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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.

Today I would like to recognize and welcome the Deputy Chief of Operations, Don Byrne, from the West End Fire Station.

Welcome to the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi; the Member for the District for The Straits – White Bay North; the Member for the District of St. John's Centre; the Member for the District of St. John's South; the Member for the District of Burgeo – La Poile; and the Member for the District of Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for the District of Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

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

In my District of Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi, we are blessed with a wonderful neighbourhood school. Bishop Feild Elementary's diverse population makes it a unique school with a strong community spirit. The students succeed in many different areas.

The most recent is probably the very successful season the Bishop Feild Elementary cross-country running team enjoyed in fall 2014. The Grade 5 girls won the team award in the Newfoundland and Labrador Athletic Association 22nd Annual Running series for schools.

Even more exciting news for everyone at the school, Bishop Feild took third place in the Paul McCloy Award Competition. The award is given out by the Newfoundland and Labrador Athletics Association to the school with the highest combined boys and girls team scores. Of note is the fact that the first place award this

year went to a high school, and the second to a junior high, so the Bishop Feild Elementary children really have something to be proud of.

I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating the runners at Bishop Feild Elementary and to wish them success in all their future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, a *Northern Pen* story from 1985 about hockey, with a photo of my dad, Clyde Mitchelmore, gave inspiration for this statement. This article brought a smile on what would have been his birthday. I fondly remember him and his love for the game.

Exceptionally talented and committed athletes spend significant ice time at Straits, Roddickton-Bide Arm arenas and the St. Anthony Polar Centre, beginning with CanSkate, minor hockey, broomball, figure skating, and recreational leagues.

Goaltender Aaron Mercer, with his St. Anthony roots, joined Goose Cove's own, Adrian Ward, who advanced to the Western Kings AAA Bantoms as top scorer. Both participated in the 2015 Chronicle Herald East Coast Ice Jam hockey tournament on the Major Bantam first all-star team. This takes dedication and hard work. Adrian's parents, Sharon and Roy, are also committed, driving him to Corner Brook, 500 kilometres each way, most weekends to ensure attendance to all team functions.

As well, Nathan Noel is identified as one of the top players draft eligible in Canada this year and will have his St. Anthony fans cheering at Thursday's CHL/NHL Top Prospects Game in Ontario.

I ask all hon. members to recognize the accomplishments of these athletes, as they inspire others from small towns to pursue their dreams.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On Christmas Day I visited the folks at the new West End Fire Station on Blackmarsh Road in the wonderful District of St. John's Centre. I had a grand cup of tea and tour. The visit brought to mind all the people who work Christmas, New Year's, Hanukkah, on birthdays and anniversaries and keep us safe, tend our sick, transport us, and keep our community and services going.

The new West End Fire Station itself is a thing of beauty. They do not have a pole, but they do have a HAZMAT response trailer, a unit uniquely dedicated to responding to emergencies involving hazardous materials. They also have the only hose drying tower for the whole city. It is really quite amazing.

What makes the station unique is their RIC, Rapid Intervention Crew, that offers city-wide safety for firefighters; but, more importantly, there are twenty-eight dedicated, courageous officers and firefighters who not only fight fires but respond to medical and other emergencies. These are men and women who are expertly trained and committed to keeping us safe.

Fire Chief Jerry Peach and team, on behalf of the people of St. John's Centre, and this House of Assembly and beyond, thank you for your incredible service. Bravo, and again, thanks.

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 Saint Luke's Homes, a division of Anglican Homes Incorporated. Saint Luke's was opened and dedicated on June 17, 1965, by the Rt. Rev. John A Meaden, of which

Bishop Meaden Manor is named after. This year, Saint Luke's is celebrating its fiftieth year of providing long-term care to seniors.

There have been many changes over the years, but today the facility itself is made up of a 117-bed nursing home, an adult day respite program for over-55 seniors. The home is manned by a tremendously dedicated staff who contributes significantly to the quality of life and care of the residents of Saint Luke's and their families.

I look forward to taking part in the various activities planned over the coming weeks and months as the organization celebrates fifty years. I would like to recognize today the valued contributions of this organization and their staff that they have made to the community and to the residents.

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 congratulate Grandy's River Collegiate Senior Boys Volleyball Team on winning gold at the provincial School Sports Newfoundland and Labrador volleyball tournament held at Gander on the weekend of December 4-6.

It took three previous gold medal wins to get to this position. On October 17 and 18, they captured gold at Corner Brook in the annual VolleyWest Tournament. The following weekend at Gander, they took gold again in the annual VolleyCentral Tournament. On November 25, Grandy's hosted the annual Western SSNL Regional, once again winning cold and earning the right to represent their region at the SSNL Provincials. This is the first time since 1986 that Grandy's captured gold at the provincials.

Grandy's is a K-12 school with a total student enrolment of 116 students. These boys, their head coach, Michael Adey, and assistant coach, Cody Bond are to be commended for the hours of practice and the hard work they put in to get to this calibre.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in extending congratulations to the Grandy's River Collegiate Senior Boys Volleyball Team and their coaches on winning gold at the Provincial SSNL this past December.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize a community coming together to help a young lady see her dreams come true.

Recently, Eastern Siding held a contest on VOCM; the winner was to be rewarded with siding, windows, and doors to renovate their home. The lucky winner was a lady from Flatrock who had been battling cancer.

The family received the materials and planned to complete the work. However, during a visit to her doctor shortly after winning the contest, the young lady received some bad news.

Mr. Speaker, hearing this, the people of Flatrock did not want her to wait. Within a couple of days there were over twenty tradespeople volunteering from the community. The work started on Friday morning and by 2:00 o'clock the next day the job was completed.

Mr. Speaker, it was unbelievable to see the people coming together in the way they did. Not only did they complete the work outside, they also completed the trim work and the painting inside.

I ask all hon. members to join with me in thanking the people from Flatrock for making a young lady's dream come true. Mr. Speaker, on January 3, Theresa passed away at the age of forty-four. Rest in peace my friend.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before proceeding to statements by ministers, I would also like to

recognize the Mayor of Wabush in the gallery today, His Worship Colin Vardy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thanks, I appreciate that.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. KENT: He is a good man.

It is my pleasure to rise in this hon. House to provide an update on the provincial government's *Understanding Changes Everything* social marketing campaign.

Last May, the campaign was launched with a specific focus to create greater understanding about mental illness and addictions in an effort to reduce the stigma often associated with these complex health issues.

As many people may know, living with a stigma that surrounds mental illness or addiction can often be harder than the illness itself. The campaign reinforces that despite living with a mental illness or addiction, people are able to lead fulfilling and successful lives.

Mr. Speaker, the core of the message is that a person is not defined by a mental illness or addiction as it is not who they are as a whole, and with greater awareness we can all help eliminate or reduce stigma and foster an environment that supports recovery and healing.

During the first year of the campaign, television commercials, online and cinema advertising, and promotion through social media have taken place. It was my privilege last week during the Premier's Summit on Health Care to announce the release of a new video which features individuals and family members with lived

experience. It carries very powerful, direct messages which reinforce that mental illness and addictions are not weaknesses and that we need to start talking and continue the conversation. As the video states, we need to be open to asking for help and together we can make it better.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage people to visit the campaign's Web site www.understandnow.ca to view the awareness materials and learn more about mental illness and addiction. People can also follow the campaign at Understanding Changes Everything on Facebook or on Twitter @UnderstandNowNL.

Living with a mental illness or addiction can be an isolating and lonely experience. I encourage everyone who is experiencing this in their lives to reach out to a loved one, a colleague, or a health professional. The more we are able to make this a part of our everyday conversation, the better it will be for everyone. If an individual finds themselves in crisis please call the Mental Health Crisis Line, twenty-four hours a day, at 1-888-737-4668 to speak with a mental health professional.

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 thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mental health is a very serious health issue and affects one in five people in this Province.

This government committed to a new Waterford Hospital in 2007. That is just still a promise on paper. We have been waiting for a new eighteen-bed addictions facility in Harbour Grace for over five years. The current mental health and addictions services and programs are just a patchwork of services.

This government has been in power for over ten years and they still have not formulated a mental health and addictions strategy. Eight years ago, this government committed to a provincial

substance use strategy to prevent and treat substance abuse. It was a major undertaking by government. It was written, it was completed, and then government walked away. Now government is saying they are working on another strategy. It is about time that they finish it. We hope that when it is released it has concrete initiatives, unlike some of the many other strategies that they have completed.

Again, it is a serious health issue. It needs significant attention. Ten years should have been time to make it a priority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Congratulations to everyone involved in creating the Understanding Changes Everything campaign. Thank you to folks with lived experience for sharing their lives to address stigma, resilience, and hope.

Raising awareness and dialogue is not enough. Our mental health system in its current state cannot serve the needs of the people who are begging for help. Wait-lists for services are growing. Community groups have minimal and shrinking budgets and are struggling trying to help people. If government is truly committed, they must call an all-party committee to address these critical issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this hon. House to recognize seven leaders inducted into the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission's CEO Safety Charter for 2014.

This distinguished network of leaders from this Province is committed to safety in the workplace and has taken the steps necessary to make their workplaces safer.

Mr. Speaker, the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission's CEO Safety Charter was established in 2007 with the intention to support the continuous improvement of healthy and safe workplaces throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. As ambassadors for safer workplaces, CEO Safety Charter signatories have demonstrated their commitment to preventing accidents and promoting health and safety in the workplace. It also sends a message to their employees that they take their safety seriously.

The 2014 inductees join a network of sixty-two leaders from this Province that all share the common goal of making Newfoundland and Labrador the safest province in Canada in which to work. These CEOs are not only leaders in their respective organizations; they are also health and safety champions in the community.

Mr. Speaker, all of these leaders have a passion for safety in the workplace. They also recognize that their employees are their most valuable asset and they must be protected. When an organization's leadership has the passion, it permeates through the organization and helps to create a culture of safety throughout the entire organization which results in a safer environment for all.

The 2014 new members of the CEO Safety Charter are: Mike Barron of the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information, Glen Skinner of Pipers, Steve Oliver of PepsiCo Foods Canada, Glenda Janes of St. John Ambulance Newfoundland and Labrador Council, Terry Croucher of Newfoundland and Labrador Vegetation Control, Len LeRiche of Safety Services Newfoundland and Labrador, and Jim Lynch of Commissionaires Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this hon. House to join with me in congratulating this outstanding group of leaders on this tremendous recognition.

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. Our caucus would also like to congratulate these seven leaders on being inducted into the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission's CEO Safety Charter for 2014. Actually, as a side note, my colleague, the Member for Virginia Waters, was actually one of the inaugural members to that charter.

Mr. Speaker, before becoming a member of this House, I worked for many years as a safety practitioner myself. I certainly realized the commitment that it takes to ensure that we have safe workplaces in our Province. It is reflected upon the workers, upon the supervisors, and certainly it would not happen if you did not have the leadership of these organizations at the very top driving this agenda. I want to congratulate them for what they have all done in terms of leadership in health and safety.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that the government here could certainly learn from these leaders. We have had many issues around health and safety in this Province. Whether it be the lack of inspections on fishing vessels, whether it be failure to establish the fish processors safety council which was announced three years ago, whether it be failure to effectively advocate for a separate safety regulator for the offshore, whether it be lack of inspectors in Labrador, and the list goes on.

I encourage the minister to sit down with these leaders and learn what safety is all about.

Thank you.

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 the advance copy of his statement. I am really happy to join with him and the critic from the Official Opposition in congratulating the new members of Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission's CEO Safety Charter for their commitment to ensuring their workers are safe.

It is true that leadership plays a key role in promoting a workplace safety culture. That is why I hope government will finally live up to its own responsibilities by addressing the problem of the lack of permanent occupational health and safety inspectors in Labrador West. The department has been promising for over one year to hire more, with no success. I know recruitment continues, but I have to ask the minister if he has done the full analysis as to why their attempts to hire these officers have consistently failed. The letter we received from him today, Mr. Speaker, does not give me an answer to that.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, when talking about the fiscal situation of the Province, the Premier said we need to start in our own house, get our own business in order, and lead by example, but he refused to immediately cut the size of Cabinet and his parliamentary secretaries.

I ask the Premier: If you are really committed to leading by example, really open and accountable, why are you refusing to immediately cut the size of your Cabinet and those parliamentary secretaries?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I quite clearly articulated to the member opposite, to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to Members of the House of Assembly as well, that as we go through this challenging time, this very significant fiscal challenge we face as a result of the falling world oil prices, that us and other provinces in the country, and other countries around the world have to face, Mr. Speaker, that as we go through that process, everything is on the table. I reiterate that today, that all potential avenues of consideration will be considered by us as a government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While the Premier says that everything is on the table, that all options are available to be cut, the Deputy Premier, however, has said that there is no time like the present.

I ask the Premier: If there is no time like the present, as your Deputy Premier suggests, why won't you put those cost-saving measures in place today?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, we are here in the House of Assembly this week because in order for us to carry out the changes to the House of Assembly – I have talked about three levels of reform. I have said that I would initiate a process to reform MHA pension plans. That process is underway. I have said that I would initiate a process to modernize how the House of Assembly operates, to ensure a more effective House and better engagement by all members of the House. That process is underway.

The Leader of the Opposition agrees the House is too big. The Leader of the Third Party agrees the House is too big. I agree the House is too big. The Leader of the Opposition is on record last week that he agrees that if I believe thirty-

eight, as the Premier, is the right number, he is fine with that and he wants to make sure there is a process. He said yesterday in his release, Mr. Speaker, we should not move too hastily, that we should ensure that we do proper process. That is what we are doing.

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.

If there is anyone in this House knows, when this government acts in haste we know what we get. There is a long example of all that, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier: In all his responses today, what he has not given me or given the people in Newfoundland and Labrador is one example – just one example, Mr. Premier, why you will not cut the size of your Cabinet. Give us one reason you will not do that.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did not say I was not going to do it. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is quite aware of that. I never said I was not going to do A, B, or C. I never said any such thing.

For the member opposite to try and suggest that I made any such comment is most unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. What I have said is that I am willing to make the tough decisions. As the Premier of this Province, I am willing to make those tough decisions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, we will see in the coming days how long the members opposite want to drag out the process of renewing the House of Assembly, providing for a better House. For renewing the House of Assembly and doing what they agree should be done,

reduce the number of seats. He says he wants to reduce the number of seats, Mr. Speaker, but he is not willing to go through the process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The person in this House who is dragging out things is this Premier, I say, Mr. Speaker. He is dragging out and refusing to cut the size of his Cabinet.

I ask the Premier: Give the people of Newfoundland and Labrador one reason why you cannot and are not cutting the size of your Cabinet today.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: I will give the hon. member a reason, Mr. Speaker. It is because we are doing our due diligence over here when we are managing the affairs of the Province. We are considering all avenues that are available to us.

We have a significant problem, I say to the Leader of the Opposition. We have a significant, fiscal problem that we have to deal with, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you about the difference in the members opposite and the members on this side. Over there they are not willing to deal with it. Well, we are willing to deal with it on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, everyone on this side of the House, I will be very clear, is willing to deal with it, and we will deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, on January 6, government wrote a letter to CETA saying they have withdrawn from all trade agreements currently under negotiation, but yesterday government said they had withdrawn from all trade agreements, not just ones under negotiation. Now today, government is backtracking saying they have only withdrawn from agreements under negotiation.

I ask the Premier: With 78 per cent of our provincial economy dependent on international trade, why have you caused such confusion around the Province's position on trade?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure you, there is no confusion. There might be confusion, Mr. Speaker, created by the members opposite, which they do on a regular basis, but over here we are very clear. We have trade partners throughout this country. Other provinces and the federal government are partners when we discuss and negotiate trade.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government has clearly demonstrated its respect, or lack thereof, for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians when it came to the CETA deal. How can we sit in a room and how can we participate in trade with partners like the federal government when they will not play fair? They will not go in there with the best interests of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in mind. We went in with an open mind. We wanted to do it in a way that was above board. We did it with all good respect to all, Mr. Speaker, and they pulled the rug out from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. How can we operate with a group like that, Mr. Speaker?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, one way you operate with a group like that is when you have an agreement, you make sure you have remedies that are attached to that and it

is a firm agreement – something this government did not have.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Premier one question: Was the minister who is sitting next to him, on this January 6 letter, when he wrote the letter to Minister Fast was that letter wrong or was it right?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the Premier has been very clear that the terminology used in the January 6 letter stands, that we have withdrawn all of our support for current ongoing trade negotiations. It does not apply to any agreements that have been negotiated.

The only thing we are doing today is clarifying. Obviously members opposite had some difficulty interpreting the language in a press release, so we are clarifying today. The letter I wrote to the federal minister is a letter that stands. We made an agreement in good faith. The federal government is not prepared to honour that. In response to that, until they are prepared to come back to us and honour that agreement, we have withdrawn all of our provincial support to ongoing current negotiations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I remind the minister that it was his comments in the press release yesterday that said the provincial government is suspending its participation in all trade agreements, and all trade agreements currently under negotiation. It is not only the members over here who have problems with those remarks, it is people in the public as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, with our economy being 78 per cent dependent on international trade,

withdrawing from these trade agreements is a very dangerous move, especially in the light of our financial situation.

I ask the Premier: What is the cost to the provincial economy by withdrawing from these trade agreements?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a very important topic. I am glad the member opposite stayed with the topic because what we had here was a very serious negotiation when we talk about CETA. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador had faith in the federal government to act on our behalf to a point where they were near the completion of a deal, a comprehensive deal, a CETA deal that would include all provinces and territories.

As the member would know, it has been said here on many occasions, they approached Newfoundland and Labrador looking for a concession of a provincial right enshrined in the Constitution, Mr. Speaker. As part of the entire CETA package, not just the minimum processing requirements but there were procurement and energy issues as well – as part of the package, we negotiated the \$400 million fund.

I say to the member opposite, we understand the significance of trade issues but we are not prepared to give things away because of some public pressure – like the member opposite may do if he were ever the Premier of the Province.

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.

The minister says they are aware of the significance of this decision.

So I ask him, if you are aware of the significance you must know the value, you must know the impact: What is the value by removing the provincial Government of Newfoundland and Labrador from these trade agreements?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, it is very unfortunate. We spent three days in Ottawa and, unequivocally, we have the support of every group and every organization that we met with. There was clear interpretation of where Newfoundland and Labrador stands with respect to CETA, what we negotiated, and what this Province is entitled to.

Today, in *The Globe and Mail*, there is another large article supporting Newfoundland and Labrador's view. The unfortunate thing is that it is only the Opposition who stands and says: Why don't you give away the fisheries fund for CETA? Whereas, the rest of the country says to Prime Minister Harper: Why don't you settle the fisheries fund so we can move forward with CETA? That is the unfortunate thing we are seeing here today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I can assure the minister there is no one on this side of the House suggesting we give up on the fishery. It is the actions of this government that has demonstrated they have given up on the fishery, I say to the Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, I will ask the minister one more time, since he claims to understand this value and the serious impact this could be: What is the value of removing the provincial government's position in these trade agreements? What is the value of that? If you know it, tell the people of the Province.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: I say to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, he is a businessman and he has been involved in lots of these kinds of negotiation activities for many years. We have withdrawn from ongoing negotiations. So I ask the member: How do you put a value on something that is not even finalized or negotiated yet? I would like to hear the answer to that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, in your capacity as Minister of Business, we typically call that a business plan, Sir, I remind you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BALL: Yesterday, the Premier said that other Atlantic Premiers support Newfoundland and Labrador in its efforts on CETA; however, it appears this is not the case. The headline from one media outlet yesterday read: Atlantic Premiers say Newfoundland and Labrador is on its own in the CETA battle with Ottawa.

I ask the Premier: Which is it? Do the Premiers support your efforts, or are you disagreeing with the media reports?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the member opposite, we fully understand what a business plan is. It is the business plan of this government since 2003 that has done wonderful things in this Province, I say to the member opposite.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: In spite of the legacy that we were left by previous governments, Mr. Speaker. We fully understand that.

We also fully understand that a deal is a deal, Mr. Speaker. We ask the members of the Opposition once again, and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, stand with the government in fighting on this deal, not standing with Ottawa to suggest, by some pressure tactic, that this government should fold its cards and go home and do away with the future of the fishing industry of Newfoundland and Labrador for some short-term gain for some business-minded people in this Province. That is not where we are and that is not where we are going to be.

We stand with the Province and we are standing to fight for the fisheries deal and for CETA, and we are doing it with the support of the Atlantic Canadian Premiers, I might add.

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 minister here. If he listened to what we said publicly about the position with the federal government on CETA, I do believe it is wrong. I do stand by the Premier on this. I said that here in this House at Christmastime. What you did do, however, was not firm up your agreement with Ottawa, I say, Mr. Speaker. The announcement was more important than the finalization of the agreement.

Mr. Speaker, the Province is in a serious financial situation, but the government has yet to even start their pre-Budget consultations. In eight of the last ten years, pre-Budget consultations were announced at this time of the year.

I ask the Premier: If you are so interested in listening to the people of the Province, why have you not started the Budget consultation process?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the member opposite confirming his support for us as a government in our dispute with the Government of Canada over CETA. I appreciate the member opposite doing that. Sometimes they change their viewpoint as we saw on the electoral reform legislation that is before us. He has changed his position on that. Sometimes it is hard to follow the bouncing ball, I say to you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes it is hard to do that.

Mr. Speaker, to his question about the Atlantic Premiers, I can tell you quite clearly that the Premiers of Atlantic Canada, the Premier of Nova Scotia, the Premier of New Brunswick, and certainly the Premier of PEI – and the Premier of PEI specifically said, and the others supported very similar commentary, that they support the position that we have taken and that if he was in my shoes, he would have taken very similar action.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is tough to follow the Premier from time to time too, I must say. Just after he announced his new departments just a few months ago it was the Department of Public Safety. Just a few weeks after that it was – oh no, it is now the Department of Justice and Public Safety.

The minister sitting next to him just a couple of years ago announced cuts to Budget. A few weeks later, guess what happened? He had changed his mind and they were all welcomed back.

I say, Mr. Speaker, the provincial radiation services report was supposed to be completed last fall, but government is still keeping it a secret. We asked for copies of this report and an update on the process through access to information, but we have been denied.

I ask the Premier: Since this report was supposed to be completed last fall, why are you keeping this a secret?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have no problem making commitments, I can tell you that. I make decisions and stand by commitments every day. I say stand by, to the members opposite over there.

Just last week, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition went before the microphones. He told the people of the Province that if the Premier wants it to be thirty-eight seats in the House of Assembly, if he feels that is the number, well, of course I have no problem with that.

I ask him today: Do you support thirty-eight seats in the House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier has already seen our amendments, I say, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, it was only yesterday that he said he would reach out to us and that he was willing to talk to us about it.

I ask the Premier: Has he done that yet?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I guess what he is saying is that he does not support what he said last Thursday. Last Thursday he said he supported thirty-eight seats. He said that if the election had to be moved for a few weeks, he was okay with that. He sent out a release last Thursday night and he said he changed his view then. In his release yesterday, and based on

what he has anticipated to come before the House, he is changing his position again.

As the member opposite can see, sometimes it is very hard to follow what the member opposite is doing over there; but I can tell you something solidly, as I have said repeatedly in this House of Assembly, we have difficult times ahead of us as a Province, we have fiscal challenges ahead of us as a Province, and I can tell you that every Member of the House of Assembly on this side of the House is committed to making difficult and hard decisions in the best interests of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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 decided he did not want to answer the question about the radiation services in Corner Brook. I have no idea why he would not want to release this report.

I ask the Premier: This was a report that was done last year. You have denied making this public. Premier, will you stand on your feet and tell the people of this Province why you are not releasing this report? It is about cancer.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, I reported to the House in the fall that there had been a delay with the provincial radiation review. I said it would be completed early this year. I can report to the House today that the review is complete. A report has been received by staff in the Department of Health and Community Services in recent days. We anticipate releasing the report over the next few weeks, once we have had a chance to review the report and complete our analysis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister: Will you please give us a date? You have been keeping this report secret, you have been keeping it from the people of Western Newfoundland, and the minister knows that he has had this report for some time right now.

I ask the minister: Will you give us a definitive date when you will release this very important report?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: The Leader of the Opposition is challenging whether I am telling the truth or not. I can report to this hon. House, Mr. Speaker, that we have just received the report in recent days. The report is now in the possession of staff of our department. I intend to get briefed on that report this week. Analysis is being done, and we will release that provincial radiation review report as soon as possible.

Members opposite often link this issue somehow to the new West Coast hospital project. There was a functional program for cancer care on the West Coast that was received in late October. We have confirmed that there will be two radiation bunkers, and we are fully committed to cancer care on the West Coast. There is no connection between these issues, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when discussing the financial crisis of this Province, the Premier said nine different times that all options are on the table. Not twenty minutes later, the Minister of Justice said to the media: As AG, I am committed to the due administration of justice in this Province, and that will not be compromised under our government's watch.

I ask the Premier: Is justice on the chopping block?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do not know how many times I have to try and explain this to the members opposite, that we have a very serious, financial circumstance as a result of the downturn in world oil prices. It is impacting Newfoundland and Labrador. It is impacting other provinces in Canada. It is impacting Canada as a country. It is impacting other countries around the world, Mr. Speaker.

We have very serious considerations to make. We have to look at all avenues that are available to us to deal with the circumstances that we face. Mr. Speaker, what is most important is, as I have said before, that as a government, I, as Premier, us, as ministers, us, as a caucus, on the government side of the House are committed to making the very difficult decisions that we have to make.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many times we have to say to the Premier that it is hard to get a straight answer on Justice when the minister is not allowed to sit here and answer questions. Clearly, we are hearing different messages from the Minister of Justice and the Premier. We know the minister cannot sit in the House, but I am wondering if she is going to the Cabinet meetings.

I ask the Premier: Who is running the Department of Justice, because the message in here is different than the message out in the media?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to making decisions and the

operations of government. We are committed to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We uphold that. We take that commitment very, very seriously. We take our work and our responsibilities very, very seriously. We are going to do the things we have to do to run the government, run the Province, provide services and supports to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are going to do that, Mr. Speaker. So that is one part of the member's question.

The second part is we have a significant financial circumstance that we have to deal with. We are also committed to making those very difficult and hard decisions, Mr. Speaker. We will do it after we do a full consideration, after we do due diligence to the full process. We will consider every avenue available to us, but we are committed to make very difficult and challenging decisions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, this is the issue here again that we face today, that the Premier says one thing in this House and then the unelected minister goes out and says the exact opposite to the media.

I say to the Premier: Can we take it now that what the Minister of Justice says outside this House is not what is actually going on and we should listen to you? We get confused after what is going on in this Department of Justice.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, there is not much doubt that the member opposite sometimes gets confused; but, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, look, we are committed to public safety in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I tell the member opposite, we are committed to the safety of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We are committed to providing services to the people of the Province. We are committed to upholding the responsibilities that we accept as a government, Mr. Speaker, and we

are going to do it to the best of our abilities having consideration for all of the factors. That is what we are going to do as a government. We are going to make those tough decisions, we are going to continue to govern, we are going to find our way forward, and we are going to make Newfoundland and Labrador better than it ever has been before, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, the Senior Crown Attorney for Labrador said the small size of court facilities in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and the lack of security lends itself to justice not being served. At times, the victims of sexual assault may be sitting two seats away from the accused. Along the Labrador Coast, client attorney meetings are sometimes held in bathrooms.

I ask the Minister of Justice: Is this what you call improving the system over the last six months?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I have spent numerous hours in courtrooms throughout my lifetime. I can tell you when you have circumstances that are very personal, you have very personal and serious charges that are laid before the court; I can tell you it is a constant challenge. It is not unique to Labrador. It occurs in courtrooms not only throughout Newfoundland and Labrador but other provinces as well. There is always a challenge in finding that balance, finding balance between witnesses and victims who have reasons to attend court, as well as the accused. We have to follow the rules of justice in Canada, that are followed throughout Canada, and we have to find our best way forward.

I agree with the member opposite. They can be very challenging, difficult times for victims of crime, for families and witnesses and those involved with crime. Mr. Speaker, we hope the courts and I trust the courts do everything they

can to protect the interests of all persons who have to find themselves in court.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains has time for a quick question.

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, prosecution staff is now down to one attorney and one article clerk.

I ask the minister: Why has the justice system in Labrador gone from bad to worse in such a short period of time?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader for a quick reply.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do not think there is a quick reply to such a sensitive issue, but I will certainly do my best. As I said to the hon. member yesterday, it is a sensitive issue and it is a very important issue.

We recognize the challenges we are facing with staffing the court system and the Crown prosecutor's office in Labrador, in particular. As I committed to him yesterday, we will work together with him and with our human resources department to secure a full complement of Crown prosecutors (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The amount of work and financial resources involved in redrawing electoral boundaries is immense. The electoral office already faces a critical lack of staff and technical support.

I ask the Premier: How many new staff and resources will be needed to carry out the extra

work that will be caused by Bill 42, and how much is it going to cost?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Realigning electoral boundaries in Newfoundland and Labrador is a huge piece of work. We acknowledge that. We also acknowledge that with appropriate resources this is a task to be undertaken by the commission and completed within 120 days.

What we understand as well, after this commission does this piece of work – in fact, while the commission is doing its work, Mr. Powers, the Chief Electoral Officer for the Province, will be doing a piece of work as well to make sure that we are ready for a general election in the fall of 2015. We have indicated very clearly, as with this commission and with past commissions, that we will provide appropriate resources to ensure that this piece of work gets completed on time so that we can have a fall general election.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister then: What piece of the \$2.5 million they hope to save is going to be spent in doing the work of the commission and the work that Elections Newfoundland and Labrador are going to have to do?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WISEMAN: I think, Mr. Speaker, it is extremely important – and the member asks a very good question. It is obvious from her question there is a lack of understanding of the process.

There is a piece of legislation on the books today called the Electoral Boundaries Act that says this piece of work was going to be done in 2016 anyway. This is not a piece of work that was never anticipated. This was a project that would have to be undertaken twelve months from now.

What we are saying is rather than wait twelve months from now, let's do it today and have it ready for the 2015 election. It is not money that would never have ever been spent. What we are saying is let's spend it today to get better value for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians so we can have it in for a fall election in 2015.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: If the commission finds that the thirty-eight districts that he wants are not going to be enough to comply with the act, which says that every elector should have equal access to this House, will the Premier go along with the decision of the commission or ignore it?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WISEMAN: One of the things that the member has raised here is whether or not – and what is a reasonable number to provide reasonable representation for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Frequently, we find ourselves comparing ourselves to the rest of the country. Members often stand in this House all the time and say: How come you are not doing what they are doing in Ontario, or how come you are not doing what they are doing in Alberta?

Mr. Speaker, we had a look at what they are doing in the rest of the country and very clearly if you just look at the number of people elected in the assemblies across Canada and the number of voters they represent, Newfoundland and Labrador is on the lowest end of that scale.

Across this country, one member can represent a constituency of 10,000 or 15,000 people quite easily, and provide adequate representation. The

question becomes: Why wouldn't we be able to do that here in Newfoundland and Labrador as well?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the Premier said everything is on the table. With this current economic uncertainty, people are rightfully worried about their jobs and providing for their families. Bill 42 will throw everything into chaos right before the election, when what is needed right now is stability.

I ask the Premier: Why this desperate move right now before an election? How exactly can this be in the best interest of the people?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the reason why we find ourselves in this circumstance is because of the world oil prices, very simply. Everyone is quite aware of what has happened in the turn in oil prices through last summer, last fall, and since OPEC had their meetings in November.

We had some of Canada's leading economists and best informed people in the country tell us – after OPEC met, they said give it a couple of weeks, ten days, two weeks, and the markets should settle down. Mr. Speaker, the markets still have not settled down and experts around the world had predicted it would take a couple of weeks and markets would settle down.

The markets are still not settled. We know the federal government are not going to do their Budget until April. They have some very serious challenges to face, Mr. Speaker. We have very serious challenges to face as a Province, and it is all related to the price of oil.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for –

AN HON. MEMBER: Bay of Islands.

MR. SPEAKER: – Bay of Islands.

Thank you.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, that is one of the problems in this House; when you are quiet, people forget you.

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 electoral boundaries commission was legislated to be appointed in 2016 to determine any changes to the electoral districts in the Province; and

WHEREAS the undersigned agree with a reduction in the number of electoral seats; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed the time necessary to properly carry out the necessary public consultations; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the population and demographics of each district and properly calculate the necessary

adjustments for a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the geographical implications of a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the government is attempting to change legislation to appoint the electoral boundaries commission early;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to ensure that, with or without the completion of the work of the electoral boundaries commission as a result of appointing the commission early, it will not interfere with the legislated and mandated requirement to hold a provincial general election in 2015.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I stand to present this petition today. I am going to speak today on behalf of the District of Bay of Islands. As we all know, next year is supposed to be when the electoral boundaries review would take place, in 2016. There is an important point being missed here in this House, Mr. Speaker, by the government, and they refuse to bring it up. In 2016 there will be a new census.

I heard the Premier himself say we have to make a decision for the next ten years. So we are going to be making a decision in this House of Assembly on information from 2011, information on population and demographics from 2011, and not wait for the information which would truly reflect where people live in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I think it is fundamentally wrong. I truly feel this is to push the election back. I truly feel that. I said it publicly. This has nothing to do with changing the boundaries because if it did, you would follow the law and give the commission proper time.

Mr. Speaker, when we have a government that is going to push this through without up-to-date

information, I think it is fundamentally wrong for the government to do that. The government has a majority, it is going to be done, but I just feel it is fundamentally wrong until we get new information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS PERRY: 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 Newfoundland and Labrador has the second largest number of members of its provincial Legislature per capita of all the provinces in Canada, which means, on average, the second smallest number of constituents per member of any provincial Legislature in the country; and

WHEREAS reducing the size of the House of Assembly by ten seats from forty-eight to thirty-eight will achieve savings to the provincial taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador of an estimated \$2.5 million per year totalling at least some \$10 million over the course of a four-year term; and

WHEREAS even with such a reduction, Newfoundland and Labrador will continue to enjoy its ranking as the Province with the second largest number of members per capita; and

WHEREAS it has been common practice for the government of the day to set the target for the number of seats in a redistributed Legislature; and

WHEREAS in moving ahead now without needless delay, there is ample time in 2015 for this independent process to unfold, and, in fact, as much time as was required when this process last happened in 1994; and

WHEREAS it would be irresponsible for any party to deny the taxpayers of our Province the opportunity to realize these savings over the next

four years when, in tough fiscal times, it would spare Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the equivalent of those savings in tax increases, increased debt, or reduced services; and

WHEREAS all three parties in this House are on record as supporting a reduction of the number of the Members of the House of Assembly and ought to stand by their words by enabling this independent process to proceed now, without needless delay;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to move forward now, without needless delay, to amend the Electoral Boundaries Act so that an independent commission will be appointed to facilitate a reduction in the number of seats in the House of Assembly from forty-eight to thirty-eight in advance of the next general election.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS PERRY: As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, it was very important that I stand up today and present this petition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS PERRY: As an elected Member of the House of Assembly, I have been receiving a lot of commentary from constituents and people I represent about the boundaries change. I have heard for quite some time, Mr. Speaker, the views of people at large who really feel the House of Assembly is too large.

You look at the workload, Mr. Speaker, of a Member of the House of Assembly. There are a lot of considerations that go into the boundaries and these –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member her speaking time has expired.

Further petitions?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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 humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS mental health programs and services –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, gentlemen.

WHEREAS mental health programs and services are crucial to the health of individuals, families, and communities; and

WHEREAS despite mental health services being delivered by government, community-based organizations and informally by families and friends, there are still large gaps in services and programs in the Province; and

WHEREAS despite these efforts, stigma remains a significant barrier for people needing to access mental health services, and participate in society; and

WHEREAS new directions and priorities are needed for mental health programs and service delivery, especially for unique groups such as youth, Aboriginal people, immigrants and refugees; and

WHEREAS deep fiscal cuts in the last budget have placed a great strain on organizations delivering mental health services in the Province;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to immediately strike an all-party committee on

mental health which, through extensive public consultation, will review the current state of provincial mental health services, receive expert testimony on best to better serve the needs of all the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I have stood in the House a number of times presenting this petition on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have thousands of signatures.

In the past week, Mr. Speaker, with the government's introduction of Bill 42, one of the rationales the government has used as well is that they want to better use the Members of the House of Assembly by using all-party committees, standing committees, select committees. The Official Opposition has said the same.

In response to this petition, in response to consultation with people all over the Province, both health care providers and users of our mental health system and the general population, they have asked for an all-party select committee on mental health. The Minister of Health has said that he will work with this committee.

Mr. Speaker, in response to that, tomorrow I will be presenting a private member's motion asking government to strike a select committee on mental health. If this government is true to its word, if the Official Opposition is true to its word, they will both support this call for an all-party select committee on mental health. To do so would be in contradiction to what they have both said in the media and in this House in the past week.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am happy once again to present this petition on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador on a very pressing need and what can be lifesaving measures.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand again to present another petition, Mr. Speaker.

The petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the electoral boundaries commission was legislated to be appointed in 2016 to determine any changes to electoral districts in the Province; and

WHEREAS the undersigned agree with a reduction in the number of electoral seats; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed the time necessary to properly carry out the necessary public consultations; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the population and demographics of each district and properly calculate the necessary adjustments for a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the geographical implications of a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the government is attempting to change legislation to appoint the electoral boundaries commission early;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to ensure that, with or without the completion of the work of the electoral boundaries commission as a result of appointing the commission early, it will not interfere with the legislated and mandated requirement to hold a provincial general election in 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I just heard the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune stand up on a petition. This is very important for the people of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. First of all, there is talk there about being independent. Is it independent when you are mandated to do

something? How much independence do you have?

I just want to explain, Mr. Speaker. Now, I heard the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. When you are mandated and you have a certain number, ten, there is no consultation. The District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune – and she is unaware of it; it is obvious she is unaware of this – there was a variance of 10 per cent, and the commission can make a recommendation up to 25 per cent. The district that it was done for was Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: To represent the people of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. So, when the member wants to stand in this House and present a petition, she obviously does not even know the regulations. She does not know the mandate that was done in 2004. She does not know what it was.

When the regulation was put in to give the commission independence of various – ten up to twenty-five, it was the rural districts like Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. The member is standing here now saying forget the people in my district. Go ahead and do what this government wants. The residents of my district, it does not matter. It does not matter about anything. It does not matter. You should be – go back and consult with your people. Go back with the people.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS PERRY: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune on a point of order.

MS PERRY: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I just said the member opposite is putting words in my mouth. That is not what I said.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands to continue.

MR. JOYCE: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

What I am saying is go back and consult with the people in your district because at the time I was in this part of the government. That was one of the districts that when that revision was made up to 25 per cent, it was for that district. Check with your residents who live there.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: 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 Newfoundland and Labrador has the second largest number of members of its provincial Legislature per capita of all provinces in Canada, which means, on average, the second smallest number of constituents per member of any provincial Legislature in the country; and

WHEREAS reducing the size of the House of Assembly by ten seats from forty-eight to thirty-eight will achieve savings to the provincial taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador an estimated \$2.5 million per year totalling some \$10 million over the course of a four-year term; and

WHEREAS even with such a reduction –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask all members for their co-operation.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista South to continue.

MR. LITTLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS even with such a reduction, Newfoundland and Labrador will continue to enjoy its ranking as the Province with the second largest number of members per capita; and

WHEREAS it has been the common practice for the government of the day to set the target number of seats in a redistributed Legislature; and

WHEREAS in moving ahead now without needless delay there is ample time in 2015 for this independent process to unfold, and, in fact, as a matter of time as was required when this process last happened in 1994; and

WHEREAS it would be irresponsible for any party to deny the taxpayers of our Province the opportunity to realize these savings over the next four years when, in tough fiscal times, it would spare Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the equivalent of those savings in tax increases, increased debt, or reduced services; and

WHEREAS all three parties in this House are on record as supporting a reduction of the number of Members of the House of Assembly and ought to stand by their words by enabling the independent process to proceed now, without needless delay;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to move forward now, without needless delay, to amend the Electoral Boundaries Act so that an independent commission will be appointed to facilitate a reduction of the number of seats in the House of Assembly from forty-eight to thirty-eight in advance of the next general election.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member his time for speaking has expired.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS the electoral boundaries commission was legislated to be appointed in 2016 to determine any changes to electoral districts in the Province; and

WHEREAS the undersigned agree with a reduction in the number of electoral seats; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed the time necessary to properly carry out the necessary public consultations; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the population and demographics of each district and properly calculate the necessary adjustments for a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the geographical implications of a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the government is attempting to change legislation to appoint the electoral boundaries commission early;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to ensure that, with or without the completion of the work of the electoral boundaries commission as a result of appointing the commission early, it will not interfere with the legislated and mandated requirement to hold a provincial general election in 2015.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition was signed by residents in the District of Lake Melville. I would like to refer to Labrador for a couple of

minutes, if I can. We have also heard the mayor – who is in the gallery – from Wabush come out in support of four districts in Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, currently Labrador has four seats out of forty-eight which makes up 8.3 per cent of the total complement of the Legislature. Should Labrador's numbers drop to two of thirty-eight seats, as proposed by this government, Labrador will constitute 5 per cent of the total complement of our Legislature. Should Labrador stay at four out of thirty-eight seats, Labrador will constitute 11 per cent of the total Legislature. Nowhere close to 50 per cent, not by any means.

I cannot see how any government can reduce the number of seats in Labrador due to a broad range of reasons: diversity, geography, culture. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Labrador West has travelled 1,800 kilometres to get home. Some districts in this Province, it is 1.8 kilometres and you are through the district into another one.

It takes me two days to travel home from St. John's – two days. It takes me six days to go through my district, and I have six communities. It takes me six days. If you look at the size and the demographics, there is no way that anyone can see the number of seats that are already low – certainly being a Labradorian, I would like to see 50 per cent of the seats in Labrador; but four seats out of forty-eight, two out of thirty-eight, or four out of thirty-eight is nowhere close to any (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member his speaking time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. HILLIER: 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 electoral boundaries commission was legislated to be appointed in

2016 to determine any changes to electoral districts in the Province; and

WHEREAS the undersigned agree with a reduction in the number of electoral seats; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 will have allowed the time necessary to properly carry out the necessary public consultations; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the population and demographics of each district and properly calculate the necessary adjustments for a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the geographical implications of a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the government is attempting to change legislation to appoint the electoral boundaries commission early;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to ensure that, with or without the completion of the work of the electoral boundaries commission as a result of appointing the commission early, it will not interfere with the legislated and mandated requirement to hold a provincial general election in 2015.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, based on section 3.1 of the House of Assembly's act, as to the resignation of a Premier, there are people in this Province who have called for a general election in the past year; the Official Opposition has not done so. Based on the non-crisis of DarkNL and the fiasco of Humber Valley Paving, a large portion of the population of this Province has called for a general election; the Official Opposition has not done so.

Based on some of the Premier's appointments after taking office, a large portion of the population of this Province have called for a general election; the Official Opposition has not done so. Mr. Speaker, based on the number of resignations from government, four, five, six, seven and subsequent by-elections, a large section of the population of this Province has called for a general election; the Official Opposition has not done so.

Mr. Speaker, this petition, and those of my colleagues, are demanding for the legislated election to take place this fall. This time, so are the members of the Official Opposition. We demand an election in the fall of 2015.

Thank you very much.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. DINN: 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 Newfoundland and Labrador has the second largest number of members of its provincial Legislature per capita of all the provinces in Canada, which means, on average, the second smallest number of constituents per member of any provincial Legislature in the country; and

WHEREAS reducing the size of the House of Assembly by ten seats from forty-eight to thirty-eight will achieve savings to the provincial taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador of an estimated \$2.5 million per year totalling some \$10 million over the course of a four-year term; and

WHEREAS even with such a reduction, Newfoundland and Labrador will continue to enjoy its ranking as the Province with the second largest number of members per capita; and

WHEREAS it has been the common practice for the government of the day to set the target number of seats in a redistributed Legislature; and

WHEREAS in moving ahead now, without needless delay, there is ample time in 2015 for this independent process to unfold, and, in fact, as much time as was required when this process last happened in 1994; and

WHEREAS it would be irresponsible for any party to deny the taxpayers of our Province the opportunity to realize these savings over the next four years when, in tough fiscal times, it would spare Newfoundlanders and Labradorians the equivalent of those savings in tax increases, increased debt, or reduced services; and

WHEREAS all three parties in this House are on record as supporting a reduction of the number of Members of the House of Assembly and ought to stand by their words by enabling this independent process to proceed now without needless delay;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to move forward now without needless delay to amend the Electoral Boundaries Act so that an independent commission will be appointed to facilitate a reduction of the number of seats in the House of Assembly from forty-eight to thirty-eight in advance of the next general election.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is the second time I have given a petition in the House of Assembly. It is not the first. When I was on city council in St. John's, oftentimes I had petitions for an issue and against. We are here today presenting in favour of our move here as a government.

I feel myself that the people in this Province want this change to take place. They want it to take place as soon as possible, not 2019. To delay doing the amendments in the Legislature now would mean that nothing would happen to this issue until the election in 2019.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member his speaking time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a petition.

The petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the electoral boundaries commission was legislated to be appointed in 2016 to determine any changes to electoral districts in the Province; and

WHEREAS the undersigned agree with a reduction in the number of electoral seats; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed the time necessary to properly carry out the necessary public consultations; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 would have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the population and demographics of each district and properly calculate the necessary adjustments for a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the appointment of the electoral boundaries commission in 2016 have allowed sufficient time necessary to properly evaluate the geographical implications of a change in the number of electoral districts; and

WHEREAS the government is attempting to change legislation to appoint the electoral boundaries commission early;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to ensure that, with or without the completion of work of the electoral boundaries commission as a result of appointing the commission early, it will not interfere with the legislated and

mandated requirement to hold a provincial general election in 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard from a number of people this weekend, from some of the people who have signed petitions. One of the petitions I am going to present today is signed by people from Clarendville; the signatures on this are all from Clarendville.

Mr. Speaker, let's make no mistake, the people I have heard from this past weekend have told me they believe this is a very political move by government; a very political move. An effort to push the election out to 2016 is the belief, which is the reason we have this petition. Mr. Speaker, they know that if an election were called today government would lose. Based on the polling, government would lose. So, there is politics behind this move today.

We all agree with reducing the number of electoral districts in this Province, Mr. Speaker, but there is politics behind the legislation that is put before the floor of the House of Assembly. The proof of that is in the petitions presented by members of government. They have every right to present a petition, Mr. Speaker, every right to present a petition, as does any Member of this House of Assembly, but it is the first time, since I have been a member of this House, that I have seen a government member present a petition.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something else. I have looked at the signatures on two of the petitions. While the signatures on the petition that I am presenting today are all from Clarendville, they are members of the general public. The two petitions that were presented today by government members, Mr. Speaker, are party executive members and party staffers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Shame, shame!

MR. OSBORNE: Now, Mr. Speaker, tell me there is no politics behind what is happening in this House, because there is. There is absolute politics behind what is happening today in this House of Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the member his speaking time has expired.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, 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, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Address in Reply.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Trinity – Bay de Verde.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do not have a petition.

Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to rise in this House today as the Member for the District of Trinity – Bay de Verde. As a person who has been involved in politics for more than two decades, it is most humbling to sit in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, my first thank you goes to my family; my wife, Nadine, and my two sons, Benjamin and Alexander. Their support to me has been unwavering. Also, to my extended family and friends, who played a major role in helping me get to where I am today.

Many thank yous also to my hardworking campaign team and my loyal supporters for believing in me. Without them, my successful outcome would not have been possible. To the people of Trinity – Bay de Verde, thank you for your strong vote of confidence in me, and I look forward to representing you in this hon. House.

Mr. Speaker, I grew up in the community of Heart’s Delight – Islington, on the south side of Trinity Bay. I have been privileged to spend my entire life there with my family who operates a small business for over thirty years. Both my parents, Steve and Marilyn Crocker, are also lifelong residents of the district, where myself and my brother Brian were raised.

Mr. Speaker, while I am new to the House of Assembly, as I alluded to earlier, I am no stranger to politics. I first became interested in current affairs in government and democracy at a young age. Most here will remember the stand that former Premier Wells took on the Meech Lake Accord. It was at this time, while still in high school, I chose to become involved in the Liberal Party.

I became actively involved in many boards and committees in the years that followed. I served as a member of the Heart’s Delight – Islington Volunteer Fire Department for more than ten years. I have also served as community representative on school councils for my former high school, Holy Trinity Regional High, Epiphany Elementary, and most recently, Crescent Collegiate. I also served as a board member on the Trinity-Conception Business Development Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, Trinity – Bay de Verde is a collection of more than thirty communities from Hopeall on the Trinity shore to Salmon Cove on the Conception Bay North side of the peninsula. The district has a population of 8,600 residents. I would be remiss, if I did not mention the district is expecting unprecedented growth in the next 120 days.

Trinity – Bay de Verde is home to the historical Heart's Content Provincial Historic Site where in July, 1866, the first permanent transatlantic cable connecting Europe to North America was hauled ashore. In 2016, next year, will mark 150 years since that historic day. Interestingly enough, one of the major issues in the district today is communications, or lack thereof. The inability for residents of Trinity – Bay de Verde, 150 years later, to not be able to use cellphones is unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, we have key industries and employers in the District of Trinity – Bay de Verde, but none more important than the fishery is the reason our settlers came to those shores, and it is the reason we are there today. The fishing industry is the backbone of the Bay de Verde peninsula. The peninsula has the Province's largest inshore shellfish landings in ports such as Old Perlican and Bay de Verde.

There are also more than 1,000 people employed in the remaining fish processing facilities in the district. We must remain vigilant to ensure continued success of this industry, not only for the people of Trinity – Bay de Verde but for the entire Province as a whole.

One missing piece in ensuring the preservation and growth of our fishery is joint management, or lack thereof, with the federal government. We have long talked about joint management with the Government of Canada. The time has come to bring this to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, outside the fishery there is an ever-expanding tourism industry on the beautiful Bay de Verde peninsula, one which includes the Heart's Content cable station, the Baccalieu Island Bird Sanctuary, Cabot Rock in Grates Cove, Northern Bay Sands, Salmon Cove Sands, and our only golf course, Pitcher's Pond Golf Course, which is a picturesque nine-hole located in Whiteway.

Mr. Speaker, throughout my entire life, Trinity – Bay de Verde has been and always will be home. We have many challenges, but we also have many opportunities. Opportunities that we must continue to invest in, like our fishery, tourism, and small business.

Mr. Speaker, I was raised in a family where my parents and grandparents were small business owners. I, too, would later continue in the entrepreneurial field. I firmly believe that as we look forward, we must ensure we diversify our economy. One of the key elements of diversifying our economy is through small and medium-sized business.

One of the biggest hurdles faced by small and medium-sized business in our Province today is red tape. Ironically, this happens to be Red Tape Reduction Week. Repeatedly, we have heard small business owners asking for support in this area. I urge the government to work with small and medium-sized business owners and groups like our Board of Trade, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, among others, to ensure that the long overdue improvements are implemented.

Mr. Speaker, like all hon. members who enter this House of Assembly, we do so at the will of the people, and our time here comes in many different durations. I firmly believe that all members of this hon. House are here for one primary reason: to serve our towns, our districts, and ultimately, the people of our Province, Newfoundland and Labrador. During my tenure as Member for the District of Trinity – Bay de Verde, I commit to representing the people I serve to the best of my ability.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, as a member who has had a lifelong love for democracy and good government, it is with great pride and a humble spirit that I take my place in the Newfoundland and Labrador Legislature, along with my forty-seven colleagues. It is a particular honour to serve my district as a member of the Official Opposition under the leadership of the Member for Humber Valley, who I had the privilege to work with prior to me taking my seat here in the House of Assembly. Having had the opportunity to work closely with our leader, I am confident that under his leadership great things are in store for this Province.

I now look forward to working with him again in a new capacity as a member of his caucus, the Official Opposition – a caucus made up of a group of extraordinary individuals with diverse backgrounds from all corners of our Province

from the northern tip of Labrador to our Province's capital city.

All of us have come together as a united team to offer a strong alternative to the people of our Province. I look forward to participating in lively debate and discussions on important matters affecting the people of our Province and working with the members of this hon. House to advance the agenda for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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 we adjourn debate on Address in Reply.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that debate be now adjourned on Address in Reply.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, debate adjourned.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to call from the Order Paper, Motion 3, and to ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Electoral Boundaries Act, Bill 42, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Electoral Boundaries Act, Bill 42, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the hon. Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce Bill 42 and that the said bill be now read a first time?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried

Motion, the hon. the Government House Leader to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Electoral Boundaries Act", carried. (Bill 42)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Electoral Boundaries Act. (Bill 42)

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

When shall the bill be read a second time?

MR. KING: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, Bill 42 read a first time, ordered read a second time presently, by leave.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would ask leave from Opposition members to proceed in calling the said bill for the second reading.

MR. SPEAKER: Is there leave to proceed to second reading?

The Opposition House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: The Official Opposition is prepared to give leave.

MR. SPEAKER: Leave is granted.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank my colleagues opposite for providing leave.

At this time I would like to call from the Order Paper, Bill 42, An Act To Amend The Electoral Boundaries Act.

The said bill is moved by myself and seconded by the hon. the Premier that the 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 To Amend The Electoral Boundaries Act". (Bill 42)

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WISEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a real pleasure today to be able to introduce Bill 42. There has been a lot of discussion in the Province since last week when the Premier made an announcement last Friday that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador under his watch as the Premier was going to introduce some legislation and some actions to reform the function of the House of Assembly.

There were three components to that, Mr. Speaker. One of them was in asking you as the Speaker to convene a meeting of the Standing Orders Committee to look at all the Standing Orders that govern the rules of operation of the House that sets out the procedures for dealing with various aspects of the House operation, with a view of ensuring that the House is effective and efficient and provides an opportunity for mass participation by all members of this House in the legislative process. The second part of that was to ask you as the Speaker, through to the Management Commission, to start a process to reform the pensions for Members of the House of Assembly. The third one, which is the subject of this discussion today and the subject of Bill 42, is An Act to Amend the Electoral Boundaries Act.

Before I get into the substance of the bill itself, I just want to remind people that Bill 42 is a bill that we are bringing into the House to make amendments to an already existing piece of legislation. To create some context for the discussion, Mr. Speaker, I want to just provide some commentary, if I could, about the Electoral Boundaries Act.

This act goes back a few years, back to 1973 in fact. Prior to that, from 1949 when we joined Confederation with Canada, the process for deciding the number of seats that we would have was a process partially driven by the House of Assembly, but mostly determined by the government of the day. They would determine how many seats we would have and there would be an election held based on that decree of the number of seats we would have.

In 1973, this piece of legislation was introduced, the Electoral Boundaries Act. Since that time, this act has guided the process of determining the boundaries for electoral districts in this Province. What we are doing here today is bringing in some amendments to this already existing piece of legislation.

This legislation makes a number of provisions. It makes a provision for a commission to be appointed with a chairperson. That chairperson is decided by the chief justice of the Appeal Court of Newfoundland and Labrador. So, there is a certainty that this is an unbiased process. It is not influenced by political pressures. It does not favour one political party or the other. You have an independent chairperson appointed by the chief justice.

In fact, the chairperson should be picked and selected from among the judges of the Court of Appeal and the Trial Division; however, if at some point in time when this commission is put together a judge is not available from either one of those courts, then it is permissible for the chief justice, but it still must be done by the chief justice. The chief justice then can look into the greater community and determine someone who is capable, confident, and qualified to do this piece of work; they can appoint that individual who is not a sitting judge, or a retired judge. The process, Mr. Speaker, is that chief justice, when asked by the

House, will then make sure that person gets appointed within a thirty-day period.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, that chairperson does not work by themselves. There are four other people. It is a commission of five. There are four other people who get appointed to this commission, and these four people are people who are appointed by the Speaker.

Generally, what will happen in the course of putting this commission together, members of the Opposition parties and members of the governing party will put forward names, make recommendations to the Speaker as to who should be appointed to the commission, to join the chairperson of the commission to fill out the slate of five. That is exactly what will be happening here. There is no change in process.

The exact same process will unfold in the proposed amendment to Bill 42. There is absolutely no change in what takes place in how the commission gets appointed, who is on the commission, and the role that they play – no change at all. In addition to that, what will happen, Mr. Speaker, they will be in a course of providing direction to the commission.

Since the very beginning, in 1973, and each time since then that this commission has been convened – because this commission has been convened in 1973 for the first time, again in 1983, again in 1993, again in 1995, again in 2003, and again in 2006. We have already had this six times, so this will be the seventh time. This will be the seventh commission that has been put in place because this exercise has occurred six previous times.

What we are following here is a well-established process. The commission in the legislation that already exists, Mr. Speaker – we are not adding this. The legislation already provides for. The legislation will tell the commission how many seats there will be. This is nothing new.

In the past, for example, the commission has said – how the legislation has, on a couple of occasions, said there will be forty-eight. Another time the commission was given direction to make it fifty-two. So the commission has always had direction based on the legislation. The legislation has fixed a

number and said you will divide the Province by X number of seats. That is the process to establish a quotient: how many people will exist in each electoral district, how many voters will exist in each electoral district.

The legislation has historically defined the number of seats that will exist. The commission has then suggested that you take the population of the Province and divide it by that fixed number of seats. That is how you determine how many people will be in a district. Then you decide to carve up the district, create your boundaries based on that kind of a configuration using the number of seats that the legislation provided for you and then doing a simple calculation and dividing that number into the population of the Province to establish a quotient. That is the process. This is laid out in legislation. There is no change this time than it was in the past. The same process is followed each time.

We are not changing anything new here in the process, Mr. Speaker. As I have said, the commission then reports back to the House of Assembly, provides a report to the Minister of Justice, and it is tabled in this House. The process is mapped out in the current legislation.

When we read the amendments to the legislation in Bill 42, it is important that members read Bill 42, which is amending an already existing piece of legislation, to look at the legislation itself, because not all sections are being amended. Much of it is intact. Not much changed, Mr. Speaker; a couple of significant points. One is that the commission has been told there will be thirty-eight seats. The commission has also been told that they will do their work in 120 days from the date on which the Chair gets appointed. So that is a bit of a change, Mr. Speaker. The 120 days is a change.

The other thing that has changed this time from the past is in the past, as I have said, the number of seats were different. Back in 2006, the direction in the legislation was to have forty-eight seats. The direction in 1995 was to have forty-eight seats. The direction in 2003 was to have forty-eight seats. The direction in 1983 was to have fifty-two. The direction in 1973 was to have fifty-one. So there has always been a direction provided by the legislation.

There was one exception to that. Back in 1993 the legislation gave a – it is an interesting one, Mr. Speaker. I will spend a bit of time talking about that one because in 1993 the legislation said to the commission, we want you to go away and do your piece of work. We want you to decide whether there should be forty-six, or there should be forty, or forty-two, or forty-four. So the commission was given an option in 1993. At that time there was a Liberal Administration in place.

The commission spent a great deal of time, did its work, and did a masterful piece of work, Mr. Speaker. They took some time, talked to people, had some consultations, and did a great analysis of the distribution of the population of the Province. They came back and said, based on your instructions, we are recommending that there be forty-four seats in the Province – forty-four seats.

That was the one and only time that a commission was given a choice of a range; only one time of the six times this has happened. Only one time was it given a range. That was in 1993 with a Liberal Administration in place. The commission, the justice involved chairing the commission, together with the other members of the commission, produced a report and said, we suggest that you have forty-four districts in this Province.

The Liberal Administration at that time said, we disagree with that. We do not think there should be forty-four seats. We are not going to accept your recommendation. We do not think you did a good enough job. We do not want anymore – even though the legislation clearly said pick forty-six, forty-two, forty, or forty-four, and they picked forty-four. The Liberal Administration at that time said, we do not want that; we disagree with your total. Even though we gave you the instructions to do that, we still disagree with you and we are not going to accept your report. We are going to throw it out, discard it, forget about it, ignore it.

AN HON. MEMBER: What year was that?

MR. WISEMAN: That was in 1993. They needed to do it. They still needed to have a boundaries commission do a piece of work.

Rather than have a piece of legislation like we are using here today to guide a process, the government of that day, the Liberal Administration of that day, the Premier and the Cabinet got together upstairs in the Cabinet room. They went upstairs on the eighth floor, got together around a Cabinet table, and said chief justice – I will not name the man – so-and-so just did a piece of work for us and we do not agree with it. We are not going to accept it.

Do you know something? We are not even going to go back into the Legislature and ask the Legislature to amend the legislation to give a new direction. We are going to arbitrarily take it upon ourselves, in a strong-armed way, because we are the government, we are the Cabinet, and I am the Premier. I am going to decree – I am going to issue an MC; I am going to issue a Minute of Council.

I am going to ignore the House of Assembly. I am going to ignore everybody down there who is elected whether you are in government or whether you are in Opposition. I do not really care what they think. I am going to ignore what the Members of the House of Assembly really think and what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador really think because I am the Premier. Me and my Cabinet are here, and we are going to decide what is going to happen.

Do you know what they did? I will tell you what they did now. They issued a Minute of Council. Do you know what they said? They said: We are going to go out and pick another judge. We are going to find a judge who might be more friendly to our wishes, so we are going to pick a judge. We are going to pick a judge and we are going to have that person do what we tell him. Here is what we are going to tell him: We want you Mr. New Judge to go out and we want you to divide the Province up into forty-eight seats. Ignore the forty-four, ignore the legislation, but I am giving you a command. I am giving you a command to run out today and carve this Province up into forty-eight seats.

Ignore what anybody else tells you. In fact, not only did they say ignore what everybody else tells you, we do not want you to do any consultations. What we want you to do is we want you to refer to what the last group did.

Whatever consultations they did, that is enough; don't you bother to do any.

We want you to come back now Mr. Judge – and do it quickly, too; do not go wasting any time. Get this done as fast as you can and get this back and only look at what we are telling you. Carve the Province up into forty-eight seats. Ignore what the previous group did, and do not talk to anybody, no consultation, and give us a report and then we will accept that.

This is our seventh time out doing this. So, in our history we have only had one time back in 1993 under a Liberal Administration where we had a very draconian, a very arbitrary way of imposing on the people a process that was not founded in legislation.

When I speak to the merits and the value of the legislation, Mr. Speaker, I felt obligated to qualify that because the legislation has not always been followed or adhered to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): Order, please!

MR. WISEMAN: – because somebody had arbitrarily decided that we were going to do it very differently down the road.

Other than that, Mr. Speaker, this has been the process. Since 1973 – and I might add that was a Conservative government who brought this legislation in, in 1973. We have had a significant history of being guided in a process, a legitimate process, using a piece of legislation that we are still following today.

When members start talking about, in a cynical way, suggesting somehow or other that this process is flawed or suggesting in some way that this process has the chance of being manipulated by politicians, this is a process that has been established since 1973. Tried six times in the past. One I acknowledged was flawed, but the other five were perfectly in compliance with the piece of legislation.

A couple of things that we are doing slightly different this time is we are looking at imposing a timeline on the commission to do their piece of work. I say, Mr. Speaker, let's think about the

timeline that has been challenged – and people are suggesting maybe 120 days is too long a period of time to do the work. Is it reasonable? Can it be done in 120 days? If you consider, Mr. Speaker, the task at hand, five bright, intelligent people turning their head to a task supported by a capable, competent staff, this is a piece of work that requires some great analytical skills, some great statistical analysis, some mapping that needs to occur.

Back in 1973 when this all started, and I suspect that probably up into the mid-1990s, a lot of this was calculators and hand calculations and trying to draw maps on drafting boards. Today, Mr. Speaker, we have GISs. We have all kinds of computing technologies and capabilities. In fact, there are people in Crown Lands who do mapping all the time. We have people in the statistical branch of the Department of Finance who, on an ongoing basis, are doing profiles of the Province in population forecast, projections, and mapping the Province in many ways for many different purposes. These are things that we have a group of professional people doing this all of the time.

Engineering consulting firms around the Province have built tremendous capacity in doing this type of work on an ongoing basis. So there is tremendous capacity to support this kind of initiative, but when you look at the 120 days – what are we talking about? Four months. So there are four months to do this.

Let me just read for you a page from the 2006 report. In 2006, the group of people who did the 2006 report, when they finished the report, they had made a couple of comments. They made a comment about the census information that they had available to use, and they made a suggestion as to what should happen when the next census information came out. It is in that context that I want to cite from the report.

These are five people, chaired by the hon. John O'Neill, Chairperson, just finished the piece of work that they had gone through. They knew exactly what was involved. They knew how long it took. They knew what challenges they had. They knew what technology they used. They knew what supports they should have had or could have had and would need to have, but with all of that, with that full knowledge they

say – let me read, Mr. Speaker, and I quote – as they suggest that a new commission would look at this boundary issue when new census information becomes available, and that they “be charged with the responsibility to provide its recommendations within six months thereafter...”.

The same five people who just spent months doing this piece of work understands fully what is involved here, understands the scope of work, the task, the challenges, the complexity. They were confident in signing a paper, signing a report. In fact, this sentence is right above their signatures; you could not miss it – right above their signatures. They say that a future commission should be tasked with doing this report and bringing forward its recommendations within – not six months, but within six months.

Now we have a group of people saying that this can be done within six months. We are suggesting here, appropriately resourced – which it will be – this is a piece of work that this commission should be able to do within four months, or by four months. We are going to have a deadline of 120 days. That is four months.

So you have one group saying within six – so that is somewhere between four and six. It might be five; it might be five-and-a-half. It might be four; it might be four-and-a-half.

We are saying we are going to resource it up. We are going to make the technology available. We are going to make the expertise available to do it within 120 days. It is doable, I say, Mr. Speaker. This group of people here said – in fact, it is interesting, one of the people on this was a former Liberal Premier. Obviously he believed, at that time, that this work can be done within six months or he would not have said it.

Mr. Speaker, that should be, to some degree, I suspect, a comfort. It should be a comfort to some people that this is a piece of work that obviously can be done within six months. We think it can be done in four. The changes here are not huge in terms of the time frame.

Let’s recap now before we move on too far. We have the same independent process of a

commissioner appointed by the chief justice of the appeal court. We have four other people appointed by the Speaker. We all know how the Speaker gets the names, from nominations from the three parties in this House – the same process as in the past. They will be adequately provided with resources. They have to report to the Justice Minister. The Justice Minister will table the report in the House of Assembly. That is all mapped out in the current legislation.

What else are we changing? What else is unique this time in 2015 than would it normally be? This came up in Question Period today because there was a question from a member opposite that would seem to suggest that we are wasting a lot of money. Why are we doing this? We do not need to be doing this. This is something that we ordinarily would not do, so this is going to be new money. In times of restraint, why are we spending it?

I just want to repeat, I guess, the answer that I gave in Question Period. This is a piece of legislation. This act exists and we are not going to break the law. We are not going to break the rules. It does not matter who sits in this House. We are going to follow the law. We are going to follow the rules. This law says that in 2016 this is going to happen. It will happen again in 2026. It is going to happen anyway. This is something that we would have had to build on for next year. It was an event that was going to occur.

All we said given the fact that all political parties have said we think that the House can function with less people than currently exists, on that premise then why don’t we go ahead and do it today? We have an election coming up – and I will speak to this in a moment. There seems to be a pre-occupation with the notion that the election will not happen in 2015. No one has said that. I am not sure where they got that idea, who dreamt that one up. No one has said that the election was not going to be in 2015. So again, they are fabricating information to try to give an impression that there is some cynical reasons for us wanting to make this change in the legislation. We are still going to have an election in 2015.

So what we have said is: Boys, if everybody agrees that we have too many of us here, then maybe we should, rather than wait until 2016

after the 2015 election – because that is what will happen. If we did not do this today we would have an election the fall, we would elect forty-eight people; in 2016, the commission would be put in place and recommend a reduction of seats. So let's say they picked six seats, or seven seats, or eight seats – it does not matter, seven or eight seats. A new commission in 2016 says: Boys, forty-eight too many; you should only have forty-two.

Now, they look around and said we just redrafted the boundaries and six of you are gone. So we will have six MHAs sitting in this House and the commissioner just said: Oh, by the way, you are redundant; we do not need you anymore. Go back home and tell your constituents that you are done; you are finished. You are going to sit around for the next two or three years, collect a pay cheque, but you are really finished. Because in the next election in 2019, you are not going to be there; you are going home. So you have MHAs sitting here in the House, lame ducks.

The commissioner just said: Guys, you have two or three years here, but you are no longer wanted, you are not needed, so you might as well go home. We have been paying you on the debt, and you are accumulating a pension, and all that stuff, costing taxpayers' money. So what are you doing here?

What we are saying is why don't we do this in 2015 before the 2015 election? The operative point here is before – please listen – before the 2015 election, because we are still planning a 2015 election. That is not changing. This bill does not say we are going to move the election date. That is a whole different act. There is another piece of legislation on the books that says when the elections are going to be held. That spells out the fixed term election. That is not the bill we are dealing with here; that is a whole different act altogether. So, we are still talking about a 2015 election. What we are saying is rather than do this in 2019, why don't we do it in readiness for a 2015 election? Why don't we do that? We have said that we believe that thirty-eight people provide – and I will comment on the rationale for that in a moment. We are saying that there would be thirty-eight people in the House.

So, ten people, there should be ten fewer MHAs. Over the course of the next four years, by doing this, it makes a whole lot of sense for a lot of reasons; but, in so doing, we have ten MHAs with their constituency offices and their constituency assistants and all the expense of operating our offices – all worthwhile expenditures, but really over the course of the next four years, we will spend about \$10 million that will be paying for ten MHAs who will be redundant. Does that make a whole lot of sense? Probably not.

Add that now to what I just said a moment ago which is, half way through the term the next time out, a commission is going to produce a report – because now remember, we are saying thirty-eight, but everybody else, all the other parties, have said there should be less. So it does not matter who sits in this House in the next session. Everybody is in agreement it is going to be something less. So, we reasonably assume, given that everybody wants it, that the commission in 2016, if it were to go ahead as planned, as previously scheduled, would come up with a number less than forty-eight.

So there will be so many MHAs sitting in this House after the 2016 report knowing that they are redundant. You have no purpose. You are getting paid. What are you going to do? Your district and your constituents have been told that you are redundant. You are no longer needed. You are extra. One of those days you are going to have to go home. It is like getting a three-year layoff notice. That is what it is like, only you are going to get a pay cheque. How productive are you? How beneficial are you? You are a lame duck.

There are lots of sound reasoning for the timing of this. Those people who think this is some sinister move to try to advance the election out in 2016 that is not happening. If that was our plan, if it was our plan to move the election out to 2016, do you know what we would have to do? We would have to bring in another bill, a totally different bill than this one. We would have to bring in a totally different bill and we would be amending another piece of legislation. We cannot go out and have an election beyond the stipulated date in the current legislation. If we wanted to do that, we would be in here amending that. We are not doing that.

We are here now debating a bill that allows us to expedite a process that is going to happen anyway. We are not dreaming up something brand new. This is expediting a process to make it happen in 2015 rather than 2016, and in the process, make this House equally as efficient as it is now, rightsize the number of MHAs that need to be here. Obviously, if I am saying rightsizing, I think I have concurrence with everybody in the House because we are all in agreement that we should be less than what we now have.

So this exercise can truly be described as a rightsizing of the membership in the House of Assembly, rightsizing the number of electoral districts in the Province. There is no debate, no argument about that. Members of the Opposition are nodding their heads up and down. I assume it is in concurrence; they agree with me. So, obviously, I am making some sense.

Let's look at some other aspects of the bill that are important for people to understand. This is not in Bill 42, but I want to go back to the legislation itself, because one of the key things that have come up in this discussion is, why thirty-eight? Why not forty? Why not fifty? Why not thirty-five? Where did we get the number? Why is thirty-eight such a magical number?

Do you know something? There is nothing necessarily magical about thirty-eight. The word magical is not necessarily the appropriate term to use. It is appropriateness. What is appropriate? What is reasonable? How do you measure appropriateness? How do you measure reasonableness? Some of it might be somewhat subjective, but at the same time you have to use some degree of objectivity. So you need to look at the profile of Newfoundland and Labrador, and look at the profile of other jurisdictions in the country. How does the rest of the world work?

We are living in a great nation, Canada. We have provinces and territories. They do the same thing we do. They have Legislatures just like we do. They have elections just like we do. They elect members. They have a fixed number of seats. They have a process in their House to determine the number of seats that exist. They

do the same thing we are doing. How do they do it? How do they pick a number? Where does that come up from? So we had a look at what is happening around the country.

When you look at Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, and say we have forty-eight seats, how many voters are in each seat? How many people live there? What is the census? There is a difference, the number of people who live there. They are not all voters. There are lots of children there under the age of voting, so there is a difference. There are two things: how many voters live there, and how many people live there?

When we started looking at Newfoundland and Labrador and we started looking at districts that have 7,000, 7,400, 6,500, 3,800, districts of 3,100, districts of 11,000, districts of 7,800. We have a range; another one of 2,100. We have a range. These are voters. We have a range of voters throughout our Province in our districts. There is a huge discrepancy from the highest to the lowest. Some districts are quite small geographically; some districts are quite large geographically. So we have diversity.

Is that inconsistent with what other provinces have? Look at maybe the rest of Atlantic Canada, what do they have? What number of people do they have? Look at places like New Brunswick and say, well, if I lived in New Brunswick today I would be looking at my Legislature has forty-nine members. They have 750,000 people and they have 15,330 people per district.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) is a smaller province.

MR. WISEMAN: One member just shouted from the other side and said a smaller province. You are absolutely right. Geographically, we are a huge Province. Just think about a province, though, that is not totally dissimilar. We are unique, we are different. There is no one else in Canada like us in many ways, geographically as well.

If you look at one province where there is some similarity – if you look at Saskatchewan, and if you look at the population density in Saskatchewan versus the population density in

Newfoundland and Labrador. In Newfoundland and Labrador we have 1.4 people living per every square kilometre. In Saskatchewan they have 1.7 people. It is not a huge difference, but a difference. I will acknowledge there is a difference.

Let's look at Saskatchewan. Remember, I just read out some of the sizes of the electoral districts in Newfoundland and Labrador. New Brunswick is probably not a good comparison. The member opposite said that was not a good comparison, so I will skip over New Brunswick, but the data is the same. It is very similar in terms of comparison.

Let's look at Saskatchewan, if that is the one that he wants to jump to. We will jump to Saskatchewan. Over in Saskatchewan they have 1 million people, almost double what we have. Yes, close to double actually, 1,033,000. They have fifty-eight seats. Eight more seats than we have, and there are 17,000 people on average per district out there.

Keep in mind, I just read out the number of voters in Newfoundland and Labrador using numbers like 7,500, 7,400, 6,500, 8,400, 3,100, 2,100 voters per district. I am going to Saskatchewan now and I am going to look at that same province. I am looking at numbers like 9,500, 9,800, and 10,000. In fact, the smallest one has 6,500 voters.

I can go through every province in the country; I can share them all with you. You do not want to hear that. You have probably already done the research. I suspect members opposite have already done the research. I bet you they have the same document in their hands as I have here. I bet they have. With all the money they have for researchers, they must be doing something.

They are up there now, Mr. Speaker, and they have the same information we have. Members of the Opposition know today that we have on average, whether you measure it in population per district or whether you measure it in voters per district; we have a number smaller than many jurisdictions in the entire country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. WISEMAN: We have that established. If you take Newfoundland and Labrador and you use thirty-eight seats as the measure and then you recalculate the numbers, where does that put us with the rest of Canada? It does not change our standing any or it does not make us number one or number two or number three. We are still relative to the rest of the country. We are still in the same standing, but we have made a huge difference in terms of that gap we have closed.

This is not an exercise of closing gaps. This is not an exercise of mathematically equating to some other province but it is a measure of reasonableness. It is a measure of fairness. It is a measure of providing reasonable and appropriate representation for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, so every Newfoundlander and Labradorian has their interest represented in this House of Assembly by members who are elected here. They have their representation, and there is some equality in that representation, Mr. Speaker.

That speaks to one of the other pieces that have come up with some criticism. I said earlier, this is the seventh time we are doing this. If you take each of the other times this has been done, the other six times this has been done, it was guided by a piece of legislation just like this time. We are being guided by legislation, not manufacturing anything, not creating something, not doing as the Liberals did in 1995, which is an issue at MC. We are doing it by the legislation. We are doing it by the books.

Mr. Speaker, during that process each of those pieces of legislation, each of those times, laid out very specific direction to the commission on a couple of areas. One was the number of seats; we have already had that discussion. The second thing was around the seat in Torngat Mountains. This legislation says there will be a seat. The word Torngat Mountain is not in there. It describes it geographically as being north of Lake Melville, but we all would recognize it in this House. The Member for Torngat Mountains is sitting in the House. Everybody here would recognize the description in the legislation as clearly describing the district now known as Torngat Mountains.

The communities in that district are all part of a – now we have a new Legislature in that area as

well, representing the people in those communities. This district has been identified as a district that will retain a seat. In fact, it was in the 1993 legislation. It was in the 1995, it was in the 2003, it was in the 2006, and it is there today in the proposed legislation.

There is one slight change, and this is an area where there has been some debate and some discussion. Members from Labrador have been particularly interested in this particular area. It is important for the people of the Province and the people of the Legislature to have an appreciation and an understanding of the nuances around having a fixed number of seats in Labrador.

If you look at the history of the Province, in 1993, in 1995, and in 2003, it was never stated in the legislation that there would be four seats in Labrador. It was stated in 2006, the number of seats were staying at forty-eight. So the direction in the legislation in 2006 was there will be forty-eight seats, and you will keep the four seats in Labrador. That was clearly spelled out in the legislation.

Now, here is a bit of challenge facing a Legislature. All of us here, as a Legislature, we face many challenges lots of times. We find ourselves in the House making decisions, called upon to pass legislation, called upon to make changes. Governments are called upon to make challenging decisions sometimes, and it is incumbent upon all of us to look at those decisions and our responsibility in an objective fashion, to be guided by something.

Is there laws of the land that should guide us? Are there precedents that we should be guided by? Are there unique circumstances that we should be guided by? These are all things that we, as legislators, have a responsibility to give consideration to.

One of the things that we all have to be mindful of, as Canadians – as Canadians, we live in a great country, and there are certain laws of the land that guide all of us. There are certain laws that exist that supersede what our Legislatures may do, and certain authorities we have as legislators to pass certain legislation here. That is an unfettered responsibility, an authority we have. It is not totally unfettered; it is fettered to

some degree by the Constitution. We cannot pass legislation in this House that will be contrary to the Constitution of Canada, for example. We just cannot do it.

Members opposite who are lawyers by profession will acknowledge that they run into this frequently, where they go to court and they challenge decisions on the basis of the Charter. They challenge the constitutionality of provincial statute on the basis of the Charter. It happens all of the time. There are all kinds of Charter challenges that members who are in the law profession find themselves arguing in a court of law.

One of the things that we have to be guided by, and I bring members' attention to a section – I said earlier that Bill 42 amends a piece of legislation. That piece of legislation – I want to bring members' attention to it – it is under the section 15 of the current act, 15.1. It deals with the rules to guide the commission. There is a principle at play here and that principle is embedded in the Charter, that one person's vote is no worse or no more valuable, or no less valuable than the next person's vote.

Simply expressed – and I will try to give that some definition. If I live in a district where there are 10,000 people, then my vote has value; but if I live in a district where there are only 2,000 people, then my vote is seen as having a greater value.

Remember I said earlier about the process that is laid out in the legislation. We tell the commission that there will be forty-eight or thirty-eight, or whatever the number is – this time we happen to say there will be thirty-eight seats. Now, what is the quotient? Take the number of people who live in the Province, divide it by the thirty-eight and that will tell you the quotient.

We then say to the commission in the legislative – by the way, this is not a precise science, so we know you are not going to get 10,522 in every district. Mathematically you cannot do that. So what we will do is we will give you an ability to use a tolerance of plus or minus 10 per cent.

Then we will say – because there are some uniqueness, we have geographic issues, we have

a bunch of other considerations that we want to make sure that you have flexibility to acknowledge, so we say to you, you are automatically given the latitude of plus or minus 10 per cent when you start carving up the Province. Firstly, you do the math, determine your quotient; and then, secondly, once you have that quotient, by virtue of definition, that is the number you work with. Now, try to get as close to that number in each district as you can. You know it is not possible in an absolute way, so we will allow you to go plus or minus 10 per cent on any given district.

There is going to be a scattered district where you are going to have to have a real challenge. You know there is a unique geography; you know that there is something unique about that area that makes it different. We will allow you in that instance to go plus or minus 25 per cent. That is built into the act. You are allowed to do that. The commissioner has the responsibility or the authority, rather, to do that and has the flexibility to be able to do that. That is the flexibility that you get.

There is another thing that we need to be careful of. That is what this bill says already. The commission has the flexibility to do that. Could you give the commission more authority? Could you say listen, put the boundaries where you want. Whatever you think is right carve them up. It does not make any difference about what the population numbers are in each district. Whatever looks right and whatever communities of interest, whatever clusters of communities makes sense to jam in one district, go ahead and do it.

Is that reasonable? Some might say yes, that sounds sensible because there are people who historically connect with each other. There are regions of the Province where there is a connection and historic connection. Kids go to the same school, they shop in the same stores, and they use the same service centre. There might be some logic to that.

There is another consideration and that is the Charter. I want to read you it because this is something that was not on the radar screen back in 1973 when this legislation was developed. It was not on the radar screen when it was done in

the 1980s, but it became a factor in the early 1990s.

It is interesting because there was a case in Saskatchewan in 1991 that happened just before – because in our legislation here I said that in 1973 and in 1983 there was an explicit reference to four seats in Labrador. It was not a coincidence that it got taken out in 1993. It was not a coincidence at all. It grew from a decision in Saskatchewan that went to the Supreme Court.

I want to read something to you because it is an important consideration. This is not about someone having a desire or no desire to have X number of seats in Labrador, or X number of seats on the West Coast or the South Coast. That is not the issue here. We have certain parameters that we need to give consideration to.

One of those parameters is rooted in the Charter and it is a general principle here. There have been some constitutional challenges to the distribution of districts. The one in Saskatchewan happened to go to the Supreme Court, but there have been other court challenges. It happened in the Northwest Territories. It happened in Alberta. It did not make it all way to the Supreme Court, but Saskatchewan did.

The constitutional challenges to electoral distribution are addressed under section 3 of the Charter. Under that reference to the Supreme Court by that Saskatchewan case – I am citing from that ruling. The purpose of the right to vote in section 3 of the Charter is not equality of the voting power per se, but the right to effective representation. The court held that one condition of effective representation is the relative – I am quoting here now – parity of voting power. A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly, as compared to another citizen's, runs the risk of providing inadequate representation to the citizen whose vote is diluted. The parity of voting power, although of prime importance, is not the only factor.

It goes on to talk about how the courts are cautious about unduly interfering with the process of legislations like ours trying to bring in electoral form in defining boundaries. Here is the challenge. If we find ourselves passing

legislation in this House today, and whose very language in the legislation serves to dilute the power of one vote versus the other, courts have said they are prepared – remember I said that we are going to give the commission the latitude to automatically use plus or minus 10 per cent, and we have a special provision in there that says we will give you plus or minus 25 per cent? The courts have taken it upon themselves to use about 50 per cent as a tolerance. When you find that you are going to carve up your province in a way where one district ends up with 50 per cent less than the average, then you have diluted the vote of one of those districts.

When we say we are going to start placing parameters in the legislation that says you must have four, five, six, whatever the number is, you must have a fixed number of seats in one region of the Province. When you do that – we could pick the West Coast. We could pick Central. We could pick Labrador. As soon as you do that, you put a parameter around the work that the commission is forced to do. That potentially sets it up to be running afoul with the Charter.

Once that happens, the very thing you are concerned about in the House is making sure that we have an election in 2015, but if you create a circumstance where through legislation you give a commission a power to develop a set of boundaries in this Province that sets it up to run afoul with the Charter, you run the risk of having a Charter challenge on the constitutionality of your boundaries and how you have actually assigned vote and the value of that vote for one individual. That is what you have done.

Once you do that, we set the stage then to have someone challenge our ability to carry out an election with those boundaries. That is what you do, Mr. Speaker. One of the delicate pieces of work for us to do in this House is when we contemplate legislation, when we consider creating laws to govern how we do things, we need to be cognizant of the parameters in which we are legally bound to operate.

Provincial Legislatures can do many things. There is great power in this House. We pass legislation all the time that govern people, that affects the lives of every Newfoundlander and Labradorian. We do it on a regular basis, but we

do not have an unfettered right to do that. We have to consider and be cognizant of the Charter, people's constitutional rights. We cannot do something in this House that tramples on the constitutional rights of any Newfoundlander and Labradorian, because if we do, that is the challenges that go to the Supreme Court. We need to be careful that in developing a piece of legislation here and giving a set of parameters for a commission to work within, we cannot ignore that.

I say, Mr. Speaker, it was no coincidence that it was not – that Saskatchewan ruling goes back to 1991. It is coincidental that in 1993 onward, that the reference to the four seats in Labrador was not included, with the exception of 2006. If you notice in the current legislation, and many might debate whether or not it should or should not have been in there then, because the same caution was there.

In the 2006 amendment that was made, it was very clear that the reference to four seats in Labrador only applied to the 2006 election. It came out immediately after. As soon as the election was over, that provision came out of the legislation. Because it says clearly: For the purposes of the commission's report in 2006. It does not embed it. It has not been entrenched in the legislation that it will follow through forever, and future commissions. It is very specific. It made a very specific reference to one report, the 2006 report.

After that report came in, the reference to four seats in Labrador, for all intents and purposes, disappeared out of the act. It had no purpose in the act. It was like having a sunset clause. An event had occurred, the 2006 report was tabled. That event triggered the elimination of that provision.

To make a conscious decision to insert it again at a time – I suspect that in 2006 when it was embedded there, someone said: Well, we are not reducing the number of seats, we are not going to trigger any realignment. So it is kind of a benign thing to do. We will leave four seats in Labrador because it will have zero effect. No one else is being any more disadvantaged or advantaged than they were yesterday.

In an exercise where you are reducing the number of seats, you do trigger an event, you do trigger a recalculation. You do trigger a recalculation, and when you do that, obviously, people start to think about, where am I relative to the other person? I end up in a seat that has 10,000 voters; someone else ends up in a seat with 4,000 or 5,000. That sets you up then for a variance of more than 50 per cent.

I have said our legislation provides for, and courts have accepted it, plus or minus 10 per cent. They have acknowledged plus or minus 25 per cent as being reasonable. In their own deliberations they have not fixed it, but have tended to look at 50 per cent as being a reasonable calculation. As soon as you have more than 50 per cent deviation from that quotient, then you have set yourself up for a Charter challenge. So we need to be cognizant of that. We need to be very much aware of that as legislators in the House.

There is a lot of debate around many of those aspects of this bill. It is one where, we talked about the timing. I want to reiterate a couple of things I said at the beginning. This is a piece of legislation that ensures we have in place, and we have set the wheels in motion, to ensure that we are still able to have a 2015 election – no change. This bill does not do that. It puts the wheels in motion to ensure that we do, in 2015, something that is going to be done anyway in 2016.

This is not a new exercise. We are not inventing something new to do because we want to create a job for someone. This is something that is going to happen in 2016. We are just saying let's do it in 2015. In the process, we will do what everybody wants to do, which is to reduce the number of seats in this House, rightsize the number of people who should be in the House of Assembly, rightsize the number of districts, and rightsize the number of MHAs who need to exist in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We are not deviating from a process that is already well entrenched and embedded in legislation. It was acceptable for the last six times it happened. The commissioner is appointed. The commission membership is appointed. The work that they do is the same. The independence of action, the independence of

thinking, no change from what currently exists, nothing new, nothing different. It is very fundamentally the same kind of process.

There are a couple of things here that people have been – a lot of discussion around is the issue of the cynical view that this is an attempt to extend a mandate. It is nothing further from the truth. The issue around the Labrador number, the four seats in Labrador, I understand it. I do not live in Labrador I acknowledge, but I clearly understand that a region of the Province has historically had four seats.

When the number of seats were fifty-two and forty-eight, was this quotient issue a problem? With a reduction in the number of seats now, there is an issue here that we need to be cognizant of. It is an issue that we cannot lose sight of. If we set the stage by passing legislation in this House that puts us in a position where our own legislation that we vote on in this House puts us in a spot where we are contrary to the Charter and could subject the Province to a Charter challenge, what would effectively happen?

Someone petitions the court – and you people who are lawyers know this better than I do – and then we cannot conduct an election because we now have a court injunction that prohibits us from conducting the election until the issue is heard. What does that do? That creates a greater challenge, a greater difficulty for us to be able to advance and hold a democratic election like we had committed to like the current fixed term elections suggest that we must do in 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken for some time. Hopefully I have covered off most of the issues that will be dealt with in this bill. As we move through into Committee, no doubt, there will be lots of opportunity for me to respond to questions and issues that arise. I look forward to it. This is an important debate. It is a very important issue facing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I look forward to listening to members on both sides of this House contribute to this discussion, make meaningful contribution to this critical piece of legislation, important piece of legislation. Members have suggested they have proposed amendments later on in Committee. I

look forward to hearing that, seeing that, answering questions, and continuing to contribute to the debate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to introduce this bill and to make some opening comments for the people of the Legislature.

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 have the opportunity to stand as an MHA in this House and speak to this piece of legislation. It is obvious this is a very important, fundamental piece of legislation that right now, as we all know, it is important to not only everybody in this room, but everybody across the Province, because we are talking about people's ability to have functional representation.

Now, I believe, as the House Leader and as the Opposition MHA responsible for Justice, which is the department that carries this bill, that I have an hour. So I look forward to exercising enough time to speak about this and taking my time. I have a lot of different points that I am going to make. Now, I apologize in advance. Sometimes you get excited, and sometimes you skip past where you want to be, and you go backwards – but I think the general crux of my feelings on this will certainly get out there.

So, to those out there listening, again, this is probably strange for people – they are not used to seeing the House open in the month of January. It is certainly very strange, the first time I have been there – and I do not know if the House has been open in January at any point in the last number of years. I believe it might have been 1974, so I do not mind saying that was before my time.

Now, we are here today to debate Bill 42. Bill 42 is An Act to Amend the Electoral Boundaries Act. I think what I am going to try to do, first off, is to explain to people why we are here, what it is we are debating – the bill itself – and

then the purpose of this new amendment which is coming forward.

So, I mean, people can look at it – I have said this on many occasions. We have sat here with some bills that are absolutely huge in size, but in terms of the effect on people, sometimes it is not so much. In terms of size, this amendment is absolutely tiny – it is only four pages – but it is absolutely huge in how it will affect Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That is why I think I am going to take my time. I am going to take my time because I do not want to rush it. I do not want to rush it because I would like to do it right. That is the thing that people in this Province, I think, would like to see.

Now, just so people know – and again, I am going to put this out in layman's terms – every ten years there is a commission that is appointed; it is independent. You get the political influence out of it; it is independent. An independent chairperson, usually a Supreme Court Justice, they come in and look at the boundaries of our electorate. Right now, we have forty-eight. Years and years and years ago – and I have a big chart here showing how many seats we have had all through the years. At one point, I believe, just not that long ago, I think it was fifty-two, then it went to forty-eight. At some point, it was lower than that.

It changes based on the distribution of the population. It does not change, obviously, based on our geography, because our geography has not changed, but population is moving about. I am assuming that it changes on the evolution of technology and the ability of Members of the House of Assembly to do their job and for people to have access to their representation.

I am sure there is going to be a lot of debate on both sides of this House about what we as MHAs do. Let me put it out there quite clearly that, again, I am not fundamentally opposed to a reduction in MHAs. I am not opposed. I think that it can be reduced. Make no mistake where I stand on this. I think it can be reduced. I think our leader is on the record as of March 2013 saying yes, I think it could be down to forty, it could be less, but I would let the commission have a look at it. When he said have a look at it, he meant 2016 because that is when the next one was scheduled.

Going back to people – this commission happens every ten years. Every ten years it happens. You cannot be doing it all the time because it does cost money, it does take time, and there is really no need to be doing it. Again, I have no problem with that; ten years was the period of time that was agreed to, that was what they said we are going to do.

The last one happened in 2006. The next one was scheduled for 2016, so let me say first off that – I think the Minister of Finance said: Well, we are not changing anything; we are following the law. Well, I disagree. We are fundamentally changing the law. You are speeding it up a year. That is a fundamental change when you do something.

Again, let me put my disagreement on the record there. Maybe my opinion is wrong, but I think when you change something and you speed it up from what it was originally planned to be – and it was this government that planned it, so they have changed where they wanted to go and why they want to do it.

Okay, so everybody out there if they are watching, my constituents out in the District of Burgeo – La Poile if they are watching they are saying: Okay, so they are in there because there is going to be a reduction. They have to debate this reduction.

The first thing is that it was supposed to be looked at next year, but they are in there now debating it. Okay, that seems odd. Well, why would they be in there now debating it? Why wouldn't you wait because the general progression – and again, this was established by another piece of legislation that this government brought forward which was fixed election dates. I believe it originated sometime after 2003 when the new government came in and they were upset that the Premier, who was elected by the party, was there and they said: No, he should only have a certain period of time, we have to have an election, and it has to go to the people.

So, they said: We are going to have fixed election date. They brought in that legislation. We had a fixed election date. The first election I ran in – the only election I have run in – was October 2011. That was a fixed election date; everybody knew it. They knew it was coming

and knew what to expect. I think the next election was supposed to be the second Tuesday in October 2015, so that is coming soon. That is only nine months away; that is not that far away.

The funny part is that we have gone sort of astray from a fixed election. Again, we know that there is supposed to be an election in October 2015, and there was supposed to be a commission the following year that would look at the boundaries. There are a couple of things that have changed the course of why we are here.

The first thing that changed this course was the goings on, the occurrences of 2014. Now, one year ago, this month, we had the resignation – I cannot say of the previous Premier, but the previous, previous Premier. I can say her name because I believe you are allowed to reference ex-Premiers. I have heard it done with Brian Tobin and I have heard it done with Danny Williams. So, that was Kathy Dunderdale.

Ms Dunderdale resigned in January 2014. That triggered us because we knew then that the governing party would have to pick a new leader and, hence, a new Premier of the Province. Again, going by the law that they brought in, they said it is not fair for that person to have any more than a year because that is not what the people want. This is their law; everybody abides by it.

What we found out then, though, is it is not strictly a year – just to go through where we are now. That was January; so one would assume, first looking at it, that it would have been January 2015 that there would have been – that is what most people thought, but then when you look at the law it says no, it is a year from the selection of the new Premier. With the selection of the new Premier, we actually had Mr. Marshall who came in as the interim Premier. We all knew – Mr. Marshall himself said: Look, I am taking this, and I will be here until the next Premier comes in.

Now, we found out again – and this is all relevant to where we are today. In March 2014, we found out that the party decided – and they had to decide because there was only one person – that Mr. Coleman was going to be Premier. Nobody on that side wanted it, or took the job,

or made the application. There were two other people who were interested who were outside and they left for reasons that we maybe speculate why. One person thought it was fixed, and the other person was booted out of it.

One person, Mr. Coleman, was the Premier designate. We knew that, I believe, in March or April sometime. Maybe my timeline is getting a little delayed here. We knew that was coming. We knew that Frank Coleman was going to be the Premier. The question then became when he is going to be Premier, because at that point the one year starts. Believe me, everybody in this Province, no matter if they are political or not political is wondering when it is going to happen, because we would like to know when we are going to have a new Premier. We would like to know when we are going to have stability. That is what they wanted to know.

We know that things went a little topsy-turvy and then all of a sudden the Premier designate – who I would remind people and I think this is relevant – cast out the biggest part of the Premier's Office staff. He was making decisions. Decisions were made, but after that changed his mind and walked away.

Then, we went back to Premier Marshall. I always think and I hate to be facetious here, but it reminds me of that movie *The Godfather Part III* because Tom Marshall, every time that he tried to get out they pulled him back in. He even said he was trying to get out.

We are back to Premier Marshall and then we find out that the party is going to have another leadership convention. I think there was one scheduled for July which, if Mr. Coleman had stayed there – so we would be looking at a July 2015 general election. That is how the law would work. Mr. Coleman walked away and Mr. Marshall came back, and a new convention was set up for September.

That happened and now we all know how that went. We know that our current Premier, the Member for Topsail won that. He won that by one vote. I think the term I heard was no clear majority at first, but that is neither here nor there. The fact is that the current Premier took over in September of 2014, meaning we should have a general election in September 2015.

The funny part is that is still not set in stone. There was some talk that the election could occur before. We might have a spring election. We might have a summer election. We might have a fall election. Right now there is the possibility that with this piece of legislation who knows when it is going to be, because the Premier himself said today as he said before: I would like to see it in 2015, but I am not closing the door on 2016.

The other thing that the Premier said today was that he would hate to see us delay this piece of legislation. He would hate to see us delay it because he wants a 2015 election. Do you know what? So do I, so do my constituents, so do all of the constituents. That is what they were promised, that was what the law said, that is what they would like to see, and that is how this works.

Again, he is saying do not delay the legislation – do not delay it. Now, two things I would say on that. Number one, there is a big difference between delaying legislation and actually reading it, debating and making sure it is done right. There is a big difference. The word filibuster has been tossed around. I am not subscribing to that word, but I am a legislator, as is everybody in this House, and our job is to read legislation, our job is to understand it, our job is to consult, our job is to talk to people and it is to come in here and debate this. That occurs with notice, first reading, second reading, Committee, and third reading. It takes time. Legislation takes time.

For the Premier to suggest that we are trying to delay it by debating, it suggests that the Premier does not understand the purpose of the House of Assembly and our roles. That is what it suggests.

Now, I have that said. The second part is, let's talk about why we might want to take our time. There are a couple of reasons. Let's look at the timeline. This came out last Monday. This was when the issue popped out on the public's radar; it came out. I think it was Thursday the Premier talked about it. Friday, it was announced that the House was going to open. Friday afternoon I believe it was is when we found out and everybody in here made their arrangements to get back here to the House of Assembly.

Whether you were from Labrador, Port aux Basques, Corner Brook or wherever, you have to get in here. On Saturday morning we got the bill. On Monday morning we had a briefing.

I will note that the briefing is done with the Department of Justice; yet it is the Minister of Finance that is leading the bill. The minister responsible for money is handling the bill. The minister of the Justice department is not here.

We had the briefing at 10:00 o'clock. We had the briefing, both parties were here, both Opposition Parties were there, staff was there, we looked it over, we talked, and I asked questions. One question I asked that I could not get the answer to, but maybe the answer could be provided. I said: When did you start drafting this legislation? The response I received in that meeting was, ask the minister. That is the first one.

Now the second one –

AN HON. MEMBER: Ask the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Actually, they said no, ask the minister. I said which one?

Now the second part of this, let's not forget this. That was one bill, one copy of the bill. Later that day – this was yesterday, sorry. A half hour before the House opened we received a new bill with changes in it. We have since been assured that they were typos, but there were changes in the legislation. The question we have then is, well, we better go over this with a fine-tooth comb because what else has changed? What else is changed in this fundamental piece of legislation? What else is there?

We have to take our time to look this over and make sure it is right because we do not want to rush this. I am going to talk about what rushing gets us now in a second. We are taking our time, we are looking this over. We have since been assured that it was a typo. We have reviewed it.

I hear one of the members over on the other side saying rush or rushing, I am not sure. I am going to talk about that now so we are ready to go today. The reason we do not want to rush it

is because rushing gets you a new mill. Rushing gets you a mill that carries humungous, hundreds of million-dollar environmental liabilities. That is what it gets us.

We are doing this to save \$2.5 million this year. We rush through a bill – and I am not blaming government. I am not blaming anyone, but it happened. We have a mill and we are responsible for the environmental liabilities, which I understand could be in the range of \$250 million because the survey was done wrong. Why was the survey done wrong? Because it was rushed, it was rushed.

What else does rushing get us? Again, let's go to something that maybe is not as popular. Let's go to the Enduring Powers of Attorney Act. I was happy to debate it; I have drafted plenty of them. We had An Act to Amend the Enduring Powers of Attorney Act. We took our time, we looked through it. We made a number of suggestions, but it was put through.

Do you know what we debated in the session after? An Act to Amend An Act to Amend the Enduring Powers of Attorney Act, because we did not take our time. That one there, I think if I recall correctly, what I was told in the briefing it did not actually affect any individuals. No individual was hurt by that, as opposed to how many individuals are doing without because we are on the hook for environmental liabilities.

Let's go to something else that was rushed, and we took our time and did it right. Something else that was rushed was – and I know the crowd on the other side does not want to hear this – Bill 29.

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance?

MR. A. PARSONS: Believe me, Bill 29 is pretty relevant. Bill 29 is pretty relevant, I can guarantee you that.

Bill 29 was dropped on a Monday. In that case there was a filibuster. The biggest part of it was because it was dropped on us, we had to do the review and we had to look through it. That had a number of substantial reviews. That had sections, that had a substantial amount of information, and we had to look through the

recommendations. We had to look through a lot of it.

I guess what I am talking about, to make it simple, is if government had actually taken their time and thought it out, they would not have ended up in here with that bill that they pounded through, and they would not have ended up having to spend money on a Bill 29 review committee. We had three esteemed individuals who came in and chaired that committee – which we are waiting on the report back now. I can guarantee you, they were likely remunerated for their efforts because their time is valuable, and that costs money. That costs money because, why could we have not done this in time.

I look at the Premier's Health Summit which went out and talked to people. I have my views on that, but that is different. They went out and consulted with people. They went out and talked to people all over the Province. I had one in my own town. They took their time, but Bill 29? Nope. Bill 42? Nope. It is not there, no consultation.

My fear is that if we do not take our time to do this properly, people are not going to get an opportunity to know what this truly means. People are not going to have that opportunity. So, it is not about filibustering. It is doing our job as effective legislators to make sure we know what it is we are actually doing.

If we want to talk about the Legislature – and I have to bring this up today because I saw something today I have not seen in my years. I believe the Member for St. John's South has not seen in his seventeen-odd years here. Let's talk about the Legislature because – and that is relevant. That is relevant because we are here to reduce the size of the Legislature.

I actually saw today, it is a tool that is quite useful. We are talking about the concept of a petition. A petition is something where you get your constituents and interested individuals –

MR. KING: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER (Cross): The hon. Government House Leader, to a point of order.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hate to interrupt my hon. colleague, I gave him twenty-one minutes of latitude, but we have yet to talk about the bill on the Order Paper, Bill 42 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, I am getting a lot of heckling there. I think a point of order entitles me for an opportunity to speak to the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The bill on the Order Paper is Bill 42, An Act To Amend The Electoral Boundaries Act. The member has now gone off on a further tangent talking about petitions in the House of Assembly. I would argue that it is nothing relevant to this particular bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order, but I would remind the member that there has been a fair amount of latitude given and bring it back.

MR. A. PARSONS: Certainly, I intend to hopefully talk about the role of the Legislature which we are about to reduce. One of the roles we have as legislators in this House, that we are about to reduce, is a petition. I think we are allowed to talk about petitions because it is one of the things we do as MHAs, of which there are going to be some less.

I am not challenging the Speaker, but I think that is highly relevant. You never said anything, Mr. Speaker, I believe, about me talking about the role of MHAs. One of the roles of an MHA is to present a petition on behalf of their constituents.

It is funny, today talking about An Act to Amend the Electoral Boundaries Act, which is going to reduce the number of MHAs, which reduces the amount of representation that people have sometimes which is expressed through the petitions which are brought here in this House. That is how it is relevant.

I say to the Government House Leader, you are going to get your time, take your time. Let me have mine. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I ask the member to speak to the Chair.

MR. A. PARSONS: Okay. I want to talk about these petitions. I saw something today. We present petitions all the time. Everyone on this side has presented a petition at some point. We present them on all kinds of issues. I saw today government members' present petitions to reduce the size of the House.

It is funny, there was a petition on that but there was a petition here on reduction in ferry services. I do not know why the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune does not read that one in because it is her constituents. The Minister of Finance stood up and talked about this act. There was a petition here today from people in Clarendville, which falls under Trinity North. Why is that one not read in? What it is, it is an affront to the purpose of the House.

I understand that this is a group that sometimes does not want to be here. We saw that when after the last election we did not see the House open. We saw that when we actually brought forward a private member's resolution to try to make the House better, something the Premier has talked about since he became the leader four months ago. He is talking about fixing the House. We tried to, it was shot down. Every single person on the other side voted against it, Mr. Speaker. I thought it was an attempt to improve it, but I guess it was not good enough.

Coming back to this, coming back to the timelines, this is something that was said here in this House today and said outside this House today, this move is based on oil prices. We are reducing the Legislature based on oil prices. I am pretty sure that oil prices were not looking good in September. In September it is relevant to note that the Premier increased the size of Cabinet. He increased expenditures – increased them. We had a Premier who has not been elected by the people bring in an unelected minister, which increases the size of it.

That was not the concern in September, but I believe – and I do not have the numbers here. I

would say the Minister of Finance has them. I think oil was not so great then. I think oil was actually going down in October, but we did not see this then. We did not see this reform then. We did not hear any talk of it.

I think oil was going down in November. I think it went down further in November. Do you know what else? In November we came back here and we did not see this then. We did not see the legislation then. It was not an issue. November also being the same time that we froze discretionary spending.

In November they were talking we have a crisis here, we have to stop this, but at no time could legislation be drafted to conclude what it is that they want to conclude. It could not be done then. It could not be done in December. It is done now. It is hard for the reasonable man – that is the concept they use in law, the reasonable man, the reasonable women – to conclude that there is an ulterior motive to this.

It is funny, I think the comment I heard earlier was this is fabricated. We have a petition from people in Clarendville saying; make sure the election happens in 2015. Is that fabricated? I do not think so.

We will continue on. I look up now, I like this, I still have thirty-four minutes, Mr. Speaker. I have lots of time to keep talking here. I know that the crowd on the other side does not like to hear that. I am going to take my time here and continue on. I have a bunch of notes here. I just saw another one here. This is a good one. I am not trying to delay this; I am trying to make sure this is done right.

The Government House Leader, the Minister of Business, Tourism and trade and Justice, CETA, the sometimes Attorney General, spokesperson for Justice; if anything, there should be a law here today to make sure he gets paid twice for the work he is doing. The man has to do two sets of briefings. He has to do his own department and he has to do the Department of Justice.

MS PERRY: Relevance.

MR. A. PARSONS: I say to the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, this is all relevant.

If it is not, please stand up and correct me. If you want to you can just sit down and listen. I sat down and listened to the Minister of Finance and listened to what he had to say. This is important. I plan on sitting down and listening because that is what this is about, debate.

I see this one, I have to put it out there because we come back to we are not trying to delay this, we are trying to make sure it is done right. We do not want to rush it. One of the reasons we do not want to rush is because there was something that was done back in February, March, I cannot remember when, involving the Department of Transportation. What we did was cancel a \$20 million contract in one day.

Why is that relevant you say? Number one, we could get into why. It was probably done a bit quick, but the other thing is that we had to bring in the AG to investigate it. That is not free, that costs money. That takes money, that takes resources to do an investigation of that nature. Why is that relevant, Mr. Speaker? Here we are, a fiscal crisis, likely to be a \$1 billion deficit and we wasted money because number one, we cut a Humber Valley Paving contract and then we brought in the AG. It cost money. What I am saying is maybe if we do this right the first time and take our time, maybe we will avoid this situation down the road.

The end goal here is I would like to see an election in 2015, just like the Speaker would like to see an election in 2015, and just like the Member for Humber West wants to see an election in 2015. That is what our people were promised. That is what they were promised and the law said that it should happen, but the whole timing of this is suspect and that is all I put out there.

We have to deal with it as it is. We have to deal with it so we have the legislation here. I want to continue on going through it. I think we need to set up this. This is just not changing any bill; this is changing a bill which could have wide-reaching implications, repercussions, and changes.

One of those things is that there are going to less of us in here. That is pretty substantial. More importantly than that, we have to make sure the individuals we represent still get full

representation. That is what we have to make sure. It is incumbent on all of us.

I will continue on here because I still have plenty to talk about and it is all relevant. I have to bring up some different points that I have gleaned through this last week of legislative reform. This is just maybe me picking something out of the words that are used. When we did the briefing at 10:00 o'clock on Monday morning in the Department of Justice boardroom, it was said to us that the natural evolution of this was 2016, but we are changing it.

If it is not natural, it is unnatural. This is unnatural. This is admitted by the government. It is unnatural to do this. They are going to come back – and the point has been, well, oil prices have gone down, we have to trim MHAs. I have already given a number of examples of waste by this government that we could have avoided by not rushing it, but there are other things too. We had to debate this because this is legislation. One thing that we do not need legislation for is we can reduce the size of Cabinet.

One thing we could do is reduce the number of Parliamentary Secretaries. Or, here is a novel suggestion, let them be Parliamentary Secretaries without the pay. That is how it was under Clyde Wells. Clyde Wells had Parliamentary Secretaries and that was their job, they did the role. We are making suggestions that – look don't you rush into changing Cabinet. We can rush into cutting MHAs, but don't you rush my Cabinet.

I find that interesting and I think people out there find it interesting. We have to look back. It has been four months since the Premier increased the size of Cabinet. I believe when Premier Williams came in he said we want to go lean and mean, we need a smaller Cabinet. He had thirteen. I believe when Premier Dunderdale came in she said we have to have a lean Cabinet, lean and mean thirteen. When this Premier came in he said I want a bloated Cabinet. I do not want them to be as effective. We need to spend more money. That is what we have going on here.

That could happen, Mr. Speaker, not without a debate. That could happen with a stroke of a pen. That could happen with a signature. That could happen today and that would give us some substantial savings. It is all going towards this crisis, to use the government's words, we find ourselves in. I find that interesting. Now I am wondering why we have a Department of Finance because there is no control there. We just have to sit back and hope it does not hurt us.

Anyway I digress, we will continue on. I think this has been out there and I am going to talk about it; there has been some talk as to what are the fiscal advantages of making this move? I am not saying this to support doing it or not doing it, but it is a question that has to be asked because we have to throw all this out there. We have to consider this. We have to reason this.

The immediate obvious savings is the reduction in salary. The immediate savings will be a reduction in pension costs. The immediate savings will be a reduction in associated salary, constituency assistants, whatever. That has been put out there and that is the figure that is being used by the government.

My concern is: Has there been any study done on is there a possible extra cost by doing this? That is what I want to know. It is not an argument against it, but we should put it out there and see. We should consult. We should investigate. We should figure that out. That is an idea. I just put that out there.

I am wondering – and this is what I would actually like to see, and if government wants to table this I would be interested to see it. I would like to see the analysis done. I would love to see an analysis done on – okay, this is what we can do, this is the immediate savings, but what is the long-term cost, even if it is a cost to constituents. I just wonder. It is not an argument for or against, but I want to see.

MR. S. COLLINS: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: I hear the Minister of CYFS over there talking, who was a former parliamentary secretary. I would understand that he would be talking about this. He likes the bigger Cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if he is going to speak in this debate, but if he does I will give him the courtesy of listening to him. I will give him that courtesy. I am trying to talk here and he will get the points out when he can. Stay calm. Look, I am sure they will not get rid of your position. I am sure of it.

We are talking about cutting MHAs. We are talking about that for savings. The immediate thing that you think about is a cut in Cabinet, which would correspond with a cut in MHAs. That would be a logical correlation and result, but I guess that is not going to be considered. That is not on the table.

The Premier said nine times yesterday it is all on the table except well, the things that he does not want to do right now. It is just going to sit there on the table. Who knows how long it is going to sit there on the table. It is obviously not pressing enough to do this right now.

We already know that since we have gotten here today that the Budget has already been delayed. We already know that this government has delayed their Budget. That is another interesting thing that I think people want to hear and want to see. It is funny; New Brunswick is actually having their Budget in February. I am sure they are affected by federal government decisions too, but there it is.

I am going to continue on here. We have a lot of people here. Actually, some people who have been in government, they have been in Opposition, they have been in political science, and they have the experience. Whether it is as members or whether it is staff, they can talk about the electoral boundary commissions and talk about how they went and how they were done, so I am going to leave that to these individuals.

I know the Member for St. George's – Stephenville East has an extensive history with this. I am sure he is going to take the opportunity to speak with his background and his knowledge to talk about the effect of this. I will let him do that. I am not going to take this stuff. Do you know what? He is certainly able to express it much better than I.

It is funny because I have to come back to this again. We talk about 2016 and why was this electoral boundaries done in 2016. Well, there is something that is going to happen in 2016 that is very significant; it is called a census. It is an opportunity to discover what our population is and where they live; something I think would be relevant to this discussion. Again, democratic representation, we might not see that. That is probably why this crowd made that decision back when they made it and help make sure this was done in 2016.

There is something to be said – I cannot help but see the correlation between fixed elections and between the electoral boundaries commission and the changes to that. I cannot take credit for this quote. There was a gentleman I heard say, he was talking about fixed elections, talking about electoral boundaries: Decisions made in the first year of a mandate are usually because they are vindictive; decisions you make in the last year is because you are desperate. That is what it is. Fixed elections were done because we had a vindictive government. This change now is happening because we have a desperate government, and that is reason the timing is what it is.

If no one over there ever thought of this before, the current Premier has been there – and this is his idea, apparently. He has had plenty of time to do this: September, October, November – again, in terms of legislation in this House, the last session was one of the lightest sessions I have seen in terms of the amount of legislation that was put out there to debate. In fact, I think we agreed with most of it because a lot of it made sense. It was changes to regulations. It was changes that were good.

A lot of it was not, as they call it, earth shattering. We agreed to it; housekeeping in some cases – again, that is the word that is used by both sides. I guess what I am saying is that there was plenty of time to get this one done. It is not that we did not need the savings then. We need them right now. You did not need them back then, even though we were freezing spending, cutting spending – and we knew a bad Budget was coming because we knew that it was at least \$916 million then. It did not just pop up like that. We knew it was coming, so why not be proactive? No, there is a reason why: Let's

do it now because we think it might help us get the end goal, which is to push this along.

Now, we continue on here, and I have made clear plenty of opportunities that the issue of seat reduction is not the issue; it is the issue of debating this legislation, making sure it is done right, make sure that we give it the careful consideration it needs so that we do not do it wrong. What we have done, we have had an opportunity to do – and I think the Leader of the Opposition made this public in a press conference yesterday, and I think he has actually written to the Premier on this. I do not know if there has been a response back; I will let them talk about that. A chance to, as the Premier said yesterday, work together – work together. Well, okay.

One of the things that we would like to see – and we have these amendments here that will be brought forward. One is: If you do not want the election to be delayed, then if the boundary commission does not get their work done in time – and again, you say it is enough time, if they do not get it done in time, then call it off and have the election in 2015, September 2015, as the law said, and as you have said you wanted. You want this, so here is a chance to make sure – okay, this is a chance to legislate what you want. We are giving you the opportunity; it is a great amendment.

Can the commission finish in 120 days? I do not know. It has been said that they can. I know previous ones took longer, but I do not know; I am not going to be on that commission. I know that there will be five great people that are picked hopefully to do this work, and I hope they get it done in time. Because (a) we want to see the savings that they need and (b) we want to see the election that they want. We want to see that too.

I think if you went out to the people and you talked to them, it seems that there are a lot of people out there. I have no stats on this; I only have anecdotal evidence and what people come to me with. A lot of people generally support seat reduction. Now there are people who do not, and that is good too, and they are getting their viewpoints out there, as they should. I tell you, I am listening to all of them. I have listened to them, and I have listened to my

constituents and a lot along the lines of: Well, why are you doing it now? Why are you rushing it now? The second thing is: Well, I am fine with less. I think you could still do it, but there is no need to rush and there is certainly no need to delay an election to do it. Why would you do that? I agree.

The second part is that we think that thirty-eight is unreasonable. We think that there should be a range. Some could say this is quibbling, but we think thirty-eight to forty-two. We think the commission should have a range to work with. I agree with that. Flexibility is key here.

The third condition is – and this is all out in the public domain – Labrador should have their four seats preserved. I have had the good pleasure, since I have been elected, of being to Labrador. I had never been there until I was elected. I have had the good pleasure of being there. It is a beautiful, fantastic place with a unique geography, different cultural circumstances. We have an Innu community, an Inuit community, huge land mass, and a population that is distributed throughout.

Now, I am not going to belabour this point because I am very lucky to have a leader who spent a fair amount of time up there who can do it. I have two caucus mates who are from there and were born there and live there and are going to get an opportunity to talk about it. They know the challenges. They want to talk about it and I am going to let them do that because they will do it far better and more eloquently than I ever can. I will let them do it and I look forward to listening to them. We have a government that says they want to listen. I hope they listen, because we think there is a reason for that.

I will continue on – and I see my time starting to run out. I am only the second speaker on this. I know there are likely forty-odd more. I do not know if the Deputy Chair of Committees is able to speak. Technically, I think the Speaker is the only one who is not going to speak on this or cannot speak on this. If that is the case, there are forty-five other MHAs who are going to have a chance to stand here and say their piece. I look forward to hearing that.

Do you know what? They should have an opportunity to do that because that is the job.

So, before someone on the other side says you are delaying it, I say, in response, you are only supposed to do your job; you are supposed to do your job and have an opportunity to speak.

I will tell you this now; I have no interest in being here for weeks to debate this. No interest whatsoever, but I do have an interest in speaking on second reading which is our chance to stand up and speak freely. I do have an interest in asking questions in Committee. I might even take the chance during third reading, I might do that, but I think that is my right but more like my duty. It is my duty to do that. That is not delaying it. It is doing it right. If you do not do it right, you get back to the circumstances that I told earlier which are rush jobs, mistakes, and millions and millions of dollars wasted. That is why we are doing it.

The other thing too, for people out there who are watching, normally we stop at 5:30 p.m. and then we go on and we come back the next day. I am fully prepared to stay here tonight to do it. That is not a filibuster. That is making use of your time.

Let's keep going and talking about it. If you do not want to delay it, I say keep going tonight. Let's go through the night so everybody can get a chance and get this done right, but done as quickly as possible so that we can get this out in the commission's hands.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: I hear some people on the other side saying they want to do it, but they do not know if they can. I say if you can make the House reduced, you can make us debate through the night. Maybe we can bring in legislation and get that done too. Maybe we can do that.

MR. KING: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The Government House Leader, on a point of order.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I actually said to the member was we would love to stay and debate all night, but we are not sure the rules would permit us to stay beyond 10:00 o'clock. We are prepared to take

up the challenge of the member opposite and stay as long as we can.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. A. PARSONS: I am glad to hear that the Government House Leader feels that this debate is important and that we should take the time to do it and that doing so is not a rush. I am glad to hear that the Government House Leader feels that way. That is good.

We are going to take our time. We are going to do this right. I think I have made my points. Sometimes I get a little worried because I know that the Minister of Finance said: Hey, we want an election in 2015; trust us. That was just said. He said: Look, I do not know why people would think we do not want an election in 2015. That is a fabrication – that is a fabrication.

I say two things to that, Mr. Speaker. Number one, if you want it, we are giving you an opportunity to do it, and if you vote against it well maybe you are showing your true intentions; and number two, there is no reason that we cannot get this done. You say you want it done, but pardon me if sometimes I get confused because I was told I was going to have a new hospital on the West Coast. It has not happened. I am waiting now for the calls of relevance from the other side. What I would say –

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance.

MR. A. PARSONS: The minister responsible for not giving us the radiation study is calling relevance. What I would say is this: Forgive me if I do not always believe the promises by the members on the other side. Sometimes they do not happen. They are not getting done on time. Sometimes there is a reason for that.

Like I say I still have a bit of time left and I am going to get another opportunity, whether it is Committee or third reading, to have my say. I think I have made the points clear and I know everybody who wants a chance in this House is going to speak to it.

People can try to tangle that around but thank God we have Hansard to record it. I think I have been clear. I think I have been concise. I think I have stated our opinion, my belief, my opinion on why a reduction is not the issue, I am worried about the process, and I am worried about why the Premier wants to rush it. That scares me. I think I have made clear why.

People should also have a consultation. We can avoid problems if we have that. There are ways we can still do that too. You can get both done. You can change your law and you can consult. You can do both.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand up and speak on this. I look forward to hearing the debate by all members of this House as we move forward on this very important issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure none of us anticipated that we would be standing this early in the New Year in this House of Assembly. However, I am happy to say that it is still, and always will be, a privilege to stand here in this House of Assembly and to represent the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We can be given no greater honour than to come to this House to represent the people of the Province, to speak what they have asked us to speak, to talk as they have asked us to express their opinion, and so on. So, Mr. Speaker, this truly is one of those moments for me when, over a period of time I had opportunity, particularly this weekend, to chat with the people of my district, as I go back every weekend. The people of my district know that I do that. I go back every weekend and make every attempt to visit them either in their homes, in their communities, certainly at any events that are happening and so on. So it was truly a privilege this weekend to

go back and be able to ask the questions around what they thought about this particular motion that we were bringing forward, this amendment to the Electoral Boundaries Act, now known as Bill 42.

Mr. Speaker, much of what I will say here has come from the reaction of the people with whom I spoke at home this weekend and throughout my district, around their feelings about this particular issue. One of the most important things that we look at when we are looking at any piece of legislation is why are we bringing this to the House of Assembly. That was the question that was asked and that is a good question to be asked. Why are we bringing this to the House of Assembly and why are we doing it now?

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of reasons for that, but one of them, in particular, had to do with the fact that this has been something that we heard for a while, that the people of the Province would be happy to embrace. Reducing the number of seats in the Legislature is something we have heard many times, many places. So that seemed to resonate with the people of the Province, and certainly was something that I heard within my district.

Mr. Speaker, resoundingly I heard of the importance of looking at the fiscal situation in which we find ourselves, and finding as many ways as we could to alleviate that fiscal situation. One of them was this particular suggestion around reducing the number of seats in the House of Assembly. It made imminent sense to people that I spoke with.

There were one or two dissenters. I would be foolish if I were to tell you that everybody I spoke to have the same opinion, because that never happens, and that really is democracy when not everyone has the same opinion. I can tell you that the vast majority of people with whom I spoke thought that this was an excellent idea. They liked the notion that we are willing to look at all measures to ensure that the future for our children, the future for our grandchildren in this Province is going to be secured.

Whilst we know the situation with oil prices is a temporary situation, that at some point in time this too will be something of the past and we

will be able to move on, we do have to live within the times that we are, Mr. Speaker. So this is a very tangible way that we can address that issue and live within those times. So, as a representative for the people of the great District of Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans, I am truly happy to be able to come here and pass on those opinions to the rest of the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard sometimes that this particular piece of legislation is being brought in because it would be a benefit to our party, in particular, or to one of the other parties. Mr. Speaker, that is not the case at all. The beneficiaries of this piece of legislation are the people of the Province. The people of the Province will be listened to, we will be able to demonstrate that here in the House of Assembly, and we will be able to save \$10 million. That is a tangible benefit to everyone in this Province, Mr. Speaker.

Once the commission is struck, we have no idea what the boundaries will look like after that point in time. So to say it would benefit one party over another party, Mr. Speaker, really does not make any sense at all. We have no idea of what the commission is going to report. It is an independent commission. So, therefore, that particular myth really does need to be dismissed, and dismissed immediately.

I want to make reference to something I heard, a criticism I heard when the speaker just prior to me, the House Leader for the Official Opposition was speaking. He was very critical, Mr. Speaker, of the legislation itself, the draft amendments that we gave to him.

I think it is important that the people of the Province understand how this came about, Mr. Speaker. What happened here was an attempt on our part to co-operate with members of the Opposition who said they would like to see the amendments as soon as they could see them.

Mr. Speaker, our very hardworking civil service actually sat down, they worked as efficiently, as effectively, and as quickly as they could to be able to provide a draft of the legislation. What they were presented with on the other side was marked draft. They knew it was draft. There were some typos that had to be addressed, that

was all. There were no substantive changes to the amendments or to this piece of legislation at all. There were some typos that had to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, it becomes very difficult sometimes for us when we hear levelled at us that we rushed something and there is going to be some huge fallout as a result of that. What we did was in the spirit of co-operation we made every effort to provide them with the legislation as quickly as we could because that is what they asked for. It was simply trying to be courteous, trying to offer up all of the information that we could, and giving them what they knew was a draft. There were no substantive changes. That is really important for the people of the Province to know – no substantive changes at all. It was simply a few typos.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the act itself, the Electoral Boundaries Act, and I want to talk about the amendments to it. What is it? Let's talk about, first of all – for the people of the Province who might be home now from work and trying to get ready for supper, perhaps have a television or a radio on and they are listening to us, let's talk about what the Electoral Boundaries Act is. Essentially, it is a mechanism to review an amendment of the Electoral Boundaries Act in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is what this particular act is.

It provides for the Newfoundland and Labrador Electoral Boundaries Commission to be appointed every ten years. Under the current act, that commission is due to be appointed in 2016. Then it is tasked with dividing up the Province into districts or boundaries. We most commonly call them districts. Some people refer to them as seats for the House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

How is the commission itself struck? We need to understand that as well, so that we can understand that it truly is an independent commission. The commission is comprised of a chairperson, and that chairperson is appointed by the Chief Justice of Newfoundland and Labrador from among the judges of the Supreme Court or the Court of Appeals and the Trial Division if possible. It can also be a resident of the Province, but most often it is a judge. There are four other members who are appointed by the

Speaker of the House of Assembly from among the residents of the Province.

It is my understanding that government has opportunity to nominate two people. The Opposition, and both parties, have an opportunity to nominate a person each. That would be two more. So it is two and two, plus the chairperson. The Speaker then puts together that commission. The Speaker certainly has the power to employ resources as may be required to do that work, including the employment of technical and professional staff as necessary.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about dividing the Province into districts, I think one of the things we would have to look at is how is that done? What is the easiest way to do that? Well, oftentimes cartographers are brought into this process. We certainly would need the analysis and the ability of the people who are appointed to the commission to look at geographical concerns, cultural concerns, historical concerns, logistical concerns. There are a number of things that would be looked at.

When we talk about the use of cartographers, Mr. Speaker, and people who would be able to actually look at longitudes, latitudes and so on and divide up the Province according to population, according to geography and so on, one of the great advantages we have at this point in time, as opposed to 1973 when this process was first started, are things like Google Maps, GPSs and so on. That can make that process so much more efficient now than it was when people were doing this many years ago.

This is the seventh time that a commission would have been appointed to do this kind of work, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest it is probably a whole lot easier in some senses to be able to do that work than it was in 1973 when the tools and the resources that were available were so much different. We live in an age of technology now and an age where we can rely on the resources of the Internet and so on to help us in the performance of those duties; therefore, I think that will help to make the process a much more efficient process than it ever was before.

Now we want to look at the guiding principles of what this particular amendment would do, Mr. Speaker. Section 15 of the act requires that the

commission be guided by "...the principle that the vote of every elector in the province shall have a weight equal to that of every other elector." It is known as parity, Mr. Speaker. We call that parity. That too is so important when we look at the House of Assembly.

The best way to do that, of course, is to establish the quotient. I heard the Minister of Finance talk about this today. He set it out earlier in the afternoon, but I will just review it again for those people who may not have been able to watch at that point in time.

The establishing of a quotient, Mr. Speaker, is very simply looking at the average population by district, or attaining the average population by district. You would do that by dividing the population of the Province by the number of electoral districts that you would be looking for.

Currently, the act states that the total population of the Province shall be determined by the latest census figures. You take those census figures and then you would divide that number by the number of districts we were looking for. In this case, that would be thirty-eight.

We would reserve one for Torngat Mountains, Mr. Speaker, which makes a lot of sense. In that sense what we are looking at again is an area of the Province that has a unique circumstance, certainly in the sense of cultural Aboriginal heritage, certainly in the sense of a very immense landform there, the geography of it being exceptionally difficult and so on. All of those reasons would validate the importance of ensuring that Torngat Mountains is represented by a particular MHA, or a particular district.

Mr. Speaker, the quotient then would be determined by taking that population, dividing it now by thirty-seven, and that would come up with the number. There is some flexibility that is built into this of course because in certain cases, common sense has to prevail. If we are looking at one side of the street as opposed to the other side of the street – and we have seen that happen in times past. It is true in my district. There is one particular area of my community where on one side of the street they are represented by me in the District of Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans, and on the other side of the street they are represented by my

colleague, the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor – Green Bay South.

Mr. Speaker, where possible we would want to look at, and any commission would want to look at those types of situations. Not simply rely on the numbers to give an exact boundary delineation, but rather use the common sense of saying maybe we can include all and incorporate all areas of one particular neighbourhood and so on. Those are some of the things that can be looked at. In order to do that, then a variance of about plus or minus 10 per cent can be applied, such that those common sense decisions can be made. There are all kinds of other reasons that might come into play, but they are also very important reasons.

We have looked at what this is. We have talked a little bit about why it is that it needs to be done. We have looked at the commission itself. We know that it would be an independent commission. We know that we would have some very skilled members of this commission sitting in place, Mr. Speaker, and so on.

One of the questions that we have also been asked, talks about doing it now. I heard again, my colleague, the Minister of Finance speak to this earlier today, talking about doing the review now as opposed to 2016. Mr. Speaker, it just made so much sense that it bears repeating in the House of Assembly.

If we were to do this work in 2016, as is the mandate right now, the work would be done in 2016. It would mean that the report would be tabled. We would know what the electoral boundaries are going to look like for the next election which is 2019. Yet, we have people sitting in the House of Assembly knowing that the districts they are representing would be null and void over the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, they would be sitting in the House of Assembly knowing that their districts were not going to be districts in the next assembly, knowing they would not be able to represent, necessarily, those people in the next assembly, taking a pay cheque for those three years, undoubtedly working. I have every confidence that anyone who would come to this House of Assembly would come here to do the work and

to represent, but knowing that all of that was changing in 2019.

It makes eminent sense, Mr. Speaker, to be able to take that now, do the work now, and have the commission report now. Then going forward into this next election, which this Premier has guaranteed will be in 2015, not 2016 as we have heard some people postulate over there, but 2015. They would be able to go forward and seek a mandate from those districts that will be represented in this House of Assembly based on the advice of an expert panel, an expert commission who would have already looked at the information and designed those particular boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, that makes eminent sense to me to do this at this point in time, such that for the next four years the boundaries and the districts are being represented as the commission next year would probably have reported. Why not do that now, before 2016 and go to the polls with all of that already in place? To me that makes eminent sense, as I said. It should be something that we do this year as opposed to next year.

Let's talk about the current amendments. The proposed amendments will require that the Newfoundland and Labrador Electoral District Boundaries Commission divide the Province into thirty-eight proposed one-member districts in 2015, in 2016, and in every tenth calendar year thereafter. Reminding those who are viewing at home, Mr. Speaker, that there would be the carve out of the one for Torngat Mountains.

The bill makes certain amendments which are specific to the 2015 process. For example, to ensure that the commission is able to commence its work as soon as possible, the Speaker will be required to appoint those four remaining members that I referenced earlier, within five days of the chairperson being appointed by the chief justice. That is very doable, Mr. Speaker.

We can be on this side of the House at this particular point in time brainstorming and trying to decide what members we may wish to nominate. I am sure the Opposition will be doing the same thing and I am sure the Third Party will be doing that same thing. It is very possible, Mr. Speaker, that we can appoint those

four remaining members within five days of the chairperson being appointed by the chief justice.

In addition, the 2015 commission will be instructed to retain, as I said, Torngat Mountains, and divide the remaining population by thirty-seven districts to determine the appropriate quotient. Then determine the remaining thirty-seven districts and their boundaries based upon that quotient, as well as that 10 per cent variance or 25 per cent that could possibly come into play given certain situations.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much more I can talk about here with regard to this, but as the speaker previous to me alluded to, we will have much opportunity. We are here to do this and to do it right. We are here for the long term. If that means sitting through this evening or any other evening, then I can assure you that the people of the Province will be well served by the people on this of the House because we are committed to doing that.

We are committed to debating this for as long as this needs to be debated. We are committed to hearing from the people of the Province. We are committed to listening, as opposed to just hearing, as I sometimes note over there. We are committed to listening and reacting to that, Mr. Speaker.

Whatever it takes, however long we need to be here to do this work, we will certainly be here. I look forward to speaking again to this particular amendment, Mr. Speaker. There will be time as we go into Committee and so on to have that opportunity to speak yet again.

I see my time is done, Mr. Speaker, but I want to end where I started. There is no greater privilege than to represent the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I thank all who give us the opportunity to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am always happy when I have the opportunity to stand on my feet and speak on behalf of the beautiful District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, and indeed today Labrador as a whole, all of Labrador, Mr. Speaker. I am speaking to Bill 42, An Act to Amend the Electoral Boundaries Act.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say upfront, for the record, there is no question where the Official Opposition stands on this act. This act which would see the number of seats in the House reduced. It was just two years ago that our leader was talking about this, so nobody should question where the support where the Official Opposition stands on this. I could go on and give many other examples of things that our leader and this Opposition have talked about and eventually it catches on the other side and they too say yes, a good idea, like MHA pension reform.

My focus for the next twenty minutes is going to be on subsection 15(6). The last time we saw the Electoral Boundaries Act brought in under subsection 15(6) there was a provision brought in for Labrador. In that, Mr. Speaker, it talked about four proposed districts. There was provision made for them to move away from the 10 per cent and the 25 per cent because there was a recognition that there were unique challenges in Labrador, an area that you could put New Brunswick, PEI, and Nova Scotia, all of the Atlantic Provinces into. It is very challenging to travel within Labrador and to and from Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, we have a Premier who I believe it probably takes him about ten minutes to travel from one end of his district to the other. Clearly, we have a serious lack of understanding when it comes to the needs and the challenges of moving around Labrador. Not a serious misunderstanding when it comes to going to Labrador to take things out and I am going to talk about that.

I am going to use my time to look at the Mahoney Commission in 1993. I am going to talk about the electoral boundary review of 2006. I hope I get a number of other opportunities because, Mr. Speaker, there are some very important things that need to be said here about Labrador. People need to understand.

They are not decisions and they are not things that can be talked about in a short period of time.

Mr. Speaker, it has been prior to 1979 since Labrador has been without four seats. To take away from Labrador right now, that Big Land, it would be too regress Labrador back, put Labrador back decades. When I picked up this proposed bill and I read subsection 15(6) of the act is repealed – repealed, to take away, to revoke, cancel; it is hard to accept that somebody so void of understanding and that knows so little – and I wonder how many on the government side have not even been to Labrador. There are lots of things I do not know, Mr. Speaker, but if there is one thing I do know it is Labrador. It is where I was born and raised; it is near and dear to my heart.

I am very well-travelled in the whole Province and I have been fortunate to travel beyond, Mr. Speaker, and there are few places that I have been where I have seen the challenges of the Labrador people. I think there are some people who need to be educated on that. When I hear that the Premier is out in a scrum talking about the Opposition wants to delay that, it turns my stomach. I do not need to reiterate examples here today of where we have rushed decisions and the price that we have paid in the Province because of that; but I can tell you one thing as the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair and one of only four people sitting in this House today for Labrador, I will not be rushed in a debate when I want to bring up important points about Labrador and why the decisions that were made were made – why they were made, Mr. Speaker.

Today we have four seats; there are two sitting across from me in the seat of government. We work for the people. I can tell you right now the people of Labrador are outraged about this. They are outraged. This is just feeding the ammunition of separatism. This is just more segregation. This is more alienation, Mr. Speaker, and I challenged the Minister for Labrador yesterday when I was up and I challenge him again, the Member for Labrador West and the Member for Lake Melville, stand up with your people. It is the people that puts us here and we are all going to see in a few months that it is the people that can put us out.

Mr. Speaker, I am a person that I stand on the courage of my convictions. If that means standing alone at my own table, make no mistake about it, I will do that. I would rather walk out of this place and know that I stood for something than to toe a line with people, because that is just who I am.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, after decades of taking away natural resources with very little coming back to the people, we are now going to strip away one of the members – and I want to talk about the role of a member. When you look at the role of a member in rural communities, it is very different than the role of a member in urban areas, Mr. Speaker. I talk to other members and I know some of the workload. We have lost so much in services in small communities and more and more you see people relying on the constituency office, and now this government wants to do an attack on democracy and take that away.

I will talk about travel to Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair and maybe if some people want to get up on the other side and talk about the time it takes them to travel to their district, I would welcome that.

Mr. Speaker, when the House is sitting, when I leave here, I fly for three hours on a plane to Goose Bay. Then I get in a vehicle and I drive 420 kilometres. During the two days I am home, I am probably getting in my vehicle and I am driving 200 kilometres to Cartwright and I am attending an event, and 200 kilometres back. The next day I am getting in my vehicle and I am driving 420 kilometres back to Goose Bay and then I am getting on a plane for three hours, I am coming back, I am getting ready to come in the House and be a voice for the people.

There is a shortcut, Mr. Speaker. I can take the shortcut. I can get on a plane and I can fly for two hours to Quebec, to another province, and after my two-hour flight I can get in my vehicle and I can drive on forty-year old pavement for half of it and on a gravel road for the other half. Then I am only driving 275 kilometres, and maybe while I am home I am going to drive 140 kilometres to St. Lewis for an event and 140

kilometres back. That is what we are dealing with challenges, Mr. Speaker.

Now, if you want to talk about accessibility and the challenges that whoever the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair is, Mr. Speaker, we are getting on a skidoo and we are travelling over sea ice to people of Williams Harbour, because the people of Williams Harbour matter in this Province, just as anyone else. Or, I am getting on a ferry and I am going to Black Tickle, or I am getting on a helicopter, if there is one, and I am going to Norman Bay.

Mr. Speaker, I talked about the vastness of Labrador, the almost 300,000 square kilometres – you could fit the Island into Labrador twice – and I am just talking about one tiny section of Labrador, one tiny part of Labrador. I could talk to you all day, until 10:00 tonight about the challenges of getting around the district.

Mr. Speaker, Tom Marshall, former Premier Marshall, a very well-respected man in this House and in this Province. As I was doing some of my research, my attention was drawn to former Premier Marshall up in the House on March 22, 2007, and at that time he was talking about the formula that was in place did not apply to Labrador. We do not a numbers game to hurt the people of Labrador, Mr. Speaker – a wise man. Every Premier since the early nineties have looked at Labrador as different, but the arrogance of this government, I am not surprised. I am not surprised at all to see a bill come in that says the act is to be repealed and there is no difference for Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I would love to see him if Labrador does go off and become Canada's newest territory. What will happen then? Can you blame the people for being upset?

When you look at the biggest project in the history of this Province, Muskrat Falls, where is it happening? It is happening in Labrador. Voisey's Bay is a huge contributor to the GDP of this Province. Where is Voisey's Bay? It is in Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, IOC has been contributing to this Province for decades. Where is IOC? It is in the district of the Member for Lab West. The Member for Lab West, I have sat at many board

tables with him over the years. He knows the challenges of Labrador. Do we really want to regress? Do we want to go back in time? Had this government allowed an independent commission to take its time and to start this process in 2016 and to move us into 2019, maybe things might have been changed in some of the communities.

I have Williams Harbour, I would be remiss if I did not mention them again, sixteen people on an island. They wanted to go – no, they did not want to go, but all the services were stripped away and they have no other choice. They have been stranded there for a couple of years waiting on this government to make a decision on what they are going to do about relocation.

Mr. Speaker, in 1993, when the Mahoney Commission looked at Labrador and the electoral boundaries, special consideration was made for Labrador when they were redrawing the electoral boundaries of the Province. They understood one size does not fit all.

Mr. Speaker, in this Province we have many, many rural communities and many unique areas. For the Premier to come out in a dictatorial way with the number of thirty-eight and with a specific number of 13,000 was wrong. It goes against democracy. That is why I am happy to be able to stand here today and debate it because one size does not fit all.

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, in an urban area to add three or four city streets to a member's portfolio to broaden a district does not mean that you are adding extra municipalities and the work that takes. It does not mean you are adding fire halls and all of the work that takes. In those urban areas there are many community services that people can go to have things done. It is completely black and white.

The Mahoney Commission was tasked with deciding the number and description of electoral districts throughout the Province. The original mandate, Mr. Speaker, made mention to Labrador directly to ensure that geographic considerations, including the community of interest of residents of those communities north of Lake Melville. It mentioned that.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard several members opposite today mention the Aboriginal seat in Labrador. Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for my colleague here, the Member for Torngat. The majority of people who live in his district are Aboriginal people, but what a blatant disrespect for the people in Labrador of Aboriginal descent who live outside Torngat.

I have more Innu and Inuit in some of my communities than the member has in his. I have it here, and if time permits me I will get – when you look at the number of Inuit in Natuashish, maybe thirty compared to ninety in Cartwright. What blatant disrespect for those people. Do they not matter? Only north and that is why that seat is being protected.

Mr. Speaker, the first proposal that was made by the commission in 1993 – the first proposal put forward was that Labrador would have three seats plus one district that would take in some of Labrador. It was felt that this was necessary in order for the commission to follow its mandate, its quotient at that time. The numbers game again. This would have meant a reduction in representation from Labrador.

At that time, Mr. Speaker, the proposed combined district was Eagle River, the Strait of Belle Isle, and then it was the Labrador Coast from Red Bay to L'Anse au Clair as far south and would go with the Great Northern Peninsula to Plum Point. That is what was looked at, Mr. Speaker, twenty-two years ago when it was looked at that possibly some of Labrador's seat would be taken, maybe half of a Labrador seat.

Guess what happened, Mr. Speaker? When the public commission went out to do their work, the independent commission, this is what they heard. They heard that North and West Labrador is different from the Coast. That is what they heard. That the Coast of Labrador needed its own representation. They heard loud and clear, Mr. Speaker, that Labrador needed four seats to properly govern that geographic area, in order for these people to have a voice, in order for the vote of these people to matter, because of the vast geography, because of the accessibility issues and the transportation challenges, Mr. Speaker, because of the culture.

We have three Aboriginal groups and they do not all reside in Lake Melville or in Torngat. We have many Aboriginal people who reside in Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair and many Aboriginals who reside, I would suspect, in Lab West. Actually, many from my district of an Aboriginal descent have relocated to Lab West.

Mr. Speaker, what the commission also heard at that time, and what they concluded, was districts should be cohesive units with similar history and people. People living in Labrador and in The Straits district would be the minority due to their separate issues from Newfoundland and that their voice would not be heard. That is what the commission heard, Mr. Speaker, and they listened.

They listened, because it was important to the commission that people, no matter where you reside in this Province, in this Legislature we are here to represent all of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Because their voice would not be heard, that was one of the reasons things stayed the status quo and the four seats stayed. Mr. Speaker, what is the fairness now? What is the equality in bringing this forward now? Where is democracy now?

One of the things that the commission heard when they looked at this in 1993 is that geography shapes the way of life in Labrador. It shapes the way of life. They added a comment that said, from our own travels – from their own travels in Labrador trying to hold the hearings – we can attest to that. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the Minister of Finance, who was up speaking on the bill earlier, I do not know if he has ever been to Labrador –

Have you been to Labrador, I do not know?

MR. WISEMAN: (Inaudible).

MS DEMPSTER: Well, I would invite him to come with me. Pack an extra suitcase because if we are going up to take the ferry, we could be there nine, ten days waiting for the ferry coming in to Labrador – take extra clothes, and it depends if somebody over there thought about requesting icebreaker support and a lot of variables that come into play.

After we are there, Mr. Speaker, nine or ten days, we might be told you are not stranded, you can go around and enter into Labrador another way. We might have to drive 3,000 kilometres and a number of ferries around another way. I am not making this up; this is Labrador. This is the Big Land. These are some of the things that make us different, but does that mean that we deserve less representation?

Forty-eight members sitting in this Legislature and we only have four seats as it is, and now somebody has the gall and the audacity to say let's come out with a number, 13,000 people, let's put a big flux of seats on the Northeast Avalon and let us abolish rural Newfoundland and Labrador, and that means taking Labrador down the same time. People see through it, Mr. Speaker. They see through it. I have been inundated with e-mails and phone calls over the last number of days.

The commission in 1993 heard that a split seat would be a step backwards. At the end, the commission said finally: The commission can only report that in our unanimous opinion changing the status quo and eliminating any one of the present Labrador districts would not be a positive move. Eliminating any one of the present Labrador districts would not be a positive move, but all of a sudden today from a tired and weary and an arrogant government who spent a decade of not listening, who have squandered millions and millions and now they come out well, the area that has been good to us, the part of the Province that has been good to us, that have given us Voisey's Bay, that is giving us Muskrat Falls, that is giving us IOC – you know, everything is not perfect in Labrador. There is a lot of infrastructure needs, sometimes they stand up in the House and they complain about things and that is taking the shine off, let's take them down a notch. Let's take another member from them.

Mr. Speaker, this is far from over. This is only the beginning. What it has done, as I alluded to earlier, is it has revived the sense of alienation and isolation and frustration and disempowerment. I do not know how some of these people over there can sleep at night. They are sitting there and they are going to go down in the history books and in thirty years' time people are going to look back and say: Who was

there when they talked about reducing the seats in Labrador and what did they have to say?

That is why, Mr. Speaker, the weight of it is on me today. When somebody looks back in thirty years, some student is doing research and they want to say who were the elected people for Labrador at that time and what did they have to say, make no mistake, I will be on record for identifying all the reasons why Labrador do need the fair seats. It is time for somebody to start speaking up for Labrador and to start treating them with some fairness and some respect for all of Labrador, what they have given to this Province.

I have only gotten part way through the 1993 Mahoney Commission. I have not even touched the best of the stuff from the 2006 electoral boundary review, and I look forward to taking my place again on behalf of the people of Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With agreement of all members of the House, the Legislature has decided that we will sit into the evening. Given that it is around supertime, with leave of all members, we will take a break and come back at 7:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: Do all members agree that we should resume at 7:00 p.m.?

All in agreement?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

MR. SPEAKER: This House now stands in recess until 7:00 p.m.