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Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of St. John's Centre, Baie Verte - Green Bay, Windsor Lake, Placentia - West Bellevue and Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, last weekend Government House was reclaimed by 27 First Peoples, indigenous artists from around the province. Reclamation, curated by Mi'kmaq artist Jerry Evans, as part of Eastern Edge's 15-day Identify: A Celebration of Indigenous Arts and Culture, the exhibit was so well attended that the organized tours had to be abandoned so the community could all squeeze in.

The pieces, gathered from public and private art collections, were made from every imaginable medium – Labradorite, caribou tufting, soapstone, bone, lithograph, digital photo manipulation, mixed-media beach glass, antler, acrylic on canvas, organic dye, beadwork, sterling silver, split spruce root, walnut and sweet grass.

Jerry point out, "there is so much more art and so many more artists who could/should have been included!"

Jerry Evans has spent his life creating art for and about his community. Curating this extraordinary collection has been a gift to us all and I know that there is more to come.

Wela'lin! Nakkumek! Tshinashkumitin!

Bravo, Jerry Evans.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the late Pearl Bailey, a well-known, respected businesswoman who passed suddenly. Pearl was one of the founding business owners within of the Town of Baie Verte and a faithful long-standing member of Trinity Pentecostal Church.

Pearl would tell you that her greatest accomplishment is her family. Instilling the importance of a rich Christian heritage, she lived a life of integrity, honesty and respect, and did so with grace and dignity.

Never viewing other business owners as competitors but genuinely wanting everyone to succeed, she stood shoulder to shoulder with the business community, especially during the leaner times when two mines had closed on the eve of the cod moratorium. Always believing Baie Verte would once again succeed, she proved it by continuing to operate the family business.

Pearl Bailey has left an incredible legacy to her family but also to the entire Baie Verte Peninsula, and had a positive influence on the many lives she touched. Baie Verte is blessed to have had an iconic businesswoman who graciously gifted everyone with loyal friendship, rich humour and unending support.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in offering condolences to the Bailey family and to the community of Baie Verte.

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, this morning I had the pleasure of joining students, staff, guests and volunteers for Mental Health Day at Holy Heart of Mary for their Minds @ Heart Conference. The day included an opening session for 500 of the school's students, a lunchtime bbq with a special visit from some amazing therapy dogs, as well as numerous breakout sessions that students participating in throughout the day.

Classrooms were taken over by students and speakers to discuss issues relevant to mental health. And over 50 per cent of the students chose to participate in this year's event. A wide variety of topics was covered including drug use, cyber-bullying and stress, just to name a few.

It was a privilege to see so many young people, led by compassionate educators, dedicate their time to learning, sharing and experiencing, all in the pursuit of understanding and building resilience.

A special thanks to Ms. Parsons for the invitation to attend. As a former alumnus of Holy Heart, it was a pleasure to participate in the conference.

Thank you to all involved. You are setting an example for our entire community and the province that mental health matters.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

MR. BROWNE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the many volunteers in my District of Placentia West - Bellevue.

Last week, I had the privilege to attend the Sunnyside Volunteer Appreciation Night. The event was organized by the town and showcased not only the council's but the citizen's gratitude to the volunteers of the community for the countless hours they put in to making Sunnyside a great and a sunny place to live.

At this event, former Mayor Robert Snook was honoured for his recent retirement after 16 years in municipal service. I wish him and his wife the very best in their retirement.

Similar events were held in the many communities of Placentia West - Bellevue, from Marystown to Long Harbour-Mount Arlington Heights, recognizing the remarkable contributions volunteers make in our communities. Mr. Speaker, my hat goes off to each and every one of them.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members of this House to join with me in recognizing and celebrating the volunteers of Newfoundland and Labrador – the beating heart of each and every community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

MR. BRAGG: Mr. Speaker, on March 6, my hometown of Greenspond lost one of its most respected gentlemen. Wilfred Carter had a smile for everyone and a story for every day.

Wilfred was good with his hands. For anyone familiar with the show *MacGyver*, Wilfred was MacGyver. Hollywood must have gotten their ideas from him. One time Wilfred made a hacksaw handle out of an old toilet seat, and his prized three-horsepower outboard had many ingenious parts to keep him going.

After the Causeway was built, he had no car or truck, so Wilfred would often be seen walking with his axe and bucksaw, pushing his homemade wood cart. Later that day, I remember him with his perfectly balanced load crossing the drawbridge to his home.

His wood piles were legendary, the topic of everyone who saw them. No level or square could have piled them so neatly. "Shucks" was his favourite word and anything from Dixie Chicks were his favourite tunes.

He was a man among men and respected by all. Ship's Island might never be the same, because his tradition of lowering the flag every day is now gone.

Good bye, Wilfred; you will be missed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. HAGGIE: I rise today to remind residents throughout Newfoundland and Labrador that Dial-a-Dietitian is a new service now available through the provincial HealthLine.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose is to encourage people to make healthier, more informed food choices and to receive helpful information or tips on nutrition.

A referral from a health care provider is not needed. Call 811 to speak to a registered dietitian. They are available Monday to Friday. Questions can also be sent using the Dial-a-Dietitian link on the www.yourhealthline.ca website.

Expansion of the provincial HealthLine to include registered dietitian services is an initiative under the provincial government's Chronic Disease Action Plan. This plan contains a series of concrete initiatives focused on prevention, self-management, treatment and care. It addresses key priorities outlined in *The Way Forward* to increase awareness and engage individuals to take action for healthy living.

Our government recognizes that healthy eating is the cornerstone of good health. Healthy living actions and targets, including healthy eating, have been identified in *The Way Forward*. Proper nutrition at any age can be life-changing. As Hippocrates said, "let thy food be thy medicine." Food can be the cause of, and remedy for, many health issues.

I encourage everyone to use this service and reach out if you need advice. It's now just a phone call or an email away.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, from a young age we were all taught the old adage, that an apple a day keeps the doctor away. While not exactly based on scientific evidence, this was our parents and guardians' way of teaching us that healthy eating is a critical part to one's overall health promotion and well-being.

I'm pleased to see that the Dial-a-Dietitian is now available through the provincial HealthLine by dialing 811 or going on the HealthLine's website. Because we live in an age where there is so much information available, some of which isn't accurate, it is comforting to know that the residents have an accessibility of experts and sources in which they can direct their questions, whether it is questions about calories, the balance of nutrition or food quality.

I encourage all residents to use this free service to promote their own health and well-being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister. This is a good step, but for most people the road to healthier eating takes more than a phone call.

Many in this province with chronic diseases such as diabetes cannot afford the healthy, nutritious food needed to preserve their health. I hear it from my constituents all the time, particularly those in receipt of Income Support and seniors on OAS and GIS. Without solving this very serious, poverty problem this is meaningless for many people in our province. Government must address the issues of poverty and the need for nutritious food.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral questions.

Oral Questions

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

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

On Tuesday I asked the Premier, on Wednesday I asked the Premier again, and today I ask the Premier again: If he stands by his comments that no one in his office, or himself, were made aware of any complaints of harassment regarding any minister in his government?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've answered those questions on both those days. Yes, I received a complaint yesterday morning around 8:30 and we've made that publicly known. I immediately – we met with caucus. We met with the media. Mr. Speaker, we disclosed that a complaint came forward yesterday morning. And yes, that's when it was, yesterday morning for the first time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: I ask the Premier, if he can outline exactly what the Member for Bay of Islands, or the Minister of Municipal Affairs, is stepping aside from. What does that mean?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, we've asked many questions inside of this House of Assembly on this particular issue. I made a decision, and working with the parties that were involved, this would be with a review that we would begin with the comfort level that would be required by the complainant. At this particular time, while a review was completed, that the Member for Bay of Islands would step aside from his ministerial roles.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Premier, just to be clear, the Member for Bay of Islands, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who has now stepped aside from that role, he is stepping aside strictly as minister. He's still a full Member of caucus. Is that correct, Premier?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I think when you look at issues that we're dealing with and the sensitivities, the number of people that would be impacted, we must let due diligence – we must make allowance for a process that is detailed and thorough as need be.

Mr. Speaker, these issues, as I've said so many times, they are serious, serious issues. Our objective is to make sure that the workplace for all of us that work here on a daily basis is one that is a safe place to live.

The decision was made to ask the minister to step out of his ministerial role. He remains a Member of caucus, Mr. Speaker, but I think, first and foremost, it's important that we allow this process to unfold and allow a thorough review to be completed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Just to be clear, Premier, you got a complaint from a Member of your caucus regarding a Member of your caucus, and you're allowing the Member who the complaints are against to remain in caucus when potentially there could be other complainants, as has been talked about in the House, and I'll refer to as we get through Question Period.

So you're allowing the person who the complaints are about to remain in caucus, probably have an office on the fifth floor with other caucus Members.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: Is that the decision you've made, Premier?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, based on the information that has come forward to me, what I know at this particular point in time is how we make decisions. At this particular point in time, with the information that I have is when I make the decision on how that should all unfold. We've made a decision that the minister would step out of the ministerial roles. We've done that. Mr. Speaker, that is based on the information we had. That's based on the information that we had when the decision was made this morning.

This is where we are, and as this whole process unfolds, I think it's important for all of us to respect privacy, respect confidentiality, Mr. Speaker, and we will do the necessary work that we need, that we all need to get us in a better place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'd suggest to the Premier, a better place would be a safe and caring environment where persons who may have a complaint or a concern or an issue to raise, can do so without fear of further intimidation, harassment, by just the very person being present in the same area, in the same caucus room, in the same offices. It makes no sense, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier would leave the person who the allegations are against in the same environment amongst the same people who may be bringing further complaints for it.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: I know the Minister of Education wants to speak here, but my question is for Premier: Do you think that's appropriate to leave the person who the complaints are about right in the same environment with people who have been expressing concerns for months?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I understand the concerns of the Member opposite, but what I find bewildering in all of this is the fact that this is a Member who is making comments on the floor of this House of Assembly today based on information that he's had. I've invited every Member to come forward; telling every single Member in this House that if there's information you have, bring it forward to me.

The Member opposite stands here in Question Period day after day – which he has every right to do, he has every right to do, Mr. Speaker, yet he has never once reached out to have a discussion on this. I have information that has come to me. I've met with many people over the last day or two. The complaint was made to me yesterday. We've made a decision based on the information that we've had to make sure that we put in place a good, thorough review on the issues that have been brought forward to me.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

My question was about leaving a person who's made a complaint, potentially other people who may want to make a complaint – because there have been discussions. He knows now, there have been issues for months about this particular minister, maybe others, but certainly about this particular minister. And he's leaving that particular minister in the Environment, having the ability to look and see and be in the same room where the actual allegations – he said himself, they're not sexual or physical; you've said that, so they must be intimidation and harassment. And he's leaving the person there.

Now, Mr. Speaker, just a few minutes ago, the very Member who the allegations are made against, according to what I'm reading through CBC and on social media, has identified people who are making complaints publicly.

And you're okay with that, Premier?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of information that comes forward. I made a decision to ask the minister to step aside; that's been obvious. We did that earlier this morning. Right now, Mr. Speaker, we deal with this as the information comes forward.

What we know, Mr. Speaker, about all of this is making sure that the person will bring the complaints forward – respecting privacy and confidentiality, Mr. Speaker, is important for all of this. We've already said that. But, likewise, I think it's important for all of us. We have a responsibility. If you have information, if you have information on anyone where there's an allegation where there could be someone that has been harassed, it's a responsibility on all of us to bring that information forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I'll bring some information forward right now for the Premier.

Just a few minutes ago, according to Twitter, the Minister of Municipal –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: – according to media reports on Twitter, yes. The media reporting on Twitter, that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Member for the Bay of Islands, who's sitting right here in this House right now, named a person who's expressed concerns about him, publicly. He publicly named a Member of this House of Assembly who has previously expressed concerns about his conduct and his behaviour.

Premier, what are you going to do about that?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, just like I've done over the last 24 hours, I will make a decision.

The Member asking the question just said nothing. The Member opposite just said nothing, when I talked about this. This is the very person that sat on information for over two weeks, and did not bring it forward, Mr. Speaker. It's ridiculous. We have responded in the last 24 hours and the Member opposite who had information says nothing?

That is a shameful comment. Based on the decision that we've made and the work that we've put into this, Mr. Speaker, engaging the person that brought the complaint forward to me in a very respectful manner, we're putting in place a process to make sure that this process comes out of this with the type of new workplace that we rightfully deserve. When Members opposite make comments about doing nothing in the last 24 hours, I would compare what I've done in 24 hours to what his has done in the last two weeks.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I remind all Members, I will not tolerate interruptions today – final warning.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

I apologize for interrupting the Premier because I really try not to do that and this is a serious matter; I'm not going to do it now.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that he's entered in a process. I told him yesterday and I said yesterday he should remove the person. Well now, after the person has been named, he's taken that action.

He issued a statement talking about a process that the complainant and the minister have agreed to. The minister has given him permission, he says. He says the minister has agreed to step aside, he said. That's what he said. That's what he has done. He's allowed the minister, if he wanted to, to do certain things, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, they entered into an agreement between the complainant and the minister and the Premier himself just talked about confidentiality. Your minister just named a person with concerns about him publicly.

My question, Premier, is: What are you going to do about it? That's terrible, Mr. Speaker, absolutely terrible, unacceptable.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the permission was to use his name, the name of the minister, trying to make sure that this whole process that we're dealing with, people would respect privacy. So the permission was to release the name of the minister. We had to do that as part of this process.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, this is brand, new information – brand, new information – that is just coming forward. Just like we made decisions based on the information that we had this morning, we will make decisions based on the information that comes forward as just a few minutes ago, as the Member opposite.

We make decisions based on the facts and the information as it comes forward, Mr. Speaker. We're just not going to stand here on the fly. We need to find out what happened; that's when those decisions will be made.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The priority of this government should have been to ensure a safe, secure environment without threat of reprisals against anyone who has a complaint, a concern or an issue, especially involving coming to harassment or intimidation or bullying by a minister.

Now we have, what I understand, is the minister has now – it's been alleged publicly here – named two different complainants who have raised concerns about his conduct, that he's

publicly named and he's called out and publicly made known two names, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, you have a significant issue here unfolding rapidly. Please be a leader; remove this person from his position in caucus, remove him as a minister, and do the right thing, Premier.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I've been a leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: I have responded as information came to me. We proactively – we dealt with it in the last 24 hours, Mr. Speaker. We have dealt with all the issues that have come forward. When the information came to me, we started to work on establishing a process. That's what leadership does. Leadership doesn't sit on information for over two weeks and not bring that forward.

Mr. Speaker, I would argue, too, that the Member opposite said that it's the role of government to make sure that this is a safe workplace. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that this is the role of everyone in this House of Assembly to make sure that this is safe workplace.

We will make decisions based on the information that we have.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I'm shocked.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonavista need not rise in his chair again today because I will not recognize him.

Thank you.

Please proceed.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

I'm absolutely shocked. The Member who allegations have been made against has publicly told the media the name and identified the person who raised concerns about his conduct in the past – totally unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Can the Premier explain to me how that is conducive to an environment where people can safely disclose issues and concerns in the workplace about one of his ministers? Can the Premier please explain that to the people, how that's conducive to a safe environment where people can raise concerns about his minister?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think all of us should take the necessary time to review the information as it unfolds. This is brand, new information, Mr. Speaker. It is brand, new information. We raise it here. We're taking the situation very seriously. We will not sit on information; we will speak to all those who are involved and make decisions based on the facts and the information as it comes forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the information: For months, there have been complaints. He says he didn't know about it. He says no one in his office knew about it. Even though, according to CBC and Fred Hutton on CBC, his office knew about it. On two different occasions, his office was made aware of it.

Are you telling me, Premier, that is inaccurate reporting? Has CBC got it wrong?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I said was this allegation or this complaint was brought to me yesterday, and that's when it

was brought to me, yesterday. These are the facts. I think the Member opposite should maybe even look at social media and look at the reports and look at where we are.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's appropriate that everyone in this House of Assembly, all leaders in this House of Assembly, would respect the sensitivities of what we're dealing with here today. Let's not try and score political points out of this. Let us deal with the situation and the sensitivities as it unfolds.

I would invite the Member opposite, if he has information, please reach out.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I can tell the Premier, the letter is being drafted as we speak and he should get that sometime today.

Even over the last couple of days, Mr. Speaker – so here we are today, we find out now that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has publicly named the person who's raised concerns about him. The understanding is, through social media, that he's done it twice. One of his own Members has said that he's named her publicly as well.

Yesterday, we had a circumstance where we found out that caucus Members were being asked to pass over their cellphones in order to determine who leaked the information. We now have a minister who won't be removed from caucus, even though he's acting inappropriately.

I ask the Premier: Why don't you focus on ensuring that complainants can come forward without reprisal, instead of focusing on trying to find out who's responsible for the leak (inaudible)?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What the Member opposite is suggesting is that we should not take some time to review the information as it unfolds. The Member opposite is saying that we should not make an allowance for proper reviews to be done.

I would suggest, in how I have responded to the information that has been brought forward to me and comparing that to the information that the Leader of the Opposition, who is now asking those questions, if you compare the two, just compare the two, he's now writing a letter, and this is now day three since he's been raising those issues. He openly said earlier this week that he's had it for two weeks.

Mr. Speaker, we have acted promptly and we will make sure that the confidentiality is kept intact, and if people are comfortable in the process once it gets finalized.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. P. DAVIS: Some confidentiality, Mr. Speaker, when the complainant is going to release the name publicly who is making the complaint. Some confidentiality that is. That's some level of privacy there. What a level of confidence and safety and security in an environment that you can come forward and be rest assured, we're going to protect you and look after you. That's a real good, confidential safe place, I say to the Premier.

One of his own Members, according to CBC, said MHAs describe caucus meetings as a joke and said people won't speak out because they're afraid of what will happen to them. Well here's another example of it Premier, of what people are afraid of.

I want to ask you Premier: How far reaching are these concerns and fears? Does it go beyond the walls of your own caucus?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, as I said so many times, the information that comes to me,

the information that I get, we make decisions based on the information that I have.

What the Member is asking about is what would occur in his own caucus meetings. Mr. Speaker, that happens. In our caucus meetings we have lots of conversations. We openly encourage people to come forward on issues that affect them and the people they represent. That's the way it works, Mr. Speaker.

We allow for that process to unfold. These are caucus meetings, Mr. Speaker, and people are openly free to discuss issues that they feel is important to them. I encourage that. I encourage them to do so, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: The Premier said he didn't know and the Premier said that his staff didn't know. Now we know that's not true, Mr. Speaker. Based on information that has come forward, we know they knew beforehand.

I ask the Premier: Has he learned more information from his staff since this discussion began on Tuesday?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, the complaint was brought to my attention yesterday morning. I've spoken with staff. Mr. Speaker, no one is aware of any information that would have come forward based on anything that should occur, based on harassment and those sorts of things.

The first time I was made aware of this was yesterday morning, and we started acting on that immediately, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the Member opposite one more time, if he has information come forward with it, have the discussion. We need to ensure that all Members, staff included, can work in a safe workplace.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It is reported by CBC, there were similar complaints regarding the Minister of Municipal Affairs brought to the attention of the Premier's own senior advisor, as well as the Minister of Justice and Public Safety who sits directly next to the Premier here in the House.

I ask the Premier: How is it that after two days, three days now we're in here asking questions about this, that the minister just didn't whisper in your ear and say, by the way, I do know of a matter? How come you haven't been made aware of that before now?

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

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

I will certainly speak to this, given that my name has been brought up.

I was asked by the media about an email that was leaked to them by a person that made a complaint to me. The email didn't come from me, so it obviously came from the person that sent the email. I don't want to get into a situation here where we discuss this on the floor of the House, because it would defeat the whole purpose of the conversation that we're having here today.

What I can say is there was no talk about harassment, specifically in that letter. In fact, the person that wrote the letter thanked me for the discussion that we had, thanked me for my time and attention and said they would keep me posted on how things turned out.

If there's an issue, I would suggest the same thing that we're all saying here, bring forward a complaint and let's do it independently with proper people rather than on the floor of the House of Assembly.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

In an email that was sent to the minister in October of 2017, the MHA said he's trusting that he will ensure that all Members of the Crown treat all MHAs with decency and respect as per the Code of Conduct.

What did you do about that, Minister?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Again, the Leader of the Opposition wants me to not talk about privacy and not out complainants, but wants to know specifics about it, which it's hard for me to do without talking about the complainant. I don't want to engage in that.

What I can say from the conversation that was had, there was no talk – it was talk about a certain issue. Again, I find myself in a conundrum, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to out somebody, but I received an email. I was told not to do anything in the email, that I would be kept posted on this. I'd love to read the email here. I can say that in this case there was no direction provided to do anything further, but I would be happy to comply with any request to do an investigation to ensure that everyone's safety was met here.

Again, if the Member wants to keep doing this on the floor of the House, I don't know what to do here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'll simplify it for the minister then. Why didn't you lean over, Minister, and whisper in the ear of the Premier and tell him you're aware of concerns from some months ago?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I actually told the Member that they should talk to

the Leader of their party or to other individuals if they have an issue. I also said you may want to reach out to other people.

But I remind the Member, I'm not going to engage in a political process here; if there's a significant issue here, I would be open to, again, releasing this email with the consent of the complainant, or without the consent, engaging in any process to ensure that nothing was done wrong here.

I certainly was not accused of any wrongdoing. I tried to provide advice in that meeting, because at the end of the day, we are all 40 people that are elected here to represent people. Again, I would always have a conversation with anyone that wants to talk.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I ask the minister: Did he respond to the email in October of last year?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: The second line of the email – and again, the Member opposite talks about privacy, and security, and protecting complainants, yet wants to talk about this situation on the floor, in the public, in the gallery.

I will say, if we want to talk about the email – and again, I'm in a difficult spot. I will release the email, I have no problem but I don't want to do so without the consent of the complainant, who I do not want to identify and perpetuate the situation that we're facing.

But I will say that the complainant in this case – and it wasn't a complainant, it was Member emailing another said I'll keep you posted and let you know if you need to do anything else.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I ask the Premier if he's spoken to his senior advisor to confirm that information regarding concerns about the conduct of the Minister of Municipal Affairs was brought to his attention.

Did he speak to the senior advisor yet, and did the senior advisor confirm he's received such information and concerns in the past?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I did, I spoke with my executive assistant on this issue. And we went through the information that was provided, Mr. Speaker. But likewise, no different than where we are, with the consent of the individuals, we are more than willing to have a public discussion on this if this is where the Leader of the Opposition wants to go with this. First of all I think before we have this open discussion, this public discussion, we would need the consent in respect to the privacy and the confidentiality of those involved.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, as a woman and as an elected Member of the House, I am appalled at the behaviour of the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands to publicly name those who have complained of harassment by him, further victimizing them. This vengeful tactic is not at all acceptable, and I am furious at this Member for Humber - Bay of Islands and his total disrespect for this House, for our MHAs and for the people of the province.

I ask the Premier what is he going to do about it immediately while this Member is sitting in the House.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well first of all, I want to put in context of the time frame that we're talking about. The information that the Member opposite is discussing and talking about today is information that has actually come forward since we've been on the floor of the House of Assembly. I think the Member would acknowledge that.

What I will do is when this Question Period is finished, when the day's deliberations are finished, we'll look at this information, take a look at it and, Mr. Speaker, we will make decisions based on the information that we have.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, this recent harassment incident is a clear illustration of the urgent need to reform the way this House of Assembly operates. We are a province of only 520,000 people with serious challenges facing us. The people of the province want us to work together. They continue to tell us that.

In their 2015 election platform, government promised an all-party committee on democratic reform. The Minister of Justice said this committee will be created this spring, at the latest.

I ask the Premier: When will he strike his promised all-party committee on democratic reform?

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

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

I'm happy to stand up here and speak to this issue. One thing I would point out is that certainly there was a mandate to bring in an all-party committee on democratic reform. There has been work done on that, but what I would point out in the meantime is that committee was talked about two years ago. We're talking about a different issue here, the context.

We have Standing Orders Committee meetings regularly, Management Commission meetings regularly and there's always an opportunity to discuss any issue that affects this House, its Members or the conduct. There are processes and procedures to deal with that now. In fact, many were laid out in the Green report of 2007.

If there are concerns, we should discuss them now.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, we have heard nothing of the minister's all-party committee on democratic reform and democratic reform is more than simply changing campaign financing rules. It's about doing politics differently and better.

I ask the Premier: Will he ensure that the terms of reference for his all-party committee will include a review of and changing the culture of the way we do politics to ensure a more collaborative, respectful and constructive way of working together for the benefit of the people?

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

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

Again, I think we've shown that we're open to changing how we do business in this House. We've made more changes to the Standing Orders in this House in the last two years than in the two decades before. I don't think I've ever turned down a meeting to discuss any issue that pertains to this House.

There have been times when Members have tried to do things differently. The Minister of Finance offered an invitation for Members opposite to sit down and discuss the budget, and the Members opposite turned him down and didn't want to be a part of that.

So what I would say is if we're going to talk about truly working together, we all have to mean it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I have to say to the minister that we're still waiting for the appointment that the Premier promised us. We've been weeks now waiting for that, but what I want to say now, based on everything that has happened here in the last 40 minutes or so I'm asking the Premier: What is he going to do to help the women in this House sitting here feel safe in our workplace right now at this moment?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the statement that led off to this question, we do take this very seriously. I want to acknowledge and at least the Member opposite should acknowledge the fact when you make those comments, you must understand that we've reached out to your office on multiple times. As a matter of fact –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

PREMIER BALL: Well, we have, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to get into a debate, but we have reached out to your office and we are now waiting.

Mr. Speaker, this is about tariffs. I offered the meeting and we've reached out to their office on a couple of occasions, waiting for a response. We are more than willing to sit down. She's shaking her head, Mr. Speaker, but I will guarantee you we have reached out to your office and we will get the dates for the Member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at and the Member opposite makes mention of the safety of women in this House of Assembly, I will guarantee you

this is something that we take and we will make sure that the workplace environment in this House is a safe place for all, all our female MHAs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing –

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, given what has transpired here in the last 40 minutes, particularly on the basis of the vengeful tactics of the minister from Humber - Bay of Islands, I ask for a recess for this issue to be resolved in terms of where we are right now in the House, before any further House business.

MR. SPEAKER: I feel the only way I could grant such is if I had leave from all Members.

The hon. the Government House Leader, I recognize first.

MR. A. PARSONS: I will defer to the Leader of the Opposition.

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I support the request by the Member. Since we sat here today, there's been information in the news breaking that's relevant to this very serious matter while we're all sitting here in the House, including the Members that are subject to the discussion here today.

There's a lot of uneasiness in the benches here in the House right now and I think it would be appropriate if the government would agree to a short recess so we can take some time to sort out exactly what's taken place since the House sat and an appropriate way to respond to that.

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

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

Again, not having seen the stuff that Members have mentioned here, we're going on basically Twitter accounts and media online. I have not seen that.

What I would suggest is there's a possibility here that leaders of the party have every right to get together outside of this House if they wish to have a conversation and make sure they chat about this important issue, but we also have work that needs to continue. I don't think – both cannot happen at same time. So certainly I have no issue making sure we continue on with debate and that we can discuss this, but what we won't have is – I think there's an expectation that there will be an immediate decision made by a Premier and by a team on information for which has not fully been received.

What I would suggest is the Premier has shown by his actions that as he gets information that he is willing to take it and act immediately. We've seen that. I have no doubt that our Premier, based on questions that have been asked here in the House and information that becomes publicly available, will act on the information that comes to him and he will be able to do so even with this House still proceeding.

So I would insist that we continue on, but I still think there's a procedure by which party Members and leaders can have this important conversation.

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

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

I appreciate the comments from colleagues in the House; however, I think it's important to reflect on the fact that this is a matter involving allegations of intimidation, of pressure, harassment and so on, when all of the parties on both sides are right here in this House of Assembly right now. I think the priority is to take a breath for a few minutes, for everyone to consider what the circumstances and the facts are now, so that you, Mr. Speaker, can ensure we have a respectful workplace and a respectful environment existing and continuing to exist right here in this House of Assembly this afternoon.

I think it would be prudent to take a recess for a few minutes. We're certainly not going to object to it. We certainly support it. It would give us as a caucus as well, Mr. Speaker, a few minutes to meet and to discuss the most recent information and then we can formulate what we also think is an appropriate way forward. And then maybe if we wanted to talk to other Members, which sometimes happens outside the House –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: – that can happen as well.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader for final comment.

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

I would move, seconded by the Premier, that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded this House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: This House stands adjourned until –

MR. P. DAVIS: Division, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Government House Leaders and Whips, please call in your Members, if they're not here.

Division

MR. SPEAKER: I would ask all Members who are in favour of the motion to adjourn, to please rise.

CLERK (Barnes): Mr. Ball, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Ms. Coady, Mr. Haggie, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Crocker, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Mitchelmore, Mr. Warr, Mr. Bernard Davis, Ms. Gambin-Walsh, Mr. Edmunds, Ms. Haley, Mr.

Letto, Mr. Browne, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Derek Bennett, Ms. Cathy Bennett, Mr. Finn, Mr. Reid, Ms. Parsley, Mr. King, Mr. Dean, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Holloway.

MR. SPEAKER: I would ask all Members who are against the motion to adjourn, to please rise.

CLERK: Mr. Paul Davis, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Brazil, Ms. Perry, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Petten, Mr. Lester, Ms. Rogers, Ms. Michael, Mr. Lane.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes, 27, the nays, 10.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is approved.

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

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