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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

When hon. Members are ready.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we have Members' statements from the Members for the Districts of Bonavista, Mount Pearl – Southlands, Labrador West, St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, Harbour Main and Cape St. Francis.

The hon. Member for the District of Bonavista.

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, provincial scholarships were recently announced and I'm honoured to stand here today and recognize five bright, young people from my district who were recipients. These scholarships are awarded to high achievers who just finished high school, are attending a post-secondary institution and are based on results from public exams. Ultimately, it's the culmination of years of hard work and dedication as it relates to their secondary education.

The Electoral District Scholarship, valued at \$1,000, is awarded to three high school graduates in each district who achieves the highest Department of Education and Early Childhood Development scholarship score. In the District of Bonavista, Vanessa Duggan of Discovery Collegiate, who had the highest marks, Olivia White of Bishop White School and Zachary Russell of Discovery Collegiate were the recipients.

The Centenary of Responsible Government Scholarships, valued at \$1,000, are awarded to 79 students with the highest marks – other than the Junior Jubilee, W.C. Moss and the Electoral District Scholarships. In the District of Bonavista, Rebecca Holloway of Heritage Collegiate, and my much smarter cousin, Conrad Reid of Discovery Collegiate were the recipients.

I ask that you join me in congratulating them and wishing them success in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This past Sunday, I had the pleasure to participate in the Mount Pearl Lions's Santa Clause Parade. The parade began at Mount Pearl Senior High and travelled down Ruth and Park Avenue, ending at Mount Pearl Square, where participants were treated to hot chocolate, Timbits, pop and hotdogs by the Lions Club members and other community-minded volunteers.

This year's parade featured cheerleaders, floats, marching bands, animated characters, community organizations and dignitaries from various levels of government. The weather was absolutely wonderful for parade participants and onlookers alike, which was evident by the large number of families present along the route who were there to enjoy the festivities and catch a glimpse of good old St. Nick.

An event such as this certainly would not be possible if not for the commitment and support of many community volunteers, organizations, the city and the corporate community.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in congratulating the Mount Pearl Lions Club and all of its community partners in hosting another successful Santa Clause Parade in the City of Mount Pearl.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate the organizers of the 6th Annual Christmas Gala held in Labrador City on November 19, raising funds for Daffodil Place.

The organizing committee of Thelma Ricketts, Amy Dumaresque, Ann Marie Riviere, Paulette Lambert, Nadine Stroud, Ronda Farrell, Christine Gordon, Melinda Myers, Linda Moulton, Dawn Willcott, Angela Cayouette and Leeann Barrett give generously of their time making this event a huge success.

The Christmas Gala consists of a great dinner, followed by both a live and silent auction that raised this year \$16,000 for Daffodil Place, for a six-year total of over \$90,000.

In honour of those affected by cancer, three candles were lit – first for those presently taking treatment, second for those who have won their battle, and third for those who have lost the battle against this dreadful disease.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Labrador West recognize the importance of Daffodil Place for cancer patients who have to travel to St. John's for extended periods of time for treatment. It is their home away from home.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the organizing committee of this great event. I am already looking forward to next year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise today to honour a remarkable person taken from us much too soon. Gerry Porter died last Friday just eight months after his brain cancer diagnosis.

The many facets of his life are reflected on GerryPalooza, a Facebook page that began as an invitation to an event, became a page of memories and love when he moved to palliative care and now stands as a beautiful tribute.

He edited the *Muse*, worked as a graphic artist at Memorial, introduced people to new music and ideas, designed posters for dozens of local

shows, and impressed everyone he met with his wit, wisdom and intelligence. He was best known, lately, for his brilliant political shareables. Many of us in this House have been his subjects on social media, Mr. Speaker. But I am sure we can all agree that Gerry always avoided low blows, and made us laugh at ourselves.

Most important, he was a loving husband, father, grandfather and friend. We all feel his loss, but I send an extra big hug to Debbie, Nick, Chris and all the other Porters and McGees.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in saluting Gerry Porter, an unmatched example of a life well lived.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Prior to recognizing the Member for Harbour Main, we welcome her guests to the public galleries, Zachary Dean with parents, Shawn and Louise.

The hon. the Member for the District of Harbour Main.

MS. PARSLEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize an inspirational young man from the District of Harbour Main. Twenty-year-old Zachary Dean from Seal Cove is an exceptional individual who faces challenges head on and will stop at nothing to reach his goals.

In 2011, after moving from New Brunswick, Zachary started bowling with the CBS Special Olympics and since then has moved on to participate in six additional sports, including swimming, snowshoeing and softball. In total, Zachary has collected more than 30 medals during his time with the club in just five short years.

In 2015, he was named CBS Male Athlete of the Year for the CBS Brightstars Olympics. This past summer, in addition to winning a silver and bronze medal at the Newfoundland Summer Games, he was also presented with his Gold Duke of Edinburgh medal by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal.

With the support of his mother Louise, father Shawn and sister Kayla, Zachary has been able to not only meet his full potential but exceed it.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Zachary on his outstanding accomplishments and showings us that a disability is not an inability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate the Town of Bauline on the grand opening of their beautiful new town hall and community centre.

In 2009, the gathering place in the town was the old school. It had to be closed for safety reasons. The town had to rent an apartment to hold council meetings and to hold public meetings, they used the United Church.

Mayor Rita King and the council started planning for the new community centre. Under a new council, with the leadership of Mayor Chris Dredge, the work was started. Town Manager Craig Drover, Mr. Everything, was the person in charge of overseeing the project.

I was happy to attend the grand opening on November 19, and already the building is booked solid. They have a dart league, Zumba classes, showers, dances, all kinds of parties and community functions. It also has new council chambers and offices.

I ask all hon. Members to join with me in congratulating Mayor Dredge and the Town of Bauline on the opening of their beautiful new building.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. On December 6, 1989, a gunman shot and killed 14 young women at École Polytechnique, because he believed they were feminists. This remains one of the worst incidents of mass murder in Canadian history.

Twelve of these women were engineering students, one was an employee of the university and one was a nursing student. All 14 were killed simply because they were women. This horrific event is a chilling reminder of the devastating effects of the violence against women and a reminder of the continued struggle that women face every day in our society.

The loss of these 14 women is still felt keenly by their families, their friends, their industry and their country. It has driven a movement that strives for a society where women are treated with equality and respect. We still work every day to achieve those goals. We all have the right to come home to a safe home, to socialize with our friends, to attend a medical appointment, to ride in a taxi, to attend university or to simply walk down the street without fear of being attacked.

Mr. Speaker, November 25 marked the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. It also marked the beginning of the seventh annual Purple Ribbon campaign to increase awareness and responsiveness to violence against women. This year to highlight the campaign, the Purple Ribbon flag has been raised for the first time at Confederation Building. The flag will remain in place until December 10, coinciding with Human Rights Day and the Close of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.

Mr. Speaker, Members of this hon. House are wearing the purple ribbon today in honour of December 6, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. In

addition this year, we are wearing the white ribbon to mark the 25th anniversary of the White Ribbon campaign, the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end violence against women.

Mr. Speaker, as a reminder to us all of the events of December 6, 1989, I would like to read the names of those 14 women who died that day into the record of the House of Assembly: Geneviève Bergeron, H  l  ne Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Barbara Marie Klucznik, Maryse Lagani  re, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Mich  le Richard, Annie St-Arneault and Annie Turcotte.

Flags at Confederation Building will be flown at half-mast from sunrise to sunset to mark this tragic day.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd ask that we all take a moment of silence to remember these women and all the women and families whose lives have been impacted by violence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Moment of silence.)

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Many people in this nation will recall where they were on this day 27 years ago when word spread across this country in 1989 that a shooting had occurred in Montreal. It was understandably met with sadness and shock.

However, the revelation that these 14 people were senselessly murdered because they were women, that fact changed our country forever. Fourteen strong, intelligent and successful females were targeted and stripped of their young lives all because of their gender.

Violence against women is real and we must do everything in our power to change this. December 6 is a grim and sombre day for our

country. We must always remember what occurred in Montreal that day and remember the women whose voices were silenced. The work to end gender-based violence must never cease.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Mr. Speaker, 27 years ago I was living in Montreal only blocks away from   cole Polytechnique. I remember it well.

For the first anniversary, I made a film for CBC called *After the Montreal Massacre* featuring Sylvie Gagnon who was shot but survived. In it, women talked about the need to end all forms of violence against women and how poverty and lack of equal opportunities affect women's full equality.

On this anniversary, I ask the minister to commit to a more rigorous and transparent gender analysis of all legislation that comes before this House, and to make it publicly available so, together, we can all work towards great equality. Gender and equality must be embedded in all that we do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

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

I'm pleased to rise in this hon. House today and share that earlier this year, and as mentioned by the Member for Ferryland yesterday, the coastline of Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve was inscribed as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization, also known as UNESCO. This is the first provincially-managed World Heritage Site in Newfoundland and Labrador, and it's the fourth jewel in our crown of UNESCO sites in this province.

Mistaken Point is home to the world's oldest, large, complex multicellular fossils, representing the remains of soft-bodied creatures that lived some 560 to 580 million years ago. Located on the south coast of the Avalon Peninsula, this is the place in the world where there is evidence of when life got big.

Mr. Speaker, World Heritage Inscription would not have been possible without the dedication of the people of Portugal Cove South and other communities on the Southern Avalon, Dr. Guy Narbonne, Dr. Richard Thomas, the very important Mistaken Point Ambassadors Inc., Fossil Guardians, as well as the commitment and support from provincial government staff, and the federal government represented by Parks Canada. This was truly a celebration of co-operation between the community, academia and government.

Because of their efforts, Mistaken Point now counts itself amongst such iconic international company – such as the Galápagos Islands and the Great Barrier Reef. Mistaken Point now stands toe-to-toe with other international natural treasures in terms of its outstanding universal value to humanity. Since the announcement, our government has rolled out our plan for additional staff and infrastructure support.

Mr. Speaker, World Heritage status ensures that this site will be protected and available for future generations to study and discover, of which I know we are all collectively very proud.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement and this tremendous story for the southern Avalon.

I, too, would like to offer my congratulations to all of those who worked long and hard towards this achievement. To the Mistaken Point ambassadors, the residents of the southern Avalon, and the numerous academia staff who worked in this destination, certainly some local people. I think of people like Kit Ward that for decades have known and understood what we had there and on their own protected the areas for the community.

Having Mistaken Point designated as a World Heritage site will ensure its protection for many years to come. I was delighted to hear the minister speak of increasing the funding and positions available as we move forward with Mistaken Point. That certainly needs to continue. I hope the minister committed to that and committed as well to employing local content and expertise where possible, which is so important.

As the minister indicated, Mistaken Point is home to the world's largest complex multicellular fossils. It is truly a unique tourism attraction. I encourage all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and Members from the House, to visit this site over the coming months and years to see exactly what it has to offer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. It's wonderful what happens when communities work together for a common goal. Congratulations to all the people of Portugal Cove South and those who worked with them to earn Mistaken Point a UNESCO designation.

I remind the minister, there is more work to do. We need legislative buffer zones that will ensure Mistaken Point and our other jewel on the West Coast, Gros Morne, are protected from encroaching development for generations to come. It is the right thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

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

I ask the Premier, if he can confirm if Mr. Bern Coffey, Clerk of the Executive Council and known critic of Muskrat Falls is actually the chair of the oversight committee on Muskrat Falls?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, as the former premier would know because this is the oversight committee that they had put in place, it was made up of a group of people that were in the bureaucracy within the province and in the capacity of the clerk, they become chair of the oversight committee.

Mr. Speaker, what we've done over the last few months is we've put in place a new board. That has been done just recently through an IAC process. In terms of providing oversight, we feel there's also some room that we can do with strengthening that position as well, Mr. Speaker. Based on some of the reports we saw just recently, if the need is to do that, I can assure you that this is a government that would do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

December 2015, was the last oversight committee report released on Muskrat Falls.

I ask the Premier, if an updated, new oversight committee report will be available this year?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's widely known around the province now and people have been watching this project, there have been a number of variables that have occurred. Last year in December we put in place an EY – we engaged EY to look at the schedule and the cost of the project. Those reports came out late spring of this year. Added to that there was some re-baselining that had to be done. That was done sometime late June. June 29 I think the date was, Mr. Speaker.

There have been significant discussions around, as we know, the federal loan guarantee. We've had Aboriginal issues around methylmercury, Mr. Speaker; we've had issues around the cofferdam and, of course, the major contractor. There have been ongoing discussions with those groups.

Mr. Speaker, most of these things that I've just mentioned are as a result of the project that we inherited because of the poor management of this prior administration. So what we've done with all those variables, we've been checking them off as we got them done. What we want to do is get those completed and get the oversight report out there as quickly as possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier needn't worry; we're going to get to poor management of the current government before too long this afternoon. They've been in power now for 12 months, Mr. Speaker. This government, this Premier has been in power for 12 months.

I ask the Premier: You're on the record as saying how important the Oversight Committee work is, how important it is to have oversight of Muskrat Falls and how valuable this committee was; why is it there's been no updated report available to the people of the province after 12 months you've been in office?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, what I would do is I'd ask the former premier if he'd just go to the website where the minutes of the meetings of the independent Oversight Committee is there. They are there.

Mr. Speaker, the oversight report, as I just mentioned, there are a number of variables. So any reporting that would have been done right now would have been with all those variables in place, so there would have been very little value I would say.

We are making a lot of headway, a lot of progress when it comes to the contract with the major contractor, finalizing that. The federal loan guarantee will have an impact. The Aboriginal issues around methylmercury – something that the former premier didn't even take the time to become familiar with – that is something that just happened in October.

So, Mr. Speaker, a lot of variables with this but when this work is completed, we want to get this done as quickly as possible and get those reports out there. I think last year, I believe, the former administration put out two reports.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Yes, the minutes are online and here's what it says. It names one of the employees "provided an update on the Project status based on the reports for the month ended July 2016." What the minutes also say, and these are for August 30: "Commence drafting of the next Muskrat Falls Project Oversight Committee report."

So, Mr. Speaker, that's all the minutes say. That's not very in-depth and not very valuable to the people of the province.

I ask the Premier once again: Why has the committee not provided an update on the status of this very important project? We've already seen where delays have gotten us; we've seen

what the independent engineer has said. People of the province want to know why is this project at risk and what's the Oversight Committee saying?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, just last year, late September when I asked the former premier to give an update on the Muskrat Falls Project, he refused to do that, I would say, Mr. Speaker. Just last year around late September, when I asked him for a financial update of the affairs of this province, he refused to do it and he had that information. He knew the information in the spring of 2015. He just refused to do it.

We've been giving regular reports on where things have been, as it relates to methylmercury, as it relates to the re-baselining, the federal loan guarantee. There have been a number of variables. I just answered the question for the former premier two or three times already, Mr. Speaker.

We want to get this information out there. When we can get some good, solid information about this project, the mess they have left this province in, we will get that information out there.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The committee has met. Here are the minutes for October 6. It's even shorter than the meeting before that where it says they're going to continue to write and draft the Muskrat Falls oversight report. That was their meeting. That's the result of the progress of this Oversight Committee that the premier himself has stood here in the House, has said publicly how important the work of the Oversight Committee is and there has been no report for a full year from this government opposite.

Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, this is the Premier who hid the information about Mr. Ed Martin's severance. This is the Premier who wouldn't release that information, said he didn't know until ATIPP proved differently. Well, there's a full report from the independent engineer, Mr. Speaker, a full report that the minister apparently never took the time to read.

They knew about this in July. They had their own people in Muskrat Falls in July.

MR. SPEAKER: I ask the Member to get to his question.

MR. P. DAVIS: Why did you not take action before now, Premier?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it's not unusual for the former premier – we would not want fact to get in the way of a good story. As we said yesterday, the independent engineer's report was released on November 22. The Muskrat Falls Oversight Committee received that report on November 22. It was written, it was done for some fact checking on November 2, so what we've now directed Nalcor and Natural Resources Canada – they received that report in its draft form. We've now directed Nalcor to provide that information to the Muskrat Falls Oversight Committee when they get it in draft form.

That has not happened in the past. That is not something that the former administration took the initiative to do. They were not involved in this and right now, just like last year, when they refused to release that information, we will get this information out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

The rhetoric continues.

I'll ask the Premier this: The independent engineer did a full review of the project in July; what officials accompanied the independent engineer during that review?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, there are a number of people that went with the independent engineer. All I would say is, Mr. Speaker, he must have read the document. The names are all there, but they were not involved in drafting that document, Mr. Speaker. Neither did anyone get a copy of the draft document.

Mr. Speaker, he talked about rhetoric, the former premier talked about rhetoric. Well, what he's doing right now is playing politics with a report based on an oversight committee that that former premier put in place. He was a part of that, and we will change that. Already we've directed the independent engineer, when those reports go into the hands of Nalcor, Natural Resources Canada, they will now come to the Muskrat Oversight Committee; something they failed to do when they put in place this oversight committee.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I do have the report and I've read the report. The report clearly outlines there were officials from government. There were officials from Nalcor that were with the independent engineer when they reviewed the site.

I ask the Premier: Why was it not until Friday past before you knew of the issues with the cofferdam?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Because that's when the final report was presented to the oversight committee, that is why.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER BALL: He is suggesting the people that went on the site visit with the independent engineer were not doing their job? Is he suggesting they were incompetent, Mr. Speaker? Because I would like to remind the former premier, these are people that they had put in place. Is he suggesting the oversight committee that they put in place were incompetent? Is that what the former premier is suggesting today?

Mr. Speaker, we have directed now that when the independent engineer's report comes in draft form, that that must be given to the Muskrat Falls Oversight Committee. That is not something the former premier in his capacity – or his colleagues in their capacity did not do. That will now happen, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We're talking about the independent engineer who in July spent several days and several efforts with officials from Nalcor and officials from government reviewing the Muskrat Falls Project and updating on the status, and in a report very clearly issued the concerns they observed on site.

My question for the Premier is: Is it an issue for you or a concern for you that officials never brought this information to you or at least through the minister to you? Is that a concern for you, Premier?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, number one, when the site visit was done in July the cofferdam was not completed. It was under construction at that point. That is clearly

outlined in the report, should the former premier take some time to review it and read the report in detail, Mr. Speaker. So as I said, we won't let fact get in the way of a good story.

Mr. Speaker, what we've put in place is a new board. The former premier let a board go with just five people. We've now put in place a new board at Nalcor. The independent engineers, a draft report will now go to the Muskrat Falls Oversight Committee. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, if need be, we will even strengthen further that oversight committee. There is a need for strengthening oversight. We put in place a new board. The independent engineers report will go to the Muskrat Falls Oversight Committee, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you now we will do more if required.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier wants to keep going back to the oversight committee. It appears the oversight committee are working. The problem is that the Premier hasn't ensured that they will issue a report, a status report on the project. For a full year there has been no report from the committee. It's about not providing information publicly. I'm not sure why he would not direct that and keep it confidential. Why are they not directing that?

The Minister of Natural Resources has said that she knew last month there were issues with the cofferdam.

I'll ask the minister: Why did you not share such an important, critical piece of information with the Premier of the province?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let's be clear on timelines. The cofferdam wasn't completed until November 5, impoundment began on that date. On November 18, which is two weeks later, the observance of

the seepage, leakage was that the water needed to be lowered. The water was lowered. A public statement by Nalcor was made on the 18th advising what was happening. Again, Nalcor did advise on the 21st what was happening. Last week in this House, when I was questioned about the cofferdam, I did say how concerned we were about this issue.

It is an ongoing situation, Mr. Speaker. There are geotechnical engineers on site and we are hopeful that we can get this cofferdam finished, get the water raised so we can protect our assets downstream.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I appreciate the information from the minister, but the question was: If she knew about this a month or so ago, why did she not inform the Premier? This is an issue that could potentially cost hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars or worse to the project.

I ask the minister again: Why did you not inform the Premier a month ago when you found out about it?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, this government has been stating publicly since September that we were concerned about the cofferdam. We were concerned about raising the water levels in the river so that we could protect downstream assets. That has been public since September.

In October we had a meeting, a very important meeting I say, Mr. Speaker, with the indigenous groups. We were able to work through a few issues with that. Water was raised in the cofferdam. It was completed and raised in November. Nalcor came publicly and said there was an issue with the cofferdam.

On November 18 when asked, I did say that I was concerned about this issue. I am concerned about this issue; this government is concerned about this issue. I think it's important to note, Mr. Speaker, this is an ongoing situation and we're continuously monitoring and discussing it with Nalcor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister said, when asked, she'd release the information. It's nice to be proactive and get that out and let the people of the province know upfront, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier stated –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, the Premier stated yesterday that river diversion should have happened months and months ago. By this assertion, is the Premier questioning the performance of the new CEO, or does he have issues with the management team which was retained by the current CEO?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I want to talk about proactive release of information. Let's keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, that this is a government around May of 2015 or June of 2015 who became aware of a major contract problem that cost many hundreds of millions of dollars. The contract is not even finalized yet. So when it comes to proactive release of information, the former administration did not even release that information when they knew about it for many months prior to going into the election last year. So they hid that information.

Mr. Speaker, the comment that I made about river diversion was always part of the schedule. That schedule was put in place by the prior

administration so they are the ones that should best answer that question why that schedule (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has just said that the current CEO or management team at Nalcor can't change the structure for Muskrat Falls, or for the timelines. That's what he just said. He said it was put in place and he's going to keep it forever. There are issues. He just said they can't change it. It doesn't make any sense.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Natural Resources, by not installing the ice boom and ignoring the risk at Muskrat Falls, with your avoidance of duty, are there issues in regard to insurance claims in case damage is done to the infrastructure?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, first of all, I'm going to answer what he talked about, the (inaudible) to all of this. I'm guessing that the former minister is suggesting that for somehow a construction team can go up and change a river diversion. That's what he's suggesting? That within a year you could actually change that schedule so that the timeline could be changed, that you could actually do that quicker?

Mr. Speaker, there is a reason why the river diversion was missed. It was related to the poor management that the previous administration had done. The schedule that they had agreed to on sanctioning of that project, Mr. Speaker, not only had they missed the schedule, but I can tell you what, they certainly missed the budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: At the next Cabinet meeting maybe the Premier can talk to his Minister of Finance and the Minister of TW who sat at the board table at Nalcor, one of them was even chair of the board.

Did they miss the schedule? Did they miss the budget? Maybe they can stand up and tell us, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I've given several warnings to Members of the House. Don't let today be the day that I identify a Member and silence them.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, by not installing the ice boom and ignoring the risk at Muskrat Falls, will your avoidance of duty on the potential insurance claims to damage to ice – could that cause insurance problems, I ask the Minister of Natural Resources?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, saying that we ignored the issue of the ice boom is not factually correct. We as a government have been working very diligently to get the Muskrat Falls Project on track.

The people of this province know the mess the Muskrat Falls Project has been in. They know that it's two years behind schedule. They know that it's multi-billion dollars over cost, Mr. Speaker. We've been working very diligently.

Let me say this, Mr. Speaker, regarding the issue of the log boom. It is because of the problems with the cofferdam and the lateness in the year. And that has to do with the fact that this project has been over schedule (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Natural Resources: What was Nalcor's response to the independent engineer's report posted quietly online Sunday?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, we have said repeatedly that this government was going to be open and transparent. When the report came in, it was delivered to the Oversight Committee. Nalcor was asked for a response. The response and the report were posted online.

We have posted much and many more documents online. We have made them available to the public. That's why they are available on an ongoing basis. We'll continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

It is important to be open and transparent. That's why Nalcor has been out there on the subject of the cofferdam since this whole issue occurred.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Why would you not be proactive and release that information in a public statement rather than just post it online?

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

MS. COADY: I can say to the hon. Member how come he didn't post anything online when (inaudible) under Muskrat Falls?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, the report, when it was ready, was posted online. This is an ongoing process. We're going to post things online on an ongoing, regular basis. We think it's very

important to make information available to the public. We made it available to the public and that is now why it's so important that they are referring to it. And that is, I think, an ongoing thing that this government will continue to do.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, the minister needs to go back and check online, indeed, if all the reports that we did during Muskrat Falls were put online. She should go back and read a few and maybe it would update her on where we are with it.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What action has been taken to address the concerns with –

MR. KING: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista need not stand for the remainder of the day.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, I ask the minister: What action have you taken to address the concerns with scheduled changes with the high voltage DC lines?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't address his earlier comments; I won't dignify the response.

Mr. Speaker, with the transmission lines, they are being worked on. A lot of work has been done over the past summer. We are catching up a little bit on schedule. I know that Nalcor has been working diligently. As you know, as the people of the province know, under the CEO, Mr. Marshall, there was a separation of the transmission lines from the powerhouse and from the generation. It is under a new leadership, and that leadership has been working very, very diligently to try and catch up on the schedule.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister: When will a detailed plan be ready on the high voltage DC lines and the challenges?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not quite sure what analysis he would like to have done, but whatever he would like to have done, I'm certain I can ask Nalcor to provide. They are working to ensure that schedule for the transmission is brought up to date, Mr. Speaker. We had several months' slippage under the former administration. They are working diligently to do their best to bring that as quickly as possible online.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, major thoroughfares such as the Outer Ring Road, Peacekeepers Way, Manuel's Access, Foxtrap Access and Route 60, to name a few, will not have 24-hour snow clearing this year.

I ask the minister: What is the plan to keep these roads safe?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess my answer today is not much different than it was last week. We're basically deploying our resources – and of course, safety is always

foremost in what we're doing. I mentioned last week that we do have a number of targets and measures in place that will deploy our resources.

The only difference this year, Mr. Speaker, versus last year is that we don't have a dedicated crew that's sitting in a depot during those hours. However, there are a number of measures that we are using to trigger our deployment of resources and one of these of course, as I said last week, we do have staff that is monitoring the road conditions. We do have forecasting that's out there. We have the RCMP that is on the roads who give us advice as well, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister provide this House an update on the million-dollar tunnel study?

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

MR. HAWKINS: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I correct that; it is \$750,000 for us budgeted – a quarter of a million dollars means a lot to this government. I'm not sure how much it means to the other side –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAWKINS: That is a study that was part of the budget, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you today what we're actually doing so far: We have a committee in place; some interdepartmental discussions we're having on that. It is quite likely that the discussions will go into the next fiscal year, but it is an ongoing discussion we're having.

When we do have something further to report, I can certainly give an update on that. But, Mr. Speaker, it is certainly something we identified last year within our budget. We will continue to look at that and we will be certainly making decisions on this side on evidence based.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South, for a very quick question.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So at a time when the Liberals cut 24-hour snow clearing at a savings of \$1.9 million, they committed to spend upwards to a million dollars on a tunnel study.

Will the minister agree to halt the study and invest in snow clearing to ensure major roads are safe and cleared this winter?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works, for a quick response.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, our roads this year – we have committed to safe roads this year as well. As you know, I mentioned last week as well that the entire province did not have 24-7. As a matter of fact, there were 13 areas that had it. Only two of those 13 areas had 7-24; the other 11 had 5-24. So it's not like the entire province was covered.

We are making sure that we deploy our resources to make sure that our highways are safe, and we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

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.

In December 2007, the provincial government announced it had finalized a nine-year agreement with Ocean Choice International aimed at ensuing, among other things, the former FPI groundfish quotas totalling millions of pounds of fish would be landed in the province for processing.

I ask the Premier to report to the House on the extent to which OCI complied with its commitments and to tell the House what will

happen to these quotas now that the agreement is about to expire.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agrifoods.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question. The hon. Member is correct; the agreement with OCI and Quota Holdco does expire in December of this year. As recently as last Monday I was in Ottawa. I met with the federal minister of fisheries. It's an issue that we have ongoing discussions going with the Government of Canada and OCI at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When OCI closed the doors on its Marystown fish plant, it entered into a commitment with the provincial government to provide a minimum of 110 full-time processing positions for a minimum of five years in the company's Fortune facility.

I ask the minister: Has OCI in fact provided 110 full-time jobs in the Fortune plant on an ongoing basis since that agreement was signed?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agrifoods.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, again I thank the hon. Member for her questions and a lot of the questions she could probably ask the party's leader.

Mr. Speaker, OCI entered into an agreement that was administered by the previous administration. That agreement has never lived up to its full potential. One of the reasons that agreement has never ever lived up to its full potential is because the previous administration never put any teeth in the agreement. So there was never any way that government could

enforce the agreement that was brought in to the OCI Fortune situation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister if OCI has advised him of its employment plan for the Fortune plant for 2017 and beyond. If so, how many processing jobs will it entail and for what duration?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agrifoods.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, since becoming minister about a year ago, I've had the opportunity on many occasions to meet with OCI. Ironically, this coming Friday I'll be joining the Member for that district in Fortune to have a discussion with the plant workers.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister then: Does government deem OCI to have met all its obligations under both the 2007 agreement and the 2012 agreement concerning the Fortune operation? What are they going to do about it if they didn't?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agrifoods.

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, again, what I can assure the hon. Member that it wasn't this government that entered into that agreement. It was the Members opposite that entered into that agreement. That agreement had no teeth.

One of the things that we're talking about with the company now, we're looking at a situation

where that agreement has one year left. We're going to explore every opportunity to ensure maximum employment for the people of Fortune.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, Grand Falls has a backlog of family law and is losing a full-time Provincial Court judge. Government is not replacing him. Women depend on the courts for protection and swift justice.

Last week, the Premier and Minister of the Status of Women held an event in the great hall of this very building proudly proclaiming their commitment to end violence against women, while acknowledging Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest rate of domestic violence in the country.

Mr. Speaker, on this December 6, I ask the Premier: Can he explain to the women of this province how he is holding to his commitment when he knows reducing the number of judges will further delay these cases?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: I'd like to thank the Member opposite for what is definitely an important question on a significant day.

What I can advise this House is that the decision to reduce the judges in Grand Falls-Windsor was actually a decision from the 2013 budget made by the Member's opposite. They cut the funding at that time. Unfortunately, the judge at that time did not retire until now.

The situation we are facing, though, is that Grand Falls-Windsor has a caseload that last year was 1,747 cases made up equally of family and criminal. We have other courts in the province, such as Stephenville, which have higher caseloads and only one judge. We have courts in Harbour Grace that have similar caseloads and only one judge.

Again, we're dealing with a decision that was made previously, but what I can assure the people of Grand Falls-Windsor is we will be replacing the retiring judge in the near future – that's an upcoming retirement. I can also assure the Member opposite that we are taking the steps necessary to ensure people have timely access to family justice.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The City Of St. John's Act And The City Of St. John's Municipal Taxation Act. (Bill 62)

Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Lands Act. (Bill 63)

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

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

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

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Provide The Public With Transparency Regarding Public Sector Compensation. (Bill 61)

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Notices of motion?

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to Standing Order 11, I give notice that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, December 12; further, pursuant to Standing Order 11, I give notice that this House not adjourn at 10 p.m. on Monday, December 12.

Further, pursuant to Standing Order 11, I give notice that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, December 13; and finally, pursuant to Standing Order 11, I give notice that this House not adjourn at 10 p.m. on December 13.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

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 Newfoundland and Labrador has the greatest percentage of the workforce earning the provincial minimum wage in Canada with women, youth and those from rural areas making up a disproportionate number of these workers;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to legislate an immediate increase in the minimum wage to restore the loss of purchasing power since 2010 and an annual adjustment to the minimum wage beginning in 2016 to reflect the consumer price index.

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

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand today and once again speak to this serious issue, a petition for which I once again have in my hand. The minister, a couple of weeks ago, announced minimum wage would go up in 2017; 25 cents on April 1 and another 25 cents in the fall, November, I think. Nowhere going near meeting what is being asked for in this petition which, number one, wants the loss of purchasing power since 2010 made up for.

I note, Mr. Speaker, we have a piece of legislation coming in front of us today which has to do with the Joint Office of Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness, which is, right now, the Maritime provinces together, but very shortly will include Newfoundland and Labrador. One of the points of this joint office is to bring commonality to the four Atlantic provinces with regard to regulations and service effectiveness. One of the things they're dealing with is minimum wage. They have aligned themselves with regard to when minimum wage announcements will be made.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, that helps.

There are aligning themselves as provinces to announce minimum wage increases at the same time. Right now, it will be April 1 every year. Next year in 2017, April 1, PEI will align itself with Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. One thing they're not doing is aligning themselves with regard to the rate of minimum wage, unfortunately, because this is what they should be looking at.

I point out to the minister, that New Brunswick in April 2017 will be going up to \$11. So I challenge his announcement in this House that we will no longer be the lowest minimum wage in Canada next year when he adds his little 25 cents in April and another 25 cents in the fall. We're going to continue to be the lowest. I would like to point out too, that New Brunswick recognizes the need for dealing with inflation

and they will be adding an increased rate of inflation every year after 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KENT: 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 firefighters both career and volunteer are exposed to many hazards in their line of duty; and

WHEREAS firefighters both career and volunteer risk their lives and wellbeing to serve our communities;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to enact workers' compensation legislation containing a presumptive cancer and cardiac clause for firefighters both career and volunteer.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time Members on this side of the House have presented a petition on this issue. It's an issue that we feel is critically important and we expect that government will be acting on presumptive cancer legislation, but our concern is it's only going to include career firefighters and it's going to ignore the legitimate needs and concerns of our over 5,000 volunteer firefighters in this province.

During the recent election campaign – well, it's a year ago now; it's not that recent I guess – we made a commitment as a party that we would enact workers' compensation legislation that would contain a presumptive cancer and cardiac clause for all firefighters in Newfoundland and Labrador, both career and volunteer.

We went a step further than that. We also recognized the impact of PTSD on all of our first responders and the need for legislation that would ensure that those affected by PTSD who are first responders would get the care and the support they need and deserve.

This is an issue that I hope we can all agree on and it's one that I hope government will act on in the interest of all of our first responders. I am pleased to present this petition today on behalf of all firefighters in our province, not just our career firefighters but our volunteer ones as well.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

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

WHEREAS the recreational ground fishery is part of our culture, history and heritage; and

WHEREAS the federal government is proposing a tag system for the recreational ground fishery in 2017; and

WHEREAS participants will have to purchase a license and purchase tags in order to participate in the recreational fishery;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the federal government to implement no cost fees for those participating in the recreational ground fishery in 2017.

Mr. Speaker, I'm after presenting this – I got up yesterday and I spoke for 10 minutes on the fishery, and at the last of it I went and talked about our recreational fishery. I've had calls from numerous people all over this province

very interested in this, and really feel that as Canadians we have a right, just like every other Canadian, to go out and catch a cod. We have a right to be able to do something that was our heritage. But in saying that, we still respect the cod, we respect the grounds, we respect the fishery and we respect the ocean. We just want to be treated equally. We wanted to be treated like the rest of Canada.

I know the minister, when I ask him a question, stated that we should be treated just like everybody else in Atlantic Canada. So I hope that he's pushing the federal counterparts to make sure this doesn't come in and it doesn't have a cost to it that we go out and have the cost to go catch the cod. We should be treated like everybody else.

Nobody knows what kind of system is going to come in place. Nobody understands how much it's going to cost. Nobody's being told how many tags they're going to get. People want to know this stuff, and it's very important. If you go around this province, you'll go to every little cove and every little nook and cranny in this province and people love the right to be able to go out and catch codfish. I hope this government will get to their counterparts with the federal government and let them understand how important the recreational fishery is to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS many students within our province depend on school busing for transportation to and from school each day; and

WHEREAS there have been a number of buses removed from service over the past few weeks for safety reasons, calling into question the current inspection and enforcement protocols for school buses in this province; and

WHEREAS there have been concerns raised by members of the busing industry regarding government's tendering practices as it relates to the provision of school bus services in this province; and

WHEREAS there are many parents throughout our province who have raised both scheduling as well as safety concerns regarding the English School District's 1.6-kilometre policy, the courtesy-seating policy, the new double-bus-run schedule, as well as overcrowding on school buses;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to strike an all-party committee on school busing to consult with stakeholders and make recommendations to government for the improvement to the school busing system in our province.

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

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to present this petition in the House of Assembly again today. Actually, I'm not glad – I wish I didn't have to present it actually, but we continue to hear of concerns by families in this province as it relates to school busing.

As I've said when I've spoken on this in the past, I'm certainly encouraged by some of the commentary I've heard from the Minister of Service NL as it relates to some new legislation, I think he's hinted at, that will be coming forward hopefully to address school bus inspections. That's obviously a positive thing and something I'm sure that parents and families will welcome. I certainly do, I'm sure other Members would as well.

There's more to it than simply issues around the inspection process. That definitely is a part of it, but there's also the ongoing concern around the 1.6-kilometre rule. That's something, as I said, that's been ongoing for years in my district in the St. John's metro area. Not so much in some of the rural areas because, while it did apply, apparently it wasn't being enforced. This year they've decided to crack down on the 1.6-kilometre rule throughout the province. Now, of

course, many families who did receive school busing for their children in the past found out this year that they no longer will if they're within 1.6 kilometres.

Obviously when you talk about small children, K to six children in particular, having to walk to school, this time of year it's certainly dark early in the morning. We're into the wintertime, you could be into snowfall where there's nowhere to walk. A lot of places don't have sidewalks. Even communities that do have sidewalks, they are blocked up with snow in a lot of cases, don't have proper crosswalks, lighted crosswalks. All those things are a real safety hazard. This new double-bus run is causing all kinds of havoc on parents, especially where they have two children who have to go to school now at different times, different buses. It creates a real problem.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this again. I will continue bringing this matter before the House of Assembly on behalf of all the families out there who are concerned about their children's safety.

Thank you.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the education of children is one of the most important and vital investments that can be made in the success of our children; and

WHEREAS the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador should be choosing educational options that will provide all students of our province with a higher standard of education and enhance the learning experience for our youth; and

WHEREAS the government's decision to make cuts to teachers and to our education system will have a negative effect on the students;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reverse the decision effective immediately.

Mr. Speaker, I presented this same petition yesterday. As I said at the beginning, I would have hoped that this wouldn't be still an issue and I would have hoped that as we got through the first third of our school system in our primary-secondary systems that some of these things would have went away or there would have been some adjustments; but after discussions yesterday and outlining my concerns that I had heard, yesterday, no less than three phone calls and seven emails I had gotten from people who had watched – obviously they're engaged here.

One was actually an administrator, a school council chair, a number of parents and somebody who has a special needs student. Then I realized my biggest fear is being realized here. Not only did we all note that this was going to be detrimental, but it's having a major impact and we're only a third of the school year done yet.

I've had parents talk to me about their serious issues, particularly around the overcrowding, kids having to eat their lunch in their classrooms, teachers trying to supervise six and eight classrooms at a time because the ability now with all-day kindergarten influx, with taking teachers out of the system, there are less teachers in the system because the ratio has increased. Taking away the capital investments around new schools, renovations, adjustments to cafeterias, using resource rooms that were supposed to be for quiet areas, for study areas, for engagement areas are now being used for other activities because the necessary rooms have never been invested in and the necessary renovations haven't been made, issues around busing – I didn't realize, maybe I was fortunate enough in my own district –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: – that busing wasn't particularly a bigger issue and maybe it's just the nature of the routes and that, but the impact I'm hearing

from all over the province about the changes to busing, particularly in some of the sub-urban areas here where kids have to wait that much longer or they have to walk a distance to get to a bus stop or the time frames because it's a dual-line bus pickup has had a detrimental effect. It's becoming more and more evident that this will have a major impact on our education system.

I didn't realize – two of people talked to me last night; one was an issue around the supervision in the school system about teachers being overworked. This wasn't a teacher, an educator, this was a parent, but also talked about her daughter, the core French program and the impact it's having and how she's still devastated over that.

Mr. Speaker, I'll have an opportunity to talk about the other issues that are relevant to the education system over the next of weeks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call Order 2, third reading of Bill 53.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that Bill 53, An Act To Amend The Labour Standards Act No. 2 be now read a third time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 53 be now read a third time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Labour Standards Act No. 2. (Bill 53)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Labour Standards Act No. 2," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 53)

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, for leave to introduce a bill, An Act To Amend The Municipal Elections Act, Bill 57, and I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded by the hon. Minister of Natural Resources that she have leave to introduce Bill 57 and that the said bill be now a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Municipal Elections Act," carried. (Bill 57)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Municipal Elections Act. (Bill 57)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 57 has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MS. COADY: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 57 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, for leave to introduce a bill, An Act To Amend The City Of Corner Brook Act, The City Of Mount Pearl Act And The City Of St. John's Act, Bill 58, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded by the hon. Minister of Natural Resources that she have leave to introduce Bill 58 and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The City Of Corner Brook Act, The City Of Mount Pearl Act And The City Of St. John's Act," carried. (Bill 58)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The City Of Corner Brook Act, The City Of Mount Pearl Act And The City Of St. John's Act. (Bill 58)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 58 has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MS. COADY: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 58 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, for leave to introduce a bill, An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety And Compensation Act, Bill 59, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded by the hon. Minister of Natural Resources that she have leave to introduce Bill 59 and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour to introduce a bill, “An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety And Compensation Act,” carried. (Bill 59)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Workplace Health, Safety And Compensation Act. (Bill 59)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 59 has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MS. COADY: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 59 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Order 5, second reading of Bill 56.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Terra Nova, that we move into second reading of Bill 56, An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that Bill 56 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation.” (Bill 56)

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great opportunity as minister responsible for The Rooms Corporation in my capacity as Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, to present the bill here today. The Rooms is truly an innovative, culturally relevant institution that embodies and showcases Newfoundland and Labrador to itself and the world, and brings the wider world to its doorstep.

The mandate of The Rooms, as outlined in the *Rooms Act*, is to: collect, preserve, present and make available for research the historic artifacts, natural history specimens and archival records that represent and illustrate the natural heritage of the province; to conduct research with respect to the history, natural history, culture and heritage of the province; collect and present provincial, national and international contemporary and historic art; advance and promote the works of contemporary visual artists of the province; support the development of cultural industries in the province; strengthen the culture of the province; and to provide and enhance client services and partnerships to promote the cultural collections of the province and to show other national and international collections.

As a public institution accountable to the provincial government and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, The Rooms must provide great value to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The care, exhibition and access to priceless artifacts, artworks and documents belonging to the people of the province;

outreach beyond St. John's; and, the focus on educational programming to deepen the pride and identity of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, together form the foundation of The Rooms' Mission Statement – which I'd like to read in the House.

“By March 31, 2017, The Rooms will have further engaged the public through thought-provoking exhibits interests, aspirations and concerns of the people of our province.”

The *Rooms Act*, when it was first enacted in 2005, brought together the provincial archives, the provincial art gallery and the provincial museum as one single entity under The Rooms Corporation – all of which are responsible for developing and managing collections and programming.

The archives preserves records of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador that having enduring legal, fiscal, evidential or research value. The archives also collects records from private sources which having enduring value to the history of the province. Archivists and technicians constantly engage with private donors and government departments to identify and acquire new collections.

The *Rooms Act* makes these collections accessible to the public. Some collections are online; some form exhibitions at The Rooms. In the reference room, staff offer direction and assistance, showing researchers how to properly handle archival material and helping guide them into finding answers to their questions.

The art gallery manages a collection of over 7,000 works, ranging from historical to contemporary, from international art to local crafts and folk art. While The Rooms concentrates most on Newfoundland and Labrador artists, the collection includes many other Canadian works. New work is added regularly, and the Art Gallery curates many major exhibitions annually.

The Rooms tells the story of Newfoundland and Labrador, its diverse people and its natural environment. Over a million natural history specimens and over a million artifacts bring these stories to life, connecting us with the past

and the environment that has shaped our experiences and been changed by our presence.

Three floors of exhibit space give the museum the capacity to interpret our past in many ways. There are permanent and temporary exhibitions from The Rooms collection, as well as travelling exhibitions that come from all around the world. Those who want to delve deeper can arrange in advance to access The Rooms research collections. Visitors are invited to broaden their experience of the museum by taking part in a variety of extensive and exciting programming. From special events, to interactive media, to on-site learning experiences, The Rooms offers a diversity of ways to better understand our environment and ourselves.

The Rooms also manages regional museums located in Grand Falls-Windsor, Grand Bank, Northwest River in Labrador. However, The Rooms is more than the sum of these parts. Exciting opportunities, Madam Speaker, for collaboration to produce richer visitor experiences as The Rooms increasingly undertakes interdisciplinary exhibitions and educational programming. This is why primarily we're presenting this bill before the House. But before I get into some of this, I want to talk about some of the most recent success which talks about the great synergies at The Rooms.

The Rooms plays a great role in engaging visitors, both local residents and tourists, through an enticing array of programs and events that reflect Newfoundland and Labrador's unique culture and history. I'm pleased, Madam Speaker, this engagement was highlighted on July 1, 2016 when The Rooms held the largest commemoration in Canada to mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War.

The First World War had a profound impact on Newfoundland and Labrador. It involved thousands of our people in world-changing events overseas and dramatically altered life at home. Our great war happened in the trenches and on the ocean, in the legislature and in the shops by the fireside and bedsides. The exhibition shared the thoughts, hopes, fears and sacrifices of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who experienced those tumultuous years through their treasured mementos, their writings and their memories.

During the opening month of the commemorative event, The Rooms welcomed 22,000 visitors, up 11,000 from July, 2015. This August also saw an increase with 14,500 visitors, compared to 9,500 visitors that same time last year.

The Rooms raised \$12 million in private sector donations and a one-million-dollar contribution from the federal government to build the Royal Newfoundland Regiment Gallery – that’s the largest permanent World War I exhibit in the country – the Fortis Courtyard and Amphitheatre, as well as to produce the July 1st event. That is quite an achievement that The Rooms Foundation was able to undertake.

In addition there was a corporate gift of \$3.25 million from Fortis and an individual gift of \$3.25 million from philanthropist Elinor Gill Ratchliffe – the two largest gifts ever given to a cultural institution in Atlantic Canada.

Furthermore, the provincial grant will represent 79 per cent of The Rooms total operating budget in 2017-2018, down from over 95 per cent reliance on provincial government grant 10 years ago first when The Rooms was established. The Rooms continues to increase its earned revenues and decrease its reliance on government funding as it pursues various forms of revenue generation and collaboration with its partners.

While The Rooms has evolved into a cultural gem of Newfoundland and Labrador over the course of the past decade of operations certain weaknesses exist within the 2005 act. That has become quite apparent and this is why the 2005 act, when it was put together then, it largely retained the same organizational structure that existed joining the Archives, Art Gallery and Museum into one corporation. As a result, three independent divisions were established within The Rooms.

In essence, these three independent divisions create silos within the organization that prevent The Rooms from fully realizing the natural synergies that exist across the Archives, Museum and Art Gallery. To present a more unified, cohesive collection that tells the story of our unique province, the CEO and the board of directors have requested amendments to the act.

The proposed amendments to the *Rooms Act* are designed to help create integration within the organization and allow The Rooms to better deliver on its very, very diverse mandate, as I outlined earlier.

Specifically, we have streamlined the act considerably by proposing to remove the requirement for separate divisions and directors for the Archives, Museum and Art Gallery, as these things are not found in other acts; it’s very prescriptive in nature, Madam Speaker.

This proposed change would allow for the grouping of like functions both within the act and in practice. By proposing the restructuring and to restructure the act, we were able to retain all of the legislative obligations associated with the operation of the Archives, the Museum and Art Gallery, but significantly deduce the degree of duplication and redundancy present in the original act. Responsibilities previously attributed to a specific division would now more appropriately rest in the care of the corporation governed by a board of directors.

In taking the opportunity to amend the *Rooms Act*, we are also able to expand on an important element previously missing from the act, which is the critical role The Rooms plays in engaging visitors, both local residents and tourists, through an enticing array of programs and events that reflect Newfoundland and Labrador’s unique culture and history.

We are proposing to incorporate enhanced accountability mechanisms consistent with other Crown corporations, including a requirement for the board to provide financial statements, reports and other information to the minister, when requested. So in an era of open government, accountability and transparency, this is a real measure to be added to strengthen the act, Madam Speaker, when we talk about the request of being able to provide financial statements, reports and other information, that’s certainly an important addition.

We are also proposing to undertake further housekeeping amendments such as clarifying the appointment process for the provincial archivist to ensure that it meets all obligations under the act and other related acts.

The Rooms is the official repository for significant archeological objects belonging to the province and clarifying inconsistencies with respect to the corporation's ability to lend, lease and borrow items to enhance the collection available to the public.

Throughout the debate, I look forward to further discussion about the important role The Rooms plays in the community. The amendments I've presented today will help ensure that the board of directors and the CEO at The Rooms have the ability to effectively govern, manage and direct the affairs of the corporation in order to guarantee long-term sustainability at The Rooms and the change will assist in the continued preservation and celebration of our unique culture and history.

The last time an amendment was made to The *Rooms Act* was in 2008 by the previous administration. Today's proposed amendments, as requested by the board, are to provide organizational direction, enhance the legislation and to bring The Rooms on par with other corporations. Make no mistake; The Rooms will continue to be Newfoundland and Labrador's premiere gathering place to celebrate our history, heritage and our culture.

I want to say, Madam Speaker, the proposed changes here in the act are really to ensure that the board and the CEO would have more flexibility by removing very prescriptive measures in an act. It does not mean that specific changes would happen to The Rooms, but it does allow the board of directors to have that flexibility.

I want to actually give recognition and praise to the board of the directors at The Rooms and the CEO for all the work they've done. Especially over the last year with being able to raise over \$13 million through private and the federal government, as well as the major initiatives that have been undertaken. It's quite significant when you see.

I'd like to thank Ms. Dawn Baker, Ms. Lisa Browne, Ms. Zita Cobb, Mr. Tom Foran who chairs the board, Mr. Stan Hill, Ms. Mary McCarthy, Mr. Jeff Pardy, Mr. Ian Patey, and Ms. Kathi Stacey, and the Deputy Minister of BTRCD who are all involved in bringing

credible experience and knowledge to their role as members of the board and ensuring that there is accountability, integrity and that The Rooms is delivering upon its mandate.

The Rooms has a significant staff employing 44 people who work very diligently; six permanent seasonal staff that operate our regional museums. It's great to see that, and the undertaking that has happened with the number of visitors and all of the programming that has taken place as well.

So I look forward to a full debate here on this matter, and I look forward to what my colleagues across the way have to say on this particular bill.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased to have an opportunity to rise and speak in response to the minister's opening comments on Bill 56 which is to amend the *Rooms Act* which was brought in, in 2005. As the minister notes, there were amendments made in 2008. So it's just over a decade old.

I think The Rooms has served our province well over the last decade. On this side of the House, obviously, given our history with The Rooms since its opening, we are very supportive of the work that's going on there and of the people that the minister references, both the volunteer board members and the professionals that work at the facility every day.

We do have some questions and concerns about this legislation. I'll speak to that in some detail this afternoon. I'll try and highlight some of the questions and concerns in second reading so that the minister is able to speak to that, either in his response or during the Committee stage of the bill.

I think in this day and age identifying opportunities to do things more efficiently makes good sense. Enabling more flexibility for

the board and the staff at The Rooms makes good sense as well, but we do have some specific concerns that I'll outline as we go through this this afternoon.

I was pleased to hear the minister talk about the investments that have been made at The Rooms. In his opening remarks – for most of his remarks today he talked more about the success of The Rooms over the last decade as opposed to the changes that are being proposed here. I was pleased to hear him acknowledge that work. He also acknowledged the continued improvement in our tourism numbers as a result of millions of dollars of investments over the last number of years. So I'm pleased to hear him acknowledge that work as well. We thank him for that.

What is this bill all about? It appears that what will happen here is we'll see a formal merging of three divisions right now within The Rooms that are fairly autonomous: the Provincial Archives, the Provincial Art Gallery and the Provincial Museum. There will also be a change to how the provincial archivist is appointed.

There's some enhancement to the objects of The Rooms Corporation which, on the surface, certainly appears to be a good thing. There's an amendment to the act that will ensure that the board, when asked, will provide financial statements and reports and other information to the minister, which seems to make good sense. There should be that level of accountability.

So again on the surface, no real concern with that as well. I'm hopeful that the minister will be able to address some of the questions and concerns we do have as we work our way through this.

As I said, the three divisions that we have currently are individually directed and operate autonomously. There was likely very good reason for that initially when these three historic independent entities were brought together under one roof at The Rooms; but there's a concern that because of that historic relationship and structure, there isn't enough collaboration happening between those entities with regard to events and exhibits and overall operations. So I think addressing that is worth exploring.

As I said, I think improving the accountability in terms of reporting, especially when it comes to finances, makes sense as well. I think adding the eighth object of the corporation, to develop and conduct programs and events that represent and illustrate the significant history, culture and heritage of the province. Adding that as an object of the corporation to reflect the importance of engagement appears to be a good thing as well.

I guess we're more concerned about what's not being said this afternoon in second reading. We'll pose some questions and raise some concerns that hopefully the minister can address. I'm just making sure I've raised the pertinent points related to the bill itself. I think we've provided a good overview of what this bill contains.

Now let me speak to some of the things that I guess come to mind as we reviewed it. Rather than save all these questions for Committee, I'll outline them now. The minister will have a chance to respond and we can work through it in greater detail at the Committee stage as well. I appreciate that he's listening intently, and I don't say that sarcastically. He's making eye contact as we speak, which makes me a little nervous and uncomfortable but that's okay. That's how democracy works. So it's all good.

One question I have for the minister is – I appreciate him acknowledging the work of the board and thanking the board members. I'd like him to answer whether the board is supportive of these amendments? Based on the minister's comments in second reading here, I suspect the answer is yes, but I'd like to hear him confirm that for the House and for the public.

He spoke about new flexibility for the board and the CEO. I suspect that simply relates to the fact that you no longer will have three entities that are not required to collaborate, but if there's more flexibility that is being given here beyond that, then I'd welcome some further commentary on that.

He spoke about eliminating duplication and redundancy, which again on the surface is something we should all support. So I'd just like him to elaborate a little further on that. What duplication and redundancy specifically is being

eliminated here? I realize the three entities will now be able to be directed to work more collaboratively, which again sounds good, but what duplication and redundancy specifically is being eliminated?

What impact will that have on personnel? We talked about the 44 people who work at The Rooms currently. If there's going to be some restructuring and some elimination of duplication and redundancy and more flexibility for the CEO, it just suggests there will probably be some budget implications and personnel implications. I get there is some sensitivity, obviously, associated with personnel matters, but I'd like to hear the minister talk a little bit about what the expected impact will be of these changes and what kind of timeline has been put in place for that.

I wonder how much influence the minister will have at The Rooms with respect to the reorganization that will now occur. I think we'd all agree, no matter where we sit or stand in this House, that preserving the quality of the work that's done at The Rooms and the need to preserve our culture and history is really important. So I wonder if the minister can give some assurances that the quality of that work won't be compromised in any way by these changes that are taking place.

I'd like him to tell us specifically how many job losses should be anticipated as a result of these changes. What level of control will the board be given in relation to these changes? The way I read it –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. KENT: Sorry, there's some heckling going on, but I don't think it's actually aimed at me this time, which is nice.

The way it reads to me, the board will have the same level of autonomy and control for the most part that it has now, except for some reporting requirements which, again, reading the legislation appear reasonable. I just wonder if the minister could talk a little bit more about in terms of moving forward with implementing changes, in terms of the operations and structure at The Rooms, how much autonomy and control will the board of directors have?

Is there any risk that any of these changes will comprise the operations of the Crown corporation in any way? I suspect I know the minister's answer. I suspect he will say no, but I just want to further explore that with him and ensure that the changes that are being proposed here will in no way compromise the operations of The Rooms Corporation.

Again, there are lots of talk of eliminating redundancy and finding efficiencies with respect to these changes, so I'd just like a better idea of what exactly that's going to mean, practically, on the ground, within the walls of The Rooms. I'd also ask if the minister could tell us if the board or the CEO have a draft organizational structure in mind. I suspect that they do. I'd be interested if the minister has any thoughts on that, if he's seen it, if there are any details he can share, just to give us a better idea of what the new organizational structure will look like moving forward.

What does this mean for the next budget? I recognize that government officials are now working through the budget process in preparation for the spring. All of this suggests that there could be further cuts to the budget at The Rooms, and I just wonder – I know government is not going to show its hand, so to speak, on what cuts may be contained in the budget in March or April, but I'd like to get some sense if the minister does anticipate a reduction in The Rooms budget as a result of these organizational changes that are being made.

Because none of us – again, I sincerely believe there's nobody in this House who would stand and support stripping funding from the arts and culture and history that The Rooms exists to help protect and foster and cultivate. So we want to try and get some assurances that our arts and our culture and our history will be well preserved and will not be negatively impacted, the preservation and promotion of those things will not be negatively impacted by these changes that are being made today.

The minister also in his comments talked about the incredible corporate and private personal donations that have been made to The Rooms Foundation. It's significant, and it's something that a lot of people have worked very hard to

achieve over the last number of years, so we want to celebrate and acknowledge that work as well. Given some of these changes to the three entities that are part of The Rooms, and given the new level of oversight that government will have in terms of The Rooms finances, I'm just wondering what assurance can be given to donors that their donations and their investments will continue to be preserved specifically for the purpose that they were intended for so that just because government will now have the ability to have more say, that will not in any way impact the targeted donations that are given for a specific purpose.

What I read in the legislation doesn't cause me grave concern in that regard because it makes sense for government to be able to get regular updates on the finances of The Rooms. But if it's any more than that, there's still a need for some autonomy for that board of directors and for the corporation to do the work that it's mandated to do.

I wouldn't want us to do anything here in this Legislature to the *Rooms Act* that could impact negatively on future donations. I don't suspect that's the case, but I'd certainly welcome the minister's comments on that.

Off the top having researched the bill, having heard about the briefing, having listened to the minister here in second reading, those are just some of the questions and concerns that we have. We look forward to comments from other Members and we look forward to his response in second reading. If need be, we can work through some of those issues a little further in the Committee stage of the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the debate.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Terra Nova.

MR. HOLLOWAY: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just want to say to the Member for Mount Pearl North that those are some great questions. Certainly, when we break into Committee, a lot of those questions, I am sure, you'll get those answers.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and speak in favour of the amendments this afternoon. Newfoundland and Labrador is widely recognized for its arts and culture and for its rich history, which stretches back to the earliest days of the European colonialization of North America and even before that to when the Vikings encountered the Beothuk on the Northwest part of the Island.

Madam Speaker, we're recognized for this rich culture here at home, in the rest of Canada and around the world. It's fundamental to our identity as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Our province has produced world-class artists, writers and performers, from the paintings of Christopher Pratt and the acting of Gordon Pinsent, to the novels of Lisa Moore and Wayne Johnston, just to name a very small number of them.

Our history, first as Canada's neighbour to the east and then as its newest province, the jurisdiction that completes Canada's full expansion across the North American continent, is a fundamental part of Canada's history. It's a fundamental part of our own story, too, and it is a narrative that continues to unfold to this very day.

Our historical role in the world wars, this year being the 100th anniversary of the battle of Beaumont-Hamel in France, or in the development of the aviation industry or technological innovations like the transatlantic cables. These are all events of global significance.

Because we have such a rich and diverse culture identity, we owe it to ourselves, to our visitors, to this province and to future generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to preserve it, strengthen it and ensure its long-term sustainability. And that is something we have done very well.

Madam Speaker, visitors and residents of Newfoundland and Labrador alike know The

Rooms building. Soaring into the skyline of downtown St. John's, The Rooms combines modern technology with a striking visual reference to our past.

Madam Speaker, the *Rooms Act* we're debating here today, which was legislated in 2005, establishes a single entity to administer the province's three great cultural institutions: the Archives, the provincial Art gallery and the provincial Museum.

Since that time, though, The Rooms Corporation has done a great job in nurturing these institutions. In the same way the *Rooms Act* streamlines the province's cultural entities and placed them under the management of a single entity, the amendments that we're debating here today streamline the operations of this single entity, merging three separate divisions into a unified single division. In effect, these amendments strengthen this legislation and make it more efficient, and that's exactly what our government has set out to do in all of our operations.

Madam Speaker, in *The Way Forward* document, our roadmap of sustainability for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador, we pledge to deliver programs and services more efficiently, more responsibility and in a more innovative way. And that's exactly what these amendments are going to do.

The Way Forward document is all about eliminating silos between government departments and agencies. These amendments which include the merging of three independent divisions within The Rooms Corporation eliminate silos within the corporation. Madam Speaker, these amendments are also a concrete expression of our strategy and our philosophy as outlined in *The Way Forward*, and I'm happy to speak in favour of them today.

I'm very pleased that these amendments also contain language that will emphasize the importance of engaging visitors. And I draw all Members' attention specifically to section 10(2)(c) and that speaks about our continued engagement of The Rooms Corporation with the public as they develop their strategic plan, as they develop the activities, all of The Rooms Corporation.

The development of the tourism industry, Madam Speaker, in this province has been an unqualified success. The industry now generates more than a billion dollars, as has been referenced in this House many times this sitting, a billion dollars annual in economic activity.

These tourists are coming to our shores not just for our spectacular scenery and our abundant wildlife; they're also coming here for our culture. They're coming because Newfoundland and Labrador has a highly distinctive culture and a very rich history.

The Rooms location itself is also of historical significance. Almost 250 years ago this was the location of Fort Townshend. After 1870, Madam Speaker, the site became the home to the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and later the St. John's Fire Department.

Before construction began on The Rooms, archeological work was done to ensure none of the history was lost. The Rooms was built in a way that preserves the history beneath it. Madam Speaker, The Rooms is truly a public space. It is fully accessible. Wheelchairs and infant strollers are available upon request. We want people to come to The Rooms.

Institutions like the provincial Art Gallery and the provincial Museum showcase this culture and this history to all our visitors. When I'm referring to visitors, I'm also talking about the people in this province who are looking to get some exposure to Newfoundland and Labrador's rich cultural identity.

These amendments we're debating here today include the phrase "develop and conduct programs and events that represent and illustrate the significant history, culture and heritage of the province" as the eighth objective of The Rooms Corporation. In doing so, it enshrines the importance of strengthening and preserving our culture for visitors and, more importantly, for the next generation.

Engaging visitors, Madam Speaker, is critical to strengthening the culture of this province and to ensure the long-term sustainability of The Rooms. This legislation is all about helping The Rooms become more sustainable.

Madam Speaker, The Rooms is a place for all of us. For those who live here in Newfoundland and Labrador and those travellers who want to experience it fully and visit for a cultural experience. The Rooms is a place we continue to preserve and celebrate our unique culture and our wonderful history.

This is why I'm pleased to support the amendments proposed in this hon. House today. I look forward to the discussion as we go into Committee.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the Member who serves the good people of St. John's Centre.

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

I'm very happy to stand and speak to Bill 56, An Act Representing The Rooms Corporation. I would like to thank the officials that we met with yesterday. It was only 24 hours ago that we were presented with this legislation and with the opportunity to be briefed. This is happening very, very quickly.

One would think that when we have heard – and I'd also like to thank all the people who work with such passion and commitment at The Rooms, all the people who work in the three distinct divisions who also work together to develop a treasure, a jewel in our crown in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. How incredibly proud are we of The Rooms and the culture, the opportunity and the experiences that it provides to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and that it provides for people who come from all over the world who will visit The Rooms.

I would like to thank the staff for their incredible work, for their years of study that gives them expertise, that gives them the ability to make The Rooms as wonderful as it is. It's not just about hanging pictures or showing artifacts or making sure that we have some items from different years of our province's history, it's much more than that.

Today, we've heard the words streamlining, more efficiency, eliminating silos and I'm concerned, Madam Speaker. I'm concerned with how quickly this has been presented to us. I believe, because of the expertise that is needed in the Archives, in the Museum, in the Art Gallery, that we have to tread carefully. Particularly in this time of economic downturn, when there is incredible pressure across government to cut, to find savings, to fine efficiencies, that we have to tread carefully.

We've already seen over the past few years, both with the previous administration and this current administration, decisions that were made so quickly without real thought of what the trickledown effects are, without real thought about what the rollout effects are on our services, on our agencies, on our Crown corporations. When we look at times what has happened in the Department of Justice when there were plans to close courts and then those decisions had to be reversed.

I believe we have to tread carefully with wisdom and with knowledge in terms of anywhere where it looks like it's simply a matter that we can do this because it's going to save us money or it's going to streamline us, because those words in and of themselves, although they sound like wonderful values that we want to be able to do, particularly in this time of economic downturn, there are dangers inherent in that.

I am concerned that when the first *Rooms Act* came out in 2005, An Act Representing The Rooms Corporation, and it was assented to in May 19, 2005, there was no public consultation. The outcry over this from the community, from the archival community, the museum community, the research community, the academic community, the arts community was loud, and there was a promise that wouldn't happen again. Here we are today with a bill before us that has had absolutely no public consultation. No public consultation whatsoever.

In the past 24 hours myself and our office have consulted as broadly as we could within the 24 hours, about people's response to the bill that's before us, and real significant concerns have been raised. That's what I would like to speak to this evening; that we have to be careful. We

have to tread carefully in terms of what this act is proposing.

The proposals that are before us need serious consideration. To revise the structure of The Rooms Corporation in order to make the structure more flexible by removing the requirement for separate divisions and directors for the Archives, the Museum and the Art Gallery and to eliminate the requirement for individually directed divisions is one of the proposals.

To revise the mechanism to appoint the provincial archivist is another recommendation proposal from this bill. The responsibility for the Art Gallery, the Museum and the Archives, currently three distinctive divisions, now is assigned to either the corporation or the CEO.

The language used to rationalize these revisions is to reduce redundancy with an implication, Madam Speaker. That it will be better to serve the needs to meet a new objective of ensuring visitor engagement. I know we all want to see more visitor engagement at The Rooms. We all want to see more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians visiting The Rooms. We want to see The Rooms crowded. Absolutely, we all want to see that. However, by eliminating the expertise we currently have with the directors of these three distinct divisions, will that in fact create greater numbers in visitations? We're not so sure.

Three directors with specialized expertise and the three functions of The Rooms is not redundancy. Our collections, our Archives, our Museum and our Art Gallery all take real expertise, people who have done academic studies, who have expertise in these areas, and that's what's at great peril with this bill. Losing the expertise that is so necessary to ensure the integrity of the work that must be done in each of these divisions.

In addition to offering quality programming to visitors to The Rooms, the core functions of the three institutions at The Rooms are: to be good stewards of the province's invaluable, historical and art collections – and these are so important. We all know that, and we all know that any of our exhibits, any of our programming, unless based in authentic, scholarly research that

verifies and manages the collections we have, that our exhibits are not the best they possibly can be, that they have to be based on authenticity, they have to be based on expertise that we can rely on.

To develop a good understanding of these collections, which has traditionally meant for provincial and national cultural institutions, there is a significant research component. It's not just about accepting items and cataloguing them. They all require significant research components. Without well cared for collections and an understanding of them, it is not possible to undertake good programming and interpretation. The expertise of our directors, the expertise of our staff at The Rooms in the three separate divisions are absolutely the foundation of any of the programming, of any of the exhibits that are undertaken at The Rooms.

Eliminating the three director positions will further erode the province's ability to be proper stewards of its collections and to undertake research. It's absolutely at the core of all work that is being undertaken. Without that foundation and that expertise, we're not able to properly and authentically do the work that needs to be done.

Madam Speaker, these functions and this expertise has already been comprised with the elimination of a number of curator positions at The Rooms Provincial Museum, which happened a few years ago, and is replaced by a single curator of history. We've already seen the expertise and the staff cut back drastically. There is no fat there; there is no fat to cut out.

Each of the three divisions of The Rooms requires specialized expertise and experience that the directors bring to it. These are not positions for generalists. These are positions – the same when we look in our health care system. We have different kinds of specialists with different kinds of academic training, with different kinds of expertise that they bring to their work. It's the same; it's not just about hanging pictures or putting tags on artifacts. It's much more than that and I believe we all know that. I believe everybody in this House knows that.

Too much will fall through the cracks if these functions are combined into a single role. We can understand the need for expertise in certain health care situations. We can understand the expertise in a number of different areas, whether it be in our natural resources, whether it be in our education system. There's also a need for expertise in The Rooms, in the three divisions of Archives, Museum and the Art Gallery. It's not just a matter of someone picking up a bit of knowledge and being able then to do the work that the directors are doing.

Basically, to have one director would mean we would have someone that was only a generalist. There is a risk that we will wake up down the road only to discover that the priceless provincial inheritance – and it's priceless, it can't be remade – that's housed at The Rooms will be in shambles as a result of this decision to further erode its capacity and its expertise. This is not about streamlining and saying we can just cut out a few people and we'll still be able to do what we need to do. We won't be able to do it. We won't be able to do it in the same way without the expertise that is so needed.

There is a risk that this legislation as proposed places too much authority in the hands of the CEO, and this is not a business. The Rooms is not a business. It's a cultural and arts institution. Now, in the briefing it was pointed out that BC, for instance, combined their three entities, but the experience of British Columbia has shown many problems combining their function. A decision to combine the provincial museum and archives had to be reversed in BC, it didn't work. It proved to be unworkable. It is my hope, Madam Speaker, that we not repeat those same mistakes here.

Also in our briefing, one of the officials that were present in our briefing brought up the Glenbow Museum. That was a private museum and that became also an art gallery, but its function was not a provincial museum, a provincial archive or a provincial art gallery. That is the difference. This is our only provincial entity that houses our Art Gallery, our Museum and our Archives. It's not housed anywhere else, although we do have some satellite provincial museums.

This is our valuable repository. It's also where research is done, where curatorial work is done with a skeleton crew. But without the expertise needed in order to do that, we cannot do that work properly.

As well, there was no consultation with the cultural community; the cultural community who's going to be impacted by these proposed changes, but also the cultural community who has expertise, who has knowledge, who have been supporters of these three entities, who have been supporters of The Rooms. When we asked in the briefing whether public consultation was done or whether consultation was done with the archival, the museum, the arts and the research communities – whether that consultation was done – we were informed that in fact it wasn't and that the consultation will be done after the fact.

It's a very odd thing now, Madam Speaker, to come to the House with this legislation just in case and that we're going to do consultation afterwards. That is not true consultation. This government has prided itself on being open and transparent, and talks again and again and again about consultation and listening and hearing the people. There has been absolutely no public consultation whatever done on this bill.

Madam Speaker, this is a major bill restructuring our Provincial Museum, our Provincial Art Gallery and our Provincial Archives. A major bill restructuring it with absolutely no consultation whatsoever, and probably not even any consultation with the staff who do have the expertise.

This is top down. It's not based in some of the most foundational expertise that we have in the province. I dare say not even those who do this work, who have the most expertise in the province; even those folks were not consulted.

So it's an odd thing now to actually ask the House to pass this legislation and then have consultation after. To pass this legislation just in case they're going to go in this direction. Again, I caution that we have to tread carefully.

The promised consultation which was promised for the original *Rooms Act* never occurred. This is happening yet a second time. I urge

government to not proceed with this legislation. I urge all Members of the House to not proceed with this legislation until a proper public consultation is undertaken.

This government proudly, publicly announces its commitment to transparency and accountability and it demands it as well; yet, that's not what it's doing with this bill. If, in fact, this bill is the right way to go, if these proposed changes are the right way to go, then public consultation should actually support that, but we don't know because a public consultation has not been done.

The concerns I have raised here today are concerns that have been raised by a number of experts in the field of museums, archives, the arts communities and the research and academic communities.

One of the rationales that were used for this is there are silos and the archives don't know what the collection is in the museum and the museum doesn't know what's in the collection of the archives and that affects public programming and exhibits, but that's a communication problem, Mr. Speaker. That can be solved in another way. I believe that can be solved through consultation. That can be solved through training. That can be solved through working together. Not by dismantling the three entities that were established that way for a purpose.

That's the way business is done across the country. There are no other provincial museums, art galleries and archives that are combined into one; none in Atlantic Canada, none across the country.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, I beg this government to tread carefully and to do public consultation diligently.

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that her speaking time has expired.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to rise here today and talk on Bill 56, An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation. I was briefed on this; I haven't had a very big opportunity to visit The Rooms, only two or three times I guess in my lifetime I've been there, but I was very enlighten to read: "The objects of the corporation are to (a) collect, preserve, present, exhibit and make available for research the historic artifacts, natural history, specimens, and archival records that represent and illustrate the significant history, culture and natural heritage of this province"

I thought that summed it up. The minister did an excellent job of going through and talking about the mandate and what was all available at The Rooms. I thank the Members opposite, the Member for Mount Pearl North, the Member for St. John's Centre, I know they have some concerns about this, and I'd like to thank the Member for Terra Nova.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say my first opening to The Rooms, I was watching *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* one night and Mark Critch referred to it as the box the Basilica came in. Now I'd like to say it's a great box that they put the Basilica in and they filled it with some great things ever since Mark made that comment.

If you look at their website they say, "This is our place. Newfoundland and Labrador: vibrant, unusual and distinct. Here where the land meets the sea different peoples have forged a rich, diverse culture that is unique in this world.

"Visitors are drawn to this place. They come seeking something original and authentic." I think right there, with what the minister presented to us before, it tells the importance of The Rooms and everybody here sees the importance of The Rooms.

Now, I'm not a one to mix words, so I will talk about the Rooms Act, 2006. The *Rooms Act* was enacted in 2005 to merge the Provincial Archives, the provincial Art Gallery and the provincial Museum into a single entity called The Rooms Corporation.

The current act largely retains the same organizational structure that existed prior to the

merger by establishing the three independent divisions of The Rooms: the Archives, the Gallery and the Museum.

The proposed amendments merge three divisions to better reflect The Rooms Corporation. And as the minister said earlier this was in consultation with the CEO and the board of directors.

The proposed amendments will revise the structure of The Rooms Corporation in order to make the structure more flexible. By removing the requirements for separate divisions and directors of Archives, Museum and the Art Gallery it will enhance the objectives of the corporation and revise the mechanism to appoint provincial archivists and introduce a requirement for the board to provide financial statements and reports and other information to the minister, when requested.

So the proposed amendments will eliminate the requirement for an individual's ability to direct divisions established for the Archives, Museum and Art Gallery under Part II, III and IV of the current act. This allows for the grouping of like functions so as to significantly reduce redundancy of the current act and ensures the continuance of all legislative obligations associated with the Archives, Museum and the Art Gallery. The responsibility is now assigned to either the corporation, the CEO, or the provincial archivist as approved appropriate by the Crown's corporation in that nature.

So the objectives of the corporation are to develop and conduct programs and events that represent and illustrate the significant history, culture and heritage of the province. Again, The Rooms, as it says here: "This is our place."

The proposed amendment eliminates the legislative requirements for a specific director function dedicated exclusively to the Archives but retain an obligation for provincial archivists to be appointed under the act. The proposed amendment introduces the requirements of the board to provide financial statements, as I said before, reports and other information to the minister.

It was basically housekeeping. An analogy was put to us about where this was going. If you had a department store where you sold men's

clothing, women's clothing and men's and women's shoes, with three different managers over there, this would amalgamate the department store for one manager over it all, and that's how it looked here.

So the proposed amendments will ensure the board of directors and the CEO of The Rooms have the ability to effectively manage the corporation to ensure the long-term sustainability of The Rooms and the continued preservation and celebration of our unique culture and history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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'm glad to have a chance to speak to Bill 56, The Rooms Corporation. I have to say that I was absolutely shocked when I read the bill. I couldn't believe what I was reading. And sitting here today I'm thinking if they wanted to top what they did with the announcement of closing of libraries, I think they probably topped it now with what they're suggesting for The Rooms.

They're sitting over there acting as if what they're doing is so smart. They're not even thinking about what they're doing, Mr. Speaker. That's what's really upsetting me. As my colleague for St. John's Centre has point out, there's been no consultation, no public consultation around this issue. I even question how much consultation went on inside of The Rooms itself.

The short-sightedness that's being shown by the government – I won't say it's unbelievable, because it just continues a pattern that is happening on that side of the House. It's over and over again they are doing things without thinking things through and without consultation. After their famous platform of being open and transparent, they're the exact opposite. When they hold what they call consultations, they're not consultations. They're not sitting down with equals and really

discussing and working through something. As my colleague for St. John's Centre pointed out, some of the things that have been presented and were presented in the briefing and were also presented by the minister aren't things that have to be solved by dissolving the three divisions at The Rooms.

The issue around people not knowing what's happening in another division doesn't say you get rid of the divisions, it says, you got to learn how to work together with the three divisions that exist in The Rooms. That's the challenge of what happened. That's the challenge of what happened when The Rooms was built and the Museum and the Archives and the Art Gallery were put in there together. The challenge was how can we make it work better now, how can we show that these are interconnected, because they're all connected to our culture and history and our present. They're all connected, so how do we help it all work together?

I think efforts have been made, if it's identified that more needs to be done to show how the working together can happen, then find the way to do that. Sit down, everybody together, and find a way to do that, if it's not happening. Have all the staff sit, have everybody sit, work it out. But not do what's being done.

What's being done is ignoring the importance of expertise, and that's what shocks me. It's quite similar. It's the second day in a row I find myself comparing Liberals to the Harper government. Well, that's the kind of thing Harper did: get rid of expertise. And we have a federal system that's really suffering because of that notion that you don't need expertise. You do.

Running a museum and understanding a museum is much more than picking up a few artifacts around and putting them on shelves. We are talking about the place in which the total history of our province is entrusted; entrusted through archives, entrusted through museums and entrusted through the Art Gallery, though the Art Gallery plays a slightly different role than the other two.

If we are going to continue to interest people coming to The Rooms, we do that by ongoing research that uncovers new things that get found;

number one, new information that comes to light. All of that results in new exhibits, in new ways in which people will want to come into The Rooms and learn about the history of this wonderful province.

That doesn't happen by getting rid of the divisions. What will happen is that we'll have a melting pot where nothing will be done well. The divisions with directors right now ensure that you have somebody at the top of the division who really knows what the work of that division is about. If we get rid of those directors, we're getting rid of that oversight that is needed. That oversight is going to be completely lost and it will result in things not happening well.

In British Columbia – and I know it has been mentioned before but I think it's important to re-mention it because they tried this in British Columbia with the provincial bodies. Not talking about any museum or any art gallery, but those that have been given the responsibility of being the place in which the history is maintained and kept. In BC they tried it and guess what? They had to undo it. They had to go back to their old model because of the Auditor General's report. It was studied by the Auditor General and it was found out it was not working. They had to undo it in British Columbia.

So once again we have this government choosing and wanting to do something, think they're being so smart, when the very thing they're trying to do has failed elsewhere. They continue doing this kind of thing and I don't get it, Mr. Speaker. Why do you want to prove over and over that we can do things as badly as somewhere else where they had to turn it all around because it didn't work?

You can't compare what we have at The Rooms to other places because they don't exist. Very few places like this exist where the provincial history, where the provincial museum, where the provincial archives are kept all in one place. It doesn't exist. So let's not wreck what we have. Let's find out how to make what we have work, and work better. We can do that.

The speed with which this government is bringing in this notion with no public consultation, the speed with which they're bringing it in is really frightening. I know,

because of conversations that we're having, that people out there in the communities that are watching are not very happy with what they're seeing unfolding here. I think government has to be ready because I'm sure they're going to start getting people letting them know they do not like what is going on.

We already know that inside the divisions right now, at the same time that government is being critical of them, these divisions have lost key staff people. That has happened because of the cuts that have gone on. They have lost key staff people. So it could very well be that some of the problems that are going on are being created by the fact that key staff people have been removed already from these positions.

There is no way that I can vote for this bill. No way that we here, as the caucus for the New Democratic Party, can vote for this bill. It will be destroying something that is extremely important to us in this province.

In the existing act it says that: "Property acquired by the corporation under paragraphs (1)(a) and (b) shall be acquired" – and it gives the sections where they are talked about – "or accepted subject to the advice and direction of the director of a division established under Part II, III or IV intended to have the care and control of that property." Now it's the chief executive officer who will make those decisions about acquisitions.

There's no – I can't make that definitive statement. We would be hard pressed to find one person with all the expertise needed to make decisions about acquisitions under the Museum, acquisitions under Archives and acquisition under arts. They are all individually highly specialized areas – highly specialized.

Now we're saying the CEO can make the decisions. The CEO is the one who is going to be able to give the advice about what can be acquired. This is unbelievable. I can't believe that they're saying it. That's like saying the principal of a school is the one who should make the decisions about the subject matter that is needed in all the various subject areas. A good principal will sit down with the math teachers and say, okay, what is it that you need to teach

your math. A good principal will sit down with the language arts teacher and ask the same thing.

One principal doesn't have all the expertise and knowledge. It's the same thing; a CEO cannot have all the expertise and knowledge that the individual directors have. The CEO should not be able to make a decision by him or herself with regard to the archival material that's collected. The CEO, unless the CEO is a trained archivist, will not know how to make that decision. The CEO may have expertise in one area. This is saying the CEO has to have expertise in every area. It makes absolutely no sense, Mr. Speaker – absolutely no sense whatsoever.

I could go on and on but the message is the same. No consultation, decisions being made rapidly without thinking things through, not recognizing that what is needed – if there are problems with silos, what is needed is how do we work that. How do we make that happen? Getting rid of them is not the way to do that. Getting rid of them is destructive, and that's what this bill is all about. It's about destroying something good that we have.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my seat. I'm going to reiterate what I have said and that is I cannot in conscience – and I mean in conscience. As somebody who understands education, as somebody who understands the role of a museum, who understands the role of archives, who understands the role of an art gallery, who understands the importance and need of a place where all of our provincial history is maintained with integrity – as somebody who understands all that, I have to vote against this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 56. Mr. Speaker, I guess I have the same concerns as has been raised by others, but I will just start off by

saying, as others have said as well, we all recognize the value of The Rooms.

There's no doubt that we're here presently in the oldest city in North America. We have a tremendous rich history. We have rich history as it relates to the World War and we know we have a very unique culture and way of life that we're all very, very proud of.

All of that comes together and it is culminated at The Rooms. I believe I heard someone say it is a jewel in the crown. I would agree with that statement. It is definitely a showcase. It showcases who we are as a people, where we came from. It's very, very important we preserve that history, we preserve that culture and it is therefore critical that this cultural icon for Newfoundland and Labrador, that we make sure it's being managed not just efficiently but being managed properly. I think that's a key word, properly.

I will say in terms of the bill, I'm glad to see they're going to be introducing a requirement for the board to provide financial statements to the minister upon request. That's definitely an important thing. It's a step in the right direction. That's adding accountability, particularly given the fact there is taxpayers' money going into The Rooms.

Now I'm very glad to hear the minister say that The Rooms over time is becoming more and more self-sustainable and the grants required have, I guess, lessened over the years. That's good news. Hopefully we'll be at a point where they're totally self-sustainable and we won't have to inject any taxpayers' money, that they can be self-sustainable. That would be a great thing and I would support that. As long as taxpayers' money is going in there should be accountability, and having those financial statements available for review is a positive thing. I support that initiative 100 per cent.

The bill also talks about, to revise a mechanism to appoint the provincial archivist. I'm assuming that's through the Independent Appointments Commission. No? The minister is nodding his head. So I'll have a question about exactly how that's going to happen.

When we talk about enlarging the objects of the corporation; I'm assuming what we mean there is to enhance the experience for people who would be going to The Rooms, whether that be local people, whether it be people from throughout the province or whether it be visitors coming to Newfoundland and Labrador. We want to enhance the experience which is currently available.

We know that The Rooms certainly has evolved. It's great place, as we've said to go and see and learn about Newfoundland culture and heritage. Like I said, whether it be from an educational point of view for our own children in schools, and all of us for that matter, or whether it be people coming to visit, that's there now and we've seen a lot of great programs.

Anything we can do to enhance that experience – and if that means bringing synergies and bringing different aspects of The Rooms together in collaboration to enhance that experience, I support it 100 per cent. I think it makes a whole lot of sense.

I don't agree with the concept of the three divisions working in silos, if that is indeed what's happening today. I can't speak to whether it is or it isn't. All I know is any time I have gone to The Rooms I've had a good experience. Now whether it could have been a better experience, whether the divisions are working together, whether everybody is getting along, I can't speak to that per se.

Although I will say, Mr. Speaker, that I did have a meeting with a person – it was a while back now, a former employee – who did indicate to me they were having issues and, I'll say, problems there. Perhaps that's what this bill is relating to because it seemed there were issues there between the CEO and between the different divisions in terms of a common vision and of things getting moved around where somebody who might have worked with the Art Gallery, for example, having certain parts of their operation moved to a different part of The Rooms and having concerns with that or not agreeing to some of those things, whatever.

I can see that happening because you have to remember, you had these three divisions that operated for years very successfully. All of a

sudden they come together and those people – unlike a lot of careers, because there are not necessarily a huge number of jobs in that area here, I would think a lot of people would come here, would get involved and they would be involved for many years. They would make it their career.

I guess somewhat, it becomes your baby so to speak. Whether it's the Art Gallery, whether it's the Archives, whatever, you're there for years, you're doing it, it's kind of your baby. You've always done things a certain way based on the expertise you have and that. All of a sudden you come together and people can get their nose out of joint so to speak, because who is this new person to tell me what to do or how to operate my archives or how to operate my museum. We've been doing it for years; we know what we're doing and so on.

While it's a good idea to bring these entities together under the one roof in The Rooms, I can see where conflicts could occur because people have done things a certain way and are not necessarily willing to change or move their position as to how things should be. Everyone can be set in their ways.

I think the big concern that has been raised, by the Opposition to some degree, certainly the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi and the Member for St. John's Centre I think in a much stronger way, is the concern about – I kind of share this concern, this view. Why can't these three entities work together? Why can't they work together?

That's why you have that CEO position, to bring those three entities together, to work together, to work out their differences. That's why the CEO should be there to make that happen. You work with people, whether it be through having a series of meetings, getting everyone's ideas, bringing the ideas together, maybe a little bit of training, whatever the case might be, to get those divisions working together to create an enhanced product for those who would go to that facility.

Ultimately, if you run into a situation where one or more of those individuals are not prepared to work together to follow the vision, to follow the overall plan and vision, I guess the option is always there for the CEO to say to one of those

directors: I want to work with you, but if you're not prepared to work with me and prepared to work with the group for a shared vision, then perhaps we'll have to part ways. We'll find somebody else to go into that role who is willing to work for the greater good, while still retaining the expertise.

What I don't think is necessarily a good idea, though, is in the absence of, first, collaborating and trying to bring people together, secondly, if that doesn't work, taking, I guess like I said, that action of parting ways with an individual or two, if that's what it comes down to, but still retaining people with that expertise.

I don't think the right way is to necessarily go and say, well, the easy way to do it is we'll just get rid of everybody. We'll just get rid of those three directors all together. I'll be in charge, I'll call all the shots and I'll do whatever I want to do. I don't necessarily see that that's the way to go, and particularly in this case. In this case, if you choose that approach you're removing the expertise. It's not just an individual; it's not just a body in a chair. These are very highly trained individuals in these areas.

You have an archivist, you have curators. These are highly specialized jobs. I don't know how you just eliminate those positions and still maintain the integrity of the museum, maintain the integrity of the archives, maintain the integrity of the art exhibits, and I'm not an expert in any of those areas. I'm really not, and that's the thing. I'm not an expert in those areas but it would seem to me they have that expertise, and I'm not sure how we solve the problem by eliminating the expertise.

You maintain the expertise, and you either agree to work together or you force them to work together. In the absence of that, if you're not prepared to do that, see you later and we'll get somebody else who will have that same expertise and is willing to work together. But to simply say we're just going scrap the whole model, I have an issue with that. I have a concern with that.

Of course, a couple of other questions I had, and I'll save them for Committee, but I'll put them out there. They've kind of been alluded to already. What type of consultation took place?

I'm hearing from Members of the Third Party there were none. Now, I haven't heard the minister say there were none. Not that I'm not believing what the Member for St. John's East said, but I haven't heard the minister say there has been no consultations. I would like to hear it from the minister, was there consultation? If so, who did you consult? Because the only thing I heard the minister say was that he consulted the CEO and the board.

Now, if the minister can tell me that the CEO happens to be an expert in archives and an expert in art and an expert in museums, and he has expertise in all those areas, so he can maintain all those things and he knows how everything has to be done and the standards that have to be followed, if he knows all that, then that's fine. If he can say that, let me know. That would be more comforting to me to know that. I doubt it; I doubt one individual has all that knowledge but maybe he does.

In the absence of that, I would like to know who was consulted. Did you even consult with the directors, the staff? Did you consult with the public? Did you consult with – maybe there's expertise at Memorial University. I'm just thinking out loud here now. Maybe at Memorial University there are people there who have expertise in these areas that you could have consulted with. Did you? I'd like to know that, and if you did what did they say?

I'd also like to know, was there a jurisdictional scan done?

AN HON. MEMBER: What?

MR. LANE: A jurisdictional scan. Did you do a jurisdictional scan? In other words, did you check to see in similar facilities as The Rooms in other provinces? Did you check with the other provinces, for example, and say, what is your model? Do you have expertise in all these areas or do you just have one CEO who calls the shots and that's the way they do it? I don't know.

Again, I heard the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi talk about in British Columbia they tried bringing two disciplines together. We're talking about three, she said two together and then they had to undo all they did because it didn't work. Now I don't know if that's factual.

I'm assuming it's factual. She said she did the research and that's what happened. So based on what she's saying at least, it was tried in BC and it didn't work. I'm wondering if we looked at other jurisdictions, whether it be BC or the other provinces, to see how they did it in other places.

Is the model we're using the standard model that's being used, or is it a model that is being proposed? Because if there's a model out there that is the way it is proposed here and it's working perfectly fine, then I would be very comforted to know that. I would be very comforted and confident to vote in favour knowing this is the way it's done everywhere else and it works. I'll be very comforted in knowing we consulted with people who are experts in these areas and they have confidence that this model will work.

Then I could vote for this knowing that I voted for something based on expertise in those areas that they agree with, because I'm not the expert. I'm not the expert, and ultimately you have to base your decisions on something, not just a gut feeling. Not just a gut feeling, oh, it's going to be fine. Maybe it will be fine, and I will say for the record that the minister – and I've known the minister a while now and I have to say I'll give credit that when it comes to Newfoundland culture and things like that, the minister, before being the minister, was someone who was very committed to Newfoundland culture and heritage. He wrote about it and he did blogs on it and he always promoted local goods and products and knitted items and crafts and all that. I know he's into that stuff.

So I can't believe, for the life of me, that he would want to do anything that was going to harm to The Rooms and harm the greatest cultural facility that we have in this province – perhaps one of the greatest cultural facilities in the country. I can't believe he would endorse something that would have a negative impact on that. I just can't see that he would, because that's not kind of where I've known him to be at. He's kind of into this stuff, big time.

That's why I'm kind of torn with this. I don't believe he would want to do anything to harm it, but by the same token I'm hearing these concerns being raised and I'm sharing these concerns.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that said, I'm going to take my seat now very shortly, but it is my hope that as the debate continues – well, certainly, I think we're going to be finished the second reading now when I sit down. I'm hoping that when we get to Committee of the Whole and questions are asked – and I understand my colleague for Mount Pearl North has indicated he has a number of questions which he is going to pose to the minister. I'm sure the Members of the Third Party will have questions that they're going to pose to the minister, and I will have some questions as well, if they don't already ask them before me.

I'm hoping the answers I get will give me some reassurance that what's being proposed here is the right thing to do and that the concerns that have been raised that there are good, solid answers so that I feel comfortable that we have nothing to worry about, that these concerns are nothing to be concerned over. But, in the absence of that, I've got to be honest I find it difficult to support this right now. Like I said, I'm hoping that some good answers will come forward and that I'm able to support it.

There have been a number of bills come to the House now; I am pretty sure I've supported every bill. I've raised some concerns on procurement but, ultimately, I still voted for it. I have no intention of voting against legislation for the sake of voting against legislation, and I'd love to be able to vote for this but we'll see what happens after Committee of the Whole once the questions are asked and answers received as to whether or not I can feel confident that this is the right thing. Because I do have concerns, like everybody else has raised.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

If the hon. the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development speaks now, he will close the debate.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and for the opportunity here to answer, I guess, a number of questions and to close debate in second reading.

Following the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands, I am somebody who is very committed to culture in Newfoundland and Labrador and so are all of us in this House. We have the onus and the responsibility. This act, the legislation, the *Rooms Act*, is going to modernize and make a change that's going to have a positive impact as The Rooms has grown.

And I want to thank the Member for Mount Pearl North, my parliamentary secretary, the Member for Terra Nova, Fogo Island – Cape Freels Member and Mount Pearl – Southlands for their contribution, as well as the Members for St. John's Centre and St. John's East – Quidi Vidi. Although they appointed very opposing views to the particular legislation, I guess without having the complete and full answers, much of what they put forward was inaccurate, it's fear mongering, and it's misstated and misquoted.

I want to point out to everybody here in the room: Is the board supportive of this matter which is governing their independent members? The Rooms is a Crown one category organization, Crown corporation that is autonomous. And as the Member for Mount Pearl North asked: Are they supportive? Yes. They drove and requested these changes because they put forward a resolution and their minutes will reflect that.

When it comes to a point made by the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands about the provincial archivist, it's stated in clause 11 that the CEO would appoint the provincial archivist and it's critical to have that position and that person, based on a number of other acts. As well, the provincial archivist organizes the work internally and the board and the CEO would never allow professional standards or expertise to be compromised.

I can't believe the Member for St. John's Centre and the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi would even put forward those types of comments about the board and the CEO, the

management of The Rooms, around that and the role of the provincial archivist.

There is no plan to get rid of directors or only have one director at The Rooms. Also, the amendments do not dictate that anything has to be done to change the structure, only that The Rooms can consider their options. That's what we're debating here in the House.

Even though the old act had listed separate entities and silos and positions clearly in an act, this one does not. This one is putting forth an opportunity to look at the common themes, the synergies that exist within The Rooms Corporation. There is nothing to consult over until The Rooms board would have a proposed organizational structure. Then that would be the opportunity for the board or the CEO of The Rooms to go out and hold the consultations that would be needed.

The board and the CEO would never entertain anything that would undermine the expertise and the authenticity of professional standards. For the Members of the Third Party to be putting forth that out there and to be fear mongering and making statements about positions being cut based on this legislation is absolutely atrocious.

The Rooms is fully aware of what was undone at the Royal British Columbia Museum. Nothing of this kind would be entertained by The Rooms. Regarding acquisitions, the CEO would delegate the responsibility to a qualified senior staff member, just as the case is presently. Ultimately, it is the corporation that is accountable and not individual directors as is stated in the act.

So for the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi to stand up here and give an example, as a former school teacher herself, about the principal – comparing that as a way that you wouldn't have the principal delivering the math without consulting with the math teachers. Well, isn't that the exact same case of having the CEO who's in the leadership role consulting with the senior staff that they would have in their facility? The example that she had presented makes absolutely no sense because that is exactly what is able to happen.

In the act, the CEO, in talking about the expertise – they have the staff. We're very proud

of the staff that we have in The Rooms and the expertise that they bring in each area of The Rooms that it's responsible for in its mandate, when it comes to collections, when it comes to looking at our natural history, our cultural history, whether it's in artistic format, whatever performance or programming that's put in place. We're proud of all of the activities The Rooms undertakes, because it does good work to preserve our culture and look at it under that umbrella of one entity.

I think that's important, to find ways in which we can have a better working relationship and more synergies so we can achieve the outcomes and the mandate. There is opportunity to do so.

Collections take place in all of the three divisions. There is no elimination or changes to functions. This is about giving flexibility. Once these changes are made, there will be consultations prior to actual changes. We have reduced the redundancies and the prescriptiveness that exist in the act.

I think the Member for Mount Pearl North clearly saw that as he put forward his discussion and debate. I'll certainly do my best to answer the questions that were put forward. If I'm unable to capture all of that now, I'm sure there will be ample time in Committee. The Member opposite asked if the work of The Rooms will be impacted. If I haven't been clear, the intent is not to diminish the work of The Rooms. The changes are meant to improve the service.

Jobs; the Member for Mount Pearl North talked about jobs and asked will they be cut. This is not something that is being contemplated at this time. This is not the intent of these changes. This process is about making legislative changes started under the previous administration, the changes that were put forward. In other words, the motivation is not about cutting jobs or cutting cost. This is about finding ways of which there can be natural efficiencies, greater flexibility and accountability to The Rooms itself.

The Rooms has proven itself from when it was introduced in 2005, bringing together three entities that were dependent on 95 per cent government grant. Right now in this past year, 79 per cent of that for the upcoming year,

because they've been able to go out to private donors, they've been able to go out and generate other revenue, such as at their Gift Shop, such as at The Rooms café and the other initiatives it has undertaken as a foundation.

When it comes to The Rooms, we have to look at from the governance structure. They have a foundation and they're absolutely out there day in and day out reaching out to people who are supportive of the arts, supportive of culture and heritage, museums, securing and acquiring various items for The Rooms itself. They want to secure private funds to be able to do so. This is not in any way to diminish the role or the memberships or the people who support The Rooms.

When they look at the successful capital campaign that was undertaken, there were some very specific things that were done under that \$13 million. Some of that money, that private funding, was around the programming to help deliver and ensure there's an educational component. The Rooms partners with the Department of Education, and that's a really positive thing as to how we can get more of our stories out there in the classrooms and take things on the road.

We need to be able to look at, when you're doing all the lines of business that The Rooms puts forward. The Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands talked about enlarging the opportunities, and so did the Member Mount Pearl North. We should not inhibit the success of The Rooms.

The Rooms has proven that it has been able to increase visitation, secure donations and private funding, federal funding as well. They've been able to do something that has been absolutely spectacular in having Canada's largest World War I exhibit in commemoration to Beaumont-Hamel. That is something that's there permanently for everybody to see and be involved in.

When it comes to all these other points that have been put forward, it's important to allow where the corporation sees within its mandate to be able to achieve greater success and enlarge its programming and reach far more areas of the province, then we need to encourage that. Us, as

this House, and as all Members representing people of Newfoundland and Labrador, it is our responsibility to ensure that our cultural facility, The Rooms, is shared across this great province in our communities, that the information is available.

They've undertaken a number of projects, whether it be the digitation of archival data, things that have come online. It's about making it accessible to all people. The Rooms is a very accessible facility, and we're very proud of that. We want to see The Rooms get to a stage where ground zero, where Fort Townshend is also on display and moving forward.

I think the Member opposite, when he talked about the donations being safe, there's no reason to think that anything would change. Government is not getting in any way of the private sector making donations.

Sometimes people donate for a very specific cause. Sometimes people have an interest in, whether it be aviation or whether they have an interest in indigenous culture and they want to help acquire items specifically for that cause, they will bequeath or they will provide funding, a donation or a pledge, to help acquire those causes. Sometimes the donations would be much more general in nature as they would put forward but, generally, there is something attached to a fund.

Government is very committed to providing operations to The Rooms. We've provided over \$6.5 million to The Rooms' operations this year. But they've also stepped up and have been able to increase their own revenue through entities they own, through their Gift Shop sales and through other creative endeavours. They've also stepped up in terms of social media, their marketing and promotion and these are all good things.

It's disappointing to hear Members of the Third Party strike such significant alarmist views around getting rid of positions, losing the expertise, compromising the integrity of The Rooms. It basically puts into question the fine individuals at the board of directors and also the CEO and the senior management of The Rooms Corporation.

We're here to basically propose changes to the legislation that is removing such a prescriptive nature, but it is not saying that there needs to be significant changes at The Rooms Corporation. This is about finding natural synergies; this is about finding better ways to do things. We all want to find better ways to do things, I believe, in this House of Assembly.

When it comes to consultations, moving and passing this piece of legislation is not changing anything today in terms of the operations at The Rooms. Before any such changes would occur, I would say to the Members opposite, a consultation process would take place.

With that, I'm going to take my seat and we'll allow the piece of legislation to proceed to another reading.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 56 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation. (Bill 56)

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole presently, by leave. (Bill 56)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 56.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dempster): We are now considering Bill 56, An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation.

A bill, "An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation." (Bill 56)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I just have, really, one question. I'm glad the minister did clarify some of it, but I

just want to seek further clarification. Again, it's on the issue which was raised about the directors. I'd say to the minister, if you read the Explanatory Notes you can see where one would get perhaps the wrong impression, if that's the word I'll use, or a different interpretation than the minister has put forward on the directors.

I'm just going to read that first Explanatory Note, Madam Chair. It says, "This Bill would revise the structure of The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador in order to make the structure more flexible" – which is fine, no issue there – "by removing the requirement for separate divisions and directors for the archives, museum and art gallery"

If the minister can say unequivocally that there's no plan, that we're still going to retain that expertise in those three areas – now, I don't care if they're called directors or managers. If what we're saying here is that we're just going to change their title or something but it's still going to be somebody with expertise overseeing all of those three operations, that's all I need to hear.

That was really the only concern that I had was that the issues being raised here – because if you read it, you can certainly get that impression and some of my colleagues obviously have the same impression. If I can have some assurances here that the plan isn't to get rid of those three positions or to have nobody in those three areas to oversee those three areas who have that expertise, if I had assurances that's not going to happen, that's not the plan, then I'm fine with it.

I would just say that the way it reads there, it can certainly be interpreted that it can happen. That's the only concern I have. Other than that, I'd support the bill 100 per cent.

Maybe the minister can respond.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker – Madam Chair. Sorry about that.

Madam Chair, as I reiterated I think in my statement earlier, as I close debated, I clearly stated that the CEO and the board of directors would never compromise the standards, the

professionalism or the expertise at The Rooms in order to be able to carry out the duties that they have been mandated to do. That is their statutory obligation as the board of directors and that would be in compliance with the act. So I have all confidence that the expertise would remain at The Rooms to be able to carry out its duties.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to ask the minister regarding the Explanatory Note: "... revise the structure of The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador in order to make the structure more flexible by removing the requirement for separate divisions and directors for the archives, museum and art gallery"

Can he please explain what that means, concretely the phrase, "by removing the requirement for separate divisions and directors for the archives, museum and art gallery ..."?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

MR. MITCHELMORE: When I opened debate I had talked about in 2005 when The Rooms opened and the original the original *Rooms Act* came together, it basically brought together the three original pieces of legislation under one entity which kept a division for the Archives, the Museum and the Art Gallery.

In that legislation, because it was separate originally, in bringing it together there was a very definitive role for each particular division and it had outlined the positions as well in the legislation. Since we've been 10 years with The Rooms, The Rooms itself has evolved in terms of its offering of programming, the natural synergies that exist within The Rooms, its revenue generation models and the foundation and its activities that it has undertaken. Right now, there is no other legislation that has come forward that would have such prescriptive roles and definitions.

In terms of the current bill that we've put forward before the House, it's just allowing the flexibility by removing the specific divisions and job positions. It does not diminish the duties or the roles and responsibilities of The Rooms itself and the requirement of needing the right staff and the right level of expertise within The Rooms Corporation.

One of the things that I want to highlight to the Member opposite is clearly around the role of the provincial archivist, which is important to have that clearly explicit in legislation. This is not about diminishing the role of The Rooms; this is about enlarging it, and we all recognize the importance of our cultural facility to the province.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to ask the minister why specifically he is recommending removing the requirement for separate divisions and directors for the Archives, for the Museum and the Art gallery, on what basis – why?

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Point of order.

MR. JOYCE: It's up to the Chair, but I'm sure the Members on our side will give leave to go ahead with the question (inaudible) pertinent question.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We'll have to hop up quickly when I sit to ensure we get a chance to ask our questions.

The minister did, in his closing remarks in second reading touch on some of the questions that we had, but I'd just like to put a finer point on a few of the issues. I thank one of the ministers opposite for raising some concern about process here. So I appreciate that support.

I recognize that some Members have spoken about the issue of consultation. I believe I heard the minister confirm that the board and CEO are supportive of the changes. Can he advise as to whether any other stakeholders, beyond the board and the CEO, were consulted in moving forward with these changes?

I'll ask one question at a time for the purpose of trying to move this along in a relatively efficient manner, but, of course, I'll ask for co-operation from my colleague. If the minister's not going to stand then one of us needs to stand. So I hope it will be – and I suspect he will answer my questions as he attempted to do in second reading.

Thank you.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll respond to the Member for St. John's Centre's question as well.

The duties and responsibilities that were separated into three sections in the act now will fall under the responsibility of the corporation. The corporation, led by the CEO, governed by the board of directors, will still have soul responsibility for ensuring that when it comes to the procurement of art, when it comes to the exhibitions, when it comes to programming, when it comes to the archival documents and all of the other things that The Rooms is mandated to do, that they will ensure they will have the appropriate staff, the appropriate expertise and the ability to oblige by their mandate. This is how all other acts and other pieces of legislation that we have within Newfoundland and Labrador is. It's not separated by specific

divisions or having specific positions listed in a particular act.

I hope that clarifies the answer previously. I think it's because of how The Rooms was created and things have evolved at this point in time. I have been very clear on that as I've been delivering the message.

When it comes to consultation, as I pointed out, this is a resolution the board of directors has put forward looking for some flexibility, looking at ways to find natural synergies, to do things better at The Rooms, to be able to find ways at which we can have greater success. This is about allowing a level of flexibility. The previous legislation was very prescriptive in that nature.

This does not mean there will be significant changes at The Rooms. If there is a change, there would be an appropriate level of consultation at that time. Right now, the requirement to consult would not change what's being proposed here in the particular act because what it does is it brings it to where other pieces of legislation are in this House of Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to ask the minister: Why was there no consultation with the archival community, the museum community, the art community and the academic community on this piece of legislation? It's a major piece of legislation that leaves open the possibility for major restructuring and a total way of restructuring The Rooms as it is now. So it's a major piece of legislation.

I would like to ask the minister, why there was no public consultation whatsoever on this piece of legislation, outside of the CEO and the board?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: My question for the minister is a little different. I didn't hear him – and if I missed it, I apologize – but I didn't hear him

specifically answer my question related to consultation. Were there any other groups beyond the board and the CEO consulted? Whether there was a need for extensive public consultation or not, I think that's debatable, but there are certainly some stakeholders that would have a real keen interest in this legislation. So I think that's a fair question to ask.

The minister did reference the BC experience, and he did say the board is well aware of what has transpired in British Columbia. I'm just wondering if there are any key learnings from that experience that have helped inform this piece of legislation or will help inform the work going forward that the board needs to engage in?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: I just want to make clear; I guess, to this House, there are no changes that are being made organizationally at this time to The Rooms. There is no requirement to go out and broadly or publicly consult based on the passage of this bill and this legislation.

I do want to state that the board of directors, who I read into the record earlier, represent a broad base of stakeholders and the community at large. As well, if there were any changes that were going to be made, that is the time then to go out and consult with stakeholder groups and the public. This is not changing how The Rooms does business or how it operates, this piece of legislation.

I think the Members opposite, what's being asked I think I've answered, but I can continue on your line of questioning if this is not a suitable answer or I'm not being clear in terms of what we're doing here today, what is actually being proposed and the process that would follow should The Rooms board look at making organizational change. That clearly would require consultation.

The board will consult. I am not opposed to any type of consultation. We've had significant consultations. This government is open to having consultation, probably more so than other administrations have engaged the public previously.

There are significant consultations that are taking place when you're looking at policy changes that are happening right now with the Newfoundland and Labrador innovation agenda that was launched in the Member opposite's district of Mount Pearl South. We're having those broad consultations. We're also soliciting feedback online. We're also looking at our satellite offices as well, and doing that engagement.

So until you're going down a road where you're looking at changing the policy, I don't see where it warrants what the Members opposite are specifically asking for.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Then I'll allow my colleague to go next; we'll try and alternate, in fairness.

Just a follow-up question then – I appreciate the minister's response. There's just something that's not quite adding up for me, which I'm sure he can help clarify. He talked today and it was consistent with what I heard was shared in the briefing as well that this will eliminate some duplication and redundancy. So the natural conclusion people are going to draw is that this will impact budgets, it will impact staffing and it will impact the resource commitment to The Rooms. Although, he's made other remarks today that suggest there's nothing to be concerned about at this point in time.

So in terms of the duplication and redundancy he speaks of, I'm just curious if he can explain what that practically means. What are the savings and the improvements that are going to come about as a result of this legislation? Because, on one hand, we're hearing him saying nothing is going to change and, on the other hand, we're hearing that this is going to eliminate duplication and redundancy.

Could he please address that point? And secondly, can he confirm that there will be no impacts on jobs at The Rooms as a result of this legislation? There just seems to be a bit of

inconsistency, so I'd appreciate it if he could clarify.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to again ask the minister because he had mentioned that this is to streamline and also to reduce redundancies. My question is: It would be helpful to know what he sees as redundancies, specific redundancies at The Rooms right now.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

At least from where I sit, this is not a filibuster. We're just looking to get some answers to some questions. Having sat over there, I recognize that sometimes the minister needs time to gather the information to be able to respond. So I don't believe it's an unwillingness to answer, but I will help my colleague by continuing to rise for a little bit so we can hopefully get some answers to what I think are important questions. We heard today this is about eliminating duplication and redundancy, yet we're hearing at the same time nothing is going to change.

I think finding some efficiencies and making the organization more efficient and giving the flexibility to the board and the CEO to more effectively carry out their own mandate, that's all good. But I think it's important to ask the questions around what are going to be the practical implications in terms of budget, in terms of staffing and so on.

So I would like to know what duplication and redundancy we're talking about, and what the job losses will be. I'd like some confirmation that the board is, in fact, fully supportive of these changes. I'd like to hear that explicitly. And are there going to be any other impacts on the operations at The Rooms? Because logically, as we went through this process, it appeared that there would be. But now we're hearing in Committee that there won't be any changes to the operations at The Rooms.

I will acknowledge the minister's commitment to consult before any future changes happen. I think that's important. We have a vibrant cultural community. We have a history and a heritage in this province that's critical to preserve. We have a vibrant arts community, and The Rooms is an important institution for preserving, promoting and fostering all of that. So that's why this is important. We're not trying to hold up a good process here, but there are some key questions – and I don't have many more, to be honest. There are just a few fundamental questions that I'd like a little bit more clarity on before we can allow this legislation to roll forward.

Is there a draft organizational structure? This bill will definitely lead to organizational changes, yet the minister is now saying there won't be changes. So if you're going to consolidate the three entities, presumably that's going to impact budget, it's going to impact staffing and it's going to impact structure. What we're trying to get – and maybe some of that makes sense. I'm not standing here to say I'm opposed to everything that is in this bill because I said in second reading there are some things that logical sense; we need some of these concerns addressed.

So that's probably respectfully where I'd say we may, on this side of the House, differ a little bit. But if we can't get answers to some of those questions, then it would be very difficult for me to stand and support the bill.

That's a few questions. I'll leave it there for the moment and I certainly would appreciate if the minister would respond.

Thank you.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Member opposite asked a number of questions. Some of them would rest – they are very operational in nature. The Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, through its budgetary process, provides a grant which makes up or will make

up about 79 per cent of its funding through the budget, which I've outlined clearly. The Rooms has a number of other revenue streams that it earns or that it acquires through its foundation for operational purposes. We've seen where The Rooms has grown its revenues which allow it to be even more successful this past fiscal year. That's a very positive thing.

When it comes to operational pieces at The Rooms, that rests with the CEO and the board of directors. The board of directors reflect a broad spectrum of the community and stakeholders and have a wide range of expertise. I want to say that when I talked about and introduced the bill initially, there is one very common theme with The Rooms itself. The Rooms, in all of its structure that it has, in terms of a museum, an archives and an art gallery, they all collect things.

There are ways to make them more accessible to the public, if we're able to find those natural synergies that exist so that the public can have greater access through that overall process. Right now, the old act, the *Rooms Act* of 2006, outlines clearly in silos the management structure, the positions and the outlines. Right now The Rooms, as a global entity, has evolved. It has taken on a number of other projects and entities and there are ways of which we can see greater synergies within The Rooms as it moves forward and lives up to its mandate. Because that ultimately is what the board of directors and the CEO is responsible to do as a Crown corporation to the government and to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I do have a question. In section 9 of the bill it says programs are the first responsibility of the Archives and the Museum. It's really unclear to me what is meant by programs. It seems to me that the first responsibility of archives and museums should be not just the managing, but the actual ongoing finding of both artifacts documents material that is important to

maintaining the repository of our history and then programs developed from that.

I'm a bit unclear as to why the first thing listed would be programs. Does that mean everything else is secondary? I would like an explanation from the minister as to his understanding of what programs are in that context.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm giving the minister an opportunity to gather his thoughts, if he is, in fact, wishing to respond to that question.

I'm very happy there is going to be future consultation. I didn't get an answer on the impact of the BC experience and what that might mean for The Rooms Corporation and the board going forward. We can't establish what the elimination of duplication and redundancy means in terms of jobs at The Rooms, in terms of the budget at The Rooms and in terms of organizational structure. I haven't heard the minister clearly confirm the board and the CEO are, in fact, fully supportive of what we're doing here.

Those continue to be my concerns. I think I've clearly put them on record. I won't continue to repeat them, but I would like to give the minister another opportunity to respond before this moves forward.

With those points clearly on record, I believe some of my colleagues have other questions. I know the Member closest to me wishes to get into some more specific questions about clauses. So I'm happy to not stand in the way of that happening, but just some of these big, broad questions that I think are overarching. I wanted to make sure the minister had an opportunity to address them here in Committee. I don't think I can be any clearer than that about what my concerns are.

I'll take my seat. I believe the minister may wish to respond. If not, we'll continue with further questions.

Thank you.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm hopeful that I'm able to answer a number of questions as I get up to speak. It's important that questions do be asked to particular legislation.

I want to go back again to an example. Right now, The Rooms has its collections in nine different vaults and it's managed by staff who are all in separate divisions. There may be a better model for that.

I know the Member for Mount Pearl North had also stated there may be a better model when he spoke originally. The CEO certainly says there could be a better model. We need to find the flexibility for a better model, and that's what this legislation would allow. The Rooms would consult before it would look to make such implementation.

The Rooms is really fully aware of what happened and what had to be undone at the Royal British Columbia Museum, and nothing of its kind would be entertained by The Rooms. Regarding all acquisitions, the CEO would delegate responsibility to qualified senior staff, just as is the case in the present. Ultimately, the corporation is responsible. It's not individual directors as stated in the act.

I want to state that there may be a better way to deliver programs and services more effectively. The Rooms has done a significant amount of programming, and there is no plan to reduce staff.

Thank you.

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I find it very interesting, and I always believe it's great to look at modernizing ways that we do things and also looking at flexibility. I think that's really important, but I would wonder, is

this a chicken and an egg thing, which comes first.

My question then to the minister is when we go back to look in the Explanatory Notes about revising the structure "... in order to make the structure more flexible by removing the requirement for separate divisions and directors for the archives, museum and art gallery." Was there exploration as to what kind of shape that might take? Also, what is the situation across the country in terms of – The Rooms is a rare facility where we see that it houses all three of those divisions – if there is a sense of what is happening across the country with provincial archives, provincial museums and provincial art galleries. That's my question, Madam Chair.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just to go back to the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi in reference to programming; programs refer to everything that The Rooms does from exhibits to educational programs in schools, special events, collections, collecting artifacts, art, documents, et cetera. All of these are part of a program.

In referring to the broad context of what the definition of a program is, it's very overarching in terms of the collection, it's in terms of the art, it's in terms of the education and school aspects. So it's not in any way to diminish the role of what The Rooms does and the importance of cultural artifacts, displays and things that are put into play. We want The Rooms to be that people's space. Culture in our province reflects \$450 million to our GDP. It's quite significant, Madam Chair.

To go back to the Member for St. John's Centre, it is the board of directors and the CEO that have the authority when it comes to the operations, when it comes to the staffing, when it comes to that aspect of The Rooms, and they will do that. Before any such changes happen, they will go out and consult. That is very clear. That has been put forward.

So that's pretty much all I can say on that particular piece, besides repeating myself on these particular matters.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, I'm glad to hear the minister say there's certainly no plans to rid ourselves of the expertise that exists in those three entities. I'm very glad to hear that, because that was really my overarching concern. I think that's the concern a lot of Members over here had.

I will just make a comment, though. I heard a couple of times when the issue of restructuring and so on was raised, a couple of times the minister didn't answer, and a couple of times when he did answer he said no restructuring at this time. Those last three words are always key every time you listen to an answer, the: at this time piece. It leaves me to believe there certainly will be some restructuring. I think that's what's going to happen.

I guess the only issue we have here, and the minister said it himself. It will be the board who will be responsible at some point of restructuring if they deem that is what's required. They will do public consultations and then they will make a decision, which is kind of like the school boards, kind of like the way the school boards work. Because the school boards will go out and they'll do consultations and they'll make decisions. And if they make decisions that the public are all up in arms against, then the minister would be able to say, well, that was the school board who did that. Now we will be able say, well, that was The Rooms board that did that; it wasn't me.

I guess the only thing that we're kind of doing here, to some degree, is by passing this and changing the legislation, while we may not be restructuring, we are giving the board the ability to go out and restructure. Then once they restructure and if people don't like it, there'll be nothing coming back to this House. It will be the board who did it and the board that will be responsible and the board that will be

accountable. You can wash your hands and say it wasn't me; it was the board.

I think what's happening here is that we're actually going to end up changing legislation, making it less prescriptive, making it more flexible, as it says here, which all sounds good and it is good; but by the same token, once that happens and the new board decides to restructure – which I have no doubt in my mind they have every intention of restructuring, especially when we talk about getting rid of redundancies and all that kind of stuff as has been said.

There is no doubt, once this is passed, they will restructure. Once they do it, I guess we won't know until it happens whether that restructuring is a good restructuring or a bad restructuring and how the people feel and how people in those areas of expertise feel about it. Ultimately what will happen then, as I said, we'll say well, b'y, it wasn't us; that was The Rooms board who made that decision and complain to them. Nothing I can do about it.

That's how I see this going down. Now, with that said, in terms of the bill itself, as long as the minister is saying and he has confirmed here that there is no intention to get rid of the expertise that exists in those divisions and that the board has that responsibility to ensure that the Archives and the Art Gallery and all that are done as per standard and so on and we're not going to water things down, and I believe that, then from that perspective I'm glad to hear that and it would be something I could support.

But let's not kid ourselves that there will be a restructuring. The board will do it. They will consult. And if people don't like it and they go to the department, the department will say, b'y, it wasn't us; it was The Rooms board.

That will be all I'll have to say on this bill.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to say to the Member opposite – I think a couple of Members may have asked this – about is there a draft structure, is there an organizational chart that has been developed. Well, there is no draft structure developed. Any such proposal would have to be done through consultation and there would be a jurisdictional analysis done at that time.

What I want to state, and I've said before, is that the current act is prescriptive. So do Members opposite want The Rooms to be stagnant and to prevent growth? Because, presently, if they vote against this legislation, that's exactly what they're voting for. They're voting against growth and for stagnation and doing anything better right now at The Rooms.

The current act doesn't allow The Rooms board or CEO to even look at considering any type of new structure because it is clearly listed in the act itself of 2006. Removing the specifics from the act is not removing these people from the organization. The Rooms is the provincial Art Gallery, it is the Provincial Archives and it is the provincial Museum. It is all of those things and it will be. That will not change. That cannot change.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

One thing we don't need here this afternoon is speakers. The sound is coming through really loudly from the other side.

Madam Chair, I do have another question. I do thank the minister for saying what he said about programs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I do thank him for his explanation about programs. I have gone through the whole list and, actually, besides the list on programs, everything else the minister said is also listed under section 9. So I think there must be a more specific meaning to programs that doesn't undo everything else that he said because it is all there. I guess the question was more around is this a list of priorities. That was more of what the question was getting at.

I'm still a bit perplexed with regard to the whole thing of consultations; number one, we're saying that here in this room and the minister is saying it. We were told in the briefings there are going to be consultations and they would occur after the amendments are passed. I'm perplexed what those consultations would be. I really am.

We're putting in place, or the government is putting in place amendments that are really making changes to how things are going to run. The framework has really changed and they're saying there are going to be consultations but what kind of consultations. What are they about? That's what I don't understand. If there are going to be, and they're meaningful and certainly if there are consultations about how The Rooms interact with the community, I think that really would be very, very important.

While The Rooms is a provincial entity, it physically exists in my district. I do know that it's an important thing in the lives of the people in my district. I know many, many, many constituents who have their membership in The Rooms. The Georgestown community association, on a weekly basis, does an online newsletter and they always put in what's on in our neighbourhood. One of the things they talk about is The Rooms, the Thursday afternoon coffee gathering and what the topic is for the month. It really is a part of the lives of the people in my district.

The makeup of my district, you do have a lot of people from post-secondary education facilities, the university and the college. You have a lot of high schools in the district as well. They all interact quite a bit with The Rooms. Whether you're talking about the Archives, talking about

the Museum or the Art Gallery, they really do interact with The Rooms.

So I'd like to have more specifics from the minister about the consultations, what he sees they are going to be and what difference does it make now that they're coming after the amendments are being made. So I really would like some clearer explanation from the minister on that.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to reiterate, as Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development and the minister who is responsible for The Rooms, we want to continue to state how important The Rooms, as a provincial cultural facility, is to Newfoundland and Labrador. It may be physically stated in your district, but it is open and accessible to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and the visiting public.

I'm very pleased to hear the Member opposite is concerned about The Rooms. The Rooms is very important. I've been there several times. I've had a membership at The Rooms. The Rooms does incredible work when it comes to the procurement of its collections and all aspects that it's obliged to do under its act. Those activities and everything that The Rooms does will not change. What we're hoping to do here is to enlarge the role of The Rooms so that it can get rid of some of the inefficiencies, some of the ability that's holding back The Rooms from reaching its full potential.

The Rooms is very supportive of the community it represents, the arts community, the cultural community. It hosts a number of events. It opens its doors to all people to be able to come in and facilitate that particular ability to either participate in programming. Whether it's schoolchildren or whether it's adults or groups or organizations or people that come for coffee, or people to participate in the culture and cocktails. The Rooms is very cognizant of its role and responsibilities and mandate.

I would hope that all Members in this House would allow for The Rooms to grow, rather than live with its current prescriptive legislation that causes stagnation and hinders growth.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Madam Chair, that the Committee rise, report progress for Bill 56 and ask leave to sit again.

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

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

The hon. the Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that some progress was made on Bill 56 and ask leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed her to report progress on Bill 56 and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

MR. A. PARSONS: Presently.

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Highway Traffic Act No. 4, Bill 60, and I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. Government House Leader that he have leave to introduce a bill, Bill 60, and that the bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Highway Traffic Act No. 4," carried. (Bill 60)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Highway Traffic Act No. 4. (Bill 60)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 60 has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 60 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I move from the Order Paper, Motion 5, pursuant to Standing Order 11 that this House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. today, Tuesday, December 6.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6, I move, pursuant to Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 10 p.m. today, Tuesday, December 6.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do not adjourn at 10 p.m.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 56.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 56.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are considering Bill 56, An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation.

A bill, "An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation." (Bill 56)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

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

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

I would like to ask the minister if he could give us an idea of what was the intent in the current act regarding safeguarding the three specific divisions and the three specific directors. What was that intent? Why that was there.

Then I would also like to ask the minister – I understand the interest to look at more modernizing the act to reflect the current needs of The Rooms and how it operates. I would wonder if he could explain why the consultation did not happen previous to the act. And once that consultation was done –and if in fact there were recommendations for restructuring, which there may very well be, why that work wouldn't first be done and then amendments to the act to reflect the recommended structural changes and then have the act amended to reflect and to support the changes, the structural changes that may or may not be recommended as a result of the consultation?

Why would the consultation not happen first and then amend the act in order to be able to do that? Because the board and the CEO are perfectly free to have consultations to ask for input –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: The board and the CEO of The Rooms are free to consult. They don't need this change that's before us right now before they can consult about what kinds of changes they want in the structure of The Rooms. So why would he not recommend that that consultation process happen? Then, as a result of that consultation process, then come and if needs be, amend the act to reflect the needs that were established through a consultation process.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's quite clear that the Member opposite for St. John's Centre prefers a very prescriptive piece of legislation, as opposed to allowing flexibility of requests made by the board through a resolution that's reflective of their minutes.

I want to point out to the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi that when she had mentioned programming, and I had referred to programming in all the other matters, that this does not indicate a level of priority. All aspects of work that The Rooms does are important. It is clearly listed and stated, all of those activities, and it's not a change from the current act itself.

I do want to, as well, point out to the Member for St. John's Centre that The Rooms has an external advisory committee for every new project that they have undertaken for a decade for its Level 4 Gallery, for art acquisitions, for the Provincial Art Bank, and The Rooms has continued to procure art. They've recently purchased art from artists all over the province to continue with that very important role that they do. They will do the same for this proposed change that's being put forward. If they propose changes to their organizational structure, then would be the time to do the consultation.

I'm surprised, you know. The Member opposite, when a previous piece of legislation was put forward about looking at judges, for example,

here in the House to enlarge the number of Supreme Court judges to allow the legislation to have that flexibility should the Minister of Justice with his federal counterparts be able to acquire the necessary federal funding and the positions for judges that will come forward at that level – that was put forward in advance.

We don't have more judges at this particular point, but the legislation has been changed to allow that flexibility should there be more Supreme Court judges that have been put forward. The Member opposite has not talked about the level of consultation that would be required or whatnot in that piece of legislation, but certainly is doing so in this particular legislation where there is a prescription which is allowing for flexibility. If there are changes to the organization at The Rooms, there will be consultation that would take place. I can't be clearer.

It seems like the Member opposite is taking a different broach to this particular piece of legislation than the previous piece of legislation that was put forward by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General earlier in this legislative session.

Now, I want to point out that The Rooms itself, and the leadership at The Rooms, has shown significant growth when it comes to the amount of visitation that's been put forward. Actually, I'll just go back to the annual report that's been put forward here; the chair has talked about the significant achievements by The Rooms when they had their 10th anniversary; 1,400 people attended.

The number of initiatives – *I Will Sing You Home*, a video produced in partnership with The Rooms, the Ennis Sisters, Shallaway Youth Choir and CBC. There are significant partnerships at The Rooms. They engage stakeholders and they engage their community when they undertake new initiatives. This is not something that The Rooms, the board and the CEO would do unilaterally based on that. I can't keep saying it over and over and over again.

Efforts have commenced in Newfoundland and Labrador to make sure that this year on July 1 – July 1 was very meaningful to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That was quite significant by

the board of directors, the CEO and The Rooms staff. All of the staff that are involved at The Rooms played a role in making sure that we have something that is lasting, that's a legacy for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

There are ways in which we can make it better, that we can have better synergies in The Rooms itself, and that is what is being proposed to allow the board and the CEO and the staff at The Rooms to do what they need to do in order to achieve greater successes, to meet their mission statement and to meet their mandate.

If the Member opposite wants to continue to ask the question, I will get up and continue to answer her questions. I'm willing to stay here as long as it takes to answer every single question that she has pertaining to The Rooms itself.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Because it's important. It's important to all of us, that we collect, preserve, present and make available the research, the historic artifacts, the natural history specimens, the archival records and the significant history to our culture, natural history of the province. This is something that we should spend a lot of time talking about in the House of Assembly.

We could spend days talking about The Rooms and everything that it does and represents because it has such a vast collection and it touches all reaches of the province.

We want to conduct research with respect to the history, the natural history, the culture and heritage of the province, as was stated above, to collect and present provincial, national and international contemporary and historic art because that is very important. All of these things will be done to advance and promote the works of contemporary visual artists of the province. There are a lot of activities that take place.

The provincial arts and letters competition has taken place at The Rooms. I was there and had a great honour of connecting with our literary writers here in the province and the display that was on at the Gallery. I believe we may be going into our 65th year this year. It will be quite an

honour – and I hope all Members show up when we host that event and that activity. The Rooms, in partnership with BTCRD, does an exceptional job of being able to showcase that.

This is what I want to point out: This is in no way diminishing the mission or the mandate of The Rooms and their ability to deliver on all aspects of that, to advance and promote the works of contemporary and visual artists.

I was at the VANL event and their awards that they have – I've been at The Rooms many, many times and we've had ambassadors here this year when we had the EU ambassadors and they were showcased at The Rooms and impressed. We had our curators showing them around and highlighting what it means for Newfoundland and Labrador and these exhibits to get down in the vaults, to look at the Art Bank, look at all of the activities that The Rooms do.

I could really get in and go into a lot of details with the talented people and the incredible work that is happening at The Rooms. I would certainly invite the Member opposite to continue to ask questions so that I can continue to relay exactly what is happening at The Rooms and their ability to increase what they're doing, their outreach to the province and to build upon their successes over the last 10 years.

This has been their best year when it comes to visitation. This has been their best year when it comes to the revenues that they've been able to acquire and everything that they're doing. We want to allow it to grow. They're currently inhibited based on their legislation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: That has clearly been stated by the CEO and approved by the board of directors.

For the House here, this is clearly something that the corporation – and I have faith in what the corporation is asking and that they will go out, if they make organizational change, that they will do consulting. They have consulted on every other project that they've done when it comes to the initiatives and I've outlined whether it be the Provincial Art Bank, whether it be the fourth

level Gallery and other things that have been done.

The Rooms is not closed. The Rooms is open to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. They've moved more things online. They're digitizing. They're forming more partnerships out there in the community and we want that. We want the arts community, we want the historians, we want everybody to have a connection to The Rooms and to participate. That is important.

I will take my seat and allow the Member for St. John's Centre to continue the debate here this afternoon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

I say to the minister: I don't need a whole lecture on The Rooms; I know everything that goes on there. I know how good it is.

I have one very specific question. Minister, when you spoke about advisory committees, were all these advisory committees consulted with in making the decisions around this legislation?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to go and explain a little bit more about what The Rooms is doing around how it acquires, preserves, presents and makes available research and historic artifacts, its natural history specimens and the archival records, and how it represents and illustrates the specific history, culture and natural heritage of the province. The Rooms collects and presents provincial, national and international contemporary and historic art. It is the province's steward of archival records, co-facilitator of information management initiatives

and serves to inform, present and interpret the province's history.

So for the Member opposite to talk about – in order to do everything that The Rooms does, The Rooms goes out and they have consultations, they engage. Their board of directors is a broad representation of the stakeholder community.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: They've been a part of the community. The Rooms believes in that and they don't want to do anything to hinder their relationship that they have with the greater community at large. The Rooms is part of all of us. It is that gathering place, Mr. Chair. It truly is.

It is that place where people can go and look up their ancestry or any archival record, and what we've done to digitize that when it comes to looking at art, the procurement of art and its connection with artists, whether they're primarily professional. We've also taken artwork from Canadian artists and from other roles. There's an engagement process to do that.

I can't believe the Member opposite does not understand or is not willing to accept that should there be organizational change, The Rooms will go out and consult.

The Rooms, again, is a very important education and outreach vehicle aiming to provide access to its collections through education programs, travelling exhibits, regional museums, workshops and residency programs. It engages a lot of people. It does incredible work for the small number of staff that it has.

The Member opposite may be very interested in knowing that last year in the 44 staff it held, 27 were female and 17 were male. These were funded in part by The Rooms operating grant from the provincial Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, but The Rooms employs a number of part-time staff on an annual basis that's covered off by admissions, visitor services and various operations.

The greater ability that The Rooms has to raise revenue, to do outreach and have that vision where it has that connection to the community and be a success in terms of using its foundation to secure donations, working with the community, expat Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, then it has that ability to grow; to grow its staff, to grow its operations and to continue to do good work.

I want to point that out, that's something that The Rooms is doing. It carries out its mandate not on a shell on its own, Mr. Chair. It works with various parties, including funding agencies, government departments, professional associations. The Rooms partners The Rooms work.

The Rooms partnered with the International Grenfell Association using a generous grant from donors to do work in processing, cataloguing and making available archival records of the IGA as part of a multi-year project. This arrangement and descriptive project will allow The Rooms to better showcase the records of IGA that are within their collection. This is good, this is good work. This is the type of partnership that we want to do.

The Canada Council for the Arts, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development K-12 cultural connections and everything that it does in consultation with the Minister of Education. There's a lot of good work from a K-6 perspective in school programming designed specifically to augment their social studies program.

I commend the Minister of Education, the Member for St. John's North, for working on that particular matter in consultation with The Rooms, because more than 7,300 students from within the K-12 system participated in the curriculum-linked education programs at The Rooms during 2015-2016. That's a lot of people, that's a lot of students. That's a broad-based connection.

For the Member opposite to be pointing out that there is a lack of partnership, that there is lack of communication, that there is lack of ability to connect and partner; they're a shared commitment. The Rooms, its corporation, the board of directors, its advisory group, its staff;

they all work. They are connected to the community. They do good work. They'll continue to do good work because The Rooms is mandated to make sure the things that I just had listed off, that they're going to do.

But right now the old 2006 act is prescriptive. It allows for stagnation and lack of growth. The Rooms is stating that without change and allowing flexibility to the legislation that currently exists, then, their growth is hindered. That's not something that I want as Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development and I don't think it should be things that this House wants.

So I'm very happy to present this piece of legislation that is here before the House. It's disappointing to see such reaction from the Third Party, in particular, when it comes to this piece of legislation that is put before the House. I've taken a lot of time to answer questions and I'll continue to answer questions for the Member opposite when I sit down.

One other thing that I want to highlight as well is that the Artist-in-Residence Program is very important. The BMO Winterset Award, Canadian Geographic, Canadian Museum of Nature, the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, MUN folklore department, the geography department, the Mummerys Festival, the National Film Board, Nature NL, the Arts Council, the Archeology Society, NIFCO, the Nunatsiavut Government, Parks Canada, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment advisory council, the St. John's International Women's Film Festival, the St. John's Storytelling Festival, St. Michael's Print Shop, Sharing our Cultures, Subsea 7, Wreckhouse Jazz and Blues Festival; The Rooms has an incredible amount of partnerships and connection to the community, the greater community as a whole. Should there be any changes to the organizational structure of The Rooms they will go out and consult.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just a quick question there for the minister; I'm just wondering, if the board does decide there is going to be some change, you're saying they would obviously have to consult with the general public. I'm assuming they have to consult.

First of all, is there anything saying they have to consult or you're just assuming they would consult or you would direct them to consult. If they consult and they come back with recommendations or with changes and the public doesn't agree with those decisions, with those changes, with that restructuring, then what recourse would the public have in that matter?

Right now, if consultations were done prior to a bill coming in the House like this that would take away certain restrictions, well at the very least, if the public had concerns about what that restructuring would look like, they could let their Members know or let the Opposition know and it could be debated in the House or brought forward.

As it see it right now, as I said earlier, what it seems like is going to happen is that we're going to remove restrictions – which I'm not against, by the way. I'm not against removing restrictions and making things more flexible, as you say. I'm glad you're going to retain expertise. But what we're going to do here is we're going to remove that restriction. The board then, at some later date – I'd say they've already got it in their mind of some changes. If they're not already drafted, they're certainly drafted mentally, I would say. I believe there will be a new restructuring plan that will come forward, as I said earlier. Then they're going to go out to the public.

Maybe the restructuring will be great. I hope it is. For all of our benefit, I hope they're going to restructure and that it's going to make The Rooms grow. It's going to grow the program. It's going to grow the public engagement. It's going to grow tourism. I hope all that happens. We all do. But, at the end of the day, when they restructure – and like I said, there is no doubt, I believe they will – if they go to consultation and if people raise legitimate concerns, whether it be people who work in the Archives or work in the arts and the Museum, whether it be academics,

whatever the case might be, what recourse does the public have?

Because right now, if it's a piece of legislation, at the very least they have the recourse of bringing it to the attention of Members in the House so it can at least be debated publicly and so on. I would think the consultation will take place, they'll get advice from people, they'll get feedback and if the board decides to ignore that feedback and go a different route, then people feel they're not agreeable with some of those changes, they'll have no recourse.

As I said earlier, what they'll probably do is they'll probably go to you, as the minister, and you're going to put your hands up in the air and say it wasn't me; that was The Rooms board that did that. The same as happens in Education all the time: It wasn't me; that's the school board.

I think that's what's going to happen here. Just for calcification, I say to the minister, can you confirm that if indeed they have restructuring, if indeed they do public consultations, if after those consultations are done and a restructuring happens and the public doesn't agree with some of that restructuring, what is the public's recourse? Do they have any recourse? I wonder if the minister could just, for the record, say what their recourse would be.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: I thought my questions were done, Mr. Chair, but this will be it for me. I was wondering if the minister could tell us if staff at The Rooms were aware of this legislation that was being brought in. Because throughout the afternoon and into the evening now we've been hearing rumours that people are so concerned about potential job cuts, the rumours that are going around The Rooms, that there were people who wouldn't even participate in decorating the staff Christmas tree at The Rooms today.

We're hearing that staff had no knowledge that this legislation was being brought in and that just leads to the concern and the fear and the apprehension. So there are rumours of layoffs running rampant. There are staffers saying that a lot of decisions do get made that they don't get consulted on and they're made without

explanation. But specifically, my question to the minister: Is this true?

Were staff completely in the dark about this legislation coming to the House? Because for the 44 people that work at The Rooms, given the changes that have occurred already, given the uncertainty in the times we live in, given it's a publicly funded institution, I'm just wondering were they at all in the loop or is this a shock that's leading to further concern and apprehension and fear of layoffs and other changes at The Rooms Corporation?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Chair, I said earlier in the Legislature that there's no plan to reduce staff at The Rooms. When it comes to the success of The Rooms, The Rooms had a bit of a rocky start. In 2004 when The Rooms was ready to open, the former premier of the day decided to keep The Rooms shut for a whole year and allow operations and delay The Rooms from being opening. That's the legacy of the crowd on the opposite side.

It took a long time to build up the success of The Rooms where it is today, 10 years, 11 years later now, what The Rooms has achieved from its staff, the CEO and the board of directors in what it's contributed to the community. It's worked very hard to build a strong relationship with the community at large and the partners that are out there. I've reiterated many partnerships today.

So for Members opposite to be putting out all of this fear mongering, it's irresponsible. It's very irresponsible of all Members opposite, and I want that to stop. But I do want to point out, Mr. Chair, that this legislation allows – why would The Rooms itself want to compromise its reputation and its success that it has built with the community? It wants to grow; it wants to achieve success. Right now, it is hindered by an old act that has a prescriptive legislation and this allows for greater flexibility.

Should there be any organizational change, there would be consultation with the public. That is something that I've clearly stated would happen to the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

So for what the Members opposite are putting forward, I believe it is creating unnecessary fear out there. Especially for the Member for Mount Pearl North to make those statements about rumours and things like that, that are going forward, it's completely unnecessary. And if I haven't –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: – been clear, I've stated previously that there is no plan to reduce staff at The Rooms.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I respect the minister's position, I understand he's passionate and that's admirable. But to suggest that somehow I'm over here fear mongering is not accurate. It's completely inaccurate –

AN HON. MEMBER: Spreading rumours (inaudible.)

MR. KENT: No, the Minister of Education is suggesting that I'm spreading rumours, and that's not true either. But I am sharing with this hon. House, during a debate that we are taking seriously, that there are concerns among some of the staff at The Rooms. There are immediate rumours circulating about their future. There are people who were too upset to help decorate the Christmas tree today because they had no knowledge or awareness that this was coming to the floor of the House of Assembly.

So if the minister wants to stand in his place in this House and accuse me of fear mongering while this is going on down the road at The Rooms, well, I'm sorry. I have a responsibility to make sure that these concerns are raised and that they're heard.

There are concerns among staff about morale at the corporation. I honestly and sincerely hope that some of these changes that are being made will create circumstances under which some of these concerns about how things are going can be addressed. There are concerns around morale. There are concerns around how decisions are made. There are concerns about the level of employee engagement. So rather than acknowledging that yeah, there is some work to do, and there always is in any organization. It's no different than many government bodies and agencies and departments. There are always going to be some challenges.

Given that these challenges are known to us, and we're debating legislation right now that impacts the very people I'm speaking of, I think it would be reasonable for the minister to acknowledge. Rather than accuse me of fear mongering, I think it would be reasonable for the minister to say, we're aware of some of these issues. We have confidence in the board and the leadership at The Rooms to work to resolve them, but we will acknowledge there are concerns.

I'm pleased the minister has said that before changes are made there will be further consultation. I'm also pleased he's committed to no job cuts; no further job cuts at The Rooms. That should provide some comfort. But the fact that those 44 individuals had to find out about all of this through a debate in the House of Assembly speaks to a bigger issue that, I respectfully suggest, somebody needs to address.

So call it fear mongering if you want. I just feel we're trying to do our jobs. I respect the minister's passion on the issue and I'm glad we've been able to have a thoughtful debate this afternoon.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 37 inclusive.

CHAIR: Clauses 2 to 37 inclusive.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 37 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act Respecting The Rooms Corporation.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

CHAIR: Division has been called.

Division

CHAIR: Order, please!

Are the Whips ready?

All those in favour of the motion, please stand.

CLERK: Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Haggie, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Trimper, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Browne, Ms. Gambin-Walsh, Mr. Mitchelmore, Mr. Letto, Ms. Haley, Mr. Bernard Davis, Mr. Derek Bennett, Mr. Holloway, Ms. Parsley, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Reid, Mr. Dean, Mr. King, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Kent, Mr. Brazil, Ms. Perry, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Petten, Mr. Lane.

CHAIR: All those against?

CLERK: Ms. Michael.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The motion is carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 56.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 56.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 56 carried without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 56 carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call Order 3, second reading of Bill 54.

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Seconded by the Member for Lab West.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs that he shall have leave to introduce Bill 54 and that the said bill shall now be read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act Respecting Regulatory Accountability And Reporting.” (Bill 54)

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It’s good to see the Member for St. John’s Centre here, she might want to stay and have a vote on this bill if we need to.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to speak to the *Regulatory Accountability And Reporting Act*. In 2015, the Council of Atlantic Premiers announced an Atlantic Red Tape Reduction –

MS. MICHAEL: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

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

I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Service NL and Member for Humber – Bay of Islands just made reference to the presence or non-presence of the Member for St. John’s Centre in the House of Assembly. I really do think it is a point of order.

It’s not in our Standing Orders; it is referenced in the other books that govern our Legislature, Bosc and – I can’t think of the full name. We do not make reference to Members of this House being in or out of the House. I do ask him to withdraw what he said.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, on a regular basis, we speak about people in the House. It’s when people leave the House or not in the House. I just said I hope the Member is going to vote on this legislation. We do it on a regular basis.

We hope people are going to stand up – I have no idea why they’re so touchy on this bill. I just said I hope the Member is going to stand up and vote on the bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There’s been a point of order raised by the hon. Member for St. John’s East – Quidi Vidi. I will review the transcripts of what the Minister of Municipal Affairs has said and report back to the House tomorrow.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I’m sorry if I touched a nerve over on some great legislation, especially The Rooms. It was a great piece of legislation that the Member – the Opposition all voted for it. Mr. Speaker, I just thought it was a great piece of legislation.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the minister to contain his comments to the legislation now before the House.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to speak to the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*. In 2015, the Council of Atlantic Premiers announced an Atlantic Red Tape Reduction initiative to identify business regulations and administrative processes that could be harmonized or streamlined. The overall goal was to make it easier for companies to conduct business across the borders of Atlantic Canadian provinces.

Complementary to this initiative, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia created a Joint Office of Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness 2015 to help advance the initiative. PEI joined later in the year.

This new legislation will facilitate our participation in this office. As a result, Newfoundland and Labrador will be able to join the other Atlantic provinces to explore initiatives, like establishing a common date for future minimum wage increases, harmonizing employment standards reporting and harmonizing procurement documentation.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to note that our participation in this initiative will not create cost for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Joint Office is already established in Nova Scotia and staffed by employees of their provincial government. All staffing requirements to support our participation in this initiative will come from existing resources.

I'm also pleased to note that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has shown their support for our participation in this initiative. They see it as an effective step forward in reducing red tape, which will support small business and help them grow the economy.

Mr. Speaker, the proposal to join the Joint Office of Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness is consistent with a stronger tomorrow, mainly to build a stronger and smarter economy to reduce red tape.

My mandate letter from the Premier committed to create an attractive business environment and cut red tape. The work of the Joint Office is consensus based and focuses on mutually agreed upon initiatives. Participating in the Joint Office features four key points: the adoption of a premier's charter outlining a shared approach with developing and assessing regulations; the adoption of common legislation; the adoption of a common approach for measuring regulatory impact; and exploring initiatives such as establishing a common date for future minimum wage increases, harmonizing employment standard reporting and harmonizing procurement documentation.

There's a sunset clause five years from now that allows a review of the legislation to ensure it is meeting its goals and objectives. It's important to note that our government will only participate in initiatives that we mutually agree upon. For example, Newfoundland and Labrador has some of the best occupational health and safety standards in the country. We would not agree to any harmonization of occupational health and safety regulations across the provinces if that has the potential to water down the strength of our own regulations.

Our participation in this initiative will be transparent to the public. An annual report will

be issued regarding the Joint Office activities and it will be made available on the website for the initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to participating in initiatives that reduce red tape and make the business environment more attractive. A Joint Office supports the goal of harmonizing business applications and other regulatory processes and to work together to reduce red tape.

We will not be adding to any regulatory burden that businesses must face. Our goal is for our governments to work together so that the regulatory burden that businesses see across the province is minimized. There are no concerns with the Joint Office being located outside the province. Our government enters into this agreement as an equal partner, has the right to refuse participation in activities it does not see as beneficial and has the right to exit this partnership in five years, or sooner, if not realizing sufficient benefits.

The primary function of legislation is to simplify a commitment to reduce regulatory burden jointly with the other Atlantic provinces. This legislation will provide authority to adopt the Atlantic Premiers' Charter, which is much like the regulatory impact already used by this province and so adoption will be easy; require the development of an annual report with respect to the Joint Office's work; require a review of the Joint Office to be conducted after three years; and allow for a sunset provision at year five for legislation.

It should be noted that *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Acts* have all received Royal Assent in the other respective provinces across Atlantic Canada. This legislation will support our province's full participation in this worthwhile initiative with the other Atlantic provinces.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my comments on the proposed legislation. Once again, I thank the hon. Members for their support of this important initiative.

Thank you.

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

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

It's a pleasure to get up here and speak on Bill 54, *Regulatory Accountability And Reporting Act*. Mr. Speaker, when you look at this act, in general terms, you hope that it will work and you can see that there will be a lot of positive things that could come out of this act. Again, the minister gave a great description of what the act really does. It strives to harmonize regulations in Atlantic Canada, streamlining processes and regulations where there are a lot of similarities.

What you'll see is that some businesses in Atlantic Canada or right across Canada – I mean, they have operations through the provinces and if you have different regulations in place, sometimes it's difficult for them to do business. Sometimes a lot of red tape can cause businesses not even want to come here to have their business here with Newfoundland and Labrador.

This Joint Office was created in 2015 and it started off with Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, two of those provinces, then, in November, PEI decided that they would like to get involved in it too. And now we're here today saying that it would be a good thing for Newfoundland and Labrador.

The act that we're bringing in here today is very similar to the acts that they brought in in Nova Scotia and PEI. The one thing that the minister did mention that time and it is very important to mention is that most of these regulations that come into place, it's up to us and it will be our decision to say we'll want to abide by that regulation. They're not binding.

There's nothing that will come in that will force businesses to say this is the regulation that's in PEI or Nova Scotia or New Brunswick and you have to do the same thing in Newfoundland. That's not the way it works. There will be regulations that will make it easier for all of us to be able to do the same in the province, but if there's something there, if there's an issue we don't wish to be in, then we don't really need to go into it.

These initiatives exist also in Western Canada. In BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, they have a similar regulatory process where their regulations – what it is, and the minister's right, it's trying to cut down on red tape and making sure that if you're doing business in one province, you should be able to do business in the other province too. As long as you're not impeding businesses and there are regulations that are going up against what we're trying to do here with a business. Also, in Central Canada, too, if you look at – Quebec and Ontario has a similar thing.

It's important because in January 2015, all four provinces agreed to create an Atlantic Red Tape Reduction Partnership. This is another partnership that we will be able to continue, just similar to what we're doing now. Partnerships focus on harmonizing and streamlining business regulations.

If we look at this; like I said, this came in in 2015. It's something that I think we could all work with and it could benefit a lot of businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are some things that are there, you could look at standardizing carrier companies for trucking systems and stuff like that is important. There are also employment standards and labour standards that have regulations that can also benefit us here and eliminate people having to duplicate it in each province.

Also, the minister spoke that time about timelines. Within three years there will be a comprehensive review undertaken in this office and the province will decide then whether it wishes to continue with it or whatever. The legislation itself, and he mentioned the sunshine clause. If we look at this in five years and say this is not for Newfoundland and Labrador, it's okay for the rest of the Atlantic provinces, we can just get out of it and go our merry way, basically.

Some of the benefits to this; if you look at the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council report, they believe that Atlantic Canada is really overregulated. They see this as a great benefit because it will take away a lot of the red tape that's already in place and it will make competitiveness in Atlantic Canada better. Also, what they said is that intergovernmental trade

will be more important in Atlantic Canada, and the economy of Canada as a whole, and eliminating trade barriers with the rest of Canada also.

I have a few questions for the minister when we do get into Committee, but overall I can see a benefit of this bill. I can see that it can benefit – any time that we make our businesses competitive in Atlantic Canada, any time that we can make our businesses make less red tape, less regulations for them to be able to do and operate and compete with other companies right across Atlantic Canada, I think, is a good thing.

So we'll have some questions for the minister in Committee, but right now that's it.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will be keeping my remarks very short. It's a pleasure to rise and to have a few words on this bill.

The only thing that I will add to what the minister has said – because I think he's explained it quite well. The Member for Cape St. Francis also has reiterated that and seems to be in agreement. The only thing that I will mention is I go back to my municipal days when we started the Atlantic Mayors' Congress. That was a congress that consisted of mayors of the major towns in all four provinces. I'm going back 10, 12 years maybe.

It was discussed, then, how important it was for Atlantic Canada and all the provinces to be on the same page when it came to regulations or when it came to lobbying the federal government. Whatever it was for, we needed to put in place a mechanism whereby we were not competing with each other. We, as Atlantic Canada, are very small in the grand scheme of things in this great country of ours. We need to be working together more in order to achieve what we need to achieve and be successful and sustainable.

So this piece of legislation, I think, goes a long way to enhance that and to certainly support what many people in Atlantic Canada –

politicians, whether it's on the municipal level, provincial level or the federal level. What we're trying to do is work together and be stronger in this great Dominion.

Having said all that, I certainly applaud the minister and the people in the department who have seen the vision here, that it's important to join this council. We look forward to working with them to standardize our regulations and to work together, as I said.

It has been noted by the previous two speakers, if we find within three years that it's not working then we have an option to opt out and do something different. I can assure you that I don't think that will happen because it's another example of working together for a common cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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'm happy to stand and speak to Bill 54 this evening and thank the minister's office for the briefing that was received.

Yes, we will be voting for this bill. I think it is important that since this Joint Office of Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness exists with the Maritime Provinces involved, I think it is important that we as Newfoundland and Labrador be involved. It doesn't mean I don't have some concerns and some questions, I do. I hope that we will be able to have a good discussion around a couple of them.

Some of the things the minister mentioned, and they were mentioned in the briefing also, of the things that would be harmonized like employment standards and labour standards, work, health and safety standards. One of the things that seems to exist, and the minister referred to it obliquely, is that it seems to me every time there has been an agreement reached among the three provinces to date and when we joined, the four provinces, it has always been the

highest standard that is followed. So if the four provinces are looking at an area that they want to harmonize, they don't go to the bottom, who has the least standard, they go to the top and choose the top standard. For most things, that seems to be the case, and I think that's very important.

The whole issue of procurement, I think is extremely important too. The whole thing of developing common documents for all the provinces regarding procurement of goods, services and construction services, I hope is going to lead to something positive for our people here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There is a period at which, as the Member for Labrador West just said, we're going to be able to review and see if it's working. I do have some concerns with regard to the construction services, for example. It's not clear what's being talked about here. Are we talking about the free movement of workers from one province to the other? If we are, could that be good for us or bad for us? That's what we don't know, and that's one of the concerns I have.

The thing with the legislation is the legislation has no details like that in it. The legislation is just a framework. It's the same way with the MOU that exists between the other three provinces. Everything is framework. It talks about regulatory governance, but it doesn't really talk about what are the regulations.

It's not until you go, actually – and I had to do this to get some handle on what the Joint Office deals with. It's not until I went to the 2015-2016 annual report that I actually got to find some very, very specific details about what really is being dealt with inside of the Joint Office. You realize then that what regulation means in the legislation, because you really don't get it from the legislation. But in practice – and that's what the report gives us – we find so much of what is being covered by the Joint Office that it can make one nervous. So I think we really are going to have to be on top of, when we talk about red tape reduction, that it's really red tape we're talking about.

I think there's much more to what I see in this document than just red tape, for example. The issues – and I have a reason for being concerned,

because the issues are coming out of what some other people are writing, Mr. Chair. It's not what's in the legislation. It's not what the minister is saying, but some of the expectations of other organizations. When we look at the report, for example, from APEC – which is the Atlantic Provinces' Economic Council – it's really interesting to see what they say, because in an article, a 2016 APEC report on red tape reduction, they refer to alcohol sales and citing our province as not being accessible to brewers from other provinces.

Now we all know this has been an issue for a long time that pops its head up every now and again. We're at a stage in our province where, for example, the microbrewery is really growing; it's growing in a big way. We're finding microbreweries now all over the province; I know especially on the Island. I'm not sure about Labrador. The Member for Labrador West might be able to answer that one if it's important to him. But certainly on the Island the microbreweries are growing up everywhere.

My concern is how would that get affected, for example, if somebody decided to really push this from one of the other provinces to remove barriers, basically, is what that would mean and if the removal of barriers is going to hurt our people here in the province, because a lot of microbreweries in the other Maritime provinces – will the competition become very, very heavy for us? Are we going to have our people being affected negatively?

I do have concerns about that whole barrier issue and the dropping of barriers. So I would like the minister to speak to that a bit because that's a bit different than looking at standards, like labour standards, workplace health and safety standards and having common standards. That's one thing, but when you get into removing barriers like the barrier that is in place with regard to alcohol sales, then where do we go.

It's difficult because we have inequality even in the size of our provinces in terms of population. Now PEI, obviously, is really small, but we come second in population in the four provinces. Is this going to be a case of a bigger province like Nova Scotia benefitting more because of the much larger population? I know they have these

kinds of joint ventures out West, BC and Alberta for example. But there's much more equality there in terms of size and economy in particular.

It is a serious concern that I have. I have –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That helps.

I do have some questions that I want to bring up, but some of them are very specific. I'll probably bring them up in Committee stage. For example, will we get to see the memorandum of understanding here in the House of Assembly before it's signed, or is that just something that's going to be in the hands of the Lieutenant Governor in Council because there will be an MOU that will have to be signed? Will that be debated here in the House? Or once we pass the legislation, is everything just passed over then to the Lieutenant Governor in Council?

Will agreements or the ongoing negotiations and agreements now inside this Joint Office – will those topics come here to the House of Assembly for a discussion? Or once again is putting the legislation in place, the act – that means that government then just goes ahead and represents us in the joint council or the Joint Office, basically, and we have to trust that they are going to always be there getting the best thing for our people, for our workers, for our small-business people, because these are the ones that I'm concerned about.

One of the things that interested me – and again, this is not a detail in the legislation, but it's an example of what the Joint Office has dealt with – and it's the minimum wage. I found this interesting that they came to an agreement, as it exists right now with New Brunswick, PEI, and Nova Scotia, that from here on in minimum wage changes would always be made on April 1.

Now last year, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick did it on April 1, 2015. PEI was not yet part of the group. They became part of the group in November so they then named April 1, 2016, as the point in which they would step in and become part of the whole process of making

changes to the minimum wage on April 1. That's great. The explanation is that all provinces – and I presume we would become part of that because we're not part of it yet. We have two changes for next year.

I think what would be said, when we become part of this office, is that we'd make one change. It begs to question why we couldn't have just gone right up to 50 cents on April 1 instead of April 1 and the fall. It's the same budget. Why couldn't we have just done the one change on April 1 and anticipated that when we are a part of this Joint Office – that when we are part of this and abide by the agreements – that will be what we will have to do, only make changes to minimum wage on April 1.

What I find interesting is that the four provinces came to an agreement on that, but they didn't look at why wouldn't we have the same minimum wage in the whole of the Atlantic provinces. If we did that and we became part of this by April 1, 2017, we would go up to \$11 right away, which is saying that it's the highest standard because PEI has the highest minimum wage right now. It's \$11 an hour.

So I found it rather interesting that the provinces could agree for the sake of business – to help them know what they're dealing with, everybody would change their minimum wage on the same day – but they didn't agree on having the same minimum wage. So I'd be interested in knowing what that discussion is all about. Is that something that our province is willing to put on the table?

There's good in this, but there's also the potential for things not working for our people, especially for our workers if there are no barriers. I know we have to have co-operation and I know we have to be able. If our worker people couldn't go outside of Newfoundland and Labrador when they need a job, we would be in a worse state than we are, we know that. But how do we deal with this without negatively affecting the economy here. The trade barriers are a big one.

As I said, I know that they have it; the wine now, I think, out in the West. They've got more co-operation going on with wine being sold in the different provinces. Our economy is a bit

different here. If we drop the barrier around the beer, for example, what would that mean for us?

These are some of the concerns I have, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, I do have some very specific questions, but I'll wait until Committee to ask them.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to rise this evening and speak to Bill 54, the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*. The basic premise is to allow Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to join the Joint Office of Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness and allow, as well, the adoption of the respective charter.

We're certainly looking to harmonize different regulatory bodies and actions, where appropriate, from across the Atlantic provinces. We look at that from red tape reduction, for integration of commercial activity, regulatory frameworks, things like health and safety training and other initiatives like that. There could be synergies between bringing those together, especially for companies and small businesses that operate in Atlantic Canada and operate in different jurisdictions. Certainly in terms of streamlining their activities, different equivalencies that may exist in one jurisdiction or the other, that we amalgamate those and make it easier to operate.

Oftentimes there are regulations as well, in regard to various activities. So this piece of legislation looks at bringing those together and reducing the amount of red tape or separate regulatory bodies, their agencies that need to be followed in each jurisdiction and look at bringing those together.

This was previously looked at in regard to CRA and an example of occupational health and safety registrations. Oftentimes a company, as an example, would operate in different provinces and would keep on file four separate numbers in regard to activities. So by using something like a CRA number related to occupational health and

safety regulations and registrations, there would be one number that would be used across the jurisdiction for that employer that may have operated in one or two or maybe all the Atlantic provinces. That's an example of the significance of the Joint Office of Regulatory Affairs and what it can do. As I said, in a lot of cases, businesses would operate in more than one Atlantic province. It makes it easier on them to function overall.

The office was created in 2015 by Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The Province of Prince Edward Island later joined in November 2015. As well, by joining, the province would adopt the Premiers' Charter of Governing Principles for Regulation. The actual act, Bill 54, the bill that we're looking at here today, was passed in New Brunswick, PEI and Nova Scotia. So we're basically looking at mirroring what's been done in other jurisdictions to become part of overall Atlantic Canada in regard to this office.

I understand, too, there's a five-year sunset clause. Once you join I think you're there for five years. Then, after that, it's reassessed in terms of where you are in regard to moving forward and what your experience was in terms of being part of the office. I understand, too, in regard to regional co-operation and regional activities from the business perspective, there are similar regional initiatives related to Western Canada where you'd see BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba engaged. As well, in Central you'd see Ontario and Quebec.

It's a known effort to integrate and, as I said before, reduce the regulatory frameworks and the requirements and make synergies between activities of an employer or others doing activities in similar jurisdictions. As you know as well, our activity in regard to the Atlantic provinces, our environment, our size; there are a lot of similarities between what we do. So in that case, this makes some sense in regard to looking at this initiative.

Again, over the past number of years, that are various initiatives in government, and certainly our administration, in regard to red tape reduction and forming various partnerships, and that's what this will do: integrate partnerships with other Atlantic Canadian provinces so the

activities carried on are consistent and of benefit to all concerned.

The other issue that was mentioned earlier by a speaker was looking at employment standards, labour standards, procurement – we talked about earlier – internal trade agreements, those types of things that are in place now that often are negotiated. Procurement is important in regard to similarities in terms of submitting tenders, submitting bids, those types of things. If you get a general recognition in terms of the type of paperwork and the knowledge and expertise you need, if that's consistent, it's important to have that through multiple jurisdictions and it certainly helps as well.

The legislation as well would require that an annual report be prepared and that will be presented to the report of the Joint Office. It is certainly reflective of the activities over the annual period of what has taken place. Within three years, a comprehensive review of the office will be undertaken and that will be made public. After that, there could be a decision to continue with the Joint Office initiative. As I said earlier, the legislation has a five-year sunset clause and all the provinces have agreed to the sunset clause, from my understanding, of five years.

I think as well the previous speaker spoke about the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council Report and some of the thoughts they had in regard to overregulation in the various jurisdictions certainly harms competitiveness of firms related to any and all the provinces. It is important as well as you look forward to economic activity in the various provinces in Atlantic Canada and how we can be most effective. And, in a lot of cases, government needs to get out of the way, deregulate and allow business and properties and business owners and entrepreneurs to do what they need to do to drive the economy and make it successful for all of us.

That's my commentary on Bill 54. I certainly look forward to further debate this evening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 54. I'm not going to take my full 10 minutes, I don't think. I do support Bill 54. I think it's a good initiative. It only makes sense, where we can, to reduce red tape and to create more opportunities when it comes doing business in the other Atlantic provinces. I don't think anybody would really be against that.

I can't say I share the same concern as the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi. I know where she's coming from, where she has concern about if you're going to start knocking down barriers. The example she uses is the micro-breweries and so on and protecting the breweries here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and if we were to start knocking down barriers, would you not be negatively impacting, for example, breweries here.

I understand where she's coming from – and perhaps the minister will respond to that at some point – but it was indicated to me that we don't have to engage in any particular initiative if we don't want to. So basically it's our choice. If we choose to engage in – for example, the Member for Ferryland gave one of the examples that was given to us, talked about workers' compensation and firm numbers so that basically we could agree to be part of a system whereby a company that's doing business in all the Atlantic provinces would use the same workers' comp firm number in all those provinces, which would reduce red tape for that company and make it easier for them to operate. So we could agree to be part of that initiative.

There are a whole bunch of other initiatives we could choose to be part of. But my understanding is that if it came to an initiative like the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi stated, where she talked about knocking down the barrier to breweries, for example, and that would, in doing so, have a negative impact on our breweries here in Newfoundland and Labrador, then it's my understanding that we can choose as a province to say, no, we don't want to be part of that initiative. That's one that we're going to opt out of. And we have the right to opt in or opt out of any of these agreements.

So we're not going to necessarily be part of any particular initiative. We can if we choose to be, if it's in our best interest, if it's in our mutual interest to be part of it, we will; but if it's something like the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi was saying about the breweries and that's not in our best interest, then we'd say, well, jeeze, we're not going to be part of that. We're not going to do something to harm our own businesses; that wouldn't make sense.

I would assume that any time an initiative were to come forward like that, that we would consult with the businesses or with the industry here in Newfoundland and Labrador to say, look, here's something that's being proposed; do you think that this is going to benefit your business? Is this going to benefit your industry so that you can grow outside of Newfoundland and Labrador, or do you see this as being negative on Newfoundland and Labrador?

Obviously, if that industry should say to us, should say to the government, no, we don't think you should be part of this particular initiative, this will do more harm to Newfoundland and Labrador than it will do good, then I'm sure that our government would say we're not going to be part of that because it's not beneficial.

So I think that all those things and the concerns raised by the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi – I think that those issues will have to be dealt with on a one-on-one basis as they occur, as these initiatives come up. Obviously, we can't come back and forth to the House of Assembly every single time there is some initiative under this framework. At some point in time government has to govern. That's part of the reality. Whether we agree with it all or we don't, they have a right to govern and ministers have to run their departments. If we're part of these entities, well then, that's it. We have to let them do their work. I guess if they make bad decisions that hurt industry and they don't consult, then ultimately they will pay the price at the ballot box at some point in time.

Overall, I think the concept of making it easier, if you will, removing red tape, removing barriers to allow businesses to grow – obviously our interest is so that our businesses in Newfoundland can grow outside of Newfoundland and grow into the other Atlantic

provinces, bringing new revenue into Newfoundland and Labrador that can be taxed and can be spent and so on to help our economy. That's something that we're going to support and we should support.

I guess there's always that balancing act because if you knock down barriers of any kind, if you make it easier to do business, if you're going to make it easier for a Newfoundland business to do business in Nova Scotia, by the same token you're also going to allow that business in Nova Scotia to make it easier for them to do business in Newfoundland and Labrador. So it works both ways.

Obviously, we have to have faith in our business community that they're going to take this as an opportunity and it's going to benefit us more than it's going to harm us on the other side. To some degree, that has to be left in the hands of our business community to see who can outcompete who and who can take advantage of this. That's all part of free enterprise and stuff anyway.

As I said, from an overall point of view, I support it. I think it's a good move. Anything we can do to increase business, support our business community, we should do it because it benefits our economy, it benefits our people. So I support that in principle.

As I said, I do understand where the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi is coming from in terms of knocking down barriers and the potential downside of knocking down barriers. As I said, I believe those initiatives will be, under this legislation, looked at on a case-by-case basis. If Newfoundland and Labrador feels that an initiative that is being proposed is not in our best interest, then we just simply won't do it. Of course, the only way we can confirm that, we can assure that, is we consult with the industry impacted.

Once again, for the record, to use the example the Member used, if it's the breweries we're talking about, that before we would enter into any agreement to knock down barriers relating to breweries, we would consult with our local breweries, our microbreweries and our other breweries to make sure they're on board and

they believe it's an advantage for us to be part of it.

If they don't believe it's an advantage, then we simply don't enter into it. That's the role that government would have to play, and I guess we're going to have to have faith in them that they're going to do it and they're going to do it that way. We can't control that in the House of Assembly. We have to leave it to their judgment and hope they make the right decisions when those opportunities arise.

So that's about all I have to say, Mr. Speaker. I will be supporting the bill.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs speaks now he shall close debate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't stay long, Mr. Speaker, because I heard some of the comments made and I'll answer whatever I can. If I can't answer them, I will take it under advisement and get back.

Some of the concerns that were raised are ill-advised. I know if the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi was at the briefing some of that wouldn't even come up here. I urge you to attend some of the briefings so you can get the information that you can bring forth and have a debate here.

Bringing up something like the brewery that's mentioned, I'll answer all those questions. But I urge all Members to attend the briefings, it's very important. The Member for Cape St. Francis always does, and the other Members do. I encourage – we offer briefings. There's not a piece of legislation that we have put in this House of Assembly yet that we haven't offered in a timely manner a briefing. So I just thank everybody who shows up to the briefings.

I look forward to any questions here now, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 54 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting Regulatory Accountability And Reporting. (Bill 54)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 54 has now been read a second time. When shall the said bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act Respecting Regulatory Accountability And Reporting," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 54)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Service NL, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 54.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 54.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 54, An Act Respecting Regulatory Accountability And Reporting.

A bill, “An Act Respecting Regulatory Accountability And Reporting.” (Bill 54)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

Minister, in Nova Scotia there’s an officer in place for it, and it was done May 15. I’m just wondering, will we be appointing somebody as an officer, regulatory office that can look and see what is happening in Atlantic Canada and see whether we’re going to abide by what they’re doing there or whatever?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Nova Scotia set up an office in Nova Scotia, and that office will oversee the procurement. We have two people assigned from within the department to be part of that. They’re just coordinated, and we have two people in house. It won’t cost any money to the government to be a part of it. The office itself is just set up. We’re just piggybacking; no cost to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for that office or that worker.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John’s East – Quidi Vidi.

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

In the briefing we were told – and my researcher is very good at reporting to me what happens in the briefings – that government will only regulate to achieve policy objectives. There will be no unnecessary regulations.

Minister, if you could just talk to us about, have you any ideas about what would be unnecessary regulations?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do recognize that your staff is very great at the briefings. He’s been to most of the ones that we had actually. He’s a great person. I encourage all Members to attend the briefings. Staff are great, but it’s nice to have the Members there also.

Mr. Chair, any regulation that’s going to downgrade any expertise in Newfoundland and Labrador or any regulations – I’ll use a prime example that we use; occupational health and safety. We have very high standards. Any regulation that comes in that’s going to diminish occupational health and safety standards for the workers, we will not be a part of.

So any regulation that comes in that we feel we could harmonize to keep up with our standards, we will partake. If we see some standards in Atlantic Canada that we can improve ourselves, we will partake. But I can assure you there will be no downgrade of any services because of this harmonization.

We’re looking to enhance all the services in Newfoundland and Labrador. We’re hoping that Atlantic Canada will learn a lot of things from Newfoundland and Labrador, as we will from partners in Atlantic Canada.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much.

Minister, in the briefing we talked about the annual report. They said that it would be online. I’m just wondering why that wouldn’t be brought to the House, especially in the sunset clause where you have it that after five years,

obviously, there has to be some decision made by government.

Wouldn't it be good to bring that report so that we could probably discuss it in the House and see whether – because I'm sure there will be businesses that will come back and say this made me not competitive or whatever. I'm just wondering why it wouldn't be brought to the House.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Chair, what we find on many occasions is that when we bring in – and we see it here in this House on a regular basis, we take a report, we table the report. What we see on a regular basis is that more people would read it if it's online. That's one of the recommendations, is to put it online.

Just to let you know, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business supports this 100 per cent. They said if you put the reports online, more people will look at it, more people will go it and see if we are keeping the commitments that we made, what changes we made. It's much better.

We know when we table reports in the House, sometimes we read them and sometimes we don't. If we don't bring it to the media attention or the media doesn't bring it to attention, it gets lost. This way here it's online; more people across Atlantic Canada can look at it – Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, readily available. The reason why is to ensure that more people have the opportunity to avail of what reports are when they're put online.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

Minister, I'm wondering with regard to the joint council, can you envision there might be times that you're working on something that has such implications it would need to come to the House to be discussed here before reaching an agreement with the other provinces? Or do you see everything being worked on totally and you take care of it and just come back and report.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. JOYCE: I can't predict the future but I know that anything that's in this to help regulations and support Newfoundland and Labrador and to improve the services in Newfoundland and Labrador, we would take care. But I can't see anything major that's going to come of this because this is more regulatory, to cut – the red tape reduction.

This is not about bringing in or cutting jobs or competing against other companies. This is completely red tape so that we can cut the red tape across Newfoundland and Labrador and Atlantic Canada, to streamline things all around Atlantic Canada.

I don't know, but I doubt very much and I can't envision any major incident where we're going to have to bring it back to the House to get a decision. I don't envision that. It wasn't set up for that and it's not going to be a part of that. I can't envision any serious incident or any serious decisions that would have to come back to the Legislature.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: (Inaudible) in the regulations, is there some way that small business can deem that, okay, due to the regulations they're not competitive any more. Do they have some means to say to the regulatory committee this is something that we really don't want? How would a small business come back to this joint council and say this is making my company non-competitive because of regulations that are in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and PEI?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. JOYCE: None of these regulations that are going to be put in place are going to impede any business. It's not the intent to impede any business, it's to standardize it. So there's nothing in there that we're going to put in any of these regulations that is going to prohibit a company from coming to Newfoundland or going because that's not part of it. We already have this flow of

information. I'll use the prime example of trucking going back and forth; just regulating the standards for the trucking so we all have the same safety standards.

This is not about putting restrictions in for business to improve business opportunities; this is to reduce the red tape which already exists there. This is not going to be part of decision making to try to improve jobs or compete with jobs, and what goods we can sell, what goods we can't sell. This is about reducing the red tape across Atlantic Canada.

CHAIR: Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 11 inclusive.

CHAIR: Clauses 2 through 11 inclusive.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

Those against?

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 11 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

Those against?

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act Respecting Regulatory Accountability And Reporting.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Mr. Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 54.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 54.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): The hon. the Deputy Chair of Committees.

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 54 carried without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 54 carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the said bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, earlier today we did first reading of Bill 57. I would ask my colleagues if I have leave to move Bill 57 for second reading.

AN HON. MEMBER: Agreed.

MR. A. PARSONS: I say thank you to my colleagues, Mr. Speaker.

I would move from the Order Paper, Motion 1, second reading of Bill 57.

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move Bill 57, seconded by the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 57 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, “An Act To Amend The Municipal Elections Act.” (Bill 57)

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

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

I rise again to bring in Bill 57, a bill to amend the *Municipal Elections Act*. As we know, this is a bill we’re bringing in to amend the elections act. Contribution was defined earlier as a contribution of money and only captured monetary contributions, therefore it was possible for candidates to get significant campaign support through in-kind contributions such as printing, signage, office space and advertisements without having to report those contributions or consider them with respect to any campaign limit which may be set by a municipality.

It is proposed that the *Municipal Elections Act* is amended so contributions now include in-kind contributions. Making this change will bring the *Municipal Elections Act* in line with the definition of contributions at both the provincial and federal level. That will include both monetary and in-kind contributions.

Furthermore, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador in 2005 passed a resolution requesting the *Municipal Elections Act* be amended to include the in-kind contribution. So to the House, this was a motion by Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador asking us to do it. I’m sure all Members in the House of Assembly will agree that we’re going to abide by that and approve this as quickly as possible.

This is if anybody wants to put something in-kind now, for example wants to give a \$75 in-kind contribution to print some brochures, that has to be included now as part of the election expenses. Anybody who wants to donate a telephone service, if it’s under \$100, has to ensure now that it’s part of the election and it’s part of the donations that are given and it has to be recorded. It has to be part of the overall expenses.

The legislation to be amended defines what is not considered in-kind contributions as well as in-kind contribution or value. The proposed

amendments are consistent with the province's legislative regime as found in the *Election Act, 1991*.

Mr. Speaker, of course, there are fines there. If someone is reported and there's an investigation, there are fines there of \$1,000 and/or imprisonment of that. So if you break the rules of municipalities, the provincial laws and the provincial election act will then be able to impose the fines on it.

Mr. Speaker, it's very hard to enforce but we were asked to do it so that everybody would have a level playing field. This bill again, as I said, it was asked to be brought forward by Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador just so everybody has a level playing field in an election. And we're just following through with that.

I look for any comments, and as the Member for Cape St. Francis is going to speak on it, I'm sure, as a former member of a council he supports this and, as part of MNL, he supports this 100 per cent. I look around and there are other people here that also were on councils that were probably at the MNL convention when this was passed. I feel very confident that this is going to pass through the Legislature very quickly, as it is a thing that everybody wants and everybody wants to have a level playing field.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It's indeed a privilege to get up and speak on this bill also. Being a former municipal leader myself, in small towns it probably doesn't make a big lot of difference of what we're really doing here because most of the people operate their elections out of their homes and they make up their own signs. If they're going to do a drop off, they do it themselves. But when you get into the larger towns and there's an election and you'll see people that donate office space, for example, and the other person has to go out and pay for office space, it can mean a lot to a campaign.

I understand that the City of St. John's brought this amendment forward at MNL and what it is doing, basically, is printing and signage, for example – if you've got a friend that can do signage – signage can probably be, in any election, one of the most expensive things that you'll do because it costs a lot of money to put signs out. If you look at municipal elections, sometimes, there are as many signs out as there are federal or provincial. So if someone's going to donate to you, that is an awful advantage that a person would have.

Office space again, it's important. Somebody may own a business and they may have a space in the business where they just give it to somebody, and it's an advantage that that person would have; also with advertising.

So I think this is a bill that we can all agree on that it puts everything on a level playing field. That's what you should be. In an election, people shouldn't have a disadvantage over one person to the next person, whatever it comes to. No matter what kind of election, whether it's federal or provincial.

The minister also just mentioned that time that this is consistent with what we do as the provincial government. It's also consistent with the federal government. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to say much more about it, but I think it's a good bill. I think that any time we make any election that it's fair for everybody, that somebody doesn't have a big disadvantage over another person. It's an important piece of the legislation that we should be bringing in.

I have a question for the minister when we do get into Committee – only six.

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

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

I'm glad to speak on Bill 57 in support of this bill the Minister of Municipal Affairs has brought forward, and I'm glad to see the Member for Cape St. Francis supportive of this bill as well.

I had the pleasure of being on St. John's City Council at the time we brought this forward. It

actually came out of an election financing reform I was bringing forward as the councillor in St. John's. So this was one of three pillars that we worked on and we sent it to MNL and it got unanimous support at the convention, and we're quite happy to be supporting that.

Part of the reason, as the Member for Cape St. Francis and the minister said, was for fairness and equality right across the board. So a candidate that comes in doesn't have to face someone that has the contacts to have office space or signage or advertising budgets donated to them. This was part of the reason – and I agree with the Member for Cape St. Francis; it may not be an issue in some of the smaller municipalities where people put their name on a ballot and get elected based on their name in their community, which is excellent, and that's great.

This was brought in place because elections are a big opportunity and a big expenditure in the City of St. John's, as well as other municipalities across this province. This is a great initiative. I'm happy to be on this side of it now, to be able to vote it here in this Legislature.

I won't take any more time than that; I just wanted to say thank you to the minister for bringing this forward and I'm looking forward for everyone to support this bill.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

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

I am glad to stand and to speak to Bill 57. It's, in one way, a very small bill. It's an important bill, but in terms of the bills that we deal with maybe a little bit smaller than some of the ones we deal with. One of the things I'd like to say, I do support it, but I'd like to actually congratulate not just Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador for this resolution that came out of its convention, but I do want to congratulate the

minister because I think the minister now – this is the second time we've had an amendment brought to the House that is resulting from a resolution at the MNL convention. It shows how the minister is working with MNL, which I think is really important.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: He could teach a lesson to some of the other ministers, I say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: Let some of the other ministers learn what real consultation is. He's not afraid to listen to a resolution from that convention and say I accept it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: He didn't amend it. He didn't say, oh, we can't do this. They didn't question it. This is what MNL wants, this is what the municipalities want; we're going to do it.

Too bad the minister earlier today, his colleague, didn't look at – gee, I wonder what the arts groups are thinking, I wonder what people in the historic monuments association are thinking. Let's do what they might be telling us.

They could learn from this minister, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I say. There's not a lot he and I agree on, but I am willing to give him credit for this.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. MICHAEL: So I hope someday he'll give me credit for something too, Mr. Speaker. It must be late in the evening. We didn't have supper but we all get a little bit silly after 7 o'clock.

However, I'm not being silly; I mean it very sincerely, actually, that it's really important the minister listen to what Municipalities NL is

saying. As my colleague for Cape St. Francis said, this is something that's really important for smaller municipalities, probably more so than larger ones, when it comes to adding in-kind contributions to contributions in municipal elections.

Small businesses; very often it's not easy to give out the cash, but the in-kind contribution is easier to deal with. So it really is important in rural Newfoundland but in the cities as well. So recognizing that in-kind contributions are necessary, that in-kind contributions will really help the municipal elections, if people know – and this has to be an education that goes on. If people out there know they can have in-kind contributions recognized, you may get more people running. It may make it easier for some people, especially in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, to run if they know they can use in-kind contributions.

I also like the way the bill deals with an employee who is working on somebody's campaign and the employer co-operating and letting the employee do it. It's an in-kind contribution of a human resource. The employer gets credited with the in-kind contribution but it also shows the spirit of co-operation that is really necessary in smaller communities in particular.

So, yes, I like the bill. I like what is in it. I thank Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador for the resolution, and I thank the minister for bringing it forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 57, An Act to Amend the Municipalities Act. Obviously, this is an issue that I've had dealing with in my years serving on council in the City of Mount Pearl, and having gone through three elections.

Mr. Speaker, I have no problem with the bill. What the bill is doing really is just saying that you have to quantify and you have to report in-kind contributions as opposed to just task

contributions. I am a little confused by some of the commentary I've heard from my colleagues on both sides of the House, to be honest with you.

I'll ask a question of the minister when we get to Committee of the Whole, but my understanding of what is here is we're just simply saying you have to now count in-kind contributions. Then you would have to report it, because under the Municipalities Act and the City of Mount Pearl Act – as far as I know, to my recollection when I was involved – if someone donated to you \$100 or more, you had to report that. Now they're saying if somebody donates in-kind contributions to you of \$100 or more, you have to report that. That's all this is doing, unless I'm missing something.

The whole concept I've heard about putting people on an even playing field and all that, that would only apply if there were campaign limits. In other words, if somebody, for example, said – let's say if you're in a municipality and you're only allowed to spend \$10,000, for argument's sake, and then one candidate raised \$10,000 cash, the other candidate raised \$10,000 cash and \$20,000 in-kind, well then they would have an advantage that nobody kind of knew about and didn't have to report it. The same as we have provincially, federally and so on.

I don't think there's a campaign limit municipally, unless I'm wrong; therefore, it's not really whether – if someone has contacts and they can get \$100,000 in in-kind contributions, they're still going to have that same advantage they would have now. The only thing is they have to report it, so everyone knows what businesses or people gave them the money. So if six months later – a signage company and then all of a sudden if there's something that comes on, there's a vote in council or something, you say well, that company there just gave you a \$20,000 in-kind contribution, make no wonder you're supporting it; that kind of an issue.

As far as taking away an advantage, I don't think it does that because there is no limit. So whether it's cash or in-kind, there is no limit on what you can spend. All it really does is forces you to report it. It forces you to report the in-kind because a lot of times companies might say, I want to donate but I don't want people to know

I gave you money. Then, of course, they can say I'll give you \$99 instead of \$100, that way you don't have to report it, or someone could say I'll give you an in-kind contribution as opposed to cash, that way you don't have to report it and nobody knows I gave you that money or the value of that money.

Now if someone gives you an in-kind contribution, it has to be reported on your election expenses that do go public at some point in time. So that's what this is doing, unless there are limits now on municipal campaigns that I wasn't aware of. If that changed I could be wrong but, if not, that's really what this is doing. In either case, I support it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs speaks now he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just thank the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi for the kind words. I mean you're not used to them, to hear them from the Legislature, but I guess you have to take them and they're well deserved.

I must say, I do listen. I do listen to people, but I have to say one thing. As much as I appreciate the kind words, I do try to listen. I always say to people, you may not like what I have to say but I'll be in front of you to say what I have to say and listen.

I have to say, when you mentioned about tourism and the Member for St. Barbe – L'Anse aux Meadows, the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development. Mr. Speaker, here's something I have to say, there's not a minister on this side of the House, not a Member who spoke to more events in Newfoundland and Labrador on behalf of this government than this minister.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi got a little personal vendetta against this Member, but I can tell you one thing, when you talk about listening, this Member, this minister, has spoken and been around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, been in every district in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the minister to stay relevant to the bill.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, when he's in the province, he listens to municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador; he listens to the towns. That's what he does. And this is what this is all about; Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador wanted this. When he's in doing his business, he meets with the councils; he sits down with the councils.

The Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi talking about how he should listen, there's not a minister here who never met with the municipalities when he's in the district, not a minister on this side that met with more people to ask their concerns. So when you stand up and give me praise and want to bring down one of my colleagues who doesn't deserve it, I have to stand up and defend this because I know (inaudible) I can tell you that right now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I can tell you because he was even out in Corner Brook last weekend meeting with the outfitters. Guess what? He met with councils out that way about some of these issues, if you want to speak about relevance.

So when you want to talk about someone not listening, pick on someone who doesn't listen, pick on someone who's not around. Don't pick on this minister and this Member who is open, he's accessible, he's transparent. He meets with any group that wants to meet with him. I know how many times he speaks, I know how many people – he's there, I could tell you that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know I need the protection but that's fine.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: The Member for Cape St. Francis was saying something nice to me. I thank you for the compliments. Thank you very much.

MR. K. PARSONS: (Inaudible.)

MR. JOYCE: I'm not sure what he said, Mr. Speaker. But, anyway, thank you very much for the compliment. I know I met with a lot of councils in your district and I appreciate the kind words also.

The Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, if you're going to use me for praise, don't try to drag down one of my colleagues who doesn't deserve it. I will not be the one to stand and take praise and let one of my colleagues be dragged down when he doesn't deserve it.

On this bill, thank you very much everybody for supporting this bill. Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador wanted this. I'll just say I heard someone talk about the election. Each municipality sets their own rules on their limits, certain limits. Some have no limits and some do have some limits. So this is why this is important to the smaller towns and all that.

I just want to thank everybody for supporting this bill. I'm sure there might be a question or two in Committee – I'm not sure. Before I close; the Member for St. Barbe – L'Anse aux Meadows and the Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, thank you very much for coming down in Humber – Bay of Islands and meeting with some people in my area, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you very much for all the work that you're doing. I can tell you when you ask around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador what minister is out in Newfoundland and Labrador, it's that minister. I just want to personally thank you and thank the Member for

St. John's East – Quidi Vidi for the compliments. I'm just going to share it with my colleague here.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 57 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Municipal Elections Act. (Bill 57)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a second time. When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Municipal Elections Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 57)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Service NL, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 57.

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

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

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Kent): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 57, An Act To Amend The Municipal Elections Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Municipal Elections Act." (Bill 57)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Against?

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Municipal Elections Act.

CHAIR: Shall the preamble carry? No –

CLERK: No.

CHAIR: It's been a while, folks. You have to bear with me.

Shall the title carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 57.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 57 without amendment.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

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

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

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 57 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 57 carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first thank my colleagues on this side for leave to debate this last piece of legislation.

Given this hour, I would move, seconded by the Member for Bonavista –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: – that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: He can't speak but he can second the motion.

The motion is that the House now adjourn.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., being Private Members' Day.

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