – and we believe that as a society, we must also make it work.

Mr. Speaker, in 2012 the provincial government released *Access. Inclusion. Equality. A Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities*. The strategy is designed to bring about changes in policies, services, programs, and attitudes. Since that time, we have taken action on several initiatives contained within the strategy, including providing grants to community-based organizations for projects such as the installation of ramps, supporting initiatives that promote inclusive work environments, and providing financial assistance to retrofit private vehicles with modifications such as the installation of lifts and hand controls.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I look forward to working with the members of the community of persons with disabilities and the Provincial Advisory Council, to achieve the shared goal of a truly inclusive society. I invite all members of this House to support us in that goal, and to join with me in recognizing the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Thank you, 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 thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The UN proclaimed the International Day for Persons with Disabilities to promote a greater understanding of the shared and varied experiences of persons with disabilities or the overall benefit of a more inclusive society. Tomorrow I will attend the breakfast the minister referenced, along with my colleagues, the Member for St. Barbe and St. John's North.

In 2012, Mr. Speaker, government released their strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. This strategy relies on the development of an action plan for specific initiatives. The minister just indicated the first plan will be released in the new year – three years after the strategy.

When we have to wait three years to see a strategy identify concrete initiatives like promoting inclusive work environments, I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I feel that is shameful. I am sure I am not alone in the calls I receive from constituents with disabilities calling me because they cannot find work, because government programs are inadequate. Today and every day, we should reflect on what inclusion really means and how it actually benefits us all.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement here today. We also recognize the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities; however, recognition of the day should also be geared to a focus on the realization that we have not done enough as a society to progress the ideals and changes to perception of what it is to live and work with a disability. More work is needed, and groups such as COD-NL are the great advocates to lead it, Mr. Speaker.

We appreciate hearing more from government on these initiatives that they will be progressing on in the future.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in this hon. House to recognize this week as National Safe Driving Week, which officially began yesterday, Monday, December 1. There has been significant attention over the years to the issue of driving under the influence of alcohol; however, many people may not be aware that It's Not Just Alcohol That Impairs, which is this year's theme of Safe Driving Week.

This week is an important time to remind all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that it is not only illegal to operate a motorized vehicle if your ability to drive is impaired by alcohol, but it is also illegal to drive under the influence of drugs. This can include illegal drugs, prescription drugs, or over the counter medication. This activity could lead in charges under the Criminal Code even if the vehicle is not moving.

Mr. Speaker, many people are also not aware of the effects of fatigue on one's ability to safely operate a vehicle. Research shows the chances of making mistakes increase when you have slept less than five hours, or if you have been awake for more than sixteen hours. In fact, Mr. Speaker, if you have been awake for seventeen hours or longer, it can be equivalent to illegal blood alcohol levels.

This year, motor vehicle collisions due to impaired driving will claim approximately 2,000 lives in Canada, between five and six people a day. In addition, 10,000 more individuals will be seriously injured, and most of these collisions are preventable.

This week provides a valuable and timely opportunity to raise awareness of potential road hazards and to cultivate safer, more defensive driving habits. It is a reminder to ensure our vehicles are properly equipped for the season, eliminate distractions behind the wheel,

socialize responsibly and never drive impaired, whether that is under the influence of alcohol, drugs or fatigue.

As we move forward into the New Year, I urge all hon. members to join me in promoting road safety awareness in our Province, and to remind their constituents that it is not just alcohol that impairs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. We, too, would like to recognize National Safe Driving Week, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, it is a very important week to raise a message with the general public to ensure they are driving safely on our highways.

The minister indicated the problem we are having with impaired driving in the Province. That is certainly something we want to curb. I encourage people now as we get into the Christmas season, if you are going to partake during the season, do not get behind the wheel.

I want to thank MADD for all the work they are doing. I have had meetings with them. They have some great ideas to help improve safety as it relates to drinking and driving.

Mr. Speaker, I never heard the minister mention the issue of texting and cellphone operation. That is something else, a message you want to get out there, the hazard associated to people on cellphones and people texting while they are driving. We encourage people to refrain from that activity.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not mention the problem we are having and the carnage which is taking place in our Province all throughout the year as it relates to moose-vehicle accidents. While drivers have to be attentive, government has a role to play there. I encourage them to do so.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement today. Back in, I think it was 1996-1997, I was hit by an impaired driver and still live with the consequences sometimes.

Teens and young adults account for one-third of all alcohol-related deaths due to impaired driving, Mr. Speaker. It is completely preventable. Groups out there are combating the problem such as MADD's School Assembly Program. People in groups are doing their part.

Mr. Speaker, it remains a question among the motoring public out there and the public in general: Why aren't drivers getting the message? Why do we as a society still see impaired driving, in spite of all the education programs out there, and in spite of the knowledge and the particular act and the offences in question?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This morning the Premier said that good governance demands accountability and that accountability demands openness.

I ask the Premier: With this in mind, will you now be open and accountable to the people of the Province and call a public inquiry into the cancelled Humber Valley Paving contract?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year when the matters involving the contract between Humber Valley Paving and the Department of Transportation and Works became known to my predecessor, Premier Marshall, he very quickly called the Auditor General. He asked the Auditor General, who is an independent Officer of this House, to conduct a full and frank investigation and review of the circumstances regarding the cancelling of the Humber Valley contract, particularly in Labrador.

He has done extensive work. He has had unfettered access to documentations and officials in government. He has carried out a number of interviews with officials and people inside and outside of government. He has completed a comprehensive report and has filed that report with five recommendations, which we fully intend to implement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier mentioned that they asked the AG to do a full and a frank report, but the AG has not been satisfied. The Premier obviously seems that he is satisfied.

I ask the Premier: If the AG is not satisfied, after you requesting him, or your government requesting him, to do the report, how can you been satisfied?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it is very important to point out that the comprehensive review that was carried out by the Auditor General, I think there was 185 officials and former officials that he had access to all of their records, all of their documentation, as well as he had the option to call and have interviews with essentially whoever he wished

to have to do that. There were sixteen different people that he interviewed.

Not only did he interview them and conduct interviews with them, but they were done under oath, the same as they would be done in a public inquiry. They were under oath, and not only did he interview them but the independent counsel that the Auditor General had retained to assist him in the work that he was doing also interviewed them.

There was an examination and, as some looked it, a cross-examination by the independent legal advice that he had retained as well. Mr. Speaker, I believe the Auditor General has done a comprehensive review of all of these circumstances.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier talked about review of documentation; that was one of the problems that the AG actually had with his review, that there was hardly any documentation. I will remind the Premier, too, that some people who were asked to appear before the AG did not; they actually refused.

Mr. Speaker, the AG said that the process to consider, to evaluate, to decide, to draft, to execute a termination of the contract occurred within seven-and-a-half hours. He said that the benefit of more time would have helped government fully consider all other options.

I ask the Premier: From start to finish, why was the process expedited in this manner?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member points out there was a broad range of officials and former officials who were interviewed – sixteen in total. There were former staff in the Premier's Office. There were

executive members of the Department of Transportation and Works. There were representatives from Humber Valley Paving who were interviewed, again under oath, Mr. Speaker.

Just to clarify, in a public inquiry, it is a course of action whereby people can be interviewed under oath, examined, and in some cases cross-examined. Mr. Speaker, that is what happened. That is what the Auditor General did. He is an independent Officer of the House and I can tell you, for me and the people on this side of the House, we fully respect his role and the work that he has done on this file.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the AG clearly said that he was not satisfied. The Premier seems to be satisfied, even though the AG is not. When government started this process, they claimed that their key objectives for cancelling the project were, number one, to ensure that the paving work would be completed on time and on budget; number two, the objective was not to hurt Humber Valley Paving or its employees.

I ask the Premier: Have you met these objectives?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Those who have not taken the time to read the report, I invite anyone to do that. It is a public report. It is a very comprehensive review. He has laid out a number of findings and a number of recommendations, Mr. Speaker. He has also concluded that while there are some suggestions made about the reasons why the contract was concluded and so on, he has laid out that there is no documentary evidence of undue influence in decisions to mutually terminate the contract.

I think that is very important, Mr. Speaker, to point that out. He said that there was no documentary evidence. Not only did he have the documentary evidence, but he had the access to full interviews under oath, sworn interviews with a number of officials, former officials, politicians, and so on – sixteen in total, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, when you establish the process to get the AG involved there were two objectives, I say to the Premier.

I ask you one more time: Did you meet the two objectives that the minister clearly established as the objectives when this project was cancelled?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, what happened here is Premier Marshall did the responsible thing. That is what he did here. He knew there was a set of circumstances, he knew that the public wanted to know what the circumstances were, and we engaged with the Auditor General – and I would say, Mr. Speaker, the Premier engaged very early with the Auditor General.

I would like to point out and remind members of the House, which I know they are all aware and also to the people of the Province, the Auditor General is an independent Officer of this House. He has broad-reaching powers. He has, I believe, great capacity to do his job, as he has done in the past. I believe he has done his job well here that has resulted in five recommendations, as a result of his report – five recommendations which we are implementing all five, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Number one, Premier Marshall did not find out until five weeks later. He found out at an airport in Halifax, we were told. So I call on you, Premier: Will you now do the responsible thing, as the previous Premier has done, and answer this question for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? The two objectives that were outlined when the AG was called in based on the cancelation of this project, did you meet the objectives of that cancellation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, when former Premier Marshall became aware of these circumstances he was part of the steps taken in the outcome that we have reached today in having a report from the Auditor General. That forms part of the report; that forms part of the circumstances that existed.

Mr. Speaker, I supported the actions of former Premier Marshall, in his decision to bring in the Auditor General. As I started to say in my last answer, he is a competent person. He has broad-sweeping powers. We know in the past, when the Auditor General has conducted investigations and reviews of circumstances, there are times when he has taken other actions and made other recommendations, such as the investigation the Auditor General did on this very House just a few years ago, which resulted in him filing referrals to the police saying there should be more investigation. That did not happen here, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we gave the Premier a couple of opportunities here to be truly open and responsible. He refused to answer the questions: Were the two objectives met?

Mr. Speaker, the government actions to cancel this contract and release \$19 million in bonds

meant that the several subcontractors in Newfoundland and Labrador were left without payment. We understand that there is a \$1.18 million holdback on this contract.

I ask the Premier: Has any of the holdback money been paid out?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have a responsibility to ensure that the holdbacks were put in place. In this case, the mechanics' lien holdback was indeed put in place. It is still held in trust; \$1.18 million by my department.

Mr. Speaker, Humber Valley Paving did put a statutory declaration to my department outlining they wanted the money released. I was not convinced that the subcontractors were satisfied that their payments were not outstanding, so I declined to release that.

We are now going through an exercise of determining what avenues we have to be able to satisfy those outstanding debts by those subcontractors. We encourage people to file their declarations with the courts and then in due time, Mr. Speaker, we will assess exactly how we rectify those situations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: I say to the minister and I also say to the Premier, if you had to have taken that time, this project and this contract would not have been cancelled in the first place.

I ask the minister: The two objectives that were outlined a few minutes ago not to hurt Humber Valley Paving, not to hurt the employees, on time and on budget, Minister, are those two objectives met?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately we were eleven kilometres short in Labrador in completing it this year. I will tell you, here are some of the key notes about what has gone on the Trans-Labrador Highway around contract 1-12. Here are the things: eleven kilometres short, that is all we have not completed; 500 kilometres have been completed and paved for the people of Labrador on the Trans-Labrador Highway.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, \$683 million has been put into the Trans-Labrador Highway by this Administration. Zero is the number of kilometres that were paved by that Administration when we were there looking at the Trans-Labrador Highway.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister goes on with the rhetoric again. Here we go again. If you look back over the history of the Trans-Labrador Highway, maybe the minister should answer the question, who started it?

Now, Minister, was the project on budget?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, we do not mind rising in this House and answering questions put to us by members of the Opposition. We do it every day, and I do it every day. I will continue to do that. I will continue to do my role and answer questions from the Opposition members, the same as all of us here on this side of the House.

When they put three or four topics and comments on top of their question, then sometimes we have a desire to answer some of their remarks as well, Mr. Speaker. When the member opposite gets up and says, well, you have not answered the question, you have not answered the question, sometimes we are addressing some of the other matters that they put forward as well.

Mr. Speaker, what we did here was we did the right thing. Premier Marshall, supported by this government – and I know members opposite support it as well – was to call in the Auditor General and have the Auditor General do a full review. He has done that full review.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What we have not seen is the statutory declaration that the minister just mentioned. That has not been tabled.

I ask the minister: Would you table that to this House of Assembly?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I noted earlier, Humber Valley Paving did indeed put a statutory declaration to my department. We reviewed it. We looked at it. We were not convinced the subcontractors were going to be satisfied to receive their payment, Mr. Speaker, so we turned it down. Again, I encourage anybody who feels they have a claim against Humber Valley Paving for contract 1-12 to table that with the courts and we will deal with it accordingly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, the minister is suggesting we have a company in this Province that they were in business with, that they actually cancelled a contract within seven-and-a-half hours. Some weeks later this same company files a statutory declaration claiming, I would imagine, the subcontractors were paid.

Why isn't the minister satisfied with that?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, we had inquiries by a number of companies saying they have not been rectified with the outstanding debt. Mr. Speaker, they could not satisfy us through their legal process that everything was satisfied. So as a result, until we are completely satisfied – this is about protecting the investment of the people of this Province and those subcontractors. We continue to do that, because we are holding that investment right now.

The mechanic's lien is held by my department and will not be released until we feel all the subcontractors have been taken care of. They have a legal process here to go through that we may be able to indeed support them by releasing the monies to the courts to rectify that situation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to be clear for the people who are following this situation. Did Humber Valley Paving actually sign that statutory declaration that you are saying?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, legal counsel for Humber Valley Paving came to our legal

counsel and had discussions and put in what they felt was their open process around whether or not their subcontractors were satisfied. We reviewed that. Because we knew there are people out there who have already made inquiries that they have not been taken care of and there are still outstanding debts, we felt until we are completely satisfied, until we know the taxpayers' money is protected here and those subcontractors are indeed fulfilled in their contract obligations, we would not release it.

Mr. Speaker, we are still holding that because we want to protect those subcontractors. Until that point is made, we will then release it to the courts to deal with it accordingly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, in this new, open, and transparent government that you are talking about today, I ask the minister, will you just please – or the Premier, will you answer the question: Did Humber Valley Paving sign the statutory declaration that you are talking about?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I had mentioned, their legal counsel approached our legal counsel. They submitted a form outlining exactly why they felt the money should be released. We again went back and said we understand there are subcontractors there who have not been fully paid. As a result, we felt it was not in the best interest of the Province and the taxpayers for us to release that.

We have as our foremost objective here to protect the taxpayers, and those taxpayers include those subcontractors, Mr. Speaker. That money will not be released until we are satisfied their money has been rectified and all outstanding debts have been paid.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, this process has taken a long time.

I ask the minister: Would he now table the documents that he is referring to in this House of Assembly?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As this was a legal document, I will check with my officials and our legal counsel to determine whether or not it can be tabled.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, if it can be tabled, I will come back to this House and table it to the people of this Province and to the Opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, this process has been ongoing for quite some time now. We have many small businesses in the Province that are left with bills that are not paid for work they have done with this contract.

I ask the Premier: What assurances will you put in place to make sure those small businesses are paid for the work they have done on that contract?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: As I have outlined, we are holding the mechanic's lien, Mr. Speaker, because we want to ensure that those subcontractors who feel they have a lien against Project 1-12 are going to be satisfied. That is part of it.

We look at it case by case, Mr. Speaker. We are encouraging people. There is a legal process for them to go through and we are encouraging them on a daily basis to do that. The moment we are comfortable that we can move forward on this, we have many options open to us, we will make sure that people who have a legitimate claim to that will be rectified.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is unfortunate that the Premier of the day and the minister who is now on his feet defending the cancellation of this contract did not take the time to do due diligence back when this project was cancelled. The AG said, actually, he could find no operational reason why government had to cancel the Humber Valley Paving contract and release \$19 million in bonds the day before the PC leadership deadline. He also said there was no evidence that it was even discussed in Cabinet.

I ask the Premier: You must agree that this is a very unusual set of circumstances that we are in today. Will you now call a public inquiry into this cancellation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, as I stated here today, the Premier of the day, Premier Marshall, took steps to ensure there was an independent review of the circumstances involving the contract with Humber Valley Paving. That was conducted by the Auditor

General for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, a qualified, competent, respected independent Officer of this House of Assembly. It was ordered by this government. It was supported by members opposite. He carried out a full review, Mr. Speaker, and has resulted in his recommendations.

He had unfettered access to documentation from 185 different people. He had a right to interview who he felt was important to interview; he has interviewed sixteen people. He has completed his report and made his recommendations. As I have said, we support and accept the recommendations and we will be implementing them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What was unusual about this set of circumstances – the Premier obviously did not acknowledge that it was extremely unusual. I want to remind the Premier, the AG was not satisfied. There was no documentation. As a matter of fact, he clearly outlined about the lack of documentation. He also said that there was no evidence that it was discussed in Cabinet – when they were meeting outside the Cabinet door just fifteen minutes prior to a Cabinet meeting. Also, the Premier of the day was not notified.

I ask the Premier: Would you consider these circumstances to be unusual – unusual enough to call a public inquiry into this cancellation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Much of what the member opposite has outlined are findings that are contained in the report. They are findings that have been determined and reached by the Auditor General in the review that he has done, that he has carried out – the review that he carried out, at the request of the

government, which was supported by members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, he has done a very competent job here. I believe he has done a very competent job. I am not sure if the members opposite are calling into question the competency and the work of the Auditor General. I hope that is not what they are doing –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER DAVIS: Because I believe what the Auditor General has done here has been a good job in doing an investigation. He has made a number of things and he has said there is no documentary evidence of undue influence in the decisions to mutually terminate the contract.

I think that is probably a very important point. The Auditor General took the time to highlight that in his release. It is a very important point and it is noteworthy, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will say to the Premier, we actually did support the AG's review of this cancellation. The AG, when he came back, made reference that he was not satisfied, could not be satisfied with what he had seen, lack of documentation, all the other reasons that I have just outlined.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier of the day, even though he mentioned about the Auditor General, who is not satisfied, I ask the Premier one more time: Why will you not call a public inquiry so small businesses in this Province know that they can be treated fairly in this process?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we have a very good relationship with the

business community in Newfoundland and Labrador and we always treat them fairly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: We work very hard to support business opportunities in our Province and young entrepreneurs.

When inquiries are called – just to review some of the inquiries over recent years that have taken place, the Wells inquiry, the Cameron inquiry, the Lamer Inquiry, Hughes Inquiry; all inquiries that were done in this Province that quite often dealt with loss of life, very serious and critical incidents of a very personal level for people and breach of people's liberties and discussions about have their liberties been breached, those types of very serious matters.

What we have done here is we have called in the Auditor General; he has done a comprehensive review, Mr. Speaker. I respect the Auditor General. I respect the work that he has done. He has used his very broad powers to carry out an investigation and he has completed that.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I agree with the Premier that many of the situations that he just talked about were very serious, but so is this, because it speaks to businesses and small companies in this Province being fairly with taxpayers' money. The Premier said this morning that being open is quickly becoming the new norm for government.

Mr. Premier, actions speak louder than words. Will you call a public inquiry into the cancellation of the Humber Valley Paving contract, yes or no?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, we did take action. We took swift action over here on this side of the House as a government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: We took action on the events that transpired. That is why we called in the Auditor General, Mr. Speaker.

We have seen in the past, Mr. Speaker, at times when the Auditor General has found that there were further concerns that required further investigation and further review. That has happened in the past. In the very time that the Auditor General did a review of operations of the House of Assembly and certain members within the House, and sent referrals to the police, to the RNC saying there needs to be further investigation in that matter.

That is an example, Mr. Speaker. When the Auditor General feels that there is further work that needs to be done, where he is unsatisfied to the point that further review and investigation needs to be done, he has done that in the past. That has not happened here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: I say to the Premier, why don't you just be open and transparent with the people of this Province? Give a simple answer: yes or no. Will you call a public inquiry into the Humber Valley Paving cancellation, a contract that was cancelled in seven-and-a-half hours?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am not sure if the member opposite is trying to suggest in any way, shape, or form that the work of the Auditor General has not been open and transparent. The Auditor General carried out a process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER DAVIS: He has broad powers, Mr. Speaker. The Office of the Auditor General has very broad powers to do full, in-depth investigations. One hundred and eighty-five officials from fourteen government departments provided documentation to the Auditor General where documentation existed, and in places where documentation did not exist, provided a statutory declaration, a sworn declaration, saying that they did not have further documents. He had the right to interview who he saw fit. He interviewed sixteen people under oath, Mr. Speaker, the same as what would happen in a public inquiry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier is already talking fiscal restraint months ahead of his Budget, the federal government is cutting millions of federal dollars for health care, and yesterday we learned Nalcor will be looking for another half billion dollars.

I ask the Premier: Does he have a vision for our health care system, other than cutting services?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite is quite aware of the fiscal circumstances that face not only this Province, but many provinces in Canada, and many countries by the spiraling oil prices and the volatility of world oil prices that we all face today. Us and other provinces rely on those oil prices very importantly for the operations of government and the work that we do in our respective provinces.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we have to make some very difficult decisions. I can tell you of utmost importance and first and foremost is the best interests of the people of the Province. Having regard to all of the circumstances, we are prepared to govern, we

are prepared to make those difficult decisions, and as time moves forward we will be going through a process to make those decisions as we have to.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Then I ask the Premier: What is his plan to end wait-lists for Janeway occupational therapists who are so swamped that they can no longer conduct school visits for children with autism?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, all aspects of health care are very important to us as a government. They are very important to us, as they are important to the people of the Province.

As I said just a moment ago, as we face these very difficult and challenging fiscal times, having in mind as well that we know that it is anticipated that in the big picture and the big scope as time goes on that these are going to be short-lived, they are going to be months or a short number of years. What we are doing is we are continuing to make investments, carry out projects, and put the Province in a place that is going to benefit all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for decades to come.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier: Well, what does he think about a parent being told that their child must wait up to two years to see an occupational therapist?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, as a government we are very concerned about wait times for health care services, and we have reduced wait times in a number of key areas. Earlier, the member asked about services for children with autism. In this fiscal year alone, we will invest \$12.5 million in the provision of programs and services for children with autism and developmental disabilities.

In terms of wait times, Eastern Health is implementing some new wait time management processes for autism-related services. We have seen already a decrease in the average wait times for speech language pathology services and for occupational therapy services, as well. We have seen a decrease in wait times for both of these services and we continue to see improvements.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The consultations for the review of the Residential Tenancies Act were completed in 2012, two years ago. People presented very serious problems in those consultations.

I ask the minister again: Why is he not releasing the report and its recommendations? People are waiting. Is he trying to hide some of the recommendations?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. member for her question. As I said last week in my answer, Mr. Speaker, we held ten public consultations across the Province between September and November 2012; 142 individuals presented in-person presentations and we also had twenty-eight written submissions, Mr. Speaker.

We are not hiding anything, Mr. Speaker. We all know the Residential Tenancies Act governs the relationship between landlords and tenants is

a very important piece of work. We will do our due diligence and we will release it when we are ready, Mr. Speaker. When we are done with the work to its completion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister once again: Why won't he release the Newfoundland and Labrador housing and homelessness report completed last year? Is he trying to hide how desperate the housing crisis has become?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I tell the hon. member across the way, we are not hiding anything. We are an open, transparent government. That is why when we do our work we consult with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are highly committed to updating this legislation, and when we have done our work we will bring it to the House of Assembly so all the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador can have a look at it, evaluate it, review it, and say what a good job we have done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answer to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Carbonear – Harbour Grace.

MR. SLADE: 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 humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the Town Council of Bryant's Cove has applied for funding of \$958,403 from the provincial government over the past three years, 2011, 2012 and 2013, for upgrades and paving to Point Road but has not been successful; and

WHEREAS Point Road has deteriorated to the point that council can no longer maintain this road, and residents and businesses are complaining about the cost incurred to upkeep their vehicles due to the condition of the road and the risk to their personal safety; and

WHEREAS school bus operators are expressing concern about the condition of Point Road and are indicating that there is a possibility that buses will not operate on this road in the upcoming school year; and

WHEREAS Point Road has the highest population and traffic than any other municipal road in the town with seven side roads branching off; and

WHEREAS the residents are stating they will not be paying any property tax until upgrades are carried out on the road;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to funding application to the town council to have Point Road upgraded and paved this year.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke a little bit on this last night, or yesterday evening. Of course, there is a bigger issue here. School buses are going out over that road and kids are popping all over the place in the bus. There is some concern about the children's safety here also.

Mr. Speaker, we do not understand why the Town of Bryant's Cove have been denied year after year after year the funding. The town is prepared to put their share into it. So one would only think it is a matter of process.

Remember yesterday when I spoke I talked about forty-eight districts. Mr. Speaker, forty-eight districts and every district should be at least treated equal. This is not the case here. This is not what is taking place here. This is a town that has been neglected by this government, and neglected in a big way, I say, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the council in this community have reached out to this government and I expect for the government to turn around and reach out to them. This is something that needs to be done; it has to be done. Other than that, I do not know what else to say here because I am baffled for words for the simple fact this government is just ignoring the people of Bryant's Cove. These people deserve that opportunity.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. J. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the communities of Castor River South, Castor River North, Shoal Cove West, Bird Cove, New Ferrole and Bartletts Harbour were contracted under Phase 2 of the Rural Broadband Initiative to receive Internet service in May 2013; and

WHEREAS the above communities were scheduled to have that service installed in the fall of 2013; and

WHEREAS the company contracted to provide that service, EION Inc. experienced delays and the new schedule for Internet service for the above communities was for March 2014; and

WHEREAS the equipment has now been installed to provide this service, but due to technical difficulties the company EION Inc. has not yet completed the installation of this service; and

WHEREAS even though contracted, residents have been advised that not all areas or all residences included in the contract will get Internet service;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately resolve the issues and delays associated with providing Internet service as contracted through EION Inc. to all of the above named communities.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is a situation where government appears to have gone out and hired a contractor to provide a service. It seems government may have paid the contractor, but the people know one thing for certain, they are not receiving the service. Yet government is bragging about having Phase 2 of the Broadband Initiative completed, when in fact maybe they have spent all the money. It would be typical of this government not to have done any due diligence, not to have checked up on it further, and to have left communities along the way without Internet service.

Mr. Speaker, in one case the broadband service, the tower that is supposed to serve the communities of Shoal Cove West, Reid's Harbour, and New Ferrole is put on one side of a hill which actually blocks any signal from New Ferrole. The representatives of the company who have attended say, well, you need another tower. It seems as if somebody at the governmental level did not bother to check and put the tower in the right place. Now they cannot receive the signal.

Mr. Speaker, in the case of Bartletts Harbour, the tower has been installed at some distance from Bartletts Harbour but the company has not gotten around to finishing the job, so you have everybody in that town without service. These residents are very concerned that the company is

now going to leave town. Government is literally washing its hands of the whole thing saying we bought and paid for it. In fact, like so many other contracts with this government, and with the severe financial incompetence of this government, it looks like they have either paid for something and have not supervised it, or they probably bought something that was not up to scratch and is not providing the service that government claims it is.

People are absolutely irate. They are disturbed. They are concerned about government saying you are receiving Internet service, when in fact they know darn well they are not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS 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 am happy once again to get up and speak to this petition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would think that the members on the other side of the House would want to hear what I have to say about this. The Premier has said he is ready to reinstate the court once he can find a way of making sure it can serve a larger part of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, I presented the Minister of Justice with a plan on how this could be done quite easily. I also presented the same plan to the Premier. I have not heard back from the Premier yet. This plan was done in consultation with people who have expertise in Family Violence Intervention Courts. As a matter of fact, not only theoretical expertise, but people who have worked in Family Violence Intervention Courts.

How this can be done, you need a courtroom, Mr. Speaker. Courtrooms are already in place across the Province. In fact, you do not need a special courtroom. You simply allocate half a day a week for the Family Violence Intervention Court into an already existing courtroom. There is no extra cost for that.

You need a judge. We already have the judges all across the Province. What we do need is a judge with a little bit of extra training so that judge, he or she, will be well versed in the issues of domestic violence, and how to best serve them through a specialized court like the Family Violence Intervention Court.

Then you need a Crown prosecutor. We already have Crown prosecutors. This would just be a little bit of their time. They need a little bit of training; that is all.

Mr. Speaker, I will finish this another day.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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 Labrador's coastal communities already pay extremely high hydro rates; and

WHEREAS small businesses are struggling to stay in operation against rising costs of operation; and

WHEREAS Nalcor, a Crown corporation, is proposing an 11.4 per cent increase to residential hydro rates and a 20 per cent increase to business rates;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to work with Nalcor to establish rates that are fair and consistent to the whole Province.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I was very saddened when I went home just this past weekend. The largest community in my district, a viable – what I thought was a viable business there, with a for sale sign. He said with the cost of transportation and everything else and now being hit with this proposed 20 per cent – and to see the minister stand repeatedly and say, yes, we support this; we support hydro wanting to double their rate of return on equity.

That is one thing, Mr. Speaker, but the issue I want to talk about is the application that they first filed in 2013, the proposed increase for Labrador isolated rates was 0.9 per cent. Lake Melville at that time was going to be hit with a 26 per cent increase. Mr. Speaker, they pulled it off the table and they have turned around and they are going to double their increase on the backs of the most vulnerable in society. Small coastal communities, older people who live on fixed income, are now going to be hit with an 11.4 per cent increase, and business is going to be hit with 20 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I tabled it here in the House last week; I held it up. Small businesses paying \$6,000 a month hydro for heat and light – \$5,000, \$6,000 a month. I met a lady in Walmart Sunday night from my district who is \$350, \$400 on her house.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I will be making a submission to the PUB because what is happening here is a very unfair distribution. I cannot believe that the minister can say he supports this. I cannot believe it. We are talking about the mom and pop businesses, the aunt Nellies and uncle Johns. What happened to the larger communities that were going to be hit with an increase where they are making very big income – but no, the people who have nothing coming in, only their old age pension, these are the people who are now going to pay for this, Mr. Speaker.

I feel it is absolutely wrong. I cannot support it. I will continue to stand on my feet, and I will continue to petition for the people of coastal Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. George's – Stephenville East.

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a petition today on health care in the Heatherton to Highlands area.

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

WHEREAS there has not been a permanent doctor in the clinic in Jeffrey's for almost a year; and

WHEREAS the absence of a permanent doctor is seriously compromising the health care of people who live in the Heatherton to Highlands area and causing them undue hardship; and

WHEREAS the absence of a doctor or a nurse practitioner in the area leaves seniors without a consistency and quality of care which is necessary for their continued good health;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to take action which will result in a permanent doctor or other arrangements to improve the health care services in the Heatherton to Highlands area.

Mr. Speaker, this is a crisis situation in health care in the area. Many people are not getting the health care services they need –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask members for the co-operation.

The hon. the Member for St. George's – Stephenville East, to continue.

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The people of St. George's – Stephenville East are concerned about the health care crisis that is developing in their area. Many people are not getting the services they require. This situation is about to get worse, as the doctor in St. George's has told the health care board that he is about to leave as well and this, of course, will lead to more demands upon the emergency centre at the hospital in Stephenville.

I think it is fair to call this situation a crisis. The clinic in Jeffrey's has been without a doctor for

close to a year now and people are not getting the services they require. I have talked to the Minister of Health and I have talked to the health board about the situation there, and I am hopeful that something will happen soon to resolve this situation.

In the meantime, I will keep presenting petitions from people of the area on this issue.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: 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 Labrador's coastal communities already pay extremely high hydro rates; and

WHEREAS small businesses are struggling to stay in operation against rising costs of operation; and

WHEREAS Nalcor, a Crown corporation, is proposing an 11.4 per cent increase to residential hydro rates and a 20 per cent increase to business rates;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to work with Nalcor to establish rates that are fair and consistent to the whole Province.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, as with my colleague, the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, we have some serious issues with this. I would just like to take a different approach here when you are looking at the margin of increase when compared to other areas in the Province.

I realize that Lake Melville and Lab West had a 25 per cent increase proposal that was put on the

table a couple of years ago but was taken off. I wonder what would be the reaction in those districts if that 25 per cent was implemented. They are not going to see it, thankfully. I am hoping it is because of the government's intervention, whether at the PUB level or before the Crown corporation, owned by the Crown, got to the stage of presenting to the PUB. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, that 25 per cent increase was pulled off the table.

What does this government do? They go back to the hardest hit people in the Province. Mr. Speaker, we have heard stories about seniors in metro St. John's going to businesses, going to the mall, turning their heat down, and spending the day there so they can cover the cost of living. I have been here all months of the year; I think I may have seen it go to minus fifteen degrees. That is a good reason for a senior who cannot pay their bills to go somewhere to save on their heating costs.

In Nain, Mr. Speaker, I have seen it go to minus fifty-seven degrees and they have to grow up their families – a lot of people stay with them. If you add to that a 20 per cent increase in residential, how much more are the commodities going to be charged for that cost that is going to be passed on to the consumer?

We all know where the Minister of Natural Resources stands, Mr. Speaker. I would like to know where the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs stands on this issue.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, that we move to Orders of the Day.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that we move to Orders of the Day.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. KING: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I would like to call from the Order Paper, Order 2, second reading of a bill, An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008, Bill 32.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that the said bill be now read the second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 32 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008". (Bill 32)

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise before this hon. House today to introduce Bill 32, which is entitled An Act to Amend the Registered Nurses Act, 2008. The Registered Nurses Act, 2008 regulates the nursing profession in this Province. The Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador is the regulatory body created under the act that is responsible for advancing and promoting the ethical and professional standards of the nursing profession, promoting proficiency and competency in the nursing profession as well.

The mandate of the association is to ensure that nurses who provide care and services to the people of this Province are qualified, and that they provide care and services in accordance

with the standards and code of ethics applicable to the practice of nursing.

One of the ways in which the association fulfills its mandate is to address issues where a registered nurse is alleged to have engaged in conduct that is contrary to acceptable practice and ethical standards. Currently, the Registered Nurses Act, 2008 contains provisions which establish a disciplinary process to be followed when dealing with allegations that a nurse has engaged in conduct deserving of sanction.

Mr. Speaker, conduct deserving of sanction is defined in the act as including the following: professional misconduct; professional incompetence; conduct unbecoming a registered nurse; incapacity or unfitness to engage in the practice of nursing; and acting in breach of the act, regulations, or the code of ethics.

The process by which an allegation that a registered nurse has engaged in conduct deserving of sanction is dealt with, as set out in the act, and may involve a settlement of the allegation by the Director of Professional Conduct Review with the agreement of the registered nurse and the person who made the complaint; a referral to the complaints authorization committee to conduct an investigation; and following which, a referral to a disciplinary tribunal for a hearing, where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the registered nurse engaged in conduct deserving of sanction.

The act sets out sanctions that may be imposed on a registered nurse who is found to have engaged in conduct deserving of sanction. The types of orders which may be made include the following: suspending the registered nurse; striking the registered nurse's name from the register of registered nurses; making restitution to the complainant or another person affected by the registered nurse's conduct; obtaining medical treatment or counselling; engaging in continuing education programs; and restricting his or her professional practice.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 32 amends the Registered Nurses Act, 2008 to add provisions which will authorize the association to engage in a process of quality assurance with a registered nurse. The amendment requires the establishment of a

quality assurance committee whose responsibility is to carry out quality assurance reviews related to a registered nurse's practice. Quality assurance reviews accomplish a number of things. They are a means of assessing the quality of care provided by registered nurses; of identifying any areas of concern; of establishing remedial action to address the concern; and monitoring the registered nurse's practice to ensure the remedy is effective in addressing the concerns.

A quality assurance review may be commenced in the following circumstances: at the request of the Director of Professional Conduct Review; at the request of the complaints authorization committee; or upon initiation by the quality assurance committee itself.

While the association can now work with a registered nurse to address concerns with respect to his or her practice, the addition of the quality assurance provisions to the act authorizes the quality assurance committee or person assisting the committee to exercise a number of powers: the power to compel a person to provide information; the power to require a person to produce information, including documents and records; and the power to inspect the premises where the registered nurse practices.

In connection with the quality assurance review, the committee may issue directives and orders regarding the registered nurse and his or her practice. These orders include requiring the registered nurse to undergo an examination, evaluation, assessment or a review of his or her practice or capacity or fitness to practice; obtain counselling; complete a course of studies or an educational or a training program; restrict his or her nursing practice; and obtain supervised clinical experience.

Adding quality assurance provisions to the act is a way for the association to engage with a registered nurse to address concerns with that nurse's practice before it gets to the point of being conduct deserving of sanction, such as professional misconduct.

However, if it becomes apparent during a quality assurance review that a registered nurse may have engaged in conduct deserving of sanction, then the review is terminated and the matter is

referred to the complaints authorization committee to be dealt with as a part of a disciplinary process.

Once a concern or issues is raised with the association regarding a registered nurse's practice, if it appears to meet the threshold of conduct deserving of sanction, then it will be dealt with in accordance with the disciplinary process that is set out in the act. However, if it does not appear to meet that threshold, it may be dealt with as part of the quality assurance process.

These amendments require a registered nurse to co-operate and authorize the imposition of certain remedial actions, which I highlighted earlier. If a registered nurse fails to comply with an agreement or a directive or order of the quality assurance committee, then this failure to comply is to be dealt with as an allegation in accordance with the disciplinary provisions in this act.

Mr. Speaker, protection of patient records and personal health information during any review process will remain paramount. The amendments require that the records and specific information are kept confidential. Through the disciplinary process, the association would already have access to patients' records and the personal health information of registered nurses in the context of the disciplinary process. The Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador has a number of requirements and policies in place to ensure the protection and security of the information it requires to fulfill its mandate under the act.

The primary goal of the quality assurance provisions, including the establishment of a quality assurance committee, is to strengthen and improve the practices of registered nurses, and ultimately provide better protection for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who receive care and services from registered nurses. Officials in my department have worked very closely with the association regarding these proposed quality assurance provisions and the amendments, to ensure they meet the needs of the association.

Mr. Speaker, at the request of the association, these amendments are subject to proclamation

and will come into force at a later date. This will provide the association with the necessary time to fully develop its policies regarding quality assurance and with sufficient time to appoint the quality assurance committee.

There are currently over 6,800 nurses registered with the association, and we hear many, many instances where nurses are providing the highest level of care every day to the people of this Province. However, in those cases where there are concerns with a registered nurse's practice, it is important for the association to have the tools it needs to address these concerns, rather than wait until they become more serious and thereby require engagement in the disciplinary process.

Mr. Speaker, this bill enables the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador to fulfill its statutory mandate by ensuring registered nurses in this Province continue to provide the highest level of care to the patients they serve by allowing the association to deal with concerns at an earlier stage before they become conduct deserving of sanction under the disciplinary process.

I hope all members of this House will join me in supporting these amendments to the Registered Nurses Act, 2008. I will leave it there for now, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to bringing closing comments later in the debate.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I am happy to stand today and speak to Bill 32, which will amend the Registered Nurses Act, 2008.

Before I begin, I should put out a thank you to the staff at the Department of Health and Community Services for sitting down with us this morning to provide us with a briefing on this piece of legislation. It is obviously very important.

In terms of the size of it, it is not a huge piece of legislation. It is just an amendment as opposed to a new bill, but it seems to be following along the lines of some statutes that have already been changed to address this particular issue. My understanding is that the Medical Act, 2011, the Optometry Act, the Pharmacy Act, the Psychiatrist Act, and there is one more piece of legislation all on the same vein where it has been amended to allow quality assurance. That is the template that has been set.

Specifically, there are two templates. The Association of Registered Nurses have decided to follow along the blueprint set by the Medical Act, or doctors. In this case it is very simple, or seems to be very simple or straightforward in that we have already had – we talk about self-regulating bodies, which there are a number of professions in this Province that fall under this, whether it be physicians, whether it be nurses, whether it be lawyers.

You are self-regulating. You are held to a higher standard to police yourself, to monitor yourself, to ensure qualities are of the highest and your members are all following a certain code, a certain ethics. If you refuse to do that then you will have that ability taken away, that privilege taken away. I think the groups that have this ability do a great job of that.

In this case, it is my understanding the nurses and government have been in conversation for some time on how to move forward. The disciplinary aspect is already there, but this will allow for quality assurance. That is one of the big things we want to make sure is there. Quality assurance is something you hear more and more of, whether it is in the service industry, whether it is in the retail industry.

It is great to hear of quality assurance when we talk about health care because that is what we want. We want quality health care and you want the people who are performing the health care, the practitioners of health care, making sure they self-police to ensure that it is there as well. We are certainly in favour of this. I think it is a great move.

This particular amendment will allow the registered nurses to conduct quality assurance investigations. I think the minister has done a

good job of explaining why and the different components, whether it be – what are the different parts that would form quality assurance and that will be looked at? It is not just criminals, say, or disciplinary, but it could be issues outside of that realm that will affect the quality of the performance of their duties but should be dealt with in a different way. It may not be a disciplinary matter per se.

I had some specific questions in the briefing this morning. I understand this will not be proclaimed right away. That is important to note because we are doing the work now in this part. We will go through our notice and first reading, second reading, Committee, and right into the third reading; however, this will not be put in right away. My understanding is we are doing this in conjunction or co-operation with the nurses because they have a bit of work to do on their end.

They have an education part they have to do with their own membership. That is fine; we understand that. My question was: What is the timeline that will take place? I think we need to know this. I have been told six to nine months would probably be the time period. I think that is fine. We need to do this right, and we need to make sure the membership are fully aware of how this is going to happen.

One of the big parts there is a quality assurance committee that will be struck and I think populated by the profession themselves. That is their mandate. They are privy to do that and put this in place. That will take some time. We understand that. I hope they will stick to that timeline because we do want to see this come into place.

We do not want to see something like quality assurance put on the back burner. I do not think that is going to happen. I am just glad to hear – when you hear a timeline put in place, that gives you an expectation. I think anybody in this Province, no matter what it is, what it is for, people like an expectation. That allows them to formulate their expectations. They have done that in this case and we are satisfied with that.

Policy work has to be done by the association. They will go out and retain quality assurance experts. We have a number of them in this

Province, a number of them in the field. They will make sure this is done right and properly. The good news, as stated before, is there is no need to reinvent the wheel. This has been done by other health care professions. So they have some guidance they can look to there, as well as going outside the Province. As I am undoubtedly sure that this is already being done elsewhere.

I do not see the need right now to belabour this. Pending any questions we may have in the Committee stage or we may get later on, I do not know. Sometimes the only drawback is that by the time we talk about this and have questions, there is not enough time for the public to maybe give us input. From what I understand, the people who are subject to this are part of the process. I am satisfied with that, if that is indeed the case, and I think people should be as well.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I look forward to the Committee stage as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am very pleased and delighted to stand in this House of Assembly this afternoon to speak to Bill 32, An Act to Amend the Registered Nurses Act, 2008.

First of all, as usual, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say a great big thank you to the people of the District of Baie Verte – Springdale for their ongoing and continued support. It is an honour and a privilege to stand in this House any time.

Furthermore, I would also like to thank the minister and his officials for their briefing this morning. Albeit, I was not there because I was attending another function at city hall on behalf of the minister. Actually, it was the Food Security Network AGM. I found that very informative, Mr. Speaker, this morning.

First of all, I will read the explanatory note. This is what it says, Mr. Speaker. “This Bill

would amend the Registered Nurses Act, 2008 to add regulation making authority respecting quality assurance; add quality assurance provisions to enhance public protection and accountability; and allow the complaints authorization committee to refer an allegation to the quality assurance committee.”

Mr. Speaker, before I begin my comments again, I simply want to acknowledge and recognize and applaud the efforts of physicians, nurse practitioners, RNs, LPNs, personal care workers, all health providers right across this great Province of ours for their genuine, competent, safe, quality of care, tender and compassionate care that they give to the residents of this Province of ours. They go above and beyond the call of duty every single day. I am sure everybody in this hon. House here recognizes that fact and do appreciate all the work they do in providing tender, loving, compassionate care to the people of this Province.

Mr. Speaker, health profession governing bodies are responsible for the regulation of health professions in this Province. They are responsible for establishing standards of conduct and practice for their members. They are also responsible for registering individuals who meet the health profession’s educational, training, and certification requirements. Only those individuals who meet these requirements are permitted to practice a regulated health profession. These regulatory bodies fulfill an important role for the people of this Province who avail of the services of health care professionals every single day.

One key area for the regulators of a health profession is to protect the public, Mr. Speaker, through the administration of the disciplinary process set out in its governing statute. Each health profession governing statute contains a detailed, disciplinary process that is generally consistent right across all health professions. The process to be followed in each of these is set out in a very clear, concise fashion.

The process begins with an allegation that a health professional has engaged in conduct deserving of sanction. The registrar, with the consent of the complainant and the health professional, may resolve the complaint; however, if it is not resolved, the complaint is

referred to the complaints authorization committee to conduct an investigation. Where there are reasonable grounds, following the investigation, to believe that the health professional has engaged in conduct deserving of sanction, the complaint may be referred to an adjudication tribunal for a hearing. There is a requirement in all of the health profession governing statutes that hearings be held in public unless the adjudication tribunal decides to exclude the public.

In circumstances where the consequence of possible disclosure of personal matters of a party to the complaint or to a witness outweigh the preference to hold the hearing in public, the adjudication tribunal may decide to exclude the public from the hearing or part of the hearing, Mr. Speaker.

Where a health professional has been found guilty of conduct deserving of sanction, the adjudication tribunal has the ability to make the following types of orders: it may order that the health professional be suspended for a fixed period of time that he or she may meet certain conditions imposed by the adjudication tribunal; it may order that the health professional surrender his or her certificate and that his or her name be taken from the registrar; and may order that the health professional may pay a fine.

An adjudication tribunal may also require a health professional to obtain medical treatment; obtain counselling, including substance abuse counselling or treatment; engage in continuing education; and permit periodic inspection of records relating to his or her practice. These orders play an important role in the protection of the public, Mr. Speaker.

The amendments set out in Bill 32 will authorize the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador to also engage in a process of quality assurance with a registered nurse. A quality assurance committee will be established that will be responsible for carrying out quality assurance reviews related to a registered nurse's practice. Quality assurance provisions are currently in five of the health profession statutes. These are the Psychologists Act, 2005; the Health Professions Act; the Medical Act, 2011; the Pharmacy Act, 2012; and the Optometry Act, 2012.

With the adoption of the amendments to the Registered Nurses Act, 2008, there will be more than 10,000 health professionals from twelve health professions who could be required to participate in quality assurance reviews, Mr. Speaker. In cases where areas of concern are identified with respect to a registered nurse's practice which do not meet the threshold of conduct deserving of sanction, a quality assurance review will now be conducted.

The primary goal of the quality assurance provisions, including the establishment of the committee, Mr. Speaker, is to strengthen and improve the practices of registered nurses and, ultimately, provide better protection for the people who receive care from registered nurses in this Province of ours.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, Bill 32 enables the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador to fulfill its statutory mandate by ensuring registered nurses in this Province continue to provide the highest level of care to the patients they serve by allowing the association to deal with concerns at an earlier stage before they become conduct deserving of sanction under the disciplinary process.

I support Bill 32. I ask all members in this hon. House to join me in supporting Bill 32.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I am pleased to stand and speak to Bill 32, An Act to Amend the Registered Nurses Act, 2008. I first of all want to thank the staff from the Department of Health and Community Services for meeting with us this morning and giving us a briefing on this act to be sure that we were ready to speak to it this afternoon, and to cover any questions that we might have had.

I have to say that I did not have a lot of questions with regard to the bill that is before us

this afternoon because it is something that makes such common sense. Obviously, I am going to be supporting it.

I remember back in 2011 we passed a similar thing in the medical services act and had a debate there about the whole issue of having quality assurance committees. We discussed other things in that act at that time if I remember correctly.

The important thing is that what we are seeing here is something which is at the heart of professionalism, and that makes me feel good. Any professional group, and certainly the registered nurses are a very important professional group in our society, would want to make sure that everything they do and everything their members do is of the highest quality. As any professional group does, they would have a sense of pride in their work, and would want to make sure that anybody who is part of their group, who is part of their association, is also always showing the best that one can do or can give to the people they are serving.

I think the fact that government worked very closely with the registered nurses association of the Province is important because it should give the people of the Province a sense of comfort that both the government and the registered nurses association are concerned that people of the Province are getting the best possible care from people in the health care system.

I am not going to go through the kind of detail my colleagues have done because I do not think that needs to be repeated, but I do think I would like to once again say that what is important about the quality assurance committee is that it is at a different level than the disciplinary committee. That would already have been covered in the act that was already there. I see it almost like a preventive measure because by the time somebody has to be disciplined by their professional association, it seems to me the behaviour has come to an extreme that has led to an act that has really hurt others.

What I see with having the quality assurance committee is people are able to bring forward an issue, a concern that is not yet at the point maybe where somebody has done real harm but

red alerts are being raised. The quality assurance committee is the body that can take those red alerts, look at what is going on, and make a decision as to whether or not there is some kind of remediation that needs to happen in the life of the professional.

I would like to read, because people watching us right now probably do not have this act in front of them. They could go online, of course. As we are doing our discussion, they could go online to the House of Assembly and find the bill and follow it with us, but not everybody has that capacity. I know a lot of people who do watch us during debate probably would be interested in knowing what it is that will get covered if somebody is investigated by the quality assurance committee and that individual is found to be lacking in some area with regard to the quality of the work they are doing.

I am going to read out one section from the act because I think it is important. I said this act should give a sense of comfort to people that those in the health care system, the medical professions, both doctors, physicians, registered nurses, and other medical professions really want to give quality care. I am going to read section 35.3 from the bill we are discussing today. "The quality assurance committee may itself initiate a quality assurance review of a registered nurse or his or her practice or at the request of the Director of Professional Conduct Review or the complaints authorization committee." There are three bodies in this act that would have the authority to initiate a quality assurance review.

"In connection with a quality assurance review, the quality assurance committee may", and this is important. This is what they may demand of the person who is being evaluated. I will use that word. They may "require a registered nurse," – require, not just recommend but require – "or another person who has information pertaining to or possession of records that relate to the registered nurse's practice, to provide information, including patient records, for inspection or review and to permit them to be copied by the committee or a person appointed by the committee for the purpose". That is an extremely important piece of power that the committee has.

Also, the committee may order a registered nurse – not recommend but, “order a registered nurse to undergo an examination, evaluation, assessment or review of his or her professional practices or capacity or fitness to practice, to the extent and under the circumstances required by the committee”.

It may also “engage in periodic or random reviews or audits of a registered nurse’s performance including the consequential review of patient records”. It may also order, again not recommend, but “order a registered nurse to (i) obtain counselling, including substance abuse counselling, until the registered nurse can demonstrate to the committee, or another body or a person designated by the committee, that a condition related to the counselling has been overcome”.

Also, order the registered nurse to “(ii) obtain medical treatment and authorize a person participating in the provision of that treatment to report on it to the committee, (iii) complete a course of studies or an educational or training program, (iv) restrict his or her registered nursing practice, (v) obtain supervised clinical experience as directed by the committee and to the satisfaction of the committee, (vi) to continue his or her registered nursing practice under conditions the committee may specify, or (vii) report his or her compliance with an order of the committee and authorize a person to report to the committee on whether he or she is complying with an order.”

This is all very important because it shows the committee has powers to make sure that actions are taken. That is extremely important.

My colleague from Burgeo – La Poile talked about the template that was used. The staff from the department gave us that information this morning in the briefing. The template for quality assurance in this act is a template that was used in the Medical Act, an act that I referred to a minute ago, an act that we discussed in 2011 in this House, the medical services act. The template in the medical services act, which is now being used here in the Registered Nurses Act, is one that we were told the registered nurses association themselves wanted.

There is another template that covers four other bodies: the health professionals, optometrists, pharmacists, and psychologists. The provisions in the template for those four acts are much more general. The template used in the medical services act, and which is now being adapted in the Registered Nurses Act, is very prescriptive and gives powers of order to the committee.

The committee is actually – and this is an important point. The committee and a person appointed by the committee – because the committee does have the powers to appoint registered nurses to work with them. The committee and a person appointed by the committee “shall have the powers, privileges and immunities that are conferred on a commissioner under the Public Inquiries Act, 2006.” This is a very serious body that is being set up here in this act. I think that is what should give a sense of comfort to people.

I think people should also get a sense of comfort from the fact that the registered nurses association of this Province wanted this legislation. They wanted this level of prescription that is in this act with regard to the quality assurance committee.

For that reason, knowing how much the association wants this, and knowing this has been carefully looked at – and not looked at once, but is a piece of work that was looked at when the medical services act was brought in. Adaptations obviously are made in this act to reflect that we are talking about a separate group. Knowing all of that, we should have real comfort that the concern for quality is high in the medical profession.

We may want to remember something else, I think, which should also be something that we are happy about, to remember that this concern for quality assurance was first something that came out from the Cameron inquiry. The Cameron inquiry addressed the whole issue of quality assurance. The addition of a quality assurance committee and procedure to the Registered Nurses Act is just another case of addressing the recommendations from the Cameron inquiry.

I think we will always have to be on our toes about that. We will always have to make sure

we are providing the highest standards in any profession, but especially in the medical profession, and to protect patient safety. At the same time, we have to protect the professional as well. I think that is exactly what a quality assurance committee will do because of what I said earlier about the preventive nature of having the quality assurance committee.

If somebody is running into trouble in his or her life that is affecting their work and somebody is observing that, that can now be picked up and it can be dealt with by the quality assurance, and in a helping way the person can be worked with, the person can be given options to make sure that he or she stops something right at the source instead of having a problem that escalates to the point where disciplinary action is needed.

I think it is extremely important to note that something to be brought to the quality assurance committee and they could look at what is being brought to them with regard to a particular individual, and they could actually decide things have gotten to a point where discipline is needed. If that happens, the quality assurance committee will pass the case over to the disciplinary committee which, of course, still exists in the act.

I think that is important for people to know as well because that also is something that would bring comfort to the general public, that they know everything has been thought about so the quality assurance committee is not there to stop discipline from happening when discipline might be necessary, it is there – this is my language; it is not the language in the act. As I see it, it is there in a preventative measure to make sure we can actually stop the actions that could lead to discipline, that we would want to have the professional person working at the top of his or her ability and be helped to do that.

I think those are the main points I would like to make, Mr. Speaker. I could repeat points that have been made by my colleagues, but I do not think that is necessary. They did a great job.

I thank the minister for giving a good explanation in the beginning and for his staff today because they were very helpful. As I said, I am supporting this bill.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed a pleasure to get up, my first time getting up in this session, representing the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, like I always say.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I do not think anyone in this House today will go against this bill. I think it is a great bill. It is a positive bill. It is a positive step that we are taking here today. I want to thank the people in the Department of Health; this morning, they gave us a great review of this new act that we are bringing in here.

Anything we do to make the lives or anything in the health care system – because the health care system is probably the most complex thing we have in our lives. Our health care is so important to all of us. It is important to our loved ones when we go to the hospitals and see them, that we are assured they are getting the best possible care they can.

I know, through personal experiences I had, you go to the hospital and when you see a nurse going and giving that extra thing that they do and their professionalism they show and the care they show to a patient, it gives great comfort to the family. It gives great comfort to the people there in hospital knowing they are well taken care of.

I speak from personal experience, Mr. Speaker. My mother was a nurse for thirty-two years. She was a Public Health Nurse in the Torbay, Flatrock, Pouch Cove, and Bauline area. Back then, in her time, we had no doctors down there then, there were no doctors' offices, and I think she did a little bit more than even the nursing part of it. I can remember nights she left our home – I drove her a scattered time; my brothers

drove her – and she just went to comfort people who were sick in their homes.

The majority of our nurses are the same way. When you become a nurse, it seems like it is a calling for a lot of people and they really take that calling seriously. Right now, in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have more nurses than ever before. I believe the minister said there were 6,800 nurses in the system right now. That is just registered nurses. We have LPNs; I think there are 2,300.

It is important that we put in place standards for nurses to make sure all nurses – I am sure everyone in this House can attest they have been dealing with the health care system, because we all do, and they can really say I have went to so and so and that nurse was unbelievable or this nurse was so and so.

I was just recently in hospital myself and there was four of us in the one room. There were three different nurses taking care of us. They all have their own little ways and, sometimes, nurses do things a little bit different. When you deal with the number of nurses that you are dealing with – 6,800 – sometimes not all people, no matter what profession you are in, not teachers, lawyers, politicians, everything, not everyone is at the same standard.

Some people have people skills and some people do not have people skills. If a person who does not have the people skills to communicate with a patient it is very, very important – so perhaps if there is a problem there with that, there can be some counselling and some mentoring or whatever. This can be done through this committee. This is what this is set up for: quality control, to make sure that there is a standard there and this standard is followed.

It could be something as simple as how they treat the patient – they could be a great nurse; you could be a great doctor. Some doctors have the skills to get there, they are great doctors; but next to that bedside they are different all together, but their knowledge and what they do is great, and the same thing with nurses.

Sometimes if there is a problem there, this committee can do it. This committee can set up and say, listen here, we have some complaints

about your manner around the bedside. This can be done through this quality control and it could be just a matter of going back and doing a little bit of counselling, a little bit of training or something like this. It is a great thing to do.

The other thing that I just want to emphasize because I know most of the colleagues here in the House already spoke about it, but it is also an opportunity for a peer, another nurse, to look at another person there and say we have records to keep. You have to keep a record. The records are so important so that when it goes into the system everything is filed properly and when you go back to your family doctor or you go back to your clinic to get everything checked out, everything is there, put in. It is important, too, with medications and stuff like this.

Again, I am sure the majority of nurses in this Province do a fantastic job, but if there is a case that somebody is not doing the proper work and a peer sees it, this is an opportunity for them to notify and say the records are not being kept properly. Because it is all about the patients. It is all about providing the best possible care that we can, and that is what this is doing; this is supplying the best possible care that can be provided.

Again, like I said, I always go back to my mother and I always remember the things she did, the little things she did as a nurse. I was always amazed with the hours and the things done to make sure someone was comforted. No matter if it was going just to have a coffee with them, it was something that comforted people. Nurses are like that in our system today. I was in the hospital a little while ago, and a nurse came in and just had a general conversation with me at the bedside for a little bit. It felt good, and that is the way they are. That is what we need to make sure our patients are feeling good, are positive about our system, and they are not there and they are not angry with somebody or they are not getting the proper care. So, I just wanted to get up today.

The Member for Burgeo – La Poile brought up an important point, too. He said this is not going to be proclaimed right away. I asked the same question this morning. It will probably take about nine months to do it. That is a good thing because that is going to give time for the

committee to put in place the proper people, and to be able to look and say, okay, these are the standards this committee is going to look at. It will be so important to make sure the committee does its proper work.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back and talk about nurses in general. When we have 6,800 nurses in this Province – and I have to applaud our government because I know that over the years in the nursing profession there was a shortage. I look at the new long-term care home facility where they are looking for nurses. It is a great job, it is a great job for individuals, it is a profession that you are very proud of, and nearly all of them are proud of what they do.

This legislation will be able to give them the tools to do their job better. On behalf of anyone in my family who has dealt with the nursing profession, I want to say thank you to all the nurses out there because I think they do a fantastic job. They work hard at what they do and we rely on them. The health care system in this Province is important to everyone, and anyone who is sick. It is important that our loved ones get taken care of.

I would like to just be able to thank the nurses in this Province and, hopefully, this is a tool that will help them in their future make sure that the quality is there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Like the Member for Cape St. Francis, I was also blessed to have a mother who was a nurse. I think that when your family members are nurses, it gives you a very close insight into what they do. My mother was a nurse, grandmother a nurse, two aunts nurses, and a nephew who just graduated in nursing.

Also, in my legal career in another province I also had the opportunity to represent nurses at disciplinary hearings on two occasions, which I think looking at this type of legislation with this

type of a committee could well have been headed off by a quality assurance review. Because the quality assurance review which is contemplated is something which, as the Leader of the Third Party said, falls short of something that would constitute a violation under the act, something that would engage discipline – well, it could, but it is something which is more remedial before there is a more serious issue that arises in the nurses' practice of nursing.

Yes, I say practice of nursing because we think of doctors as practicing or lawyers as practicing, but nurses also practice, but they practice nursing. They do not diagnose, although nurse practitioners are certainly moving in that area; and they do not generally treat, although, as I say, nurse practitioners are moving into that area.

Nurses generally nurse and provide the type of care that is required for patients who may have other issues. They may have post-surgical home care requirements, they may be residents in extended care homes, they may be in hospitals, and they may be served by the medical profession including nurses in a variety of areas.

As the practice of nursing is becoming more complex and is evolving more, it is more important that they have more autonomy and that is exactly as the Member for Burgeo – La Poile pointed out, to be a professional self-governing body, which they are with this. That also means they assume the responsibility for oversight, peer oversight, and review.

In the clauses that are referred to here it is easy to see where if somebody filed a report because they thought that such and such a nurse really needs to have, in this case, what we will call a quality assurance review because that may head off a future problem.

By way of example, Mr. Speaker, when we look at disciplinary issues – if we look at disciplinary issues involving the police, I have been advised by a police chief that the most frequent issue is incivility. The most frequent complaint is incivility because the person who is being apprehended by the police officer was not happy about the officer's manner. It is not that easy to be nice to somebody that you are arresting so they like the outcome.

While nurses are not doing this, nurses are put into situations where, in cases that I am aware of, a nurse may have worked for the last twelve hours, all through the night, 8 at night until 8 a.m., maybe in a nursing home, many elderly people, some suffering from a variety of dementias and complications and whatever befalls many of us if we live to that age. On meeting the family at 8:00 a.m. the family is all chipper and eager to see – the family may be dissatisfied because they feel that my mother, father, or whatever has not had enough bedside attention.

It may well be that nurse has had to deal with scores of residents. Not just a few, not just a few dozen, but maybe fifty, or sixty, or seventy, or more. That nurse may well have overseen, licensed practical nurses may have seen other individuals on that nightshift and might not be as pleasant as the family would like the nurse to be.

Immediately if the family is upset because they are dealing with a loved one who may well be in end-stage renal failure and if the nurse does not present as the public would expect that nurse to present to them, then disciplinary issues may arise. It may be a simple quality control issue. I know that sounds sort of clinical to talk about a quality control issue when you are talking about somebody with a loved one who may well be dying, but these are the situations that nurses are in.

The nurse may be seen to have commented inappropriately. By that, nurses generally will have a full knowledge and understanding of what the patient is dealing with without necessarily disclosing this to the family members. It may be inappropriate for them to comment on the medical aspects. Only the doctor can do that. It may be easy to comment in a way, to say something to the effect that your mom or your dad just had brain cancer or whatever.

This may be crushing news to somebody who should have been delivered by a doctor and not necessarily by a nurse. It may be something that a quality control review, which is contemplated by this legislation, would make available. In the act as it stands, before this act introduces quality control, as the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi pointed out, it may be something which

should not necessarily engage a disciplinary proceeding, but it really needs to be dealt with before the situation may escalate and result in a disciplinary proceeding.

It also may be something, by reading this legislation if it says that this quality assurance committee can “order a registered nurse to (i) obtain counselling, including substance abuse counselling, until the registered nurse can demonstrate to the committee, or another body or a person designated by the committee, that a condition related to the counselling has been overcome”.

It may well turn out that it is a co-worker. It is somebody who – and nurses are people. Nurses can just as easily become substance dependent. Particularly the long hours, heavy stresses, and potential injuries that many nurses have in the course of their work. It may well be the upper body, back injuries from handling patients who may well be 200 or 300 pounds. Looking after them, a nurse may become injured and may become dependent on painkillers, for example. That may not yet be a disciplinary issue, but it might well be important that the nurse be required to address this issue at a level which is lower than a straight-up disciplinary issue.

Mr. Speaker, this is for sure not only to preserve quality assurance. It is also to provide another avenue so societally we can move forward with our thousands of nurses who are absolutely crucial to the health care system. As we expect nurses to shoulder a more complex and potentially higher burden, then – the cost of our health care budget today is approximately 40 per cent of our budget.

If we need to maintain cost controls while providing the same level of quality health care, then nurses and nurse practitioners will be expected to assume more responsibilities, more areas of responsibility, and with the increased requirement for professionalism and the level of services they provide, this type of a quality assurance review I think would be very helpful and probably should exist in many professions. Although with nurses being so close to the person receiving the care, often on a one-on-one, hour-by-hour, day-after-day basis, this is a very useful piece of legislation.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have no reservations whatsoever to support this piece of legislation.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is great to stand today to offer a few comments, a few personal viewpoints to this legislation. It is an amendment to Bill 32, the Registered Nurses Act, 2008. It is going to add in some provisions that would really guarantee or put in a provider that our patients who have the one-on-one contact with our nurses in our health care facilities, Mr. Speaker, would receive the best possible care that they can receive.

That is what this amendment is for. It is establishing a quality assurance committee, and the committee would have a responsibility to carry out certain reviews and to ask for certain pieces of information if a nurse in her day-to-day practice is witnessed by a fellow nurse, a physician, or a patient who would offer some observation that would mean we need to intervene. It is like an intervention, Mr. Speaker, to allow for growth and for remediation. These ideas are necessary.

Quality assurance comes about, from the manufacturing world, when a product is created and people want an assurance they are getting the best possible product for their money. Now you take that analogy and apply it to the health care profession, then people need to know that when they enter a hospital or a clinic or elsewhere, that when they get there the person who is going to meet them, the person who is going to be in most direct contact with them – they are not going to have as much time with the doctor, Mr. Speaker, as they are with the nurse, and if they are admitted to the hospital they will spend most of the one-on-one contact they will have will be with the nurse, whether it be an RN or an LPN.

That direct contact requires, as the Member for St. Barbe said, the last speaker before me, that the nurse has to act in a very difficult situation

sometimes. The amount of knowledge she is supposed to have and the observations she is supposed to have, is supposed to have consequences for the patient. It is a very subjective call sometimes, based on evidence she ascertains from her observations and reports of others, but sometimes these calls have to be made very quickly.

In the carrying out of her duties, the nurse needs to know she has support, as well as some rules and obligations she needs to follow. This person who is the primary contact, Mr. Speaker, with our patients has to have the best up-to-date training and the best mannerisms to deal with the patients under their care.

This quality assurance committee, Mr. Speaker, does not just offer suggestions to the nurse that she may take under their advisement. The power of this committee means the nurse shall comply with some of the recommendations they may have.

In subsection 35.3, Mr. Speaker, it sets out some of the powers this committee may have. I just want to lay that out, put it there for the people of the Province, the patients in our Province to understand that this is what this really looks like and what can happen if they have a complaint.

This committee will have the power to access patient records in the investigation of their complaint or their observation; require records to be provided, Mr. Speaker, in order for a registered nurse to do an examination, or undergo practice evaluation or an assessment of his or her fitness to practice; they may engage in performance audits and other counselling as may be needed; they may order someone to obtain medical treatment or to complete a course; they may even restrict practice of a nurse.

I just felt that these few comments need to get out there so our patients, Mr. Speaker, who go into our hospitals and our clinics know that this amendment to this legislation is providing a mechanism that is going to give them greater safety and greater care. It is for that reason that I very proudly stand here today to support our minister.

I would like to thank the officials who gave us the briefing this morning to all of us, Mr.

Speaker, because everybody refers to them for the thoughts that we might have to put into this. We rely on the comments from these officials. We also rely, and what is more important every day, is our direct contact with these nurses. We know that we are getting the best possible care that we can. I will support this amendment to this bill today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services speaks now he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank members for participating in the debate today. Thanks to members on both sides of the House from all parties.

I would like to respond to a couple of the points that were raised, and I will just make some general closing comments as well. The question was raised by the Member for Burgeo – La Poile around timeline. He is correct. Based on experiences with other pieces of legislation and other professionals who have gone through this process, we estimate it will take six to nine months to be fully ready to get the committee in place to do the necessary training, to do the necessary education.

I feel confident in saying it will all be in place in 2015, and that we can enact this legislation in 2015. It is important to ensure we have all the provisions in place to conduct quality assurance reviews. They require the co-operation of the health professionals as well. They require other people to provide information and documentation as well.

A couple of issues came up in the briefings this morning that I wanted to quickly mention as well. There was question around the structure of the quality assurance committee that will be put in place. It has not been confirmed yet, but it

will include public representation, I can assure hon. members of that.

There was also some discussion during the debate today and also in the briefings this morning around whether we are following the same template regarding quality assurance provisions. I thank the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi for her positive comments. Nurses did choose the model of quality assurance that we proposed in this bill. I certainly do agree that is a positive thing. Quality assurance provisions are currently in place in five of the health profession statutes: the Psychologists Act, 2005; the Health Professions Act; the Medical Act, 2011, which the member referenced; the Optometry Act, 2012; and, the Pharmacy Act, 2012 as well.

I again do want to thank members for participating in the debate. This bill and actually the act itself contain provisions which establish a disciplinary process to be followed when dealing with allegations that a nurse has engaged in conduct deserving of sanction. What we are doing here through Bill 32 is amending the Registered Nurses Act, 2008 to add provisions which will authorize the association to engage in a process of quality assurance with a registered nurse. I know that this will be well received by the association, which has been actively involved in this process as well.

I can assure members of the House and I can assure the public that patient safety and the quality of patient care are two top priorities for our department. These amendments will further enhance both safety and care for the residents of our Province.

I hope that all members of the House will join me in supporting this legislation, which will amend the Registered Nurses Act, 2008. I look forward to further debate as we move into the next phase.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt a motion 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 Registered Nurses Act, 2008. (Bill 32)

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: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008", read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 32)

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that the House now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 32, An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is this House does now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 32.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker left the Chair.

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Cross): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 32, An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008". (Bill 32)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 4 inclusive?

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 4 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 4 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that the Committee rise and report Bill 32, An Act To Amend The Registered Nurses Act, 2008.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 32 and ask leave to sit again.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, Mr. Speaker returned to the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): The hon. the Member for Bonavista North.

MR. CROSS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matter to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 32 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 32 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. KING: Now, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MR. KING: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I would like to go to the Order Paper and call Order 3, second reading of a bill, An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission, Bill 33.

I so move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the said bill be now read the second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission". (Bill 33)

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

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to read the introduction to Bill 33. In the explanatory notes of the bill, “This Bill would enact the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission Act. The commission would have unified jurisdiction with other Atlantic provinces for the regulation of harness racing in the province.”

Mr. Speaker, in Newfoundland and Labrador we have only had, and still only have, one harness racing track in the entire Province, and that is in the Goulds. It has been there for some over fifty years. A couple of things take place at that: there is obviously racing taking place there, and there is a whole process of regulation around harness racing and the betting process around those races.

A part of the regulations within the Criminal Code controls parimutuel betting. The reference particularly is Parimutuel Betting Supervision Regulations under the Criminal Code of Canada. Up until now, the regulations that have been governing, and the process to regulate and manage those activities in the Goulds, has been done by Standardbred Canada.

Under the Criminal Code, jurisdictions have a couple of options. They can bring in their own legislation, bring in their own regulatory structure to control and regulate this industry; or, in the absence of a province having its own regulations, by default, it defaults to Standardbred Canada, which is an umbrella organization responsible – or not responsible. They have a self-proclaimed mandate, not legislatively given to them, to be responsible for harness racing in the country.

They were doing this regulation for this Province up until now. They have indicated to the Province that in 2015 they intend to withdraw their services in providing this regulatory process and oversight for this industry. The Province had a couple of choices. It could decide that it wanted to bring in a whole new regulatory regime itself, put in place a structure and a mechanism to manage this industry, or it also had the option to work with

other Atlantic Provinces in becoming a part of what already is an initiative.

Under the Council of Atlantic Premiers there is a structure in place to manage harness racing within the other Atlantic Provinces, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and PEI. We, with them, have agreed that rather than us as a Province going on our own, building up the expertise, building up the regime that would be necessary to regulate this industry, we felt it was better to become a part of an umbrella organization recognizing, as I said a moment ago, we only have one racetrack in the Province. It has been there for fifty years. No one else has entered the industry.

The notion that we will have large numbers of people requiring a large regulatory oversight body was not really practical. Being very practical of what was necessary here, we are bringing in this particular piece of legislation to be a part of the Atlantic Provinces.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, while we are introducing this bill in our House, and this is a new piece of legislation for us, there is a piece of legislation that looks just like this in the other provinces. They will proceed to make an amendment to theirs to stop referring to it as the Maritime provinces, but the Atlantic Provinces. The legislation will mirror what we are doing here.

Basically, what this proposed legislation will do is help us establish an authority to govern, to regulate, and ensure the integrity of harness racing. While the Province is joining with other Atlantic Provinces in doing this, it is important to point out that the sport of harness and the wagering that accompanies it is a highly regulated – as I said a moment ago, it is covered under the Criminal Code of Canada. Gambling is unlawful, unless it is conducted and managed by the Province or a body that is authorized by the Province to manage it on its behalf. That is what we are doing here as a part of this Atlantic Provinces organization.

As I said a moment ago, the Maritime Provinces Harness Racing Commission is the authority that will be regulating harness racing in all of Atlantic Canada when this particular piece of legislation hopefully gets passed by this House.

Its mandate is to regulate horse racing, to protect the health and safety and welfare of the horses, the racing participants, and the racing officials, and to safeguard the interests of the sporting public. The Maritime provinces formed this commission to oversee the sport of horse racing in their region, and now it is extended into Newfoundland and Labrador.

Standardbred Canada, as I said, has been doing this since about 2005 on behalf of the Province, and they have indicated to us after 2015, they do not have an interest and do not want to be a part of that process and that oversight process and providing the regulatory structure that is necessary to make this particular venture legal under the Criminal Code.

Mr. Speaker, this commission would be an agency of the Council of Atlantic Premiers. That council was put in place to promote Atlantic Canada issues at a national level, so it has multiple functions and roles within this. Initially, to get this thing off the ground, it was recognized that the current Maritime commission has been in place for a while. They have put together their structures, their administrative structures, their letterhead, their Web site. All of their mechanisms are in place focusing and referencing only the Maritime provinces.

In the first year that we engage with them to do this, we have some transition cost associated with this move, and on an ongoing basis it will cost the Province roughly about \$25,000 a year for our participation. Obviously there is a fee structure that is in place, and that fee structure is driven by the dollar value of the wagers made at this location. So, we estimate based on past activity at this track that our annual cost for this, our participation in this Atlantic regulatory commission, would be roughly \$25,000. In the first year there will be some one-time transitional costs and for those of you who might recall the discussion during the Estimates Committees in this year's Budget, there was a discussion in the House about a \$50,000 allocation that was set aside to deal with this transition and the normal operating costs that will be incurred for our participation in this process.

The money was voted for in this past year's allocation. As I said, on an ongoing basis, beyond this year, we estimate that cost to be around \$25,000. The Department of Finance, as we are in carriage of this particular bill and we are bringing it forward to the House, we have been very pleased that we have had the help and support and the co-operation of the Newfoundland Harness Horse Owners Association, together with the St. John's Racing and Entertainment Centre. We have also had some discussions with the Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, and the Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development have also been actively involved in some discussions with us because this is a business venture.

As I said a moment ago, it has a long history of some fifty years of providing an entertainment, a sporting venue, but also a business venture in the Goulds. It employs about eight people year-round and in the summertime it could peak to about twenty-five people, many of them working part-time; but it is a business enterprise with a tremendous history and a long track record of success – pardon the pun, but it has had a successful fifty-year history.

Mr. Speaker, the piece of legislation akin to this is new to the Province and it is several pages of clauses and provisions that I would only been too glad when we get into Committee to respond to questions that may exist. As I said a moment ago, this particular bill that we are introducing here is a piece of legislation that exists in Nova Scotia, a piece of legislation in New Brunswick, and a piece of legislation in PEI that mirrors this. They have now moved forward to amend their acts to reflect the new name so it will be encompassing all of the Atlantic Provinces.

Mr. Speaker, I guess, in summary, what we are trying to do here now is to create, through legislation, a regulatory regime that will allow an already existing business to continue, to allow an industry to continue to operate legally in the Province, because there is an obligation under the Criminal Code of Canada to ensure that if such operations exist in your jurisdiction there must be a regulatory regime around it to ensure compliance with the Criminal Code.

What we are doing here, Mr. Speaker, is introducing a bill that will do just that for us, to ensure that this operation remains compliant and able to operate within the Criminal Code, and continue to provide the entertainment and the sporting opportunities for those people who participate in this venue.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments. I look forward to members of the House contributing to the debate, and if there are some questions that arise in Committee, I will only be too glad to answer them.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 33, An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission.

I thank the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for giving the overview of this new piece of legislation that harmonizes with the other Atlantic Provinces, which would allow the continuation of harness racing in the Province, because this is a highly regulated industry and certainly would need to have some overseeing of regulatory bodies and to comply with the Criminal Code of Canada.

With the one racetrack that we have in the Province, which the minister had highlighted, is in the Goulds for approximately fifty years or longer. There was in the Estimates debate listed a line item of \$50,000. I would like – and maybe I will get into this in Committee, or maybe the Finance Minister in his closing remarks will be able to elaborate on the \$50,000, the one-time cost, saying that on a go-forward basis it will be \$25,000.

Would the member be contributing money towards this particular membership fee when it comes to the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commissioner? Is the Province paying 100 per cent of the membership cost and is the total cost \$25,000, or will it actually be less than that? There is administrative, or travel, or remuneration for members on the commission as such.

Reading through this particular piece of legislation, it does have a number of definitions and it does outline the process of which this new structure would fall under for our own entity. Previously we were regulated under Standardbred Canada since 2005, but Standardbred was not happy and certainly felt a bit conflicted, which the minister did not mention, in terms of continuation of such a service and continue that level of regulation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I have lived in other provinces, such as Alberta, where they have had regulation of the industry. Seeing this is not about – as the minister talked about, when it comes to a form of gambling, it does have to be highly regulated and controlled. That is why we need to have the highest level of standards possible.

I am pleased to see there was some means to find an entity that would be willing to work with the Province to ensure there would be continuation of a business that has been around for a half century. Given that the infrastructure is already in place, and Newfoundland and Labrador is joining them to ensure there is adequate oversight, the legislation in the other Atlantic Provinces, as the minister stated, would be changing to reflect this so that we would allow having the continuation of horse racing in the Province. We were told there are, right now, seventy, eighty horses that are being raced in the Province. The Province is paying the annual membership fee through the Council of Atlantic Premiers.

This may be an opportunity when we look at other pieces of legislation as well. I had an issue and a situation in my own district when we talked about midwifery. HIROC was the insurer that would not provide liability insurance to midwives operating in a publicly funded setting. They were pulling back in a similar situation that Standardbred Canada is.

There may be an ability to work with another jurisdiction around the regulation. We have seen announcements come forward where the focus for midwifery would be around privatization. To look at the small number of midwives that we would have in the Province, if we were able to look at a similar legislation that is inter-jurisdictional, we may end up finding a

solution to allow midwives to operate in a publicly funded session, as well as we are looking at regulations in harness racing here in the Province.

Based on the information the Finance Minister has put forward, I do not see how we could not support this particular piece of legislation. With that, I will take my seat. If I have questions I will ask them in the Committee.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just have a few words myself. I think the minister has outlined this very well today. We are dealing with Bill 33, An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission.

As the minister has outlined in his remarks earlier, basically what we are doing today, Mr. Speaker, is harmonizing the regulatory body coming from the Maritime Provinces Harness Racing Commission to the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission. It is harmonization. It is a regulatory agency, Mr. Speaker. All we are doing, basically, is making sure we have a regulator for it.

As the hon. member from the Opposition pointed out, from 2005 up to most recently, the Canadian Standardbred association was the regulator and they felt like they were in a bit of a conflict of interest position. They felt like they needed to move away. This was a logical place to go to have regulation throughout Atlantic Canada.

Harness racing, Mr. Speaker, is something, as the minister has stated, has gone on in this Province for over fifty years. Being a boy from Bay Roberts, I remember very well Mr. Harry Bishop. Mr. Bishop was a prominent harness racing driver and a person who kept horses. He even made his own track in the backyard, out in his field, so he could train his horses in the springtime to get them ready to go to the track. On mid-Wednesday afternoon he would get out

of his business – he was a wholesaler – hook up the trailer, put the horses in, and off he would go to the track. I have many fond memories of this. Harness racing has gone on for a long, long time in our Province and the racetrack in the Goulds has been something.

One of the things the hon. minister did not mention is the fact that the amendment has already gone through the Nova Scotia Legislature. Nova Scotia has already amended their legislation to allow for the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission. Its mandate is to regulate horse racing in Atlantic Canada. It is something very simple. It is to protect the health of the horses. It is to protect the health of the drivers. It is also to protect the well-being of racing officials.

I know there has been some training taking place. We had a judge leave here and go to PEI recently to get new training, train to be a better judge to make sure that the racing was done fairly, and the drivers and the horses were better protected. These are to safeguard the interests of the sporting public.

Again, over the last fifty years, Mr. Speaker, I do not know, I would assume there are members on both sides of the House have taken the opportunity to go to the raceway and see it in action. There have been thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people maybe, who over the last fifty years have taken the opportunity to go to the raceway and watch the horses race.

It has been something that has gone on for a long time. Mr. Speaker, I think this legislation just speaks to the fact that we do now have a regulatory agency which is standard throughout the Atlantic Provinces. I think, based on the comments from the member from the opposite side, they are supporting this legislation. It brings us into harmony.

There are no changes at the track. There are absolutely no changes at the track. It will carry on as it carried on for years, Mr. Speaker. In terms of going to the track, an average person walking in, they would see no particular change. It is just a regulatory agency that would oversee harness racing within Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the minister did speak about the \$50,000 fee, and it may be \$25,000. Just to clarify for the member of the Opposition, that would vary depending on the amount of betting that would go on. I think that fee could vary. Fifty thousand dollars right now was the estimate, but it could even be less this year, for the Opposition member. I would suggest that the minister may speak to that as we go along. It was a cost of doing business, a cost of getting ourselves within the Atlantic harness racing association.

A number of departments were consulted. The Harness Horse Owners Association was consulted, St. John's Racing and Entertainment was consulted, as well as a various number of government departments. Mr. Speaker, this is a good thing. It regulates the industry, and it allows for those enthusiasts who wish to speak and race to continue.

Mr. Speaker, with that I will sit down and take my seat.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I am happy to stand and speak to Bill 33, the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission. I will not have a lot to say. I do support it, obviously. The Minister of Finance did a great explanation of the bill itself, and the MHA for The Straits – White Bay North as well.

I will not repeat things that have been said, but just to say I think it is extremely important that if we have anything to do with people laying their money down and making bets et cetera, it has to be regulated, obviously. It has always been regulated.

With the changes that came about since 2005, we had Standardbred Canada that was in charge of the regulation here in Newfoundland and Labrador. When they decided they wanted to get out I think the government here in this

Province made a very wise decision to look to what existed in the Maritimes and to join with them. It made all the sense in the world.

The Maritime commission, as has been said, was already in existence. There was legislation in place. Joining with them to have all the same regulations for Atlantic Canada was the way to go. We probably need to look at that for a lot of things, Mr. Speaker, in terms of working with the Atlantic Provinces in putting things in place that are beneficial to all of the provinces.

As I said, I do not think I will take up time repeating what has been said. It is a detailed piece of legislation. It is technical and I think that people – I use this language in speaking to the former bill – should have some sense of comfort knowing that we are well regulated. Even though we only have the one racetrack here in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is still important that people know when they go there that there is a commission which is regulating it.

It is a place where somebody is looking after them because of the commission. I think that is what is important. They know they are going someplace where they are not going to be cheated, where they feel safe, and where they can enjoy this social event knowing that they are not going to be victimized. I think that is what the regulation is all about.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I assure the Minister of Finance that we are supporting the bill.

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): The hon. the Member for Bonavista North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, we visited the office and spoke to the officials to get some information on this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. It was something that was totally new to me. I am obviously not built like a jockey, I am built more like a horse; therefore, I would not have been experiencing much success at the racetrack.

What I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, is that this is not something that is new to the Province.

This has been on the go for fifty-plus years racing at Goulds. It is like a tradition now. Even in some of the names of restaurants and places around town in the city here, the connection with racing and harness racing, and the way that the sport has evolved – and it is a sport. A lot of people, as the Member for Port au Port mentioned, spend quite a bit of time and personal time training their horses, preparing for races, and making sure that the people who visit Goulds and visit the racetrack, do experience a high-quality performance when they get there.

The minister spoke to this, Mr. Speaker, and there are two or three comments I just want to sort of reiterate very quickly on what he spoke about. He addressed the information very quickly. In looking at the documents that we received since yesterday and the notes that we scribbled down when we were at the department, there are a few things that just an extra set of eyes might look at and be able to offer.

Since 2005, there has been no commission. Or this commission that was in place – by default Standardbred Canada regulated the horse racing. Standardbred Canada is more into promotions than they are regulations. For eight years they carried through with this activity here in our Province, Mr. Speaker. They decided they needed to move away from regulating the harness racing that was taking place in Newfoundland and Labrador, so we had to look for an alternate arrangement.

As our speaker said, we did not need to reinvent the wheel. We did not need to go and create a whole new system or a whole new commission. There was a commission that was taking place in the Maritime provinces, the Maritime Provinces Harness Racing Commission. With the paired legislation that you alluded to, Mr. Speaker – or the Member for Port de Grave alluded to – some of this may have already been successfully passed in legislation in some of our sister Legislatures.

In parallel, all four Atlantic Provinces now will have a piece of legislation that means we have a new commission. It is the Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission. Once these amendments proceed through the Legislatures, this authority will be in place to govern and regulate the harness racing industry here in our

Province, Mr. Speaker. It is not different than it would be taken care of in any of the other provinces in Atlantic Canada.

Just because there is a commission, in the legislation there is a couple of comments that we may look at – what would this commission look like, Mr. Speaker? Well, it is a body of eight individuals appointed, and they will have a unified jurisdiction throughout all four Atlantic Provinces. They would appoint a Chairperson from among their commissioners, and they would determine the locations of offices and administrative functions like that.

In a couple of other sections here throughout that part of the act, it also talks about if someone resigns from the commission, they will still stay a member until they are replaced. Therefore, the continuity of this committee will be intact, and it will not have to shut down because one or two members have decided they need to move on.

This is a seamless piece of legislation that needs to be passed through our Legislature. It will allow for business as usual, and nothing will change at the Goulds. For next summer, it will be track activity as usual, nothing really new, nothing enhanced, just governed and regulated by a commission. I support this bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Finance speaks now, he will close debate.

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank my colleagues for their comments with respect to the bill. During the discussion there were a couple of issues that arose, and I just want to provide some additional commentary and some response.

With respect to the fee structure and how we pay for this, as I said in the beginning, in the initial year there is a transition and there is an administrative transition cost that this Atlantic commission will have to incur to facilitate our becoming a part of the umbrella group. In that first year, we are going to cover those direct

costs; simple things like changing the name on a letterhead, changing the design of the Web site so it reflects our participation, just to illustrate a point.

The other components of that, what the annual cost will be for this year and future years is based on – and I used the figure of \$25,000, because there is a fee structure that is influenced by the amount of activity, betting activity that is occurring. So depending on how much activity there exists, our fees will vary based on that. What we are using as a proxy is the past couple of years experiences of the current track, we have used that number and said if that continues then we can anticipate that our costs will be around \$25,000, based on today's current fee structure.

Obviously, if the commission overall makes some adjustments in fee structures on an annual basis because of budgetary consideration, then the unit price will go up, but the principle at play here is a principle whereby our annual fees are influenced by the amount of the wagers that are occurring. If that shrinks, our fee will shrink. If it expands, our fee will expand.

Then, of course, we, as a Province, because of our participation in this regulatory regime, we are obligated to pay for those fees. The bill will come to our provincial government and we will make the contribution to the commission.

As a Province, though, what we are doing with this regulatory regime is keeping in place a business enterprise. Business enterprises, as we talked about in this House many time, creates employment activity. There is direct spending they will have. They induce certain other amounts of spending that will occur in the community and in the region. There are a group of horse owners, for example, who have those horses in this Province because we have this activity. So, they are part of our community. They raise these horses. They are spending money to do that, and the patrons of this facility come out.

It is a part of an entertainment, a sporting event, and there is revenue that that activity induces and that is where we benefit as a Province. No different than conversations we have about any other small business in the Province. So, I say,

Mr. Speaker, that is how we will then recover some of those costs. What we are really paying for is a regulatory regime here.

I think those were the only points that were raised that I thought would be important to clarify as I conclude debate on second reading. I do want to thank members of the House for their contribution and participation in the debate. I wait, as we move into Committee, if there are some very specific questions about a clause, I will only be too glad to address them for them.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission. (Bill 33)

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

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

MR. KING: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission", read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 33)

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 33, An Act Respecting

The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker left the Chair.

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Cross): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 33, An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission.

A bill, "An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission". (Bill 33)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the Minister of Finance for answering the questions I had posed previously. I would like to further know if there was any type of cost analysis done in terms of setting up our own entity versus joining this entity. Was there any review from the department on that matter; and, if so, would any documentation be made available?

As well, the bill here also talks about two members who would be appointed through the Cabinet, basically, to this commission and that it would take five members for quorum. My question is around the meetings that these individuals would have in quorum. Are there costs associated with travel, or would these meetings take place through an online component? Or, out of this \$25,000, does that include the fee for travel of board members or commission members; or is that an outside cost, and will that fall under the Department of Finance and Treasury Board?

Those would be a couple of particular questions that I have on that matter and then if I could receive a response, it would be appreciated.

Thank you.

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

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With respect to the second question first, around the meetings, the commission operates with its own autonomy, its own budget, approved by the four Atlantic Provinces. So the costs of operating administratively, which includes the commission meetings, they are all absorbed by the commission and the contributions are a pooled contribution from each of the four Atlantic Provinces.

With respect to the other question around the cost-benefit analysis – unfortunately the piece of work around this, the analysis was done before I became minister, so I cannot answer the question specifically if there was a detailed analysis done. Just intuitively, if you think about it for a moment, you have a structure that has an administrative structure and a whole regulatory piece to manage, and a certain body of knowledge and expertise in this field is required to operate such an enterprise.

Intuitively speaking, I would have to suggest that if we were as a Province going to put in place a regulatory regime with having the individuals with the expertise and the skill to be able to manage this and maintain a structure, individuals, an office, and the wraparound supports for that for one track in the Province –

and I suspect there is obviously opportunities of others to consider investing in an enterprise such as this, but you would have to think that if it is the only one for fifty years, there is probably not going to be many more expanding into this field.

If you think about it for a moment, would you set up an office and recruit people with a talent and the skill and maintain those talents and skills and maintain an understanding of the legislative regime – because keep in mind as I said a moment ago, the Criminal Code of Canada governs many of these activities so you have to be very familiar with the Criminal Code and the regulations around this.

We talk also about the welfare of the animals, the welfare of the participants, the races, and the individuals involved, so it is a fair body of knowledge and expertise that would need to be imbedded in such an office to do this.

Instinctively, you would have to think if there was not a lot of work done in trying to spend a lot of time doing a detailed analysis, I would understand it because on the surface if you think about it, intuitively, you would have to say this is a much better way to do it when you have the collective views of all Atlantic Provinces and you are able to build that expertise. Because no one province by itself would have enough activity to justify establishing a standalone office and this just works out – the economy is a scale. On that principle alone, I suspect that in and of itself would give you the answer.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 18 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 18 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 18 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Racing Commission.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay’.

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, that the Committee rise and report Bill 33, An Act Respecting The Atlantic Provinces Harness Commission.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 33 and ask leave to sit again.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, Mr. Speaker returned to the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): The hon. the Member for Bonavista North.

MR. CROSS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 33 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 33 without amendment.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

When shall the report be received?

MR. KING: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I would like to call from the Order Paper, Order 1, Address in Reply.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It has been a little bit of a busy day up and down here, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to speak to the Speech from the Throne today. As always, it is a privilege to stand here and represent the fine people in the District of Port de Grave.

Mr. Speaker, today I want to speak about some of the events I had the opportunity to attend in the last week or so covering for the hon. Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development. I had the opportunity to attend a couple of events, and one of them had a significant impact on me.

I attended the opening of the forty-first Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador at the Arts and Culture Centre. Mr. Speaker, it was a pretty amazing event. The work that you saw while you were there was pretty amazing. I spoke to a local jeweler who did some amazing work with brass and silver and all the rest. She did – I will call it engraving, but it was a design into the brass and silver and everything else.

Her mom comes from Nova Scotia every year, Mr. Speaker, so she has the opportunity to come down, spend a weekend. She said to me at that time, this local jeweler, this is the best event that I attend all year long. I sell more product at this event than I sell anywhere else at any other time of the year.

Then, Mr. Speaker, as I was going around I went and I saw a visual artist. This visual artist had all kinds of paintings, different types of paintings, black and white paintings, colour paintings, and t-shirts. He was telling me how last year he did very well here, but after this was over – the Craft Council ended on Sunday

afternoon – he was on a flight Monday morning to attend a major craft event in Toronto. He had to be ready and had to have everything packed up and ready to go to Toronto the very next day. He was going to a craft fair there. He expected to do just as well here at the local Newfoundland and Labrador craft fair as he would do in Toronto.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I went and I saw another group of ladies, and they sold jewelry, different types of jewelry. They were from Nova Scotia. They have been coming to the craft fair now for, I think they said six years. One of the local people there from Nova Scotia said they come to Newfoundland and they come to our Craft Council fair because it is the highest sales event that they have each and every year in the last six years, and they do about thirty events a year throughout Atlantic Canada.

So, Mr. Speaker, that drove me to wonder what kind of value does local craft producers and all the rest have and the impact that it has on the Province. So I did a little bit of digging and a little bit of background research. I found out that the local crafts in this Province generate about \$30 million a year. It is an amazing total when you think about it; \$30 million a year that local craft suppliers in this Province do.

Mr. Speaker, when you are going to these types of events it is funny how you meet old colleagues and old friends. At one point I was an historic sites officer with the provincial government. I used to do a fair amount of work in Trinity. Trinity now is a destination in Newfoundland and Labrador. Most people and most tourists want to come. They come to Trinity and there are a lot of different things to see and do. The Rising Tide Theatre has many festivals there in the summertime. There are a lot of local craft producers.

When I went there I saw an old friend. She was sitting around the corner knitting away, selling her produce at the forty-first craft council fair. I said to the lady, are you still with the department? Oh yes, she said. I am still working eight months a year with the department, seasonally, enjoying it immensely. She said I love to see the tourists come from all over the world. I love to see the local people come. Mr. Speaker, you never know who you

are going to bump into when you go to these events.

The other thing I noticed, and one of the things that I dug into as I was talking to these people, is that these are micro businesses that are employing one or two people. These one or two people are for the most part living in rural parts of our Province and contributing to the economy of our Province.

They are not only contributing to the economy of our Province, Mr. Speaker, but some of these people also go out and employ others to knit socks, or knit caps, or whatever. That supplements the family income. Yes, and not only supplementing the family income, but also supplementing the local economy. There are a variety of things that go on here and these micro businesses are doing very well.

The other part of this, Mr. Speaker, when I was looking at this, one of the initiatives at the Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development was linking crafts with tourism. This was a pilot project that got started in 2012 on the Bonavista Peninsula, and it went very well, trying to link craft producers and craft suppliers with tourism opportunities. In 2012, it started on the Bonavista Peninsula. It was a successful program. Last summer, as I understand, it was starting to expand onto the West Coast of our Province and the Northern Peninsula.

There are many opportunities, many linkages between our craft suppliers and some of our tourist operators. By providing that linkage, Mr. Speaker, we are providing opportunities for our tourists to buy local crafts and support the local economy, and local craft producers, as I said being, self-employed or employing one or two other people.

The next event, Mr. Speaker, that I attended was what they call a futurpreneur event. This was amazing in a different way. When I went to this event it was at the Common Ground. I was wondering where I was going, but there was an announcement being made there for entrepreneur week. The Common Ground is a locally-run organization. They have a lovely executive director, her name is Jennifer. She was there and welcomed me at the door. She

told me to come in, excited to have someone there representing government. She was very, very friendly and obliging.

Mr. Speaker, Common Ground, this building, this organization is there to promote and foster entrepreneurial success and entrepreneurial stories. I was in a room full of young entrepreneurs between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine. To see their enthusiasm, to see their spirit, and to see their dedication to make sure their entrepreneurial efforts and the things they were going to try to start in the business that they were in, was absolutely inspiring. There was so much energy in the room that day.

Mr. Speaker, once again you go to these places and you do not know who you are going to run into. A colleague of mine – for fifteen years we worked basically cubicle to cubicle in the old Department of Tourism. He broke out on his own. He is now a personal ADHD coach and he is coaching adults.

He was diagnosed at thirty-nine with ADHD and he left government. He is trained as an ADHD coach and now he is assisting our youth and adults in how to handle their ADHD. It is an amazing story. He is the only one in the Province, but he broke out on his own. He was diagnosed at thirty-nine, as I said earlier, and he is out there now helping other people.

He said, Glenn, I have so much work I do not know what to do. He said it is so rewarding to be able to help others and to be able to understand. He said I never understood myself for years. When he was finally diagnosed, he understood some of the things and some of the anxieties that he had. Mr. Speaker, it was great to hear of the success that he was having.

Mr. Speaker, we talk in this House many times about how we can diversify our economy. We are going to be able to diversify our economy through the efforts of these entrepreneurs and the various activities they are getting involved in. These people are dedicated to their projects.

Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged to watch them. I was encouraged to watch them, not only in terms of their determination to make their individual businesses work, but the opportunity they took when they were in the room to talk to each other.

To talk to each other about their successes, to talk to each other about some of their challenges, and to talk to each other about just trying to encourage each on to continue to believe.

At this particular event, Mr. Speaker, all these young entrepreneurs, there were about thirty in the room, and none of them were giving up on their ideas and their dreams. Some were in different phases and some were in different stages, but they were there. They were there and they were determined to make their business idea work for them. We were there encouraging them to take advantage of some of the programs and the suite of programs that are available through our Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development. That is a mouthful for me. Trying to get all of that out is a mouthful.

These people were there and we encouraged them to come to government and talk about the suite of programs. One of the things that has come out of that, Mr. Speaker, is that I have already arranged a meeting with the executive director for Common Ground and the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development. We are going to meet next week. We are going to have a little conversation about how the government can become more involved in assisting with Common Ground and the activities and the initiatives that are going there in that building.

Mr. Speaker, there are great opportunities for rural diversification. I have talked about the Craft Council and local producers, and what they are doing for the rural economy. I have talked about another event, the futurpreneur event with young entrepreneurs between eighteen and thirty-nine and the business ideas and the business opportunities they have. Common Ground provides them a place to come and work. They have the computer space. They have the work space. People come and they work on their business ideas.

Mr. Speaker, those are two very interesting pieces that normally backbenchers like myself would not get the opportunity to go see. Because the minister asked me, I got an opportunity to learn about some of the things that are going on in our Province in the craft industry and in our entrepreneurial spirit.

Mr. Speaker, the other one I want to talk a little bit about is near and dear to my heart. I went to Conception Bay South about a week and a half ago to the Softball Newfoundland and Labrador Hall of Fame induction. When I went to the Softball Newfoundland and Labrador Hall of Fame induction, there were eight inductees. I was very proud to be there because they were all former teammates of mine, or former competitors of mine; a great field of inductees, Mr. Speaker.

One of the other things we do not do enough of is to recognize those people who have given to their sport. Whether it is as an athlete, whether it is as a builder, whether it is as a fighter – as my loyal Member for Cape St. Francis, he has been known to duke it out with a few people over the years.

Softball Newfoundland and Labrador were leaders in this area. They were the first provincial Sports Hall of Fame. They were the first provincial sport organization to establish a Hall of Fame. I would suggest now that over thirty sports, thirty provincial sport organizations recognize many of their athletes. I am sitting in a room, I am looking around, and I know when I look around the room there are many Hall of Famers in this room from various areas. That was great and, Mr. Speaker, something we do not always recognize.

We are three-time national championships at the senior fast pitch level, and sometimes we do not take the time to recognize our peers. When you are playing nationally and you win three times in a row that is significant. That means you are producing quality athletes. That means you are doing something right in your program. My hat goes off to 3 Cheers Pub Bud Light, because it takes a lot of effort to organize and make sure you are ready to go to these national championships.

Mr. Speaker, as my time is winding down this afternoon, I want to talk a little bit about my district. I would be remiss if I did not. One of the things I am proud to say as I go through my district and go to various events throughout my district, my district continues to grow. Every community I go into, housing starts are up. New schools are coming along, but housing starts are up. Younger people are coming to our area. We

are attracting younger people to our area. Housing starts all throughout the Port de Grave district are improving.

Mr. Speaker, that leads to good things. That leads to young people coming in, and our schools are full. I am very proud that we have a commitment to replace Coley's Point Primary. We are in the early stages of replacing Coley's Point Primary. In last year's Budget, \$1.8 million was provided to start that, do the site planning, the site selection, and do some of the design work. That work is moving forward, Mr. Speaker.

As well, this last summer, Mr. Speaker, in speaking to the local harbour authority – because the fishing industry plays a vital role in my district. It is a driver in our economy, but it is particularly a driver in the economy of Port de Grave. As the fishery goes in Port de Grave, Mr. Speaker, local business goes in my district as well. In speaking to the local harbour authority back a couple of months ago, it was a record year in landings.

We had a great season in the fishery. The crab fishery was good. The shrimp fishery was good. There were great landings in capelin. There were great landings coming in later on in mackerel and herring. I hear there is much to be proud of. As the Minister of Fisheries turns around here, he likes to hear about the fishery. We have had a very good year in the fishery.

The fishery is very important to our local economy because it drives local business. Our fish harvesters and our plant workers, when we have a good fishing season, you can see increased car sales. You can see increased sales in our local stores.

AN HON. MEMBER: Restaurants.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: In our restaurants and our local businesses, sales are up. Mr. Speaker, when you go through our district people are saying our sales are up because we have had a good year. One of the contributing factors and one of the major factors is our fishery.

Mr. Speaker, we have been working away and we have had a dedicated number of years trying to improve our roads. One of my objectives

when I came into government was to improve the Conception Bay Highway throughout our district. We have worked very hard to improve the Conception Bay Highway through the district.

Mr. Speaker, the Conception Bay Highway through our district has some five kilometres of upgrading. It has been well received. Once again, that makes for better roads and we do not have as many people calling me and saying, Glenn, there is a pothole. Do not get me wrong, Mr. Speaker, we have lots of potholes and there is a lot of work to be done, but we have made some progress along the Conception Bay Highway.

The Conception Bay Highway, particularly through the Town of Bay Roberts, has very heavy traffic volumes. Some 18,000 to 20,000 cars a day go through that one stretch that we call the golden mile. We have significant traffic, and by having improved roads we are having less damage to our cars, but also it is great for our local economy.

Mr. Speaker, we have done a lot of good work. There is a lot of good work we have done, but there is work that we need to do. There are still some sections of road that I would really like to get done. Happy Jacks Hill comes to mind in Port de Grave. We have more work to do on Crane's Road in Upper Island Cove. We have more work to do in the upper end of the district in Clarke's Beach on the Conception Bay Highway.

Mr. Speaker, my focus has been on doing the roads that have the highest density volumes of traffic. Getting the Conception Bay Highway significantly upgraded has helped because that is the highest volume of traffic. Once we have that to a sufficient level, I hope to start to do the major secondary roads. That would take in Bareneed Road, which we have done a little bit of work on, down to Port de Grave and Happy Jacks Hill, and more work on Crane's Road needs to be done. We need to do some work also in the Makinsons area, because going in through Makinsons – that access to Veterans Memorial Highway. So there is work that needs to be done, and we continue to make progress there.

We have had some great progress in terms of our water and sewer projects. I was very pleased this year through municipal capital works to get some work done in the Town of Spaniard's Bay. There was a sewage problem at the bottom of Brazil's Hill, and we have that corrected. We are getting the outfall there fixed. Also, Mr. Speaker, there was some roadwork they wanted to do on New Harbour Road. We have that commitment done. We had some work done in Makinsons, and we also had some work along the Conception Bay Highway.

Mr. Speaker, as my time is winding down here this afternoon, I want to thank the people of Port de Grave for their confidence in me once again. We have work to do, and I look forward to working with our municipalities and all the people in the District of Port de Grave to improve life and the quality of life in our district.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Cross): The hon. the Member for St. John's South.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, before I start my comments today I am going to pass on some congratulations to our new members, the Member for Conception Bay South; the recently elected Member for Humber East, yet to take his seat in the House; as well, the Member for Trinity – Bay de Verde. Very good candidates, I think they will make fine members of the House. The folks who ran against –

MR. LANE: What about St. George's?

MR. OSBORNE: Well, I already congratulated the Member for St. George's.

I know some of the candidates who ran against those individuals. Larry Wells and Barry Petten, for example, were good candidates as well. There is absolutely no doubt about that. They obviously worked hard and campaigned hard. Sometimes these campaigns, Mr. Speaker, take on a life of their own and certainly the momentum is with our party, but congratulations

to the other candidates who fought in those campaigns as well.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to just promote, tomorrow evening – as all members of the House are aware, and some of the viewers who are watching us – we are going to have a food drive from the rear parking lot of Confederation Building. That is going to start at 5:30. We are only asking people to donate an hour of their time.

On that note, I will send out a bouquet to the Minister of Transportation. He agreed to put the bins in the lobbies of both buildings. I notice that the public service have been bringing in bags of groceries and leaving them to be part of that food drive tomorrow evening. I will thank the minister as well. I might beat up on him tomorrow in Question Period, but today I am thanking for the food drive.

Mr. Speaker, some of the comments that I wanted to make, the Residential Tenancies Act, I know that I have asked questions on that a couple of times in the House. The consultations and the work around that were done a couple of years ago. There were recommendations and so on around that piece of work, and landlords and tenants in this Province are looking for more modernized legislation. That legislation now is several years old and it does not fit with the needs of tenants and landlords in today's marketplace.

We do need more modern legislation regarding the Residential Tenancies Act. I am hoping that in this session of the House, before we break for Christmas in a couple of weeks' time, we will see that legislation tabled in the House. It is timely legislation, Mr. Speaker. We have seen several instances where we have had people complaining about challenges and issues relating to standards. We see standards in other provinces. We look at other provinces and they have minimal standards in place to protect tenants.

We do not have those in this Province, Mr. Speaker. So I urge government to move forward and to bring that legislation to the House. On several occasions over the past couple of years we have asked for that legislation to be tabled. I

know that it is important legislation. I know there is work to be done on the legislation.

The new minister of that department now, Mr. Speaker, has to become familiar with that, but we have had several ministers in that department that we have asked for that legislation to be tabled. We are certainly hoping to see that legislation very soon.

Mr. Speaker, we look at the minimal standards that are in place in other provinces. Just going to an issue that was very public and in the media, a number of cases – it sort of died down as far as media attention, but there are still people battling with the issue of bed bugs. Minimal standards may help in those situations.

We look at issues where tenants are into an apartment, because they simply cannot afford anything else, but the electrical systems or the plumbing systems do not meet today's standards and are inadequate, or the installation, windows, doors are very drafty. In the winter months it creates very, very difficult situations for those tenants because the heat and light bills go up astronomically because of the fact that they are older units and not properly insulated. Minimal standards would perhaps solve some of those issues.

I know that the City of St. John's is there and if people have complaints they can call the inspections division of the City of St. John's. That does not solve all of the problems in the City of St. John's, but there are many, many municipalities where the municipality does not have inspectors able to go out and inspect these units, or they do not have the ability to look at some of the concerns. So, it is a provincial issue that needs a provincial solution, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister responsible to look at that legislation and to bring it forward and, hopefully, we will see that before we break for the Christmas recess.

We look at rental subsidies, through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. I know I brought that issue up on a number of occasions as well, the fact that the subsidy should be attached to the individual as opposed to being attached to the rental unit itself. There are some tenants who have qualified for and have gotten

rental subsidies. Those rental subsidies, because they are attached to the unit, if the tenant runs into a problem with their rental unit or in the event that the owner wants to sell the property and gives notice to vacate to the tenant, the tenant does not have the ability – that subsidy is not mobile at the moment. It does not go with the tenant, so they cannot go find another suitable rental unit and carry that subsidy with them.

They have to go back to Housing and they have to go back on the list and be considered for other units that have a rental subsidy. That is creating an undue hardship. Changing that policy to give tenants the subsidy as opposed to applying the subsidy to the rental unit would not cost government any additional money, because they are paying the subsidy anyway. It would just make it easier for the tenant if they had the ability to, for whatever reason, say that either because of medical reasons and they want to move closer to a hospital, or like I said a landlord wants to sell the unit and gives notice to vacate, or there could be a whole host of reasons that a tenant would need to leave the rental until that they are in, they should have the ability to take the subsidy. If they have qualified for and have received the subsidy through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, that subsidy should belong to the tenant. They should be able to take that subsidy with them, find another unit that is acceptable to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and is acceptable to the tenant, and carry that subsidy with them.

If you look at the income supplement or the Income Support system in the Province, Mr. Speaker – and again I have raised this issue on several occasions in the House. The rent supplement through Income Support is about \$520, if memory serves me correctly, for a family. That is the maximum rental supplement. You look at some areas of the Province where the supply of rental units – there is a great demand for rental units; therefore, it is a supply and demand issue.

Rental units for a family cost more than \$520. There are several areas in the Province – I know in my own district in St. John's, Mr. Speaker, you cannot find a two- or three-bedroom unit for \$520. They are simply not available. They do

not exist. If that is the maximum rental rate, then people have to take money out of their food allowance. They have to take money away from their food allowance to be able to rent that unit.

If you look at a single parent or even a couple with children and they are receiving a maximum rental allowance of \$520 and they need to find a place to rent and that rental unit is costing them \$1,000 because there are parents and a couple of children, they are paying for their rental unit by taking money from their food allowance, or from their family allowance, or what have you.

That means, Mr. Speaker, that if there is a shortage of money for rent and they are borrowing the money from their food allowance to pay their rent, they are obviously not eating healthy. That creates a host of issues from children potentially going to school hungry. If they go to school hungry, they are obviously not learning. If you are going to school hungry, you are not able to learn. You have families who are not eating healthy. It creates health issues.

In this Province we have the highest rates of obesity, the highest rates of diabetes, and high blood pressure. Part of that is eating habits. If you are not able to afford healthy foods, you still need to eat. You are buying the cheaper foods, the processed foods. A consistent diet of unhealthy food is going to create health issues. It is not just exercise that keeps us healthy, but it is healthy food that keeps us healthy, Mr. Speaker.

As the Auditor General, or the former Auditor General, pointed out when he was hired by government to do a review, the rental rates in Piccadilly are not the same as the rental rates in St. John's. In some areas of the Province the maximum rental allowance that is provided is suitable. You can rent a unit for the maximum rental allowance provided, or for the rental allowance that one would qualify for under Income Support, but in some areas of the Province it is simply not enough.

You see usage at food banks increased. You see usage at soup kitchens increased. There is a greater demand on Kids Eat Smart, the breakfasts or the lunches provided through the school programs. There is a reason for that. That is because many people simply cannot

afford to provide proper nutrition for their children.

Mr. Speaker, again, I urge government to look at – we passed a private member's resolution in this House that I brought forward. It was voted on unanimously by the House, to look at the rental structure or the allowances provided through Income Support. That was last year, Mr. Speaker. Last year we voted on that in the House.

I was hoping that under last year's Budget we would see changes to make accommodations or allowances to change the rental structure in the Province. We have another Budget coming up, and I certainly urge the minister responsible, and the Minister of Finance, to look at that issue because it is an important issue for many people around the Province.

Mr. Speaker, I have talked a little bit about ferries in Question Period this week. I just threw a bouquet to the way of the Minister of Transportation, but now I am going to get around to the other side of the Minister of Transportation.

We are looking at ferries, and the vessels that were purchased in this Province cost tens of millions of dollars more than some of the other proposals that came forward to government. Some of the companies that have offered proposals to the Province, Mr. Speaker, are very qualified shipbuilders, very qualified shipyards, amongst the best shipyards in the world.

In fact, we look at one of the other provinces in Canada right now, British Columbia are getting three ferries built for that province. Their ferries can accommodate 600 passengers; versus the ferries we are getting built for our Province accommodate 200 passengers. Their ferries can accommodate 145 vehicles. The ferries we are having built for this Province accommodates sixty vehicles. The ferries in British Columbia can accommodate 145 vehicles, whereas the ferries in this Province can accommodate sixty vehicles.

The ferries in British Columbia are considerably larger than the ferries we are having built here. You cannot just go by the length of the vessel, the metres. The vessels in British Columbia,

Mr. Speaker, I think are 105 metres in length. The vessels here are eighty metres, but you are looking at the height and width of the vessel as well. The vessels in British Columbia are considerably larger than the vessels we are having built here, but they are almost the same price.

In British Columbia you have \$55 million per vessel, and I am sure they are purchasing quality vessels. I am sure they went through their quality assurance and they are getting vessels that meet their needs and their standards. Here, it is \$51 million. Only \$4 million cheaper and you are getting a vessel perhaps only half the size of the vessels that are being built in British Columbia. So there is something wrong with that math. We are being told it is because we are getting a quality vessel. We wanted to put quality first. We wanted to ensure these were second to none.

Mr. Speaker, the shipyards that have bid, many of those shipyards are amongst the best shipyards in the world. We look at some of the shipyards that made offers have built the Maersk vessels that are operating on our offshore. We all know that those vessels, Mr. Speaker, are very good, quality vessels. I understand they are not ferries, but that same shipyard builds ferries and they made an offer on the vessels here.

Mr. Speaker, one has to wonder what the difference is in a Province now where we are looking at greater demands on our Budget. We are looking at greater demands to tighten the belt, the Premier talking about the need to cut back, curb spending. We are probably going to see some of that in the upcoming Budget, some measures taken to try and curb the spending, because we know there is going to be a deficit this year. We know that deficit is growing, and in part, Mr. Speaker, because of a cheaper barrel of oil, which means cheaper oil royalties to the Province.

We know there is going to be a deficit this year. How we can afford to pay tens of millions of dollars per vessel more than some of the bids that came in – what are we getting for that tens of millions of dollars, Mr. Speaker? That is the question, and that is what the people, the taxpayers of the Province, would like to know, and I think they deserve to know that, Mr.

Speaker. The people of the Province would like to know because it is their tax money.

As legislators, we do not own the money we are spending. That money belongs to the people of the Province. If we are supposed to be making the best decisions we can on behalf of the people we represent, they have a right to know what the difference is and why we are spending the extra money on these vessels.

Mr. Speaker, an issue I brought up last year was regarding the taxation of Metrobus in the city, and the fact that the public transit system is being taxed by the Province. The snowplows are not being taxed, dump trucks are not being taxed, but the public transit is being taxed by the Province. I think that is inherently wrong, considering the users of the public transit are the people who can less afford or least afford to pay an additional fee or a higher fee because that transit system is being taxed.

Again, under this year's Budget – and I know there has been a lot of talk about fiscal arrangements and new fiscal arrangements with municipalities. I think that is one item, when we are looking at a new fiscal arrangement with municipalities, we really need to focus on that, Mr. Speaker. We need to focus on why we are charging a tax on public transit. I think we need to do away with that tax.

I know it is a tough topic to bring up when we are looking at a shrinking Budget and spending demands and how we are going to pay for all of the services we have; but, again, we are taxing a service that provides transportation to the people who can least afford, in many cases – not everybody. In some cases it is a choice to use Metrobus but in many cases it is not a choice. They have no other choice. It is the only transportation they can afford. Again, I ask government in the upcoming Budget negotiations to have a look at that particular issue.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about tourism. I know my colleague from Burgeo – La Poile is one of the members. We have the Member for Placentia, another area where we have Marine Atlantic vessels, but our rubber-tire tourists, if you want to call it that, is down. The number of people who are travelling by Marine

Atlantic, for example, are down. I know it is a federal responsibility. Marine Atlantic is a federal responsibility, but it affects this Province. It is our connection to the Trans-Canada Highway.

In other parts of the country, Mr. Speaker, you do not have to pay such an egregious rate to travel the same number of kilometres from North Sydney to Port aux Basques on any other stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway. That is our Trans-Canada Highway. It is our connection.

You look at the rates being charged by Marine Atlantic, make no wonder rubber-tire traffic to this Province is down, Mr. Speaker. I see you giving me the signal and I have about two seconds left in my speaking time.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak. I will have another opportunity to make comments.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It is a pleasure to rise today. Every time we get an opportunity to rise to our feet in this House, it is a great honour. It is something that I take very serious, not only in my responsibility as an MHA but, as well, the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

It makes me proud to be able to stand in the House when you hear a number of individuals speak. Their passion and the fire they have inside certainly show through. We had that yesterday. The Member for Exploits did a fantastic job on his feet yesterday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: It is great to see because we all have passion. We show it in different ways. Of course you have the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale who has no lack of passion. When he gets up and speaks, if you cannot hear him,

you can certainly feel it. You can feel the room shaking when he is speaking. It is nice to be able to stand in the House and obviously contribute with individuals like that. We have a number of them, as do the members on the other side as well.

Also, I would like to take this opportunity – just in case, for the folks back home, in Address in Reply we can talk about a number of things. I just want to touch on a few things before I get into some of the investments in my district over the last number of years.

I want to recognize and thank the great residents of the District of Terra Nova for the support over the past six years, tremendous support, not only the residents, my constituents, but also my family. I would be remiss if I did not specifically mention my wife who is probably home watching. My wife Samantha is home with our two young daughters, Sophie and Anna.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: It is a privilege to be here, Mr. Speaker, but it is also a privilege as a person with a young family to be able to have that person back home, the support network back home to allow you to do it. I know there are other members in this House with young children as well. It is trying at times, but it is always nice when you have that rock support back home.

I would like to throw a bouquet out to my wife. I will not buy her one, but I will throw one out from the House of Assembly.

I want to talk about a few things. As all members, we attend various functions in our district. Just this past weekend I was fortunate enough to have the MHA for Conception Bay East – Bell Island and the Minister of Transportation and Works – actually, first we went out to St. Brendan's for a trip. It was the minister's first time out to St. Brendan's; it was nice. I have been very successful in getting ministers out, particularly Transportation and Works ministers out to meet with the transportation committee and the council out in St. Brendan's. It is a very small, quaint community, but just as important as any other community in my district. We had a great

meeting out there, and great hospitality was shown as always.

Something that was very striking – and of course, I have always complimented our ministers throughout the years, but there was something very striking about this minister. He understands ferries and the way they work and the way they have to work for its residents. Of course, it is very obvious from his upbringing on Bell Island. He recognizes the needs because he has lived it. That was something I understood – when watching the interaction between the town council and the minister, it is something that he gets. It does not have to be explained to him about the necessity of a ferry and how it is their highway; he understands that. Certainly, they appreciated that, and I appreciated their hospitality, as always.

That was Saturday morning, Mr. Speaker. Then on Saturday evening he attended the Glovertown and area volunteer firefighters' banquet with me. It is an event I go to every year. I never miss a firefighters' ball in the district. I think it is incumbent on us, as MHAs, to make sure we get out and take the time to recognize our volunteers, particularly those in the firefighting service.

I was glad not only just to have him there, just out to a firefighters' ball, but he came out with a great announcement – something we have been working on for a number of years now. Back in I think it was the summer of 2012, there was a young man in Glovertown, twenty-two-year-old Andrew Sheppard. Andrew was a third generation volunteer firefighter and actually he served on the fire department with his father John Sheppard who is a lifetime member of the Glovertown firefighting team there in Glovertown. It was back in 2012 in the summer of that while kayaking on Terra Nova River, he had a tragic accident and Andrew lost his life.

It was obviously a huge tragedy to the Town of Glovertown and surrounding communities, particularly the fact that he was a young man who was a volunteer. He was with the air cadets. He actually had an opportunity to travel to Beaumont Hamel when the government did that trip as well, so he was able to experience that, but he was also able to experience giving back to his community as a volunteer.

It was so nice that I had the Minister of Transportation and Works to come out and announce that the bridge that crosses Terra Nova River – not Spencer’s Bridge upon the TCH, but the one that crosses over within the Town of Glovertown. It is a significant bridge. It is going to be named in honour – it is going to be the Andrew Sheppard Memorial Bridge. There was between about 250 and 300 people at that firefighters’ banquet on Saturday night and I can tell you they certainly appreciated it.

It is not about me, it is not about the minister, but it was about remembering that young man who gave to his town. It is always great when you have, especially the younger generations, because we know the older generations seem to carry us on their shoulders but when you see young people like Andrew Sheppard getting involved in the firefighting services in the town, voluntary at that, it is important we recognize that.

It was great, and I want to thank the minister again for coming out and making that possible. I know the town council, the firefighters out in Glovertown, as well as his parents who were in attendance, were so very proud. I also want to say congratulations to his sister Stephanie who had a baby, I think, on November 14. She named her son Andrew after her late brother, Andrew Blake Sheppard.

It was nice timing. It took a long time to do, but I am glad it actually came to fruition. Hopefully, now this spring we will be out there to cut a ribbon and do some sort of plaque unveiling on the bridge.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: Mr. Speaker, I want to continue to talk about firefighters, just for a little bit, because this seems to be the season. Every weekend now I, as many members here, are off to different firefighters’ banquets throughout their district. I have a number of fire departments in my area, as many do. You have Hare Bay and Dover areas, Gambo, Glovertown, Eastport Peninsula, Terra Nova, Charlottetown, Bunyan’s Cove, Musgravetown, Port Blandford, all volunteer fire departments and all of those with a number of volunteers, men and women.

It is important, and as I said, I always try to make an effort. I do not think I have ever missed a firefighters’ banquet in my district. I always make an effort to get out to it and make sure we recognize it.

It is one thing, Mr. Speaker, to attend these firefighters’ banquets and thank the members, that is very important, and to recognize them and the work they do, but it is also incumbent on us, as members of government, and Opposition members as well, to make sure we fight to get those folks the equipment they deserve, to be able to provide them the equipment to be able to do their jobs in a safe fashion.

There have been some great investments over the last number of years, since 2003, in the District of Terra Nova. I just want to talk about a few of these. It is pretty impressive. It is something I am very proud of, as I am sure the former MHA, Mr. Oram, was proud of as well.

You do not have to look any further than some of the major investments, four new fire trucks, with the fifth one announced just recently, actually. I had the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services, the Member for St. John’s West, was out on the Eastport Peninsula with me and we announced a new pumper truck; \$250,000, basically. That is something that will be delivered in a number of months. It is something they are very thankful for, and something they have been asking for, for quite some time.

It was something that I worked with the former fire chief, Clarke Matchim. Clarke has since stepped down and Dan Powell is the new fire chief out on the Eastport Peninsula. I can tell you that the firefighters and the community, as a whole, all of the communities on the Eastport Peninsula, certainly appreciate that and look forward to the delivery of the truck.

Then, of course, you have Musgravetown, Port Blandford, Gambo, Glovertown, all brand-new trucks. Most of these trucks, as I had said, are in the vicinity of \$250,000 each – a huge investment.

The interesting piece, Mr. Speaker, is the vast majority of these – all but one – were purchased

under the 90-10 cost-shared agreement. A lot of these communities would never be able to afford such a purchase under a 50-50 cost-shared, as was the case prior to 2008 that was announced. So it provides them the opportunity to purchase these types of items, and provides them with the equipment to be able to do their job in a safe fashion.

Aside from the major investments in the fire trucks and pumper trucks, you also have things like breathing apparatus and fire-retardant equipment, beepers, smaller things of that nature. Actually, just this past weekend when I was at the Glovertown firefighter's banquet, we also celebrated the recent approval of a Jaws of Life, which is in the ballpark of about \$26,000. It is a major investment and something they needed. Regionally, they serve pretty well almost my entire district with that vehicle extraction tool. The one they had before, it was a number of years old and they were having issues with it and breakdowns.

It is incumbent, not only as a politician, but as a resident of Terra Nova District, I would want to make sure they have the equipment to do their jobs. If it was me or my family or one of my friends or whatever the case, who needed to be removed from a vehicle after a car vehicle accident, that they had the right equipment to do so. Now this is going to allow them to do it. Again, it is very much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have a lot of time, but I just want to touch on some of the work that has been done in my district. We talk about – it seems to be, the topic quite often is where we have wasted our money. Of course, we are always very quick to defend our expenditures and what we have done, what we have purchased, and what we have funded over the last number of years. It is important –

AN HON. MEMBER: Major investments, major investments.

MR. S. COLLINS: Right, we talk about major investments. Saying major investments is fine, but you want to talk about the tangible things that you can see and feel, and certainly I see and feel things all over the district that have been done, as in infrastructure.

It is important to point out a few of those. I just want to talk about some of the things – roadwork is very important, and we have gotten a great deal with regard to roadwork, both municipally and provincially. I could talk about all the paving that has been done over the last decade, but I want to focus on one area in particular, and that is in the Bunyan's Cove, Musgravetown, Canning's Cove, Bloomfield area.

I have often heard it, and I can remember when I was knocking on doors back in 2009 seeking election during a by-election. They said, you know, we have not seen a whole lot of pavement here. The last time an extensive amount of paving has been done was when Glenn Greening was the MHA. We were completely ignored, forgotten, while the Liberal Administration was there. They only came to see us when they needed a vote. They said the last time we had paving was under a PC government.

We hope we can get some paving and get some of the road maintenance done, because it was in quite a state, Mr. Speaker. I am glad to say we have done extensive roadwork, particularly in the Bunyan's Cove and Bloomfield area, again, places that have been ignored.

It is ironic, this past week I am hearing that the former Liberal MHA is making calls around now trying to rustle up support for the upcoming election. People have said to me, he has some nerve calling when we did not hear from him while he was our MHA. Now that he is looking for votes for a member of his family to run in the upcoming general election he finds our phone number. I think the message has been sent back strong and clear to him where the people's loyalties lie.

I feel blessed to have the support that I have had over the last number of years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: It is not only about investments. Mr. Speaker, we know from past experiences laying pavement cannot win you elections, but it is with the connection to the district. You cannot forget who put you there.

When I knocked on doors back in 2009, a lot of people said, well the next time we will see you

will be during the election. I said do you know what? The next time you will see me will probably be only a couple of weeks down the road. I hope at the next election you will say I am sick of seeing you because I see you at every function.

That is something that I have worked very hard on, Mr. Speaker. I think that is what truly makes a successful MHA. It is nice to be able to get things for your district, but it is also nice to have a presence in your district and to be respectful to those who elected you. That is something I have tried very hard in the last number of years. That is what I will go and I will campaign on in the next general election, and hopefully we will see where it goes.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a couple of other things as well, particularly about smaller communities. I have a number of middle-sized communities in my district, the Gambos and Glovertowns, even the Eastport Peninsula. I would call those larger communities as they relate to my district. Some of the smaller ones felt ignored as well.

A lot of times people think politicians, you only do work where you are going to get the votes out. Those are the big spots, the Glovertowns and Gambos, if you will. There has been extensive work done in a number of places, water and sewer, in particular, and quite expensive projects; Happy Adventure, Bunyan's Cove, Sandringham, and we talked about St. Brendan's.

St. Brendan's is about 110-120 people I guess thereabouts. They are given as much attention as any other community in the district, Sandringham the same thing, Bunyan's Cove, whatever the case is. That is something again, people want to be heard. I have twenty communities in my district and it is important to have the connection with each and every one of them. Their issues are as important to them as the larger community's issues are to those.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: It is important to keep that front and center. We only have to go back and talk about the 90-10 cost-shared ratio. It is something I have spoken about a number of

times in this House. It is so important. We tend to take it for granted now, but that program in itself has opened the doors to so many projects in so many communities, particularly in rural Newfoundland, particularly small communities that could never, ever do a water and sewer project.

I look at a town like Bunyan's Cove – well actually the work is ongoing now – half a million dollars was approved for water and sewer. They could never, ever do that. Even at 90-10 it was not easy, but at a 50-50 cost shared it would never be done. No work would ever be done in that town. That is what we had seen in previous Administrations, work just simply was not getting done.

Mr. Speaker, I will not take up too much time but I just want to say that I am proud of our expenditures. I am proud of the investments we have made. It is interesting that on one side some of the Opposition will talk about we need to cut spending, others will ask for new spending, and, of course, the messaging gets mixed. I can tell you on this side we are very proud of the investments we have made.

If you ask me, have we wasted money? Absolutely not! If you ask me, have we wasted money? I would ask you a question back, please show me where it was wasted. Come with me to Bunyan's Cove, come with me to St. Brendan's and see about the investments there, Glovertown and Gambo, and all communities throughout the Province.

Mr. Speaker, I do have a few moments left but I will take my seat as the end of the day is coming to a close. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak a little bit on this.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 2:00 p.m. tomorrow, Private Members' Day.

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