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Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we begin today, I'd like to make a couple of announcement, one regarding some technical issues we're having in the House of Assembly broadcast. Yesterday, we became aware of some technical difficulties with the broadcast in areas where cable service providers are using a satellite downlink for distribution. So, in fact, some folks out there in TV land may not be watching us, as I'm sure they like to do on each session.

So, I wanted them to know that customers of cable service providers that carry the broadcast using fibre distribution are not affected. The House of Assembly is working with our satellite service provider to find a resolution. Residents in affected areas can view the House proceedings on, of course, the House of Assembly website.

I'd also like to speak next on a point of order that was raised yesterday by the Member for St. John's Centre. That point of order was raised in accordance with Standing Order 49. The Member for St. John's Centre indicated that in the course of delivering a petition she heard another Member of this House use unparliamentary language towards her. The matter was taken under advisement at that time. I have had an opportunity to review *Hansard* and to also review the video record of the debate leading up to the point of order.

Our Standing Orders are the rules agreed on by this House. They are the orders which allow us to conduct order and decorum in the House. Primary among these is Standing Order 7(1), which states in part as follows: "The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and shall decide questions of order."

Standing Order 49 states: No Member shall "use offensive words against any Member of this House."

In addition, the Members of this hon. House have endorsed and are therefore bound by their Code of Conduct. A second paragraph of the

Members' Code of Conduct states: "Members of this House of Assembly respect the law and the institution of the Legislature and acknowledge our need to maintain the public trust placed in us by performing our duties with accessibility, accountability, courtesy, honesty and integrity."

These are serious matters and Members must be aware of their obligation to behave appropriately in this Chamber. In this House, a word, phrase or behaviour must be seen within the context of how and what was said and done. Some actions are unparliamentary in some contexts and not in others. The essential root of supporting or not supporting this point of order is however whether or not the challenged actions are seen to be disruptive and therefore unparliamentary.

Having reviewed *Hansard* and the video record of debate at that time, the unparliamentary language in question cannot be discerned; therefore, there is no point of order. However, I would like to take this opportunity to remind all Members of their duty to preserve dignity and decorum in this hon. House and that I expect them to govern themselves accordingly.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today, we will hear statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of Fogo Island – Cape Freels, Conception Bay East – Bell Island, St. George's – Humber, Virginia Waters – Pleasantville and Topsail – Paradise.

The hon. the Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels.

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I rise in this hon. House to inform my colleagues of the success we have had in my district with regional co-operation.

Some time ago, the Towns of Lumsden, Newtown, Wesleyville, Greenspond and Valleyfield, along with the local service district of Cape Freels, met to discuss the idea of building an arena. A joint committee was struck and the work began.

This year marks the 25th season for Beothic Arena. We have had challenges, but have

succeeded in providing recreation for local residents for a quarter of a century.

It is with great pride the volunteer committee continues to govern. We started out thinking of only hockey, but soon added the Crystal Gliders Figure Skating Club. Later, our icemakers perfected the art of making curling ice, thus adding more interest into the building. The inside walls are lined with banners from successful competitions. In the off-season, the ice surface gets transformed to accommodate weddings and other special events.

While many people have contributed to the success of Beothic Arena, it is the co-operation of the town councils that has led to this success. Please join me in thanking the towns and committees responsible for running Beothic Arena.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand today to recognize a constituent of mine who, once again, will be recognized for his exceptional athletic achievements. I speak of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's athlete Colin Abbott who will be inducted into the Canadian Softball Hall of Fame this month.

Colin may very well go down in history as Newfoundland and Labrador's most accomplished softball player. He has won 29 medals at the national and international levels, not to mention the dozens of provincial and Atlantic competition medals.

In international play, he captured three MVP awards, one top batter award and was an all-world selection as an outfielder 15 times. Nationally, he received two top batter awards and six all-tournament team selections as an outfielder and two MVP awards. He has been a great ambassador for the game through his leadership, success and competition diversity and has paved the way for the future softball players in this province.

Colin's accomplishments have been recognized by other sports-governing organizations with his induction into the Newfoundland and Labrador Softball Hall of Fame, the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Hall of Fame and, in 2015, the International Softball Hall of Fame. These are all testaments to the impact Colin has had on softball in Newfoundland, Canada and the world.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Colin Abbott on his induction into the Canadian Softball Hall of Fame.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. REID: Mr. Speaker, entrepreneurs take an idea and turn it into reality. Through their hard work, investments and persistence they create something where nothing existed before. I rise today to pay tribute to a group of entrepreneurs on the West Coast of our province.

The company, Growing for Life, plans to provide fresh vegetables to market year-round. They have already proven that tomatoes can be commercially grown year-round in this province and plan to expand to other crops such as peppers, lettuce and cucumbers.

The operation is a private venture and the greenhouse growing method focuses on using local resources to supply local needs. For example, a wood furnace is being used to heat the operation. Plans are also in place for a farmers' market and a restaurant on site, which will sell produce from other farmers in the area as well.

Growing for Life has accomplished much in a short time and is well on its way to be a major supplier of fresh produce for the province.

I would like all Members to join me in recognizing the work being done by Blaine Hussey, Louis MacDonald, David Hobbs and Scott Madore, the entrepreneurs behind this innovative company: Growing for Life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I recognize the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

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

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 56, in Pleasantville. With November 11 coming this weekend, it is an important opportunity to recognize the valuable role that the Legion plays for veterans.

Ever since its establishment in 1964, the Legion's primary goal is to provide representation, advocacy and financial assistance to serving and retired veterans and their families. As well, they work to ensure the sacrifice of those who served is never forgotten. They do this by organizing the annual poppy campaign each year, which starts on the last Friday in October and runs until Remembrance Day.

Unfortunately, some of us know all too well the importance of honouring those who have given the ultimate sacrifice. I personally lost a close friend of mine on Easter Sunday in 2007 in Afghanistan to a roadside bomb, which forever changed Remembrance Day for those close to him and myself.

I encourage everyone to visit a service of remembrance in your community, and I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking Branch 56 of the Royal Canadian Legion and all Legions across our province for the fantastic work they do to support our veterans, their families and friends.

Lest we forget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I wish, today, to recognize Heather Healey, a resident of Paradise and Team Canada pitcher.

Mr. Speaker, Heather's love of baseball started at a very young age. Heather was first introduced to the sport of baseball at the age of five and came up through the Paradise Minor Baseball system. Last year, she was the starring pitcher for Team Canada on the under 20 national team in the women's international cup held in the Dominican Republic and helped Canada win gold.

In 2014, Heather was the first female to be drafted into the St. John's Amateur Baseball league for the intermediate division and, in 2016, to the senior men's division. She also played with the Capitals in the men's junior A provincials – another first for a female baseball player in our province. Quite the accomplishment, Mr. Speaker, and it doesn't stop there.

Last September, Heather travelled to South Korea with the Canadian women's national baseball team to play in the world cup and there helped Team Canada win a silver medal. It's not surprising that she was this year's Town of Paradise 2017 Female Athlete of the Year and provincial 2017 Senior Female Athlete of the Year.

Mr. Speaker, I feel it would be very appropriate for Members of this hon. House to join me in congratulating Heather Healey and all of her accomplishments so far.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House to highlight the great work of municipal councils, councillors, community administrators and volunteers in our province. Last week, I was fortunate to join the Premier in Corner Brook and take part in the Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador convention and AGM.

The event was a great success as so many of the people working hard to address local governance issues came together to exchange ideas about how we can work collaboratively to improve the quality of life for residents throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, I should note that those who attended acknowledged the excellent work of outgoing Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador president, Karen Oldford, who presided over the events.

On November 1, we held the second annual Premier's Forum on Local Government with 52 delegates representing all areas of the province. We continued the process of consultations on regional government and noted the ideas and concerns from the delegates that we will strongly consider as we address this very important issue.

On November 4, I announced that the department will amend its municipal infrastructure policies to eliminate the requirement for municipalities to enter into a Limit of Service Agreement, which were previously required in order for municipalities to be eligible for cost-shared ratio funding. This will allow us to make quicker decisions related to infrastructure funding.

We anticipate that Phase II – the Investing in Canada Infrastructure fund, should be in place by March 31, 2018. We have also begun a review of the *Municipalities Act* and other municipal legislation, both of which Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador has indicated are very important to them.

I'm very pleased to also highlight our strong relationship with the Professional Municipal Administrators who are undertaking excellent work for our municipalities.

I extend thanks to the executive and all the attendees of the convention and annual general meeting for sharing their knowledge and expertise and for working with our government. We look forward to working alongside them again this year and I know we can accomplish a great deal together as we continue towards our collective goals of achieving greater efficiency, strengthening the province's economic

foundation, enhancing services and improving outcomes for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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.

I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand here today and recognize many hard-working individuals involved in municipal government across the province. As a former mayor, I have attended MNL conferences and I have always found them very useful and informative. Networking among municipal leaders is very important and always gathers lots of information that you can bring back to your towns.

I have been speaking to mayors and councillors in my area, some of who are first time councillors, and they all told me they found the conference very helpful. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all councils, staff and municipalities across the province. I know most of them are volunteers, and what they do for our towns is so important for the life of many residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I was delighted to be able to attend the Municipalities NL AGM convention this year and, as always, congratulations to them for another very successful event.

It was wonderful to see new faces – there were quite a number around – and interesting to listen

to mayors and councillors speaking in the sessions but, as well, to meet them face to face and hear what their concerns are. I am always impressed by their knowledge and insight.

Government must listen closely to these people who are on the ground if we are going to work together to achieve greater efficiency, enhanced services and better outcomes for the people of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for embracing Carrot Rewards and taking steps to becoming healthier.

In June 2016, we launched this free innovative app that engages and rewards users for physical activity and completing healthy, active living quizzes with points from loyalty programs, like Scene and Aeroplan. In *The Way Forward*, our goal was to increase to 10,000 new users by the March 31st, 2018. At that time, there were 18,000 users.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to join Premier Ball to announce that we have achieved and well surpassed our goal. We now have over 32,000 Carrot Reward users in Newfoundland and Labrador. This represents 6 per cent of our residents, which is the highest percentage of users amongst other provinces using Carrot Rewards.

Our government is committed to supporting healthy, active living and surpassing this milestone is placing us on the path to achieve our goals.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of using Carrot Rewards are great. We know that by becoming healthier, we will reduce the demands on our health care system. We also know that physical activity and healthier eating improves our mental well-being. I fully encourage anyone who does not currently use Carrot Rewards to download the app today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Any programs and initiatives that encourage Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to increase knowledge of healthy choices, increase their physical activity and lead healthier lifestyles will be supported by this side of the House. I'm pleased to hear there's an uptake in this app and I hope that more people will continue to avail of these types of programs.

It should not be lost on anyone, though, that the Liberal minister congratulates her government, yet she ignores the fact that it's the same Liberal government that cut health care services in our province, most notably in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

In concluding, Mr. Speaker, I certainly commend the people of this province for showing the initiative to lead healthier lifestyles, and I congratulate them on taking these footsteps.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Bravo to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for doing what they can to be more active and healthy.

If this government were really committed to improving the overall health of the people of this province, they would invest more directly into community recreation and poverty reduction and reinstate the funding they recklessly cut from the Boys and Girls Clubs and the Jumpstart program. People and programs cannot survive on virtual carrots.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate Dr. David Allison on receiving the Public Service Award of Excellence and also thank him for his contributions to Newfoundland and Labrador as he prepares for his retirement next February.

The Public Service Award of Excellence is the highest honour that can be received by public service employees. The award recognizes individuals who display exceptional work performance and achievements in innovation, leadership, relationship building and excellence in service delivery.

As Newfoundland and Labrador's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Allison is a respected voice in the medical community. During the ceremony last week at Confederation Building, some of Dr. Allison's work was highlighted including expansion of the provincial vaccination program to include the HPV vaccine for boys and his work on the effects of opioid misuse.

Dr. Allison is also a member of the Emergency Response Unit with the Canadian Red Cross and has completed short deployments in Haiti and Sierra Leone. Dr. Allison has participated in the development of a Nepal-based training program for general practitioners. Recent visits to Nepal have shown the continued strength of this program in preparing physicians to meet the rural health demands of a developing country.

Dr. Allison also chooses to dedicate his time as a mentor to medical students. He sees the value in nurturing strong relationships, providing insight and support as students prepare to enter their field of study.

Dr. Allison is a leader and a valued colleague. Upon his retirement in February, he will be missed in my department. I wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

I invite all Members to join me today in acknowledging the work of Dr. David Allison.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. This side of the House would also like to commend Newfoundland and Labrador's chief medical officer of health, Dr. David Allison, on an exemplary career in the practice of medicine and congratulate him on receiving the Public Service Award of Excellence.

Dr. Allison is deserving of the highest praise, not just for his professional role he has played in our provincial health care, but also for his humanitarian contributions he has made in the global community.

Dr. Allison's contributions locally and internationally are what have made him a respected leader and valuable mentor to the young men and women who avail of his guidance. I wish Dr. Allison the very best for his upcoming retirement in February and his presence will indeed be missed by many.

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 thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I, too, on behalf of our party want to congratulate Dr. David Allison on winning this prestigious award. Indeed, we all know that he has performed a great service to the people of the province during his term.

He also is giving a wonderful example to the men and women in his profession by working with people in less fortunate countries develop their health care, working with the Red Cross and mentoring medical students. He will, when he retires in February, leave big shoes to fill. Good luck to Dr. Allison in his future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, I made a commitment to make available to the House the purchase orders and contracts of Nalcor since the time that I became minister on January 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017. I'd like to make them available. They are publicly available and online every month.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

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

Outside of the normal protocol, I know usually Tabling of Documents comes a little bit later, but the minister just tabled a number of documents.

Minister, yesterday when you were asked by Members of the Opposition and of the Third Party here in the House of Assembly about these

particular documents, you weren't aware if the documents were even on your desk.

What have you done in the last 24 hours to make sure that legislation has been complied with in relation to these documents?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The act is the *Energy Corporation Act*. It's been enacted since late 2007, early 2008. Mr. Speaker, it does, under section 17 in the Procurement Act section of the act, require the tabling of all purchases and contracts of Nalcor to this House, and that has not been done since the conception of the act, unfortunately. They have been online. So I'll remind the Member opposite that, of course, his government wasn't any more compliant.

Mr. Speaker, we have made them available now at this point and we will continue to put them into the House of Assembly on a regular basis. I will remind this hon. House they are available monthly online.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I appreciate the fact that they're available online, but under the act it does clearly indicate the minister's responsibility to not only receive the reports from Nalcor and its subsidiaries, but also to table and present them here in the House of Assembly.

So I'll ask the minister if the reports that she's tabled in the House today, and the information that she is going to provide – are the reports complete as laid out in the legislation and does it include the subsidiaries: the Muskrat Falls Project, Hydro, oil and gas, Bull Arm, energy marketing and Churchill Falls? Do the reports completely include procurement-embedded contractors for all of those branches of Nalcor?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I did lay before the House today based on the question yesterday was all the subsidiaries of Nalcor that are included under the act. I'll remind the Member opposite – because it is his former government's piece of legislation – that does not include Hydro. Hydro is separate under the definitions of the *Energy Corporation Act*. Theirs are online and made available as well, Mr. Speaker, so they are available.

He did ask about embedded contractors. As he well knows, this government has been clear to Nalcor and to the people of this province that we believe that embedded contractors' information should be made available. The Premier has been very vocal on this, including writing several letters to the Nalcor board on this very issue.

Under this particular piece of legislation –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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. We are going to ask more, Mr. Speaker, because let's not forget this is the government who did promise openness and transparency. This is the minister who didn't know the contents of the former CEO's contract, Mr. Ed Martin, when it was talked about last year. This is the same minister who hid Oversight Committee reports for 18 months, Mr. Speaker. This is the same minister who, yesterday, on this very significant project, didn't even know if the reports were on her desk.

We have to ask more questions about it, Mr. Speaker. The act clearly says that the summary of contracts, the procurement principles adopted and the reports required in the act, which includes a summary of contracts entered into and identities of suppliers, are to be made public.

Minister, is all that information made public in what you've tabled today?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the Member opposite, it is his former administration that sanctioned the project to begin with.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I have spent the last 24 months cleaning up a mess that is unbelievable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the Member opposite – I will remind him again – that this legislation is the former administration's legislation and in that legislation it deals with the Procurement Act. As the people of this province know, the Procurement Act has been changed because there were so many problems with it.

Mr. Speaker, they exempted Nalcor under that Procurement Act.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the hon. Members to respect who I have addressed and identified, who I have recognized. I will not tolerate any more abuses of that.

Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

I'm glad the minister points out that she has been in the office for 24 months, Mr. Speaker – 24 months. Under her watch, the project has grown, when they promised it wouldn't, by another \$1.5 billion. That's what happened under her watch.

Here we have a history under her watch of no Oversight Committee reports being tabled or

shared. She stood and defended it in every way, shape or form without answering it, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to apologize for asking questions about these reports that they didn't table.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, it's important what was raised here in the House yesterday because it's an important piece of legislation.

I'll ask the minister again: I appreciate the history lesson on the project, but does what you tabled here today conform to all the requirements of the legislation? It's a very simple question, Minister.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Everything that I put forward to this House today contains the information that is required under the *Energy Corporation Act*. As I specified to the Member opposite, Hydro, under his definitions, under his legislation, is not required as part of that information.

I will remind the Member opposite that when they developed the legislation, specifically around the Procurement Act, it had to do more, Mr. Speaker, with the procurement processes, around the competitive bidding process, and therefore not sole-source individual contractors; therefore, the embedded contractors are not covered. They didn't want the information put out there, Mr. Speaker. This government is working hard to make sure it is.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

There are six different entities over at Nalcor, which includes Hydro, she mentions. She said they're excluded. So that's one of them. One of the other six is the Muskrat Falls Project. Under

the Muskrat Falls Project, there are embedded contractors, which are suppliers. The act clearly indicates that the identities of suppliers to whom the contracts have been awarded is to be reported every six months.

Minister, does your report include the identities of suppliers and reported every six months?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite should be familiar with legislation that his administration brought forward. There are limitations under that section of the act that specify the *Public Procurement Act*.

The *Public Procurement Act* requires that any of the procurement processes, any competitive bidding processes, are included in the information. Unfortunately, it does not require sole-sourced contractors or consultants.

I have said to the Member opposite, I'll say to this House, I'll say to the people of the province: the Premier has been very vocal on this issue. It does not pass the smell test, as he said, embedded contractors –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm going to quote right from the Corporation Act. This is the *Energy Corporation Act*: "The corporation and its subsidiaries shall report to the minister on their procurement activities and shall include a summary of contracts entered into and the identities of suppliers to whom the contracts have been awarded every 6 months." It goes on to say the minister will table that in the House.

Minister, is that what you've tabled in the House here today?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Member opposite needs me to say it very clearly. Yes, everything that is required under the legislation is included in the information that I laid before this House.

Unfortunately, and I say that with sincerity because this government has been working very hard to uncloak the secrecy around embedded contractors that the former administration put in place. Mr. Speaker, embedded contractors are not covered by this section of the act, unfortunately.

We are working very hard. As the Member opposite knows, it's before the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner right now. We believe the information should be public and we hope it will be in the very near future or we're going to work harder.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

What I read from was the *Energy Corporation Act*.

I'll ask the minister: Where in the act does it excuse identifying embedded contractors or suppliers under the *Energy Corporation Act*?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, a legal interpretation of the act – if you have a legal interpretation of the act and the requirements under that particular section, a legal interpretation says that it is procurement processes and a competitive bidding process that's included in that. That's not from my definition, Mr. Speaker; that's a legal definition.

We would be very pleased to have the information on embedded contractors. As the people of this province know, the Member opposite knows, the Premier has been very vocal on this issue. He has been public on this issue. He has written to the board of Nalcor as well

and now it's before the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, if we need to go further, if there are things that need to be changed, we will certainly do that because we are continuing to clean up the mess that they left.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Yesterday, the minister didn't even recall seeing them on her desk and she didn't even know. She said she'll have to check, and now today she talks about a legal interpretation.

Will you table that interpretation, Minister?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, all the information has been online, just as it was online when they were in government. This government, the new Liberal government, has made every effort, has worked diligently and methodically to bring the project in a better place, and EY has said it is. Mr. Speaker, we're unveiling the cloak of secrecy that's always been around Nalcor. We are working very diligently.

It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that under his watch he didn't unveil the Procurement Act. It was his Bill 1 when he was Premier and he didn't even get to the Procurement Act. That would have helped change things for Nalcor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's the *Energy Corporation Act* that we're speaking –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for Bonavista need not stand for the remainder of the day because I will not recognize him.

Please proceed, Sir.

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

Again, I'm reading from the *Energy Corporation Act*, is what we're reading from. It actually references that the *Public Tender Act* does not apply to the corporation. Then it goes on with its own parameters, its own legislation. The minister seems to keep going back to the *Public Tender Act*, which is not at play here. It's the *Energy Corporation Act*.

My question to you minister was: Will you table that legal interpretation that you spoke about?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is very clear that it does specifically relate to the Procurement Act. It is really unfortunate, really unfortunate in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, the opinions of most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, that the former administration decided to exempt Nalcor from the Procurement Act and give it other requirements, summary requirements, instead of using the *Public Procurement Act*.

That is what we have done now, Mr. Speaker. This government is very sincere and dedicated to opening up and making more transparent all the processes around Nalcor. That's why we have put through a Procurement Act that will include Nalcor, Mr. Speaker.

The legal interpretation of that particular section, what the former administration put in place, is saying that it does not include embedded contractors. It is only about processes.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Maybe the minister is not listening to the question. I just listened to what she said, and she's right. Under the *Energy Corporation Act* it lays out that the minister will table a document that identifies suppliers – every six months will identify suppliers. Embedded contractors are suppliers.

I've asked the minister several times if the information is included. She's walking all around it without giving an answer by saying if it is or is not. I'm sure it's not intended, included there, but she has also said she has a legal interpretation.

All I'm asking you, Minister, will you table the legal interpretation? This is the third time I've asked. Will you table that interpretation?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure he is using all the powers that he learned as a constable in the RNC for many years of repeating the questions. As I have said quite clearly, under this particular section of the *Energy Corporation Act*, it deals with the procurement processes, it deals with tenders. It does not deal with sole-source consultants or contracts. He can get his own legal interpretation; that's what it says.

Now, this government is really working hard to ensure we have the information on embedded contractors. The Premier has been very public about this, Mr. Speaker. We wait what is happening with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. When we have that information, whatever we need to do to change acts, to make changes, we will do, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm not sure what the minister is trying to get at when she refers to my powers as a police officer – were the words, I believe, she used. I'm not sure what she is trying to assert or trying to say

about my background, my own personal background, professional background.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: The question here – well, she brought it up, I say to the Members opposite. She raised it. She is the one who raised it, Mr. Speaker.

The question was very, very simple, Mr. Speaker: Will she table the legal interpretation? And she won't answer the question, so I'll give her one more chance. Will you table the legal interpretation?

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

MS. COADY: I am a bit surprised that he is sensitive about his skill level as a constable, Mr. Speaker. I was referring to the fact that he had skills in this area, and he is again repeating a question – that's a skill. I was referring to his skill level.

Mr. Speaker, I will again reiterate, as I have said, if you look at the *Energy Corporation Act*, in that particular section it talks about the Procurement Act and the procurement processes. It deals with tendering processes. It deals with the information that must be contained in those tendering processes. It does not deal with sole-sourced consultants and contractors.

Mr. Speaker, I didn't write that legislation. I didn't vote for that legislation. That was the former administration.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Mr. Speaker, the minister has made it clear she will not table the legal interpretation.

A press release in July claimed that the Liberal government's business innovation agenda would

be launched in September. It is now November. Minister, where is this innovation agenda?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question.

The province has undertaken a thorough consultation process with the community, with stakeholders. We've engaged over 250 people in surveys, all the stakeholders, to engage and find out how we reset the innovation here in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

And that's so important when we look at diversifying the economy, and when we look at how we enhance productivity and how we create new opportunities here in Newfoundland and Labrador. It was a key pillar of *The Way Forward* and I can assure the Member opposite that the innovation agenda will be launched in due course, very soon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Seems to be a common pattern that there's still no plan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the minister said there'd be no changes to program funding allocations when they shut down the Research & Development Corporation, but made no mention of the projects that were currently being worked on at the time.

Can the minister state if any projects have been cancelled since the dismantlement of the RDC?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things we've been doing as we've been listening to the people of the province, engaging with the business and the innovation community, and all industry stakeholders, one of the things that was very clear is that they wanted

one-stop shopping. They wanted to look at the consultation and the financial supports, all from idea generation to looking at how we get to market and how we export.

That's why in July we created InnovateNL. That is a very thorough process. It's been working well. That's why when we look at our contracts and we look at the review, things have been running very smoothly when it comes to how we've been working with business and entities in Newfoundland and Labrador through that process. InnovateNL is certainly working.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Mr. Speaker, the minister claimed that the change to shut down the RDC was made to promote the business agenda.

Can the minister tell us how many ongoing projects were impacted by his decision to shut down the RDC?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was a very smooth transition as we created InnovateNL. Things have been working very well within our department; there's been a very collaborative relationship.

We've seen where contracts have been continuing. We've been continuing to work with our clients, the programs that had been in existence. The envelope of funding has been maintained. Now what we're seeing is greater collaboration where somebody can come in with an idea, somebody who's looking at an R & D activity, but also looking at export potential or looking at things that are not pre-commercial.

The former RDC only looked at things that were in that pre-commercial space. So this is a way of which the former administration created redundancy and created inefficiencies.

We're changing that, Mr. Speaker. We're making sure we have a more innovative environment –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The RDC was key to accessing applied research, in particular, for the oil and gas and mining sectors.

Are we still leveraging funds from the offshore? What amount was leveraged for this fiscal year?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This gives me a great opportunity to talk about one of the initiatives that our department has been working very closely with other departments, like the Natural Resources and the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources, as we look at pursuing ocean supercluster initiatives with the federal government and our Atlantic counterparts. We are one of the entities that are shortlisted in that field.

When we look at trying to secure \$950 million, dollar-for-dollar match funding, we've been working with PRNL, we've been working with all the entities that are out there to make sure that they're working together and collaborating and being competitive, so that we can continue to bring as much research and development dollars here in this province. We're certainly focused on applied research.

With the Minister of Health and Community Services, we make –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During Estimates, the minister was asked specifically about the RDC and refused to inform that it would be shut down. Why did the minister fail to tell the House about the closure of RDC during Estimates?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to talk about more investments that we've made in research and development that's happening such as Janssen research that's been taking place right now when it comes to the health sector, as well as one of the first investments that we made was in aquaculture R & D that's taking place.

I don't know if the Member opposite is opposed to the half million dollars that we put forward in InnovateNL that leveraged \$3.9 million to look at enhancing the strains and the vaccines to make sure that we're doing the right R & D, that we have a stronger aquaculture sector – one that benefits her district quite significantly.

The investments that are being made are continuing to be made, yet these are being made through InnovateNL and she's opposed to that; that's ridiculous.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Another typical non-answer. He refuses to tell us why he would not disclose to this House their plan to shut down the RDC.

Moving on, according to the year-end financial report the RDC had outstanding contractual obligations in the amount of almost \$32 million.

Can the minister tell us if government will meet these obligations?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear from the beginning that we would honour all contracts that exist. The RDC had a revolving fund as they would roll out contracts. Sometimes things would take one year or two years to complete with milestones and projections, and that all the funds that are committed as contracts, all the funding is accounted for and is available through that process. So there is no outstanding allocation financially and all contracts will clearly be honoured when it comes to RDC.

Another particular initiative that we've invested in since we created InnovateNL is through an industrial research chair for Ocean Choice International with the Marine Institute to look at stock assessment in the offshore with our groundfish. These are good things that's happening and this is all happening under our –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune for a quick question; no preamble, please.

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Can the minister state for this House which projects were promised the \$32 million in funding, and will he table that list in this hon. House?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation for a quick response.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, there's public disclosure on all of these projects. They are available on the website. We've made them available when it came to Estimates, when I was questioned by the former Member for Mount Pearl North in the House of Assembly on this. Clearly, all projects and all funding that's committed we can certainly make available and it is publicly available.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Yesterday, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development in response to a petition on the educational needs of deaf and hard of hearing children said that his promised education action plan will be based on recommendations of the Premier's task force report. However, this report inexplicably, knowing evidence that was presented to them, does not mention deaf children once and includes only a passing reference on page 19 to students with significant hearing loss.

I ask the minister: On which of the 16 recommendations dealing with inclusive education that do not mention the education of deaf and hard of hearing children is he depending to give him direction?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate, this line of questioning. The Premier appointed four distinguished academics to review the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador and gave them a specific mandate, and that the Member would stand on the floor of the House of Assembly here in this province and bash those individuals to try and discredit their work is absolutely shameful behaviour, Mr. Speaker, and I won't stand for it.

Mr. Speaker, there are 16 recommendations in the report of the task force and we are going to implement them – 16 recommendations on inclusive education and we are going to implement them.

We have been following up with various interest groups on their concerns. There have been many meetings. I can go on –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, we heard of Newfoundland Power pressuring landlords to disclose tenant's personal information to them, resulting in tenants having their power cut off.

BC and Alberta have provincial privacy legislation that prohibits landlords from disclosing tenant information to debt collectors without the tenant's consent, except for collecting back rent on behalf of the landlord.

I ask the Minister of Justice: Will he introduce provincial privacy legislation that would prohibit Newfoundland Power from collecting and landlords from disclosing tenants' private information?

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

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

I certainly appreciate the question from the Member opposite. I am the minister responsible for ATIPPA. This is not a concern that has been brought to my attention prior to this, but as with any valid concern that's brought to my attention and to our attention, we're always open to considering legislative reform and to ensuring that our laws are there in the best interest of all people of this province.

What I would suggest to the Member is I'm certainly open to looking at it and making sure an analysis is done so that we can consider it and make sure that, like any legislation we pass, it is in the best interest and considering the jurisdictional scans and everything else across the country. I'm happy to look at it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm very happy to hear that response. We know there is a gap in our privacy legislation around this issue.

The price of power is escalating. Last February, Ontario passed legislation making it illegal for utilities to disconnect power in the winter for non-payment of bills. Other provinces have done the same.

I ask the Premier: Will he direct the Public Utilities Board to look at similar provisions to protect our people from power cut-offs during the winter?

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

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

I'm certainly happy to stand here. As it stands, the Public Utilities Board also falls under the Department of Justice and Public Safety. When we talk about issues like this, when we talk about something so important as power and people having access and being disconnected, it is something that we take concern with.

What I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, is I'm always happy to ensure that the Public Utilities Board has a look at issues like this. It's unfortunate that the previous administration didn't let them look at other issues that they might have, but certainly we'll make sure they look at this.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Again, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to another solution on behalf of the people of the province.

The Ontario government has also promised to improve programs to help people who are struggling to keep up payments on their power bills. Last year, this government cut the Home Heating Rebate, leaving people stranded.

Will the minister look at what they are doing in other provinces to help people with the cost of heat and bring those programs to our province, to the people of our province?

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

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

What I can say is that I always avail of the opportunity, especially at federal-provincial-territorial meetings, to look at other jurisdictions and see what the best practices are and see what they are doing elsewhere. In some cases, programs and opportunities that exist elsewhere can be applied here; in some cases, they cannot. There are certainly differences between every jurisdiction.

What I can say is with every good suggestion that's passed to us as a government, we're always willing to consider all options to improve the situations and lives of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister of Housing: Will she change Newfoundland and Labrador Housing policy to make rent supps portable so people can live closer to their family and their community supports?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I will say in response to the question, as a part of 50 initiatives outlined by this government in *The Way Forward*, we are currently undergoing a thorough review of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation's programs and services. We certainly want to look at, going

forward, where the needs are, identifying those needs and how we can best meet them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has ended.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

MR. SPEAKER: Under Section 37 of the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, the Commissioner for Legislative Standards conducted an inquiry into the conduct of the Member for Terra Nova for the alleged contraventions of the Members of the House of Assembly Code of Conduct.

Under Section 38 of the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, the Commissioner for Legislative Standards delivered his report resulting from the inquiry to former Speaker Osborne in his capacity as chairperson of the Management Commission of the House of Assembly. This report was distributed by the Speaker as the chairperson of the Management Commission of the House of Assembly to Members of the Management Commission on May 30, 2017.

In accordance with section 38(1) of the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, I am hereby tabling the report of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards into the conduct of the Member for Terra Nova.

Further tabling of documents?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the Financial Administration Act, I am tabling three Orders in Council relating to funding pre-commitments beginning in the fiscal year 2018-19.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following resolution:

WHEREAS in accordance with section 39 of the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act, the Commissioner for Legislative Standards has recommended to this hon. House that the Member for Terra Nova be reprimanded for violating principles 2 and 11 of the Members' Code of Conduct.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this House of Assembly concurs with the findings and recommendations of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards and asks that the Member for Terra Nova stand in his place in this House and apologize to this Assembly for his failure and violation as cited by the report of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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 deaf and hard of hearing children in the public education system of Newfoundland and Labrador are not receiving full and equivalent access to a quality education because of the lack of appropriate full-time resources; and

WHEREAS from 1964 to 2010, deaf and hard of hearing children were provided with a full-time quality education in the Newfoundland School for the Deaf, but deaf and hard of hearing children currently placed in mainstream schools receive only a fraction of a school day –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask that we respect the recognition of the hon. Member who's speaking to a petition.

Thank you very much.

Please continue.

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

I thank you for recognizing the people who signed this petition and the concern they're expressing for children in our province.

WHEREAS from 1964 to 2010, deaf and hard of hearing children were provided with a full-time quality education in the Newfoundland School for the Deaf, but deaf and hard of hearing children currently placed in mainstream schools receive only a fraction of a school day with a teacher qualified to instruct deaf and hard of hearing children;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to undertake an immediate, complete and thorough assessment of the supports in place for deaf and hard of hearing children by a committee of at least two independent and recognized experts in the field of deaf and hard of hearing education and to accept the recommendations of these experts; and in the interim, take measures to honour the support commitments made to all current and future students upon closure of the Newfoundland School for the Deaf in 2010, to

ensure that all deaf and hard of hearing children are provided with access to a quality education equivalent to hearing classmates as well as access to sign language.

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

Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to stand and speak once again to this concern that is being raised by petitioners throughout the province. Right now, I understand thousands are signing petitions that I will be happy to bring here to the House.

The School for the Deaf was one of the most successful things we had in our educational system in this province and we have closed it. Throughout this country, that had been done by some governments who have retraced their steps. In places like Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec, they have retraced their steps. Actually, they've increased having schools for the deaf in these provinces.

A province like Saskatchewan is looking at the fact that they closed. They haven't reversed their decision yet, but they are looking at it because it's being proven that it's a very special need that deaf people have and these deaf children have, and the inclusion model we have in this province is like a cookie-cutter model. It's being shown at this moment that it cannot work. If this government can't put the resources in place to make inclusion work for deaf and hard of hearing children, then they have to change that for these children. They have to either make sure that all the resources are there or reopen the School for the Deaf.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

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

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

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

WHEREAS government has removed the provincial point-of-sale tax rebate on books, which will raise the tax on books from 5 per cent to 15 per cent; and

WHEREAS an increase in the tax on books will reduce book sales to the detriment of local bookstores, publishers and authors, and the amount collected by government must be weighed against the loss in economic activity caused by higher book prices; and

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the lowest literacy rates in Canada and the other provinces do not tax books because they recognize the need to encourage reading and literacy; and

WHEREAS this province has many nationally and internationally known storytellers, but we will be the only people in Canada who will have to pay our provincial government a tax to read the books of our own writers;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government not to impose a provincial sales tax on books.

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

Mr. Speaker, this tax on books will have been in effect for a year or perhaps over a year. I can't quite remember when it was imposed, when it came into effect. It's clear that this government, when making this decision, had not clearly analyzed what the rollout would be, what the effect would be. This was done without consultation from the people of the province.

Again, it's so interesting that we have the highest illiteracy rates in the country and that the only solution to illiteracy rates is to help people learn to read and to teach people to read. For the most part, people do that by reading books. Adult literacy programs use books to help people learn how to read.

I believe that it's still valid to continue to present this petition because people who have signed it want their names recorded as having been opposed to this tax on books. We have to continue to look at: How are decisions made by

this government without fully analyzing the rollout effects? They couldn't have. They couldn't have fully analyzed what the effects of this would be. Probably the majority of taxes that were collected on books were on the backs of students, on the backs of post-secondary students, some of the people in the province who could least afford it.

When we look at the situation we're in right now, one of the things we must do is make post-secondary education accessible to our young people.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the Adult Dental Program coverage for clients of the Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Drug Program under the Access and 65Plus Plans were eliminated in *Budget 2016*; and

WHEREAS many low-income individuals and families can no longer access basic dental care; and

WHEREAS those same individuals can now no longer access dentures;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reinstate the Adult Dental Program to cover low-income individuals and families to better ensure oral health, quality of life and dignity.

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

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of emphasis today on trying to reduce health care costs and, along

those lines, trying to encourage people to live healthier lives. We talked about the Carrot program here today, the whole idea of the healthier we are as citizens, the less expensive our health care system will be.

Along those lines, teeth really affect a person's heart health in particular. They affect a person's dignity, a person's ability to socialize. So we feel that it is shameful that the people most disadvantaged in our society, the people with the least amount of money to afford these dentures, are the ones who've been penalized with the cuts in the budget. We certainly hope government reconsiders this decision and helps those who truly need it the most.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS government recently cut vital funding to many of the province's youth organizations; and

WHEREAS the cuts to Grants to Youth Organizations will have a devastating impact on the communities, as well as its youth and families; and

WHEREAS many of these organizations deeply rely on what was rightfully considered core funding for their day-to-day operations;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon our House of Assembly to urge government to immediately reinstate funding to province's youth organizations.

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

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken to this a number of times and now we're into the second year of these youth organizations who provide vital services. These are services that go from the range of inclusion, to mental health, to physical activity, to anti-bullying, to everyday services around education and others – the whole gamut of what we would expect the type of services necessary or the type of mentoring and engagement for a young person to become a holistic citizen, an engaged citizen, a productive citizen and have a quality of life that's acceptable. We've done a detrimental, negative effect to these organizations.

I've talked to a number of board members who are frustrated because they're spending more time having to worry about fundraising than about talking about policy and developing programs and services, and developing partnerships with existing partnering organizations or government entities, or educators or health professionals or police forces that would be better used and develop a system that engages more people to ensure that young people have proper opportunities, that we have an even playing field, regardless of your geographic location, your economic background, your cultural background, that young people would have access to basic services that would enhance their ability to be productive citizens.

The minor amount of money, and I keep going back to it. When I added it up, what was actually taken away from the youth organizations in comparison to – not the overall budget line, but just the budget line in one of those divisions – it was insignificant. It was nickel and dime from a department point of view, but it was detrimental from an organizational point of view and from an operational point of view.

When you weigh into it, that small amount of money invested guarantees somewhere from 10 to 20 to, in some organizations, 40 times on return. Some organizations, the few pittance they get from government, it comes back 40 times. That's money going into programs and services. It is programs and services that we don't have to pay for, but we reap the benefits as taxpayers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

To cut these organizations – three issues here – without any consultation, without understanding

the investment here and without understanding the need for the young people here.

Mr. Speaker, I'll have an opportunity to present this again in the future.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to present a petition today related to an issue that I brought up several times here in this House in regard to education and the building of a middle school in the Mobile-Witless Bay-Bay Bulls response to this.

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 construction for the planned extension was to be tendered and begin in the spring of 2017 is now several months delayed; and

WHEREAS issues with septic and water capacity on site have not been resolved, nor have the concerns of the proximity to the artesian well to Mobile cemetery and the potential unearthing of unmarked burial sites during construction; and

WHEREAS safety concerns related to traffic, emergency access and parking during and after construction have not been addressed; and

WHEREAS the original budget of \$7 million is now estimated at \$10 million due to complications identified on site; and

WHEREAS actual student enrolment has exceeded all projections and the extension is a short-term, two-year solution to a capacity issue; and

WHEREAS the elected members of the board of trustees of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District have formally and

publicly endorsed the need for a new middle school for the region;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to halt the planned extension to Mobile Central High School announced in *Budget 2016* and move forward with a new middle school that was recommended in the BAE-Newplan in 2014, subsequently announced in *Budget 2015*. The new middle school is the long-term fiscally responsible solution to capacity issues in our school system.

Mr. Speaker, this has been something I've spoken of a couple of times. It's an issue that is important to the region and important to the parents of the region. We've had a number of discussions about it here in the House. We've asked for a meeting with the Minister of Finance; that wasn't available.

The parents wanted to put forward, from their perspective, what they talked about in terms of the use of the financial resources for this and how a better solution could be found. That's something the parent group always wanted to do. They wanted to work with government to find a solution on *The Way Forward* issue.

An initial tender has been put out. Some work has been done in regard to the water and electrical transfers. I read the environmental report with regard to water and availability. That is still unable to confirm if the water flow is there, or actually the content, and the water is appropriate to use. There needs to be further reviews done based on recommendations. That's an issue in regard to the extension. When we look at the full capacity, what they're adding to that facility and whether the water quality is going to be there to be able to do this.

The other interesting point is the English School District; their position on this, they're the elected board trustees. They very clearly indicated they are in favour of the middle school. There's certainly lobbying done to change their mind on this and do what's right, both fiscally and from a long-term delivery of service to build that new middle school.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just rise on a point of order regarding the petition; Standing Order 49 regarding the petition presented by the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

I want to draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to a ruling made by Speaker Wiseman on June 6, 2012. I quote from the ruling in *Hansard*.

He said: "I would not want members – or the public – to think it is possible to separate pages of signatures such that one petition can be presented to this House many times. A citizen signing a petition which, for example, may have 1,000 signatures, there is an expectation that that petition be presented in its entirety. If a member were to separate signature pages in this fashion so that one petition miraculously becomes twenty or thirty petitions, I want members to fully understand and to know that I would consider such a practice to be dishonourable and unworthy of members of this House."

Now, Mr. Speaker, yesterday it was clear, the Member had been presented a petition that had, one media outlet said, 4,000 signatures and there was a tweet that said 2,700. The Member is not permitted, according to the ruling of Speaker Wiseman, June 6, 2012 – and I remember this well because the ruling was directed at me, Mr. Speaker. The Member is not permitted to submit a petition in this sort of piecemeal fashion. Under this ruling, as the Member said, "such a practice would be dishonourable and unworthy of members of this House."

I encourage, Mr. Speaker, for you to consider enforcing this ruling because we have all abided by it since June 6, 2012.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further commentary?

I thank the hon. minister for bringing this matter to my attention. We will take it under advisement and report back to the House.

Thank you.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Orders of the Day, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I would call Order 2, third reading of Bill 15.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that Bill 15, An Act To Amend The Securities Act, be now read a third time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 15 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 Securities Act. (Bill 15)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill is now 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 Securities Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 15)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call Order 3, third reading of Bill 16.

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

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, that Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Labour Relations Act, be now read a third time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the said bill 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.'

The motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Labour Relations Act. (Bill 16)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call Order 4, third reading of Bill 18.

MR. SPEAKER: I'm sorry, if I could retract, I missed a sentence. Could I just go back to it?

MR. A. PARSONS: No problem, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: My apologies.

I wanted to go back and insert: This bill is now read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper. My apologies.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Labour Relations Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 16)

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

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

Sometimes I wish I could retract.

Mr. Speaker, I call Order 4, third reading of Bill 18.

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

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

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour that Bill 18, An Act To Amend The Prepaid Funeral Services Act, be now read a third time.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

This motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Prepaid Funeral Services Act. (Bill 18)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill is now 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 Prepaid Funeral Services Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 18)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Health and Community Services, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Vital

Statistics Act, 2009, Bill 20, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009, Bill 20, 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.'

This motion is carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Service NL to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009," carried. (Bill 20)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Vital Statistics Act, 2009. (Bill 20)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 20 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

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

I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 17.

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.'

This motion is 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 now considering Bill 17, An Act To Amend The Labour Relations Act No. 2.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Labour Relations Act No. 2." (Bill 17)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Labour Relations Act No. 2.

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 Bill 17 carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Mr. Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 17.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 17.

Shall the motion carry?

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 (Trimper): The hon. the 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 17 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 17 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 Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 2.

MR. SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

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

I move, seconded by the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, the following resolution:

WHEREAS section 4 of the *Seniors' Advocate Act* provides that on resolution of the House of Assembly, the Lieutenant Governor in Council in shall appoint a Seniors' Advocate;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Dr. Suzanne Brake be appointed as the Seniors' Advocate.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to stand here today and speak to this resolution that's being introduced by our government. It's something

that, again, I had the pleasure of being in this House of Assembly on the Opposition side when our party, when our Opposition, moved that this was a necessary creation for the people of this province. It's something that we advocated for.

I'm very proud to say that it was led by our Premier who was then the Leader of the Official Opposition. It was something that he felt very passionate about, spoke about it going back as far as 2014. This is something that our Premier and our party have advocated for, was the creation of a Seniors' Advocate office.

We stand here now today having passed this legislation in the House, the *Seniors' Advocate Act*, and today we're here with the resolution to appoint the first Seniors' Advocate in the history of our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: I know that everybody that wants to will have an opportunity to speak to this today, Members of the Opposition and I know the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, someone who is fairly new to Cabinet, but you wouldn't know it. She certainly carries herself like a veteran and has a passion for these issues, whether it's children, whether it's seniors, just people in general; she's going to have an opportunity to speak to this. I look forward to her speaking to this resolution, which will appoint Dr. Suzanne Brake, someone she's had an opportunity to work with since her elevation, since her promotion to this position.

I have an opportunity now to speak about the selection of Dr. Suzanne Brake, someone we are proposing would make an admirable and very strong Seniors' Advocate for not just the seniors of this province, for all the people of this province because a senior is something we all aspire to be. Everybody wants to – if you're not a senior now, the fact is you want to be able to live and become a senior. This is someone that carries a background of public service, of academia; someone that I think will do a fantastic job.

I'm going to speak a little bit about the process itself. We've had an opportunity on multiple occasions in this House to stand and speak to the legislation which led to the creation of this

office. We've had an opportunity to speak to what this office will comprise. Again, the minister may take the time to talk about that, but I want to speak to the process so that people understand how this works.

The Seniors' Advocate, similar to other positions that are independent offices of this House, whether it's the Child and Youth Advocate, whether it's the Chief Electoral Officer, these are not political appointments. These are independent offices of the House, not answerable to government per se, answerable to the people and answerable to the House of Assembly. We're familiar with a number of these positions. They all come through the House, and the selection of these individuals is debated here in the House.

In this case, I guess contrary to what has happened in the past where a selection was made, in this case all the selections that we've made have gone through the Independent Appointments Commission, a commission that is led by the hon. Clyde K. Wells and his very steady team of volunteers who are taking on the job of ensuring we have the best people put in positions of trust to the people of this province. In this case, this is one that has also gone through that process.

What I can say is I have a letter here from the summer where the Independent Appointments Commission actually wrote to the Clerk of the Executive Council and said that at the request of the chairperson of the Independent Appointments Commission and response to the Clerk of the House's request from 2017, there is an IAC recommendation and observations for the appointment of this. The names that are put forward for selection are put forward by the Independent Appointments Commission.

What I can say is I do believe there was a significant amount of interest in this position. People from not just this province but across Canada, I believe, expressed interest in this process. It's something I think is quite important.

The tackling of systemic issues that affect the seniors of this province, that affect all of our loved ones, is something I think we all hold dear. The individual that has been selected here

is someone who, through her past work, through her career, through her study, and, from what I can gather, her passion is for seniors in this province.

The person that is being selected is Dr. Suzanne Brake. I have here in front of me, Mr. Speaker, and this I believe is information that has been forwarded to Members of the Opposition who have requested it so that they have an opportunity to look at the resume, the curriculum vitae of the individual who is seeking this. What I'm going to do, I'm just going to take an opportunity to go through this so people out there that are watching and that are listening have an opportunity to see the skill set of the individual that's being proposed here today to be our first Seniors' Advocate.

Suzanne Brake's career began in the areas of clinical, supervisory and management as a social worker and long-term care where she developed a strong background and knowledge in the challenges of growing old. Ms. Brake's interest was rooted in the intergenerational extended family in which she was raised and her curiosity to learn more about the aged. Her early work with the aged, their families, volunteers and those employed in the provision of services to the aged gave her a new perspective on the aging population. She also assisted in establishing one of the first protective care units in this province.

After working at the Grace General Hospital, the Miller Centre and the Hoyles-Escasoni Complex, Ms. Brake worked for the School of Social Work at Memorial University. She developed and implemented an evaluation of the research internship components of the masters of social work program. She also coordinated and facilitated community consultation and developed the course social work in gerontology, which she taught along with other courses.

For the past 12 years, Ms. Brake has been the director of Seniors and Aging with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. This position includes providing direction in the areas of development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of legislation, policy, programs and services related to seniors.

While in this role, Ms. Brake leads the direction and development of the evaluation of legislation, policies and programs related to the *Adult Protection Act* and is the provincial director of Adult Protection. She holds a master's of social work and social policy and administration, as well as a Ph.D. in social work and gerontology. She was also awarded the Canadian Association of Social Workers Distinguished Service Award in 2015.

Obviously, Ms. Brake would have gone through an extensive interview process, and in this process she demonstrated knowledge of seniors' issues both provincially and nationally. Her working career has been focused on the many areas dealing with the needs of the aging community. She has managed to establish excellent working relationships with stakeholders, public sector groups, and she demonstrated in-depth experience in navigating the experiences working within government and with external partners and groups focused on the needs of seniors.

Mr. Brake is a leader in identifying, directing, implementing the interrelated and often complex work of many organizations who are focused on seniors' issues. Dr. Brake also took an opportunity to write a submission herself.

What I want to do is I just want to go through her background, her actual CV here. When you look at it, it is absolutely amazing, just the different positions she has held and the work she has done. I think it is worth recording for the record here, for *Hansard*, the skill set and experiences this individual will bring to this very important position.

In terms of education, as I just said, we have a Ph.D. in social work, a master's degree in social work and a bachelor's degree in social work right here from Memorial University. I would note that the Ph.D. is from the University of Calgary.

Since 2005, she has been the director of the Seniors and Aging Division of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. In June 2010 until now, she served as the provincial director of Adult Protection. She was an assistant professor at the School of Social Work at Memorial University; an accreditation

coordinator for the School of Social Work at Memorial University; an assistant professor of research at the School of Social Work, Memorial University; a social work manager at Hoyles-Escasoni – and not just a manager. She also started as a social worker III and she worked her way up through that level since the '80s.

She worked in the juvenile divergent program; she has worked at, as stated before, the Grace, the Miller Centre; she has taught in the School of Social Work for years now at Memorial University. She has field instruction, and it is listed out here: working with social work students from MUN, dealing with undergraduate students at the CINB, Health Care Corporation, John Howard House, St. Francis Foundation group home for adolescents, and Hoyles-Escasoni.

When you look at the publications she has here: publications in the *Smith College studies in social work*, the *Gazette* of Memorial University, *The Canadian journal of continuing medical education*, family making project from Memorial University, and the gerontological social work undergraduate curriculum content. She has done a tremendous amount of work. She has done some consulting; she's worked as a research assistant.

Let me see, her professional memberships and other related activities. She is a registered member of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers, recipient of the Canadian Association of Social Workers Distinguished Service Award, member of the Ph.D. committee at Memorial University, chair of the Disciplinary Panel at the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers, a board member at the Seniors Resource Centre of Newfoundland and Labrador and a program planning subcommittee member with the Conference Planning Committee for The Faces of Elder Abuse.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, the resume speaks for itself.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: She absolutely has the education, the work experience that will allow her to do, I think, a tremendous job in tackling

some of the systemic issues that we face in this province.

I'm not going to belabour the point too long. I'm going to leave it to my colleague who's quite versed in this to talk about some of the challenges that seniors face in this province right now. We all know it.

The other thing that we all know and we've known for some time is that our seniors' population is growing. It is growing quite rapidly; in fact, I think I may be correct in saying faster than anywhere else in Canada. So I think this could be as timely a juncture for the establishment of this office. I couldn't think of a better time for us to be able to do this.

I'd like to point out I think it's important that this was something that was talked about in 2014, it was promised in 2015 and it's being delivered right now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: I think that's worth noting. This is something that our Premier has talked about when he was on that side and has made it now a reality. The Premier deserves a tremendous amount of credit for making this happen, but certainly there's been a lot of credit that goes around to the people behind the scenes that have helped come up with the establishment of this office.

As with the creation of any independent or Statutory Offices of this House of Assembly, it's a very important role and there's a lot of work goes into that. I also have to thank staff that are sitting here now that have been a part of this.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to get an opportunity, I think, again, later during this debate to speak to this. What I'd like to do at this point is I'd like to take my seat, I'd like to turn it over to my colleagues across the way as well as my colleagues on this side of the House to debate this resolution, which I certainly think is important.

What I can guarantee you is that everybody on this side of the House will certainly be supporting Dr. Suzanne Brake as the first

Seniors' Advocate for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further speakers?

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

We, Members of the Opposition here of the Official Opposition, would certainly like to commend Dr. Suzanne Brake for stepping up to advocate for seniors in our province. Like Members of the government opposite, we certainly highly respect Dr. Brake for her credentials and her abilities.

She's a very highly regarded individual, exceptionally competent, exceptionally qualified. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador are indeed fortunate to have an individual of her calibre step forward to serve.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is a problem. She's being appointed to a role that will tie her hands behind her back. If only the Liberals had given her a piece of legislation similar to the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* or the *Citizens' Representative Act* with real investigative powers, but unfortunately they didn't. They set aside a budget of \$500,000 for a person who can advise but who really has no real investigative powers.

Instead, they have given her a little more authority than to refer a matter to the Citizens' Representative for follow-up. She will not have investigative powers like the kind the other Officers of this hon. House have. We certainly feel that it's a wasted opportunity for an individual of this calibre. We certainly believe that Dr. Brake could do a lot in terms of advocacy for seniors in this province, if she were provided with the proper legislation that would enable her to do so.

Why did the Liberals disempower the office before making the appointment? We can only assume it's because they don't want seniors'

issues thoroughly investigated. Maybe they don't want to be embarrassed by what an advocate might find when she digs into their actions, but the whole purpose of putting a Seniors' Advocate in place is so they can investigate serious issues and can make recommendations for improvements based on their thorough investigations, in-depth investigations, and their recommendations should have to be honoured and implemented by government.

She will be referring matters to an office that is already quite stretched to the limit and whose mandate is not concerned specifically with only seniors' issues but with a broad range of issues across all interest and all persons in the province. So the seniors' issues will be one of many that the Citizens' Representative has to deal with.

That's of major, major concern for us on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, because \$500,000 is a significant amount of money and seniors in this province, as we all know, are hurting. An office that requires such a significant investment of public dollars, but has absolutely no powers that such a statutory office should have, is really just window dressing. It's lip service, Mr. Speaker.

The Seniors' Advocate bill is similar in my mind to the Appointments Commission. It's a lot of promises, but I don't see where the action is really going to improve the situation for the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is set up to let the Liberals say we've kept a promise without them actually having to keep that promise, because this position will effectively have no impact. It's not about this position. It's not about the effect the individual is going to have on changing an outcome of the person in distress. It's not about the best interest of the seniors. It's certainly not about the wisest expenditure of public funds. It's adding yet another layer for people to have to navigate, a position that can only advocate at a cost of \$500,000, Mr. Speaker, and this from a government – the very same government – that cut seniors subsidies for diabetic strips and dentures.

You go to any senior in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador today, Mr. Speaker, and their main concerns are: How are they going to pay their light bill; how are they going to afford their medications; how are they going to protect themselves from financial abuse, from physical abuse? These are the concerns of seniors in this province. It's all well and good that there's yet another person that they can now pick up the phone to call, but it's yet another person whose is not going to be able to do anything to help them, because they have no legislative power to be able to do so, Mr. Speaker.

So we strongly feel, in the Official Opposition, that this is smoke and mirrors; it's all about appearances. We can only imagine what the Advocate would uncover and bring to light if she were to be given the powers of the Child and Youth Advocate.

We clearly over here on this side of the House applaud Dr. Brake, without reservation, and at the same time we fault the Liberal government for wasting an opportunity to let Dr. Brake hold this government's feet to the fire, and all future governments feet to the fire, with the power she truly needs to advocate for seniors in our province. From that point of view, we certainly feel it's shameful that the government is playing politics with the seniors of our province.

I'm going to recap, Mr. Speaker, what the Red Book promise was for establishing a seniors' advocate. Section 3.5.1 of the Red Book promise states that the Liberal government would: Establish a Seniors' Advocate Office: "To ensure seniors have the strong voice they deserve, a New Liberal Government will introduce legislation to create a Seniors' Advocate Office, which will be the third of its kind in Canada. The Seniors' Advocate will be independent of government, and will report to the House of Assembly instead of a Minister.

"The Seniors' Advocate Office will improve the health and well-being of seniors by:" – now, we're supposed to see tangible results from these bullets – "Advocating on behalf of seniors and their families, investigating individual complaints." Now, as we see in the legislation, there are no real legislative powers for this Seniors' Advocate to actually do investigations

in a similar manner to the Child and Youth Advocate, so there are certainly going to be shortcomings there.

The other thing they tout: "Working collaboratively with other seniors' organizations and service delivery groups to identify and address issues impacting the health and well-being of Newfoundland and Labrador's seniors." Mr. Speaker, certainly, we like the sound of that.

The next bullet as well: "Advising on policy and program changes to improve services and support for seniors, thereby improving health outcomes amongst this population." Again, Mr. Speaker, we like the sound of that, but we also know that's being done. It's been done by the 50-plus organizations. It's being done by MHAs, I would like to think, on all sides of the House who bring the concerns of seniors that are brought to their attention to the minister. I would like to think everybody on all sides of the House does that. Certainly, the Seniors Resource Centre does that.

So here we are at \$500,000. We have another layer to do just the same thing, but they won't be able to deliver any results, Mr. Speaker, and they won't be able to make any changes. It sounds to me, in fact, in terms of working collaboratively with seniors' organizations and service delivery groups, that sounds to me like something any good minister would do himself or herself on a regular basis, through regular consultation and meetings with the organizations they represent and that they are responsible to the Crown for ensuring they serve in the best interest they possibly can.

To me, it's a whole lot of duplication with existing roles and existing mandates of entities in place to support seniors. I see a whole lot of duplication in the last promise of the Liberal red book: "Serving as a navigator, providing seniors and their families with the information they need to access government programs and services in a timely manner."

Certainly, a lot of duplication there with the Seniors Resource Centre role as well. When I look at \$500,000 and when I consider the fact that the Liberals say day after day after day we're in a hard place, we have to find a way to save money, and you see them adding another

layer. Imagine what the Seniors Resource Centre could do with \$500,000. Imagine what effect they could really make in the day-to-day lives of seniors with an extra \$500,000. Imagine how much healthier a senior would be if they could afford to buy their diabetic test strips that the Liberals cut out, that they can no longer afford to buy.

So we're going to see an increase in health care problems. We're going to see an increase in diabetes. We're going to see an increase in kidney issues because people can no longer afford to buy diabetic strips, but we have \$500,000 to put a person in place that can advise, Mr. Speaker, and advocate. I truly hope that they advise and advocate strongly. I know that this individual certainly will.

The Liberal government has said they plan to listen to what the advocate has to say. I hope they listen to what the Seniors Resource Centre has to say, what all MHAs have to say, what the 50-plus clubs have to say and what all seniors who approach them themselves have to say as well.

I would really like to see one of the very first recommendations coming from the Seniors' Advocate to be for a change to this legislation to actually give her the legislative authority she needs to do a thorough and proper investigations that will actually result in making changes for the better in the lives of seniors by identifying the true cause of some serious problems some of them are facing, Mr. Speaker.

Again, certainly I will say that we, on this side of the House, are very proud of the appointment of Dr. Suzanne Brake, a very, very well-respected individual who will do the best she possibly can within the limits of the legislation, the very poor legislation, I think, drafted by the Liberals.

Five hundred thousand dollars to advocate when we need a doer; we need a person who can hold government's feet to the fire. We need a person who can hold government accountable. I truly believe that we are going to see great work from Dr. Suzanne Brake, but the Liberal legislation falls short of where it needs to be.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm very happy to stand and speak to this motion. I can recall when the legislation was first passed I thought who could best be our new Seniors' Advocate. The name of Suzanne Brake was the one that I thought would just be an absolute brilliant appointment for this position.

I would like to speak to that issue that Dr. Suzanne Brake comes with such an incredible resume of experience, of concrete experience in the field working with seniors, working with our health care system with seniors, working in the area of policy as well and in academia. She has such a broad scope of experience and expertise. I am so excited about her appointment. I believe that it is one that will serve us well as a province.

Mr. Speaker, many people talk about the tsunami, the tsunami of seniors that we are facing and going to be facing. But really, a tsunami is something that comes on unexpectedly; this is not unexpected. We have all kinds of information about the demographics of our province and we have for years and years and years. Academics have been telling us, activists have been telling us for years that the demographics of our province was shifting and that we were going to be the province in Canada with the fastest growing percentage shift in our demographics to seniors.

We also have the highest percentage of seniors in receipt of OAS and GIS which means, if you translate that, we have the highest percentage of seniors living either in poverty or right on the edge of poverty, particularly if seniors do not own their own homes and are having to rent. We know that in a lot of areas in our province that rent has skyrocketed, for a number of reasons, for some of the big boom and bust projects that we've had, which have affected the rental rates in a number of areas in our province. So we have seniors whose income would be somewhere around \$1,100 to \$1,200 a month.

I've presented this scenario in this House a number of times for the past six years. If we look at that scenario, so the average income would be if you're on GIS and OAS – and a number of people who are in receipt of OAS and GIS, seniors, are a majority of women; women who've raised families, who volunteered in their communities who may not have had a lot of formalized jobs, salaried jobs outside of the home.

They are women who have dedicated their lives to their families and to their communities. Now when these are supposed to be their golden age, their golden years, they're living really in poverty again, particularly if they have to pay rent. Again, in a lot of areas in our communities we know that to get a decent one-bedroom apartment – nothing lavish, there are no swimming pools, there's not a lot of space, these are very basic units that may be secure – that it's at least \$800 a month on average. You would see that in St. John's, in Clarenville – well, Clarenville it's probably even more than that. Certainly, Happy Valley-Goose Bay is way more than that.

So we have, again, a lot of women on OAS and GIS who are paying a minimum of \$800 a month, then their heat and light, maybe around \$200 a month and their phone and their cable about \$100 a month. Already that's \$1,000. What do you do? That's \$1,100 actually, Mr. Speaker.

What do you do when your income is \$1,100 to \$1,200 a month and your basic expenses, even before food, are already \$1,100? That may leave you with about \$100 a month to feed yourself, clothe yourself, dental care – because this government cancelled the dental program – and over-the-counter drugs.

We're hearing stories again and again and again of seniors – again, particularly women – who may need iron supplements, iron pills. Then, if you use those, you often also need stool softeners. Those are no longer paid for so people can't afford them. We hear stories of seniors who are not filling all of their prescriptions because they just don't have the money to do it. We know that the seniors in our province are facing a real tough time right now; the price of power is going up.

I'm really excited about the appointment of Dr. Suzanne Brake as the new Seniors' Advocate because her role – although some people are concerned that she's not going to be addressing individual issues and advocate on behalf of individuals, but we do have those kinds of services in place.

Mr. Speaker, what we don't have is anybody whose sole responsibility is to look at the systemic issues. The shortfalls, the abuses, the lack of resources are the systemic issues for seniors in our province and that's what I find exciting. We can no longer tolerate just tinkering around the edges of our social programs as it relates to the needs of the seniors of our province.

We can't always just speak about seniors as victims or as vulnerable or who have to be taken care of. Where we are right now today in our province the seniors have built the economy, have raised children, have been part of subsidizing our health care system, have been part of subsidizing our university system, our whole education system. They have been part of building our communities. They have a lifetime of experience.

We no longer need to speak for seniors but at times we have to highlight what seniors are saying. They know what they need. They know what changes need to happen. They know how the system is not supporting or not delivering what is necessary so that every senior can live in a healthy and a secure manner and still be a contributing member to society.

Because you've reached the magic age of 80 years old doesn't mean that what you have provided to society is now finished. We know that seniors, again, have a lifetime of experience and we have to be listening. We have to be listening with the real intention to hear. Hopefully, that's what our Seniors' Advocate will do. Not tinkering around the edges, but addressing systemic shortfalls. Also, not simply addressing complaints, but that she will have a proactive duty and that's set out in the legislation as well.

In section 16 it says: "In carrying out the powers and duties of his or her office the advocate may (a) receive and review matters related to seniors;

(b) initiate and participate in reviews related to seniors.” So she may initiate, she’s not just reactive to complaints. She now has the power to initiate work. That’s what’s exciting, Mr. Speaker, and that’s what we need.

We need an Advocate who is able to be proactive and to initiate. She’ll be able to –

MR. LETTO: (Inaudible.)

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member for Labrador West, I’m sure he’s going to have the opportunity to stand and speak rather than speaking over me. He’ll probably be heard much more clearly when he speaks when he has the opportunity. I promise I will not be speaking over him.

In carrying out her powers she will also be able to “conduct research related to seniors, including interviews and surveys.” So she will be able to speak to individual seniors. She may not do advocacy on specific individual issues. Again, the Citizens’ Rep may be able to do that, the Human Rights Commission may be able to do that, the Consumer Advocate may be able to look at some issues and then we have the Seniors Resource Centre. But she will be involved in that because she will be able to look at trends, at particular areas of weakness in legislation and in service delivery.

She’ll also be able to consult with seniors, with service providers and with the public. She will be able to request information and she will be able to make recommendations to government, to government agencies, to service providers and community groups respecting legislation, policies, programs and services impacting seniors.

Where the Advocate does become aware of a matter relating to an individual senior, the Advocate may refer that senior to the Citizens’ Representative for investigation of that matter. I suspect what will happen, that many of us will refer issues or people to the Seniors’ Advocate. Although she may not be able to address those issues, she may be able to at least get a handle. By getting those kinds of referrals to her, she may be able to get a handle on something that’s happening sort of in an aggregate.

There is no tsunami of seniors. We’ve known the information; we’ve known the demographic shift that has been building up. It’s not a surprise, but government has acted as if it was a tsunami, as if they are surprised that: Oh my goodness, this is coming upon us now, what are we going to do?

Again, it’s so important to no longer tinker around the edges, but some of the issues – and I’ve had the pleasure and the honour of working with Suzanne Brake, as an MHA, in her former job where she served the people well, where I was able to bring specific issues, particularly very serious issues that seniors in my district have faced. She has been so responsive and very proactive. I’m really excited about her doing this job.

Some of the issues I think that are glaring and are huge issues that affect the well-being of seniors in our province is the issue of housing. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing has not prepared for the housing needs of seniors across the province.

There are several seniors who live in units that belong to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing that are three-stories high; that are too big. Their partners may have passed on, their children have grown and left, and they’re now rattling around in houses that are three-stories high and many of them can’t negotiate the stairs.

I have a few constituents in my district, one woman who is a senior. She has been begging for a unit that’s all on one floor, on the main floor. She fell not so long ago and broke her hip, and she can no longer negotiate the stairs in her unit. The reason she broke her hip was because she couldn’t negotiate the stairs in her unit.

I have another woman who had both her knees, a senior, on both knees she’s had surgery and now she has to have surgery on her hip. She has been begging as well for a unit that’s on one floor or in a building that has an elevator, but where all her unit is on one floor.

We have many, many seniors in this situation, who’ve been on the wait-list for years, either for rent supps or for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing that would be appropriate for their needs; but Newfoundland and Labrador Housing

has not had the money or government has not tended to the needs of seniors who are living independently in rental units. There is a backlog of years of seniors, and also other people who have mobility issues, waiting for homes that are appropriate and conducive to their particular needs.

Affordable housing; we have a number of seniors in my district alone who've been put on the list for affordable housing, for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. They're on the list for a year. They drop off the list. They have to reapply. They're on that list for another year. Again, what happens, their rent may be \$800 and they end up, once heat and light and phone and cable is paid for, with maybe \$100 or \$200 a month to feed and clothe themselves, transportation and their over-the-counter drugs. The whole issue of poverty, housing affects poverty for our seniors.

Their health care needs; I have a senior who came to my office this week and she brought her broken dentures, and they've been broken for almost a year. She's not eligible to get new dentures. She can't eat properly, and she's a diabetic. She also doesn't have the money she needs in order to be able to feed herself properly. Her doctor tells her and her dietician tells her what she must do to stay healthy, but she simply can't do it. She doesn't have the money to do it.

This government cut the Home Heating Rebate; I wonder with the Seniors' Advocate, will she look at policy decisions like that, that this government has made in the last two budgets and how they impact on seniors. Again, we have so many seniors living in poverty.

Our health care; cancelling of the dental program has had such devastating effects on many seniors. Cancelling of the over-the-counter drug program, again, has had many devastating effects on seniors.

Isolation; when we look at the issue of mental health and addictions. When some seniors who can get rent supp, when they're offered an apartment that's miles and miles and miles away from their family and their community supports, then they turn of down because they know they will be so isolated and so alone.

We know the whole issue of loneliness among seniors is a huge mental health issue. I believe these are issues that we can solve. I know these are issues we can solve, and for the very reason that we have a Seniors' Advocate and a Seniors' Advocate in the person of Dr. Suzanne Brake, I am really excited about this because she gets it, because she's worked in the field. She knows the impact of poverty on seniors. She knows how important it is to listen to seniors with a real intent of hearing, because they also have solutions.

The solutions aren't necessarily ones that cost us a lot of money, but they are about shifting money around. They are about making sure that seniors have a safe place to live, the health supports they need, and access to transportation so they can continue to be fully participating in our communities. Transportation is a huge issue.

The issue of addictions among seniors is something we haven't really paid attention to, and seniors are talking to use about that. We have to be able to use the wisdom and the life experience of seniors to tackle some of the problems. I believe Dr. Suzanne Brake has the skills and the commitment, the passion and the compassion to do that.

I'm looking forward to her leadership because her role is not just about tinkering around the edges. Her role is about leadership and leading our province and looking at better social policy, at better legislation as it relates to our citizens who are in their senior years.

I am really looking forward to the work she will do. I'm really looking forward to being able to work with her. I have lots of confidence that we can do better by our seniors, that we can improve our social services, we can improve our legislation, we can make it more possible for our seniors to live in ways that allow them to continue to fully participate in our communities. I know she will be speaking out about issues like cutting back home care when we have a policy about keeping seniors in their homes as long as possible and then yet cutting back a few hours of home care – homemaking home care. That makes it next to impossible for seniors to keep in their homes.

This is going to be about dignity. It's going to be about justice. It's going to be about human rights. It's going to be about doing the right thing. The budget that's been set out for this office certainly doesn't seem like enough, but it is my hope that should that be the case, that we will actually hear from Dr. Suzanne Brake if in fact the budget is not suitable and does not allow her to do the very intensive work that is needed at this time.

It is my hope that government will support her in every way that she will identify so that she can do the work that has been set out for her.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It really is a tremendous privilege today, Mr. Speaker, to stand in this hon. House and to speak to the resolution to appoint a Seniors' Advocate.

As a part of our plan to support seniors, the Premier mandated the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development to lead the development of legislation to create a Seniors' Advocate including the appointment of Newfoundland and Labrador's first Seniors' Advocate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: Only the third province in this country to have an Office of the Seniors' Advocate.

Mr. Speaker, time is going to fly I know, I only have 20 minutes, but I'm going to use it to identify a couple of things. I'm going to talk about the role of the Seniors' Advocate and I'm also going to talk about a number of things that our government and my department is doing for seniors today.

Mr. Speaker, before I start, I have to say, I wish the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune had done a little bit of research into the role of the Seniors' Advocate and her homework before

she stood to speak. I really wasn't surprised to hear her the way she spoke because this is something that we have been advocating for the last three years.

In 2014, the Liberal Party advocated for the creation of the Seniors' Advocate. Mr. Speaker, to understand the challenges that our province faced due to a rapidly aging population – 19 per cent over the age of 65 right now in Newfoundland and Labrador and going to go up to 27 per cent within the next 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, our then leader at the time announced that a Liberal government would commit to pass legislation to create the Office of the Seniors' Advocate. We went on, in April '15, to introduce a PMR in the House to urge the then government of the day to establish a Seniors' Advocate office. At that time, every sitting MHA voted against.

Here we are, Mr. Speaker, with the most rapidly aging population in the country, we have all kinds of issues, and the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune said it is a luxury as luxuries go. And she said: In a time of fiscal restraint is it a luxury or is it necessary?

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that in my district of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair – we have a rapidly aging population all across the province and I think sometimes that's pronounced in rural parts – I have many, many seniors and I love them dearly. I really do. When I pop in, there are many seniors that are lonely; they're waiting for someone to visit. There are many seniors that could avail of programs and they may not be aware of what programs are out there for them.

I'm pretty pleased, Mr. Speaker, that I am part of a government and we have enshrined in legislation the independent power of a Seniors' Advocate to represent the rights and the interests of seniors here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I do have notes on some things I wanted to say, but I felt compelled to respond a little bit to the hon. Member across the way. She referenced many times how the Office of the Seniors' Advocate is different than the Child and Youth Advocate.

Mr. Speaker, the distinction is the Child and Youth Advocate has legislative authority to address individual and systemic issues that impact children and youth in our province. The Seniors' Advocate has the authority to address systemic issues because we already have a number of mechanisms in place. I'm surprised the Member didn't know where a senior can direct their individual complaints concerning impacts to adults. The Citizens' Representative would be one such area.

The Member for St. John's Centre referenced the good work of SeniorsNL. Actually, SeniorsNL is in my district this week, Mr. Speaker, travelling and doing some important work. They do great work. They are a partner that we value greatly in this government. I'm really pleased to say that we continue to support them in my department.

It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that someone could stand and totally discount. We have a stellar candidate that's going to become an Officer of this House, a statutory, independent Officer of this House and she is going to represent the rights and interests of seniors in this province. I'm pretty excited about it. I'm going to talk about that for a little bit.

Back in 2014, my colleagues and I, a number of us that are here today on this side of the House, undertook a Let's Connect seniors tour. We held town hall meetings with seniors throughout the province. What this tour did for us, Mr. Speaker, was it gave us very important perspective on the needs of seniors throughout the province and how those needs could be better met.

Who better to talk to, when we were looking for what direction we were going to go in determining what the needs of seniors are, than to get out and about in our province and to listen to what the seniors themselves had to say. I know in my district we had a number of town hall meetings and we had some luncheons and brunches. It was really well received and we gained valuable feedback. I know the same was true for all of my colleagues at that time.

Mr. Speaker, from that tour it became clear to us the need for an independent voice for seniors in this province. We needed an Advocate. The need to establish the office, Mr. Speaker, this office

today, while it's not supported by Members across the way it was supported by seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: That's who it's for and that's who we're most concerned about. Seniors organizations, major stakeholders all supported this office, Mr. Speaker.

In 2016, our government launched *The Way Forward: A vision for sustainability and growth in Newfoundland and Labrador*. That, Mr. Speaker, is our road map. There's much that I could say when we look back at when we formed government and the necessary steps that we had to take to secure our footing on some pretty unstable ground at that time, if we want to talk about the safety of seniors and what's in their best interests and the things that we were left to deal with.

Mr. Speaker, we have done that. We have done a number of things so that we now have money to free up for an Office of The Seniors' Advocate. Things like put in place a more efficient public sector, a stronger economic foundation, better services and better outcomes: all things that I was pleased to be part of a government that implemented those things. When it came to seniors, our focus is on better services and better outcomes. That's why we're here today talking about this office that we're going to set up.

Mr. Speaker, the numbers were too staggering to ignore. We couldn't continue. I read a quote: Do what you always done and you get what you always got. We have to look at what's happening all around us and we have to adjust the dial accordingly.

We have a rapidly aging population. The Member for St. John's Centre talked about housing and housing needs. We understand that too, Mr. Speaker. In my department in the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, we have a team of people that's doing some very important work right now.

Our government committed to a new provincial housing plan. I have been working closely with my federal counterparts on a new National Housing Strategy because we are not the only

province in the country that has aging demographics happening. We have to prepare.

I'd say to the Member for St. John's Centre: There is a lot of work happening right now as we move forward. Something will be coming on that in the coming weeks, Mr. Speaker.

Sometimes I have to say, Mr. Speaker, when we reference the seniors, we talk about the challenges that are coming with the seniors, but I'd be remiss if I didn't stand and mention the opportunities as well. In September, I had the opportunity, with my federal Minister Duclos, to co-chair the 18th annual federal-provincial-territorial meeting for seniors.

There are three different things coming out of that, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to work on across the country with my colleagues and our federal colleagues and that was ageism and the systemic things that come with that, aging in place, putting supports in to help people grow older in their community with their families and also labour force participation. We know people are living longer and healthier lives, especially the age category of between 55 and 64 years old. So these are things we're going to work on over the next year collectively with other provincial and territorial provinces.

I mention that because sometimes we talk about our seniors like they're a burden, when the fact is we have seniors that are contributing greatly to our communities and to our province. We're very proud of the work they do.

I just spent a day on the West Coast last weekend. I attended some of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. A big shout out to the organizers, they did a great job. When you look around that room, a room full of hundreds of people, many of them with no hair or grey hair – no offence, Mr. Speaker – and well along the road of life and they're still very actively engaged in their community. They're in leadership roles; they're doing a great job. We appreciate them.

Mr. Speaker, here right now today we are talking about the Seniors' Advocate. I guess we felt we needed to listen to those that required those services. We needed to listen with an aim to finding relevant solutions to our rapidly aging

population. That was why we decided and we committed, led by our Premier, to the establishment of a Seniors' Advocate office.

Presently, Mr. Speaker, we have the Office of the Citizens' Representative, which accepts complaints from individual adults of all ages, including seniors. We have SeniorsNL, which I mentioned already, and they provide very valuable information and service referrals.

But, Mr. Speaker, when we spoke to seniors' groups and when we conducted our reviews, it was clear to us that we had no mechanism in place to address the systemic issues. It has been mentioned today some of the things that our seniors are dealing with, like seniors are often vulnerable to poverty, to isolation, loneliness, health issues, neglect and abuse.

The really, really important thing that a Seniors' Advocate will do for the seniors in our province is they will work to identify shortcomings around policy, programs and services, to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our seniors, and to make recommendations to us going forward. Mr. Speaker, those needs will include things like health care, transportation, housing and the navigation between programs and services.

Mr. Speaker, all the things we heard from the lived experiences of seniors. I was just recently driving into – no offence to anybody that is smoking, but in my department we are doing a lot to reduce the rates in *The Way Forward* initiative of smoking in our province because we know all the negative health impacts of that. When we think about seniors that are lonely, and there is lots of research about the impacts of loneliness on your health – as I was driving into work one day, just recently, they were sharing some results from a research project, where the results of loneliness equated to 15 cigarettes a day.

Now, I can't speak as my colleague, Minister Haggie, could speak more intellectually to the impacts of 15 cigarettes a day on your health, but I imagine it is not very good. So these are the things that our Seniors' Advocate will do. She will look at these different systemic things and try to identify ways that we can combat some of that.

As a part of our government's plan to support seniors, we committed to the establishment of an office that is independent of government and reports to the House of Assembly. I am very pleased, Mr. Speaker, that we made the commitment. It is something we have been advocating for since 2014 and 2015 and we are well on our way. My colleague, the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, did a great job outlining the bio of the candidate that has been chosen through the Independent Appointments Commission's merit-based process.

This lady, when I joined the department on July 31st – there's a great team working hard in the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, often dealing with heavy issues, Mr. Speaker. I was quite impressed with Dr. Suzanne Brake, down in Seniors, and the passion that she had to want to make life better for these people was clearly evident to me from the very first time I met her. So I think we're very, very fortunate, Mr. Speaker, to have been able to retain a woman of that calibre and a resume at that level to work now with the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador, to make recommendations to government respecting changes, to improve services to and for the seniors.

The third office, we're only the third – and we had BC and Alberta in 2014 and here we are. Mr. Speaker, I think that we are demonstrating just how committed we are as a government to focusing on the needs of seniors in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to mention some of the initiatives – I've only got five minutes left – some of the things we have been doing to demonstrate that we are listening. We understand that meeting the transportation and housing needs of older adults, it encourages participation in communities, promotes social inclusion and supports healthy, independent living.

One of the things identified was transportation issues. We were pleased again this year in my department to support individuals to more fully participate in their communities and promote social inclusion through the implementation of an age-friendly transportation program. Under the age-friendly transportation program, we have six organizations that have been funded to

implement projects that are age-friendly and to improve accessibility.

A wonderful example of this initiative would be the community transportation service provided by the Canadian Red Cross Society some would be familiar with, happening right here in metro. We're evaluating this program this year to allow for implementation and monitoring of best practices, which will only serve, Mr. Speaker, as we go forward to strengthen this initiative.

I mentioned earlier when I was speaking seniors are living longer; they're staying healthier and they're actively participating in their communities longer than ever before. One of the things that we committed to in *The Way Forward* is that healthy living assessments would be carried out. This is voluntary for seniors age 70 and over. And myself and my colleague, Minister Haggie, have been working on some of this where officials will go into a senior's house, look around and identify things. Maybe they have a staircase that needs some adjustment. And if we can work with them to make that modification in their home that may save that senior a fall, save them a six-week stay in the hospital, which we know is not only the monetary expense to the government and the taxpayers, but it's also a cost to that individual to go through that in their twilight years.

So those are some of the wonderful things, Mr. Speaker, that we're working on that I'm really pleased about, and that's the healthy living assessments will focus on potentially preventable or amenable interventions for those people.

Mr. Speaker, the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit, a refundable tax credit for low-income seniors and the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement, despite us forming government in the worse fiscal climate that this province has ever seen, when things were pretty shaky, we were still able to put money aside for a Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit, a refundable tax credit for low-income seniors.

I'm sure my colleagues will confirm, just like in my district – when I move about my district, I hear from seniors all the time – that cheque that they get four times a year, \$500 or \$600, Mr.

Speaker, it varies a little based on your individual financial circumstances, but it is well received and it is going a long way to help meet the needs of seniors every day.

I'm running out of time here, Mr. Speaker, and I had lots more that I wanted to say on this: the Aging in Place, through accessible and affordable housing and community supports, we are committed to working collaboratively on a number of those issues that came out of the FPT meetings that we had here in September.

So I guess I'll just clue up by saying the Advocate will be an Officer of the House of Assembly and will work with the Citizens' Representative, but will not duplicate or impede their mandate. It will focus solely on systemic issues affecting seniors and making recommendations.

My colleague talked about, when he stood up, my passion for seniors and I guess it shines through, but it's true. I was raised by my grandparents, Mr. Speaker, something that I'm very proud of. I only realized when I was sitting at the 50-plus club – and some of my colleagues here as well – that in a family of 12, when they actually took me in and raised me, they were already in their senior years. As my grandfather would say, they worked hard to blaze the trail for those of us coming behind. Some of our seniors have worked really hard. They've sacrificed; they know hardship that those of us younger will never know anything about.

Now we have spread out over a large landmass, 526,000 people, almost 20 per cent that are seniors, I am really pleased, Mr. Speaker, to be a part of a government led by our Premier. He saw that we need an individual office to address some of the issues of seniors as we go forward to make life better for these people that we owe so much for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It's indeed an absolute privilege to get up here today and, like I always say, represent the District of Cape St. Francis. The one thing I enjoy most about my District of Cape St. Francis and being an MHA for that district is the opportunity that I do have to spend with the seniors in my district.

We spoke on this before when it came into legislation. The previous government brought it in about the Seniors' Advocate and we got the chance to get up and speak. At that time, I did have the opportunity. I think I spoke on behalf of everybody in this House of Assembly that we all respect what seniors have done for us, to put us in the place we are today. I only look at the opportunity I get whenever I go to – this time of year coming up – most of the seniors' dinners and to be able to sit around with them and be with communities.

The communities in my district – it's called seniors appreciation night. They'll have a dinner for the seniors in their district. The minister just alluded to it minute ago. She said that sometimes people consider seniors a burden but she doesn't. I don't think there are very many people in this province who will ever consider seniors in this province a burden. I know I don't. I know Members on this side of the House don't. I'm sure Members on the other of the House don't consider seniors a burden, I guarantee you that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Now, Mr. Speaker, Dr. Brake – as the Member for St. John's Centre spoke earlier today and told all her credentials and so did the minister – is a person who is ideal for this type of job. She's the perfect candidate for this type of job, perfect to advocate.

But what we're saying and the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune said, we'd like to give her more teeth. We'd like to give her investigation powers. The same as what the Child and Youth Advocate would be able to do. To come with a report and say this is what's happening to seniors today, this is what government has to change. Come with a series of reports and show incidents where seniors –

and there are lots of them, we all do have them in our districts, where seniors really do need change in legislation, need change in what's happening in society today.

We only have to look at our seniors and look at that – we understand that our demographics in this province have changed so much over the last number of years. I've noticed in my own communities. My communities are growing. There are a lot more seniors.

Go outside in rural Newfoundland, in rural areas of this province and just look at what's in a lot of the communities today, a lot of communities with seniors and a lot of communities that have different needs.

When you look at what we did in *Budget 2016* – and I always go back to this – when we needed an advocate, we needed someone to tell government that the 300 taxes and fees you brought in, what an effect it has on seniors in this province. We needed an advocate because they weren't listening to the seniors in this province. They wouldn't listen to what they did to seniors in this province.

I spoke to a gentleman the other day, an 82-year-old man. He explained to me about how he does his finance and the effect the 15 per cent on car insurance has on what he can do and what he had to take away, because most of it – and as Members here already got up and said, we understand that seniors are on fixed incomes and every dollar counts. Well, 15 per cent on the car insurance counted to this man. It counted because it meant he could – what food he was putting on, whether he could turn on his lights, worrying about his light bill and how he was going to pay his bills.

That's what we have to do. As people in this House of Assembly, we have to realize we represent all people in this province and we represent seniors. I'm sure Dr. Brake is going to do a great job in advocating. Like I said, she's a perfect candidate for this position. It's too bad the legislation is not giving her the same power as it does for the Child and Youth Advocate because seniors need to have that voice there also, someone to investigate what's happening to them.

When you look at some of the hardships we put on with the 300 taxes and fees and, not only that, with the diabetic strips, now having to pay for diabetic strips. Over-the-counter drugs were mentioned earlier. I spoke to a senior in my district that told me it costs him an extra \$28 a month now for over-the-counter drugs. This person was on a fixed income, and \$28 a month was a lot for that person to be able to have to spend. It meant something else. Did it mean what they bought for their food? Did it mean cutting down their lights for a little bit? I don't know, but that's what we need to do.

As MHAs, I'm sure we all get up here, get up here at budget time and every time, and we do advocate for seniors in our district because they're so important. They're not a burden. I guarantee you, they're not a burden.

Again, I just have a few things here to say today. When it comes to Dr. Suzanne Brake, I'm sure she'll do a great job and I'm sure we will support her appointment. As the minister just alluded to that time, she just said she didn't think we were going to support her. Yes, we will. I'm sure we will, because she is a great candidate for this position.

It's too bad the legislation doesn't give her the powers to be able to do things for seniors, to make sure we're not cutting diabetic strips, to make sure we're not causing hardships for seniors in our province. They paid the price. They've done everything they could.

There are a lot of times – as the minister said, the hardest times ever in this province. She got up and said the hardest times ever. I'm sure there are seniors in your district and seniors in my district who can remember a lot harder times in this province, and I know that for a fact. They can remember times when it was a job to put food on the table and everything else, but we all advocate in here for seniors. I really hope Dr. Brake does a great job and brings something to this legislation.

Again, I hope she brings in a part where she says I'm the one who has to advocate. I'm the one who has to investigate these things and not give it to the Citizens' Representative, but give it to her. Give it to her to stand up for seniors in this province, an independent person, an independent

act to be able to take care of seniors in our province. It's important.

As we know, the seniors' representative does a lot of great work in this province. I'm wondering also, is anything going to be added to the seniors' representative to the new things that are going to be coming to him from the Seniors' Advocate? Is he going to get more resources? Is there going to be more money, more people put in his department because of this? I hope so, because he's definitely going to need it.

Mr. Speaker, we will definitely be supporting the appointment of Dr. Suzanne Brake, but we'd like to see the legislation and this government put a serious job on this position because seniors deserve it. They're not a burden on us or anybody in our society.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to see the Deputy Speaker getting accustomed with the new seating chart and doing well with it. It's always nice to see, but it's certainly my pleasure to stand in this House and speak to this resolution before us as it relates to the appointment of a Seniors' Advocate.

It's my first time speaking here in debate since resuming the fall sitting of the House. So, as always, I want to thank my constituents for the opportunity to serve them, many of whom are seniors. In fact, just last Saturday evening I spent an evening with the seniors of the Chance Cove area. In fact, they have a yearly senior's banquet where they invite all of the seniors from Chapel Arm, Norman's Cove, Long Cove, Thornlea, Bellevue, Bellevue Beach, Chance Cove, Fair Haven and Little Harbour East. They all come together. Instead of having a small gathering in each community, they come together for – I think there were almost 300 there. We had a wonderful evening together, I must say, Mr. Speaker.

I want to come back to a point that the Member opposite for Cape St. Francis had mentioned with respect to a comment the minister made in her opening remarks about some people consider seniors a burden. I agree with the Member opposite; I don't think anyone here and few out there think of any senior citizens as a burden. They're a gift to us as a society. As family members, we cherish every moment we have with them.

I think what the minister was referencing there was when you look at challenges as it relates to long-term care and people who are aging, there are often challenges associated with that. I think she was trying to say – and I felt she did it quite clearly but, obviously, others did not – that this position will be able to address some of those systemic issues within the health care system and other departments, Mr. Speaker, that I think government can address.

You know, it's important. I think the most important piece of all of this is the follow-through. What happens after the appointment of the Seniors' Advocate? The Auditor General long warned of massive overspending by the former administration that went on deaf ears. Today, we're in a situation where we're billions of dollars into debt; there's no money for nothing. The former administration had all these pleas from an Officer of the Legislature, the Auditor General, a warning of the massive overspending, Mr. Speaker, and it just didn't come to fruition.

I think it's important to see the follow-through of what happens. You look at the Independent Appointments Commission which the Seniors' Advocate went through. That's a process that now has been tested; it's gone through a number of appointments to agency, boards and commissions. It's following through on the commitment for independent appointments, a merit-based process.

I think it really matters with the follow-through, Mr. Speaker. I know this government is going to take issues that pertain to seniors very seriously because seniors are a very important part of our society.

I also wanted to congratulate the minister on this appointment today and, of course, the former

minister, now Minister of Service NL, for bringing through this legislation earlier in the spring. When I look at it, I'm the youngest one here, Mr. Speaker, but I have just such a profound respect for seniors. I have such a profound respect for them.

I look at how they've survived and how they've thrived over the years, and lived with dignity and grace and raising large families, often with little resources. My grandmother had 13 children on my mother's side and eight on my father's side; two passed away. When you look at that, years and years ago, before there was running water and electricity – my father grew up on an island – and you look at the challenges that they faced and overcame, it really gives you inspiration, Mr. Speaker. It makes me as an MHA want to work hard for them because I know they worked hard to build this place that we are so proud to call home.

It is difficult, Mr. Speaker, to listen to some of the rhetoric coming from the opposite side. We have the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune calling this a luxury. Mr. Speaker, this is not a luxury, this is a focused approach for seniors to have systemic issues addressed.

Just like we heard in Question Period with respect to questions related to RDC, they favour duplication. They don't want efficiency; they want duplication. They want multiple people fulfilling the same role.

What's missing from the conversation today, Mr. Speaker – yes, the Seniors' Advocate, as we have established it, has a focused approach in terms of dealing with and addressing the systemic issues facing senior citizens and the senior population in the province. The Citizens' Representative, SeniorsNL – all these resources which are also funded through government, through the House of Assembly, have the capacity to deal with the other issues that have been suggested.

The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune gets up today and calls it a wasted opportunity, Mr. Speaker – a wasted opportunity. All smoke and mirrors, no teeth, trying to hide everything they have done. I have to remind the Member: Bill 29 has been repealed long.

As the Minister of Natural Resources said today, we're trying to peel back the cone of secrecy that lived for so long under the former administration. Whether it was Nalcor, whether it was health care, the cone of silence was alive and well in this province for a long time under the former administration. They tried to harden it with Bill 29, but the people of the province spoke up, Mr. Speaker. The Opposition, the Liberals of the day, led the longest filibuster in history at that point and Bill 29 is no more.

I can tell you one thing today: It is the Seniors' Advocate, a commitment that was made in the previous election, Mr. Speaker, one that I am proud to say was made by our Premier, one championed by him. I'm proud to say we have followed through on that because of our commitment to seniors.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWNE: It is very important. It is extremely important that we give back to those who have given to us. Not only give back what they deserve but give back what they are entitled to. They're entitled to an Advocate that is independent of this Chamber; that will examine and study the systemic issues within the government framework that affects senior citizens and report back.

Dr. Suzanne Brake, as has been mentioned by many speakers, including – the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune has even said that her credentials are impeccable. It has passed through the Independent Appointments Commission; in fact, I remember this when it came to the Management Commission. She is an impeccable representative of the senior population. Her post-doctoral work has represented much of the issues which she will be addressing over the course of her term in this role.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to stand here. I'm very proud to say that this government has followed through on this commitment, a position that the Opposition voted against for whatever reason we shall never know, just like they voted against the private Member's resolution relating to the increase in the Seniors' Benefit. We put more money into the Seniors' Benefit. We created the Income Supplement, Mr. Speaker.

We're helping senior citizens and I won't have anyone tell me otherwise.

I talk to the senior citizens of my district; I speak to them every single day. When the quarterly cheques come out with the Seniors Benefit, they understand that we know the challenges they face. We're trying to do the best we can to help address it, despite the flagrant mess left behind by the former administration.

People say sometimes: You have to stop blaming. Mr. Speaker, I'm not blaming; I'm just laying out the facts. If we could give every senior a thousand-dollar increase in the benefit, I know we would. If the capacity allows in the future, I'm sure that's something we'll consider. But we are taking steps, despite deep fiscal restraint, to help seniors as best we can. When we look at the Seniors' Advocate, this is another step that was committed to in *Budget 2016*, just shortly after the election, to bring forward this mandate into legislation and to the appointment that we're seeing today.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that I concur with the Member for Cape St. Francis. I never see senior citizens as a burden. They are a true gift to Newfoundland and Labrador for all they have done. I want to again thank the minister and the former minister for bringing this forward, and the Premier for his leadership in recognizing this is a sector of society that requires and deserves this extra level of oversight, independent of government. Mr. Speaker, it's important to have that.

All I hope is that whatever comes of this position does not fall on deaf ears, like the many pleas from the Auditor General to curtail and curb spending to the former administration. It didn't happen and here we are today getting questions from the other side, yesterday in Question Period, about the state of the economy. It's because of the mess that was left behind and the constant ignoring of warnings by an Officer of this House, the Auditor General.

I hope and I certainly will do my part in holding my colleagues accountable on our side of the House to listen to what the Seniors' Advocate says in representing the senior citizens of our province; and making sure that we can prove to the critics that call this a luxury, Mr. Speaker –

we will show to the critics and everyone out there that this is a necessity, not a luxury.

It is not a wasted opportunity, Mr. Speaker, which is so sad that would be the commentary on such a happy day, such a good day. It's not a wasted opportunity; it's an opportunity. Now it's up to us as legislators to make what we want of it once we begin getting recommendations from the Advocate when she's in her role.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I believe I've made my points. I'm very happy to support this.

I know many of us in our rural districts will be heading in to the Christmas seniors social circuit. Mr. Speaker, I've been trying to cut back a little bit, so I might not eat the whole plate, but I can tell you I appreciate every opportunity to spend with seniors. They are special in our rural communities. They are extremely important to the vitality of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, so any opportunity that I can spend with them and hear their issues and concerns, I go.

I attend these functions, just as I did with the Chance Cove seniors function this past weekend, because it's an opportunity for them to approach me as MHA with issues of concern. A number of people did, and I've been working on them now ever since Saturday night. I'm very proud to do that and have that opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

It's important to show up to functions in your district. It's important to be present. It's important to represent those who have elected you. It's important to recognize opportunities such as voting in favour of and celebrating the appointment of a Seniors' Advocate in this province. It is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to take too long to speak to this resolution. I guess just for the information if anyone is watching, what we're actually

debating here is the appointment of Dr. Suzanne Brake as the new Seniors' Advocate.

Now, we're after going off on many tangents and I understand why. I guess some Members on this side want to remind government of cuts that were made in the budget and Members over there want to say what a wonderful job they're doing. That's all good; it's all part of it.

I will say for the record that we all love seniors no matter what side of the House we're on. We all have grandparents, or had them, and parents. Many of our parents would be seniors if they're still with us. We have seniors groups in our communities. I'm sure every one of us loves seniors and we respect all they've done. I guess we'll just get that part out there as well.

But, really, what we're supposed to be debating is the fact that we've appointed – or it's being proposed that Dr. Suzanne Brake would be appointed as the new Seniors' Advocate. Personally, I don't know Dr. Brake; I don't think I've ever met her. Looking at the credentials that were presented, and from what I've heard through other circles in the past, certainly, it would seem to me that Dr. Brake is a very good choice, someone who has the credentials, the experience and the education to do the job. With that said, I will be, obviously, supporting the appointment of Dr. Suzanne Brake. I certainly congratulate her on the actual appointment.

I guess without rehashing the debate that we had in the House of Assembly on the Office of the Seniors' Advocate and of the establishment of that position, I guess I would just say that I support having an Office of the Seniors' Advocate. I think it's good that we would have somebody that would be putting a seniors' lens, if you will, on all issues affecting us as a province and as a society. I think that's a good thing.

I think it's great that we have an independent person who can look at issues that are impacting seniors and make recommendations to the government to improve services and improve programs that would benefit seniors in our province. I can't see how anybody would possibly be against that.

I do understand, you know, for certain issues we do have a Citizens' Rep. I can understand that every time a senior comes forward with an issue that could be handled by the Citizens' Rep, you wouldn't necessarily say: Well, you happen to be a certain age, we're going to refer the issue to the Citizens' Rep, or you happen to be above a certain age, we're going to refer to the seniors' rep, depending on what the issue is.

If it's an issue which is sort of a systemic issue, an issue that impacts seniors in particular, then I would agree with the Official Opposition that I would like to have that seniors' rep to be able to investigate a specific complaint if it was a totally seniors issue. Right now, as I understand it, it would be referred to the Citizens' Rep. It's too bad that's not in place. I would like to see that.

As I said, the fact that we can have a seniors' rep that can focus on government policy and how it applies to seniors and makes recommendations, I think that's a positive thing. I'm sure Dr. Brake will do a good job. The only caveat I would place there, and I guess it's no different than – because these are recommendations, obviously, that Dr. Brake would be making. While, obviously, I'm sure seniors' groups, the Opposition and so on would do their best to hold government accountable on implementing many of these recommendations, they're not binding recommendations.

I would say that whether it be this position, no different than when you're hiring consultants to do different reports, studies and everything else – and we hear about how studies get done and they're placed on a shelf somewhere collecting dust. I certainly would hope that Dr. Brake, in doing her work, if she puts in the effort to really delve deep into government policy and make reasonable recommendations to improve the lives of seniors in our province, I would certainly encourage this administration and future administrations that they would obviously take these recommendations very seriously and would, if at all possible, implement them and implement them in a timely manner.

It would simply be window dressing if all we did is said we had a seniors' representative and that individual is going through the motions. Well, not going through the motions, they're actually doing the work, doing the research,

bringing forth reasonable recommendations and then those recommendations are not acted upon. That would be a real shame and that would be a total waste of money if that was the case.

We can't predict what's going to happen in the future, other than to say that hopefully this improves things. Anything we can do to improve the lives of seniors in our province, I think it is incumbent upon us to do just that.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, as indicated, I will be supporting this resolution. I congratulate Dr. Suzanne Brake on the appointment.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PARSLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's quite an honour to stand in the House of Assembly and speak today on our Seniors' Advocate. Thanks to the minister, our Justice Minister for the work they've done, the work they've put in and the commitment of our government to finally put something in place to protect our seniors.

Dr. Suzanne Brake is one of the most extraordinary people in our province. I have some background information; I've dealt with her on a few issues. I've been at events for seniors actually in the town of Brigus. I don't know if she owns a summer home out there or what, but when it comes to Canada Day and things like that, she is the one that's out there working with the people, being a part of it. I have no doubt in my mind, when she takes this position over, that she will be here for the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Speaking about seniors, I have an awful lot of seniors in my district, as most of us do here. When we live in small rural towns, the seniors are the backbone of our communities. When you go to a fundraising event, it's the seniors that are behind. They're the ones that are selling the tickets, trying to make funds, trying to plan dinners for the next event. Let me tell you,

there's nothing that goes undone when it's done by a senior.

To speak a little more, I attended a senior's event on Sunday afternoon in Turk's Gut in Marysvale. It was held at the Heritage House. To just see the seniors come in, get their tickets on something, have a cold-plate dinner, get up and dance, have a band there, it was just unbelievable.

I encountered a lady there that I knew on something our province is now doing. She was on dialysis and she was getting her treatments at home. She was so thrilled that she didn't have to make that trip into St. John's. I spoke to her quite lengthily about it because her husband had been trained.

By the time the afternoon was over, let me tell you, I had a broader explanation about our seniors. Most of them are happy with what they're getting. We all know they could use a little bit more. Us here in the House of Assembly, that's why we're here, to advocate on their behalf. They are the backbone; they are what we have today.

I was raised in a family of nine, Mr. Speaker, and my father worked in Labrador. When my father left for work, my mother was left with the duty of raising nine children. Let me tell you, it wasn't an easy task, but she did it. We had to respect her and the many other people in the community for doing what they did, because in those days the father had to leave to go to work and the mothers were the bread and butter of the family. They were the ones who had to support their children and support other families when they had to.

You know, you have to respect seniors. Seniors are entitled to everything they can get. When a senior walks down the road and you see a young couple out, you stand and you open doors for them, you respect them because if we don't respect our seniors, we don't respect anything. Most of them in the last couple of years, yes, they're finding it hard, but some of them are lucky enough to have their children step in and help them out when times are rough.

We also have seniors out there with disabilities. This summer, I spent a little bit of time in

hospital. Actually, I spent time in the rooms with seniors. I didn't let on that I was an MHA, of course, at first, but I listened to their stories. I took a few stories out of that hospital and I worked on them. They were wonderful people and the stories that you heard were unbelievable.

Commitment from this government is everything. We have to stand by our people. I'm sure Dr. Suzanne Brake is going to do that and is going to work for all Members of the House of Assembly to make sure Newfoundland and Labrador is a better place for our seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to get up to speak this afternoon, which is the approval of Dr. Suzanne Brake to be appointed as the Seniors' Advocate.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said several times by Members on this side of the House, and Members on both sides of the House this afternoon during this debate, that I believe there will be unanimous agreement in the appointment of Dr. Brake. It appears that the debate now, with the consent of the Speaker and Chair this afternoon, has moved off of that specific debate and into more of a discussion about the legislation. In fact, some Members have talked about the previous administration and gone back and talked about the economy and so on.

When the member for Placentia West – Bellevue spoke a few minutes ago, he talked about the Seniors' Advocate and systemic issues. Then he talked about the overspending of government. I'm not sure if he is saying the Seniors' Advocate should have – if it's related to the Seniors' Advocate being responsible for looking at systemic issues, but it's certainly one that, yes, the Auditor General has talked about and has talked about in this year's report, actually.

The Auditor General talked about it in this year's report, in some length, about government having to reduce its spending. We know when we asked about it this week in Question Period, the government asked us for our opinion and

asked us to help resolve it for them, but they're the government and it's their job to do that.

The Member also referred to the IAC, or Independent Appointments Commission, which is probably wrongfully named in some regard because they have no power to make appointments; similarly, that the Seniors' Advocate under legislation has no power to advocate for seniors. When you look up what advocate means, there are many definitions under various sources. Merriam-Webster talks about it being: one who pleads the cause for another is an advocate. Yet, the Seniors' Advocate as brought forward by the legislation, by Members opposite, has no authority to advocate for seniors by that definition.

You'll find definitions to say: one who defends or maintains a cause, proposal. It's not really what the Seniors' Advocate is to do. As well: or one who supports or promotes the interest of a cause or group. It's not that, and maybe advocate was the wrong name. Maybe that was the problem, where things kind of went off the rails for the government when they referred to it as a Seniors' Advocate.

We had a lengthy discussion on this. The Member for Placentia West talked about they're bringing in the longest filibuster in the history. Well, certainly that record will never be beaten because the government has passed legislation that essentially eliminates having filibusters in the House. So they've looked after that part of it as well.

Mr. Speaker, seniors are important – we all agree with that – and are very significant in our province. There are aspects in government today that deal with advocating, and for seniors. The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development has a responsibility. Even their own website refers to their mandate and describes what their mandate is, which includes children, youth, families and seniors as well.

There is the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. This is really what makes it, I suppose, somewhat of a mask. It kind of presents it somewhat inconsistently. I was going to say falsely, but that's probably a wrong word to use in the House. So I won't say it represents it falsely, but I'll say it represents it

inconsistently from what other offices within government or within the House of Assembly.

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is an independent statutory office of the House of Assembly. It has authority to represent the rights and interests and viewpoints of children and youth who are entitled to receive services and programs that are provided by the government.

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate also has the mandate to individually advocate, something the Seniors' Advocate does not have. It also has the mandate to look for systemic advocacy which the Seniors' Advocate does have. Education and promotion, and it does reviews and investigations. The Seniors' Advocate has no teeth, no legislative power, no regulated legislated law that allows the Seniors' Advocate to review and investigate.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Members opposite like to talk about the past. They like to talk a good bit about the past. I sit here in my seat every day and listen to it, as we all do. So let's talk about the past. Let's talk about what they got elected on, because in their 2015 red book, yes, they did. I say to the Member opposite who raised it: Our leader made a promise and made a commitment. Well, let's look at what that promise was.

The promise was, and I won't leave any of it out. I won't editorialize it. I'll go through it all: "To ensure seniors have the strong voice they deserve." Well, does their legislation do that? No, it doesn't. It's simply for systemic issues. It's not to be a strong voice for individual seniors.

"A New Liberal Government will introduce legislation to create a Seniors' Advocate Office ..." – yes, well they've done that, but let's pick through the meat of it – "... which will be the third of its kind in Canada. The Seniors' Advocate will be independent of government, and will report to the House of Assembly instead of a Minister."

Well, if we look at the legislation, under section 3 of the *Seniors' Advocate Act*, it says: "The Office of the Seniors' Advocate is established to..." and it names some things, (c) "make recommendations to government and

government agencies respecting changes to improve seniors'..." programs.

I may have quoted one wrong word there, Mr. Speaker. So I think it's important to get back and make sure it's right, "to improve seniors' services" – not programs.

As well, the 2015 Liberal red book said: "The Seniors' Advocate Office will improve the health and well-being of seniors by: Advocating on behalf of seniors." Mr. Speaker, the Liberal legislation goes far short of that commitment that the Liberals made in 2015: "Advocating on behalf of seniors and their families." And there was no legislative authority for that to take place. Here's a big one, Mr. Speaker, and I'll read the whole line: "Advocating on behalf of seniors and their families, investigating individual complaints."

The Member for Bellevue and others talked about systemic issues repeatedly, because that's what the legislation does, it's for systemic issues. It certainly gives no ability, no intent and no authority for the Seniors' Advocate to investigate individual complaints.

We just saw one publicly this week in Holyrood. I saw it. The news media carried it, in Holyrood, where a senior needed an ambulance service. There was a story about some of the issues. To me, it would be an ideal circumstance for the Seniors' Advocate to say: Let's see what happened here and let's have a look at it because there's some confusion.

I'm sure the Minister of Health and his department and the medical oversight are looking at it. I hope they do. I look forward to hearing more on it because it's certainly not clear exactly what happened, but it would be important to understand exactly what happened, especially if the circumstances in some way were unique to seniors. That's what the Liberal's promised; it's not what they delivered.

It goes on to say: "Working collaboratively with other seniors' organizations and service delivery groups to identify and address issues impacting the health and well-being of Newfoundland and Labrador's seniors." Perfect.

“Advising on policy and program changes to improve services and support for seniors, thereby improving health outcomes amongst this population.” Perfect.

“Serving as a navigator, providing seniors and their families with the information they need to access government programs and services in a timely manner.” That’s not a systemic issue. That’s an individual issue or individual assistance.

I’m not sure, Mr. Speaker, I was going to rise and say the Seniors’ Advocate has not been tasked with doing that, because Members opposite have said we’re going to duplicate the service. I’m sure the Office of the Seniors’ Representative has not been tasked with that, because the Office of the Seniors’ Representative is a province-wide ombudsman service. Their role, in a very high level, is to accept complaints from citizens who feel they’ve been treated unfairly with respect to their contacts with government offices and agencies. Their role is to mediate complaints, and if they’re unable to mediate, if those mediation efforts are unsuccessful, then to undertake an impartial and unbiased investigation.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don’t see anywhere there where it says serving as a navigator, providing seniors and their families with information they need to access government programs and services in a timely manner. I don’t recall anywhere in debate hearing that would be a function of the Seniors’ Advocate. I don’t think I’ve heard that anywhere.

It’s certainly what they promised in 2015 when they asked the people to vote for them; certainly not that. We’ve heard about broken promises here today and the last couple of days it’s been a topic again. It’s been a frequent topic throughout the province, Mr. Speaker. I speak to lots of people in the province and we quite often hear about those types of broken promises. The 2015 red book promise is far beyond what they delivered in the legislation; far beyond what they delivered. It’s certainly not duplicated by the Citizens’ Representative as asserted by Members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of thoughts on this. Maybe they named the Seniors’ Advocate wrongly. Maybe they should have called it something else. If the Seniors’ Advocate is going to be about systemic issues, which it primarily is, to look at programs and systemic issues within government, which is primarily what the legislation says, then they should have called it something else.

Under section 3 of the Seniors’ Advocate legislation, it says: “The Office of the Seniors’ Advocate is established to (a) identify, review and analyze systemic issues related to seniors;” – so that is 3(a) – “(b) work collaboratively with seniors’ organizations, service providers and others to identify and address systemic issues related to seniors; and (c) make recommendations to government and government agencies respecting changes to improve seniors’ services.”

It is 3(a), (b) and (c); in (a) and (b), which lays out why the office was established, they both refer to systemic issues: “identify, review and analyze systemic issues related to seniors; and work collaboratively with seniors’ organizations, service providers and others to identify and address systemic issues”

So they are about systemic issues. They are in no way about individual advocacy. It’s in no way about navigating for individuals. It’s in no way advocating on behalf of families. It’s in no way about investigating individual complaints. It’s in no way about providing seniors and their families with information they need to access government programs and services in a timely manner. It’s none of that. It’s none of that, which is what we expected to see, Mr. Speaker.

Members opposite referred to the IAC a little bit earlier, and I don’t want to go back on them too much – it wasn’t my intention today – but I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention it because that’s a similar kind of promise that never evolved into reality. Members stand up all the time and say oh, we have the Independent Appointments Commission. An Independent Appointments Commission that has no authority to appoint. They have no authority to appoint. We have a Seniors’ Advocate who has no authority to advocate.

Maybe if they had to change their title a little bit, maybe it would have took the wind out of our sales in what we are saying here today somewhat if they had to call it what it was, instead of trying to represent it as something that it's not.

The Independent Appointments Commission can make recommendations to Cabinet and Cabinet can pick from those or any other list of names, and we will never know. That's the Independent Appointments Commission; we will never know, Mr. Speaker. The Seniors' Advocate has a similar type of circumstance whereby they can't do what was promised; they can't advocate.

There is a lot of talk here today about seniors. We've seen changes in programs and services being delivered by government and we know they have a spending problem. The Finance Minister has finally said that they have a spending problem, and we don't disagree with that. There is a spending problem in government and they have to deal with that, so they changed programs for seniors.

Let's use the example of the lady – I won't name her – on Fowler's Road in my district who needed to go through a process for fairly significant dental work and repairs and so on that she needed, and she actually protested out here on the front steps. If there was a Seniors' Advocate, specifically for seniors that could lobby on her behalf and advocate on her behalf, it would probably be a really good example of how a Seniors' Advocate could have assisted her, could have assisted a senior.

We have seniors who have housing issues, transportation issues, regarding health issues. We have seniors who are trying, as the government likes to talk about on a regular basis – and I don't disagree – trying to stay in their own homes for a longer period of time. But if those individual seniors can't make their issues known and reach out for assistance and help, then they are really at a loss because the Seniors' Advocate can do none of that.

Now, Members opposite will say this is a duplication of services; there is no reason why seniors can't go to the Office of the Citizens' Representative and will seek out similar

services. I will say to Members opposite, there is some merit in what the Member referenced opposite. But why don't we have the Child and Youth Advocate just send them to the Citizens' Representative as well? Because we don't – we don't have children and youth who have concerns about programs and services from government, we don't send them to the Office of the Citizens' Representative, as has been suggested should happen, and what has been suggested shall happen to seniors, because they are quite often specialized, very difficult and complex matters, that children and youth sometimes experience that need specialized handling.

Not only specialized handling, but someone who understands the needs of children and youth to advocate on their behalf, to do investigations and reviews of government services and programs; because our children are very important as well, Mr. Speaker, and our children and youth are very important, as well as our seniors. So much so that we all believe in this House that an Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is important enough to have in place to advocate for children, independently of government, an Officer of the House, with the authority to represent the rights of those children, and the authority to represent the interest and viewpoints of children who are entitled to receive service and programs from government.

Mr. Speaker, what Members opposite want us to do is when seniors have a right to be represented, when seniors need someone to look after their viewpoints, and seniors who are entitled to receive programs and services by government and they feel it's not being adequately received, should go to the Citizens' Representative.

Well, maybe Members opposite could have said the Seniors' Advocate will be part of the Citizens' Representative. They could have taken the Seniors' Advocate office and made it a branch of the Citizens' Representative; not work separately from, with a completely different set of rules, a different playing field and a different authority as the Citizens' Representative, and a completely different set of rules from the Child and Youth Advocate.

Maybe they could have considered taking the Seniors' Advocate and be part of the Citizens' Representative office, to complement the Citizens' Representative, not just to be a forwarding service because the government is well on the record – when we've asked and we've talked about it and said, well, what happens if the Seniors' Advocate receives inquiries for assistance and help from seniors, then it becomes a forwarding service. Their role is just to forward it on to an already overtaxed, overburdened Citizens' Representative office; a Citizens' Representatives office who has tremendous amount of pressure, roles and responsibilities in our province; a Citizens' Representative who does great work under, sometimes, very difficult circumstances.

And I say the same thing about the Child and Youth Advocate who does very, very good work, very difficult work and challenging work, and results in good changes in policy, or at least it should result in good changes in policy and program delivery to benefit children and youth.

The same thing should happen for seniors, Mr. Speaker. If the government feels that to advocate for seniors would be a duplication of what's already done by the Citizens' Representative, well, make them part and parcel of the same. Instead of just being a forwarding service, add it as part of that office because the Office of the Citizens' Representative and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate are offices of the House of Assembly, independent from government, with special powers and rights to access government files, to get records and files on individual people from government departments who can't turn them down. They have special rights to say I want to see the file on this child. I want to see. I want to talk to the social workers. I'm doing an investigation. They have rights and authority to do so, and we all support that, but when it comes to seniors, there is no such power.

When a senior goes to the Seniors' Advocate and says I have a problem, here's what I've been dealing with, can you look into it, the Seniors' Advocate says: No, I can't, because even though I'm called an Advocate, I have no role to advocate. When such a good appointment, as a strong person like Dr. Brake to a position like this, which we fully support – and I don't need

to get into her background and credentials and so on, it's been talked about here in the House. It's such a loss of an opportunity to benefit seniors.

I have two seniors' retirement homes in my district, which I visit fairly regularly. One more than the other, I have to admit, only because my mother lives in one of them. So I'm there more often than the other one.

I also attend functions from time to time with the Paradise 50-plus group in my district as well. I find that when I walk through the hallways of one of these homes – it just happened to me the other day – or if I attend an event at the Paradise Adventure 50-plus group, it's not unusual for a senior to tap me on the shoulder and say: Got a minute? I'd like to talk to you. One I always kind of smile at, they say: Excuse me, I know you're really busy, but are you able to talk to me – absolutely, because that's why we're here – I have a problem or I have an issue, I don't know where to go.

Now, if that was a child who came to me and said I have a problem, we can go to the Child and Youth Advocate, or a teenager who's trying to find their way. We know that lives of teenagers are more complex today than they ever were before, and even beyond teenagers, to young adults. Their lives are more complex, more difficult and more challenging than ever before. We have a place for them to go where if they need individual advocacy, if they need assistance with programs or services, or maybe they raise an issue that the Child and Youth Advocate has heard so many times before, there's a method to go. For seniors, yes, they can come to their MHA, but to have a centralized seniors' representative, a Seniors' Advocate with a specialized, specific role of advocating for seniors, would be beneficial to seniors in our province.

As I stand here before you today, Mr. Speaker, I can think of numerous experiences I've had where seniors needed help and assistance and it wasn't always readily available through a department, or there were some obstacles and red tape in departments that were slowing down what a senior needed and it was becoming problematic. It could have been transportation for a health matter, which we know in rural

Newfoundland and Labrador is of utmost importance. It could be assistance in trying to stay in their home, as I mentioned. Maybe their roof is leaking and they're trying to find, through all the programs and services, what's available for them. To have a centralized, specialized office to deal with all those issues, the broad range of issues and concerns and challenges that may face any senior in our province would certainly be beneficial for seniors.

Mr. Speaker, that's what was promised to people. When they went to the polls in 2015, that's what was promised to them by the Liberals. Everyone over there campaigned on it and supported the red book, which they didn't release until just a few days before the election, by the way. I remember when they released it because it came under heavy criticism. People said, you can't do it, it's impossible. What were some of the words they used? Pixie dust and all that kind of stuff, but when it comes to seniors – which I want to try and stay to that and not be swayed off by some of the things I've heard in previous debate. When it comes to seniors, what they promised clearly wasn't in the legislation.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that one of the outcomes from the appointment of Dr. Brake, because I believe in her role of reviewing systemic issues, in her role under section 3: “(a) identify, review and analyze systemic issues related to seniors; (b) work collaboratively with seniors’ organizations, service providers and others to identify and address systemic issues related to seniors; and (c) make recommendations to government and government agencies respecting changes to improve seniors’ services.”

Mr. Speaker, I honestly hope that one of Dr. Brake's recommendations will be to give her office, the Office of Seniors' Advocate, authority to advocate because that will become and is today a systemic issue on itself. It is a systemic issue today that seniors do not have a specialized, specific office with specialized investigative powers to review files and records and documents and programs and services within government. It is a systemic issue today that that's not there.

I had hoped that when the government brought the legislation it was going to be what they

promised. They were elected. When I looked at that I said: you know what, if they're going to bring this forward, well, good for them. It's time to do that, because we know we're an aging population. We know the population is getting older, but they didn't do it. Just like the IAC I talked about a little while ago, the Independent Appointments Commission, they didn't do what they promised.

I really hope that Dr. Brake, when she gets to work and she works collaboratively with seniors' organizations and service providers and others to identify and address systemic issues, that she will understand before too long, once she's in the office and gets in place and she's working away and she gets settled in and she starts to talk to seniors and groups and organizations around the province, I suspect she's going to hear there's nowhere for seniors to turn, other than a Member of the House of Assembly. When the chips are down, where else do we go but the Office of the Citizens' Representative?

I hope she identifies that as a systemic issue so this matter can change and be fixed, because in a roundabout way that's her job now. Her job is to identify those systemic issues and make recommendations to government and government agencies respecting changes to improve senior services.

I trust that we, as Members of the House, will have access to all of those reports and recommendations that's provided to government and to government agencies and then we can have some insight into the work that Dr. Brake is doing in her very important role here in the province.

I hope there will be a way to alleviate some of the pressures that we see on the Office of the Citizens' Representative, but I believe that can only happen if Dr. Brake makes a recommendation for change. Certainly, we made recommendations for change to the Seniors' Advocate legislation – unsuccessfully, I'll add, Mr. Speaker, but I hope that between Dr. Brake and the Citizens' Representative, maybe there could be changes.

I've talked to the past Child and Youth Advocate many times, have met with the current

Child and Youth Advocate as well, and I know how complicated, detailed, sensitive and difficult some of the work they do can be as well. I'm sure that seniors are getting lost in the loop. We don't want our seniors to be lost in a shuffle here. We don't want our seniors to be the ones who are lost out of all of that.

Mr. Speaker, the motion today is to appoint Dr. Suzanne Brake as the Seniors' Advocate. As my colleagues have said already, our intention is to support that motion before the House today on the Seniors' Advocate.

I'm glad we've had the opportunity today to talk about some of the shortcomings of the legislation. Hopefully, down the road government will see the benefits of some small changes to the legislation, but would be significant improvements to Dr. Brake's authority.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak on this very important motion. I don't know Dr. Brake personally, but I've heard so much about her and I've read so much about her. Certainly, the CV the Minister of Justice and Public Safety read today on Dr. Brake leads me to believe that we could not have chosen a better candidate for the position of the Seniors' Advocate.

I find it very unfortunate that we are here today to the motion to appoint Dr. Brake as the Seniors' Advocate and it is being overshadowed by the Opposition trying to pick apart the office and legislation that was put forward back earlier this year.

I just want to go back to give a little history, so that leads me to where I want to go with this today. Because the motion is not whether we should have a Seniors' Advocate office; the motion is to appoint Dr. Suzanne Brake as the Seniors' Advocate. Unfortunately, as I said, it is being overshadowed by the Opposition, by

information, by advocacy and by, I guess, issues that they had the opportunity to bring up under Bill 64.

May I remind the Opposition, they had the opportunity to vote against it then, but the records will show that under second reading, there were no nays. Under the third reading, there were no nays. And here they are today when we are about to appoint probably the best candidate we could have chosen for the Seniors' Advocate, they want to rehash the information and they are lobbying for things they should have done under Bill 64.

If they didn't agree with it, they should have had the gonads then to vote against it, Mr. Speaker. But here they are today trying to overshadow this appointment. It's shameful. When we hear things like a wasted opportunity, my God, mon Dieu, how unfortunate. This is a very important office that we created here today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: It is one that we advocated for back on April 22, 2015 when the Leader of the Opposition was then premier, to establish a Seniors' Advocate office, and every one of them who sat on this side of the House voted against that PMR. In fact, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune called the Seniors' Advocate a luxury as luxuries go. And asked: In a time of fiscal constraint, is it a luxury or is it a necessity?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how everybody else feels; I consider it a necessity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: Then the premier of the day, who is now the Leader of the Opposition, he deemed it redundant – redundant – saying the government already has a minister with seniors as one of his primary responsibilities, as well as a seniors' advisory council, an age-friendly plan and more.

Mr. Speaker, here they are today over there trying to say and tell us that the Office of the Seniors' Advocate is not adequate. Well, I tend to differ. As I said, this person that we are voting on today is probably – not probably, by her

credentials is one of the best people that we could have chosen for this position.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: I'm sure that Dr. Brake will address any issues if she feels that the office – if she doesn't have the power in her office to do what needs to be done for the seniors of this province, I am sure that Dr. Brake will let us know. If something needs to be done to correct it, it will be done.

Mr. Speaker, they keep saying that the mandate of the Seniors' Advocate does not go far enough and it does not give her, in this situation, the authority to do what needs to be done. Well, again, we tend to disagree. When you look at the mandate – enough people have said it, but I'll repeat it again. The mandate of the Seniors' Advocate is to identify, review and analyze systemic issues. That's the core mandate of the office.

Mr. Speaker, the office is to work collaboratively with seniors' organizations, service delivery groups –

MR. SPEAKER: Point of order.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

I rise under section 49 of the Standing Orders with a point of order. In his speaking, he referred to the Member and used terminology that I feel is unparliamentary and offensive to both males and females in this Chamber. I think in the interest of improving the decorum of this House of Assembly, the Member should apologize to this hon. House for referring to Members and referring to the term “gonads.”

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

MR. LETTO: I apologize.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. LETTO: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, to carry on, I thank the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape

La Hune for pointing that out. I appreciate that. I tend to get carried away sometimes.

Anyway, the Seniors' Advocate is to work collaboratively with seniors' organizations, service delivery groups and others to identify and address systemic issues; and then make recommendations to government respecting changes to improve services to and for seniors.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that part of the mandate really addresses the authority of the Seniors' Advocate. If she feels that things aren't going the way they should, certainly under that she can make recommendations to us, to government, respecting changes that need to be made to improve that.

So I think we've covered all the bases, Mr. Speaker. Even though Labrador City-Wabush has been known as a young town, that's no longer the case; we do have quite a few seniors in our towns and a lot of them, especially those in Wabush have been, as I've stated in this House many times, they've suffered enough in the past three years with the cutbacks in their pensions and whatnot. So seniors are at the top of our list too.

We have a great seniors' organization in Labrador West that addresses the needs of seniors and certainly to help them get through their day. Mr. Speaker, so what we're doing here today –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind all hon. Members that the Member for Labrador West is speaking. He's been recognized and that should be the only person we hear here.

Thank you very much.

MR. LETTO: My God, I haven't been interrupted so many times.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

I think in the interest of time and safety within the House of Assembly, I will conclude my remarks by saying that this appointment today is

very important. It is very important to the people of this province, to the seniors of this province. It's very important that we have a person in place to –

AN HON. MEMBER: Champion.

MR. LETTO: – champion – that's a good word – seniors' issues. I feel that we've chosen the right person, that the IAC has chosen the right person, and that this office will be very beneficial going forward, Mr. Speaker, to the seniors of this province.

But I won't sit down without saying that we don't want to lose sight on what we're voting on here today, Mr. Speaker. We are voting on the appointment of Dr. Suzanne Brake.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: That's what we're voting on today, Mr. Speaker. We are voting on the appointment of a very special person for this province who will do great work. Unfortunately, it's been overshadowed by information that should have come up and should have been discussed during the debate on Bill 64.

I won't say what I said before, but anyway, I stand by that. Today, let's do the right thing and appoint this person to the Seniors' Advocate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, I was just looking at the clock there, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to stand up again and speak to this very important resolution and to conclude debate on the appointment for the first ever Seniors' Advocate in this province. I'd like to thank the Members from both sides for their speeches and for their comments on this very important resolution that we're debating here.

This is a resolution which will put this person in this position. It's a statutory office of the House of Assembly. It's an independent House. This is

not one that is controlled by politics. It's not one that will be partisan. This is a person, an office that will speak for the best interests of seniors in this province, regardless of political stripe, regardless of who's in government. Their concern is seniors.

Similar to the Child and Youth Advocate, a position where it doesn't matter who is in government, it doesn't matter who controls the House of Assembly, what matters is the voice of children being heard. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that Dr. Suzanne Brake will be a voice for seniors.

Again, there were a lot of very good points brought up here. One thing I would like to note – again, this is strictly from reviewing the *Hansard* from the debate of Bill 64, which was the actual act that established this office, so again that's different than today. Today is the appointment of the person who will work in this office. Bill 64 was the appointment of the office.

Now, unfortunately – and I won't say a couple of Members because that would put everybody in the same situation. I would like to thank the independent Member for his support of this. I'd also like to thank the Member for St. John's Centre for her very complimentary speech regarding Dr. Brake. The fact is we may have differences but nobody has an issue with saying that obviously, (a), seniors are important and, (b), this person will be a great addition to this position, as someone that comes with the resume.

It's unfortunate that a couple Members on the other side in the Official Opposition who have made clear their disdain for this office since their time in government, took today, instead of speaking positively about the person turned it back into a rehashing of Bill 64, which again going back to the *Hansard* I believe – I couldn't see any nays there, so my understanding is that they supported this bill. But today, what they did was they took a very quick yes, we support Dr. Brake, great job; let's go back and criticize the piece of legislation that we voted for not that long ago.

The Member for Fortune Bay –Cape La Hune, in particular, took the opportunity to complain about the necessity of this. Took the opportunity

to speak about basically, if you want it in layman's terms, there's no need of it. No need to have this; this is going to serve no purpose.

That's unfortunate that the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune feels that about an independent voice for seniors. I think that's unfortunate. What I would suggest is – again, I don't know why that perspective was put out there. We had a debate on that where the Member opposite could have voted against it and chose not to. So to stand up today during the speech where we are to talk about – and I took most of the opportunity, when I first addressed this, to speak about the individual that's going to do this, to which nobody I think can say anything negative about.

This is a person who has devoted their professional career to the advancement of seniors in this province, to the advancement of the aging, to not just advocacy work but academic work, but very little of that was noted. What the Member noted was that they didn't think this was necessary.

I could talk about their track record when they were in government and a lot of the steps and policies that they put in place which, believe me, Mr. Speaker, will have quite a negative effect on seniors, but I'm not going to get into that right now. What I'd like to ask are three very simple questions. I think they're simple. Is this appointment and is this act an improvement from what was there? The answer is a resounding yes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: The second question is: Will this appointment and will this act make things better for seniors than what it was before? The answer is yes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: Finally, will this appointment improve the situation and lives of seniors across Newfoundland and Labrador – will it or won't it? The answer again for the third time, Mr. Speaker – and if there's any contrary voice to this, I ask the Members to get up and put it on the record. The answer again is a resounding yes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: I'm happy to stand here today. I appreciate the fact that I do believe there will be support for this appointment. I think this is a very important appointment. We have a very good person that's being selected and we all look forward to working with Dr. Suzanne Brake as she takes on this important role, which I assume will happen with the support.

I can guarantee you, I know the government is going to support it. I know the NDP support it. I know the independent Member supports it. I sometimes question where the Official Opposition stands, because what they say and what they do are two different things.

Mr. Speaker, we support Dr. Suzanne Brake. We support the Seniors' Advocate and we support seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador. We look forward to voting for this resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Is the House ready for the question?

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.'

Motion carried.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Division

MR. SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Those in favour of the motion, please rise.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CLERK: Mr. Andrew Parsons, Ms. Coady, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Haggie, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Crocker, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Warr, Mr. Bernard Davis, Ms. Gambin-Walsh, Mr. Edmunds, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Letto, Mr. Browne, Mr. Bragg, Ms. Cathy Bennett, Mr. Finn, Mr. Reid, Ms. Parsley, Mr. King, Mr. Dean, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Holloway, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Brazil, Ms. Perry, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Petten, Ms. Michael, Ms. Rogers, Mr. Lane.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against the motion, please rise.

I recognize the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

By leave, and I think I have leave from all in the House, I would like to make a correction to the notice of motion that I made yesterday, because it is for the private Member's motion tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Okay.

Does she have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

MS. MICHAEL: The change will be two changes in the very first WHEREAS, and after I read it I have copies of the new one to give out. It's the first WHEREAS.

WHEREAS the province's serious financial situation has caused government to predict a decline in program expenses of 0.85 per cent per annum – that's the addition – or \$376 million over the next six years – and that's a correction – which could result in tens of millions of dollars kept from health care each year.

That's now in *Hansard* as corrected, and I have copies here for everybody.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Now I ask for a report from the Clerk.

CLERK: Mr. Speaker, the ayes 32, the nays zero.

MR. SPEAKER: I declare the motion has been carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Given the hour of the day, I move, seconded by the Member for Harbour Main, that the House do now adjourn.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn until tomorrow, at 10 a.m.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.