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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House met at 2:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we have the hon. the Members for the District of Conception Bay East – Bell Island, Placentia West – Bellevue, Virginia Waters – Pleasantville, Topsail – Paradise, Exploits and Stephenville – Port au Port.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand today to congratulate the graduates of St. Michael's High on Bell Island. This past Saturday I had the privilege of attending the 2016 prom with 27 graduates, their parents, guardians, teachers and hundreds from the community who wanted to celebrate their accomplishments.

The celebration started with a church service and ended with the grand march and the safe grad dance. The highlight of the dinner came when the guest speaker addressed the graduates by video. To the surprise of the graduates, it was their former teacher Mr. Jamie Wilkinson who has been on medical leave for the past 18 months living in hospital in Toronto while he waits for a heart transplant.

Jamie spoke of watching the students grow into community volunteers and leaders. He empowered them to never give up and work through adversity. He ended by sharing with the graduates that his health had improved to the point that he had now been added to the list for a heart transplant and his hope is to be back with the class and meet them in their graduating ceremonies next fall. This was received by a roaring cheer.

Mr. Speaker, we congratulate all the graduates and wish Mr. Wilkinson good health.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue.

MR. BROWNE: Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago in 1966, Premier Smallwood initiated a resettlement plan which saw thousands of families asked to pack up the belongings to move from isolated coves and harbours and islands to larger towns, which Smallwood dubbed as growth centres.

Placentia Bay served as a focal point of resettlement, seeing many of the islands pack up and move to areas such as Placentia, Marystown or Arnold's Cove. In fact, my own father and his family sold their home in Western Cove on Bar Haven Island, floated it across the bay to Southern Harbour and moved themselves to Long Harbour to gain work at the ERCO plant, where my grandparents built a home which still stands today.

The Town of Arnold's Cove, a small community of about 100 at the time, quickly grew to over 1,200 as new settlers arrived. This year, they have endeavoured to commemorate the 50th anniversary of resettlement with a suite of activities that began in January and will continue on through this year.

I congratulate the town and organizers on taking the initiative and thank them for enabling many of us this year to take stock of where we were and where we have come.

I ask the public and indeed Members of this House to take the time to visit www.resettlementnl.ca to learn more about their plans and activates and to participate in the re-living of these moments of our history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

MR. B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate an exceptional student at St. Paul's Junior High.

Mahiba Khan, a grade eight French immersion student, has been making waves in recent months.

A well-rounded student, she is a regular feature on the principal's academic list. She is also an active member of the school leadership team and she volunteers her time with the Do It Crew that looks after the Kids East Smart program.

Mahiba represented St. Paul's at the regional Heritage Fair and she won the prestigious Ambassador Program Award. For this award, she will be travelling to France and Belgium at the end of the school year, and will be representing Newfoundland and Labrador at the First World War battlefields.

She is an excellent photographer, having won numerous Skills Canada awards for her photographic ability. She is also an NXT and underwater robotics team member. Her teachers describe her as a wonderfully friendly and outgoing person.

I ask all Members in this hon. House to join me in recognizing the academic and extracurricular success of Mahiba Khan.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise.

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the members of the Paradise Adventure 50+ Group. Since its inception in 1987, this group has been providing quality opportunities to its members and, as a result, has grown to become a very well operated and organized and physically active group of 156 members.

This active group is primarily comprised of residents from the Town of Paradise, but also residents from Conception Bay South, the City of Mount Pearl and other areas. On a weekly basis, they participate in various regular activities such as dancing, card games, shuffle board, dart tournaments and once a month, on a

Saturday night, they enjoy a social, which I've had the honour of attending many times.

The Paradise Adventure 50+ Group is a great example of a group that is proactive, fostering both active, healthy lifestyles and close friendships amongst its participants.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating the Paradise Adventure 50+ Group and wish them continue success in all of their efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DEAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize World Pulmonary Hypertension Day, which took place on May 5. Eighty organizations around the world participated to raise awareness of this often misdiagnosed disease and offered support and celebration for those living with PH.

As I speak today, a constituent of the Minister of Transportation and Works, Wendy King, along with her husband Steve and their seven-year-old son Kenneth, are presently in Toronto, where Wendy is waiting for a double lung transplant.

On behalf of the minister and all hon. Members of this House, I would like to wish Wendy and her family best wishes for a successful recovery. None of this, Mr. Speaker, would be possible if it weren't for the organ donation program.

I encourage all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to consider becoming an organ donor. I ask all Members to join with me in wishing Wendy and her family all the very best.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to acknowledge 18-year-old Jesse Renouf of Stephenville. Although Jesse has challenges with autism, he's an extremely talented musician who plays the piano, various percussion instruments, including the drums, and also sings.

Further, he is an exceptional athlete who competes in track and field and swimming with the Special Olympics. Jesse graduated from Stephenville High last year with honours and a 90 per cent average in math.

He is currently enrolled in the College of the North Atlantic's Film and Video Production program in Stephenville. During the week of April 18, Jesse competed in the 41st Stephenville Rotary Music Festival, both in the piano and voice categories. At the closing gala, which highlighted the stars of the festival on April 23, Jesse delivered a stunning performance of composer Franz Schubert's "Impromptu" on the piano.

This performance ultimately led the adjudicators to award Jesse the coveted Rose Bowl as the top performer in this year's festival. As a result, Jesse will be competing here in St. John's next weekend at the Provincial Rotary Music Festival.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Jesse for his Rose Bowl victory, and wish him the best of luck next weekend.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

The Commemoration of the First World War and the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel

MR. SPEAKER: For Honour 100 today we have the Member for the District of Humber – Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: I would now read into the record the following 40 names of those who lost their lives in the First World War in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Royal Newfoundland Naval Reserve or the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine. This will be followed by a moment of silence.

Lest we forget: Albert Moore, Eric Moore, James E. Moore, John Moore, Thomas Moore, Albert Moores, John Moores, Samuel J. Moores, Hugh J. Moran, Walter W. Morey, Frederick Morgan, John Thomas Morgan, Robert Stanley Morgan, William Morgan, William Morgan, Edward A. Morris, Frank Morris, Harold Morris, James R. Morris, Kenneth Morris, Robert Morris, Walter Morris, William Morris, John Thomas Morrissey, Joseph Morton, George Mosher, Daniel J. Moss, Albert Edgar Moulton, Herbert Moulton, John Moulton, Allan Moyes, Bennett Mudford, George Mugford, Jacob Mugford, Luke Mugford, Nathan Mugford, Gordon Mullings, Harry Mullins, Edward Joseph Murphy, Joachim Murphy.

(Moment of silence.)

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to report on successful participation in the Offshore Technology Conference held last week in Houston. One hundred representatives from the province attended – from supply and service companies, industry associations, offshore operators and government.

From 2013 to 2015, employment in the province averaged in excess of 10,000 persons per year for Hibernia, Terra Nova, White Rose and Hebron. Additionally, those projects have seen expenditures of close to \$9 billion in this province over the same period.

During the week, I presented to delegates and focused on the opportunities in offshore Newfoundland and Labrador. Seismic data has validated the incredible prospectivity offshore with over 350 leads and prospects. Working with the represented companies, meeting with operators, discussing the benefits of doing business in Newfoundland and Labrador made for a productive week

Companies also represented and reported a successful week: Oceanic Consulting Corporation met with clients from the United States, Europe and Australia and gained new business opportunities; Pro-Dive Marine Services indicated that companies are eager to meet as everyone is looking for work in this market; Kvaerner demonstrated their business concepts and met with existing and potential clients, business partners and suppliers; Virtual Marine Technology met with global drilling contractors and have initiated commercial discussions with at least two regarding the potential use of the company's lifeboat simulators; and GRi Simulations Inc. announced a business partnership with Underwater Group of Brazil.

We will continue to work hard to encourage growth, development and opportunities in the oil and gas industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the minister for an advance of her statement. Indeed, it is very optimistic to see over 100 representatives from our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador attending the oil and gas show. I'm confident that the operators, companies and industry members were well represented at the show.

The oil and gas industry, as we know, is a very (inaudible) today our economy and certainly holds great opportunity for the future. I know some of these companies that the minister mentioned based on the suite of programs – as I was Minister of IBRD in our administration. We worked with many of these companies to grow their opportunities, to help them build their technology and to be successful, not only here in Newfoundland and Labrador but around the world and money well spent.

I am also encouraged by the minister's reference to seismic data. We, as administrators, had significant investment through Nalcor in seismic data for several years, and sparked tremendous

interest in the industry and bodes well for future growth.

We look forward to greater opportunities, greater success and dividends to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador through this industry.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement. I am glad to see the province is still active in the global oil industry, and I'm also pleased to see government helping local companies take advantage of international trade shows to sell their services on the global scene, but I remind the minister and her colleagues that we cannot continue to depend solely on the oil industry for our economic salvation.

I ask them, Mr. Speaker, where is the economic diversification they have promised?

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, last month, harvesters from our province headed out to sea, as they have done for many years, to participate in the annual seal harvest. The sealing industry provides significant economic support to many families throughout the province, particularly in coastal communities.

This year, over 66,000 seals have been harvested to date, with a landed value of over \$2.3 million – almost double last year's harvest. The

purchase of seals from the 2016 harvest was conducted by the private sector, without the need for public sector financial assistance.

The Canadian seal harvest is one of the best managed harvests of animals anywhere in the world. The Canadian seal harvest is humane, sustainable and economically important.

The provincial government has a history of partnering with industry to support international market efforts, research and development projects in support of new products, and sealer training seminars. On May 17, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that I will be attending Seal Day on the Hill where I will meet with key industry players and other relevant jurisdictions to demonstrate our government's support of the sealing industry and its growth potential, particularly as we work to diversify the economy.

The sealing industry is economically viable to our province and we will continue to work with stakeholders in the federal government to ensure its viability. We are unwavering in our commitment to achieving long-term sustainability and growth, and the investments we have made here in the seafood industry help put this province in a better position.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Mr. Speaker, the sealing industry is very important to the people of our province. Not only is it part of our colourful history and heritage, but it's also an economic generator for many parts of our province.

The sealing industry supports many people, not only the harvesters, but crafts. I'm so proud to see so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians wearing seal products. It's really a great sign and it's a great support to our industry.

Mr. Speaker, I go back to, my father was a sealer and was so proud to go to the ice. I went to a 90th birthday just a little while ago and the gentleman, Mr. Herb Hudson, the one thing he wanted to tell me was – and he was so proud of it too – that he went to the seal hunt with my dad. It's a part of our history. It's a part of who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and it's very important that we all, all Members of this House support our sealing industry because it's who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I'm happy to see our sealing industry doing so well and that the province's financial assistance to the industry is showing results. The \$2.3 million earned by the industry may not be a big number by industry standards, but it is essential extra income to the many people in our small rural communities who make their living from the sea – an essential, not to forget there, Mr. Speaker, that it is essential to people like me who also love seal flipper.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, just this morning more protests on the Liberal budget. Today, parents

and children held peaceful protests at Beach Cove Elementary, in King's Cove, at Vanier, at Mary Queen of Peace, and at stake here is a solid education foundation for our children.

Liberal reductions include reductions to intensive core French, reductions of reading time, gym and music, just to name a few of the many impacts that parents are starting to understand.

I ask the Premier: Are you listening to parents and what is your response to them? Will you put kids before cuts?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, we are listening to parents and we also realize that because of the fiscal mess the previous administration created, we're spending more on debt servicing than we are on education, the whole education budget at present, so we've had to make some difficult decisions.

As I said when this question was asked by the Official Opposition here in the House of Assembly the week before, intensive core French is an optional program that we can offer when we have extra teaching units, and we frankly don't have any extra because of the fiscal mess that we're in.

Combined grades are a teaching model that is utilized from downtown Vancouver, to downtown Toronto, to the rest of the country. It's nothing new. It's a proven teaching method and it does work.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, just as I expected, but I'll ask the Premier again because the Premier, I'm sure, must understand that the concerns being expressed by the parents of this province are falling on the deaf ears of your minister who says he's listening but he's not acting. He's not taking their concerns into consideration in the decisions that he is making. Parents are being quite clear on many areas, including combined classrooms, which will lead to children in different grades sharing a teacher – a reduced number of teachers – and classrooms in September.

I ask the Premier: Will you stand in your place and tell the people of the province are you comfortable with the choices being made? Are you comfortable with the choices to cut teachers, to combine classrooms and to reduce the quality of education that is going to be received by the children of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just a follow-up to the minister's response to the question that was asked by the former premier, now the Leader of the Opposition in our province, I told a story last night at a meeting that I was to about picturing a five-year-old getting on the school bus for the first time in that person's life. By the time that five-year-old would have gotten to grade four, based on the actions or the inactions of the previous administration, by the time that child reached grade four the debt that that person, that individual, that five-year-old would be expected to carry would have been doubled as a result of the mismanagement, the poor planning of the previous administration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER BALL: It is a mess that you left our children in. It is a mess that you left this administration to clean up. You should be ashamed that you're bringing up these questions about the mess that you've left this province in today, I'd say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I've asked on several occasions for order and decorum in the House. I point out to the Member for Cape St. Francis today we will not tolerate any interruptions during Question Period.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hear you being interrupted by Members opposite there.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier stood in his place and he's talking about education that's so valuable and the importance of education. We're being told that schools and teachers have been put in a very challenging situation. They're talking to us because the fears and the concerns they have are falling on the deaf ears of the minister.

They're talking to us and they're saying they will not be prepared in September. They will not have the resources in September. They will not have the proper training to deal with what's coming in September as a result of the choices made by this government.

I ask the Premier: Where is your voice; where is your focus on quality of education? Instead of responding to the minister, why don't you respond to parents of the province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The former premier just reminded me of a situation, when you think about responding or talking or evening listening to people in the province. Back in September when he was asked to give a fiscal update of our province, he refused to do so.

I find it intriguing that today he sits there and talks about his listening skills, talking to people. Yet, just a few short months ago, he refused to

tell the people in this province the mess that he was actually trying to manage his way through.

I ask the former premier: Why is it that you did not share this information and assume the responsibility, which ultimately is squarely in your lap to the parents that you are now talking to? Why aren't you accepting some of the responsibility, at least, for the problem that exists in our province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: A typical response, Mr. Speaker, from the Premier of our province who likes to spin things around. He thinks he's still in an election campaign; he's going to play rhetoric.

When we're asking questions about the education of our students, he wants to play politics with it; no different when he says he doesn't know where the budget was last year, what was happening. If he couldn't follow the price of oil, he's either incompetent or he's playing politics, Mr. Speaker; it's as simple as that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, we're being told that the proposed pay increases for provincial court judges is a done deal. The decision has been made.

I ask the Premier: Can you be clear with the people of the province and confirm that the government has agreed to a \$32,000 pay increase for judges and that's why you've budgeted the \$1.2 million? Premier, can you clarify that for us and answer that question?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, as I've said on multiple occasions in this House, there is

absolutely no pay raise for these judges right now. That's a matter that actually has to be voted on in this House by everybody in this House, including the Member opposite, who proposed a raise for the judges less than one year ago.

So again, Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that was proposed by an independent tribunal based on information provided by the previous government, and I look forward to debating that motion when it's placed here in this House prior to June 1.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member knows quite well there was a 5 per cent increase put in in anticipation of the report coming out. There certainly wasn't a raise provided, or the deal was done and committed to, as we're hearing the Member opposite has already committed to.

Now, the Minister of Justice got up and answered the question –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: The minister got up and answered the question when I asked the Premier. That's the same minister who refused to answer the question here in the House when I asked him if it's been budgeted, and five minutes later he goes out to the media and he tells them it was budgeted, Mr. Speaker. That's what he's done – he told us there was no decision made, and we're hearing the decision is made.

So Premier: Can you set the record straight; can you tell us what is the status on this?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Again, as the former premier should know, this is a matter that is again handled by an independent tribunal, presented to the Minister of Justice, a proposal or resolution is put on the floor of the House of Assembly and it's voted on by all Members of the House.

I don't know how many times we have to say that but, again, if the Member wants to continue asking, I'll continue saying it. Anything saying that the decision has already been made is absolutely false. I cannot make it any clearer to the Member opposite.

He can ask the question again, and the answer stays the same. This is a matter that's voted on by all Members.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and the recommendation comes from the hon. Member opposite who just stood in his place. The recommendation comes from him, and we're hearing he's already made his decision on it.

We're also hearing that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're also hearing that the government opposite is considering rolling back the wages for teachers and nurses in this province. We're hearing that; we're hearing as much as 12 per cent rollbacks for nurses and teachers in our province.

So I'm going to ask the Premier: Will he stand in his place today and finally give a straight answer, is this something government is considering doing?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador intends to clearly bargain in good faith with our valuable public sector unions and the people that they represent. We will not bargain in public, nor will we – the rumours that the Member opposite is perpetuating, quite frankly, I find insulting and scary for those Members. I think that is totally in absence of an understanding of the true collective bargaining process that needs to happen in our province. We will bargain in good faith at the bargaining table, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are lots of reasons why public servants are nervous today. I'm asking questions based on what we're hearing in the Opposition office because public servants and the people of the province can't get a straight answer from their own employer or from the people who are leading the province. So they are calling us and asking us to ask these questions on their behalf.

I will ask the Premier again: Will you have the courage to stand in your own place – instead of having one of your ministers' answer – and tell the public servants, tell teachers, tell nurses, what's in their future during your collective bargaining?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I have no problem standing in my place and supporting the comments of the minister and other ministers that we said. It seems to me that unless we just come out and say what the former premier wants to say, he's never going to be satisfied.

The Minister of Justice just mentioned to him about a process, about the judge's tribunal that will be debated on a resolution here in the House of Assembly. He's not satisfied with that answer. He wants to hear answers that will put people in fear in this province. Unless he gets those answers – if they should be fearful of anything, it's the inactions of your government back over the last 10 and 12 years. That's what's creating the fear in people in our province.

We will negotiate in good faith with all our labour leaders, with all our unions. They deserve that. They supply critical services to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and we look forward to having that negotiation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: There it is again, Mr. Speaker, the broken record.

The Premier quite well knows that choices – that's what budgets are about, it's about choices that he makes and what his government makes. It is not about choices of the past. It's about him doing what's right for the people of the province. They seem to have forgotten who they are there to serve, Mr. Speaker. The people of the province, they seem to have forgotten that.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that recently, just before Easter the Premier rose and he talked about, why do you raise a flag outside? Well, we said, there's no policy. Now today we hear there is a policy, Mr. Speaker. It is a continued trend from this government. They say one thing, we hear something else. They said there was no policy. We now hear there is clear policy. Today he said, well, it was a decision that we made. We know they change their position all the time.

I ask the Premier: Why did you tell the people of the province when you were directed by your own Director of Protocol who said here's the policy, you were given a copy of the policy, then why did you misdirect the people of the province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, to be quite honest with you, it is – that is shameful what the former premier is talking about. It was clear, draft policy. He knows this. Members opposite knew this. They established a draft policy in 2015, but he failed to put it into clear policy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER BALL: So what we've done, I've reached out to all parties. By the way, he refused to come to a meeting, didn't show up. The Member of the Third Party did show up. He couldn't send a Member to the meeting that we had with the Speaker.

It's now in the hands of the Speaker to put clear policy regarding, not only the flying of the flag in our province, but also the lighting of the Confederation Building. It should not be political. He will never be satisfied unless he makes it political.

I ask him: Why did you refuse to send someone to the meeting?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the Premier misspeaks. That comes from his office quite often – that comes from his office. We've had conversations on this matter. We've articulated our position on the matter. As a matter of fact, the Premier's office today has said there's an all-party committee in place.

Mr. Speaker, I don't remember coming to the House and establishing an all-party committee. There is no all-party committee. We can't listen to anything that comes out of the mouths of the Members opposite because it's always spin. It's smoke and mirrors and spin, that's all that comes out.

Premier, the Director of Protocol told you there's a clear policy in place. The Director of

Protocol wrote you and said it cannot be religious, but you said there was no policy and you went ahead and raised the flag.

Tell the people why you went against your own policy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to clarify, there was only a draft policy in place. The former premier knows that. Members opposite know that. We provided the link to the draft policy that they sat on for quite a few months. It was draft policy. If he spoke to the Director of Protocol, he would also say that it was a draft policy that he was quoting.

Indeed, it was draft policy. We will work with the Speaker's Office to put clear policies in place. Currently, we have only just draft policies in place. We will also add the lighting to the Confederation Building, also to the flag that will fly at Confederation Building.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development have both stated that residents of rural Newfoundland and Labrador will be within 30 minutes of a library.

I ask the minister: Once libraries are eliminated, how many people in rural Newfoundland and Labrador will not be within 30 minutes of a library?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, as we've said a number of times, the public libraries board has decided to move to a regional model to better reflect our ability to support public libraries and

the needs of the province and increasing e-books. I think year over year there's about a 25 per cent increase.

I think what was said was that with the new model approximately 85 per cent of the people in the province will be within 30 minutes distance of one of the regional libraries. I guess if you subtract that from 100, then 15 per cent of the people from the province will not be within 30 minutes. That's why there are more monies being invested into e-books and other formats that people can access text in different ways, as they do now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: It's a sad day for rural Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. Not much support from this government for them.

Jenny Wright, the Executive Director of the St. John's Status of Women Council, states that women make up the majority of the province's senior and low-income population. As a result, women will be disproportionately hit by this budget.

I ask the Minister Responsible for the province's Women's Policy Office: Was there a gender lens applied to the development of your budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, as we worked through the budget the important women's lens, gender lens was certainly used. The most practical example of that would manifest itself in the introduction of the Newfoundland Income Supplement which was specifically initiated in discussions with Cabinet and colleagues because of the high level of poverty we have for senior women in our province.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that our province has – sadly, after years and

years and years of mismanagement – the highest level of poverty amongst senior women of any province in Canada. That's why the Newfoundland Income Supplement was introduced to help offset some of the impacts of this budget, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: As a result of this budget, we're soon to see the highest out-migration and unemployment we've ever seen, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, in a speech in Corner Brook –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, in a speech in Corner Brook, the Premier again stated that his government is protecting the vulnerable in society including seniors and low-income earners. However, anti-poverty advocate, Dan Meades, has stated that the Liberal budget hurts people in poverty.

I ask the Premier: Who is telling the truth? Is the expert confused and yet another person who you suggest does not under the Liberal budget?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to address the earlier comments about out-migration and unemployment rates in our province.

I will tell you, as a result of the actions or inactions of the government that she was a part of is what led to the decisions that had to be made. I hope she's not trying to distance herself from the mess that has been created.

When it comes to working with low-income people, working with seniors in our province, working with people with disabilities, there are a number of programs in this budget. As an example, the \$76.4 million Newfoundland and Labrador low-income supplement program that is there to help mitigate many of the measures in this budget, as well as affordable housing projects.

We are working with our federal colleagues and we have been able to leverage money with the federal relationship, as well as with the private sector, to put in place over 400 new affordable housing units in our province as a result of this budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Mr. Speaker, of the 54 library closures the Liberals will close, those located on islands such as Bell Island, Fogo Island and Gaultois mean that residents will have to take a ferry to access a library.

I ask the minister: What is the plan for residents located on islands to gain access to library services?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I've mentioned yesterday in the House of Assembly, the ones that are located in the municipal buildings, I would be reaching out to the municipalities over the next year and seeing how we could work together to keep all libraries open in the municipal buildings.

There is many times, Mr. Speaker, that municipalities have already reached out to me and said: What can we do to help out with this situation? As I said before, there will be a year's grace, and we will be working with all municipalities to try to keep all libraries open that are in municipal buildings now.

I take it upon myself very seriously to work with all municipalities to ensure the services are there because a lot of municipalities want to help, they are reaching out to help, and I'm willing to help any way I can.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, that's different than what Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador are saying. When asked if municipalities were consulted, the CEO of MNL said, I quote, when you have a choice to take it or lose it, I'm not sure if I'd call that consultation.

So I ask the minister: Is that the consultations you are talking about?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: I'm not sure if the Member is speaking about the libraries. If he's talking about the libraries, I could state categorically in this House I've never spoken to Craig Pollett on libraries in Newfoundland and Labrador. I challenge, Mr. Speaker – if I ever said something which I don't feel is correct, or if I feel I made a mistake, I will stand and apologize.

I would say to the Member if I'm saying anything incorrect here that I spoke to Craig Pollett and said take it or leave it, it's absolutely categorically false. I challenge the Member if you can prove anything different I will stand in this House and apologize. If you can't, I ask that you stand and apologize for saying things which I did not say, which I was not a part of. I have yet to speak to Craig Pollett on closures of libraries in municipalities, ever.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the Bonavista Area Chamber of Commerce has joined the long list of rural Newfoundland and Labrador communities and organizations who feel cheated by the Liberal government.

I ask the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills: When his AES office saw over 400 clients per month, how will closing the Bonavista AES office not affect the success of residents on the Bonavista Peninsula?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, as communities and as individuals adopt on the income support program they are telling us that they are using more and more telephone services to access their services that they require. In fact, new technologies were brought in to be able to afford an even richer and better experience in terms of accessing the programs and services that they need.

And, in fact, I'll just read out a press release that was issued: In terms of improved technology which now enables clients to access the income support program from their own homes by telephone, this is a great advantage.

Mr. Speaker, this press release was issued in 2004, when the previous administration closed 20 AES offices and reduced the complement of staff on Bell Island from six to two.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, as the Liberal attack on rural Newfoundland and Labrador continues, not only has the economy been hit in these areas, health care is being impacted too. In Bonavista for instance, hospital X-ray services are now being reduced. The Bonavista Area Chamber of Commerce responded to the budget by saying the short-sightedness of the Liberal government's attempt to cut costs is effectively engineering a piece-by-piece economic demise of our region.

I ask the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development: When he addressed the Chamber of Commerce only a few weeks ago, did he explain why the people of the Bonavista region are being unfairly targeted by the Liberal government?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you very much for the question.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the health-related concerns of the Member opposite. Decisions to change models of service are taken based on a variety of factors: utilization, time of utilization, workload alternatives and travel. I'm advised by Eastern Health that there will be minimal, if any, impact from the changes to the hospital in Bonavista.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, on Monday, at the launch of Innovation Week the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development once again mentioned the red book commitment to develop a new innovation strategy, which could be a good thing.

Can the minister comment on when exactly this strategy will be developed and released?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad the Member opposite mentioned my attendance at the launch of Innovation Week at Common Ground, which is a site that was started by entrepreneurs that has ended up creating 50 jobs. We have a phenomenal ecosystem right here in Newfoundland and

Labrador, with tremendous events and opportunities to look at innovation.

NATI today had a Knowledge Summit and we, as a government, the Premier here, have directed my department to look at resetting the innovation agenda when it comes to the Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

We're very proud to engage and to have discussion around all of the opportunities that we have in innovation. We have a tremendous amount of companies here that are ambitious, that are doing deals. The Minister of Natural Resources mentioned GRI simulations and I am quite proud of what we are going to do for innovation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Close to \$40 million has been taken out of the regional health authorities budgets. The Minister of Health and Community Services told us in Estimates today that he directed the health authorities to look at all front-line programs in health care, not just efficiencies in operations, as places where potential cutting. The Premier meant it when he said everything was on the table.

I ask the Premier: Why did government put regional health authorities under the pressure of targeting front-line health services for cuts?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before I recognize the Minister of Health and Community Services, I am asking the Member for Bonavista to please respect the Member who has been recognized to speak.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

This budget presented some significant challenges, given the fiscal constraints in which we find ourselves. The direction and discussion between the department and the health authorities was to examine programs that were of documented benefit in terms of outcomes and also to examine those areas where changes in utilization and improved models of service could actually better deliver services at lower costs.

The Member opposite references those savings that have been achieved by just that process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

A really fancy way of not admitting that cuts have been made.

This morning the minister also explained cuts to the provincial drug and dental plans by saying we have to live within our means. The new benefit for seniors is not going to cover the budget burden placed on their shoulders.

I ask the Premier: Is this government really going to tell seniors whose dental plan was cut, who cannot afford to pay for vital over-the-counter medications while also feeding themselves that they'll just have to live within these means?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's an unreasonable suggestion to the Member opposite, either in Estimates or in this House, that a province live within its means when you have, essentially, a debt load payment each year which is equivalent to one-third of the total Health budget for this province.

We cannot afford the utopia that she would have us afford. Realism has to enter the calculation sometimes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I've already asked the Member for Cape St. Francis – I don't want to be embarrassing Members by naming them, but this is the second time today.

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

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

Is the Minister of Health and the Premier telling the seniors that there wasn't one place in that budget of \$8.4 billion that they couldn't find money to let them still be able to access these services? I can't believe it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We recognize there are challenges for seniors, particularly those on lower incomes. The policies put in place are measures to mitigate against those, and you've heard my colleague from the Department of Finance.

The programs that we are supplying through NLPDP and through the department directly are on a par with every other jurisdiction in Canada. As far as the dental plan is concerned, we're better than three and identical with five. Really and honestly, I think this is the best situation we can find ourselves, given the mess we were left to deal with.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I visited a 76-year-old woman in my district yesterday who has such a bad infected foot because of her diabetes. She can't afford the medication that's been prescribed to her. It's over the counter. I wonder is that utopia?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. ROGERS: How much will it cost the province if she has to have an amputation? Maybe the minister would know that.

Mr. Speaker, people are calling our office, sending us emails, asking when the vote for the budget will be.

I ask the Premier: In the interest of openness and transparency, will he level with the people of the province and commit to giving them advance notice of when he will call the budget vote?

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

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

I'm certainly happy to stand here and answer that question. As the Member opposite would know – and in fact we've been providing a very sufficient amount of notice to everybody in this House on any business that we carry on in this House. In fact, when it comes to budget we've moved around Estimates meetings to make sure that we can accommodate the schedules of all individuals.

The fact is we are not going to have the vote this week. We have budget debate left to happen and we have a Concurrence debate left to happen. I am sure that when the Members opposite are advised as to when the vote will be, they will certainly have an opportunity to let everybody know.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to report back to the House the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: The Social Services Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have passed without amendment the Estimates of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services; the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; Fire and Emergency Services; the Department of Health and Community Services; the Department of Justice and Public Safety; the Department of Municipal Affairs; the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation; the Labour Relations Agency; and the Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

I'll just mention for the record, Mr. Speaker, the Committee Members on the Social Services Committee: myself as the Chairperson; the MHA for Topsail – Paradise; the MHA for Burin – Grand Bank; the MHA for Mount Pearl – Southlands; the MHA for Harbour Main; the MHA for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune; the MHA for St. George's – Humber; and the MHA for St. John's Centre.

Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of years as a critic in various departments in Opposition, I had the opportunity to sit on that side and to ask questions and get familiar with the Estimates process. It was my first time this year on the government side. I was a privilege to chair the committee, but I can't tell you that I'm not glad they're done. Eight departments, it took a lot of time, a minimum of three hours for each of those meetings.

I want to thank everyone, Mr. Speaker, who was involved in the process. I want to thank the Committee for the valuable work. I want to thank the departments; the ministers were very co-operative. They have a minimum of three hours. And Justice and Public Safety, I'll single out in particular, we went well into the night on Justice and Public Safety.

I also want to thank the Broadcast Centre downstairs. While we can't see them, they're always there and they're doing their work and we appreciate the valuable work that they do to record this information and keep it in time immemorial.

Mr. Speaker, for people who might be watching and might be wondering what Estimates is I'll just speak to that for a couple of minutes. After the budget by whatever government of the day is passed, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition and the Third Party in the interest of openness and transparency of the taxpayers' dollars –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. DEMPSTER: – of Newfoundland and Labrador we come into the Chamber, the minister and their senior officials and the Opposition and Third Party go line by line and ask questions, especially sometimes when there are different amounts budgeted one year and it changed and they ask for clarification, why there is a difference.

Estimates are very important process that takes place in this Chamber. It's been a very busy two or three weeks for everyone involved. With the House open in the springtime in the afternoon, Estimates are usually in the morning from 9 to 12, or we sit in the evening from 6 to 9.

I want to thank everyone for their co-operation this year.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, during debate I committed to have answers back to the Member for St. John's Centre and the Leader of the Opposition about the merit points and about the school zone, the speed limit. Today, I'm heading out to CBS, but I'll commit that I will have the information back tomorrow. I just want to let you know that I committed to have it back to today, but I'm going out the door to CBS and I will have the information for both Members tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Further answers to questions? Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

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

WHEREAS the Deficit Reduction Levy is an extremely regressive surtax placing a higher tax burden on low- and middle-income taxpayers; and

WHEREAS surtaxes are typically levied on the highest income earners only as currently demonstrated in other provinces, as well as Australia, Norway and other countries; and

WHEREAS government states in 2016 provincial budget that the personal income tax schedule needs to be revised and promises to do so;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to ensure that the Deficit Reduction Levy be eliminated and any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation principles and that an independent review of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial income tax system begin immediately to make it fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to stand and present on behalf of the people in province, people from the West Coast I notice, people from the Southwest Coast, people from St. John's and I think people from CBS as well. I see Pool's Cove there and English Harbour West.

Mr. Speaker, people from all over the province are so concerned about this levy. I've had so many emails about it, so many people presenting their concerns and I have an extremely well-written, full two-page letter from a professor from the university who talks about many things, but also talks about the levy, which he says is fair to characterize as a taxation for the privilege of living in the province. The aim of the levy is to essentially pilfer dollars from residents for simply living in the province. I find it very interesting that he shows the contrast between what lower income people would pay and what higher income people would pay.

He says it would mean that low-income families will be paying at least 3.3 times more in levies than wealthier citizens of the province. Considering that unemployment is high and Newfoundland already has its fair share of low-income earners, it would seem like the Liberals are attempting to balance the books on the backs of the poor while protecting higher income earners.

He goes on to use stronger language, Mr. Speaker. It is unconscionable to introduce this grotesque tax which seems to unfairly target a more marginalized group, the working poor. Undoubtedly, the levy will increase the divide between upper and lower classes and can thus be considered a dubious tactic utilized to wage

class warfare in the province – very strong language from a very educated person.

Thank you very much, 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 Budget 2016 decreased the amount of funding available for health care services; and

WHEREAS as a result of Budget 2016, Eastern Health has reduced routine breast cancer screening in women aged 40 to 49; and

WHEREAS early detection of cancer results in the best prognosis possible;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to direct Eastern Health to reverse its decision and to ensure that the population-based breast screening program is accessible to women aged 40 to 49.

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

Mr. Speaker, I've brought this petition to the floor of the House and will continue to bring this petition to the floor of the House until we see a reversal of this decision, not just at Eastern Health but at all the health boards across the entire province because every single life matters. It astounds me.

There was a very strong advocacy and lobby movement for breast cancer screening by Members opposite when they sat in Opposition. One of their former colleagues, a lady I respect very well, who is an MP now in Ottawa, actually lobbied this House quite hard and delivered petition after petition after petition to see breast cancer screening take place. We certainly have great respect and admiration for Yvonne Jones,

and we will continue the fight to get breast cancer screening back in our province.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Orders of the Day
Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: It being Wednesday and Private Members' Day, I call on the Member for Labrador West to present his motion.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Member for Torngat Mountains:

WHEREAS Wabush Mines pensioners have experienced a reduction in pension benefits of 25 per cent for the non-unionized pension plan members and 21 per cent for the unionized pension plan members; and

WHEREAS those reductions have happened because of Cliffs Natural Resources entering bankruptcy protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA) and given relief and contributions to the pension plans resulting in a significant unfunded liability in the plans; and

WHEREAS many pension plans across Canada are experiencing significant unfunded liabilities and could meet the same fate as the Wabush pension plans;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador supports the efforts of federal Members of Parliament, led by the MP for Labrador, in seeking amendments to CCAA to ensure pensioners are given priority on the secured creditors' list during the bankruptcy protection process.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the people of Wabush were dealt a significant blow back a couple of years ago when Wabush Mines shut down. Little did they know two years later that they would see their pension plans reduced by 25 per cent and 21 per cent.

Before I go there, I guess I need to probably give a little explanation of what the Companies'

Creditors Arrangement Act really is. I won't use all those words any more today. I will refer to it simply as CCAA.

It is a "... Federal Act that allows financially troubled corporations the opportunity to restructure their affairs. By allowing the company to restructure its financial affairs, through a formal Plan of Arrangement, the CCAA presents an opportunity for the company to avoid bankruptcy and allows the creditors to receive some form of payment for amounts owing to them by the company.

"The CCAA is restricted to larger corporations, as a corporation must have amounts owing to creditors in excess of \$5 million to be eligible to use the Act....

"The process begins in the Court system when the company applies to the Court for protection under the CCAA. The Court will issue an Order giving the company 30 days of protection (often referred to as the "Stay") from its creditors to allow for the preparation of the Plan of Arrangement. The Court can extend the Stay against the creditors upon further application to the Court by the company.... There is no time limit on how long the Stay can be extended." – as we found out through this process – "During the Stay period, the company will often continue operating, although it may commence restructuring activities at any time.

"A Monitor is an independent third party who is appointed by the Court to monitor the company's ongoing operations and assist with the filing and voting on the Plan of Arrangement. The Monitor's duties include monitoring the business, reporting to the Court on any major events that might impact the viability of the company, assisting the company in the preparation of the Plan of Arrangement, notifying the creditors (and shareholders) of any meetings and tabulating the votes at these meetings....

"The Plan of Arrangement is the proposal that the company is presenting to its creditors on how it intends to deal with debt it owes at the time of the initial filing with the Court."

Mr. Speaker, in this case, with Wabush Mines that's exactly what happened. As you know,

Wabush Mines was owned by Cliffs Natural Resources. It is still owned by Cliffs Natural Resources today, who also happens to be the owner of Bloom Lake. We all know that Bloom Lake, right now, has gone through a successful sale so that leaves Wabush Mines still in the same position as it was before.

On May 20, 2015, a little more than a year after – it actually shut down in February 2014 – Wabush Mines, Wabush Iron Ore Company, Wabush Resources Inc., Arnaud Railway Company and Wabush Lake Railway, which are all subsidiaries of Cleveland Cliffs, filed for bankruptcy protection under the CCAA.

Pursuant to the Wabush initial order, FTI Consulting Canada Inc. has been appointed as the monitor. The Wabush initial order also provides for a stay of all proceedings against the Wabush CCAA parties for an initial 30-day period until June 19, 2015, subject to further extensions by the court. It's normally referred to as the Wabush stay. The Wabush stay has since been extended several times by the court and is now in effect until September 30, 2016.

That's where we find ourselves today. It is now May 2016, and the company is still in bankruptcy protection. As you know, several things have happened over the last two years that have affected the lives of many people in Wabush.

The purpose of our PMR today, I guess, is to – I'm going to get to that – avoid and try to avoid this from happening in the future. Once the stay went into place, of course, there were many companies that were owed money by Wabush Mines. I have here a list of creditors, but the problem, Mr. Speaker, is that nowhere on that list are the pensioners. That's a sad, sad situation. That's what the people of Wabush are facing today.

It's sad when you see – and I'll go through a couple of the creditors that are on the list because it sort of makes me angry how big corporations like Cliffs Natural Resources can maneuver their assets to benefit themselves. The majority of the creditors on this list, certainly the major ones, are Cliffs themselves. So they owe themselves money.

For instance – and I'll go through just a couple of them – the first on the list is the Bloom Lake Iron Ore Mine which is also a company owned by Cliffs. They owe them \$9 million. Cliffs Mining Company, CMC – Cliffs Mining Company, for those of you who don't know, is the company that Cliffs Natural Resources operates in the Mesabi Range in Minnesota. So they're not even in Canada. They owe them \$200 million – \$200 million.

The list goes on. We do have a couple that are familiar to us like Bell Aliant, for instance. They owe them \$13,000. When you compare that to the companies that they own, it's just mind boggling.

That's the problem that we find ourselves in here today. Not only do they owe the parent company, but they owe each other. Wabush Mines is one subsidiary who owns a partner subsidiary of Wabush Resources Inc. They owe them \$635 million – \$635 million. Then they owe another company – which is the same owner as Cliffs Natural Resources – the Wabush Iron Ore Company. They owe them \$615 million.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that – and the list goes on. I'm not going to go through all of them. I might get a chance later on to go through some more of them. The fact of the matter is that nowhere on that secured list of creditors are the people who have been mostly affected, and that's the pensioners of Wabush Mines. Not only the people that are on pension, but the people who were employed by Wabush Mines at the time of the shutdown, which is over 400 people. In total, there are 2,400 pensioners affected by this move by Cliffs Natural Resources.

You may talk about: How did they get away with it? Well, you see our province has – they're not foolproof legislations or regulations regarding pension plans, but they're pretty good. Our legislation says that any unfunded liability, the owner of the pension plan – which in this case was Cliffs Natural Resources – has an obligation to fully fund the plan.

In 2014, they were ordered – because there was an unfunded liability in 2014. Cliffs Natural Resources were ordered to put money into the plan, as well as to continue their regular

payments. What happened in May 2015, they made their special payments for 2014 and part of 2015, but what happened when they went under bankruptcy protection a court in Quebec, the Quebec Supreme Court said well, because you're now under the CCAA, which is the protection plan, you no longer have to pay, so you're off the hook.

I'm hoping I'm going to get more time to speak to this – I know I will – but the purpose of this and as you know, and I can get into that later on, we ended up having to wind up the plan. Because if we had nobody was contributing to it, the plan would have gone bankrupt itself and there would be no money there for either the pensioners or the people that are due to retire. That's why the plan was wound up: to protect the plan and to protect the people that are there, even though they've received, as of March 1, 25 per cent decrease in the non-unionized, and 21 per cent in the unionized.

So what has happened, CCAA, is that the MP for Labrador, Ms. Yvonne Jones, has formed a parliamentary committee to lobby the CCAA and lobby the federal government, because the CCAA is scheduled to be reviewed every five years. The last review was 2014, so it's due to be reviewed again in 2019, but there's no reason why that cannot be reviewed before then.

What she has done, she has formed a committee, and they call themselves the Liberal Steel Caucus – which is a good name, for now – and it consists of the hon. Bob Bratina from Hamilton East – Stoney Creek; Terry Sheehan is co-chair from Sault Ste. Marie; Karina Gould from Burlington; Celina Caesar-Chavannes from Whitby; Francesco Sorbara from Vaughan – Woodbridge; Patty Hajdu from Thunder Bay – Superior North; Don Rusnak from Thunder Bay – Rainy River; and Paul Lefebvre from Sudbury.

As you can see, these are towns and cities that have a strong mining relationship. What they're doing – and their next meeting is scheduled for next week with the industry reps – they are planning now to put forward amendments to the CCAA that will strengthen the CCAA in favour of the pensioners and make the pensioners as a secured creditor with all these other multi-international companies that are on the secured

creditors list, that the pensioners would become part of the secured creditors.

They have a ways to go and they have to reach out. Of course, they have to get it through Parliament. I know the Parti Québécois has already provided their support because of the strong mining background and the people that they represent have also been affected by this on the Quebec North Shore in Pointe-Noire, Sept-Îles who is part of the Wabush Mines shutdown. They're on board.

They have to lobby now to the other parties in the House and gain support to push these amendments forward. It is going to take some time; I know that. Nevertheless what this PMR does today and I look to the Official Opposition and Third Party – I don't see any reason why they would not support this – for support today so that we as a government have a role to play in supporting the efforts of the parliamentary committee to push these amendments forward.

Now, what that role will be remains to be seen, but I know that we've already provided support through our superintendent of pensions, through our legislation, which is fairly strong, but as I said it's not foolproof. I guess in this case what happened was our provincial legislation was trumped by CCAA once Cliffs Natural Resources went into bankruptcy protection. We have no control over that, nevertheless we need to make sure that if the CCAA is going to trump us, then they need to have protection in place to protect the people who have been affected most in Wabush – and not only Wabush, by the way. Every Member in this House has a Wabush pensioner living in their district somewhere – everyone – because they are all over the province, the country and the world, really.

Time is running out, but I look forward to the comments from the other speakers today and I look forward to their support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Lane): The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for the District of Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed, it's an honour to stand and speak to the private Member's motion today. I'm just going to read the motion here. I know my hon. colleague for Labrador West, who is presenting this, read it out but I just want to acknowledge it again so there will be relevance to the conversation that I have as I go through the next number of minutes.

“BE IT RESOLVED that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador supports the efforts of Federal Members of Parliament, led by the MP for Labrador, in seeking amendments to the CCAA to ensure pensioners are given priority on the secured creditors' list during the bankruptcy protection process.”

Mr. Speaker, this is a resolution that we wholeheartedly support. I do want to thank the Member for putting it forward, and I do want to thank the seconder, the Member for Torngat Mountains, for seconding that. I do know their passion for Labrador. I do know their passion for doing what's right, as we have the same principles over here.

This is one of those things where you look at a wrong that's been done and try to find a mechanism to make it right. It's good that we are finding a collaborative approach between this House of Assembly, the entities that we have in this province, and working with our counterparts on a federal basis, those who represent the needs of the people in this province on a federal level. So it's good that we're moving that forward.

I do want to note too that I come from three generations of miners, so I have a bit of kinship when it comes to what this means to people, and people who work in mining communities, particularly one-industry communities. When they work all of their lives, their pensions, what they work towards and what that means for their stability and what it means for their livelihoods in the future. Particularly, if you look at communities where people migrated to when they came from other communities around this province because we're a migrant-oriented province here, where people came from different

areas they went where the jobs were, and they used their expertise.

Many years ago, my great-grandfather was a miner, my grandfather was a miner and my father was miner. As people would know, and the Member for Labrador West would attest to in a conversation we had, a number of the people from Bell Island when the mines closed in the '60s moved to Wabush and Labrador City and were part of that initial building stage up there.

I remember in the early '70s, 1970, my father had been to Churchill Falls; he was at the time working in St. Lawrence and had secured a job in Wabush. He was coming home for Christmas and the plan was, as the Member had said, he'd go up first for three or four months and then the family would come after. That's how the men settled. They went up, got their bearings, got their houses and do that. We were all poised. When school was going to end that June, we were going to move to Labrador and that would be our new home.

Unfortunately, he passed away in a car accident on the way home from the mining that time. We never got to go to Labrador and to Wabush. It might have been a different destiny. It might have been a different philosophy. Not only would I be standing here defending and trying to put something in place in supporting our colleagues over there for pensioners and people I don't know and haven't met, but it probably would have been something for my father. Who knows destiny, I might have stayed in Wabush and became a miner and would have very proud to do so.

This is not only about the mining industry; it's about addressing the needs of other industries, protecting people who pay into a pension plan. Where it's not protected by a company, it's done in good faith. The companies pay into it, the employees pay into it, based on the principle that companies should be solvent. People do that for the duration of their working lifetime, and expect at the end of it what they paid into and what their expectation is of when they get out in a healthy manner and be able to provide for themselves and their families in their retirement time.

Unfortunately, in this case, they worked towards that. They knew there were going to be challenges because over the last number of years there have been issues around security of the mining industry anywhere, but particularly in Wabush. At the end of it, through the unions and through the companies – and what looked like there would be some, at least, stability there and they bought into that. That's what they based their lives on.

People over the last number of years, the last two or three decades, some stayed in Labrador, people went back to the towns they were originally from. People moved for various reasons where their family had migrated to, but they did that based on the principle of the incomes that they had. That was going to be their stability for the duration of their lifetimes.

Anybody – we all know we live within our means. We live, 99 per cent of the population, cheque to cheque. So when people are relying on a pension that they paid into and it's their stability and all of a sudden that gets changed without them having any input or any control over, and because somebody else didn't manage a company properly or didn't invest in a mannerism that would have been beneficial to – the first primary people should have been the workers; not the stakeholders or not the secondary creditors.

In this case, the legislation that needs to be changed is based on the principle of protecting the key people who obviously made these companies viable for decades and decades. That's the crux of what I see here as the valuable part of this motion. We're all going to come together and we're all going to fight for the common cause. The common cause is protecting those workers who pay into a pension plan so they have stability in their later years.

Mr. Speaker, as I went through the motion and started to get a little bit more understanding of the impact it would have – and I'll emphasize a little bit more on Wabush, and as my hon. colleague had mentioned there, we've got 400 people who only recently went out and are trying to now get some stability around their pension plans. We've got another 2,000 who are pensioners who have been relying on this for the last number of decades. Now all of a sudden

their world is turned upside down. In some cases 25 per cent of your income is gone – keeping in mind these are not indexed pensions. So they have to take the everyday hits of cost of living increases year in, year out, as part of that.

As you get older, the expectation around additional costs in health care and all these things have to be incurred. Now all of a sudden somebody comes to you and says 25 per cent of your monthly income is gone. No fault of yours, absolutely no fault of yours. You've done your part, you've worked, and you've paid in to every pension plan that you could pay into. You've done everything in the right interest of everybody. You've paid your taxes. You contributed to society, and benefits to everybody else in the province, and now all of a sudden you're going to have to take a major hit. We all take our hits every now and then with increases in taxes and everything else, but you're taking a major hit – again, no fault of your own – 21 per cent in other categories.

When you look that, some of the data I looked at, the average income in Wabush was \$84,000 – fairly good income, but you also got to take into account the cost of living in Wabush and Labrador City, and my hon. Member would attest to this, housing – astronomical costing what a house would cost and your mortgage payments and that. People wanted to come out for a visit at the extra costing of being able to travel.

So an income like that doesn't leave a lot of room for people to be able to have an immense amount of savings in their bank accounts. They, like everybody else, were looking at if they stayed in their home community their pensions would get them through the next number of years, and if they moved and came out they could absorb those type of expenses because of the fact that their small savings would have got them to that, but their pensions would be stable. That's where we are right now, and it becomes a major issue here.

Wabush was key employer in that part of Labrador, particularly Labrador West, for decades and decades. It was a drawing card for stability for fishermen in different parts of the province, for miners from other parts of the province, tradespeople. It also was open to

people from all over the country and other nationalities. One thing about Wabush, it was a melting pot of people from all parts of this province, but all parts of this country, and in the world.

So it was a great opportunity for a community to grow, provide a great service, be an economic boost for this province, and for people there to take pride in what they did – and they very much did and built a great community, and a community that will still thrive, even with the adversity they're facing right now, no doubt about it.

Again, for people to be able to come back and take a major hit, a major financial burden based on the principle that somebody else didn't do due diligence, and because there wasn't proper legislation in place to cover clauses in an act or an agreement that protects companies, that's why – as I mentioned earlier, let's find a way to rectify that wrong.

This approach here, I like very much. I know Members on this side are very supportive of that and obviously other Members will talk to that. I would suspect Members of the Third Party, without putting words in their mouth, would support the fact that we're standing up for the rights of a group who right now really don't have much of a voice because they've been dispersed all over various parts of the world. They are getting older. They are obviously now taking a financial hit. They have to readjust and requalify for their own ability to be able to provide for themselves and their family members.

As I look at this, I look at the fact that we're fully supportive in seeking an amendment to the CCAA because, again, we feel it doesn't go far enough to protect workers. It probably goes further in protecting those who may have a claim from a business point of view to a particular company that goes into bankruptcy, which is not the principle of protecting the workers who built those companies over the years.

As I went through it and I did a little research on exactly what the whole act is about, the only question I had particularly, or the only concern I had was around whether or not there was some

way we could put in it that we could force it to at least put it as an agenda item, that there would be a way of making it retroactive to those Members who are out there now; those pensioners for what they've lost.

I know we have a great opportunity to fight on a go-forward basis, but if there could be some way it could be retroactive to address the needs, because people have lost – I've talked to pensioners who are in my own district. I know my colleagues have them. I know other colleagues have it as part of that. So that was an important point.

As I had the discussion and I had the discussion with my colleagues, we thought about with full support for this and that we would propose a small amendment that we felt would enforce at least being on the agenda and giving to the committee, the support for the committee, a fact around let's make this all-encompassing. That it supports all workers out there but also those who have been wronged that there might be a way to make it retroactive.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proposing an amendment. I move, seconded by the Member for Ferryland, that a resolution be amended in the resolution clause by adding after the word "process" the words "and urge the Parliament to give these changes retroactive effect so that pensioners of Wabush Mines may benefit from this action."

I present that as an amendment, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

We'll take a short recess to determine whether or not the amendment is in order.

The House is recessed.

Recess

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker has reviewed the proposed amendment and has found the amendment to be in order.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to hear that it's in order. Again, it was meant to enhance exactly what has been put forward here by the Member for Labrador West. The legal approaches and that, they will be determined by the legal minds in Ottawa and the committee itself. The intent here is to ensure that those pensioners who have already lost, who have already fallen behind because of the reductions in their pensions from 25 per cent to 21 per cent, that there's at least a glimmer of hope it will be discussed, that there's a possibility maybe this can be rectified and they can get back what has been taken away from them unjustly.

We wanted to continue that process and that amendment there, I think, gives a little bit more leeway to our seven colleagues in Ottawa to justify why these amendments should be made and why there should be a full review of what is going on there. No doubt they can pass that on to their colleagues who come from other mining communities about the injustice here and how we protect the workers themselves.

I'm glad that went through. It was a great opportunity for us in our discussions in caucus around supporting the private Member's motion, but particularly if there was some nuance there that we could add to it. We wanted to ensure another part of what needed to be done in this province. All of us talked about – I know four of us had constituents who were miners in Labrador, who were now moved back to their communities, and in some cases were devastated by the reduction in their income right now on a given basis. Some actually now, have been able to qualify for other pensions they weren't eligible for, which doesn't make up what they've lost because they were decent pensions.

As a result, if you lose 25 per cent of an income, and that's your livelihood that you're relying on, it obviously puts you in a different category. That had a major effect on people. I've had some people talk to me about how they had worked all their lives when they were in Labrador. When they'd come down in the

summertime for their holidays they were building a cabin and that, but because of the lost revenue now in their income stream, they've had to sell off their cabins.

At least we can tell the people they haven't been forgotten. I know the Members from Labrador have been fighting for it for the last number of years. I know the former Member for the House of Assembly and the MP up there now; she's been fighting for it. I have every expectation, now that she's on the government side, that she'll have influence.

I heard the Members that have added to that committee and the communities they represent. That will add a real credence. There's power in numbers, particularly when there's a commonality here and a brotherhood and a sisterhood from communities that rely on the mining industry and rely on pensions that are covered by particular companies in this.

I think it will send a message to the industry out there, particularly the companies, the big multinationals, that protection of the workers has to be first and foremost, and that all levels of government – provincial governments and municipal governments should be engaged in this too, and federal governments – are going to put in place legislation that ensures workers are protected.

There's no doubt, you have a responsibility to also try to protect the solvency of companies because they're going to help drive the economy. They're the ones who are going to start these major projects and the mines and that in these communities. This has to be a collaborative approach between the companies themselves, all levels of government and the employees. The foremost, ultimate issue at hand here is to protect those who pay into pension plans to ensure they have some solvency for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, on that, we will be supporting – or I definitely will be supporting this motion. I look forward to the vote at the end of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for the District of Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

MR. B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very happy to rise in this hon. House, especially after my colleague across the way made a friendly amendment to urge the Parliament to give changes of our PMR here for retroactivity for pensioners of Wabush Mines. I couldn't agree more. I think it's a great, friendly amendment. I have no problem supporting that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm quite happy the hon. Member for the District of Labrador West brought this private Member's resolution forward. It's understandably so, we've got to make sure we always try to protect our employees that are going to be providing such great work for these corporations. It's timely and necessary, as pensioners who have toiled with Wabush Mines are facing a difficult reality that the company has entered bankruptcy protection.

It's a very difficult situation for all parties involved. The miners participated in this dangerous, taxing environment. They entered this knowingly. They were surrounded by hazards, knowing their labour is both physical – it takes a physical toll on their body – and mentally as well.

The hard work that is carried out in these difficult conditions need to be compensated. The hon. Member across the way mentioned their compensation, but that also goes one step further from compensation for actually doing the work, to actually receiving the compensation they're owed and contracted based on their services rendered.

Mining has historically been one of the pillars of our economy. We're a resource-rich province. Labrador is a treasured house of mineral wealth and has long been a critical facet of our economic activity in this province. We owe it to the men and women who built the industry to fight for them as they confront this major issue.

The individuals laboured under the agreement so that they, at the end of their careers, would have a comfortable and hard-earned retirement. Wabush Mines was able to stop the special

payments to this pension plan because of a Quebec court ruling in favour of creditor protection, as the hon. the Member for Labrador West alluded to earlier.

As a government, we did not and still do not support this decision. We fought it but, ultimately, the court in another jurisdiction made this decision. The court ignored our objections. We are quite lucky we have such strong ties to our federal counterparts in Ottawa, and we believe that with the strong ally in this fight, with Ottawa – for Wabush Mines pensioners.

Our friends in Ottawa have the power to amend the legislation that led to this decision. As the Member for Labrador West stated in his resolution, this could affect pensioners in other jurisdictions as well, since the unfunded pension liability is widespread throughout our country and, in turn, our province.

There's strong bipartisan support – which I think we're going to get from across the House for sure – for this PMR. It is important that we stand united to show this vital support to the people that are suffering under this heinous act by the company.

We have to do everything we can, as a government, to protect the pensions and individuals who worked so hard in the mining sector. Because this issue crosses provincial borders and is bound by federal statutes, it's important. There are many groups involved that also need to be looked at. The unions, the stakeholders, creditors and governments all play a vital role in this, and that's why our MPs are going to be able to advocate to amend this legislation.

As of March 1, the Wabush Mines pensioners who were receiving \$1,000 per month can expect, and have been cut to, as I said before, 25 per cent if not in the union and 21 per cent for unionized. It is disheartening to imagine a substantial cut like that to their income coming in each and every month. It's amazing to me that we could even sit idly by without doing something like we're doing here today.

We have to get this changed in order to ensure that these individuals here that have worked so hard in the mining industry to make Cliffs

Natural Resources and Wabush Mines a success, they shouldn't be affected by the errors of the corporations that happen to employ them.

While we cannot go back in time and reverse the course for sure, I do, however, like the amendment from the hon. Member across the way and I think that is a great focus that we can move forward on to try to build, and hopefully our MPs can get this legislation changed so it can be retroactive. So those people, not only can we improve it for the future, people who may be affected by corporations doing this in the future, but we can probably, hopefully, be able to go back and retroactively fix some of the wrongs that have been done to these pensioners.

Corporations have a social contract with the employees, as well as in the community. When times are tough, people have who have paid into this particular pension plan, they should be able to receive what they have paid into and what they've agreed to receiving. People shouldn't have to worry about the future after decades of great work in a particular industry or with a particular company.

People made plans based on the money that they were going to be receiving from their pensions. Whether that's vacations or visiting with the grandkids, or even putting food on their table, it's not right to have that happen to them. Pensioners need to be treated fairly and companies should not be able to operate in a manner that is not above board and the people who have given so much to them.

It's disheartening to think the Supreme Court of Quebec would not listen to the 2,300 members and the 1,100 retirees as well as their provincial government who was advocating on their behalf. It's amazing to me.

This PMR needs to be bipartisan, as we've said before. It's great that we can speak together to show our counterparts in Ottawa that we're all in this together and that we're trying our best to bring forward these changes, because it has to happen, not just for the Wabush retirees but for all members that have a union, have big companies that shouldn't be able to do what they've done.

Stability is what every worker wants and needs in their retirement. By making this resolution we will focus the attention back on this devastating occurrence to these pensioners. Rest assured that we will work with our federal counterparts to continue to make the appropriate changes to legislation to protect our most vulnerable individuals.

In our province, mining is a \$3 billion industry; that's a huge percentage of our total economic output. It's a tremendously vital industry for us here and we want to make sure that it has long-term sustainability and making the changes to the legislation will help in that way so employees have confidence that their pensions are going to be protected when they do those weeks and months and years of work.

The industry lives and dies by its workers. Without miners, there is no mining industry. As many of us can attest to, you can't expect a company to reap the resources, taking them out of Labrador and wherever they are to in our province or anywhere in Canada for that matter, and not have to take care of their major resource: their employees. The employees are the reason why this material comes out of the ground and it should be the reason why we make sure we protect them long term.

We have to give our workforce the confidence they need to choose mining as a profession. The hon. Member for Labrador West understands that his whole community, not his whole community, but a large portion of his people in Lab West are affected directly by this, but he mentioned earlier that all of our districts are affected. I've had calls and it is very disheartening to have to hear people say that they're taking a 25 per cent reduction in their pension. I mean, that's not sensible; it's not even remotely right.

In the case of Wabush Mines pensioners, they have earned their hard-earned pensions and we want to make sure we don't forget them, and that's why I like the friendly amendment that our hon. Member across the way mentioned. I think that recognizes the effects that it has had on them, the devastating effects, and hopefully with a little luck on our side we'll be able to get this done retroactively. I have no problem supporting that.

That's what we are doing here today, trying to support the hard-working men and women who spent their careers in the mines, making Newfoundland and Labrador's economy stronger. We are showing that we value the contribution and we're willing to fight for them and advocate in favour of a fair resolution to this issue.

I encourage all Members in this House and all Members across Newfoundland and Labrador and all people across Newfoundland and Labrador to join this fight with us and contact their MPs to get onside with this issue.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased to stand and speak to this private Member's motion put forward by the Member for Labrador West. Indeed it is a very important motion in regard to those employees in Wabush and how they've been affected by a receivership and a stay that was mentioned by the hon. Member, and the current rules that are in place the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act*, CCAA, and how at this particular point it's not at the level that allows protection for those employees that have worked at the mine for a number of years, have invested like anybody would.

Part of that employment relationship would be the fact that they recognize that there were benefits they were accruing at the time they were working and that they would lay out their future after retirement and had comfort in the fact that those benefits were there for them, whether that's their actual pension, whether it's their medical plan, what that is. As we all know, as we get older and retire there is certainly greater need, oftentimes, for things like medical health insurance, those types of things. So it's very important that this motion came to the House today.

I do want to recognize as well my colleague for Conception Bay East – Bell Island in regard to the amendment that he added. It's well intentioned by the Member for Labrador West in regard to what he was trying to achieve to bring encouragement and support to our federal MPs in Ottawa to lobby for changes to the actual legislation, which is a federal statute which needs to be changed at that level in the Parliament of Canada, and to ensure that is changed. We're not so sure with the current motion if it would have allowed the current issue that we're discussing, the employees who were involved with Wabush Mines, whether it would help them in terms of moving forward.

The amendment that's laid out – and he spoke positively, the last speaker did, on that amendment. That gives a wholesome view or holistic view of what we're talking about. It looks at and suggests that we do everything we possibly can to try and assist those that have been negatively affected by what's happened with Wabush Mines and in regard to the receivership and where the pensioners are in regard to creditor status.

They need to be on top of the list. We need to make sure that, in those cases, pensioners are taken care of first and foremost. That's why it's important that we look at the retroactivity of any changes that are made in the Parliament of Canada to make sure that those folks we're talking about here today, here and now, that have been affected in the past number of months and will be affected in the future, that the provisions are made that can reassure them and reassure their families on their future and what they expected when they worked, and their remuneration and their compensation will continue on as it should have, that they accrued when they worked.

I know the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville spoke of the fact that the federal members in Ottawa have the ability to change the legislation. We certainly encourage them to do that, and do it quickly, move it forward – obviously, their leader is the Prime Minister. Engage the relevant minister who's responsible for the legislation to get it moving and to get this done.

My understanding in regard to the CCAA and the legislation itself, it's very prescriptive. It is my understanding, it directs the court in a particular circumstance what to do. In this particular case if it's changed – hopefully, it can be changed in a manner that directs the court to deal with creditors and to deal with these employees of Wabush Mines and to deal with them prescriptively in the legislation or in the direction given to the court.

Again, I said this was timely, but it's timely because I know the hon. Member mentioned as well people they know. I have a number of people in my district who have worked at Wabush Mines, and listen to them first hand in terms of the devastating effect these changes have made to them and their families – and two, in particular. I think to bring some relevancy to it I'm going to share – speaking to those two families, the effect it's had on them. It's devastating. Both are retired, looking to plan out the next number of years and what their expectations are, as I said before, when they worked and what dramatic effect it's having on them now.

One of the particular couples I spoke to – I spoke to them several times, actually. Obviously, they're very concerned over the past number of months. When I heard the hon. Member was bringing the motion to the House, I followed up with them and went through it again and said, just give me some actual details of what the financial effect has been on you so we can see. They laid out some information to me month by month. So I want to share that with Members and the public just to get a general idea of what we're talking about here.

One of the couples lost about \$282 per month from their pension – \$282 per month. Think about that, Madam Speaker, in terms of what that amounts to. If we were to take all of a sudden almost \$300 plucked right out of your disposable income on a monthly basis – enormous.

There was a death benefit that was immediately removed that they were entitled to and had accrued over the number of years they worked. They lost their medical plan, which is huge. It's one thing to lose those dollars, those net dollars from your monthly income, but the medical

plan. We all know when you have to purchase a medical plan it gets costlier the older you get.

So these are individuals who paid into a medical plan, believed it was there, knew what the medical plan held for them with regard to what they could access and how it would take care of them, but all of a sudden it was gone. For this couple and their family – I spoke to their daughter as well and the concerns. It's not only the individual who worked, it's the family. It's a concern. It's right throughout their whole family and their circle of friends.

Another gentleman I spoke to, and I was speaking to him over the past number of months in regard to it, he worked for 32 years at Wabush Mines, and moved back to my area just a number of years ago. Obviously, 32 years, what an investment in a company. With that, as I keep saying, he built up a set of remuneration and packages and plans to help him later in life but all of a sudden that was taken away.

As he said, he gave the best years of his life to the company and he stayed. One of the reasons he stayed was because of the benefits and the pension. As I said, he enjoyed his work. He invested a lot in the company, but the greatest benefit for him at the time was living in Labrador, he enjoyed it, but at some point expected he would move back to his home with the security of the benefits and pensions he had accrued.

He retired in 2008, and has been retired since then. When he retired he would have a medical plan worth about \$60,000 for him and \$60,000 for his wife combined, which would be about \$120,000 worth in the medical plan; a death benefit of \$12,500 for him and \$12,500 for his spouse and, as well, the pension component that he would have.

In 2015, he was given five days' notice that he would be losing his medical and death benefit. He was given the opportunity to transfer over to another company but he had to do it within a 30-day period. In that whole transaction, what transpired was he lost both his wife and his death benefit. The cost of these benefits is about \$120 for the retiree and \$190 for a spouse per month. The total cost is about \$310 per month for both – significant.

I talked about the medical plan. So at that point in time he had a total of \$120,000 in medical, with \$27,000 used up between him and his spouse. At that particular time he had about \$93,000 left of unused medical plan, which is significant, but what happened when the transaction took place in May 2015, that was gone. So \$93,000 he had built up and was unused for him and his wife, it was all of a sudden no longer available.

Now, think about that. You spent 32 years working. You retired. You moved back to where you originally grew up to enjoy your retirement years, maybe go on and do some other things, but the greatest understanding you would have is that you had things like medical insurance to take care of you.

At this particular time, obviously, that couple realizes this is a new day – it's not a good day – where they had this medical plan and could access it, that it was no longer available. That's the benefit side of it.

In January 2016, the pension was cut 21 per cent. His income was cut 21 per cent which resulted in \$340 per month. Imagine that. We can all understand our income, our gross income, our disposable income. We have a certain standard of living and all of a sudden, unexpectedly, a significant portion of that is torn away. As I said when I started, devastating for these families and what has happened to them.

When you look at the loss of medical insurance and having to purchase medical insurance for this retiree and his family, coupled with that his pension income reduction, it is \$650 a month. With the reduction in what his actual pension is and dollars he needs to pay out for medical insurance that he lost – \$650 a month.

That's someone who is already on a pension. As I said, worked 32 years and this is what they're receiving. This is what they have to look forward too and the challenge they have today in terms of what has transpired here.

With those examples – everybody agrees here I'm sure – that's the reason we're having this motion. With the amendment that was proposed by my colleague for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, I think it puts more teeth into it. We will

advocate to those elected MPs in Ottawa to ensure we get something done with this, and get something done very quickly.

It's every important for corporations to be held accountable as we move forward, but for those individuals, and two I've just mentioned here from my district who gave a lot to Wabush Mines, what they had and what they worked for, that they can get entitlement to. That's so very important as we move forward with this private Member's motion, that we advocate – I think the motion referenced the Liberal MP for Labrador would lead this, but it needs to be led in a very active manner that we can have this dealt with, and go back and look if we can help those employees from Wabush Mines in terms of being retroactive.

This is a motion. This isn't about rewriting legislation. That's left to the parliamentarians and all others in Ottawa and the lawyers to come up with a manner and a means to go back and try and address and help those people who worked at Wabush Mines that have been so devastatingly affected by what has transpired.

That's what we're doing here today. We're hopefully going to unanimously pass a motion that says let's look at the workers of Wabush who have been affected. Let's look at amending this legislation for those going forward, on a corporate basis, to make sure it never happens again.

That's why I think the amendment is so important. I acknowledge the Member for Lab West for bringing it forward for discussions we've had on it. I certainly encourage all Members to support the amendment.

I wish and advocate to our MPs in Ottawa that they quickly get on this, move it forward. They have the authority to make the changes. They are the governing party in Ottawa in the Legislature. This needs to get done. It should be done quickly so we can address the concerns of the employees of today, and when we look at things like this happening in the future, that it never happens again for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada as a whole.

I thank the hon. Member for bringing forth the motion. We'll certainly be supporting it on this side.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

MR. FINN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's with great pleasure I rise today to speak to this private Member's resolution brought in by the Member for Lab West. The Member for Lab West has been very passionate about this issue as it affects many people in his district. As acknowledged and previously stated, it certainly affects people throughout the province as a whole. So I'm very pleased to see the Member for Lab West bring this issue to the table.

Just to put in context, for those who might be tuning in or haven't heard around what this private Member's resolution means and what it is. Essentially, we're putting strong lobby efforts together to look at amending some federal legislation, the federal legislation that currently takes into account the issue around Wabush Mines. I'm going to try and put that in a bit of context for everyone here.

Before doing so, I also want to acknowledge the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island for his words. He was very passionate about the subject as well, as was the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville and the Member for Ferryland.

Essentially, what's happening here is there's provincial law and there's federal law. While our provincial law is quite strong when it comes to pensions and pension liabilities and requirements, we do make it mandatory for all companies to submit updates on the funding of their pensions. We require them to make special payments to their pension liabilities when there is a deficit. However, at a certain point in time companies can fall under the federal legislation. The federal legislation is referred to as the CCAA, the Companies' Creditors Agreement Act. The Supreme Court decision in Quebec ruled in favour of Wabush Mines in this regard.

Basically, it's a federal act that allows financially troubled companies, opportunities to restructure their affairs. The companies would have to have over \$5 million in revenue, I believe, as the Member for Labrador West indicated. So it's only a certain percentage of companies that can fall under this type of protection. It allows creditors to receive some form of payment for amounts owed to them.

Now, the key part in this legislation here is around the word creditors because Wabush Mines, in this particular instance, has a number of creditors, as the Member for Lab. West outlined. I'll refer to some of them in a moment, but the creditors are secured creditors. That's the key piece to this federal legislation.

The pensioners, in this particular instance, are not secured creditors. Under this current legislation, the pensioners are not covered at all.

The companies on this creditor list are what are really kind of interesting and appalling. As the Member for Lab. West eluded to, Wabush Mines or Cliffs Natural Resources, being the parent company, and then there are a number of subsidiary companies as well. Under that they're essentially paying themselves as their own creditor here.

They also owe millions of dollars to other companies, be it railway companies and Bell Aliant, other payments that they didn't make. All of these individual companies are falling under their creditor list. When and if this is taken care of, they'll receive some form of payment, but our pensioners are not included in there at all.

MR. LETTO: (Inaudible.)

MR. FINN: Thank you very much to the Member for Lab. West.

We're looking at hundreds of millions of dollars in which they owe, basically, themselves in this instance. Wabush Lake Railway Company Limited, Cliffs Mining Company – now this is Cliffs Natural Resources but Cliffs Mining Company is a creditor on this list that's owed to the tune of \$200 million. I can go on and on. There are five or six pages of amounts they owe and different companies that they owe, but,

essentially, it's the pensioners here who have been forgotten.

This particular piece of legislation is important to look at amendments here federally, because it's not just the Wabush Mine pensioners who could be affected. There are other industries across the country that would fall under similar protection under CCAA and that would have implications on pensioners of those. Whether that's other mining companies in other provinces in the country, it could be forestry-related instances, auto manufacturers. The list goes on and on. People who have worked hard their entire lives contributing to their pension and now are finding themselves in a situation when there's a massive reduction of such. We're not sure what's going to happen as we move further, right now, in terms of bankruptcy.

It's certainly very important we look at having our lobby efforts now. As alluded to, with our strong colleagues in Ottawa, that's the plan right now, and led by the MP for Labrador, Yvonne Jones, and her great team, which the Member for Lab West has alluded to as well.

The Member for Ferryland and the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island spoke specifically to personal connections as well. I don't have any personal connections. I do have friends I've heard of who have friends and this sort of thing with respect to being directly affected here.

The overall picture is this is a great time where our side of the House and the Opposition can work together in this lobby effort because we're all recognizing that it affects everybody, whether or not it affects my district or the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville's District, that's not the important piece here. The thing is it affects everybody that has a vested interest in this pension plan and certainly the future implications of such in other pension plan issues. It's something very important. I'm glad that we can all stand and work together on this.

The people in the mining industry are some of the toughest people you'll find. The conditions they expose themselves to in mining, the dangers of such, the physical toll it takes on their bodies; they're some of the hardest working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in our

resource industry that we have out there. Knowing that they laboured for years and years and made pension contributions, and now they're in a position where this can be taken away from them and has already been cut – and the Member for Ferryland referenced some direct impacts – it's not acceptable. It's not acceptable at all. It's not acceptable in 2016. How a federal law and a court ruling in Quebec from the Supreme Court can essentially undermine the entire process of all those people who worked so very hard.

I'm not going to belabour the issue too much further. I know the Third Party will certainly get a chance to speak to this. I believe we'll be looking at another speaker on our side before we conclude debate. Overall, this is essentially a resolution where we have a strong lobby effort, through our colleagues in Ottawa. All sides are going to be working hard on this to ensure the pensioners of Wabush Mines have their fair share. I can't stress enough the importance and the implication it has on a number of industries. Not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, but across the country as well.

With that – oh, before I conclude, sorry, just to acknowledge the amendment that was put forward by the Official Opposition. It is certainly a great amendment and we've acknowledged we'll be supporting that. Just in extension to our lobby efforts, any decisions made would be urged to be retroactive as well.

So I'd like to thank very much the Member for Labrador West for putting this private Member's resolution forward. We certainly appreciate the co-operation from the Opposition and we look forward to co-operation from the Third Party as well.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm really pleased – I always say I'm pleased to stand, but I'm really pleased to stand to speak to

this today. I'm very glad that the private Member's motion was brought forward. I thank the Member for Labrador West for doing that.

Probably we all have very frustrating moments as MHAs, but I think there are times when one feels sometimes very helpless, you know, you can't do anything. When Wabush Mines closed down I was still the leader of our party and, as leader, I made visits to Labrador West to meet with the workers, as other leaders did as well. It is such a helpless feeling because there was nothing that we could do with regard to what was going to happen in terms of the loss of the pensions and their not being recognized under the law as having first rights as workers. It was really, really frustrating.

At least today we're talking about something that we can at least promote some action on and hopefully get changed in this country. The closure of mines in particular, the closure of industrial developments, the closure of major manufacturing operations in the country goes on all the time. Companies always get protected. Who doesn't get protected are the workers. They don't get protected, and that's what this is about. I'm delighted that we're discussing it because Canadian laws do not protect the workers; Canadian laws protect the companies and the companies go on.

I remember once being in the southern tip of Peru and meeting with people, communities and workers there in a little town that had been devastated by a company. I won't name the company, but it was a company that had devastated a community in our own province, and I thought they're still at it. The workers who worked for them in Newfoundland and Labrador are gone, they're no longer workers, they're gone, their operations in Newfoundland – because it was on the Island – they're gone, but the company was still at it, still devastating the environment and still treating workers badly, et cetera.

We have to make sure that we get the law changed in Canada so that we can offer protection to workers; so that we can have something that will give us leverage when something happens to them.

We are, obviously, going to be supporting this private Member's motion. The whole issue of protecting of workers' pensions has been something that NDP Members of Parliament have been talking about for years. Just in June 2015, when this was an issue that was high on the agenda, there was a statement by Jonathan Genest-Jourdain who was the former MP for Manicouagan. I think what he said says it all.

"Three generations of my constituents worked at the Wabush mines, but now hundreds of retirees are no longer covered by the company's life and medical insurance, effective June 1, while the Wabush group is placed under the protection of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. Some of my constituents spent their life working hard in the mine only to end up with nothing, not even medical insurance." That comes from June 5, 2015, House debate in Ottawa in the House of Commons.

That's the part that's so sad and I know that's the part we're all upset about and we want to see done right. An employer shuts his door, goes off, has operations elsewhere, does fine and the workers are left with nothing. Pensions are at risk, the loss of medical coverage, everything is gone. For too long our governments in Ottawa has gone on letting this continue.

Right now, the United Steel Workers, of course, are still in Labrador because we have other operations, especially IOC. Euclide Hache who is the steelworkers' representative in Labrador District 6 put it like this, "The retirees negotiated agreements in good faith and didn't do anything except work 30 years or more for the mines in Wabush." They worked hard, they built a community, they helped our economy, they were the ones who gave, and now they're the ones to feel the brunt of our lax laws with regard to pension protection. It's really, really frustrating.

We need to look at what we can also do here in our own province. In December, during the election campaign, the Premier said that a new Liberal government will promote growth in the mining sector of the economy with some actions, but the Premier didn't promise anything about pension protection.

In our '15 election platform, we committed to bringing in amendments to the provincial

Pension Benefits Act and the *Personal Property Security Act* to protect pensions when companies go bankrupt, similar to Ontario's *Personal Property Security Act*.

Now, these amendments would only apply to local companies because that's all we would have jurisdiction over here in Newfoundland and Labrador. The amendments would not apply to a multinational mining company like Cliffs. So we also pledged to initiate talks with the federal government regarding changes to the federal *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act* to better safeguard pensions in cases of bankruptcy. With our record in Ottawa I know that Ms. Jones, as the Labrador MP, is going to get a lot of co-operation as she fights this one and tries to get action.

It's something that the Liberals on the other side, the government, need to know as they push the current Liberal government – because Liberal governments haven't had a good record in Ottawa. In 2003 when Paul Martin was the prime minister, our federal party brought a motion before the House of Commons asking for an amendment to the *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act* to ensure that wages and pension funds owing to employees would be the first debts in line to be repaid in case of an employer bankruptcy.

Then in 2004 we introduced a bill to amend federal legislation to protect the wages and unemployment insurance benefits of workers from being seized as part of the assets of a bankrupt business. Unfortunately, the Liberal federal government of the day defeated both of those initiatives, but they felt the pressure from our party and others to do something and you did get some changes happen in Ottawa so that in 2005 the federal government introduced legislation to pay workers for wages owed by bankrupt employers. That was a step for wages owed by bankrupt employers. This was called the Wage Earner Protection Program, and the federal government amended other laws to make wages and pensions a higher priority than secured creditors. So some steps have been taken.

Then in 2007, the Conservative government passed their own version of these amendments, giving unpaid wages and pension contributions a

higher priority than secured creditors and prohibiting companies from restructuring unless unpaid wage claims and pension obligations were met. That was another step, so we do have actions that have occurred in Ottawa that show federal governments accepting the principle that workers, not creditors, should receive the benefits from the pensions they paid into over the years.

The federal legislation still leaves the workers' pensions vulnerable to being taken by creditors. That's the issue we're dealing with in this private Member's motion. Even though we have these recognitions by the federal government in one piece of legislation, we have another piece of legislation, the CCAA, which negates this by not allowing the workers' pensions and their rights to be ahead of the creditors.

The new federal government needs to fix this. They need to look at what they did in 2004 and say there is another step to go. It would be helpful if Liberal MPs from this province, all of them, would speak out about this, not just the Liberal MP from Labrador. This is a provincial issue in every way; it's not just an issue of Labrador. Labrador's focus this time, as the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island said when he spoke; there was nothing like this around to protect the workers of Bell Island when that mine closed, for example – nothing whatsoever.

We're in the dark ages with regard to this and we have to do something about it. We need to take an active role as an Assembly. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador needs to take an active role, needs to be out there pushing this issue, meeting with people it needs to meet with, showing that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador wants this change in Ottawa.

As I said, one of the steps would be to change the law here in Newfoundland and Labrador for our local companies. We need to look at the future. We need to realize this can happen over and over and we don't have the ability as a province to protect the workers ourselves. We can't be coming up with hundreds of thousands of dollars for workers to help them; we don't have the money to do that. It's an ongoing issue.

It's an ongoing struggle. We have to keep the battle going.

I totally agree with the amendment going into our motion. I suspect it would have some resistance in Ottawa, though, as a position. Retroactivity, when we know that there are companies all over the country where workers have been affected – it would be opening Pandora's box.

I'm not opposed to its being in the private Member's motion. I don't think that any government in Ottawa would pick one company out of all the hundreds that have had this happen to them. We stand in solidarity with the workers in Wabush and I'm not opposed to the amendment being part of the private Member's motion. It's the spirit of what we want. I doubt that we'll get it, but it's the spirit of what we want.

I will end by quoting the former Wabush mayor, Ron Barron. Also somebody who worked in the mines who wants to see federal legislation changed to protect pensions. This is what Ron says, and this is the spirit I think Ron would want from us today as we vote for this private Member's motion: "I'll go to my grave trying to fix this. It might be too late for the people of Wabush Mines but it's not too late for the people of IOC, because the same thing could happen to them tomorrow."

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I am very delighted to rise and speak on this private Member's resolution brought forward by the hon. the Member for Labrador West. It's a very timely piece. It's a very effective piece to make clear the intentions of this House of Assembly, which also makes clear the intentions of our government to act in the best interests of those that are finding themselves in very, very difficult circumstances through no fault of their own.

Listening to the debate here today we've gotten some perspectives that show a unity of cause, a harmony of effort and a common cause to support those that are in need of our assistance. The spirit of the proposed changes that we would advocate to the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* would be of benefit not only to a select group of workers, hard-working miners in Newfoundland and Labrador, but in particular, it would have an impact right across the entire country.

We support the amendment to the resolution. It's an amendment that takes an effort to look back. It speaks to the fact that it would have been helpful, probably, if this debate and this resolution had hit the floor, that the government itself of the day had brought forward with it the impact and its strength as a government resolution. We, as a government today, are championing this cause. We are very effectively making sure that we seek a common effort to make sure we provide the common good.

I listened to the Member for Labrador West make a very passionate, eloquent speech reflecting the values and the realities of what's happening on the ground in his own district, the importance of creating an action plan towards this.

I know from my own experience that within the Chamber, within the House of Commons, there's a real opportunity here that either the government itself could bring forward its own amendments championed by the government with the full force of the Cabinet, or the debate could open up through a private Member's bill, a proposed change to the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act*. That, Madam Speaker, would stimulate should it win.

When such a piece of legislation would get to the Committee stage, following a report, there would be a committee process. I believe the standing committee on employment and human resources would then take up the legislation and conduct a study where expert witnesses would be called, expert witnesses not only from this province but right across the entire country.

I would expect, Madam Speaker, that the hon. Member for Labrador West would, indeed, be called by that committee should one be struck to

examine any amendments to the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act*, not only because of his own positive role that he's played, but because of the expertise that he would be able to provide a select standing committee of the House of Commons on reviewing this matter.

I noted very clearly the wisdom that was offered by the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville. This is a changing environment. The perspective that was offered by the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville was that we are now in a circumstance – because of certain labour market shortages, because of certain evolving labour market conditions – that it would be difficult to get employees if the mining industry does not put itself forward as an employer of first choice.

When you look at that perspective, it is up to the mining industry. It has been argued, Madam Speaker, in the past that any change to the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* that would actually put pensions on a more secured foothold and pensioners on a more secured foot holding – in terms of the arrangement, the order of creditors that would be provided protections and the level of security that would be provided – that this could prevent or discourage investment in the mining industry.

Madam Speaker, that argument, I think, needs to be examined. It needs to be examined especially so in a modern context because what the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville rightfully and astutely added to the debate was that should the mining industry fail to project itself as an employer of first choice, and as an industry of first choice, then talent may leak from the industry. This proposed amendment that we would ask the federal Parliament to consider does indeed provide, we would argue, even greater stability to the industry as a whole in a modern context, given the labour market circumstances that it also faces.

The Member for Stephenville – Port au Port added a very relevant perspective and that is the value and the contribution to the entire economy of our province and to the well-being in the future to our province.

This leadership we're seeing on the floor of the House of Assembly today I think will mark we

well when the Parliament of Canada takes hold, sieges this issue, takes hold of it and makes it its own, as we have done here today, I think that leadership will be voiced, not only in the debate on the floor of House, the House of Commons, but it will be reflected in the expert witness testimony during the course of the standing committee process as well. These are the values that we as a province can take. This is the leadership role that we have taken and this is why we are now being seen as a leader in making sure this particular issue takes fire and comes alive, and real change is brought about.

The initiative brought forward today by the Member for Labrador West I think is at the pinnacle of that leadership. As a Member of our government, as a valued Member of our caucus, he has reminded us repeatedly, as have you, Madam Speaker, and your colleagues from Labrador, how important this industry is to us as a province, to our well-being and our future, both economically and our ability to continue to provide our social safety nets.

As we understand on this side, without the capacity to be able to generate the revenues, without the economic capacity, without the ability to be able to meet the expectations of our people, without providing that revenue, without balancing our expectations with that, we will not be able to provide what our people so rightfully understand and expect; because without that balance, without growing our economy, we will not be able to achieve our full revenue targets.

Now we are in a situation where we are in a bit of downturn in the commodities industry. Now is an appropriate time, now is the best time, to actually review all practices of the industry and to ensure that the industry is on a more solid footing; to ensure that the industry on a go-forward basis is looking at its own future and whether or not it's providing a stable foundation and a footing for its own success.

We, on this side, would argue – and I'm sure we're joined by others, Members opposite as well, and I'm very delighted we've been able to seek that common cause and be able to consolidate our efforts so that we're a single voice on this. We would argue very, very effectively and astutely that in order for this industry to grow, the capacity of its own

workforce to be to its highest calibre and to attract its best and most talented and skilled workers, this is an amendment – this would be a change and a change for the better.

As a result, by reviewing and amending what would normally be considered a financial practice exterior to the actual act of mining itself, we are expanding and making greater the opportunity of mining not only here at home but across the entire country, and we would be seen as leaders in doing so.

The perspective must be offered. The industry itself is evolving. What was true 10 years ago or true 20 years ago may not have been as applicable as what it is today. From that perspective, a look back to 10 or 20 years ago may not be as worthwhile, some may suggest, but what we know of today is that this particular action that is being prescribed on the floor of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador will provide a better, stronger foundation for the mining industry for generations to come.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate the opportunity to address this private Member's resolution which I think is very timely.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: If the hon. Member for Labrador West speaks now he will close debate on the motion he put to the floor today.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

First, I want to thank all the Members on both sides of the House who spoke on this today. The Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville, the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port, the Member for Corner Brook who brought his federal expertise to the floor and certainly gave us an insight on to what lies ahead for us.

I want to especially thank the Members of the Opposition, the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, the Member for Ferryland and the Member for St. John's East – Quidi

Vidi, for their support and positive comments for this PMR.

I want to thank the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, especially for his amendment. I noticed that the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi brought it up. We had that discussion in putting together this PMR regarding the retroactivity issue, nevertheless I think it's important we put it in the motion and we put it forward. What happens at the federal level, I guess, is really out of our control regarding that issue but it's something for them to consider, and I thank him for that.

I also want to thank him for the personal side he brought to it with his dad and the fact that he could have ended up in Wabush. That would not have been a bad thing, I guarantee you that right now. Because 90 per cent – probably even more than that – of the people who went to Wabush and Labrador City in the early '70s and late '60s, they all went for three or four months to earn a few dollars because money was good at that time. The pay was great in Labrador West at that time. They were going to go for three or four months, come home, who knows what would happen, but they stayed. These are the people we're talking about today.

I went there in 1973 as a student for four months; 37 years later, I was still there. Not a student, but still there. The point I'm trying to make is it's these people who we're talking about here today. It's those people who went to Wabush and Labrador City, in this case, for three or four months. These are the people who we're talking about today, who've been – I don't know what you would call it, but, certainly, they've been done wrong because they went there for three or four months, and what happened? They stayed 30 or 40 years. They stayed with the understanding they would be able to retire after that time and reap the benefits of their hard labour, because mining is not easy work. It's dangerous work.

I know the Member for Ferryland referred to it when he talked about his personal contacts with retirees and the fact that they not only lost their pensions, they lost their health benefits. They've been done bad, I guess, is the right way to say it, not only once, but twice, because the health benefits – and for those retirees – are just as

important, or more important, probably in some cases, than their pensions. It's the health benefits that they saw go first, and then to be hit again.

I have to tell you a little story because I got elected on November 30, we got sworn in on December 16, and the Premier asked me to go parliamentary secretary to Department of Service NL, which controls pensions, which regulate the pensions. Two days later I, and the minister, along with our officials, stood in front of 250 maybe or more retirees, pensioners from Wabush Mines, a week before Christmas on December 18, a week before Christmas Day, and tell them that we have to terminate the pension plan, and that in a most likely case they would lose a part of their pension. On March 1, 2016, that's what actually happened. What a start to a political career.

It wasn't an easy day, and I reflect back on it today and I still can't comprehend how I did it, actually, because it was so hurtful – it was so hurtful. I saw the look on the people's faces when you tell them this. There were people there who had lost their husbands, widows who were on survivor pensions. The despair and the look on their face, I'll never forget it, because it's just too much to really comprehend.

So we stand here today and I'm glad that we have the full support of this House on this resolution, because I know the MP for Labrador, along with – and I can say to the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi that she has the support of the MPs from Newfoundland and Labrador; that's a given. The people that she's getting around her are people who have similar situations looming at them – looming – with pension plans, as we know the state of pension plans today.

She also mentioned about the Steelworkers' rep in Labrador West, Euclide Hache, and over the past year and since – well, not the past year, but the past six months since this has been brought to light – I've had a lot of discussions with him. He's a very passionate man who has the full interests of these people at heart. As a steelworker representative, he's working very closely with all of us to make sure that something is done here.

I can tell you as well we have formed a committee. I'd like to inform the House that we have formed a committee of the Wabush pensioners, representing both the non-unionized pensioners and the unionized pensioners. We've formed a committee and we meet on a regular basis – we met just a couple of weeks ago – moving this issue forward. So we're moving on all fronts.

Without breaching confidentiality, we are working with legal counsel that's been hired to bring Cliffs Natural Resources to meet their obligations. We believe as a government, we believe as a committee and the people of Wabush believe that Cliffs Natural Resources are still obligated to fully fund this plan and to get people back to their full benefits. We believe that. That's what the committee believes, the people believe and we as a government believe.

We have committed our support, our, being government support, whether it's legal support or through the superintendent of pensions. We will co-operate with legal counsel that's been hired to move this issue forward. And it's moving.

We're also working with different departments. I'm working with a new company looking at a new owner for Wabush Mines which, hopefully, will come to fruition very soon. That, too, will help the situation because this has to be a concerted effort here. It's not going to happen by just one person or one group. It's going to happen when all things come together.

I want to thank again the Opposition for their support. I certainly do appreciate where they're coming from. I know and I will say again that I doubt if there's a Member of this hon. House that is not affected by this, doesn't have somebody who worked at Wabush Mines who are under these conditions who are living in their district. It's not just a Wabush issue. It's a provincial issue. They're all over the world actually, so it's something that we have to move forward.

Getting back to the PMR which is, I guess, what our role will be in this and that's yet to be defined, determined, but I can tell you I've been back and forth with the MP today with several emails and whatnot. She knows we're putting

this PMR through today. Things are moving on the federal level with regard to this.

As I said in my previous comments, CCWA is up for review in 2019 but we do not have to wait for that. We cannot wait for that. We cannot wait that long because these people of Wabush have suffered too much. They've suffered too long and it's unfortunate.

They've said to me several times: Do what you can. Do what you can for us. We know you can't perform miracles but do what you can. Make sure provisions and legislation is put in place to protect any other group of individuals, whether it's in mining, whether it's in – like I said – car manufacturing, forestry. Put it in place so pensioners are protected.

When I look at this list of creditors that are on the list, I said a few of them, it's so unfortunate, I guess, is the best way I can put it, that there are people here who are owed millions and millions of dollars, but, if and when – and we don't know what's going to happen when they come out of CCWA. They're in protection. The Stay of Proceedings now, as I said earlier, is extended to September 30. Hopefully, positive things will happen before that.

When I look at the list of creditors and I see Cliffs Mining Company, Cliffs Quebec Iron Mining, Cliffs Natural Resources owed \$244 million, \$126 million, \$24 million, \$635 million, it makes me angry because what they've done – the list of creditors are themselves.

It's a known fact that Cliffs Natural Resources wants to get out of Canada. There's no question about that. They bought Bloom Lake for \$4.9 billion. We all know what happened to the iron ore industry. They sold it for \$10 million plus \$40 million for – so \$50 million altogether. They want to get out of Wabush Mines. They want to get out of Canada, but Cliffs Natural Resources are still doing very well, the parent company.

They have facilities operating in, as I said, the Mesabi Range in Minnesota. They're operating in Australia. As the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi referred to, they're still making millions of dollars. Yet, they've turned their back on the very people in Labrador who not only helped build the company, but put them in

a financial position where they could expand everywhere else, and they turned their backs on them. They turned their backs on them. Not only did they do that, but they penalized them. They penalized them for working for them by eliminating their benefits and part of their pension.

I think when you look at that, it's natural that something has to be done to protect people like that. There are lots of Wabashes out there, let me tell you, and you don't have to go very far to find them. There are lots of pension plans out there that are not in good shape today, and we don't have to go very far.

When I look at these creditors, all pensioners can be the very people who donated their lives, who have given their lives and put themselves in danger in many situations because it's not easy work. Mining is a dangerous work and people have referred to that. You have to put yourself in peril many times, and we've lost many people in that industry. Many people have been injured in that industry.

But for a multinational company like that to turn their backs – I guess what really irks me, the latest thing to happen, is that now they're mining in Minnesota and they're going to sell their product back to a Canadian steel company in Sault Ste. Marie. I mean, it's just incomprehensible that a company can be allowed to do that.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank everybody who spoke today in support. I want to thank the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi who I know has a strong history in this. I appreciate her comments. I appreciate the comments from Conception Bay East – Bell Island and the amendment, as well as the Member for Ferryland, and the Members who spoke on this side of the House. I look forward to support of the House. Hopefully, this will lead to something positive for pensioners in this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): All those in favour of the amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, amendment carried.

MR. SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion, as amended?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

I declare the motion approved.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

It being Private Members' Day, this House now stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow.