



Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

FORTY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Volume XLVIII

SECOND SESSION

Number 47

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

Thursday

March 1, 2018

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

In the public galleries today, I'd like to welcome members of the executive of the Citizens' Crime Prevention Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, which will be referred to in a Ministerial Statement today. Joining us, we have: Roberta (Bobbi) Stanford, who is the president; Kelly Piercey, the vice-president; Cheryl Barrett, the secretary; Wilson Chaulk, past president; Constable Jason Coombs, RNC liaison; and Constable Brad Squires, RCMP liaison.

Thank you, and welcome very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome in the public gallery, I am very pleased to welcome several guests who will be referred to in a Member's statement today. That's Ms. Mary Shortall, she's the chair of the St. John's Status of Women's Council-Women's Centres' Board of Directors, and Director Ms. Dwan Street.

Welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I'd also like to welcome members of the Friends of India Association, including: Rafid Khan, Sudhir Saha, Ela Saha, Nabila Quereshi, Shirley Swamidas and Reshma Amanat.

Welcome to all of you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today, we will hear statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of Ferryland, St. George's - Humber, St. John's Centre, Baie Verte - Green Bay, Windsor Lake, and Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the steamship *S.S. Florizel* off Horn Head Point in Cappahayden on February 24, 1918. Of the 137 souls onboard, 17 passengers and 27 crew Members survived.

This past weekend, I had the privilege of attending a commemoration event in Cappahayden. This involved a wreath laying ceremony at the newly constructed Florizel viewing site, storyboards listing names of those involved and details outlining what happened that night. The Town of Renews/Cappahayden also renamed a road, Florizel Lane.

Following the site events in Cappahayden, a get together was held in the Town Hall in Renews to showcase local musicians, storytellers and a theatrical production of the events from 1918. There was also original songs about the untold stories of how the heroic residents helped in the rescue on that early morning.

I want to recognize the organizing committee of the event and especially Susan Sheehan for ensuring that a significant marine event in our history is remembered and we ensure such a significant part of our culture and history be shared with residents and all those that travel to the region.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of the House to join me in congratulating the Town of Renews/Cappahayden on the commemoration on the 100th anniversary of the *Florizel* and certainly ask everybody to visit the site.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of George's - Humber.

MR. REID: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recount a little known story of events which happened 150 years ago in the Bay St. George South area and to recognize a group of dedicated volunteers working to preserve the heritage of the area.

In April of 1868, six boys ages 11 to 16, and one young man, 21, stowed away aboard the *Arran*, a bulk carrier leaving Scotland bound for Quebec. The boys remained on the ship until they were abandoned on the ice floes out in Bay St. George, off the community of Highlands on May 15.

Two of the younger boys did not survive; and had it not been for the sighting by Catherine Anne Gillis - MacInnis the other four may have suffered the same fate.

The four boys were rescued by fishermen and brought ashore where they were treated kindly by residents. The captain of the vessel was eventually convicted of homicide and sent to jail.

This year members of the Bay St. George Heritage Association and the local service district are planning an event in May to commemorate Catherine's sighting and rescue of the boys.

I ask all Members to join with me in wishing them well with this project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we all heard the news that Jenny Wright and her daughter Shelby had survived a harrowing collision on the Southern Shore highway, there was an enormous outpouring of concern and support. Jenny's commitment to the feminist movement and to the innovative work by her team at the St. John's Status of Women Council's Women's Centre is legendary.

I am thrilled to report that Jenny and Shelby are recovering and Jenny's team at the Women's Centre continues to do fantastic work. Their "Right Here, Right Now" counselling clinic, the province's first and only drop-in, single-session counselling clinic specifically for women, quickly connects with women and refers them

on to complimentary programs and well on to the road of recovery.

Conceptualized by the Women's Centre and partnered with Catherine de Boer from the School of Social Work at Memorial University, "Right Here, Right Now" has had its first comprehensive evaluation and has proven to be a resounding success.

Bravo to Jenny and her extraordinary team, and her fabulous board members for creating a drop-in counselling centre that is useful, relevant and responsive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the Town of Springdale and its residents for holding their second ever Random Acts of Kindness Week, which was enjoyed the week of February 17-23.

Random Acts of Kindness Week encourages residents to give to a neighbour, co-worker or classmate, as a way of saying thanks.

The event is promoted by the Town of Springdale which was kick started by delivering fruit trays to local groups. Others have jumped on board: strangers paying for coffee for the vehicle behind them in the Tim's lineup, others were shovelling driveways, students holding doors for one another and delivering flowers to their teachers. As the week went on, it became more contagious.

Teachers were placing motivational notes on students' lockers and bringing treats for all to enjoy.

Indian River Academy decided to promote the idea even further by placing a tree in the school lobby decorated with a heart for every act of kindness.

Social media was alive with related stories of kindness. It was a wonderful idea the whole

community rallied around and you could sense it everywhere.

I ask my colleagues to join me in applauding the residents of Springdale.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Windsor Lake.

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize the Friends of India Association.

For over 52 years this organization has worked tirelessly to preserve, create awareness and promote the Indo-Canadian cultural heritage here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Led and operated entirely by volunteers, the Friends of India Association offers year-round cultural, social and educational programs that bring many communities together by showcasing Indian and other ethnic traditions through music, dance, cuisine and art. Designed to promote multiculturalism, the activities and events that the Friends of India Association host foster friendships between people of Indian origin and of all the people throughout our amazing province. The organization is a non-profit, secular, non-political organization that has multi-generational volunteers who not only celebrate culture, but also give back financially to young people for educational opportunities.

Recently, I was privileged to celebrate the 69th Republic Day Celebrations hosted by the Friends of India.

On behalf of the people of the province, I would like to express our gratitude to the Friends of India Association for more than five decades of work and dedication to promoting the rich cultural heritage of India in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With leave of my colleagues, I'd like to deliver a Member's statement.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Member have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

MR. SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the amazing dedication Alice Cumby has made to the residents of Heart's Content.

Ms. Cumby moved to Heart's Content in 1965 with her family. When the town was incorporated in August 1967, an advertisement went out for a part-time town clerk. Having two small children at the time, and being what you would call a people person, Alice decided the two-day job would be something she would enjoy and applied for.

Mr. Speaker, Alice was the successful candidate and on March 1, 1968, she began her role as town clerk/manager and has held that position as the town clerk/manager of Heart's Content ever since.

Today marks 50 years since Alice Cumby began working for the town. What started out as a two-day-a-week job has grown into a full career, half a century in the making that anyone would be proud of. The Town of Heart's Content has seen positive changes over the past 50 years and Alice has been a part of many of these changes.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members of this House to join me in congratulating Alice Cumby for 50 years of municipal service to the residents of Heart's Content and best wishes as she continues to serve the residents of the town.

The Premier and I will be in Heart's Content later this evening to attend an event in her honour and look forward to congratulating Alice in person.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House to recognize Mr. John Antle, Principal of Exploits Valley Intermediate and Mr. Michael Tobin, Principal of Paradise Elementary, both of whom were named to the list of Canada's Outstanding Principals for 2018.

For over 14 years, the Learning Partnership's Canada's Outstanding Principals program has annually recognized the important contributions of the country's top 40 principals in publicly funded schools. Candidates are nominated by parents, colleagues and community members, and are chosen by a national selection committee for their work demonstrating creativity, innovation, leadership and student achievement and success.

Mr. Antle has been recognized for his leadership role in the development of the Positive Behavioural Intervention Strategies program, which focuses on rewarding positive actions and behaviours in the school.

Mr. Tobin's efforts are being acknowledged for his focus on innovation and his encouragement for more technology-facilitated learning within the school.

Mr. Speaker, I commend Mr. Antle and Mr. Tobin for their work and continued commitment to our province's education system as they join the prestigious ranks of the National Academy of Canada's Outstanding Principals, which I understand has more than 400 members now. I thank them for the dedication and for the vital role they play both as principals, influencing, inspiring and positively impacting the lives of students and school communities.

I invite all hon. Members of this House to join me in congratulating Mr. Antle and Mr. Tobin on this incredible achievement.

Thank you very much, 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 thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The Official Opposition congratulates Mr. John Antle and Mr. Michael Tobin for making it to the list of Canada's Outstanding Principals of 2018. These gentlemen have gone above and beyond in their fields and the results have been a significant, positive change in the lives of their students.

Being recognized by the Learning Partnership's Canada's Outstanding Principals program gives this side of the House a tremendous sense of pride that we are able to call these educators Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I commend Mr. Tobin and Mr. Antle for being recognized as leaders in their professions and the contributions they are making to Newfoundland and Labrador's education system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. It's wonderful to see two of our provincial educators being recognized on such a prestigious level for their valuable contributions in our schools.

I would hope that the department is learning from the work they are doing. I would encourage the minister to look at how these programs, which are being recognized so wonderfully by their colleagues, can be spread out throughout our whole system.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With the challenges facing Newfoundland and Labrador's health care system today, innovation holds the promise of opportunities to drive meaningful change.

Mr. Speaker, started about six years ago in Montreal, Hacking Health is an international movement designed to improve health care through diverse partnerships. Today, there are active chapters in more than 60 cities in 15 countries.

The St. John's Hackathon, March 9 to 11 at Memorial, is a weekend-long event designed to break down barriers to health innovation. At a hackathon, health care professionals, IT developers and designers, technology innovators and entrepreneurs form teams, and each actually develops a solution to a known challenge in health care in this province.

One thing Newfoundland and Labrador has to offer to many health innovators and entrepreneurs is the potential to design and test provincial solutions, which can then be promoted to other jurisdictions. Today, there are about 10 local start-ups, at various stages, operating in the medial technology sector, offering a broad range of services from point-of-care devices to apps specifically focused on seniors. Some of these early stage ventures have come about from previous Hacking Health events in St. John's. Some of these start-ups were at our technical summit last week. This summit put forward a clear plan to encourage that innovation and the growth of provincial tech companies.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage companies and people throughout the province to take part in the upcoming Hackathon. For more information, they can visit hacking-health.org.

Good luck to all of the participants. Thank you for your desire and drive to change the health care system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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 the advance copy of his statement. As the minister stated, we face numerous challenges in the health care system. Through such innovative approaches like the Hackathon, we can find creative ways to find solutions that bridge gaps. Newfoundland and Labrador has some of the best and brightest minds, and it's encouraging to know their involvement and contribution to this project.

I look forward to the solutions and suggestions, which will surely benefit so many in this province. I join the minister in encouraging local companies to take part and to participate in this upcoming event; your support is appreciated. Good luck to those participating. You make us all very proud to be Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I'm glad to hear about the Hackathon happening once again in St. John's, as it is such a great opportunity for technology innovators to collaborate with health professionals, project managers and entrepreneurs to design solutions in our health care system.

I look forward to hearing about the practical applications that come out of this year's Hackathon, and I think it's a wonderful example of the type of growth that we need in this province in IT, in particular, for jobs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

The Citizens' Crime Prevention Association of Newfoundland and Labrador is celebrating 30 years of serving our province by working to make our communities safe. I'd like to thank the organization and their volunteers for their hard work and their dedication.

This anniversary is an opportunity to raise awareness of this valuable collaborative and community effort. The Citizens' Crime Prevention Association was formed in 1988 and is comprised of both police officers and citizens. This dedicated group has invested a substantial amount of time and energy to develop projects and initiatives that aim to inform and encourage people to become involved in crime prevention.

Mr. Speaker, the group has a number of important initiatives. One example is the Rachel Project, which aims to spread kindness and compassion. This project was brought to schools to enforce anti-violence and anti-bullying with students and to encourage acts of kindness. They have also launched the buddy bench, which aims to eliminate loneliness and foster friendship on the playground. It helps spread the message of inclusion and kindness by placing a park bench where children can sit if they are looking for a playmate.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Citizens' Crime Prevention Association of Newfoundland and Labrador on their 30th anniversary in the province. We thank them for their tireless work on behalf of all residents and wish them all the best in the next 30 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement this afternoon. We join with the minister in congratulating and thanking Citizens' Crime Prevention Association of Newfoundland and Labrador for their long time support, not only to individuals but also to community programs, schools, neighbourhoods and, as I said, individuals as well.

Mr. Speaker, I remember many, many years ago when crime prevention was in its infancy. I remember in the early '80s when the RNC first started sending officers to the Canadian Police College to learn the very basic and the newest programs in the evolving thoughts of crime prevention, but it has continued on to this day and that's a testament to the people and volunteers around the province who continue to drive it.

I still remember the very early words used by Gary Brown, who was one of the first officers assigned to crime prevention, he commonly used the words: evil prevails when good people do nothing. I think that holds true still today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Congratulations to all.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Congratulations to the Citizens' Crime Prevention Association on reaching its 30th anniversary, and a special thank you to all the volunteers who have worked so hard with passion and compassion. Their work is a valuable part of encouraging crime prevention within our communities and it great to see anti-violence and anti-bullying initiatives in our schools like the Rachael project and buddy bench.

I can't wait to hear about what these young folks and the programs within their schools are going to be teaching us. I can't wait to see that, and maybe we could include a buddy bench here in our House.

Bravo, Mr. Speaker!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, details surrounding the new federal Liberal environmental assessment process for offshore oil and gas projects have been limited. The C-NLOPB is uncertain on how their role would change.

Can the minister inform the House today what the new role of the C-NLOPB will be under the new proposal?

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

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

(Inaudible) for last two years the government, Mr. Speaker, is working diligently. We needed to have a role for C-NLOPB. The Member opposite might remember that under their watch in 2012 the role of responsible authority of the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board was removed, Mr. Speaker. We felt very certain that we needed a role for the C-NLOPB.

As you've seen in the last number of weeks, we are moving towards an impact-assessment process here in Canada. The federal government has recognized the incredible strength of C-NLOPB. They will be a joint on the impact assessment board and the panel review list.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, whether the responsible authority was removed by a Conservative government and not reinstated by a Liberal government in Ottawa, it still doesn't suffice for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, the new environmental assessment process could add an additional layer of bureaucracy and could slow offshore development. A former Noia president has expressed concern noting that as many as over 50 groups may be able to weigh in.

I ask the minister: What assurances that you have been given that the new process will not negatively affect or slow down offshore development?

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: While I welcome these questions from the Opposition, I just question where they've been for the last two years where we've been working on this issue. And where they were, Mr. Speaker, in 2012 when responsible authority and the opportunity for C-NLOPB to manage their environmental assessment process was taken away.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that we have worked very hard to ensure the federal government recognizes the role of C-NLOPB in impact assessment. We are also working now to ensure there are regional environmental assessments. Exploration would fall under those regional environmental assessments and that will be governed by the C-NLOPB; much further ahead than we were in 2012.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll ask how further ahead they are today. Have you discussed it with the seven MPs, the regional ministers? Are they all committed? The Liberal MPs, seven for Newfoundland and Labrador, are they all committed to responsible

authority being implemented in this bill before the House of Commons?

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I could tell the member opposite is a little sensitive because it was under their watch that responsible authority was removed.

I've been working, and the entire government has been working very hard over the last number of years working with our colleagues and yes, the seven MPs, the minister of Environment for Canada, the minister of Natural Resources in Canada. We've had repeated discussions.

The Premier himself has weighed in on this issue. He was able to bring it to the Atlantic premiers; they wrote letters as well, Mr. Speaker. Critical to all of this was ensuring that the offshore petroleum boards in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Nova Scotia had a role that was taken away from them under their watch.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was the Conservative government in Ottawa that made the change in regard to responsible authority, and the minister didn't tell us today whether the seven MPs that are supposed to be representing Newfoundland and Labrador support putting responsible authority back into the regulations.

Critics suggest that the federal minister has the ability to make case-by-case decisions, and this new process centralizes power in Ottawa.

I ask the minister: Did you advocate to keep the assessment role with the C-NLOPB, or are you simply accepting what's delivered by the federal Liberal government in Ottawa?

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

MS. COADY: So let me tell you what happened in 2012, Mr. Speaker. Responsible authority and the role of the C-NLOPB in environmental assessment process was taken away.

So here's what we've been able to achieve, Mr. Speaker. We have tighter timelines. We have been able to say that we're going to do regional environmental assessments, and that explorations would fall underneath that and that would be under the control of the C-NLOPB. We've been able to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we are able to advance our offshore in a much more efficient manner than what was there previously.

I can say to the Member opposite, that we've been working on this. I'm glad they're now starting to ask questions about this. We've been working on this for over two years. We think we have done very, very well of ensuring that we are able to advance our offshore, but we will continue to work this file.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister said they're working on it. I understand that, but again I'll ask her. We have a regional minister who sits in the federal Cabinet, we have six other MPs, Liberal MPs.

So I'm asking her: Are they endorsing her position that responsible authority would be back entrenched in the legislation that's now before the House of Commons? A straightforward question. Are they in agreement with it – I'm sure she must have spoken to them about it – yes or no?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the Member opposite is now finally asking these questions. We've been working very closely with the seven MPs. As a matter of fact, we had ad hoc committees going on all over the last year. We've been repeatedly talking to our regional minister, talking to the minister responsible for environment, minister

responsible for natural resources, constantly on these issues.

I can tell the Member opposite this, we now have secured a role for the C-NLOPB as a joint responsibility with the impact assessment agency for those projects that require the panel.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the regional environmental assessment process, we're working on making sure, and we have the commitment of our seven MPs, as well as our regional minister, to have exploration under that

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. COADY: – that will really expedite our offshore development.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The minister's time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll advise the minister, we already had a joint partnership. It was called the Atlantic Accord in 1985, so we don't need another one.

What representation did the minister and this province make specifically to the federal government regarding the specific role of the C-NLOPB?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you this government has been very diligent on its efforts around the Atlantic Accord. Much more diligent than the former administration, under whose watch this entire system changed, Mr. Speaker.

We have now been able to have a role for C-NLOPB, recognized by the federal government. We now have regional environmental

assessments and we're working to ensure that explorations fall under those regional environmental assessments.

Mr. Speaker, going back over the last two-plus years, this government has been advocating for a strong role for C-NLOPB in the environmental assessment process. We have secured, not only additional resources to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador with regard to this, but also a key role for C-NLOPB.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Back in 1985, it was a Progressive Conservative Prime Minister of Canada and a Progressive Conservative Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador who signed and brought the 1985 Atlantic Accord act to the province. Mr. Speaker, that agreement stated: "The Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador have reached an Accord on joint management of the offshore oil and gas"

Does the minister believe that the new environmental assessment process honours the Atlantic Accord as defined in 1985?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat surprised by this line of questioning. Why didn't he question this back in 2010, 2011, 2012 when the C-NLOPB was losing its role in the environmental assessment? It's perplexing, Mr. Speaker.

I can say this, the minister responsible for Natural Resources Canada, Minister Carr, I can say that Minister O'Regan have been here to Newfoundland and Labrador, have been to the Newfoundland Oceans Industries Association. They have given assurances of the paramountcy of the Atlantic Accord. This, Mr. Speaker, is of utmost important, to not only this government, but to the entire people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As you've seen recently, the Premier has written to the federal government, written to the prime minister on the issue of making sure that we have maximum benefits under the Accord.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, in the breadth and scope of the first nine minutes, the minister has gone from being happy with the questions, to being surprised that we're asking the questions. I don't know where she is with it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I will not tolerate interruptions.

Please proceed.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister admit, finally, that the new environmental assessment process erodes the Atlantic Accord and the representation has not been given to Ottawa, as it should be by this province, by the elected officials?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I am appalled by the tone of that question. To insinuate that we have not done our utmost when it was under their watch, Mr. Speaker, it was under their government that we lost the opportunity for C-NLOPB to be responsible authority for environmental assessment. I am not just –

AN HON. MEMBER: Shocked.

MS. COADY: Shocked, I guess is the word.

Mr. Speaker, I will say this. We now have made sure, under the amount of work – and I can produce all the letters that have been written over and over and the times I've gone to Ottawa to speak to the minister responsible.

The reason I'm happy here today, Mr. Speaker, is that they're finally asking some questions about this issue that has been burning in the province for over two years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A proposed eye surgery clinic in Corner Brook was rejected by the Minister of Health. The Premier has since interjected and said he wants to review the Minister of Health's decision.

I ask the minister: Do you agree with the Premier's decision to review this case?

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

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

We received an unsolicited proposal from a business venture on the West Coast. It didn't pass muster. What it did do was generate a really important discussion about service delivery for people with eye disease on the West Coast and Northern Peninsula of the Island. That discussion really started just over a week ago. We have several avenues to explore, and I'm cautiously optimistic that we'll be able to provide an even better service on the West Coast in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: I would hope that the Minister of Health would also engage unsolicited proposals that enhance our health care system, no matter who offers those unsolicited so-called proposals.

The Corner Brook eye doctor, Dr. French, would pay for the building, its maintenance, its equipment. The services offered would remain publicly funded and accessible to all, no

difference than they currently are in the public health system.

On what basis did the minister so quickly deny such a proposal which would greatly benefit the people of the West Coast and the Northern Peninsula?

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

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

Just to correct some background facts there. We, the department, have been engaged with Humber Valley surgical services probably since January or February of 2016 on this topic with considerable back and to.

The issue we have identified is quite clearly a much broader subject of a much greater importance in many respects. It's not just about cataracts, it's not just about procedures. It's about the package of eye care, sustainable eye care to the people of the province on the West Coast. We have several mechanisms, including a formal arrangement with the NLMA to look into such mechanisms and we're moving forward with that now, 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.

Considering the doctor suggested that the facility would be a unionized environment, in what way will this plan differ from the proposed public-private partnerships for the construction of the West Coast hospital or the announced long-term care facilities?

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

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

The issue is one of sustaining a reasonable, high-quality service for the people of the West Coast of the province. Not just around cataracts and

how they are done, but also around recruitment and retention and also around issues that we have inherited an arrangement from the previous government about a negotiated clause to look at the transition of publicly funded services into other arenas.

That's built into the negotiations. The NLMA want to be part of it. The doctor concerned wants to be included in that process, and we're helping that process along.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When Dr. French suggested that he may be forced to leave his practice on the West Coast, the minister said: "I cannot control, nor can I advise him, what his career path should be"

Does the Premier endorse such a negative response from the minister when we're trying to recruit and retain health professionals in this province?

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

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

Those comments as quoted were taken somewhat out of context. That's always a risk that is evident when you make public statements.

Dr. French is an excellent clinician; there has never been any concern about the quality of his service. The concern I have is the sustainability of his workload.

What we have done in conjunction with Humber Valley services, himself, Western Health, the department and the NLMA is to work on a program that will enable him to continue to provide that service without killing himself, 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.

The Health Minister said “some eye surgeons may have engaged in illegal activities,” and he accused eye doctors in the province of undertaking potential criminal activities.

Does the minister stand by those very serious accusations against health professionals in this province?

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

MR. HAGGIE: It’s really an interesting contrast of topics here. It’s very useful, though, to use the opportunity to say this is a totally separate issue from the one that we were discussing a few moments ago.

What happened was eight individuals approached the department saying that they had been given to understand that an insured service was being provided outside of an RHA facility and money had changed hands in the course of that. We started a hotline to try and ascertain the magnitude and breadth of that problem to see if we did actually have a problem and what that is.

Those calls are being returned and analyzed, and I look forward to that report in the very near future, 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.

Are you going to use your influence and your position to ensure there’s better access to eye surgery and eye care in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

MR. HAGGIE: At the risk of repeating myself, Mr. Speaker, the whole issue about eye care is one that is front and centre at the moment. We

have challenges, we also have some great successes. We have areas in the province in eye care where the national benchmark targets are met and exceeded, and have been for some considerable time.

What I want to do is make sure that every citizen of this province, whether they live in Nain or whether they live in Ferryland, has the same opportunity for high-quality service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, after 2½ years in government, the Liberals are spending tens of thousands of dollars to ask expats why people are leaving the province.

I ask the minister: Do you think this a good use of taxpayers’ money?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, when we looked at opportunities to increase residents, or ex-residents of coming back into the province, it was intended for us to do a survey and to gather some information. When you look at the survey, Mr. Speaker, it contains more information than just looking at why you left. There are other areas of that as well, which we will look at and monitor and gain some information from the data that will be collected.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, it’s very important for us when we’re looking at the province to take all the initiatives as possible for us to enable that we do have – we do have, certainly, an interest in the province. Mr. Speaker, very clearly from some of the summits that we’ve done, there’s obviously a lot of interest in coming back into the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister: Don't you think that over 300 new Liberal taxes and fee increases that your government introduced is probably what is driving people away?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What really would be driving people away is the \$2.7 billion deficit that we were faced with, and the Muskrat Falls. When we look at all of these issues that come in, Mr. Speaker, there's been a tremendous amount of pressure that's been placed on this government to try to clean up some of the mess that's been created on the other side.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, if you listen to some of the hon. Members over there, they have a very narrow vision. As a matter of fact, I think some of them, they're thinking they can probably look through a keyhole in the door with both eyes at the same time, because that's about as limited exposure that they have to what exactly is going on in this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

How many provincial government officials will be attending the outreach events in Canada and the United Kingdom?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, what we have done and what we continue to do is we look at ways in which we can improve within this province opportunities for people to work. We have a committee on jobs, Cabinet committee.

Mr. Speaker, if some of them had enough interest, they would have turned out to the technology summit that we had last week where we had young people with a tremendous amount of interest.

Mr. Speaker, it wasn't government – it's not government saying that we have potential. They need to go out and talk to some of the industry sector members, people who are working and employers and what they're saying. They're saying there's a tremendous potential for young people in the technology sector in this province, and we'll continue to work on that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, the technology summits are all great, but that's about keeping people that are already here, here. He's trying to get people back, and I already answered that question. I think most of the people in the province agree with the 300 fee and tax increases. They don't need to do a survey, the public already know.

Mr. Speaker: Is the cost of the minister's travel included in this fact-finding (inaudible)? He never answered my last question, maybe he'll give me the total cost this fact-finding trip to the United Kingdom is going to cost the province.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. Member opposite, it was a lot less than going over to Romania and getting two ferries (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

MR. HAWKINS: – at \$54 million each for this province that we had nothing but problems when it started that we were handed.

So, Mr. Speaker, you want to talk about expenses – and a lot less than going to Romania, I can tell you that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Despite hearing numerous concerns from Canadian small businesses that proposed tax changes would negatively impact their ability to do business, this week's federal budget signalled the government is moving ahead with attacking small business investments, retirement benefits and ability to transfer to family members.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Are you content with what is included in the recent federal budget related to small businesses?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The federal budget did pull back, to some degree, the announcement they had made earlier regarding some business taxes; that is for this province, Mr. Speaker. We're still evaluating exactly what it means to this province, to the Treasury and to businesses.

At the outset, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think it's good news for the business community here. I think I've heard the President of the Board of Trade indicate the same, that they were pleased with the measures taken by the federal government in pulling back, to some degree, the measures they had announced earlier this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I encourage the minister to really take a closer look. What we're hearing from small business, there are still deep concerns in regard to the issues that were related in the proposed legislation and what's proposed now in the current budget related to the continuity of small business and the business to access that equity and (inaudible) for retirement.

This week's budget also mentions changes to the Employment Insurance Program. Can the minister update us on the impact of these changes, possibly on seasonal workers in the province, industries such as tourism, fishery and forestry which is so important to Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say to the Member opposite, when it comes to small business, Newfoundland and Labrador has the most progressive small business rates in the country at 3 per cent, and it's good to see the federal government is reducing the small business tax rate that's happening.

As well, in the federal budget we saw billions of dollars over five years that's unlocked in research and development and innovation. That's going to help Newfoundland and Labrador grow. Companies like we had seen yesterday at an announcement, Oceans Ltd., has made a breakthrough in discovery through their lab testing and also through testing on animals for breast cancer that inhibits the growth. These are all positive things that are in place.

When it comes to the federal budget, the Finance minister and his department will do an evaluation. It's early days and, as he said, there will be an analysis done on how it impacts the people of the province.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed, it's important for small business, I agree, but we need to be on this in terms of the changes. They've been proposed for some time.

The US has decreased corporate tax to approximately 20 per cent while Canada ranges

at almost 27 per cent. This will obviously affect investment.

I ask: How will the lack of initiative on this by the federal budget impact a goal announced by you recently of increasing oil production by half by 2030?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've put in place many initiatives over the last six or seven months in terms of how we work strategically with all industries in our province. I think the most significant collaboration and partnership we've seen so far is really company's private money building on investments that have already been made in our province.

Mr. Speaker, this province, along with other Atlantic Canadian provinces, was successful in getting some positive news around the ocean supercluster. That will bring hundreds of millions of dollars of investment, Mr. Speaker, in Atlantic Canada. I can assure you that Newfoundland and Labrador is primed to take full advantage of the Ocean Supercluster.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Yesterday, when responding to my questions about what he expects to get from the Atlantic Accord review, the Premier said he hoped to get to a place where Newfoundland and Labrador finally gets the benefits from its offshore developments.

Currently, we get royalties that are shared between the government and Nalcor. As well, Nalcor benefits from equity shares.

I ask the Premier: What are the other benefits that he is expecting to get? Does he think he can get the federal government to change the equalization formula to benefit us?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I also said yesterday, it's a little too early to predetermine what the outcome of a negotiation would be until we actually start the formal review. Mr. Speaker, there are so many opportunities when it comes to working with the federal government. I just mentioned just a few minutes ago about the positive news around the Ocean Supercluster.

We speak a lot about equalization and everyone in this country would know right now that based upon the current equalization formula, this province would not qualify for equalization, simply because it's based on revenue only. Newfoundland and Labrador, along with Alberta, would always be either first or second when it comes to the amount of revenue that's created in our province on a per capita basis.

That prohibits us right now from qualifying for equalization. There are two other transfers that I'd love to talk about just in your next question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'll ask my questions. This government has had over two years to work with their federal cousins on these issues. Finally, he has written the prime minister about hurrying up the Atlantic Accord review.

I ask the Premier: Has he yet had a response from the prime minister to his letter? If so, what does it say?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've yet to hear from the new federal NDP Leader. Apparently, he's not that interested in what's happening in our province, Mr. Speaker. He's yet to reach out about our situation.

I will say we've had many meetings with our federal colleagues. As I said yesterday, I've written the prime minister. Before the end of this week we'll be reaching out to the prime minister's office, as we've been trying to get a meeting and to set up the review.

Back to her question, though, Mr. Speaker, about two years to work on this. If the interim Leader of the Third Party had read the agreement, she would have known that this must be completed before March of 2019. That is the review that we are starting.

MS. MICHAEL: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER BALL: As a Member opposite, she will ask the questions, Mr. Speaker. I will take the advantage to answer the questions on behalf of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Finance if he was doing a gender-based analysis for his current budget. He said he was speaking with the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and her officials. He also told media he would be open to it, but that he would be bringing down his budget in four or five weeks. Sounds like a no to me, Mr. Speaker.

Deficit reduction budgets disproportionately hurt working women who typically earn less than men. Single mothers, seniors and indigenous women suffer the most when governments cut programs.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister again: Is he doing an actual gender-based analysis for the preparation of his budget? If so, when did it start?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Every decision we make as a Cabinet, every decision we make as a caucus and as a government we put a gender lens on it. Every decision we make in the upcoming budget and in the previous budget, the Women's Policy Office had a view to our decisions. The minister responsible for the Women's Policy Office had a view to those decisions.

The federal government, in their recent budget, Mr. Speaker, announced some significant policies towards gender. I was asked if I would introduce the same in this year's budget. It's a great deal of work, I would suspect, to do what the federal government did, in the next four to five weeks. But I can absolutely assure the Member that every decision we make in this upcoming budget, the minister responsible for the Women's Policy Office will have a say.

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.

It's more than having a view to, and the federal government does it automatically. This is their third budget chance.

I ask the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women – she responded to my question yesterday saying: This is the second year it's been done here in Newfoundland and Labrador and that the Finance Minister has been engaging with the Women's Policy Office to ensure that lens is there. Mr. Speaker, I find that pretty vague.

I ask her again: Can she describe what exactly is being done? Is a specific gender-based analysis tool being applied in the actual preparation of the budget? How it is being done? When did it start? Who is doing it?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Responsible for the Status of Women.

MS. COADY: That's a very thorough question, Mr. Speaker. I'll do my best to answer all the questions that were asked within that larger question.

First of all, this is the second year that a gender-based analysis has been applied to the budget. The Women's Policy Office has been engaged for the last number of months, reviewing all positions, all budgets that are going forward, all asks that are going forward, Mr. Speaker. They're applying a lens on every decision, every policy that's being brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, they're using the Status of Women Canada's core program, their core dimension. They're also then layering on top of that the data relevant to Newfoundland and Labrador. That's the process. I understand that last year the former minister that was responsible for the Women's Policy Office did engage with the Member opposite to advise her exactly the process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Pursuant to section 8 and section 10 of the *Public Tender Act*, I hereby table reports of Public Tender Act Exceptions for October 2017 as presented by the chief operating officer of the Government Purchasing Agency.

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, pursuant to Standing Order 11(1), that this House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, March 5.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS a year has passed since the tragic event of January 17, 2017, where our school was completely destroyed; and

WHEREAS we have 250 people in a building which is only equipped to handle 150; and

WHEREAS we do not have a science lab, a library, a resource room, a cafeteria, a computer room, a student support suite, wheelchair accessibility washrooms and no multi-purpose room; and

WHEREAS we have classrooms which require co-programming but this cannot happen because of space issues in the building; and

WHEREAS government has a legal responsibility to ensure our students have access to the best education;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to: one, commit to a new state-of-the-art K to 12 school for the students of Bay d'Espoir; two, announce funding in the 2018-2019 budget to begin the design and tender

process; and three, we would like the construction to be expedited.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is the second petition I have brought forward to this hon. House. I will continue to bring these petitions forward on behalf of the children of the Bay d'Espoir area until such time as the budget comes down. Please, God, the announcement is in there.

This is not a circumstance whereby parents are saying we want a new school; it's a situation where we need a new school. We tragically lost our school. We're in a building that 20 years ago the school board shut down. Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that our children are able to avail of a decent education.

This day and age, no child should be heading to university without having been in a science lab. Our children, who are in grade nine, will have grade nine, grade 10, 11 and 12 without access to a lab. We looked at alternative measures but because of insurance issues and other factors, they don't seem to be working out, Mr. Speaker. It is unacceptable that our children will have to go off to university without having seen inside of a lab.

It's a crucial issue for all the residents of Bay d'Espoir. By the time this petition is fully submitted, there will be 766 signatures. We truly hope that the Premier, the minister and the government opposite recognizes the children deserve a new school.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development for a response, please.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to respond to the Member's petition. It was a tragic event, the burning of the school and the other buildings. I have to say, the one thing that came out of this that was most positive is that I got to see just how kind and co-operative the people in the Coast of Bays region are.

I went down with the Member and met with a couple of mayors. I had a kitchen-table conversation with the mayor of Milltown-Head of Bay d'Espoir and the mayor of St. Albans. I met with the school community, the school council, the principal. I had a tour of the temporary location. They have been nothing but co-operative through this difficult time.

I would say for the public record – I'm not sure the Member is aware of this – the Minister of Finance has advised me there's \$13 million that will be coming to the province through the insurance process because we do have insurance on our schools. I have made a commitment, publicly, to the people of the area that they deserve nothing less than a facility to replace the one that burned down. We'll certainly work to that end, Mr. Speaker.

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.

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 government has not implemented curriculum to teach the basic monetary skills needed for our youth; and

WHEREAS the government of our province has the responsibility to act in the best interests of our youth; and

WHEREAS the youth of our province deserve the greatest level of respect and consideration;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to introduce financial education into provincial curriculum to prepare youth for the monetary and financial challenges of life upon entering the workforce.

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

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, things are changing in our world here. We're finding ourselves, and young people, particularly, in financial peril at times. Their understanding of how they deal with that and the realities of long-term planning for retirement, long-term planning for changes in their life, long-term planning for their education and long-term planning for starting families or whatever other entity they may be involved in or long-term planning to become entrepreneurs, all starts with them having a key understanding of financial management, the monetary expenditures and a key understanding of how the whole monetary process works. It's a very simple process.

I commend the minister who last week talked about we're going to be introducing some new modes of use of technology in education; very important, very valuable and very timely, as we move forward. Just as timely is the understanding of how financial operations and the needs for an understanding of the monetary expenditures and processes in this world. It's not just about in your own neighbourhood, that's important, or in your own school, but it's very important about how we do it from a global perspective and their understanding of that.

We've had people from those who deal with bankruptcies, to understand that if people get in over their heads, without understanding the cost of borrowing, some of the restrictions on certain things, assets and what that means and their ability to understand debt loads and how you stretch it over periods of time or what their financial ability would incur.

We have an ability here. We have a captive audience. We have an audience who are very intelligent, who are open to learning and we need to prepare them for the basic things in life. This is one of the key basic things. We include that in the same way we use technology, their understanding of financial monitoring, financial processes and their understanding of planning and that's very easily done.

You know years ago some of our institutions, when we were all kids, would put out the little things about starting your own bank account and

give you a little tidbit and give you a little one pager of what you could expect to know about that.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important. I encourage the minister to outline exactly how they're going to approach addressing this. It's very valuable with all the other things that are being done in our education system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development for a response, please.

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the Member would want to have some financial literacy because the previous administration of this province didn't have any financial literacy or we wouldn't have walked into office with a \$2.7 billion deficit staring us in the face.

However, I would say – and I don't say that lightly, Mr. Speaker, I'm very serious – the fact of the matter is we have heard the calls for financial literacy to be added to the curriculum for quite some time. As a part of the process involved with the Premier's task force, we will be looking at curriculum review in a number of different areas. There are currently – and I won't get into the details of it because I'd be announcing something that I don't have the authority to announce, but basically there will be a course in future that we're going to develop that will incorporate a number of important things, including financial literacy. So there will be a course that's sort of oriented around life skills and careers and so on that will include financial literacy. So that work is ongoing.

As I pointed out the other day, I think 15 of the recommendations of the task force have now been implemented and virtually all of the other recommendations – there are 82 in total – all of them are seeing a certain amount of activity. So we are very committed to curriculum reform in the province in terms of mathematics as well. We will be doing that. That is our priority to implement this report in its full form.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call Orders of the Day.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

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

I call from the Order Paper, Order 2, third reading of Bill 31.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I moved, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that Bill 31, An Act To Amend The Order Newfoundland and Labrador, be now read a third time.

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

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

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

I'm glad to be able to speak once more to Bill 31 to raise an issue that we did talk about in Committee when we were doing that stage. I know that there will be no more questions or anything, but I just do want to make, again, the important point that we were talking about.

It had to do with the two members at large that are going to be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council under the Schedule C of the *Public Service Commission Act*. The issue that I was raising with the minister was the issue of the need for our process to be an open process. That's no problem. That's not my issue,

but to be also a process that shows an understanding of the diversity of our province.

If we're going to have a process that recognizes the diversity of our province and the need then to have diversity in those who are nominated to become members of the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador, that we need to have diversity, gender and otherwise, on the council itself.

The minister agreed with me; there was no doubt that he agreed with me. Also, I think we have agreed that four of the eight people on the council we have no control over because they are in roles that are fixed roles, and there could be diversity in those roles. Because they're not connected with each other, there's no way to make that happen. They're totally individual roles such as the Clerk of the Executive Council, the chancellor of Memorial University, the chief justice of Newfoundland and Labrador or the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Speaker of the House of Assembly.

There are times when they could all be four women, times when they could all be four white women, times when they could all be four white men, who knows. So we have no control over diversity in those four, but we do when it comes to the members at large.

The minister made a commitment which regard to making sure diversity happened. When I look at section 12(1)(b) which says "2 individuals who are members of the Order who shall be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, each for a term of three years," well, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, and therefore the minister, does have some power over who gets chosen there. We do have diversity among the members of the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I would suggest it's a small diversity in some areas. Probably the largest area where it's positive diversity is on the gender level. In other levels with regard to indigenous representation and representation by people who come from different ethnic backgrounds, it may not be the same; it may not be the same when it comes to people with disability either, but at least we do have representation.

The minister can keep a commitment that being part of that decision that he really is going to be concerned and the government is really going to be concerned about diversity. But when it comes to the two individuals who are appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, according to Schedule C of the *Public Service Commission Act* there is no power over that; it's a system that does not recognize diversity. It recognizes only an evaluation of the person and person's background without any sense of diversity.

We had this problem arise when we discussed the formation of the IAC. It was absolutely definite that because it was part of the Public Service Commission process they really had no legislative stance for looking at diversity in the names that would come forward. Now, obviously if there's diversity in the names that come forward and they go on to the government, then government can certainly say, okay, we want to make sure that in these names that have come forward there is diversity.

But I really believe that the minister made a commitment that he can't keep with regard to those two positions, the two individuals, members at large, appointed according to Schedule C of the Public Service Commission. I'm very disappointed that the minister didn't see that this was an opportunity to put the call for diversity into the piece of legislation. That would mean not using Schedule C of the Public Service Commission, but there could have been another way to have two people appointed in a fair and just and equitable way, recognizing diversity. And I'm very sorry that we don't have that laid out in the bill. I will be passing it, I will be voting for it, Mr. Speaker, but with that disappointment.

Thank you.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

All those against, 'nay.'

This motion is carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Order Of Newfoundland And Labrador Act. (Bill 31)

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 Order Of Newfoundland And Labrador Act," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 31)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 4, continue second reading of Bill 32.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed an honour to stand and speak to Bill 32, An Act Respecting the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information. Mr. Speaker, going through this and having a somewhat connection to the Centre for Health Information in a previous life, in working for the department at one point, but since then in politics being connected with the Public Accounts Committee, a number of years ago we had looked at one of the reviews from the Auditor General about the Centre for Health Information.

I remember doing some very in-depth research and discovered this was a great agency that we had set up and it had a great process to ensure that data was collected relevant to the well-being of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and how the information could be disseminated to ensure that those who do research, those who are in the medical fields, and those who on a day-to-day basis are front-line providers of services can share information, but in return get data back that helps them deliver the service in a more equitable and a more time-efficient manner.

There's no doubt, when you set up any new entity – and it's been around for a number of years and changed somewhat in the mid-2000s.

It was changed to enhance the attraction and the dissemination of that information. There were a number of segments over the years. It started as a small project to be able to say how do we particularly address the needs we have in Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to our health information, keeping in mind geography has a major play in Newfoundland and Labrador. The different regions have different health needs. There are different challenges. There are different priorities. There are different models on how we deliver our health systems.

The best way to address how we improve that – the whole process of our health care system but, particularly, the data being collected and the ways it's broken down and shared, not only provincially but also nationally, and in some cases internationally when we look at things that are changing in the way of diseases or chronic ailments or, particularly, in ways that we address those ailments that people may face.

As this whole process was developing, it started to morph into its own entity. It had gotten to a point where the entity needed a specific set of skills. To get those skill sets, they tried to recruit within Newfoundland and Labrador. They went outside Newfoundland and Labrador in some cases, but in some other cases they try to draw from the existing regional health authorities.

Unfortunately, the dilemma with that is we've only got so many trained professionals to go around who are already in a mode of being able to provide a particular area of health care and their speciality. When we start trying to recruit one from the other what that does in some cases, in my opinion, and, particularly, in a number of other people's opinions, it slows down our process, it doesn't move us forward. There has to be a way of being able to make an equitable process in making sure the centre does what it needs to do without it being a hindrance or taking away from our existing process.

Unfortunately, at the end of the day, when you've got a job to do and you're in charge of the Centre for Health Information, you want to recruit the best you can get, those who already have experiences. As a result, they had the ability inadvertently to interpret their act and their legislation that they could bypass some of

the other particular regulations around salaries to change the classifications, to change some of the job descriptions, to enhance salaries, thus encouraging or recruiting people away from existing services that are part and parcel of being able to provide our health service.

So, while we set up an entity that was very beneficial and had long-term processes to ensure the data would only improve our health care system for decades and decades, it became a little bit of a challenge in that we were slowing down some other parts of it because of the recruitment process, which was very vigorous. No doubt, was seen in the light of the senior executive of the Centre for Health Information a benefit to everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador but, particularly, a benefit to them in doing what they were set up to do. No doubt, it started to do that, but you can't steal from Peter to pay Paul in those processes. So everybody needed to be working together.

It got to a point where we discovered in our research as we prepared for the Auditor General's review, that there seemed to be a disconnect between the regional health authorities and the centre and at times a competition, which isn't healthy. We all should be on the same page. We all should be complimentary. We all should have a fluent continuum of how we improve our health care system here. Obviously, that seemed to be a concern at the time.

I remember meeting with the Auditor General today and asking – obviously, his officials had done some very in-depth research and had come back and said the centre itself, its mandate, the philosophy, its intent to enhance the health care system are very valid and have shown successes. The challenge he has is they haven't been following the processes that were put in play when it came to their management system and their pay scales. He did note also, as a result he felt it would have a negative impact on some of the other processes we have in the health care system.

When we looked at it – I remember my colleagues, all from different parties – we also identified that that was a challenge. As a result, we felt we needed to have that discussion with the centre to ensure we're supportive of what

they do, but the processes they follow can't be any different than any other Crown agency we have or any other entity we have out there. We want to support exactly what it is the program and services are set up to do.

We engaged in a process of reviewing the report and found a number of key concerns. One was that there was no process in play where they could justify why reclassification for a position in the Centre for Health Information would be any different than it would in one of our regional health authorities, or even within the department. The issue about that was there was compliance here, and there has to be a process that is equal and fluent for everybody across the board.

The second thing, as I mentioned earlier, we started to notice they were very good at recruiting people away. It's very easy to do when you're offering 10, 15 and in some cases 25 per cent more salary and have a more flexible working environment. That resulted in some shortfalls in some of our regional health authorities, particularly where the centre is mainly based, its function here in the metro area. If you have people who have a specific skillset, who are in another health region in some of the remote areas, and who go there because they're committed to the health service and that, but it's a career and we have to be realistic. People base their lives, to a degree, on their incomes. That drives exactly what they do and their career paths.

So when you're enhancing and enticing people away, then, to me, and to us during that conversation, that becomes a concern because we want to ensure that every region of this province: people in Nain, Labrador; people on the Southern Shore; people in Twillingate and people in the Coast of Bays area have access to proper health care. To have access there, you must have the skillset of those professionals.

In some cases, it's automatically harder to recruit just because of the geography or because of people's attachment to another particular area or people's interest in this social life and that. So it becomes a challenge.

If you, then, also centre everything in one particular area, and in this case it would be the

urban area, which is an attraction in its own self because of some of the things it has. You add on that a higher salary base for doing the same job then you've got a real challenge in equity across our health care system here. You don't want a divide of regional health authorities, not only competing against each other, but now competing against a bigger entity who has limited restrictions on what they can do. So that became a real concern.

I can remember being in this House of Assembly and questions being asked to the representatives of the authority, who, at the time, I can't say flippantly, but I suppose honestly, felt they weren't doing anything wrong, that it was well within their jurisdiction and their obligation to enhance the centre. They felt the approach they would use to enhance the centre would get the best people possible. The way that they could do that was enhance their benefits. The way they could do that was use an obscure interpretation of any restrictions they may have on following the collective agreements and the salary bases set by Treasury Board or by government or by the department or by their board.

It became a bit of a tangled situation because it wasn't that they were deliberately – I shouldn't say deliberately. They were deliberately enhancing them because they saw the benefits of it but they weren't doing it with malice. It was never meant for that reason. It was meant to, obviously, enhance what they had established. No doubt, if you're a manager in any position or you're a CEO, you're going to want to do that.

They also had a board of directors who were appointed, people who come from various backgrounds, some medical, some business and some from other entities that are appointed to the board. That entity, obviously, would help direct the work of the centre itself. It would help also to direct the focus. If you're on any board you have as your objectives, and your main objective, to meet the process that's been set out to you by whoever your umbrella organization is or your boss to achieve those.

Competition is healthy. In this case, competition was about making the Centre for Health Information the best it could be and to achieve what it was set out to do. Even the board didn't take a hands on to question: Why are we paying

20 and 25 per cent more for salary bases than we would in the normal regional health authorities or in normal government equal type of positions?

No doubt, some people on that board were very aware; some had come from the regional health authorities and understood: We're allowed to do that because we have this interpretation. It took a bit of discussion in here. It took the Public Accounts with the Auditor General pushing back at the officials who came and presented. Their arguments were valid from their perspective. They weren't valid from the Auditor General's. They weren't valid from the Public Accounts and they weren't valid from the Department of Health at the time.

A number of recommendations were made around them having to come in line with the existing classifications and contracts that would be put in play for any other person offering a service or being part of a Crown agency. We know there are specific nuances there if you're going after a particular skill set that you're looking for, but in a lot of cases here we found the skill set was just the same offered in one regional health authority or somewhere else in government, and at a particular salary that we felt was in line with other jurisdictions, that having an unfair advantage to that entity, took away. Not counting the fact, we're responsible for the taxpayers' monies that are spent here. For having an entity to have carte blanche on how they spend money wasn't acceptable.

There were recommendations made. It went back to the minister of Health. The minister of Health of the day came back and put a total freeze on any reclassifications or any other increases. As a result, wanted a full review to ensure that we got the salary bases in line with what other system we have within the civil service or equivalent Crown corporations. That was put in play, so it got to slow that process down.

I say that upfront before I get directly into the bill but that's a very important part of the bill because one of the key components here is about financial management which is, I think, one of the big drivers.

A number of the other ones here are about expanding the objectives. As I noted at one point, the board themselves, when we talked to them and the officials, were talking about to expand the objective, to reach our goals and beyond we need to have a particular skill set. Nobody disagreed with that. We understand. We want you to have the best, the brightest and the most experienced you can to ensure that what was set out as your objectives and your responsibilities can be achieved and build beyond that.

We can't do it at the expense of the other entities. We have to have a responsibility to provide services, be it health care or be it whatever individuals that were recruited out of a government department, if it's finance or if it's HR or if it's particular management skills. Once we had that discussion and that debate – and that's what it was, it was a healthy debate about understanding. There has to be a happy balance here.

You're well-funded. We understand there are specific projects that you may take on or there are skill sets you may need. Everybody was open to that. The department is open to being able to look at that. That can't be done in isolation of just your management team and your board making decisions because that has an impact on the regional health authorities.

It has an impact on the department. It has an impact on all the civil service. It also particularly has an impact on the taxpayers. If we're going to spend \$10 million more because we're using that to enhance more recruitment for a particular skill set, if we can get that skill set for the salary that we're offering everywhere else, that \$10 million is better used somewhere else in the health care system to provide other services.

After the debate was done, and there was some discussion and there was some pushback on certain areas, there obviously then was still left that there was interpretation in the existing legislation that dictated the board and the senior executive still had the ability, through interpretation – and there was still debate over one definition of that interpretation versus another that they could still do it.

Obviously, the discussion then – and this was back in 2014-2015 – was about there has to be clarification on that. There was a review of the legislation and discussion. I know Public Accounts had a discussion around it, but then it was also discussed within the department about the definitions. It was felt there were changes that needed to be made, while at the same time sending a very stern outlined processed letter that says: Here are your limitations now when it comes to the issues that have been identified around your spending practices and your hiring practices.

That was clarified. To my understanding, for all intents and purposes, in most cases it was followed. There still have been some challenges around salary bases and recruitment, and the impact that may have on it, but no doubt that was heeded by the board at the time. There have been changes to the board because it's a living entity, and staffing also, as they went through the whole process. So that was in play.

My understanding is that it was being followed through. But the fear was always there that if a new board came in, or a new CEO or senior executive or whoever may want to interpret that they have the authority to change the funding process for hiring and the classifications, then that puts us back to where we started from. That wouldn't be acceptable.

I know it takes a bit of time to change legislation. When you're dealing with an entity you want to make sure – if you're going to change it, you don't want to be doing this flippantly every six or eight months – that this has to last and reflect, and anticipate the changing trends over the next five, 10, 15, or 20 years so that the centre is well equipped and well resourced. But at the same time doesn't have carte blanche freedoms, while enhancing their ability to change with the flows and the needs to collect that data and that information. Then disseminate that in the manner that best fits how we're going to improve our health care system.

I know it's a balance. Discussion with the minister over the last year or so, particularly the last number of months since I became the Health critic, and looking into what pieces of legislation may be coming and what changes were taking place – and even since reviewing the Auditor

General's report on the two-year follow-up where it says there have been major improvements, but there's still no legal documentation that doesn't restrict the entity from being able to do it.

I wholeheartedly support the fact that we're bringing legislation here – and the Minister of Health is doing that – and clarifying, particularly, key areas and adding some that enhanced existing ones so that it's reflective of modern-day needs. Particularly, I do like some of the things I read here, that it anticipates some of the changes in our health care models down the road and our health care processes.

As part of that, the collection of that data has to be able to configure differently. As Newfoundland and Labrador, from a geographic process and a population process, changes and their health needs, you need to be able to conform to that also. What that does here does give that ability.

I'm just going to quickly talk about the purpose of the bill. There are four key categories; one, I've just spent a fair bit of time. I may go back to that because, from my perspective, it's one of the key ones. It's the key one because the other three are important, have been happening, will continue to happen and are just being modified. The key one about financial control is very important because you want to maximize the benefit, but you can't do it at the expense of other investments in health care.

Purpose (a) of Bill 32 is to expand the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information objectives. The key objectives for the centre, as people would know, and the key mandate here – and I'll just read it out so people are familiar with it, because the minister noted some of it yesterday, for those who are listening now, as we get into debate, they would understand exactly what the centre is all about.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information is responsible for developing and implementing the province's confidential and secure electronic health records, which we all know when you talk in the field: EHR. The centre also works to improve the health of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians by providing quality health information to health

professionals, the public, researchers and health system decision makers. The centre is a Crown corporation of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and it also receives funding from the not-for-profit group Canada Health Infoway which funds EHRs across Canada.

Don't forget now, as I've said earlier, this information is used particularly in Newfoundland and Labrador as we develop our health system. It's particularly used in particular regions, our regional health authorities, to be able to ensure they address their particular needs. It's used on a national level.

We all feed into what are the trends nationally. What are the supports that our federal counterparts must give us? What are the commonalities we have in other provinces that we can partner with and share information so we're better equipped to either training our health professionals, doing education with our citizens, or addressing particular ailments when it comes to either research or new types of implemented strategies around addressing those issues.

It's also on a global level. That's why there's a private sector not-for-profit that funds that. They fund it for that reason because they look at it – and they partner with other entities around the world. There's a global need when you collect health information. It's a global need because genetically we can all learn from procedures, we can all learn from ailments or diseases that happen in particular areas.

Particularly, the information gives us the ability to counteract interventions that are needed or diseases by coming up with a strategy that globally can be implemented to help everybody. If you can do something on that level, then you know the cost is going to be much more effective. The training modes would be much more beneficial to everybody.

These are some of the important things that the Centre for Health Information does. When it says about the public because the information then will send out – every now and then you'll see statements or sometimes there are even radio or television ads around the Centre for Health Information; some of the information that it's

gathered and some of the things they're doing as part of the process.

It's a very important entity; it is in line with some of the other provinces. I'd like to be able to say we have some particular nuances because we've been cognizant of our past health, our present health and our future health, but also our geographic differences and even the climate when it comes to the terrain: that all has to be taken into account when you look at how you address people's particular health needs.

Health needs are not only about the physical interventions you need, but some of it may be the physical ability to get to an intervention, to get to a service and to ensure that people have the adequate access to it, but at the same time do it in such an equitable way that minimal investment is necessary to get the maximum return. When you gather information, the best way you can do that is you have all the players feeding information into one central entity who can then break that down and, again, ensure that each category is relevant to those health professionals or a region or a particular entity who may have the ability to address that.

The other thing that's very important and perhaps the most important thing: this is about security of the information that's being gathered. We have a great system here in the OCIO, Office of the Chief Information Officer. They have and they're entrusted – any dealings that anybody has with government and all the information that's gathered about our citizens in Newfoundland and Labrador is secure and only accessible by those who have a right or a privilege or a need to have access to that. That has to be protected.

As a process here, there's an entity established that does all of that, ensures that our information is kept safe and secure and is only shared in the benefit of the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador, and for particular reasons. That becomes a very important issue.

It was only recently that we've had it noted that there are some sexually transmitted diseases that now seem to be becoming more prevalent around Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly in certain areas. As doctors feed in, as we get a better process of sharing information

– one doctor may not know on the West Coast what’s happening on the East Coast or on the Northern Peninsula or in Labrador. But if all the information is fed into the Centre for Health Information, that can be broken down and then trends can be identified, practices can be identified and interventions can be identified.

It’s a collaborative approach of all the health information that’s necessary, but it’s also just as important that it ensures all the information relevant to a particular patient is secure, safe and private. That’s what it is. As citizens, while we want people to ensure that we’ve got the best of services, we particularly want to ensure that only those who should have access to that should be given an opportunity to do it. There has to be a mode, a medium and a process in play that protects that. That’s what the Centre for Health Information has as one of its other key component responsibilities there.

When we talk about the act itself, the act was incorporated in 2004. The entity itself, the centre, existed for six or seven years before that on a smaller scale. As it grew, and as the mandate got defined, then it was entrenched that it had to have its own act. Like other corporations that we have, it had to have responsibilities, it had to have parameters and it had to have objectives. They were all set out in the 2004 act.

I do realize now that more than a decade later you need to go back and review exactly what the initial intent was. Has it achieved that? Has it gone beyond that? Are there ways we need to modify it? Are there ways that we just need to make it timely? That’s what this piece of legislation will do as we bring that forward over the next number of days in debate.

As I mentioned earlier, the Auditor General had some real concerns about how we were going to sustain at this salary base. As we all know, we’re spending \$3-plus billion in our health care system and we have to be answerable for that. We have to be answerable because we have to ensure first and foremost that we get the best return on that investment. We also have to ensure that, as part of that, everybody is responsible for what they do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: That was one of the key things that the AG talked about and it was key just around salaries. We’ve already talked about how that process will be put in play. What’s outlined here is a key component as to what can be done here to ensure the health authority follows these set out regulations.

There are some things here I want to talk about too. One of the other objectives here is that the minister would have more direction. I shouldn’t say more direction – more input and would outline more direction to the entity itself.

For those who can remember, back this past fall we had a great debate on a great piece of legislation that was set up around the opioid registry program. It’s a very important piece of legislation. I’m glad we all supported it. We had some concerns about some of the nuances in it and we had great debate. We even had some collaborative co-operation and understanding, that there were some changes that were accepted that would benefit everybody involved in it. So that was a testament on how we can have open debate and actually enhance a piece of legislation when everybody throws in their perspective or other outside entities’ perspectives. We had a great debate on that process.

For a fair bit of time I stood and talked about the biggest concern I had was about the minister having a lot of influence and direct control, for want of a better phrase. That’s in no disrespect to the minister or his title or his responsibility. At the time on that one it was felt by myself in some of the research I had done – and my colleagues and some outside entities – that there were other processes that could be as beneficial that could have restricted the minister from having to have total control. But after the debate, after the discussion and after some agreeing and disagreeing, we passed and could live with the fact that the minister would have a major influence on the opioid registry program. It’s important because it’s necessary to do that.

When I looked at this and saw that almost in the same vein the minister would have direct oversight when it came to that, red flags went up again. I started to go through it and I started to

do my research and get my head around what impact that would have. It's no disrespect to the present minister, what it was about was ensuring there's a process that can't be influenced in one particular area by one individual from a holistic point of view.

But saying that, and saying what we had argued previously reviewing this piece of legislation, it's a bit different, from my perspective. It's a bit different because there are certain nuances here that are very important that the minister be engaged. It's not just the minister as an individual and as a former practising health professional or a non-health professional. It wouldn't make any difference. In this case it's about administration, it's about accountability.

The registry was a whole different scenario because we were bringing entities from outside that have a particular speciality in that field. I felt at the time, and we felt at the time, that maybe the minister should relinquish some of that control to them. Fair enough. We came to a consensus. We agreed to that, came to a consensus and we're happy that's moving forward. It was a great piece of legislation and we're looking forward to all the positives.

In this case, I'm going to go the opposite side and say I see the benefits of the minister having direct input. I see it because it's a different set-up; it's an outside Crown agency. There have to be checks and balances. It's all related to the health care but it's a different process than that. Not only with the minister but I know, no doubt, as minister directing it, the direction and the dialogue, obviously, would come from the officials in the department. It would come from the regional health authorities who may have a concern as part of that. Because it's information – and some of the changes that I'll note as we talk about it a little later – the OCIO would be engaged.

This is a very important entity that we have here in government because they're the people who collect our data. They break down the best way we can analyze it. They break down the best way we can keep it private. They also break down the best way we can share that information. That's another entity that no doubt the minister will have, as part of that agency, a

very close working relationship with and the department, his officials, will.

I see, coming from that perspective, that it's not just that a minister would have carte blanche. In this case, you can have carte blanche and still ensure the process is not going to be influenced by a certain particular mindset or a particular background. This would be based on the principle that the minister going would drive the objectives of the entity or pull the entity back, if they're going beyond their scope or not following their scope, to ensure they meet their aims and objectives.

I know sometimes it becomes questionable because they have a board of directors that will be appointed and appointed through the proper process, which is ideal. It adds a flavour of people coming from different backgrounds. I think in any entity we have, a case internally or externally that deals with the holistic approach to a particular need, we need to have influences or we need to have information and guidance from people who come from different sectors.

I know the ultimate decision has to be made by the government of the day. The recommendations come from that line department who comes from the leadership, which in the case would be a minister. Been there and I understand that. You make those decisions based on the information you're given and your understanding of what's happening. You make it based on the principles that what you're doing is going to enhance the objectives here.

I have no qualms in supporting that the minister would have much more influence over directing what the Centre for Health Information does. I think it's healthy in this situation. I think it will only enhance what gets done. I think it will help better coordinate exactly what we're doing.

That has no bearing on which minister is there at any given time. What it does is gives an opportunity for the department that's ultimately responsible. The Department of Health and Community Services is ultimately responsible for enhancing our health care, for providing the health care from an umbrella perspective, but also to ensure that the information is available so that we can change policy, we can change

programs, we can support programs, we can delete programs that are no longer in the best interests of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and we can find a collaborative partnership with other entities that work.

The minister having that authority makes all the sense in the world. No qualms in supporting that whatsoever. I think that's a good addition. I think maybe in some cases – not all cases, in some cases – maybe line departments need a little bit more where a minister doesn't have directly hands on but has the final decision when it comes to directing outside entities on making them accountable.

That's what it's about. It's not telling them what to do and when to do it; it's making them accountable for reaching their goals and achieving their objectives. If some stray, somebody has to be able to pull them back and say – there's an entity with the Auditor General and that, but that's encompassing and it's two or three years down the road. By that time we've either lost an opportunity to enhance our health care, we may have lost an opportunity to spend our money more wisely or we may have lost an opportunity to develop our partnership.

When you're in the House and the minister has all the people advising him around him who are specialists in that field, then you obviously have a better opportunity, from a time point of view, to make changes that are in the best interests of everybody that you're trying to serve. I have no qualms in that. That's one of the second ones that are being proposed here. I think that it fits well. I look forward to it working.

The minister has outlined some of the objectives. I've had some people discuss with me whether or not it should be that, that you're giving so much authority. But after reviewing it and reviewing exactly, there are two nuances here. One, it's the responsibility of the minister and what the minister already has within the department, but it's also looking at the other entity. It may not be transferable for every agency we have or every program but when you look at the Centre for Health Information, to me, it makes a good fit.

I think it's a continuum there, it's a safeguard, it's an enhancement but it's also a support

mechanism for the centre. It's not an us-and-them type of thing in any agency that a government department is responsible for. It's always a collaborative approach of ensuring you get the best return, the best results, and for the most equitable investment possible. If you can take money and put it somewhere else and still get the same return, why wouldn't you have, in some form, an oversight process there to ensure that it works?

So I like that. I think it's healthy; I think it benefits exactly where we are. There's no doubt the minister has been brought up on the file as to where the Auditor General came from. He can now start directing some of the key things. Some of the key things were around job competition, upscale hiring, centre's pay structure, step increases, reclassification, pay in lieu of notice, chief executive officer's contract of employment, salary increases and the hiring of external consultants to fill employee vacancies. So now he can be aware of that and he can influence that by directing it. Somebody has to make decisions if things are not going.

Now, you let these entities have their freedom. They're independent and they do and they operate very fluently, but there has to be a mechanism to ensure if things get off the rails, somebody can bring it back on. So I like the outline that that would work there.

One of the other things here we pointed out, there would be a chief executive officer appointed. And while we've always had that, or we've had some form of senior management, it's never been entrenched in the legislation. We need to have that, because you need to be able to determine exactly who is responsible for what in your organization. As we do that, it works very easily. When you have set position, and people would know their responsibilities, then they would know exactly who reports to who and who has to take the lead in moving the process forward.

So having that entrenched, it's a simple change, but it's one that does two things. It now gives the ability for promotion of that particular position – promoting but also recruiting. In this case, because it's going to be entrenched in legislation, it will have to be recruited through the Independent Appointments Commission,

which is healthy. We have no problems with that. We've great debate on that. We saw the benefits of it. We see the people appointed. They are very fluent people, very competent, who do a very diligent job. But this process then makes it open to the general public to ensure you get the best qualified people who should be put in those positions. It opens up that process to enable that to work the way that you want it.

One of the other changes to the legislation that will be enacted here is about adding a senior official from the Office of OCIO. While there has always been a working relationship, it has never been entrenched that there has to be somebody from that entity in government, and that agency, who ensures that the information that's being developed and accumulated can be done in the mode that fits with all the other systems that we have in government.

OCIO – for those who don't know it – is established to do a key thing here: Collect our data, protect it and ensure we have access to it. They do a great job at doing that. We need to have that mechanism now part and parcel of the Centre for Health Information because they bring in expertise that would be beneficial. Instead of duplicating, there may be particular skill sets that we have in the OCIO that can enhance it. Or if we're doing a contract with an outside entity with OCIO it may be, on an economy of scale, better if we partnered and added on to that contract something that Centre for Health Information may be able to benefit from.

Having all the resources that we have at our disposal sit in the one room, sit on the same board or have similar responsibilities is a positive. We can do that very easily and the change being made there makes sense. In Committee, I'll have a few questions around at what level will this person, or individual be; how much of the time will be spent with that; are they just a member of the board when the board meets periodically, or will they be working very closely with the senior executive of the organization to ensure that the information, recommendations and that, make sense. These are some of the key components of what would be very important if we're to ensure that these changes are going to be beneficial.

Again, as we talked about earlier, the Centre for Health Information – it's a fairly large piece of legislation. We talked about the few key things here that we're going to do that are very important: expand its objectives, very important. It's been talked about for a number of years. We have an ability to do that now, as times have changed, developing new partnerships. Add the position of chief executive officer. Again, you need somebody at the helm to run it, the internal operations. Now they would have a set of rules, regulations and responsibilities in legislation. They would be chosen through the Independent Appointments Commission, through an open, obviously, recruitment process.

Then that person would be known publicly who's responsible for it. So then they're accountable, obviously, to the department, the minister, but particularly to their board as they operate the agency that they've taken on. I see that as a positive. I see that moving in the right direction.

Again, as we talked about earlier, an employee from the OCIO to be a director on the board at the centre. As I just mentioned earlier, I have no problems with that. I endorse that. The issue I have, I'd need to know – sitting on a board meeting once a month or once a quarter may not work. I'd like to know at what level or what influence that director will have or what responsibility or reporting process. Is it back to the Minister Responsible for the OCIO? Or does that person come back and also report to the Minister of Health on some of the information or develop partnerships with some of the recommendations they're making.

I know the minister and the department work closely with the board and the board comes back with sets of recommendations and that. But I think we have a great asset that's going to be added. I think and I would recommend that you use them to the ultimate benefit to the agency. They have a wealth of experience, whoever is going to be appointed. I would hope it will be somebody at a senior level who's, not only from a management point of view but understands exactly the objectives of the centre and the information technology uses here and how that can benefit exactly what we're setting out to do as we try to look at improving our health care system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As I said earlier, allow the minister to direct the centre itself. Direction sometimes is not considered having control. It's setting direction, making sure people are on the right path and supporting. Direction, in a lot of cases, can be support. So now it's set out that the minister has the ability to direct the centre which, as I see it – and I'm looking forward to this as it evolves over the next year or so – directing exactly how we improve what the centre does.

It's very easily done when you have an understanding of what's happening and your officials are briefing you on what's happening. In this case, the minister would understand the nuances around the health information because he's worked in that field. That's an added bonus here. I see that as very beneficial and encourage him to use that knowledge as quick as possible to move us to the next level.

These are all good things that are part and parcel of what's being proposed here. A key one, while it's number five here I don't think it was done in any manner that diminished its importance: "... modify the financial responsibilities and obligations of the centre." This was outlined, as I said earlier.

What the Auditor General has noted in previous reports and what we have talked about, it's maximizing the investment we make to ensure we get the best returns; but while we're doing that, to ensure even while we're getting great returns from the centre, that sometimes we've identified there may have been at the expense of a particular other entity out there who also has a responsibility in ensuring health care is improved.

We don't want that duplication, we don't want that competition. We want to find a way that works best for everybody. To do that, the classifications, the modems that's used, the administration process has to be on an even keel with everything else. We can't segregate one group over the other. You can't just say because somebody gets information around health that's more important than an entity that generates hundreds of millions of dollars from a sale for something else that does something around protection in a school system.

You have to ensure all entities and programs that we support in government are treated equally and are treated fairly. There may be different funding models, but in this case, at the end of the day, that the skill set works for everybody involved.

These are some key components as to why this piece of legislation will I think help enhance the centre as it moves forward. It will also, no doubt, make people more aware. We're having legislation here – I suspect, other than if you drove by and saw the sign on the building or you're involved in the health care system, you probably didn't have a real keen understanding of what information is being collected on us as citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly around our health needs, particularly around some of the interventions that are happening here and particularly around access to particular health care in certain regions.

This dialogue and this discussion here, I would hope those who are watching at home and anybody else who may see some of the information that's coming out, those who read new parts of legislation that get added will have a better understanding that we do have a very professional agency, a very equipped agency, a very financially supported agency but a very open agency that will use the data that's collected to ensure we all have better modes of health in this province.

The encouragement here now is to ensure that the regional health authorities are tied in and now see the even higher value of having an entity that's not competing against them anymore. There was some challenges. People manage in different ways.

Some of the regional health authorities were perturbed at times because just as they get somebody trained, they're being taken away by the centre because of a higher salary base. They can't fault their employees but they can fault the entity for doing that, and they can fault us. When I say us, the previous administration, present administration, for not having a system in play that ensures everything is equal across the board and that we're making sure we don't take from one so that another one can gain from that.

So, hoping that the regional health authorities, no doubt when the information gets out there, they'll have a better understanding of exactly what's in play. I know there have been some past practices over the last couple of years and the freeze that was put on a number of years ago about making those practices.

I do realize there are times when the centre has come back and said: No, we need a particular skill set and it doesn't fit with any other classification that we have existing. We need to find a different way of doing it or a different classification. Nobody has ever been adverse to that, but you have to follow the same processes and procedures that any other entity would do about adding a new classification or a new subcontract. Or if you're going outside for a particular piece of consulting work, you have to follow the processes that are in play.

What's being offered here is a very in-depth piece of legislation that will now say while we're only changing some key headings, the detail does ensure this entity falls in line with other entities that we have in Newfoundland and Labrador. That can only benefit the people of the province. It can only make it easier for management to, no doubt, operate the facility and the process they have in play. It can only ensure that staff know exactly where they lie.

If there's room for advancement, they would know the pay scale is no different. So it doesn't restrict them from taking another position somewhere else that's a lateral move, that's in their best interest from a career path, or it fits them from a social perspective. These are simple things that need to be put in play to ensure that everything is in the right order as it should be.

I do want to stress again – and I go back to the minister – I will be in Committee asking if he's developed a process with his involvement with the board. Will he meet with the board periodically? Will he just wait for the board to do their recommendations coming to him? Will it be when there are recommendations that there are changes in the existing structure of the organization that he then intercedes and gives direction? No doubt, when we pass this legislation he'll have the authority to do that. But I'd like to know – and I think the House and the people would know, and I would suspect the

Centre for Health Information would like to know – exactly what the minister's thoughts would be on how he feels he's going to address the particular needs.

For over two years he's been in that position and would have clear knowledge of exactly the connection and the partnership between the centre, the department, the regional health authorities and any other outside group or agency that we partner with to ensure that the information is collected and is developed in a manner that's going to be used. Also, we want the minister himself to clarify, to what point will there be changes in additional legislation? Is it necessary? Is there a review of the full centre?

One of the questions I want to know: Was this just added because of some of the recommendations from the Auditor General, or was there a full scope of review on the centre itself and its operations and the legislation that would overrule or legislatively control what the centre does?

I'm not quite sure – I read it, I know there are some changes there and I read what the changes would be, but in Committee I know the minister will be able to explain to me exactly how we got to this process. What was the process prior to that? I haven't been able to find out exactly what happened so we got to understanding these are five key things.

I know from our perspective and the AGs report that makes total sense. These are conversations that were had a number of years ago, but are there other things that are not being addressed yet because they were the most pertinent things or they were already on the agenda, or has there been a full scan and the scan has resulted in: Yes, what's already been identified, what the Auditor General had done, previously, was a very thorough review, a very in-depth review.

His staff, at the time, came back with concerns they had. He reviewed that and then made a set of recommendations. Public Accounts had an open-hearing process and made a set of recommendations. So if these are reflective of that, that's great. I think that was a great process. It obviously shows that there are checks and balances here and that people are accountable. In this case, the entity is accountable.

I'd like to know, when we get into Committee: Was there a full scan? Did the department move in? Did they meet with the board? Did they look at the structure of the board? I know we're adding, we're changing, we're instilling in legislation that the CEO will be there but that was a structure that already existed; the partnership with OCIO, as I noted there, what level that would be and what responsibilities they'll have.

It says here: They'll be a member of the board. Again, a member of the board could be somebody who shows up once every three months for a quarterly meeting versus somebody who, on a constant basis, is in contact with the senior executive of the organization and making recommendations, or in turn bringing back information to the minister and advising the minister on how things should proceed forward when it comes to the collection of the information and the security of the information.

That's another part of that we'll have a discussion on. No doubt, the minister will be able to explain how they got to it. I'm looking forward to that because, I think, and I'm hopeful, that a full scan was done to look at exactly where it started nearly 20 years ago, to where it was looked at 10 years ago, to where it is now and, more importantly, where it should be 10 years down the road.

I'm hoping that's reflective in that we've haven't changed a lot of the other parts of the legislation because the administration is still fluent and this still reflects how we can maintain the centre in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I look at here some of the things we'll look at also will be around the formation of the board itself and those who are on it. It's outlined here on that process, but, again, I'd like to feel comfortable that that was looked at too because even boards, the configuration of a board, the skillset that we look for, that changes. It changes as the entity develops. It changes as the needs develop outside on what their aims and objectives are, so particular people we wanted or particular skillsets may have changed.

I want to feel comfortable that was assessed also as to why we didn't dramatically change the

configuration and what that was based on, or does the minister, after doing the review, say: Do you know what? There's no doubt, in four or five years as the entity moves forward and things change, there may be a need to come back again. That's fine. You don't want to change everything now because of something that may happen because it may not be necessary. There are a lot of other important things and legislation that needs to be debated. Let's debate things that are pertinent now and have an objective to look a bit further down the road also. I'm looking forward to having that conversation of exactly how we got to this point.

Also one of the other key components here, I would hope somewhere along the way there's been analysis of the skillsets we're going to need. Is there going to be a dramatic difference down the road and the skillsets we're going to need, how do we recruit that?

We've all heard challenges in here in the House and we've heard it from employers, we're losing particular skillsets out of this province. How do we continue to keep them here? How do we train the right ones we're going to need for an entity like this?

We've talked about and it's been mentioned here by the Minister of Education that we're going to get more advanced technology in the schools. Great idea. What role will that play in potential employment for people in this particular centre that we would need?

There are things like that, as part of that discussion that I'm looking forward to getting a better understanding of the whole review. Was it a six month review? Was it 18 months? Was it taken in for the last two years?

These are things that I think we need to know so that we're comfortable in ensuring that the system will reflect the changing needs, and that the minister and his staff have looked at all of the particular set-ups and unique characteristics of this agency.

I touted earlier that you don't want to treat this agency any different than anybody else, fair enough, and you shouldn't, but you've also got to take into account this is a very unique agency. Its responsibilities are totally unique. Its skillset

is totally unique and its potential to change a lot of things that we do and how we offer, particularly, programs and services in Newfoundland and Labrador and the influence it will have on tens of thousands of people who work in this public service, but hundreds of thousands of people who rely on a particular service in the health care.

I want to feel comfortable. No doubt, all of us on this side of the House want to feel comfortable that every stone was turned over, every discussion that could be had was had, every bit of research was done to ensure that if we're going to put legislation we want to make sure that the agency is very explicitly spelled out, there's no room for misinterpretation, as what we had for the last decade or so around their financial responsibilities or limitations.

That's a very easy fix. I'm hoping that the minister has gone through that process. I'm confident that they have because I know this wasn't just flippantly put together. I know the discussion that's gone on. If you read from the Auditor General's reports over the course of the last number of years, there's been a lot of energy put into it. There's been a lot of concern. That's why, if it gets to the Auditor General's level, there's a concern that we're not getting the best return on our investment.

Doing due diligence is the most important thing here. It's unfortunate, it is bureaucracy. It is government. Sometimes the wheels move very slowly and it takes a couple of years to get stuff done. When it comes to legislation, you have to ensure – you only get one kick at it every so often – that you get it right and it reflects exactly what's going to ensure that this is the best piece of legislation we could put forward at this time. At the same time, being creative enough that it would cover off anticipated future processes, unforeseen circumstances that give you the flexibility that you're not restricted and you have to wait for a period of time to come back and make changes, so that an agency or an entity or a department can do what it feels is in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We've gotten to a point where I'm happy to say we've got a good piece of legislation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: It may not have been a lot of actual dramatic changes, but they've been very important changes. Important changes because they set the direction of how we can ensure the information meets what it's set up to do and that the organization continues to do great work here.

The other key important thing here – and I know the minister has already outlined this – is setting up the partnerships with the existing groups, agencies, entities that we have out there to further benefit the information being gathered in a timely manner and how we distribute that information out to the general public, out to all the other groups and agencies and health authorities that could benefit from it. But, then, in a timely fashion, ensuring that we set-up programs and services that benefit people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The one objective – I remember asking the first key in the Public Accounts to one of the key people was: What are you set up to do? You're set up to collect information that benefits the people of Newfoundland and Labrador in receiving adequate and beneficial health care. I thought very fluent, very easy, very distinct, to the point and very beneficial. That's a very important part.

Explaining how they do that was a little bit more encompassing, if you didn't know exactly the collection of the data and then how it gets broken down. But after getting a bit of an understanding, then you can say: Do you know what? You can't change something if you don't know it's not the right thing to be doing. When you get the information, you have an understanding. What we've doing, let's continue to do it. Don't change for the sake changing. What we've been doing is not working, let's change that. Or what we've been doing works well here but it's not a one-size-fit-all, we need to modify and change it for somewhere else.

In a nutshell, from my perspective that's how that information can really benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. If we're going to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into a program and service to get that information so that we can save hundreds of millions in our investment in health care, but at the same time

improve our quality of health care, then we've done a great service to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

To do that service and to ensure that it's equitable and that it's secure, you have to have good legislation. In this case, after going through it, this legislation has been developed over the last 12 or 13 years and reviewed multiple times. It never got changed maybe in a timely fashion a number of years ago, but now it's coming to the House to be changed. It covers off some of the concerns that a number of people have had – including the Auditor General, myself and a number of former Health ministers and, no doubt, the present Health minister – around how we can take something that's of value and of benefit to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and make it that much better.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I will say wholeheartedly that we'll support this. I look forward to talking to the minister in Committee and look forward to the Centre for Health Information not only doing the great work it does, but actually improving on that and doing more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to have an opportunity to rise to speak on Bill 32, An Act Respecting the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information.

I was listening to the comments of the Member opposite. I'm very encouraged with his positive comments towards this bill. He made some wonderful points there in relation to the importance of maximizing the return on the investment that we make in this centre, the importance of reducing duplication and to maximize the efficiencies that we can have in the operation of this centre and in our health care delivery in general.

It's an interesting piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to take a long while; I just want to make a few comments related to this piece of legislation.

The centre has been through a number of changes. In 1998 it started as part of the Eastern Health board. In 2007 it developed to a point where it came under its own act. Now we're here again and we're seeing the legislation changed again.

I think that has something to do with the evolving nature of the technology, the role this centre has had and the success the centre has had in dealing with issues that have been assigned to them; for example, the electronic health care record, Mr. Speaker.

It used to be years ago, when I was young boy and went to the hospital, that the doctor wrote notes in his paper file and kept them in the file. If you moved to another city, another town, the file was sometimes put in the mail and sent to the new location where you were. Sometimes it wasn't, sometimes the information didn't get to your new location and things like that.

This electronic health file allows for information gathered by doctors, entered sometimes right as they're doing the meeting with the patient, entered right into the system from there. That sort of change takes a long while to implement. It takes a change in practice and the way professional people do their work.

One of the things I did before I was elected to this House of Assembly was teach the change management course at Memorial University in the MBA program. I had a lot of students there who were from Eastern Health. This was a big topic for some of their research papers, to look at how you get health care professionals to adopt the use of electronic files.

It's an important transition that we've seen happen over the last number of years because of the ease that this type of information can be exchanged when it's in electronic format. I guess that's something that's happened in many other sectors as well. You're seeing electronic files be shared very easily. The legislation is changing partly because of that, Mr. Speaker, and the importance of the electronic record.

As the Centre for Health Information has expanded its responsibilities, it's taken on new responsibilities as well, such as the Pharmacy Network. The Pharmacy Network contains a record of all prescriptions filed and medications dispensed by community pharmacies. This source of health information is the foundation of the province's Prescription Monitoring Program.

The objective of this program is to monitor prescriptions, dispensing and the use of monitored drugs such as opioids. It allows health authorities to identify problems with the prescribing of opioids and other potentially dangerous drugs as well, Mr. Speaker. That's an additional role this Centre for Health Information is taking on.

Another responsibility is to provide the picture archiving for things such as X-rays. X-rays are entered into the system; doctors can go in and look at it. If they want to they can get a second opinion from another medical professional. They can do that much more quickly than they would have done in the past. The fact that interaction is facilitated with electronic records results in patients getting better care, Mr. Speaker. It's a very important service and I'm very happy we've had such a success in this province with developing this kind of system.

Someone also mentioned in this debate that this province is becoming a leader in the use of electronic records. I think this is sort of a natural tendency that we would have in this province because of our geography. We have a big area, a sparse population; we sometimes have bad weather, those sorts of things. So the physical transfer of information is somewhat difficult.

We've seen this sort of pattern where Newfoundland and Labrador become leaders in fields like this; for example, in distance education. Newfoundland has developed an expertise in distance education because of our geography. Because of our sparse population we developed an expertise in distance education that was exported in many ways from this province. It's good to see the same trend is happening in this area where we're seeing new techniques developed in this province that are being examined by other people around the country and around the world indeed. I think it's very positive what's happening here.

Some of the updates in this Bill 32 – some of the updates to the activities that the centre engages in are things like managing provincial databases, preparing health reports, conducting research and evaluation and providing health analytics and decision support services. Because we have this electronic record, it makes it much easier to do these sorts of things.

This legislation is a way of keeping up with the advancing and the changing that's happening in these technologies. It's a very positive development, I think, and it's very good to see. Professionals in this province are being very innovative in the way they use technology and it's very encouraging.

In conclusion, I want to say it's very encouraging that the government officials in the department, the minister and this government in general, are pushing forward and facilitating this kind of positive change in the province and allowing it. That's what this piece of legislation is about. That's why I'm supporting it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm glad to speak today to this bill that's on the table, Bill 32, An Act Respecting the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information. It's well overdue I would say, Mr. Speaker. I think we would all be agreed upon that.

The bill that we're dealing with today is actually going to replace the act that's in place, which was assented to on June 8, 2004. An act that was amended in 2008-2009, 2015-2016, and those amendments were pretty small amendments. So I think it's really good that what we're dealing with today is with a bill that's, number one, replacing the old act; number two, is comprehensive; and, number three, is up to date. Because I think the problem is that we've been dealing with an act that doesn't even reflect

what the centre is now doing. I think that's not an acceptable situation.

When I say that this bill is overdue, it's because there were signs that things needed to be fixed at the centre, and one of those signs came in January 2013 with the annual report of the Auditor General of Newfoundland and Labrador. That was when the Auditor General identified concerns with compensation and recruitment practices and governance. Some of us may remember that because it was in the news, and one of the things around compensation and recruitment practices was the high rates of salaries that we're being paid at the centre.

So two of the things actually that we're dealing with here today – and the key one will be the financial accountability and changes that are being recommended by this bill with regard to financial accountability. Also, overall, a whole modernization of the act so that we are dealing with what the centre actually does now at the moment, so that there are changes to the objectives of the centre, the objects of the centre and those changes don't reflect something new that's going to happen, actually reflects what's going on now.

We certainly are due for this bill. Some of the things that were pointed out by the Auditor General in 2013 were concerning, as it says the centre uses public money to compensation employees. Government is effectively the ultimate employer of all public employees whether they work for a government, a department or a Crown agency. In actual fact, the centre is a Crown agency; it's a statutory body.

The Treasury Board recently directly – that was back in 2013 – that, as an agency, the centre is to ensure that certain other compensation policies were consistent with government policies. And that was the big problem, that there were policies that were being carried out in the centre that didn't match the Treasury policies of government, and this was simply not acceptable.

Some of the concerns that the AG pointed out were the policies around job competitions, the policies around upscale hiring, the centre's pay structure, as well the step increases in pay,

reclassifications of positions, pay in lieu of notice, the chief executive officer contract of employment, salary increases and hiring of external consultants to fill employee vacancies.

I'll think we'll all recognize that problems in these areas are very problematic. This was identified back in 2013 and it's only now that we are dealing with a bill that is actually putting in place things that will make sure that the governance of the centre will be top-notch, and that the centre will be the type of statutory body, Crown body, that we want it to be with accountability and transparency.

This bill is very important and, of course, I'll be voting for this bill. Having said that, there are a couple of things that I do want to bring up, a couple of things that were identified by the AG that this bill takes care of. One was that there was no current representative from the department on the board. Now, that got fixed in terms of practice since 2013. What the bill does is take care of it in legislation so that it's not just going to be in practice. The Lieutenant-Governor in Council had not appointed a new chairperson since September 2011. I also think that type of thing got dealt with right away after the AG report came out.

So the bill that we have is going to see that our centre, which is an important centre, is going to be everything that we want it to be, that it will be a centre that we will be proud of, not just because of the work it's doing but also because of the governance structure and the way in which it is running.

One of the things that I think is really, really important is that the centre will now be under the minister in a way that wasn't happening before. The section that gets at that is the section which talks about the reporting. This, to me, is one of the most important things of this bill, and that is that the centre now is totally under the minister. The centre will have to annually "prepare and submit to the minister, at the time and in the manner required by the minister, a budget containing estimates of amounts necessary to enable the centre to carry out its duties and responsibilities and exercise its powers in the coming financial year."

The minister will have the power and the responsibility I would add, to approve or disapprove of the budget that is submitted. Except with the prior approval of the minister, the centre will not make or contract to become liable for, expenditures or indebtedness beyond or in excess of the estimated amount of expenditure set out in its budget.

What I'm doing here is pointing out the points of financial accountability that the centre will now have to follow, which is no different – and should have been in place – than other Crown corporations and no different from Statutory Offices. For example, Statutory Offices have to do the same thing except they do it to the House of Assembly Management Commission.

Every year the House of Assembly Management Commission sits with the budgets of the different Statutory Offices. Whether it's the Child and Youth Advocate or the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Chief Electoral Office, we have quite a number of Statutory Offices. Those offices, every year, have to submit their annual general report to the House of Assembly Management Commission and they have to submit their budget.

I'm currently on the House of Assembly Management Commission. We sit with that budget. If we see something in it that we're not happy about, the director of the Statutory Office comes in, meets with us and explains why he or she is asking for what they're asking for. They have to be accountable for how they spent money the year before.

This is a normal practice. It's rather a surprise that the Centre for Health Information wasn't under the same kind of rubric. It being a Crown entity and spending public money, it has to be accountable. The way in which it's being made accountable is through the minister.

I have to say that I'm very pleased with this aspect of the bill. As I said, not only do they have to submit a budget, they have to submit an annual report and they have to submit audited financial statements. These have to be tabled by the Speaker of the House of Assembly and the Speaker is responsible for getting those reports. If the House is not open when he or she gets them, within seven days after opening they have

to put them out there. So this is good news. It's good news that this is happening.

Let's look at a couple of the other things. The centre has done great work with regard to the electronic health records. There's no doubt about it, we are becoming much more modern in our province. We are using technology in a way that is helpful.

I think what's really important is with the new bill, and this work is ongoing, the centre now will be the focal point on the provincial level for all of the electronic health records. The four regional health associations, the four RHAs, will now be working together, through the centre, in sharing the electronic health information. This is an extremely important step forward in the modernization of our system here in Newfoundland and Labrador, because the way in which we move around the province – the way in which there are some services that cannot be done under one health authority but can be done in another.

For example, people from the West Coast or for Central may have to, or from Labrador – not only may, they have to very often come into Eastern Health in order to have certain tests done. Those tests therefore, the record for those tests would be in the Eastern Health authority, I would imagine, but now everything that happens for an individual, everything that happens for a patient, all of the different services they will avail of throughout their lives will now be available electronically. That information is available electronically to everybody who deals with that person, whether it's their physician over on the West Coast, for example, or the specialist in St. John's, whatever it is, the information will be there and available.

We all know that we can go in to our doctor's offices and the doctor can get a report of an X-ray that we had. They don't need to get it in paper anymore. They can get that report, and the record of that report is there. So the fact we're going to have a co-operation of melding of the four regional health authorities with regard to the electronic medical records or health records is extremely important.

I would like to speak for a minute about the electronic medical records because there is a

difference. When we had the briefing – and I thank the minister for the very good briefing we had from the Department of Health and Community Services – I asked about the electronic medical records. That would be the medical record that your physician keeps, which is different from the health record. The details of everything that your physician has done with and for you are in the medical record.

This is going to be huge to have the electronic medical records also occur. Right now, and it will continue to be, it's voluntary whether or not a physician gets into electronic medical records.

I was told by the officials who did the briefing with us that the numbers of physicians who want to have electronic medical records is growing. They're there for them to work with them, but they said there are going to be holdouts. There are going to be physicians who don't want to have electronic medical records, but they will continue to work with them as well. They won't say to them, because you're not keeping electronic medical records you're on your own. They won't do that.

It is a massive undertaking, we have to realize. A massive undertaking for a physician to take all of that paper, everything they have in those files – and we all know, we go to our doctor and we know what that file is like. I've been with my physician since the 1980s, so that's quite a file. To put all of that stuff into a medical record takes a lot of resources. On that level, I think we are not going to be as far ahead as we are with the overall health record that now the RHAs will be involved in.

The other thing I think is important is the fact that now the centre will be under two other acts, which are really important, the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Personal Health Information Act*. It will be accountable to those two acts as well and that's key.

I want to note, that because of the information to a protection of privacy act, which covers an extremely important statutory office, you now do have representation from that office on the board, not just in practice, but now in legislation. So they had already started doing that. The Privacy Commissioner was on the board, was

coming to them and was part of all the discussions because there's such a connection between the health records and then privacy issues. So, now, it just won't be in practice, but legislation will say the Privacy Commissioner should be on the board of the centre; an extremely important new move.

The other thing, too, which is part of accountability, is the role of the minister, because the minister now will have powers that the minister didn't have before; powers that exist in other parts of government. The minister will give directions to the centre and give directions with regard to ensuring that the objects are met, provincially. That is no different than a section that's in the *Regional Health Authorities Act*. So you're seeing the act with regard to the centre and powers given to the minister that are dovetailing with what's happening in other sectors of government.

I don't think there are any more individual points I wanted to make. I think the really important thing is that number one: Our act reflects reality, that the act that will come from this bill will reflect reality. Number two: The whole issue of accountability, whether it's accountability on a financial level or whether it's accountability for making sure that the work that the centre is supposed to be doing is done. Whatever the level of accountability is, we now have in legislation, very strongly, systems for accountability from the centre.

I think everybody should feel really secure about that. It's just so important that the centre is something we can be proud of and that we can have faith in and that we can trust. That's the role of government. That's why we believe in having public health care. That's why we have Crown agencies, so that we have accountability to the people, which is sort of what makes us who we are as a country. It's something that we believe in, is our public health care system. So now we have our Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information on par with the rest of our system in terms of, not just off on its own as if it were a private agency, as if it were a private company. That's not what it is. Now, it will become, through this bill, an essential part of our health care.

I look forward to seeing, as time goes on, that the centre will help us, both on the level of keeping the information but also information will help us make policy changes and will help us become a healthier population. That's one of the reasons for having information is to be able to use that information as we go forward in various policy directions that will help the people of the province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to take a few minutes, I guess, to bring forward a few thoughts on Bill 32, An Act to Amend the Centre for Health Information, or create it, actually, not to amend it.

As has been said, this is basically we're repealing the old act and we're bringing in a new one. Certainly, I have no issue with that approach. It actually makes sense because there are so many changes that would be required to the old act, it's easier to just sort of scrap it and start from scratch. That's what's being done here.

Normally, when we stand in the House, we're normally speaking to amendments to bills, most of the time. In this case, we're actually speaking to a brand new bill because the old one is being repealed.

I guess one of the first things I asked when I went to the briefing – and I do thank the staff for the briefing and the minister for arranging it for me, they were very helpful, I have to say, very accommodating – was the consultation piece. Did we consult with everybody that we should have consulted as it relates to this act?

I guess, primarily, one of the people I felt would be important that we consult with on this is the Privacy Commissioner and, indeed, I was told that there had been a number of consultations, if you will, and discussions with the Privacy Commissioner. This bill actually went through, I think, a number of iterations as a result of those consultations. I guess, finally, I was told that the Privacy Commissioner had a number of

concerns with the bill from the onset but that pretty much most of his concerns have been addressed.

One of the questions, which they couldn't answer at the time, was – I'm glad that most of his concerns have been addressed – I just wonder what concerns weren't addressed? I am going to endeavour to reach out to him to ask him myself what, if anything, is still hanging that he had a little bit of concern about, but by and large, I was told he's on board with what's here.

Mr. Speaker, as has been said – and I'm not going to repeat it – we're doing a couple of things here. One of the main things we're doing is we're going to sort of change the scope of this organization in that we're going to be adding IT services and so on for all of the health authorities. I understand that it's going to be phased in; it all can't be done at once. I guess we're going to start with one health authority and then gradually add another and another until everybody is there.

I think that presents some opportunity, perhaps, for some economies of scale and some efficiencies. An example that was given to me, which makes sense, is software licences. Right now, each health authority has to pay a fee, if you will, or a software licence it's called, for computer programs.

Now, instead of having to pay four of them, we'll only have to pay for one software licence because once this all comes on board, it falls under one entity. Instead of Eastern Health purchasing it and Western Health, Labrador-Grenfell Health and Central Health, now, there would be only one purchase for all of them. That would obviously create cost savings. From that perspective it makes sense to me and I'm certainly supportive of it.

One of the biggest things, as has been said, that this does is it creates a lot more accountability. I think that's probably the most important thing, particularly given the history of this entity, as has already been described, and how things over a number of years did get out of hand in terms of cost, in terms of salaries and so on. It's an example to us all what happens when you don't have appropriate oversight and checks and

balances and so on, you just allow any government entity to operate totally autonomously and do whatever they want without being accountable to government, hence the taxpayers. So what's being done in this act, of course, is that we're seeing a lot more accountability. It'll be through the minister. I certainly support that concept 100 per cent. I'm pretty sure listening to others speak, I think everybody supports it.

There are a few points, Mr. Speaker, that I'll probably raise in Committee, but I will say that one of the points, in general is – and we talked about this before with other legislation; it's been mentioned – the powers of the minister. Now, I'm not concerned about this minister, to be honest with you. I'm really not, when it comes to health care and so on. But we have to bear in mind that anybody could be minister at any given time, so we can't make all of our commentary based on the fact that we've got a minister here who has the experience and the credentials and so on to understand all this stuff and we trust him with that.

We always have to bear in mind that there could be new ministers at some point in time – there will be, not could be, there will be – and we have to make sure that whatever is written here is going to apply to whoever is in that seat and they may or may not have the same abilities, qualifications and understanding that this minister would. I just make that point that when we raise, or at least when I raise questions about the power to the minister on some of this stuff it's not a personal thing or any belief that this minister doesn't have a full grasp on it because I believe he does, but it's bearing in mind the position of the minister and whoever may be sitting in that seat at any given time. So that's an important point to make.

In particular, the biggest concern I have around the powers of the minister – well, it was a couple of concerns. One concern I had originally was: If the minister can compel all of these records and documentation, how would that impact people's personal information? Could the minister say – and I made the comment jokingly, but I'll make it again. I said the minister might say, well, based on the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands and the way he gets on sometimes, I think he might have some issues. I think I must

go look that up and see if he has any issues and get my personal medical records and look it up. No, that's not the case because that is protected under other existing legislation that protects my personal information. The fact that the minister in here, it gives the minister the power to ask for information records that's more around statistics and data and so on. It's not asking for people's personal medical records so he can look it up.

I didn't really think that was the case, but the way it's written in the legislation you could look at it and think that he can have access to everybody's personal information. That's not the case; that's protected. So that's an important point to make, I think.

The biggest concern I have, I suppose, or potential concern, would be the fact that when it talks about the objects of this entity – (a) and (b) talks about the objects of the entity, and then in 4(c) it says “those other objects prescribed by the regulations.” And then it gives the minister the ability, basically, under the powers of the minister, to have influence there.

My concern would be around just like the entity has changed significantly in that we're adding all the IT for all the health authorities, what if next year or two years or three years from now there's another significant change, whatever that might be – and I have no idea what that significant change might be. But there's a significant change to the scope, to the objects of the entity and so on, and I guess the concern would be the minister can sort of just do that now, he has the power to do it, under the regulations, and if it's under the regulations that means it doesn't come before the House of Assembly. So we could take a drastic change in what this entity is doing and is responsible for, and it would never have to come before the House of Assembly for debate. The minister could just do it under the regulations. I'm not saying he would. I'm just saying that it opens that potential possibility.

I'm just putting it out there for the record that it is something that theoretically could happen. Probably may never happen, but it could happen, and if there was going to be a significant – if it was a minor change – I'm not talking about the day-to-day operations of the entity. I don't think we should be micromanaging. But if there is

something that is significant – and I know, how do you define significant? It's difficult to put parameters around that definition, but something that's really significant changes in the scope of what this entity is doing, then I believe that should have to come to the House of Assembly for debate, as opposed to under the regulations we can just start adding stuff, whatever we feel like doing. So that's the only concern I have, really, about all of that.

Obviously it's talking about the board and so on here as well. People will be appointed under the Independent Appointments Commission. There is a subsequent amendment here; section 28 and 29 talks about the board, the CEO and appointing people. So that will be done under the Independent Appointments Commission. That's fine and that's good; no issues with that.

There are obviously some housekeeping issues here. There are also a number of things, I'm told, that are happening anyway but it's not covered in the legislation. So they've been doing it but there's no legislation to cover it, so to speak, so now the legislation is catching up with practice, I guess. There are a few things there. That's all good as well.

Overall, I don't have a lot of concerns. Like I said, it adds accountability which is very important. I'm glad to see that's happening. I can't believe it wasn't there before, to be honest with you, but it is now. That's a good thing. Kudos to the minister for doing that.

It brings it all under a new act, which makes sense. We're adding the IT piece, which makes sense. I think it can create some savings and so on, which is good. Privacy is protected under this legislation and the other accompanying legislations, so I don't think privacy will be an issue. So that's good.

The only one I question in terms of a clause, and I guess when we get to Committee we can talk about specifics, but section 24 confuses me, and nobody in the briefing could really give me an answer why it even exists. If you look under section 24 of the act here, it says: "Where the centre is, in the opinion of the minister, in serious financial difficulty, the minister, subject to the approval of the Lieutenant-Governor in

Council," – which is Cabinet – "may appoint a person as an administrator who shall" –

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): I call order, please, to the Member, just to remind him about relevance and stick with the principle of the bill, please, not a clause-by-clause evaluation.

Thank you.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll do it in Committee, but I guess the point is that in this piece of legislation, in this act there, is a reference to, basically, the insolvency of the entity and that if there is an insolvency in this entity, then the minister can appoint someone to sort of take it over, take control. I guess the CEO would be let go or the board would be disbanded and he'd just appoint someone to put there.

Given the fact that, first of all, the entity is pretty much 100 per cent or 99 per cent – maybe there are a few federal grants, but it's depending on provincial government money. That's what funds this. It's an entity of the provincial government. Everything has to be reported to the minister. They're not allowed to go over budget like a municipality. Under this now it talks about they have to have a balanced budget.

All capital expenditures have to be approved by the minister. They can buy office supplies and whatever, but they can't buy a new building or enter into any real estate agreements or anything. Given the fact it's a government entity, everything is going through the minister, it's funded by the provincial government, I can't understand – it doesn't make sense – why we would contemplate the thing ever going bankrupt or insolvent that you would have to even implement this. I don't see the need for that particular clause and I will ask that question specifically when we get to Committee.

Other than that, Mr. Speaker, it's a good piece of legislation. I support it 100 per cent. As I think the Member for Quidi Vidi said, it's about time that we've done this. Let's get on with it and pass this bill and get this set up so we can add some more accountability to an entity that does receive taxpayers' dollars and should be accountable to the government and to the people.

Thank you.

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

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

I'm going to have a few words, and a few words it is. My hon. Member and my colleague here for Conception Bay East - Bell Island was very good in his statement here today. He got up and gave a lot of information, a lot of good knowledge. I learned a lot from what he had to say. He gave us a lot of information, I have to say. He did a fantastic job on this bill.

I'm going to go to the bill itself and just talk a little bit. I have two purposes of getting up today; one, is I want to let the people at home know a little bit of what the Centre for Health actually does. Also, I'm going to mention later on, just for a few minutes or so – I want to mention that I was involved.

When the Auditor General does his report every year with the Public Accounts Committee, we had the opportunity – and the hon. Member that got up and spoke – to go back and review stuff. We usually pick out three or four items on which the Auditor General reported. As a Public Accounts Committee, we get the opportunity to get those agencies or boards or whatever concerned – it could be departments, it could be whatever the Auditor General's concerns are at the time. We can haul those people in and ask questions on what the Auditor General reported. I'm going to talk just a little bit about that but first of all, the Centre for Health Information is exactly what it is: it is information that's out there that they get and they store.

I know one of the Members opposite mentioned files. I'm sure we all went to the doctor's office for years and years and years and the doctor would walk in with your big file, with all the information in it or whatever; the broken bone that you had years gone by and whatever. What this information centre does is puts all that in electronic form. It's important.

The other thing that is really important today – because there are a lot of people that need our files. I mean from health care information,

whether you go to your doctor's office or you go to the Health Sciences complex, they can just generate the X-ray that you had two months ago or some part of the file; it's all done electronically. This is how it's all done and the information is stored.

I think today it's so important. We live in a different age than what we did in the '70s, '80s and '60s when we were around. Today, security is so important for people and people's information.

What fear that people usually have with any of this is a fear that my personal information may get out there. It's important that we have mechanisms in place to assure people and give them confidence in saying my files or whatever – whether I have some issues, they could be physical, they could be mental, they could be anything – that they're my own personal. That's my personal information.

It's important we make sure we manage that properly. The Centre for Health Information puts the files together for us. It's important today that people have that confidence in our health care system. I know sometimes you hear it in the courts every now and then; you'll hear people accessing their personal information. I know that I don't want anybody accessing mine and I know most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are in the same boat. It's an important role that this Centre for Health Information plays.

I spoke to the minister a little earlier about it and we talked. I know there are some improvements and there are changes. Even in this act today there's an expansion to the act itself and some of it's going to be with our pharmacies. We know some issues we have with opioids and use and stuff like that. We debated this a little while ago.

We have a crisis. We have people that are affected by abuse of systems and stuff like this. So hopefully they expand it and this can help, the Centre for Health can help, in anything we can do to protect families. We all know that anything we can do to protect the health of our individuals is great and our families, in particular.

I know that people today got up and spoke about accountability and authority of the minister. Mr.

Speaker, I'm going to support this bill because somebody has to have the authority. Somebody has to have the authority to be able to do things.

I know the hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands just said: It can change. The minister can change. This can change. We have to have faith in the people that are elected, the people that are in authority and the Minister of Health. I think this is a place where we can all agree that somebody needs to be in charge, somebody needs to make sure that the mechanisms and everything are in place so that, for one thing, our security of our information is there. We also have to make sure that people have confidence in that and make sure they have confidence in what the centre does itself.

I looked at the bill and I know it's all revamped; everything, like you said. It's a new bill that's in here now. Again, it's basically started from scratch. The board will be appointed by the Independent Appointments Commission which is good. I think it's an increase on the number of people that are actually on the board. I think that's good too. In general, the bill itself is definitely a good bill; I think it's a step forward.

I just want to go back. I know the minister is going to have authority. I had some major issues back when I was on the Public Accounts Committee. The Public Accounts Committee at the time – we review the Auditor General's report each year. Probably the Auditor General may have eight or nine things on his report that he has concerns about. I remember one year it was Marble Mountain, another year it was the Western School District and another year it was Eastern Health.

One year it happened to be the health authority. We reviewed it as a Committee. We went and we looked. When we reviewed it we had some major concerns. There were some big concerns there. As a Committee we said: How is this happening?

When the Auditor General reported that there was an increase in salaries, in some cases up to 354 per cent, to me, the bells went off and I said: How could this happen? We should be asking questions about this.

When we did – I remember because we got it here. Usually what we would have, we'd have one session in the morning, one session in the afternoon and when we got into asking questions – and there was a Member from the Third Party, there were two Members from the Opposition at the time and there were three Members from government at the time – we all got into it and started asking questions, we were all just amazed by what was happening. Because there was no structure and there was no one there, really, that did answer to government.

I know, since then, I remember two specific people, both Susan Sullivan and Steve Kent afterwards brought in changes to the Centre for Health. Because there was so much discussion on the Auditor General's report and what was happening there – there was nothing there that, basically, made them accountable. I think that's the biggest thing this is doing here today is making this accountable, and making it so that people – no matter whether it's Public Accounts or whatever – understand what's happening with the centre.

Back then, they could go – and I remember one case we asked about. There was a problem the Auditor General had with internal promotions or so. He said upscale hiring and he had problems with pay in lieu. There was all this – and the contract of the CEO at the time. It was all done internally. It was done with the centre itself and there was no accountability – absolutely no accountability whatsoever.

Minister, I am glad today because I know at the time it really did bother me when we saw salaries go 354 per cent increase – and what happened with the staff in a lot of cases, it's the same staff here, just the title is changed. There was one incidents there I remember it went from one step to another step and it was 119 per cent increase in pay. That was huge.

I could have the figures wrong, but I believe in core government and most other Crown agencies the start-off level, the entry level, was at one point and they were at \$16,000 to \$35,000 higher than the start-off level in any other agency or Crown agency. At that time – I haven't been on Public Accounts now for a few years and I know there are some Members here, my colleague for CBS is on there. I really liked

Public Accounts because it would give us the information that we needed to know, to be able to dig into what's happening in some of these organizations, to dig into what's really happening with anything.

What it did back then was it really enlightened what was happening at the Centre for Health. I know since then, like I said, it's after going through two or three ministers, that there has been a lot of changes. There are a lot of changes that have taken place, but this bill today, these new amendments and new bill that we're bringing in today, my hope is that it will have the accountability that we talked about. It will be able to do what we set this up for in the first place.

Like I said, the Centre for Health is very important today because I guess things have changed so much over the years. Again, I go back to the filing systems. We all walked in the doctor's office where he had the massive files all over the walls and you walk into a doctor's office and it's probably a foot high on his desk. Today, with technology and what we have in technology, it's important that our physicians, our medical people in different clinics, whether it's the hospital, whether it's anywhere at all, have the access to the proper information and have files on hand because, hopefully, things don't get lost through medical records and things like that, so it's important.

I hope in the future that maybe the Centre for Health can do more in line with what I've talked a little bit about the pharmacy and seeing records whether a person went and got prescription here and then went down the road and got another prescription and got another prescription somewhere else. So that's something that's new that will be coming in, and hopefully that they will be doing it. I know that the minister, that's part of what he has brought in before in this past session in the House.

The Centre for Health, like I said, is an important organization in our province. It's important that we have proper people running it. It's important that the government have confidence in what they're doing and it's important that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have great confidence in what's happening at the Centre for Health and they're

confident that their records are going to be kept secure. That's the main thing about it.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

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

Obviously, there are a lot of Members on the other side who've aged through the iterations of NLCHI far longer than I have, but I was heartened to hear the general tone of support. I think the objectives of the act are clearly laid out and have been repeated several times by the speakers. I would simply thank them for their input and look forward to Committee.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 32 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

This motion is carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act Respecting The Newfoundland And Labrador Centre For Health Information. (Bill 32)

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act Respecting The Newfoundland And Labrador Centre For Health Information,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 32)

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

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

I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 32.

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.’

The 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 32, An Act Respecting The Newfoundland And Labrador Centre For Health Information.

A bill, “An Act Respecting The Newfoundland And Labrador Centre For Health Information.” (Bill 32)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I’ll just direct a question to the minister asking about the consultation process that took place to get to the final version of Bill 32, please.

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

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

We consulted with a pretty wide range of individuals. It would be hard for me to list them all off from memory, but I know the areas of concern have been around OCIO, the Auditor General and the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, given the nature of the information about which we’re talking. There had been extensive back and to between the department and OIPC, and recommendations from that office have been incorporated into the draft that’s before the House.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: I’m just wondering in a general sense, the act referenced the electronic health record system and I know it’s been province-wide and it’s been ongoing for some time. I’m just wondering if we could get a brief update from the minister of where that’s to exactly at this point in time?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: The electronic health record, which has sort of been badged under the brand name of HEALTHe NL, is widespread. There is a viewer that is available to any physician through the Centre for Health Information. In actual fact, there’s been an accelerated push to make sure that viewer goes out because it will be instrumental in the Prescription Monitoring Program. One of the reasons, if you recall, from that debate around how we stagger the

proclamation of that act was to allow that to roll out.

Underneath that, which ties in input from the radiology system, the lab system and various others, but underneath that from a specific point also run through NLCHI is the electronic medical record which relates to those elements that are physician and prescriber centric really. That is being rolled out in conjunction with the NLMA to physician's offices who are fee-for-service.

There's also work going on to roll out enterprise versions of that to salaried physicians who are in RHA facilities. That's part of the push, and I think that's going on well. It's part of the expanded mandate of the centre. It really fits with its original design.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The electronic medical record system, I guess is the one I was referring to. That one now is, I think it's fee-for-service. Is that mandatory now by physicians as it's rolled out or is it voluntary that they would have that in their offices and have the ability to access records through that means?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: This was an initiative started before my time, but the original process was that there were 300 licences paid for by government. Government would subsidize the installation and hardware costs if necessary for the physicians concerned.

My understanding at the moment is something over 200 of those have already been taken – it may be 260, I don't have the number off the top of my head; but, you're right, that was for private fee-for-service physicians in their own offices.

On the other side, to ensure we keep up within the RHAs, the salaried physicians' piece, we've gone to an enterprise solution and NLCHI are looking at that. It's basically the same package, it's just done in a different way.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just ask the minister, can you just outline how – with his new powers – he and the board will co-exist, and will you have veto powers over board decisions?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: The relationship between the minister's office and the board of the newly constituted government structure will be identical to that of the minister and a regional health authority. There is scope in the act to provide direction.

To reference a comment that was spoken of in one of the debates on second reading, there has been a need on two occasions to provide specific direction to an RHA, which effectively expanded, in a way, the mandate of the RHA, and it speaks to some of their concerns. That was actually – the best example of it was in 2011 when the RHAs were mandated to adopt and implement the recommendations of the task force on adverse events, shared at the time by the then Clerk of the Executive Council who has since moved on.

That was in response to the adverse event scenarios at the time. That, in actual fact, has been covered off in subsequent legislation because it was referenced specifically in the *Patient Safety Act* which we debated in the House here over the course of last year.

The powers are basically to direct in the hope and the expectation that later on the paperwork, as it were in terms of regulation and law, would be tidied up in how to deal with an exigent program. The minister, however, is in no way able to direct the centre to act contrary to the objects of this act or contrary to any other piece of legislation that exists in the Statute book, for example, PHIA, ATIPP or the *Public Procurement Act*.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to that point, the act speaks to ministerial directives and there's also the authority outlined at the board of directors.

Directives of the minister, is that through the board or is it through the acting administration of the organization at a point in time? I'm just wondering the board relationship as to the minister's directives and how that would flow, or your thoughts on that.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: That relationship exists at the moment with the RHAs and is really from precedent and practice, kind of a three-ring affair. You would go to the CEO and the board chair, and then if a broader discussion was needed on the advice of the others, as it were, the CEO or the board chair, then that could take place.

You can see that having used it once with the RHA act, it was an exigent circumstance around patient safety issue, and with the House not sitting, this was a quick way of dealing with it. Ultimately, it took four or five years to roll it into a more comprehensive piece of legislation, but it buys you time to deal with an exigent process. So it's a co-operative arrangement, it's not adversarial.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I'm just wondering, as you alluded to, the Privacy Commissioner did have a number of concerns. I know he went back and forth a number of times, and that's what I was told at the briefing as well, fair enough. I was also told at the briefing that the majority of the issues were dealt with. I'm just wondering if you are able to provide the information at this time as to what issues weren't dealt with.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: The issues were all addressed in the discussion. I think the one that was outstanding really referenced whether or not it

should be written into the act, as in PHIA around privacy of data.

The argument we had, as it were, in the department was that I am – the minister is already a custodian under PHIA. The Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information will also be a custodian under PHIA, and that this piece of legislation has to be read as an entire piece, but also in the context of the fact there is a privacy, if you like, ecosystem out there. There's ATIPP, there's PHIA, and rather than redundant references in here, we could be guided by any changes that were made in PHIA or ATIPP. So it was kind of that dynamic interaction between the two.

I think he just wanted different wording. That's my understanding, but the bulk of his issues were actually written into the act the way he wanted.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I'm just wondering, on the new initiative that's being undertaken, and I understand it's going to be a phased-in approach when we look at the IT services and administrative services that are happening at the regional health authorities, that that will all be brought in under the umbrella of this new – well, of this entity, guided by a new act.

Can you give us a sense of how that's going to roll out? I'm assuming you'll start with maybe Eastern Health as an example and then eventually other health authorities. Is this going to be done over the course of a year, two years, five years? What are your thoughts on that piece?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: This is as much a governance issue and an operational issue. The governance piece would essentially be that provisioned of networking and eHealth services, in general, would be managed through the centre. In practical terms, there's a considerable amount of integration in the back office functions that

already exists. The RHAs, all of them, already provide data dumps to NLCHI but they don't do it real time. The goal is to move that to a real time thing. The reason for that is that it can be used for policy and decision support, real time, and we can perhaps even incorporate public health surveillance for epidemics and those kinds of things.

The other piece that you alluded to is very much around the duplication of administration, the duplication of service contracts, particularly across the RHAs. This takes a common function and provides provincial responsibility in one location, in the same way we've moved with purchasing and inventory control has gone to a shared services model that will be located somewhere else.

The advantage of NLCHI's operations is the staff can do it from wherever they are. They just simply change their reporting structure at management level because it exists in a network and in a virtual space. So it's already started.

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

MR. LANE: Minister, I think maybe you've answered it but I just wanted to clarify, anybody who's already doing this kind of – yes, there's duplication and hopefully there are some savings with software licensing and equipment purchases, all that stuff, but the people who are actually doing these jobs now in the health authority, will they still continue to do that same job in the health authority? Will they be transferred under the umbrella and no longer employees of the health authority and now employees of the new entity? Do you anticipate there will be any job losses or transfers of people and so on as a result of this initiative?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: There'll certainly be a streamlining, I think, at the management level. I think in terms of on the ground and with maybe the bargaining unit elements, those are things that would be discussed as this rolls out in a phased way.

The facts of the case are you're still going to need people in the RHAs to do some of the hands-on work but some of the people who do networking in Central may actually end up reporting through NLCHI and doing network work for the entire system.

I think the implementation, the phasing plan, will be dependent on the regulatory framework underneath this and then a whole series of implementation steps.

The team has actually started work, but the actual what happens next in terms of whose reporting structure moves to what, will be part of a negotiation between the RHAs, NLCHI and any bargaining unit that's involved.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to reference, specifically, and I did in second reading, sections 4 and 5. It all ties together, I believe, to some degree. The objects of the centre are under section 4 and then section 5 is ministerial directions and so on. It all kind of ties together there.

I'm just looking for a little bit of commentary, perhaps, from the minister on this one. In principle, I don't have a problem with it, as I said in second reading, I really don't. I'm glad there's more accountability. I have no problem with the minister if he has to intervene in certain situations. I'm sure the minister is way too busy to be micromanaging this operation or any other operation. I take that for granted and I accept that.

I guess the only concern I have on this piece is, for example, the new initiative, which we just discussed, the IT services, taking them out of all the health authorities, so to speak. There could be changes in management. There could be bargaining unit implications. There could be a whole bunch of implications around all of this. Fair enough, and I'm supporting them, but it is a significant change from what's currently in place in the current mandate of this entity.

A lot of it's going to fall under the minister and the regulations, am I wrong in thinking that the

minister, if this is passed as is, there could be a significant shift in what this entity does or something significant that's added to it, perhaps something that's controversial in some way and so on. It can just be done by the minister through regulations and never find its way to the House of Assembly for debate.

I'm not talking about micromanaging. I'm not talking about minor changes. I'm not talking about day to day. I'm not talking about emergency situations and things that happen. I'm talking about a significant shift in the focus or adding something significant to it and it would never come before the House of Assembly.

The way this is written and how this is worded here now, is that how that would work?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: I would actually go back, Mr. Chair, to the comments I made before about section 4 and 5, but essentially the RHAs don't go off in the weeds providing cosmetic surgery or spa treatments. I don't see that there is any significant risk with this wording that NLCHI would suddenly become RadioShack (inaudible).

I think the keys there are I can't, as minister, direct NLCHI under these provisions to do anything that isn't already set out in their objects. The object flexibility is simply one that would, in the future, align with a new development that fits – quotes – (c) with the policies, programs, work of government of the province, agencies of government and other in the provision of health care.

It's the same as the RHAs; we haven't had that problem with them. We have needed to use these powers to bring in an object at short notice, which was a benefit to the public, the people of this province as a whole. This is a decision, like any government policy that is made by the Cabinet of day, it's not made by the minister himself.

I think the fact this mirrors the RHAs and the RHA act has been working very well is an adequate bulwark to that.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't have any further questions on this particular section, but I do just want to make a point – and I thank the minister for his response, by the way. I guess the minister kind of confirmed then, as I'm understanding it, though, that the minister – or the Cabinet I should say, really, because it goes under the Cabinet although it's the minister and the department – that through the regulations they can make changes to the scope of what is happening at this entity and so on.

I just want to say for the record that I don't have – the minister gave an example, I think, with the RHA or something, I think he just said where an initiative was brought in that came up and it was of benefit to the taxpayer and the citizens. I'm not disputing any of that. I'm not disputing any of that at all, but the point I'm making, though, is that if there was something significant that changed from what's in this scope of what this organization does and so on, that there would be no requirement now – and it could be something controversial. It could be something that the Cabinet thinks is a great idea but some of the stakeholders don't think it's such a great idea, which happens all the time. That's just the nature of what we do. But now that is left to the Cabinet to decide to implement it and it will never come to the floor of the House of Assembly, so I just wanted to make that point.

The final question I have, Mr. Chair, relates to section 24; that's the final one I have, section 24. I just wonder if the minister can clarify because when I went to the briefing, the staff that did the briefing could not give me clarification or an example of why this would be here or why it exists other than the fact that it was in the health authorities act. They just basically cut and pasted it from the health authorities act, which is not necessarily a good reason. It's not an explanation, but I'm just wondering.

If you look at section 24, Mr. Chair, it says: "Where the centre is, in the opinion of the minister, in serious financial difficulty, the minister, subject to the approval of the Lieutenant-Governor in Council," – which is

Cabinet – “may appoint a person as an administrator who shall have the power to carry out the duties and responsibilities and exercise the powers conferred on the centre and the board, including the duties, responsibilities and powers of a custodian under the *Personal Health Information Act*.

“(2) Upon the appointment of an administrator, the directors shall cease to hold office and the directors and the board shall no longer direct the affairs of the centre or carry out the duties and responsibilities or exercise the powers conferred on the board by this Act.”

I could almost see, given what happened in the past with this entity in terms of when things kind of went off the rails with salaries and accountability and the Auditor General’s report and so on, at the time, I could see why that would have been a good thing to implement, perhaps. Maybe there would have been a need to disband the board and whatever had to be done, perhaps; I don’t know all the details, but obviously there was an issue that occurred in terms of cost and so on.

But basically what this is saying to me, it’s saying that should this entity become insolvent or something in some way that the minister can just disband the board, fire the CEO and appoint someone to run the place on an interim basis until they replace the board. Although there’s nothing in here to say any timeline because, technically, the way it’s written, you could appoint somebody, leave them there for the next five years if you wanted to because there’s no timeline. I’m sure that wouldn’t happen.

I’m just wondering given the fact that the centre receives all of its funding or the majority of its funding, minus maybe some federal grants or something – the majority of its funding comes from the provincial government, it’s an entity of the provincial government and they have to report to the minister, give him all the financial records. The minister is the only one that can approve capital expenditures and so on. He sees the budget. It has to be audited, all this stuff. So given all that, how is this section even necessary? I don’t understand why it’s even there.

I wonder if the minister can comment as to why that exists, what the rationale is, because I can’t see why it would be there.

CHAIR: Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2 to 34 inclusive.

CHAIR: Clauses 2 to 34 inclusive.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 34 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act Respecting The Newfoundland And Labrador Centre For Health Information.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I move that the Committee rise and report Bill 32.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 32.

Shall the motion carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

The hon. the Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

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

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

When shall the report be received?

MR. 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 32 ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

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 Placentia West - Bellevue, that the House do now adjourn.

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

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.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow, 1:30 o'clock, Monday.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Monday, at 1:30 p.m.